ANALYTICAL REPORT

THREAT OF INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM
AND RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM
TO CSTO MEMBER STATES
IN THE CENTRAL ASIAN AND AFGHAN REGIONS

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years the situation in Central Asia has been characterized by growing risks and noticeable instability. The region suffers an increase in negative influence from the Middle East conflicts, especially via recruitment of international terrorist militants who gain combat experience and then return to their home countries to continue their destructive activity. Religious extremism is supported financially by various radical Islamic funds which are also located in the Middle East. Extremists and terrorists effectively use new technologies; recruitment via Internet and social media is especially widespread.

The situation in Afghanistan is an important factor that multiplies negative impacts on Central Asia. There is a growing governing crisis in the country, especially in its Northern part, and a deepening controversy between local key players. Afghanistan suffers an increasing infiltration of international terrorist structures such as ISIL. The structures of Al-Qaeda deployed in the country and various ethnic terrorist groups including immigrants from Central Asian countries and the Russian North Caucasus are taking root. Under such circumstances possible incursion of groups of militants from the Afghan territory into the neighboring post-Soviet countries cannot be ruled out (similar to the Batken conflict in 1999 in Kirghizstan or the clashes on the Tajik-Afghan border in the 1990s).

The security in Central Asia is directly influenced by the economic crisis that has struck a number of countries in the region due to the fall of international oil and commodity prices and to the impact produced by anti-Russian sanctions and counter-sanctions. It contributes to recruitment for international terrorist structures, especially among socially and politically vulnerable populations groups such as migrant workers.

The political situation in the region is characterized by contradictory trends, but it is too early to assume that one of the numerous catastrophic scenarios described by experts is being realized. So the countries of the region and the whole international community still have a certain amount of time to react to growing challenges and security threats.

After Islam Karimov’s death Uzbekistan chose Shavkat Mirziyoyev as a new head of state (in office since December 14, 2016). So the first stage of power transfer in this country which is a key player in the region took place without any incidents. In the neighboring Turkmenistan presidential elections took place on February 12, 2017 and resulted in re-election of the incumbent president Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow. It is also a proof of political stability in this country.

The situation in the Central Asian states which are CSTO members (Tajikistan, Kirghizstan, Kazakhstan) is characterized by high risks as well, but political stability in these countries is all in all being preserved. Tajikistan has not seen any serious or threatening incidents since September 2015 when the clashes connected with the attempted military coup took place.

Due to increasing challenges and stability threats in Central Asia CSTO is becoming more important as a key regional military and political structure aiming at maintaining a high security level in this part of Eurasia.

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1 ISIL (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), also known under the abbreviations IS and ISIS and the Arabic acronym Daesh, is a terrorist organization prohibited in Russia. See: Islamskoye gosudarstvo: fenomen, evolutsiya, perspektivy // Analiticheskie doklady. (Исламское государство: феномен, эволюция, перспективы // Аналитические доклады. – М.: Институт международных исследований МГИМО МИД России, 2016. № 1 (45). 43 с.)
1. MAIN TRENDS OF TERRORIST ACTIVITIES AND OF FIGHT AGAINST INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

Strategic evaluation of the fight against terrorism in the modern world. International terrorism in its modern form became a global phenomenon in the last decade of the 20th century. It was caused by a whole range of reasons, the major one being the appearance of the America-centric model of international relationships after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Among the peculiarities of that model was a considerable weakening of the centers of power and influence serving as an alternative to the USA and the West as a whole. At the same time radical Islamic ideas which were used purposefully to supply the ideology beyond extremist terrorist activities were being rapidly propagated.

Throughout the 1990s the USA and the Western countries were closing their eyes to manifestations of international terrorism that did not affect them directly at that moment; they were striving to narrow down the problem to a local one. At that time already their policy displayed the division of all terrorists into “good” and “bad” ones, which is characteristic of the modern Western policy as well. And there was no difference between “good” terrorists and “rebels” in the American-Western political discourse. To the West they all were fighters for a certain freedom and a certain democracy.

The major terrorist attacks Russia suffered in the last decade of the 20th century were not taken seriously in the USA and in the Western countries which did not express any sympathy that was expected from any civilized society. Some representatives of the American elite even received the news with malicious joy.

A certain consciousness of danger (which in the course of time also proved to be rather relative, though) came to the minds of the American establishment after the well-known attacks of September 11, 2001. The events of that tragic day made the US government face the necessity of international cooperation in the fight against the evil of terrorism.

On September 28 the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1373 which established the UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC). After the adoption of the resolution, by December 2011, a global counter-terrorism system had been formed under the auspices of the UN. All UN committees specializing on civil aviation, fleet, customs, etc. implemented in their structure relevant departments to participate in that war. Practically all UN member states established their own internal structures countering terrorism. It resulted into creation of a global counter-terrorism system that had to face, according to different estimates, more than 500 terrorist organizations. It should be mentioned that the growth of geopolitical disagreement between leading world and regional powers, especially after the Arab Spring, made the international counter-terrorism system split into coalitions having different, sometimes not coinciding approaches to fighting the evil of terrorism. As a result, the terrorism situation is still alarming and even continues to aggravate in some regions.

Statistics of terrorist attacks in the world. According to mass media, the second half of 2016 saw 107 terrorist attacks committed in 19 countries, a third less than in the first half of the same year (142 attacks in 26 countries). On the whole, 2016 saw a total of 249 terrorist attacks in 29 countries around the globe.

Terrorist activities distribution among countries in the second half of 2016 is as follows:

1. Afghanistan – 30,
Similarly to the first half of 2016 the largest number of terrorist attacks happened on the territory of the Republic of Afghanistan.

In the second half of 2016 4 terrorist attacks were committed directly on the territory of CSTO member states (Armenia – 1, Kazakhstan – 1, Kirghizstan – 1, Russia – 1), similarly to the first half of the same year. **On the whole, 2016 saw 8 terrorist attacks.**

In the second half of 2016 48 terrorist attacks happened on the territory of states bordering the CSTO member states (Afghanistan – 30, Turkey – 18). **On the whole, 2016 saw 96 terrorist attacks.**

It can be stated that the second half of 2016 saw an increase in attacks committed in the USA (5 times more) and in Europe (2 times more). At the same time the number of terrorist attacks in African countries decreased. The number of attacks in Pakistan decreased as well (2.5 less), but some attacks committed in that country were relatively large.

**Regional particularities: Afghanistan is the world leader of terrorist activities.**

In 2016 the highest level of terrorist activities could be observed in five countries:
1. Afghanistan – 55,
2. Turkey – 41,
3. Iraq – 37,
4. Syria – 23,

The analysis of spatial and temporal intensity of terrorist activities around the globe shows that Afghanistan retains the world’s leading position by number of terrorist attacks. **In 2016 22% of all world terrorist attacks were committed in Afghanistan.** At the beginning of 2017 this trend does not change; on the contrary, the number of attacks committed in this country is still increasing. For the moment **about 30% of all world terrorist attacks are committed in Afghanistan.** The amount of terrorist activities in Afghanistan has been rising since 2001.

After 15 years of the Global War on Terrorism waged by the allied USA/NATO-forces in Afghanistan the stated goals to kill fighters of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban movement were never achieved. More than that, Afghanistan saw the appearance of ISIL militants.
The nineteenth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team pursuant to Resolution 2253 (2015) concerning ISIL (Daesh), Al-Qaeda and associated individuals and entities notes: “The overall flow of foreign terrorist fighters to Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic appears to have markedly slowed as a result of increased control measures put in place by Member States and military pressure brought to bear on the groups. A growing challenge involves returnees and intercepted fighters. The travel of these persons entails the risk of concentrating individuals who potentially pose a considerable threat in particular regions”. It concerns, above all, Afghanistan with its growing concentration of ISIL militants building up their terrorist activity. It can be stated as an example that in 2017 already the terrorist activity level of the ISIL rose by about one third compared with 2016. Here are only two examples of terrorist activities of ISIL. On February 8, 2017 militants killed a group of Red Cross employees in Jowzjan Province2. On February 11, 2017 there was an explosion near the Afghan Ministry of Defense3.

Despite continued presence of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) the concentration of terrorist activities in this country has been the highest in the world for many years. After 2001 there has been an increase of terrorist activity by 18 times. The country was flooded with terrorists of various nationalities: Arabs, Bengalis, Pakistanis, Uyghurs, Tajiks, Uzbeks, North Caucasian immigrants etc. The leader of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan Tohir Yo’ldosh stayed there for a long time. The activity of Islamic extremists who are based in the area around the Pakistan-Afghan border stretches geographically from Central Asia to China. The terrorist activity in Afghanistan has begun to pose a serious threat to the security in the region.

In his interview with TASS Mr. Zamir Kabulov, the head of the Second Asian Department in the Russian Foreign Ministry stated that activity of ISIL in Afghanistan had been witnessed since summer 2014. Nowadays the number of ISIL militants is estimated at nearly 3,500 (if sympathizing and so-called sleeper cells are taken into consideration, this estimate may multiply many times). Their main areas of influence are Eastern provinces of Nangarhar and Kunar. The total number of extremists from all terrorist groups in the North of Afghanistan is about 15,000. There are concerns that militants can try to expand onto the territory of neighboring Central Asian states. The situation in the Tajik region is the most alarming nowadays due to high concentration of international terrorists in Badakhshan Province. They can be countered by the CSTO force. For example, in April 2016 joint exercises of intelligence units of the CSTO member states’ armed forces “Poisk” took place in Tajikistan, and in October Kirghizstan hosted joint tactical exercises of Collective Rapid Reaction Force of the Central Asia region “Rubezh-2016”. There is also some concern in the Russian Foreign Ministry about the situation on the Afghan-Turkmen border. Turkmenistan is known to belong neither to SCO nor to CSTO. The Russian Foreign Ministry has the information about the location of about 1,000 ISIL militants in the North-Western Afghan provinces4. According to Mr. Kabulov, the USA and their allies are partly responsible for the instability in Afghanistan because they did not manage to stabilize the security situation in the country.

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2 URL: http://afghanistan.ru/doc/107138.html
3 URL: http://afghanistan.ru/doc/107197.html
4 For more details, see: [electronic resource] TASS. URL: http://tass.ru/opinions/interviews/4011028
Use of the Internet in the Interest of Terrorist Organizations

Alongside their traditional activity spheres (land, sea and air) terrorists have increasingly used the Internet since September 2001. Social media, messengers and video hosting services – these are new battlefields for terrorists to advance in. They widely use smartphone operating systems that include popular social media applications and special messengers with a high level of data encryption (Telegram, WhatsApp and Viber). Messenger accounts are linked to telephone numbers, and the access to users’ phonebooks, e-mails and other data allows exchanging messages or creating a chat room for an almost unlimited number of persons. The popularity of such applications among religious extremists can be partly explained by the fact that the developers of these programs present their products as hacker-proof.

Popular social media are used worldwide to recruit terrorist sympathizers and to provide informational support for terrorist attacks. Very often terror propagandists have published materials from the scene in about an hour after an incident took place. In many cases short messages from the scene have been sent via the popular microblogging service Twitter most of whose users publish messages from their mobile devices.

With the appearance of ISIL in the Middle East the amount of terrorist content from this region has increased five times, and they started to translate their videos almost immediately into many world languages (with Russian among the languages most frequently used). Information security specialists urge to pay particular attention to the accounts from which such content is uploaded. In spite of special rules introduced by video hosting services to prevent uploading of such content, videos with beheading or shooting executions still appear in the Internet.

According to specialists, conventional undercover methods of identifying social media used by terrorists and also of searching for terrorists must be supplemented in nearest future with activities of state intelligence and analysis structures whose tasks will be to search, filter and analyze information and to define the areas for other intelligence agencies to work in.

New technologies of terrorism. Law enforcement authorities fail to catch up with terrorists who constantly refresh their means and introduce new ones: human bombs, airplane bombs, car bombs. In the second half of 2016 several terrorist attacks were committed using trucks, a motorcycle and small children. Here are some examples.

On July 14, 2016, during the celebration of the French national holiday, an Islamic terrorist on a 19-ton truck slammed into a crowd of people who had come to see the fireworks from the Promenade des Anglais in Nice. 86 people died, 308 were injured. The terrorist was shot and killed by the police. ISIL claimed responsibility for the attack. The terrorist Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel (January 3, 1985 – July 14, 2016) was born in Tunisia, had been living in Nice since 2005, had a French residency permit and worked as a delivery-truck driver. His personality was identified thanks to his papers found in the cab of the truck. The police also found there his bank card and his mobile phone. In the cab of the truck there was a handgun, a replica grenade and replica long guns.

On December 19, 2016 a tractor trailer slammed into a Christmas market in the central part of West Berlin, Germany, at Breitscheidplatz, close to the shopping street Kurfuerstendamm. It happened around 8:20 PM local time when the market was the most crowded. The truck drove about 80 meters at the market territory. As a result, 12 people were killed, 48 were hospitalized, and some of them were in serious condition. ISIL claimed responsibility for the attack. Anis Amri, the 24-year-old Tunisian who committed the terrorist attack in Berlin, was killed by the
police in a shootout on the outskirts of Milan, Italy on December 23, 2016. Before it he had spent four years in jail in Italy.

On July 5, 2016 in Indonesia a suicide bomber drove his motorcycle into the grounds of the police station trying to get through security cordons. According to The Jakarta Post, the terrorist detonated an explosive device. A police officer was injured in the explosion.

On December 21, 2016 ISIL fighters posted in the Internet a video in which small suicide bomber girls said goodbye to their parents. The video shows the girls’ father sending his daughters to their death. The mother also says goodbye to her daughters of seven and nine years of age. The parents help their children put on warm jackets and then send them to Damask police stations. One of the girls was asked to address the Syrian police saying she was lost. After it she detonated an explosive vest, as her father had told her to, killing herself and three policemen. Her sister failed to enter the police station as the policemen had immediately blocked the territory.

A large terrorist attack committed on July 3, 2016 in Baghdad, Iraq killed 213 people, and more than 200 were injured. A bombed car driven by a suicide bomber exploded in the night between Saturday and Sunday in the city center in the district of Karrada where many restaurants and shops are located. There were a lot of people coming there to go shopping prior to Eid al-Firt, the feast marking the end of the fasting month of Ramadan. The explosion was so strong that it resulted in fire in several buildings spreading fast because of hot weather. ISIL claimed responsibility for the terrorist attack.

Rumor spread has become one of the new terrorist mechanisms in the post-Soviet countries.

Mass media of Kazakhstan informed that on July 22, 2016 the police for the first time arrested people spreading rumors about the alleged hostage-taking in the shopping center City Plus and the presence of armed people in the district of Zhuldyz during the events in the city on July 18, 2016. The police arrested Ms. Ch., a university student born in 1995, as one of the so-called panic instigators. In her comments to social media posts about the events in Almaty she insisted that hostages had been taken in the shopping center City Plus and several people had already been killed. At the same time another user, Mr. A. born in 1993, was purposefully spreading the rumor about 100 armed individuals who were allegedly shooting people down in the lower part of the city. Both instigators were arrested in the course of pretrial investigation for offences under Article 274, Part 2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

Experts’ evaluations of the terrorist threat growth in the post-Soviet countries. During a yearly session of the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund’s Club of Friends on December 14, 2016 the participants were questioned in an expert survey on the problems of Eurasian security. The survey was conducted by young political analysts, the former participants of the Security Academy programs organized in 2013-2015 by the CSTO Analytical Association and the Gorchakov Fund. They were citizens of the CSTO member states and also of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Moldavia, Georgia, Transnistria, Serbia, Latvia, Estonia and Italy.

The experts were provided with a list of possible factors which have or may have a negative impact on the collective security system. (This list is part of the CSTO Collective Security Strategy up to 2025 adopted on October 14, 2016). The experts were to identify the threats requiring priority attention from the CSTO member states.

As stated by 68% of the experts, growth of international terrorism and extremism threats and an insufficient level of practical international cooperation in countering these threats become a main concern for Eurasian states. The same number of respondents (68%) says
there is a danger that existing international and intrastate conflicts will escalate and new flashpoints will emerge.

The experts singled out the use of mechanisms of the so-called color revolutions and *hybrid wars* as the second most important threat (stated by 40% of the respondents).

According to the experts, *illicit traffic of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances* is the third most important threat (stated by 28% of the respondents).
2. CSTO – A GUARANTEE FOR STABILITY AND SECURITY IN CENTRAL ASIA

Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which at present has become an effective tool for keeping international security and stability, needs constant improvement and adjustment. This is due to the fact that the international situation in CSTO’s area of responsibility has been changing rapidly and also because of technological and intellectual innovations, if not to say revolutions, which take the matters of security and sovereignty from the military to the information, mental and ideological levels. This compels those who are committed to keeping the security in Eurasia not only to seek for answers to the challenges, following the trend, which was not set by us, but to seriously consider forming such trends ourselves.

The adoption of CSTO’s collective security strategy for the period until 2025 by the heads of member states in October 2016 was a landmark event for the organization. This is a document, which is designed to become the conceptual basis for the long-term work of the organization. By the decision of the heads of CSTO member states counter-terrorism and counter-extremism were made priority spheres of the organization’s activity.

A unique mechanism, forming a unified list of terrorist and extremist groups, which does not have equivalents in other international organizations, was adopted within the CSTO.

To address counter-terrorist tasks Special Forces units were formed as part of the Collective Rapid Reaction Force and now receive intensive training.

Special events, aimed at discovering and closing the venues of citizen recruitment by terrorist groups and at preventing the militants from the areas of armed conflict from infiltrating the CSTO member states.

There is an increasing level of CSTO’s cooperation with other international organizations, and especially with the UNO. For instance, as an addition to already existing package of documents about cooperation between the CSTO and the UN, a memorandum of understanding between the CSTO Secretariat and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate was signed on September 23, 2016.

The actions coordination with other international organizations (OECD, CIS, SCO) was established, including efforts to create space for cooperation with all above mentioned organizations. For instance, a meeting of ATC of CIS, RATS, SCO and CSTO Secretariat leaders took place on August, 2, 2016 in CSTO’s Secretariat. Counter-terrorist issues were also tackled during the discussion of CSTO, SCO and CIS leaders in October 2016, organized by Russia as part of its presidency in the UN Security Council.

Without ignoring the importance of upgrading the military component in the actual system of collective security and also recognizing the importance of deeper integration processes in the economy as the main condition for keeping our armed forces at the required quality level, the humanitarian aspect of CSTO member states should be pointed out. Today, there are enough reasons to state that the humanitarian aspect of international relations directly influences the quality of the collective security system, and the so-called “unconventional” threats like terrorism and religious extremism, which the member states of CSTO face today, became conventional and indicate only one thing: the world changed in the new century, also changing the nature of wars. In the modern context it may seem dubious that the 4th article of the Collective Security Treaty can be needed as it had originally been enshrined. It is unlikely that some country can resort to direct aggression against a CSTO member state. However, the practice of destabilization of Middle East countries by extremist, terroristic and informative-
ideological means can be transferred to Central Asia. Moreover, the citizens of CSTO member states, who are now in special training camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan and fight in Syria on the side of ISIL, can return home and actively participate in the destabilization processes in the region. The analysis of events, which took place on the territory of Central Asia, shows that there is no traditional frontline in a conflict with extremist forces. A hybrid war is waged to form the necessary views of the citizens, and especially the young generation.

Hybrid war is the complex of measures aimed at military, political, diplomatic, financial, economic, information, psychological and technical pressure, as well as of "color revolutions" technologies, terrorism, extremism, activities of intelligence agencies, special forces units and public diplomacy structures, carried out under the joint plan by the state, military or MNC authorities.

Objectives of hybrid warfare are: full or partial disintegration of the state, qualitative change of foreign and domestic policy, change of government for loyal political regimes, establishment of foreign ideological, financial and economic control over the state (protectorate in essence), or spread of chaos and subjugation by other states and MNCs.

A principal feature of modern foreign relations development stage is the powerful political, informational and economic pressure from the West towards Russia, which constitutes part of the Western hybrid warfare strategy, aimed at disintegration and spread of chaos as well as instability in the Eurasian area.

In the final declaration of NATO Summit, held in Newport, Wales in September 2014, the need for the Alliance to be prepared to take part in the wars of new type – hybrid wars was first officially stated. And in December 2015 a new strategy of hybrid warfare was adopted at a meeting of NATO foreign ministers.

In consequence, military activity near CSTO area of responsibility borders intensified significantly. The Armed Forces of NATO states military group in Eastern Europe increased. An extensive network of command posts is being created in Eastern-European area.

The result was a sudden and what appears as long-term destabilization in the Middle East and Afghanistan. Afghanistan remains a weak point for the CSTO. The flow of drugs from Afghanistan into the territory of CSTO states and further into Europe does not decrease. The situation at the Tajik-Afghan border remains perilous. According to the decision, taken by the heads of CSTO states, sudden test of Collective Rapid Reaction Force military contingents was carried out to check their readiness to fulfill purposes as intended. It should be stressed that the military exercise of CSTO Collective Rapid Reaction Force in May 2015, and exercise “Poisk-2016” in April 2016 showed that both Tajikistan and CSTO have the necessary capacities to maintain the integrity of the borders and to prevent any attempts of destabilization in CSTO area of responsibility, if required.

A new dangerous trend of Taliban and ISIL uniting their forces should be noted. ISIL militants were spotted in many provinces of Afghanistan. Based on radical extremist views and deeply rooted in the countries, forming the so-called “arc of instability” (Syria, Libya, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Pakistan, Afghanistan etc.), these terrorist and extremist groups are expanding their area of activity to Caucasus, Central Asia and further into Europe. According to some reports, several thousand citizens of CSTO member states undergo training and fight on the side of ISIL. Having received good fighting practice in the ranks of ISIL these people can return home and considerably strengthen extremist organizations operating undercover in Central Asian region. According to the words of those, who had been to the so-called “caliphate” the following conclusions can be drawn. The recruitment is performed mainly via Internet and social media, as
well as through preaching in “unofficial” mosques and prayer rooms. The popularity growth of radical ideology is increased by acute domestic problems of the region: the youth bulge, religious ignorance, disorder and poverty, social inequity, ethnic conflicts etc. Adherents of the “caliphate” are attracted not only by ideas of building a “fair” state, which are promised in ISIL, but also by promises of a high salary.

Syrian conflict, which arose as a result of Western Middle East policy, became a powerful incentive for enhancement of the “World Terrorist International” and its reunification under the banners of ISIL.

Given the urgency of the situation, on the December session of Collective Security Council (CSC), on proposal of Mr. Nazarbaev, President of the Republic of Kasakhstan, the fight against terrorism and extremism were made priority goals of CSTO. During this session of the CSC the statement of fight against international terrorism was adopted. In doing so, CSTO made the fight against terrorism a priority in 2016.

To coordinate the cooperation in the field of counter-terrorism and counter-extremism, a special task force of state experts from security, law enforcement officers, and employees of security councils was formed and now holds meetings on regular basis.

To reinforce counter-terrorism capabilities of the Organization’s Armed Forces (Collective Force), Special Forces’ units of member states, aimed specifically at implementing counter-terrorist measures were included in the Collective Rapid Reaction Force.

Combat training of forces and resources is being carried out on a scheduled basis. Issues relating to achievement of counterterrorist goals are being included in the plan of joint tactical and special exercise (“Vzaimodeistvie”, “Nerushimoe Bratstvo”, “Cobalt”, “Grom”).

To combat the terrorist threat the capabilities of the newly formed CSTO crisis response system are being used in an effective way. Counter-terrorist and counter-extremism issues are addressed in the context of CSTO operations: counter-narcotics “Operation Kanal”, and operation to ensure the security of electronic knowledge networks – Proxy. During these operations, along with assigned targets, the following issues are also highlighted: the prevention of illicit weapons, ammunition and explosives trafficking; detection of information resources, used by terrorist and extremist organizations for recruitment. Several expert and analytical, as well as educational activities were carried out with the participation of the CSTO Analytical Association and CSTO University League. In the period from 2013 to 2016 several dozen expert and analytical activities were carried out, including events on counter-terrorism (Roundtables, international conferences, situation analyses etc.). Among them are:

- Presentation of the public report by CSTO Analytical Association on the subject “CSTO and Security of Eurasia” (held in RIA Novosti Press Center on September 30, 2013)
- CSTO Analytical Association roundtable “Information and terrorism” (held on April 18, 2013)
- CSTO Analytical Association situation analysis, held at the MGIMO university of Russian Foreign Ministry on the subject “Scenarios and development prospects of the situation in Afghanistan and Post-Soviet Central Asia after 2015” (June 9, 2015)
- CSTO Analytical Association closed situation analysis on the subject “Challenges and threats to Russia and other CSTO member states in the context of increasing ISIL (Da’esh) terrorist activity and the sharp deterioration of Russian-Turkish relations” (held on December 16, 2015 in the CSTO Secretariat conference room)
CSTO Analytical Association and MGIMO university of Russian Foreign Ministry International Research Institute situation analysis on the subject “Trends of military and political situation development in former Soviet territory in the context of increasing ISIL terrorist activity, the sharp deterioration of Russian-Turkish relations, worsening of the situation in Afghanistan and CSTO’s measures in addressing the existing threats and challenges” (February 16, 2016)

On February 14, 2016 the CSTO Collective Security Council held its regular meeting in Erevan, where 20 questions were on the agenda. The session focused on issues of joint fight against terrorism, including the problem of forming a unified list of terrorist organizations. This sets up the legal framework to jointly fight against terrorism and will allow prosecuting terrorist groups under law in all member states of the Organization. During the session heads of CSTO member States adopted the CSTO’s collective security strategy for the period until 2025. The CSTO Secretary-General N. Borduzha described its importance in an interview to RIA Novosti on October 6, 2016: “I would say it is basically our Bible in terms of forming our collective security and issues which we must keep in mind above all and those, where we must develop our joint activity in ensuring security of our countries”. “It is a very important document – it is of conceptual design. It had really been thought through”. “Maybe we did not include everything we wanted in there, because this document is a result of compromises among our countries on various issues. All security issues are related to the state’s sovereignty. Nevertheless, the document gives an idea, how we are going to form the Collective Security System of our countries” – emphasized the CSTO Secretary General.

The preparatory work on the Strategy was hard; it included various activities of the organization: foreign policy, military policy, counter-terrorist issues, as well as countering the threats of hybrid war. All activities are reflected in the Strategy. The Strategy gives a response to those challenges and threats, which CSTO member states face. The Strategy defines the nature of a threat, its level and extent. The threats can be both internal and external.

Some passages from the Strategy:

3. Dynamics and development forecast of military and political situation in the world are defined by a number of factors, which have/ can have negative effect on Collective Security system:
   - The danger of escalation of already existing and new international and intra-state conflicts;
   - The achievement of political and economic goals with the use of force in some cases, and also of economic and information pressure, the practice of intervention into domestic affairs;
   - The use of the so-called “color revolution” and “hybrid war” technologies;
   - The build-up of existing and the deployment of new military force, the creation of military infrastructure on territories adjacent to CSTO area of responsibility, statements about resolution of international issues through military force;
   - The increase of international intolerance and sectarian strife, xenophobia;
   - The growth of international terrorism and extremism threats, insufficient level of international cooperation in confronting these threats;
   - The illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

4. The strategic objective of the CSTO is ensuring the collective security by consolidating the efforts and resources of the member states based on the strategic partnership and principles and laws of international law.
6. The achievement of the strategic objective, ensuring the CSTO collective security is accomplished by developing and systematically implementing a complex of interdependent political, diplomatic, defensive, economic, information and other measures aimed at deterrence and reduction of threats to the CSTO collective security.

6.2 In the sphere of crisis response the following activities will be carried out:
- Development of the CSTO crisis response system based on the CSTO crisis response procedure of December 10, 2010;
  - Complex development of crisis response tools;
  - Prevention of crises by preventive diplomacy;
  - Settlement of crises and their preconditions mainly by political means;
  - Humanitarian aid and the creation of humanitarian response centers, if needed;
  - Creation of CSTO crisis response centers and national crisis response centers in CSTO member states, if needed.

6.5 In the sphere of addressing transnational challenges and threats the following activities will be carried out:
- The development of the system, preventing challenges and threats and responding thereto;
  In the sphere of counter-terrorism and counter-extremism:
    - Coordination and cooperation of CSTO member states in the field of fight against terrorist and extremist organizations on the territory of the member states;
    - Improvement of the CSTO regional counter-narcotics operation “Canal”;
    - Better cooperation and information exchange during preventive and special activities as part of CSTO operation “Nelegal”
  In the sphere of information security:
    - Development of information security system for CSTO member states;
    - Joint activities to fight and neutralize the illegal activity in the information and telecommunication space of CSTO member states
    - Creation of conditions and carrying out joint practical activities, aimed at forming the basis of a coordinated information policy in the interests of CSTO member states

6.6 In the sphere of countering modern forms of influence on CSTO member states, including combined forms for the purpose of the State disruption, destabilization of the domestic political situation or change of political regimes, the following activities will be carried out:
- Research and analysis of the practical use of “color revolution” and “hybrid war” technologies
  - Development of the Collective Response System
  In the sphere of CSTO crisis response the main aspect is the informational, analytical and organizational support of consensus decision-making by the CSTO Collective Security Council about the joint action to prevent (settle) crises in the CSTO area of responsibility, as well as defense of security, stability, territorial integrity and the sovereignty of CSTO member states. This task will be organizationally addressed on the basis of CSTO crisis response center, established by the decision of CSTO Collective Security Council on October 14, 2016, with the latest technology, including strongly secured videoconference in the interests of the CSTO constituent bodies.

Today the CSTO is the only international organization in Eurasian area with the necessary collective capabilities to provide for security of its member states. Only this organization has a well-equipped collective force, which underwent joint training and the Peacekeeping force, ready
for operations abroad. Real coordination of foreign policy is carried out within the CSTO, based on collective instruction to permanent representatives of the member states in missions to international organizations. Military and economic cooperation was established. Joint military technical projects are carried out on favorable terms. Really effective crisis response system and a system of response to natural or man-made emergency situations were established. In this regard, the CSTO main line of action must be the improvement of already existing collective security system elements, as well as creation of mechanism to coordinate joint action in the sphere of counter-terrorism and counter extremism.

3. EVOLUTION OF TERRORISM AND EXTREMISM THREAT IN CENTRAL ASIA

The sharp deterioration of the situation in the north of Afghanistan due to the increasing influence of the Islamic State (ISIL) in this country, the increasing terrorist threat in the Post-Soviet territory because of military operations in Syria as well as the grave economic situation connected with the domestic situation in many countries of Central Asia make the problem of religious extremism and terrorism growth in the region’s countries acutely relevant.

V. Putin said during the CIS Council of Heads of State meeting that “from 5 to 7 thousand Russian citizens and other member states’ citizens are fighting on the side of ISIL militants”.⁵ At that point the official estimate of the Russian Federal Security Agency regarding to the number of Russians, fighting on the side of ISIL in Syria and Iraq was 2400.⁶ Thus, other countries of the Post-Soviet territory account for about 2600-4500 militants. And it is well-known from estimates of international experts that the bulk of these militants come from Central Asian countries⁷.

However, the militants from Central Asia in the Middle East fight not only on the side on ISIL. There is a large number of terrorist ethnic groups, involving people from Central Asia (Imam Bukhari Jamaat, Jaish al-Muhajireen, Saifullah Shishani Jamaat, Tawhid wal-Jihad).

According to the data of Soufan Group⁸, based in the USA, the number of militants from the countries of Central Asia in Syria and Iraq is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of militants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkmenistan</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2046</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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It is important to note, that for every militant in Syria and Iraq there are hundreds of supporters in various local “sleeping cells” of terrorist networks. These people, just like the returning militants, who received combat experience, can be used for carrying out terror attacks, inciting disorder or even guerilla warfare. As the famous Kyrgyz expert and theologian Kadyr Malikov said, ISIL alone provided 70 million dollars for subversive activities in Central Asia (later it was acknowledged by Tajik authorities).  

Russian experts in turn indicate the increase in funds influx to all countries of Post-Soviet territory (In context of Russian operation in Syria) through various channels, which is connected with the spread of religious extremism (through Al-Qaida channels, for instance), not only through ISIL channels.

3.1. PROBLEM OF RECRUITMENT INTO INTERNATIONAL TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS IN TAJIKISTAN

A major source of external spread of extremism and terrorism risk in Tajikistan and other countries of the region remains the complex military and political situation in the neighboring Afghanistan, where the significant military escalation was registered lately. Having the longest border with Afghanistan in Central Asia, Republic of Tajikistan has been experiencing challenges and threats from Afghanistan for tens of years and stands in the forefront in the fight against them.

Particularly alarming is the infiltration of radical branches of Islam (mainly Takfiri), which are characterized by violent spreading methods. At present, the main threat is posed by ISIL activity, which consolidates its positions in Afghanistan as part of “Caliphate Horasana” (Hurosona) and in the end aiming at building a Caliphate on the territory of Iran, Afghanistan and countries of Central Asia. Threat of ISIL for Republic of Tajikistan is also based on the fact that over 1 thousands Tajik citizens fight with the terrorists, along with representatives of other nations.

The phenomenon of ISIL is that by masterful propaganda, this organization managed to attract tens of thousands of citizens around the world. Today, about 40 thousand citizens of European and Asian countries fight in the ranks of ISIL. Whereas earlier the base for recruitment in ISIL was the financial interest, that is, higher wages for taking part in military operations, now the ISIL propaganda machine began to change its recruitment tactics, especially for the people from countries of Central Asia. For instance, in their early propaganda videos the ISIL militants threatened to return home, topple the “tyrant authorities” and introduce Sharia laws. Today the ISIL encourages people from countries of Central Asia to come live with their families and defend the Caliphate. The ISIL ideologists began to put a special emphasis on the “social justice” in the Caliphate, religious “purity” and family values, necessary for children upbringing by the Sharia laws.

Citizens of Central Asian countries and Russia constitute the third largest group of ISIL foreign mercenaries after citizens of West European and Middle East countries. According to

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9 Tajikistan says that IS provided 70 million dollars for creating its cells in Afghanistan [Electronic resource] – URL: http://www.rosbalt.ru/exussr/2015/10/06/144809.html; IS provides 70 Million for operations in Central Asia. What is the share of Kasakhstan [Electronic resource]. – URL: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxZSiFWe8Do. In the last footnote the speech text of famous specialist in Central Asia and Afghanistan A.Knyazev is provided, which states that the bulk of the money came from Katar, and for comparison, his estimate is that the whole budget of foreign investments in “Tulip revolution” in Kyrgyzstan could only amount to about 5 million US dollars.
official data, Russian language has the third position among languages used in ISIL advertising materials (after Arabic and English). ISIL also professionally prepares advertising materials in Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Uzbek and Tajik language. Professional recruiters work in ISIL units, who are basically experienced psychologists. They know perfectly well how to gain one’s trust and make them become one of them. The recruiters claim that only they follow Islam right and only they can build the true Islam state and also that religion – is the only right path to lead man into Heaven. They maintain that in the home country of another recruit there is a sharp social injustice, when somebody has everything and the other have to survive and lead a wretched existence. Accordingly, the Islamic State is represented as the ideal world, where everyone gets what they deserve, where there are no lies and deceit and the main components of the state are fairness and justice.

But the most effective weapon and the most spread recruitment platform into the ranks of extremist organization are the social media – a place for young people. Online recruitment is the most convenient method for terrorists as they do not need to leave their homes and the special services and other entities concerned cannot trace the recruiters because of the possibility to open a new account after the old one was closed. Internet technologies enable people to communicate with almost limitless number of people relatively anonymous, quickly and effectively transcending the borders between states. Modern technologies are the strategic factor, used by terrorist organizations and their supporters to achieve a wide array of goals. Young people are lured into ranks of ISIL through Skype. For example, attractive Turkish girls talk to men through various services and invite them to Turkey, say it is good there and no problem to find a job. They even promise to marry them. Young people, including Europeans, believe these promises but on arrival they find a criminal organization instead of Heaven. The same work is carried out with young women (In one such instance, a Russian woman, Varvara Karaulova, was lured into the criminal organization due to personal feelings to the recruiter.)

In social media the ISIL propagandists post videos, which show mass executions of people, including those, who refused to join their ranks. In some cases it can attract unstable young people with unclear moral views. Internet-propaganda also includes video games, which imitate terrorist attacks and stimulate the user to join the game as a virtual terrorist, subconsciously preparing them for real terror.

The analysis of Tajikistan’s information field shows the increasing use of Internet to spread extremist and terrorist ideas as well as appeals. About 80% of 3 million Internet users in the republic willingly or unwillingly have access to extremist materials via social media. Latest data of General Prosecutor’s Office in Republic of Tajikistan show 1094 Tajik citizens in the ranks of ISIL, most of them are followers of Salafism. 400 of them come from Khatlon region, 272 – from Sughd region, 254 – from Direct Rule Districts, 139 – from Dushanbe and 26 – from Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region. 85% of them are migrant workers, who got in sight of ISIL recruiters in the Russian Federation. Currently, 60 citizens of Tajikistan returned from Syria, who sincerely confessed of what they have done and were granted amnesties. Their lives are not in danger and they are not prosecuted by law. 300 deaths of Tajik citizens are officially confirmed.

The main factors, which stimulate the attention of ISIL recruiters to migrant workers in the Russian Federation, are the following:

- Active propaganda and recruitment among migrant workers by ISIL recruiters;
- Unfavorable living conditions, disorder, non-payment of wages, other migrant rights violations, certain acts of violence and xenophobia;
- Low working efficiency of consulates, migration services of the Republic of Tajikistan as well as Tajik migrant communities in defending the rights of migrant workers, insufficient prevention of extremism among migrant workers;
- Weak coordination of interaction with law enforcement authorities and migrant services for migrant workers rights’ defense and the prevention of recruitment by ISIL envoys;
- Insufficient level of awareness-raising and prevention work with migrant workers before migration;
- Religious and law ignorance of migrant workers, lack of possibility for positive personal fulfillment.

ISIL envoys pay attention not only to migrant workers, but also to fanatical Tajik citizens within the republic. The most prominent example is the online-recruitment of former commander of OMON of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Tajikistan, Gulmorod Halimov. He went missing on April 23, 2015. On May 27 he posted a video message in social media, in which he confirmed, that he joined ISIL. It is known that later on, Halimov stood at the helm of ISIL militant wing, replacing another person from Post-Soviet territory, Chechen-Kist Tarhan Batirashvili, citizen of Georgia.

In the last years ISIL envoys have increased their illegal activity within Republic of Tajikistan. Law enforcement authorities and special services conduct active search and detention, for which they established close ties with similar bodies in Russian Federation, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey and other countries with which there are bilateral agreements of extradition. Based on these agreements, citizens of Tajikistan, suspected of links to ISIL and arrested on the territory of enumerated states, are punctually handed over to Tajik authorities.

3.2. TURKMENISTAN

Turkmenistan is one of the countries with a sharp exacerbation of religious extremism problem. It is related to the appearance of forces connected with ISIL on the border between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan (where Turkmen tribes live) in 2014-2015 as well as to the increase of Salafism propaganda inside Turkmenistan (according to reports and expert estimates). Unfortunately, due to the closed nature of the country international community doesn’t have any reliable information about the situation in Turkmenistan.

Most citizens of Turkmenistan are Sunni Muslims. Besides the Turkmen, other nationalities that manifest Islam live in the country. They are the Uzbeks, the Kazakhs and small groups of Shia Muslims (appr. 120,000), most of them are the Azerbaijanis and the ethnic Persians. Turkmenistan, as well as Kazakhstan, belongs to the Turkic nomadic area of Islam, where heterodoxy, free observance of religious doctrines, clear division of social life into religious and secular spheres and non-interference of religion into politics are typical.

After Turkmenistan had become independent, the first president Saparmurat Niyazov used a Turkish “Kemal-like” variant of political system as a model, where power remained secular. At the same time Niyazov carried out the hajj and supported building of new mosques. The new version of the Constitution of Turkmenistan was adopted in 2008, already with the second

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president Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov in office. It ratified formal principle of separation of religious organisations from the state and guaranteed equality of all religions (article 12). The dominating role of Islam (in its official interpretation) was increasing at the same time. Islam is considered first to be an important part of national and cultural identity. Islamic symbols are present on the country’s symbols as well as in national daily life, and main religious holidays are official holidays in the country.

President’s Council for Religious Affairs works since 1994 to control religious activities in the country. The Council’s leaders (the chairman and his deputies) are Mufti (Muslim head) of Turkmenistan, Mufti’s deputy, Dean (the major Orthodox priest) of Turkmenistan and one civil official. In wilayahs (regions) regional Councils for Religious Affairs were established under local administrations. These Councils are led by the major Imams in the regions. All the religious leaders listed above get salaries as government officials. Such governmentalisation of religious bodies (Islam and the Orthodox Church) created evident prerequisites for breaking the principle of “freedom of religions and denominations and their equality under the law”, declared in the Constitution of Turkmenistan (article 12) and contradicts another constitutional norm, under which “all religious bodies are separated from the state and cannot execute state functions”. Nowadays the major priests of two traditional religions (Islam and Christianity) have exclusive right to make and implement state policy, unlike other denominations, which is unprecedented for a secular state.

State pressure upon religion under Turkmenbashi (the title of Saparmurat Niyazov, lit. “Head of Turkmen”) was seen in active introduction of the president’s cult as „prophet” and the cult of the Ruhnama (a book by Saparmurat Niyazov) as „the sacred book of the Turkmen”. It was even required to place the Ruhnama beside the Quran in mosques, and the imams who were against it were subject to repression. During Berdimuhamedov term this practice was ended.

Due to the state efforts many mosques are built in Turkmenistan, Islam is taught at special schools and Theology department at universities, Muslim holidays Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha are announced state holidays, the imams of mosques get salaries from the state treasury.

Various experts and political analysts indicate that Turkmenistan could avoid the appearance of Wahhabi groups and their agents of influence before 2013-2014 when the problem grew tense. It was possible thanks to the strict control of the authorities and security services as well as because Turkmen religious sphere and national mentality do not accept religious fundamentalism (because of the nomadic tradition). As famous expert on Central Asia affairs Aleksey Malashenko observed, „Turkmen Islam has always been apolitical. The phenomenon of traditional Islam is Islam o tribes. It has always been very passive across the world, stuck to its ceremonies, to family life and never interfered with politics”.

Almost all emissaries of the extremist religious organisation Hizb-ut-Tahrir going to Turkmenistan failed because the population was too passive in reacting to their propaganda, and literature on the subject brought into the country remained unclaimed. Only in 2014-2015

11 [Ibid.]
12 [Ibid.]
13 [Ibid.]
because of the situation’s exacerbation on Turkmenistan – Afghanistan border the media first published the news about the sharp increase of religious extremism inside the country. Meanwhile the quick growth of religiousness for unknown reasons is observed inside Turkmenistan, also among young people. It can be proved, for example, by the number of visitors of the mosques where there were no mosques at all before (for example, in capital Ashgabat).

The situation on the Turkmenistan border aggravated at the end of April, 2015, when the Taliban in Afghanistan announced the beginning of the spring attacking the government forces. During May and June there were regular reports about violent clashes between the Taliban and the government forces of Afghanistan in provinces Herat and Badghis bordering on Turkmenistan. It was also noted that the Taliban forces surpassed those of Kabul. Intensive fighting in these provinces at the end of May led to the increase in the flow of refugees from Afghanistan to the border with Turkmenistan. However, they were not allowed into the country by the custom officers of Turkmenistan.

Among the Turkmen living in Afghanistan near the border with Turkmenistan there are many descendants of Basmachis who fought against the Soviet power (in the Turkmen Kara-Kum Basmachi movement was especially long, it existed up to the middle of the thirties, and during the Second World war Basmachis who escaped to Afghanistan even establish contacts with German military intelligence). In the provinces of Afghanistan named above there was a traditionally strong support of the Taliban among the Turkmen tribes, however, last year or two years most of the supporters took the side of ISIL (according to some expertises, one of the reasons was active foreign financing, probably from Qatar, that prevented building of gas pipeline TAPI).

One more reason for the difficult border situation is that it was traditionally the area of drug smuggling that came through Turkmenistan detouring Iran on a Western or Balkan route. Some experts raise concerns it could be the basis for extremist groups to emerge in the country. For example, some reports about the arrest of extremists in Turkmenistan by the guards of the Chinese pipeline indirectly point to it as well as the presence of many Turkmen among ISIL militants in the Middle East (per capita the Turkmen are the most numerous in ISIL in the former Soviet countries, see further in section 3).

As for the situation in Turkmen army forces, the reality is unsatisfactory, notwithstanding the reforms implemented by the government, and the army capability to respond to new threats seems doubtful. It was clearly evident in the aggaravated situation on Turkmenistan – Afghanistan border. By 2015 up to 70% of the Turkmenistan army contingent was relocated to the border with Afghanistan, according to the opposition reports.

Prewar mobilization atmosphere is sensed in the country. Conditions of national military service are being toughened. Because of the exacerbated situation on the border with Afghanistan the call-up age was increased up to 30 years (27 years before). Besides, the term of military service for people with higher education increased from one to two years. To prevent the outflow of call-up age citizens the migration service and border guards were ordered not to let them out of the country. Every Etrap (regional) department of the Ministry of Defence got the task to double the number of conscripts and not to provide deferment from military service.

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19 [Ibid.]
without objective reasons. Reservists were told to participate in obligatory 40-day long military training.

At the same time the government of Turkmenistan officially denies the threat on the border with Afghanistan to save neutrality. It even addressed the appropriate note (after the statement by Nazarbayev who claimed he and Putin were concerned about the situation on the border between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan).

On the whole, one can note there was traditionally quite low rate of extremism spreading in Turkmenistan. However, because of the destabilisation in neighbouring Afghanistan it started changing. The highest level of the ISIL forces penetration on the north of Afghanistan was reported on the border between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan (however, it is important to mention that for the time being it is mostly „flag game“, i.e. some groups of the Afghanistan Turkmen on the border raise ISIL flags in response to the financing from the Middle East, not obeying directly the orders of the caliph). However, one cannot deny possible incursions.

Beside the factors listed above, economic and debt crises are also among the problems that lead to the instability and growth of extremism in the country. As the building of Chinese pipeline on the territory of Turkmenistan is formally a loan and not an investment, the country faced the debt crisis. At the same time it is experiencing difficulties because of the slump of oil prices on world markets.

The Turkmen is a “nation” of tribes. That’s why the issue of the aggravation of intertribal relationships becomes more important these days. The reason is that president Berdymyuhamedov, unlike the late Turkmenbashi (who grew up in an orphanage and didn’t like his Teke relatives), favors his tribe of the Ahal Tekes. As a result, the discontent among the representatives of other tribes is growing in the province. Even the related tribes - the Ahal Tekes and the Mary Tekes whose business is experiencing restrictions lately - are engaged in the conflict. As many experts think, it may provoke the development of Libya-like situation (the collapse of the Gaddafi regime was also triggered by the increasing activity of the tribes that were traditionally hostile to his own clan and strengthened due to the support from the outside; the situation in the North of Afghanistan and in the Middle East may become such an external factor for Turkmenistan).

3.3. UZBEKISTAN

Concerning the confrontation between the government and Islamic extremist groups, the situation in Uzbekistan is quite controversial. On the one hand, the most powerful extremist groups in the region such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) appeared in Uzbekistan. On the other hand, powerful security forces and tight internal policy provide a strict control over the activity of religious extremists.

Officially, 2,225 religious organizations and 16 different denominations are registered in Uzbekistan. The Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan guarantees the right to manifest any

religion or none (article 31 of the Constitution of the RU)”22. Sunni Islam is the predominant religion in the country manifested by 93% of the population, except for 1% of Shia Muslims living in Bukhara and Samarkand23.

The government implements the policy of emphasising that Islam is the major traditional religion in the country. The first president of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov stressed it in his speech during the Bukhara Regional Council session in March, 1994. He said: “Religion and believers play an important role in the life of society. Our policy here is clearly defined. Islam is the sacred belief of our ancestors. Thanks to Islam our folk saved itself, its spirituality and rich cultural inheritance in history”24.

Basic principles of state policy in the sphere of religion are set forth in the book by Islam Karimov “Uzbekistan na poroge XXI veka: ugrozy bezopasnosti, usloviya i garantii progressa”. He writes that the government, in regard to religion, “is secular and adheres to the following principles: respectful attitude towards religious sensitivities of believers; acknowledgement of religious beliefs as a private issue of citizens or unions of citizens; guarantee of equal rights and inadmissibility of persecution of citizens manifesting any religion or none; need to set up a dialogue with different religious organisations to use their abilities for spiritual revival and consolidation of universal moral values; acknowledgement of using religion for destructive purposes as inadmissible”25.

Uzbekistan (especially a part of the Fergana Valley) is the major hotbed of Islamic extremism spreading in Central Asia. In this connection the government is actively fighting against the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the related Islamic Movement of Turkestan (IMT) and other radical groups that attempted several times to start hostilities against the ruling regime. Islamists organised terrorist attacks (in Tashkent and other cities), uprisings (in Andizhan), attempted to invade Uzbekistan through neighbouring countries (Batken war in Kyrgyzstan).

Large groups of armed Uzbek extremists, tightly connected with Al-Qaeda, are based in the neighbouring Afghanistan. Now the IMU, slightly weakened by internal splits, tries to build its capacity by cooperating, apart from the Taliban, with other Islamist groups that operate in Afghanistan as well as in Pakistan. In particular, the IMU (represented by Usman Ghazi) announced its entering ISIL. The security services of Uzbekistan are also concerned about ISIL threats from Syria and Iraq, where many immigrants from Uzbekistan are fighting.

The problem of religious extremism growth in Uzbekistan is very difficult, besides, due to the clan policy. There is a traditional division of labour between regional clans in Uzbekistan expressed in the proverb “they rule in Samarkand, they count money in Tashkent, they pray in Fergana”. This proverb emphasises a special role of Islam exactly in the Fergana Valley and the fact that key clerics are traditionally from this region. During the post-Soviet development of the

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23 [Ibid.]
country’s political system Samarkand (the president belongs to it) and Tashkent (it controls economy) clans came to power. That’s why Fergana clan used the threat of religious extremism in the 1990s as a way to increase its influence, many experts say. Understanding of these relationships between the clans is essential now because after the death of Islam Karimov Uzbekistan may experience a sharp exacerbation of inter-clan fighting. Religious extremists may use it to their benefit, experts think. However, it is important to mention that the first stages of power transfer in Uzbekistan happened without any problems and difficulties.

The situation in Uzbekistan is also aggravated by the economic crisis caused by declining revenues from labor migration to Russia and slump of prices on hydrocarbons on world markets. Consequently, because of the rising unemployment many young people can become a target for recruitment by terrorists. At the same time the economic crisis is weakening the country. Not only public servants, but also security forces officers have their wages delayed.

As a whole, the situation in the religious sphere is now under government control in Uzbekistan. However, the prospects of further stability in the country remain quite uncertain because of the economic crisis and the inevitable redistributing of power between the clans of the ruling elite after Islam Karimov’s death. In case of negative external impacts, in particular from Afghanistan, the Middle East and other, less stable states in Central Asia, the situation may become especially alarming.

3.4. KAZAKHSTAN

Until recently, Kazakhstan was the safest country in regard to the problem of religious radicalism spreading. It could be explained by several reasons: stable economy (about 2/3 of GDP of Central Asia countries is produced in Kazakhstan), rather high level of social modernisation during the Soviet period, many Russians living in the country and historical traditions of Islam spreading among the Kazakhs.

As the former chairman of the Senate Oralbay Abdykarimov noted, the relationships between the government and religion have their specific features, connected with the historical past of the country as well as with the internal policy implemented by the sovereign state. He especially emphasised the tradition of peaceful co-existing of different religions in Kazakhstan’s steppes. In his opinion, the nomadic culture has influenced Islam; for instance, no traditional religious institutions functioned in Kazakhstan for a long time, unlike in the neighbouring settled countries. Religion became even more insignificant during the Soviet period, when Kazakhstan was actively russified and modernized.

Independence of Kazakhstan was accompanied by reforms in all spheres of social life. The young sovereign state totally changed its attitude to believers and religion as a whole. During his speech at the Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan president Nursultan Nazarbayev mentioned social liberalisation could not happen without deliverance of people from ubiquitous control of authorities, first and foremost, in the religious sphere. According to the Republic of Kazakhstan’s Constitution, the state is secular. It means that the relationships between state and religion from now on are formed under new rules: 1) state is separated from religion and

28 [Ibid.]
29 [Ibid.]
religious communities; 2) no religion can be established as a state or obligatory one; 3) state and religion do not interfere in each other’s affairs and are full co-existing partners in everyday life.\(^{30}\)

The state implemented the policy that created real opportunities to build religious life of one person and communities without any obstacles. Such policy contributed to establishing the relations of mutual tolerance and respect both among the citizens and different religious communities. With the independence political pluralism grew. According to the Agency for Religious Affairs, there were more than 4,550 religious communities in 2013 (670 in 1990). Among them were Islamic, Orthodox, Catholic and other religious communities.\(^{31}\)

Nowadays Islam in Kazakhstan is experiencing its rebirth, its socio-political prestige and authority grew. However, negative aspects appeared as well. Many small religious groups that do not always follow the law emerged. All in all, there are 579 such groups in the country that appeared in the years of independence, says the chairman of the Agency for Religious Affairs.\(^{32}\)

Concerning the spreading of radical Islam, the situation is critical in two regions. In Southern Kazakhstan that was always a “settled” zone, Islamic institutions always had a strong influence upon the life of society. Besides, the rebirth of Islam in this region was accompanied also by emerging of “non-traditional” forms, in particular, Salafism. The situation is even more difficult in Western Kazakhstan in recent years. Intensive industrial oil and gas development in the region led to the concentrating of socially marginalized groups there, especially migrants (first of all, the Oralmans – the ethnic Kazakhs returning to Kazakhstan). Radical Islamic groups felt comfortable in that environment.

In recent years single extremist groups appeared in Kazakhstan that harm national security. Among them are Hizb-ut-Tahrir, various Wahhabi organisations, politic-islamic organizations like Izgi Amal («Изги амал»), Kazakhstan Musylym Odagy («Казахстан мусылман одагы») and so on. These processes caused serious changes in relationships between the state and religion. For instance, the new law “On religious activity and religious organizations” formulated the principles of a stricter government policy in the sphere of religion affairs, which implied fighting against radical Islamism.\(^{33}\) Registration and reregistration of religious communities is now carried out in accordance with this law.

The security services of Kazakhstan raise concerns about ISIL militants returning from Syria and Iraq. It is essential there are many Kazakh women and children who can be used by the extremists with the militants on the Middle East. Kazakhstan is also a unique country in Central Asia by the fact that socioeconomic reasons do not play here such an important role for recruiting militants as in neighbouring countries (because socioeconomic position of the country, in comparison to its neighbors, is relatively prosperous).

However, socioeconomic crisis in the country caused by a significant decrease in oil revenues, in the first place, plays an important role among other reasons for the growth of terrorism and extremism. Particularly, it led to the depreciation of national currency (tenge), price increase, cut in social expenditures of the state. Growth of social tensions showed itself, for

\(^{30}\) Problemy vzaimodeystviya religii i politiki v sovremennom Kazakhstane (Проблемы взаимодействия религии и политики в современном Казахстане) [Electronic resource]. - URL:http://articlekz.com/article/8058

\(^{31}\) [Ibid.]


\(^{33}\) Problemy vzaimodeystviya religii i politiki v sovremennom Kazakhstane (Проблемы взаимодействия религии и политики в современном Казахстане) [Electronic resource]. - URL:http://articlekz.com/article/8058
example, in massive unauthorized rebellions against amendments to the Land Code that enlarged
the rights of foreign investors. The protests had an evident anti-Chinese orientation. Like the
Zhanozen protests earlier, the rebellions didn’t have any religious content. They are more likely
to indicate social problems, and their political agenda concerned anti-Chinese attitudes and
protests against corruption. The most massive rebellions took place in the West of Kazakhstan
(cities Atyrau, Aktobe, Semey). They began on April, 24, 2016 and continued up to the end of
May, 2016.

Experts are also concerned about the possible growth of religious extremism influence if
power transfer from the first president of Kazakhstan will be attended by inter-clan conflicts.

Finally, it is important to mention that Kazakhstan has partly lost its image of “stability
home” in the region in 2016 in terms of terrorism dynamics. It happened because of the terrorist
attack in Aktobe on June, 5, 2016. During it two armor stores (with the purpose of arms
acquisition) and military unit 6655 of the National Guard were attacked. Terrorists used a taken
passenger bus for the attack. They had brought all the passengers and the conductor out of the
bus before (for the time being, a characteristic feature of terrorist attacks in Kazakhstan is their
non-orientation towards civils) 34. Altogether 25 people died (4 civilians, 3 militaries, 18
terrorists). The attack was committed by a group of Islamic extremists that were engaged in
criminal activities at the same time. On July, 18, 2016 a similar terrorist attack happened in
Almaty, during which there were shootings between police and terrorists that had acquired guns.

It is necessary to point out the tendency to criminalisation of radical Islamists or, vice versa,
Islamic radicalisation of ordinary criminals. It is especially obvious in Western Kazakhstan.
Kazakh information sources point out that local terrorists are connected with their confederates
in the Middle East.

In this connection it is relevant to refer to the typology of terroristic activity growth in
Kazakhstan offered by a noted Kazakh expert and politician, Director of KazISS (Kazakhstan
Institute for Strategic Studies) under the President of Kazakhstan Erlan Karin35.

He noted that at the end of the 1990s – the beginning of the 2000s the terrorism problem
was that foreign terrorists were hiding in Kazakhstan: North Caucasian immigrants (Kazakhstan
was the place of exile for the Chechens and other nations), the Uzbek from Uzbekistan or the
Uyghurs from China.

However, at the beginning – in the middle of the 2000s a new period of recruitment began.
There were more citizens of Kazakhstan taking part in terrorism activities both within and
outside CIS countries. For instance, group Jamaat of Mujahideen in Central Asia («Жамаат
моджахедов Центральной Азии»), that included the citizens of Kazakhstan as well, organised a
series of terrorist attacks in the neighbouring Uzbekistan in the spring-summer in 2004.

Finally, in 2005-2011 terrorism “assimilated” in Kazakhstan. During this period the
number of prosecuted Kazakhstan citizens that had committed crimes of terrorist or extremist
nature right in the country began to increase. In 2008-2009, officially, 7 terrorist attacks were
thwarted in the country.

In the period of 2011-2012 a totally new tendency appeared. Terrorists purposefully
attacked the officers of security forces, so they affronted government structures. In 2011
explosions in the building of the NSC in Aktobe and near the pre-trial detention facility of the

34 URL:https://www.nur.kz/1151925-chislo-unichtozhennykh-terroristov-v-akt.html; URL:https://lenta.ru/
news/2016/06/06/shotdead/
35 URL:https://regnum.ru/news/polit/1598478.html
NSC in Astana took place. First terrorism was acknowledged as a threat for national security after two explosions in Atyrau at the end of October in 2011, when a criminal case under the corresponding article of the Criminal Code was initiated.

In 2012 Kazakh experts Marat Shibutov and Vyacheslav Abramov gave a report on “Terrorism in Kazakhstan 2011-2012” and claimed that the “incubation time” of inner terrorism was over and soon there would be a new, stronger wave of terrorism.

Unfortunately, these predictions came true. The Deputy Attorney General of Kazakhstan Andrey Kravchenko announced on January, 31, 2017 that 9 terrorist attacks had been committed in the country for the previous 5 years. Besides, 80% of young people were recruited by terrorists via the Internet.

The above tendencies result in disappointing forecasts. As the experience of many countries and regions shows, terrorist activity has a certain consequence. For instance, they always begin with violence against government and security services without harming civilians. The terrorists behaved in such a way during the attack in Aktobe. They simply brought the driver and the passengers out of the taken bus. However, along with the development of terrorist activity their actions towards civilians become more violent. Terrorist attacks become terrifying and irrational because the victims of such attacks are often people who happen to be near by chance. The question, when this phase will begin in Kazakhstan, has no answer yet.

3.5 KYRGYZSTAN

According to the State Committee for Religious Affairs under the President of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, by the beginning of 2016 the activity of 19 extremist and terrorist organizations, 18 of which identify themselves as Islamic ones, is forbidden by courts of all instances in Kyrgyzstan.

Some of the forbidden organisations are increasing the number of their supporters very fast – first and foremost, Al-Qaeda – 2,000 members, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) – about 3,000 members and Hizb-ut-Tahrir – about 15,000 members; among the unregistered organisations the biggest is Tabligi Jamaat – about 20,000 members. They have their departments in all regions of the republic. Besides, although Tabligi Jamaat’s activity actually aims at creating Islam theocracy in the republic, officially it doesn’t interfere with politics and prioritizes preaching and propaganda. That’s why it’s quite difficult to prove its extremist activity.

At the same time the outside forces influence the division of traditional religious Muslim organisation under the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan (SBMK) into smaller groups that differ in their aims and religious beliefs. Today the SBJMK leader is one of Tabligi Jamaat’s
leaders – Maksat Toktomushev. As mentioned above, the aim of Tabligi Jamaat is to revive the world caliphate and to eliminate national states\textsuperscript{40}.

The presence of foreign religious centers is particularly seen in such an important sphere of religious activity as the building of new religious facilities. Since the beginning of the 1990s the number of mosques increased from 39 to 2,362 – about 70 times. The majority of mosques is situated in the south of the country (67.8%), and religious extremism is traditionally connected with southern regions: the Osh, Jalal-Abad and Batken regions\textsuperscript{41}.

Experts estimate that more than 90% of these mosques were built with financial support of foreign religious centers, prosperous citizens and states implementing their geopolitical projects in Kyrgyzstan\textsuperscript{42}. More than $ 500 million was invested in mosque building during those years\textsuperscript{43}.

Negative processes can be observed also in the sphere of religious education. Out of the 6-million population 10% are devout believers, however, there are 92 religious educational institutions, among them 10 Islam and 4 Christian colleges, 65 madrasas and 11 parochial schools. More than 5,000 people are taught in these institutions, and about 300 more attend religious institutions in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the Arab Republic of Egypt, Turkey and Russia\textsuperscript{44}. A delayed problem is the establishing of religious institutions in Kyrgyzstan by a famous preacher Fethullah Gülen.

The extremist religious organisations’ activity overview shows that the government and society fighting against it is an important issue of national security. In the national security concept of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan much attention is paid to the estimation of such movements. For instance, it is stated in the document that “religious extremism and international terrorism nowadays pose a serious threat for the Republic of Kyrgyzstan. After the consolidation of their forces on the basis of common extremist ideology religious-extremist and terrorist organisations become powerful criminal international structures that have a wide network of supporters also in our country”\textsuperscript{45}.

The document elaborates on purposes and tasks of the extremist religious movements in Kyrgyzstan, their methods of undermining national security in the republic. The concept says in that regard: “Many missionaries and funds, media and Internet sources are used by international extremist and terrorist organisations with the implicit support of many Muslim countries to accelerate Islamisation and radicalisation of the countries in Central Asia. Literature on extremism and other symbols of indoctrination of the society are brought into the country. Besides, these organisations strive to unite forces of political and religious extremism, terrorism, separatism, drug mafia and other criminal structures for destabilisation and seizure of power,


\textsuperscript{41} URL: http://24.kg/obschestvo/40314_za_godyi_nezavisimosti_chislo_mechetey_v_kyirgyzstane_kontseptsiya.html

\textsuperscript{42} V Kirgizii – bum stroitel'stva mechetey (В Киргизии – бум строительства мечетей). 14.03.2016. [Electronic resource] - URL: http://islam-today.ru/novosti/2016/03/14/v-kirgizii-bum-stroitelsstva-mec...

\textsuperscript{43} L. Khodov. Istochniki finsirovaniya zapadnykh khristianskih tserkvey // Voprosy ekonomiki, 2002. №1 (Ходов Л. Источники финансирования западных христианских церквей // Вопросы экономики).

\textsuperscript{44} O sostoyanii religioznogo obrazovaniya v Kyrgyzskoy Respublike: Materialy parlamentskoy slushaniy (О состоянии религиозного образования в Кыргызской Республике: Материалы парламентских слушаний). – Bishkek, 2013.

\textsuperscript{45} Kontseptsiya natsional'noy bezopasnosti Kyrgyzskoy respubliki (Концепция национальной безопасности Кыргызской Республики) [Electronic resource]. - URL: www.centrasia.ru/news.A.php?st=1339492740
primarily in the Fergana Valley, and to create here a launchpad for further expansion in the region”\textsuperscript{46}. The religious-political group Hizb ut-Tahrir al Islami (HT) is considered to be one of the most active extremist organisations. The special feature of the party Hizb ut-Tahrir is its active recruitment of new members. Recently it also became more active in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The main hotbeds of spreading of the HT ideas in Kyrgyzstan are the Osh and Jalal-Abad regions\textsuperscript{47}.

HT is actually the largest and the most active extremist religious organisation in Kyrgyzstan nowadays.

The leadership of HT is always willing to cooperate with the representatives of other extremist religious organisations. HT members in Kyrgyzstan think of Salafis as of “brothers in faith”, possible allies that can join them during collective actions in case of oppressions against Muslims\textsuperscript{48}. Besides, HT members don’t condemn ISIL activity, and some of them are ready to participate in the war in the Middle East. In general, „there is a tendency among HT members to cooperation with various political forces and radical organisations for HT purposes”\textsuperscript{49}. Besides, officially proclaiming the abstention from violent actions, HT is often a fertile ground for establishing new radical terrorist organisations.

HT is seeking to engage as many supporters as possible so it intensifies the activity on extension of social and political base of its sympathizers and speculates on socioeconomic problems and drawbacks of government institutions. For example, there are attempts to attract young people who are looking for answers to urgent questions of their daily life in Islam and cannot get convincing answers from mosque imams. As a result, HT ideas become quite appealing for many young people\textsuperscript{50}. In recent years the party also tries to engage women by establishing female jamaats that organise so-called mashvaras – discussions often held in different places. Female jamaats are especially active in the Kara-Suu, Aravan and Nookat districts\textsuperscript{51}. At the same time one cannot underestimate the evident HT endeavours to extend its social base, to strengthen its political activity by pushing its members to government institutions of all levels, political parties, local governments and public organisations.

The organisation Mahdi Army is an open terrorist group in Kyrgyzstan that has committed a series of terrorist attacks in various cities and regions of the republic. It shows that modern media play nowadays a significant role in spreading of extremist ideology and practice. According to law enforcement bodies of Kyrgyzstan, Jamaat of Kyrgyzstan Jayshul Mahdi (Kyrgyz Jamaat “The Mahdi Army”) was set up in 2007 but began its activity in 2010. The Amir of the Jamaat was the citizen of Kyrgyzstan S. Islamov. The aim of the organisation is to build

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[46] [Ibid.]
\item[48] [Ibid.] P. 21.
\item[49] [Ibid.] P. 12.
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caliphate on the territory of Kyrgyzstan and other countries of Central Asia by wide application of terrorism methods.

The members of the Mahdi Army try to draw attention of international terrorist organisations in order to get financial and ideological support, so they shot a videoclip where they were wearing masks and holding guns. It was said in the clip about the establishing of the organisation in Kyrgyzstan and announcing of the armed jihad. Recruitment of young people to the members began. It is notable that all the young members of the organisation are the natives of Northern regions of the republic\textsuperscript{52}. For a short period of time the members of the Mahdi Army committed several terrorist attacks, including explosions, attacking law enforcement officers and robberies to use the stolen property for criminal purposes.

Pervomayskiy district court of Bishkek prohibited the activity of the organisation Takfir wal-Hijra in Kyrgyzstan on October, 24, 2014\textsuperscript{53}. It appeared in Egypt in the 1960s with the aim to create a single Muslim state on the territory of several states by using force, changing the constitutional order by force and the armed fighting the infidels.\textsuperscript{54}

To prevent subversive activity and distribution of Takfirism and Jihadism ideologies in Kyrgyzstan Pervomayskiy district court of Bishkek prohibited the activity of the organisation Ansar Allah in Kyrgyzstan on October, 24, 2012. This organisation was established in 2005 in Pakistan, province Waziristan. In Central Asia it is known as the Tajik department of Al-Qaeda.

Osh city court declared the organisation Katibat al-Imam al-Bukhari to be extremist and terrorist and banned its activity in Kyrgyzstan. The organisation is named after an Islamic scholar of the IX century Muhammad al-Bukhari born in Uzbekistan. Its activity is more known in Uzbekistan, however, there were attempts to create its departments also in Kyrgyzstan. The bodies of the State National Security Committee of the republic defeated a Katibat al-Imam al-Bukhari cell in Osh. During the operation 7 extremists were arrested, a number of guns, much ammunition and explosive were seized\textsuperscript{55}. The organisation is known for its connections with Jabhat al-Nusra as well as for the recruitment and trafficking of the Osh region inhabitants to the battlefield in Syria and Iraq.

There are evidences of the activities of the religious and extremist sect Akromiya in Southern regions of Kyrgyzstan. It was set up in the middle of the 1990s in the Andijan region of Uzbekistan by a former member of Islamist organisation Hizb ut-Tahrir Akrom Yoldoshev. Pervomayskiy district declared the religious movement Akromiya to be an extremist organisation and prohibited its activity in Kyrgyzstan on March, 14, 2014\textsuperscript{56}.

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\textsuperscript{52} “Jayshul’ Mahdi” vne zakona. – Infocentr “Antiterror”, 2012. February, 26 («Жайшуль Махди» вне закона. – Инфоцентр «Антитеррор»).

\textsuperscript{53} [Ibid.]


\textsuperscript{55} Teper’ v Kyrgyzstane budut sazhat’ v tyur’nu za odnu tol’ko syvaz’ s nekotorymi “mezhdnunarodnymi organizatsiyami” (Теперь в Кыргызстане будут сажать в тюрьму за одну только связь с некоторыми «международными организациями»). 28.05.2015 [Electronic resource]. - URL: http//www.delo.kg/index.php/health-7/8651-terroristy-zapreshcheny-ofitsialno

\textsuperscript{56} Sudami raznykh instantsiy Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki zapreshcheny na territorii respubliki deatel’nost’ ekstremistskikh I terrorishcheskikh organizatsiy (Судами разных инстанций Кыргызской Республики запрещены на территории республики деятельность экстремистских и террористических организаций) [Electronic resource]. - URL: http://www.religion.gov.kg/ru/not_registration_union.html
The resolution of the Supreme Court of Kyrgyzstan adopted on August, 20, 2003 declared the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) to be a terrorist organisation. The movement stands for establishing of an independent state on the territory of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in China, it is suspected to have connections with Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Taking into account that the Uyghurs live also in Kyrgyzstan, the militants of the movement tried many time to recruit young Uyghurs to the members of the organisation. They also committed a series of terrorist attacks in Kyrgyzstan. For instance, on May, 25, 2000 the terrorists of ETIM attacked three Chinese government officials who were in Kyrgyzstan. One of them was killed, two others injured. On June, 29, 2002 the militants of ETIM shot a Chinese diplomat. They also killed the leader of the Uyghurs as he had refused to cooperate with them. On August, 30, 2016 a terrorist attack against the Chinese embassy happened in the capital of Kyrgyzstan. A suicide bomber in a mined car rammed the gates. He was a member of the Uyghur terrorist movement. Afterwards more than 10 militants were arrested on suspicion of illegal sale of arms that were used during the mentioned attacks.

The terrorist organisation Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) also operated in Kyrgyzstan. This organisation separated from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan because of disagreements with the IMU leaders on the issue of strategy and aims of the movement. The latter had as their priority the fighting against the Karimov regime in Uzbekistan. In 2001 some members of the organisation, representing its radical wing, demanded to expand jihad not only on Uzbekistan but also on all Central Asia and later on other countries. In 2002 the representatives of the radical wing, having failed to impose their aims on the leadership of the IMU, set up in Wasiristan (Pakistan) a new organisation Islamic Jihad Union. In 2004 the members of this group committed a series of terrorist attacks against the Uzbek, American and Israeli objects in Uzbekistan. The members of the IJU known as Sauerland-Gruppe had planned several terrorist attacks but were arrested in Germany in 2007.

In 2013 the State National Security Committee of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan in the Osh region apprehended several members of the IJU trafficked from Syria who planned to commit a series of terrorist attacks in Bishkek and Osh during the Summit of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

In Southern regions of Kyrgyzstan the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan operated very actively. On November, 29, 2010 three militants of the IMU were killed during the special operation in the Osh region, one more committed suicide with a grenade. The extremist group was to carry out terrorist attacks and attacks against government officials in some cities of the Osh region.

57 [Ibid.]
58 Organizatsiya osvobozhdeniya Vostochnogo Turkestana (Организация освобождения Восточного Туркестана) [Electronic resource]. - URL: http://www.din.gov.kz/rus/pressluzhba/spisok_zaprexhennyx_organizaci/?cid=0&rid=465
59 URL: http://www.interfax.ru/world/533652
ISIL implements the project “Islamic State’s Khorasan Province” that includes the territory of Kyrgyzstan. There are about 6,500 militants engaged in this project, according to various estimates, mostly from the region countries. The leader of the project is Pashtun Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, and the USA announced the reward of $ 10 million for him.

Nowadays financing of terroristic activities by international structured masked as commercial activity poses a serious threat for the country. For instance, on February, 2, 2017 officers of the State National Security Committee apprehended the organiser of international terrorist organisation (ITO) financing, Kyrgyz citizen Z.K., born in 1984, the Osh region. It was revealed that Z.K. was studying in religious educational institutions of Egypt and Syria in 2012 and got connections with the leaders of ITO groups. In 2012 Z.K. organised commercial activity together with the members of ITO in one of the Arab countries to finance terrorist groups. In January, 2015, he came to Kyrgyzstan and continued the criminal activity on financing international terrorism forces by money transfer while undertaking commercial activities.

4. THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN: THE RISING SECURITY THREAT IN CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES AND RUSSIA

Currently a major threat for Russia and other Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) member states, particularly for Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan is posed by the emerging trends in the situation development in Afghanistan. These include the infiltration of ISIL militants, the growing role of Al-Qaeda, the Middle East crisis and the situation in Pakistan, growing inter-ethnic tensions between the factions in Afghanistan's current government (between Pashtuns and Tajiks within the National Unity Government as well as between Tajiks and Uzbeks in the north of the country) and the growing refugee problem.

4.1. INTERNATIONAL TERRORIST NETWORKS ESTABLISH LOGISTIC CORRIDORS TO CENTRAL ASIAN BORDERS

Small groups of ISIL supporters (sympathizers) started showing up in Afghanistan and Pakistan in autumn 2014. Along with the deployment of militants from northern Pakistan to Afghanistan in winter and spring 2015, logistic corridors were established to supply the groups that had moved to Afghan territory. At the same time Afghan National Security Forces representatives claim that Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) is involved in both the appearance of ISIL militants in Afghanistan and supporting the fighters after they had settled down in the country.

According to reasonable assumptions made by Afghan experts, Inter-Services Intelligence took part in the establishment of logistic corridors across Afghan territory. “Among other things, in spring 2015 Afghan security forces detained trucks in the southern provinces of Afghanistan loaded with new small arms (assault rifles and machine guns) and...

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64 URL:http://afghanistan.ru/doc/104040.html
grenade launchers. These arms were delivered to Afghan territory from Pakistan and were intended for ISIL militants. In June 2015 the Governor of Badakhshan accused some unnamed “external forces” of trying to turn his province into “another North Waziristan”. It is these unnamed forces who, in his opinion, are to blame for many antigovernment forces that operate in Badakhshan being better equipped than the local military and police units. Most of the local commentators believe that the “unnamed forces” primarily stood for Pakistan.

The most conclusive proof that backed the popular opinion of Inter-Services Intelligence’s involvement in ISIL infiltration into Afghanistan was the 2015 scandal in the Afghan Parliament. The first deputy speaker of the national parliament Abdul Zahir Qadir demanded to shell the mysterious unidentified helicopters flying over Nangarhar province. Qadir also stated that these helicopters were used to supply ISIL fighters in Afghanistan, although the pilots attributed the landings to “technical difficulties”. More than that, as was pointed out by Qadir, during armed clashes between the Taliban and ISIL these helicopters provided the latter with air support. It is worth noting that the unidentified helicopters that are commonly associated with Pakistan have not appeared in Nangarhar alone and provided logistic support to some other terrorist groups, including Afghan Taliban. For instance, in 2016 four unidentified helicopters landed in one of the regions of eastern Afghan province Ghazni, which was under the militants’ control.

In this context, it may be recalled that the first rumors about the infiltration of ISIL militants into Afghanistan in 2014 were caused by “masked men”, who appeared in Kunar in eastern Afghanistan. Back then they were taken for Pakistani officers that trained the Taliban fighters. Later, however, it turned out that in 2014 they actually took on the fight against the Taliban. Taliban militants were found hanged in their areas of operation. Commentators in this respect note that it was the eastern Afghanistan that later turned into the arena of confrontation between the Taliban and ISIL and that actions of unidentified “masked men” allegedly associated with Pakistan in fact opened this “front”.

4.2. GEOPOLITICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN: THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL ACTORS

While analyzing geopolitical reasons for the surge in international terrorists’ activity in the country, some Afghan experts point to long-standing relationships between Pakistan’s military, connected with ISI, and the Gulf monarchies. For instance, Pakistan military representatives (officially registered as mercenaries) are involved in the Gulf oil-producing countries’ security matters as well as in the operation in Yemen, carried out by Saudi forces, formally as part of the coalition. Thus it seems like certain circles of the Pakistani military forces and security services informally “bound” themselves to the anti-Iran coalition led by Saudi Arabia.

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66 [Ibid.]
67 URL:http://afghanistan.ru/doc/87609.html
68 URL:http://afghanistan.ru/doc/93155.html
69 URL:http://afghanistan.ru/doc/93513.html
70 Iskandarov K. “Исламское государство” в Афганистане: проблемы формирования и потенциал угрозы для стран региона (Искандаров К. Исламское государство в Афганистане: проблемы формирования и потенциал угрозы для стран региона) [electronic resource]. – URL: http://afghanistan.ru/doc/91334.html
In this respect it is worth mentioning that over the past few years some actions on the part of a number of international actors (primarily Saudi Arabia and Qatar) resulted in a link between the grave situation in Afghanistan and in the Middle East; there is clearly a confrontation between the Saudi-led bloc (the so-called Sunni bloc which has recently been formally established as the Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism (IMAFT)) and Iran-led bloc (commonly known as the Shia bloc, which has not yet been formalized). A number of sources suggest that the above-mentioned redeployment of militant groups from Pakistan to Afghanistan has originally been funded by Saudi Arabia and Qatar with the objective of training the militants for fighting against Iran (Iran recruited Afghan Hazara Shias to use them as militants in the Middle East) or for confronting local Shias (ISIL and Al-Qaeda actively perpetrate terrorist acts against Shias in Pakistan and Afghanistan) or for further relocation of militants to the Middle East. The relocation of war from the Middle East to Afghanistan also poses a serious threat to former Soviet republics of Central Asia. Since then the reasoning for financial support of the militants could have changed significantly.

It is particularly disturbing that in the context of Russian military operation in Syria Saudi-led bloc countries turned out to be also interested in the destabilization of Russia and the post-Soviet space in order to use it as means of political pressure against Moscow. Thus there is speculation that this has been the reason for the additional “big money” coming to Afghanistan from the Middle East. For instance, according to Al-Jazeera ISIL militants earn ten times more money that the Taliban.

Some Afghan and Central Asian experts claim that this is some sort of a typical operation, similar to the one that took place around the time of Al-Qaeda formation, when Russian troops were in Afghanistan, and then again in 1990s, when the Taliban was being formed. In all those operations Pakistani ISI, connected with Saudi Arabia, Qatar and a number of other oil-producing monarchies, acted as “commodity manager” and an administrator of the financial assistance those monarchies received.

A number of experts interviewed in the context of this report also suggest that certain circles in the USA are interested in the process as means of opposition to the Chinese projects (primarily the Silk Road economic belt). It means that if the situation in Afghanistan and the post-Soviet Central Asian countries does explode, the implementation of the above mentioned China’s projects will be impossible. It must be noted, however, that this strategy cannot, even theoretically, be implemented as long as US troops remain in Afghanistan and are held accountable for the area. That is why some experts believe that this is a plan B in case U.S. troops are withdrawn from Afghanistan. Some experts also indicate the possible impact of the confrontation between the USA and Russia on the influx of funds from the Middle East to Afghanistan and also establishment of ISIL, Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups’ supply routes in northern Afghanistan, closer to the borders of the former Soviet states.

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72 Mansur A. N. Destabilizaciya severa Afganistana mozhet sta' otvetom na dejstviya Rossi v Sirii [electronic resource].Мансур А. Н. Дестабилизация севера Афганистана может стать ответом на действия России в Сирии.
Among some of Afghan experts there is also a version that some circles in Kabul have deliberately exaggerated the scale of the threat posed by ISIL supporters in Afghanistan for receiving support (supplies of arms, including helicopters) from countries in the region.

Either way, the expert community does not yet have hard public evidence to corroborate one or another point of view on the real geopolitical reasons for some international forces to support the infiltration of ISIL and other terrorist groups into Afghanistan. More than that, certain groups involved in the infiltration of militants should not be regarded as uniformly representing the interests of their own states (for instance, Pakistan as China’s ally on the whole can hardly be interested in the collapse of China’s projects). Thus it is rather a collusion among some elite groups within the countries concerned.

Nevertheless, the increased financing from the Middle East has become an important substantiated dimension of ISIL militants infiltrating the country. According to Russian presidential envoy to Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov, ISIL gets 70% of its funding from abroad and the earnings from its operations in the region (including those derived from drug trafficking) cover 30% of the expenses. Many Afghan analysts speak about the abundant supplies Islamic State terrorists get. For instance, in 2015 above-mentioned Zamir Kabulov expressed concern about ISIL militants being especially well-equipped in Nangarhar province. According to him, they had whatever one could think of and only lacked tanks and helicopters. Afghan media analysis, however, revealed that in 2016 national security forces’ operations resulted in significant damage for Nangarhar ISIL branch. At the same time, the same analysis shows that in the second half of 2016, despite the losses suffered in Nangarhar, ISIL managed to extend its geographical scope in the south and east of the country.

4.3. THE TALIBAN AND ISIL: CONFRONTATION OR COOPERATION?

A “war” between the Taliban and ISIL is another complex issue. This raises the key question for the future dynamic of Afghan policies: to what extent do the Taliban and ISIL really confront each other?

When the militants deployed from Pakistan first appeared in Afghanistan, ISIL propaganda campaign was launched to persuade Afghan Taliban members to pledge their allegiance to the Islamic State. In Afghanistan ISIL even developed its own media outlets: in Nangarhar, for example, there is a radio station, broadcasting in Pashto, Dari and even in English. Since the radio station is mobile and broadcasts either from the border areas or from neighboring Pakistan, it cannot be destroyed.

On January 25, 2015 Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi called Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban, “ignorant and uneducated militant, lacking the essential qualities of a spiritual leader and a политик.” Later the group’s new formation, Khorasan Province (ISIL-KP), was announced that was active in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Iran, parts of post-Soviet Central Asia and a Chinese region Xinjiang.
On April 21, 2015 the onset of hostilities between ISIL and the Taliban was reported (although the military engagement only affected the east of Afghanistan, not the north of the country)\(^81\). Special Taliban units were even formed in eastern Afghanistan to fight ISIL\(^82\).

On June 16, 2015 the Taliban leadership under Mullah Akhtar Mansour sent Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi a letter, expressing their concern on ISIL operating in Afghanistan. The letter emphasized the religious affinities of both groups and also insisted that ISIL not interfere in the Taliban internal affairs. After Afghan Taliban publicly admitted covering up Mullah Omar's death, the rift within Taliban deepened and a severe internecine strife began. A number of Taliban warlords and Omar’s family refused to support Mullah Akhtar Mansour. Mansour’s subsequent death also did not result bring about consolidated peace within the Taliban. A group under Muhammad Rasul also refused to recognize Hibatullah Akhundzada as the new leader. In 2016 Muhammad Rasul was reported dead. And though there is still no hard evidence of his death, since then opposition faction’s activity has much reduced.

Thus while in 2015 the experts observed an escalating internal conflict within Taliban resulting in some Taliban militants joining ISIL, in 2016 there were signs of Taliban’s strengthening: in September-October 2016 they launched a number of major attacks across multiple Afghan provinces resulting in considerable difficulties for the authorities and NATO. The coordinated assaults on Farah and Helmand, much resembling military operations, demonstrate a shift in Taliban tactics.

Still so far it is too early to tell whether Taliban fighters stopped joining ISIL. Along with the inflow of funds from the Middle East and support provided through logistic channels from northern Pakistan, ISIL favored conflicts between various Taliban militia groups over proceeds from the poppy cultivation and heroin laboratories.

ISIL makes former Taliban militants join them primarily through terror and intimidation. For instance, in March 2016 the Afghan Ministry of Defense stated that more than 600 Afghans were massacred by ISIL. They were mainly young men who refused to join the Islamic State\(^83\).

The scope of ISIL presence in the north of Afghanistan is still unclear. In August 2015 the former ally of Al-Qaeda the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) released a video in which stated its self-dissolution and taking an oath of allegiance to ISIL. Since then, however, IMU made no more statements concerning its stance towards ISIL. Besides, there were some instances of cooperation between terrorist groups coming from Central Asian countries and the Taliban. Some Afghan experts attribute this cooperation to the rise of the Taliban in the north of the country that foreign militants have to reckon with. Nevertheless there are reports indicating that ISIL is firmly entrenched in the northern region, particularly in provinces Badakhshan, Kunduz, Faryab, Jowzjan, Sar-e Pol, Balkh which are located in close proximity to former Soviet states of Central Asia. In 2016 reports of ISIL activity came from such northern provinces as Balkh and Kunduz.

In June 2016 the Governor of Balkh Province Atta Muhammad Nur stated that ISIL is trying to establish its bases in the province, as evidenced by the documents seized during a special operation and 7 ISIL operatives being killed and 23 captured\(^84\). In March 2016 police chief for northeastern Kunduz province Kassim Jangal Bagh stated that a unit of about 120 ISIL

\(^81\) URL:http://afghanistan.ru/doc/84396.html
\(^82\) URL:http://afghanistan.ru/doc/90555.html
\(^83\) URL:http://afghanistan.ru/doc/95750.html
operatives appeared in Char Dara District\textsuperscript{85}. They could be recognized by their usual style: black clothes and black flags. An important role in ISIL infiltration in the province was played by Jundallah terrorist group (formerly a militant group \textit{financed by} Saudi Arabia and operating in Pakistan), which had also vowed allegiance to the Islamic State. Reports of the end of 2015 from Baghlan province also indicate ISIL presence in the region, noting that Jundallah militants played a major role in this process\textsuperscript{86}.

The redeployment of forces from the south and east to the north of Afghanistan is attributed not only to the redeployment of militants from northern Pakistan and establishing corresponding logistic corridors\textsuperscript{87} but also to the Russian military intervention in the Syrian Civil War. In October 2016 First Vice President of Afghanistan Abdul Rashid Dostum stated, referring to intelligence reports, that ISIL was planning to redeploy thousands of militants from Iraq and Syria to Afghanistan. According to him, they would primarily be immigrants from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and the North Caucasus\textsuperscript{88}. However, currently in northern Afghanistan the key role is played not so much by ISIL but by a certain number of groups publicly associated with the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, some ethnic \textit{non-Pashto radical terrorist groups or ISIL, depending on where the funding comes from}.\textsuperscript{89}

\textit{The link between the internal conflict among Taliban units and infiltration of certain ISIL groups into Afghanistan can be demonstrated by the following example}\textsuperscript{89}. In the end of 2015 – spring 2016 in Shindand District in Herat Province there were some major internecine clashes between contending Taliban factions\textsuperscript{90}. According to some reports, up to 2000 people were involved. The winner was the faction under Akhtar Mohammad Mansour, Omar’s official successor. The defeated party was led by his opponent, Mullah Mohammed Rasul. Interestingly, it was reported that shortly after the victory the militants formally loyal to Monsour, hang a black ISIL flag. There were also reports of a massive execution carried out the same way ISIL did in Syria and Iraq\textsuperscript{91}. ISIL recruiters also started operating in the region, offering young men aged 18 to 20 a wage of 600 dollars a month\textsuperscript{92}, which is much more than Taliban militants get.

Although in the second half of 2016 Taliban fragmentation has decreased, it is still too early to talk about overcoming the rift within the group. That means that the possibility of a growing tendency of certain Taliban factions cooperating with ISIL cannot be ruled out.

4.4. \textsc{International terrorists aim at the Central Asia and Afghan government seems unable to contain the threat}

Another important issue concerning the infiltration of ISIL militants into Afghanistan is the evident orientation of the group towards destabilization of the post-Soviet Central Asian states as well as Xinjiang. There is consensus on this matter among experts both inside and outside of Afghanistan. In this respect it is worth mentioning National Security Advisor to the President of

\textsuperscript{85} URL:http://afghanistan.ru/doc/95713.html
\textsuperscript{86} URL:http://afghanistan.ru/doc/92050.html
\textsuperscript{87} URL:http://afghanistan.ru/doc/84201.html
\textsuperscript{88} Hashte-sobh. Kabul. October 16, 2016.
\textsuperscript{89} URL:http://afghanistan.ru/doc/96756.html
\textsuperscript{90} URL:http://afghanistan.ru/doc/96756.html
\textsuperscript{91} URL:http://afghanistan.ru/doc/96756.html
\textsuperscript{92} URL:http://afghanistan.ru/doc/96756.html
Afghanistan Mohammad Hanif Atmar addressing the upper house MPs of the National Assembly. He stated that various foreign terrorist groups, including IMU and ISIL, are interested in using Afghanistan as a transit route to Central Asia and Russia.  

Currently a lot of radical groups are massed in the north of Afghanistan in the area from Badghis to Badakhshan, which are identified with ISIL in the media and are not controlled by the Taliban, including 200 people in Torghundi, 700 people in Shindand and 300 people in Islam Qala. However, some experts believe that these groups are not affiliated with ISIL and consist of immigrants from Central Asian countries, Russia and China, who are aiming at cooperation with underground extremist groups active in Central Asian countries. The initial results of their activity can already be seen on the border between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan.

In this respect the question arises to what extent Afghanistan is going to undermine the schemes of ISIL and the geopolitical players behind them. Evidently, in terms of stability within the country Afghanistan certainly has grounds for pushing the militans further into Central Asia just like Pakistan has done.

This complex issue has already prompted some discussions inside and outside of Afghanistan. “On the sidelines of Kabul authorities’ meetings it has been rumored that some experts close to Afghan National Security Council are considering all sorts of scenarios on dealing with the threat posed by ISIL. One of which implies, among other things, reaching an agreement through Pakistan and other mediators with local Islamic State leaders on establishing some “green corridors” through Afghanistan for ISIL militia to get into Central Asia. As per this scenario a corridor to Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan can be established provided that ISIL ceases hostilities in Afghanistan.”

The first deputy speaker of the national parliament Abdul Zahir Qadir confirmed this suspicion. In November 2015 he accused the National Security Council of supporting ISIL. According to Qadir, ISIL commanders are free to live in Kabul, visit foreign embassies and government agencies, including law enforcement agencies. He also added he could prove the negative interference of the National Security Council into the matters of Nangarhar province, which he represents in the Parliament.

The growing chaos in the Afghan political system also increases the probability of the infiltration of ISIL and other terrorist groups into Afghanistan and further into the post-Soviet Central Asia. The Afghan National Army has been significantly weakened by the conflict between President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Abdullah Abdullah representing Afghan Pashtuns and Tajiks respectively. The conflict is in fact very similar to the one that was once eroding the pro-Soviet regime of The People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan, divided into two political sects: the Tajik Parchams and the Pashtun Khalqs. For more than a year and a half president Ghani has been trying to appoint Mohammed Stanekzai as Minister of Defense. More than that,
because of the conflict between Ghani and Abdullah in Afghanistan there is still no official government.

The conflict is still unfolding. In August 2016 Abdullah strongly criticized President Ghani’s policies, accusing him of reluctance to address important national issues. Abdullah expressed the view that the President was trying to monopolise power and accused him of making decisions unilaterally and failing to consult Cabinet of Ministers on appointments. He also accused Mr. Ghani of unwillingness to listen to other people’s opinions and added that someone who did not have patience for discussion was unfit for the presidency. Abdullah was immediately supported by Jihad Commanders Council, which was assembled by the majority of former Afghan Northern Alliance leaders who in 1990s fought a defensive war against the Taliban and before that, in 1980s, fought against the Kabul regime and Soviet forces. “Now there is a serious threat of a transformation of the conflict from a verbal political one into a military one”.

Even more dangerous for the situation in northern Afghanistan, which determines the state of affairs in the neighboring post-Soviet countries, is the 2016 conflict between the two key ethnic groups of former Afghan Northern Alliance - Uzbeks and Tajiks. “Another issue that indeed has a negative impact on the overall picture is the ongoing ethnic conflict between the Tajik party Jamiat-e Islami (also known as The Islamic Society) and the Uzbek party Junbish-i-Milli with Ghani’s tacit support of the latter. His interest may be primarily in decreasing the influence of Tajik party and thus there is every indication of a manipulated ethnic conflict”. The Tajik party will probably also be weakened as a result of Hezb-e-Islami party under Gulbuddin Hekmatyar becoming a part of the legal political system of Afghanistan.

Amid the growing threats Afghanistan law enforcement agencies are increasing in importance as one of the elements of the regional security system. Afghan National Army representatives keep complaining about insufficient equipment, although their complaints are not always found justified. For instance, Afghan Ministry of Defense Spokesman Dowlat Waziri has recently complained about the lack of anti-aircraft warfare. The question is: why does the Afghan Army need anti-aircraft warfare if the enemy has no aircraft? Probably one of the main reasons for the extremely cautious approach on the part of the USA and NATO concerning equipment of Afghan army is their uncertainty about the country’s future and the army’s conduct. In the post-Soviet period under Najibullah Afghanistan had one of the best-equipped armies in the region, however, a sudden change of authority resulted in all their armament being taken by various groups, including illegal rebel groups.

Afghan army representatives admitted that the Taliban militants managed to seize large amounts of weapons, including heavy machinery, in the course of clashes in Kunduz in 2015 – 2016. Another reason for Afghan army being poorly equipped may be the existence of some agreements between the Western Coalition and Afghanistan’s neighbors, that do not favor a strong and full-ledged Afghan Army. Along with insufficient equipment Afghan law enforcement agencies suffer from soaring corruption, commanders’ poor performance and low

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98 URL:http://afghanistan.ru/doc/100900.html
100 [Ibid.]
morale (for years former Afghan President Hamid Karzai was deliberately publicly addressing the Taliban militants as “brothers”, resulting in army being completely disoriented). As a result, the current army is unable to carry out any serious operations without US support. It is worth mentioning that the army was initially demoralized by the fact that even though the core of it was comprised by Tajik officers, the actual power under Karzai (with US assistance) was in the hands of Pashtuns, formerly affiliated with Afghan Northern Alliance.

Afghan Northern Alliance, which used to be the major force to curb Taliban and other terrorist groups’ expanding in the north of the country, collapsed. Its key leaders were either killed in a number of terrorist attacks or died under circumstances that were questionable even for northern residents themselves.¹⁰²

### 4.5. INCREASING THREAT FOR THE CENTRAL ASIAN STATES

Most of Russian experts and representatives of the relevant agencies believe that the situation in Afghanistan poses a serious threat to the neighboring Central Asian states and the whole post-Soviet space.

According to Russian presidential envoy to Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov in some provinces in northern Afghanistan a number of militants training camps were set up by various international terrorist groups, which are affiliated with the Taliban, ISIL, Al-Qaeda and various ethnic groups (immigrants from Central Asia, Uyghurs, Caucasians, Arabs). The militants mainly amass in two spots. The first one is in Badakhshan and Kunduz area (particularly in Imam Sahib district close to the Tajik border), the second one is in Badghis and Faryab.

Existence of a whole number of training camps affiliated with international terrorists, primarily ISIL, in northern Afghanistan was repeatedly pointed out to by Kabulov and other representatives of Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “A number of ISIL training camps specifically convert immigrants from Central Asia and some Russian regions into militants”¹⁰⁴. The training of ISIL militants is carried out by the instructors of various nationalities, including immigrants from Pakistan, Arab countries, the USA and Great Britain.

In the context where the groups located in northern Afghanistan constantly switch their allegiances depending on various factors, including influx of funds from the outside, a favorable environment is created for strengthening ISIL influence. In this regard, Evgeny Sysoev, FSB Deputy Director and head of the unit of the National Anti-terrorism Committee of Russia, stated that of great importance now was ISIL’s intention, that was publicly announced in January 2015, to create a new branch “Islamic State’s Khorasan province”, which proved once again ISIL’s aggressive intentions towards the post-Soviet Central Asia.¹⁰⁵

In November 2015 Deputy Minister of Defence Anatoly Antonov also confirmed that there was a serious threat to the Central Asian countries posed by ISIL. According to his data, ISIL is present in 25 out of 34 provinces of Afghanistan and its militants also appeared on the borders of

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¹⁰² URL: http://afghanistan.ru/doc/85649.html
¹⁰³ URL: http://afghanistan.ru/doc/85649.html
¹⁰⁴ URL: http://afghanistan.ru/doc/90463.html
¹⁰⁵ URL: http://afghanistan.ru/doc/91588.html
Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. In October 2015 Antonov also stated that ISIL might use Afghan territory to infiltrate other CIS countries and northern China.

In October 2015 Igor Sergun, Director of GRU, the Main Intelligence Agency of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, estimated that there were around 40,000 militants operating in Afghanistan, mostly Taliban. Around 3500 of them were affiliated with the Islamic State terrorist group and around 4500 favored ISIL while remaining relatively autonomous. Sergun also noted that ISIL “tended to make extensive use of national minorities’ human resources and of regional terrorist groups’ fighters”. In April 2016 Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin named a similar figure, according to which around 6000 ISIL militants operated in Afghanistan.

It is worth mentioning that international experts still argue on the number of militants. Some of them agree with the figures provided by Russia, others suppose that the number of ISIL militants in Afghanistan is about 300-600 people. Therefore as of now the issue remains open. However the vast majority of experts agree that in case of further destabilization of the situation in Afghanistan there is a serious threat of ISIL infiltration.

4.6. INCREASING ACTIVITY OF AL-QAEDA AND VARIOUS ETHNIC INTERNATIONAL TERRORIST GROUPS IN AFGHANISTAN

Along with ISIL various ethnic groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda pose no less serious threat to the post-Soviet space. The concentration of the latter ones is observed in northern Afghanistan.

In this context it is worth mentioning that for the last two years Al-Qaeda was increasing its influence in Afghanistan. This was also confirmed by Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. “In the beginning of 2015 we had optimistic assumptions as to the fact that its power had significantly decreased. As of now it is no longer the case,” he said. The USA has also confirmed the information of drastic increase of Al-Qaeda’s activities. In May 2016 Charles Cleveland, a spokesman for the US mission in Afghanistan, said that the remnants of this terrorist group were supplying Taliban with even more funds and human resources than they used to. On the whole according to the estimates presented to the UN Security Council by Afghan security forces there are around 6500 foreign militants in Afghanistan (the majority of them have recently come from Pakistan and are more affiliated with Al-Qaeda than with ISIL).

Therefore, monitoring an increasing threat of ISIL infiltration, one should not forget about the problem of Al-Qaeda’s renaissance which poses no less a threat to Russia and to the countries of the post-Soviet space.

106 URL:http://afghanistan.ru/doc/91351.html
107 URL: http://afghanistan.ru/doc/90709.html
108 URL:http://afghanistan.ru/doc/90463.html
109 URL:http://afghanistan.ru/doc/90463.html
110 URL:http://afghanistan.ru/doc/96498.html
111 URL:https://lenta.ru/news/2016/01/22/afgany_caeda/
5. THE SPECIFICS OF THE EXTREMIST CONTENT SPREAD OVER THE INTERNET IN CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES

As a means of communication, the Internet provides unique opportunities for those who spread extremist content, which can be roughly divided into:

- extremist content aimed at arousing dissension between races, nationalities and religions;
- content aimed at glorification and propaganda of extremism, terrorism and drug trafficking.

In the Global Terrorism Index\textsuperscript{114}, yearly published by the Institute for Economics and Peace (London), Tajikistan is ranked 56\textsuperscript{th} and is placed among countries with high impact of terrorism. Kyrgyzstan (84\textsuperscript{th}), Kazakhstan (94\textsuperscript{th}), Uzbekistan (117\textsuperscript{th}) are ranked among countries with low impact of terrorism.

It is noteworthy that the same can be said about the corresponding segments of Internet. In addition, the majority of the detected content belongs to the second group involving the glorification and propaganda of extremism, terrorism and drug trafficking.

Extremist content spread over the Internet can be roughly divided into two large groups:

1) content ruled extremist by the decision of the court;
2) content with elements of extremist nature but not officially ruled extremist.

The content of the first group is relatively easy to find as it is disseminated in the same form as it used to be, notwithstanding its illegal status. (Fig. I)\textsuperscript{115}

\textbf{Fig. I.} Screenshot of the text included into the List of Religious Literature and Informational Content Found Extremist and Prohibited from Importation, Publishing or Distribution on the Territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan.\textsuperscript{116}


The example in *Fig.1* has a different title and no indication of the author, but the text is quoted in full.

The previously banned extremist content can be disseminated by:

1) publishing it in a different format (a text is changed into an audio recording, a book – into a video recording, etc.);

2) publishing and distributing certain extracts and quotes from it.

The banned extremist content is reformatted, i.e. it is uploaded to the Internet not in the same format it was banned, in order to make the search for it more difficult. *Fig.2* provides an example of such content.

*Fig.2.* Screenshot of a video file reproducing the text included into the List of Religious Literature and Informational Content Found Extremist and Prohibited from Importation, Publishing or Distribution on the Territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan.\(^{117}\)

Another way to bypass the ban is to upload the content on virtual libraries and cloud storages, platforms like GoogleDrive and Yandex.Disk. In this case, a link to the cloud storage is posted on social media or some other webpage and website managers can merely block the page, but not the content itself. For example, the Al-Waie journal that has content inciting dissension between nationalities was uploaded in Uzbek and Kyrgyz with the help of GoogleDrive (*Fig.3*).

\(^{117}\) The printout “39 Ways To Serve And Participate In Jihad” (written by Muhammad bin Ahmad as-Salim, 1424, 35 pages) [Online version]. List of Religious Literature and Informational Content Found Extremist and Prohibited from Importation, Publishing or Distribution on the Territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan. No.166. – URL: http://pravstat.prokuror.kz/rus/o-kpsisu/spisok-religioznoy-literatury-i-informacionnyh-materialov-priznannyh-ekstremistskimi-i (data extracted on November 18, 2016).
The content of suspected extremist nature is more frequent and less accessible through targeted search as such uploads are non-recurrent and contain calls to incite national and other dissension.

One of the particularities of Asian Internet is the absence of hashtags, so often used in its Russian segment to disseminate illegal content. By clicking on a hashtag, the user filters the content automatically and finds the extremist materials released by special news agencies. For example, the hashtag “#запрещённые” (translated as “banned” in English; one of its variations – “запрещённых”) is used by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant to promote their extremist ideas on Twitter (Fig.4).

The content aimed at glorification and propaganda of Islamic extremism and international terrorism mostly idealizes the ISIL activity. The terrorists’ tactic is to publish materials in national languages so as to disseminate the Islamist ideology and get more supporters from different countries. The traditional symbols and concepts of Islam are re-interpreted by the IS

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118 URL: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B8Wj9vjI3-f-bTZjaUJVVYU1OMUE; https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B8Wj9vjI3-f-N2IWay1QcW92RHM (data extracted on November 19, 2016).
119 URL: https://twitter.com/hot_news_003/status/7185524664037376 (data extracted on March 1, 2016).
and are actively promoted over the Asian Internet, the VKontakte social network is also widely used: to distribute propaganda they create personal web pages that are simulacra, i.e. fake accounts (Fig.5).

Fig.5. Personal page on VKontakte¹²⁰.

Typically, extremist content is uploaded in the format of audio recordings. In most cases they are nasheeds (an Islamic song traditionally performed a cappella, either solo or with a choir) or duas (a personal prayer). These traditional forms of communication used by believers acquire a new meaning: while terrorists keep the structure and main features of the genre, they impart an extremist meaning to the texts calling for violence, glorifying terrorist actions, threatening the opposing politicians and so on. Fig.6 shows an example of an extremist audio file – “Dua against Kafirs and Their Myrmidons” – that calls for elimination of several Russian politicians. A nasheed is usually accompanied by a footage of the terrorist military success.

The analysis of the extremist content dissemination over the Internet in Asian countries shows that, in general, the tendencies coincide with those in the Russian and European Internet segments, especially in terms of the form and format of the content.

¹²⁰ URL: https://vk.com/id373122420 (data extracted on November 19, 2016)
Fig. 6. Screenshot of the ISIL video file “Soldiers of Allah Nasheed”\textsuperscript{121}.

This type of Internet extremist content differs in subject matter, platforms used for dissemination and grouping mechanisms (for instance, the hashtags are not used).

\textsuperscript{121} URL: \url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-mS00nOhTM} (data extracted on March 3, 2016).
6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE POLICY OF RUSSIA AND THE CSTO

A. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Due to the increasing threats to security in Central Asia and Afghanistan, the CSTO (where Kazakhstan and Tajikistan are member states) as the only international organization for security in Central Asia with actual military force becomes considerably more important and significant. At the same time, cooperation with non-member states in the region (Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) becomes more crucial as well. In case the situation in Northern Afghanistan or on the borders of former Soviet republics escalates, the CSTO’s involvement may be integral to mitigation. All this indicates the need to make the Organization much more prominent on the international scale, to emphasize the role it actually has in the region and to enhance cooperation with expert community in Russia and other countries.

The CSTO should be regarded as a basis for providing security in Eurasia, an essential part of the global cooperation system including the CIS, EAEU, SCO, CICA and the UN which work under their mandates, either jointly or not.

The CSTO faces most of the serious threats to security in Eurasia and has managed to develop mechanisms to deal with them. Special mechanisms and means created within the CSTO structure allow curbing the threats as much as possible, if not eliminating them.

The CSTO is the only international organization that has the willingness to take responsibility for maintaining security in Eurasia as well as the means and resources to stand up to that challenge: e.g. Collective Rapid Reaction Force, peacekeeping forces, and expert working groups.

Certainly, the Organization has not used all of its potential and there is room for improvement, especially with the adoption of the CSTO Collective Security Strategy up to 2025. However, it is already possible to say that the CSTO has developed into an influential international association operating in many fields.

The target set for 2025 is for the CSTO to become a complex organization that comprehensively assures the security of its members and has an extensive and effective collective system to promptly pinpoint a starting crisis, to act pre-emptively and to counter “hybrid warfare”.

The vital line of the CSTO activity is humanitarian cooperation and implementation of the so-called “soft power” to help create a secure environment in Eurasia that favours the dialogue among civilizations and cross-cultural communication on different levels, ensures mutual respect between all peoples, restores and preserves cultural and moral values, and consolidates the moral unity of Eurasian peoples.

The CSTO is the Eurasian security umbrella and the defence shield of the Eurasian Economic Union. The progress already made by the CSTO suggests an optimistic view of its future in this function.

B. PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS ON POLICY FOR RUSSIA AND THE CSTO

Countering terrorism and religious extremism in Central Asia and Afghanistan is a complex task.
In Afghanistan the main methods applied are military and special ones, including strengthening of the borders, creation of different “security zones”, military modernization of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, engagement of the CSTO Collective Rapid Reaction Force and the SCO Regional Anti-terrorist structure, as well as bilateral cooperation development (in the case with Uzbekistan and, possibly, Turkmenistan). The program of Tajikistan military modernization, for example, will last until 2025 and will cost Russia $200 million.\textsuperscript{122}

Further cooperation between the SCO and the CSTO becomes crucial in countering interrelated security threats like religious extremism, separatism, terrorism and drug trafficking. The development of the CSTO operations “Kanal” (anti-narcotic) and “Proxy” (countering extremism in media and on the Internet in particular) may be the focus area. It is necessary to think of ways to get the SCO members, including China, involved in these activities. One solution may be to make the relevant programs open not only for international observation, but also for active participation of the non-CSTO states (following the model of NATO’s Partnership for Peace program).

It is also important to work in a closer coordination to counter illegal migration, both from third countries through Central Asia territory and from Central Asian countries, especially between the CSTO (who conduct the operation “Nelegal”) and the SCO countries. It will effectively stop the movement of world terrorists from Afghanistan through Central Asia to Russia, China and Europe. The information exchange between intelligence services within the CSTO and the SCO needs to be intensified as well.

Due to the increasing threats in Afghanistan and Central Asia, all CSTO working bodies need reinforcement. \textit{It should be emphasized that, along with the reinforcement of military bodies, the Organization requires more resources for countering propaganda spread by the ISIL and other Islamist groups. What is more, within the CSTO it seems relevant to partially redistribute the military aid to Central Asian countries in favor of supporting ideological fight with religious extremism and international terrorism.}

To protect Central Asian countries from terrorism in Afghanistan it is vital to increase aid coming from Russia through the CSTO, the EAEU and bilaterally.

A significant contribution to achieving stabilization in Afghanistan can be made by the SCO through the alignment of Russian, Chinese, Pakistani and Indian interests in the region. At present Russia and China in particular are big funders of the Afghan government both in the military and economic sphere. Russia exports arms to the legitimate government (e.g. attack helicopters and spare parts for them)\textsuperscript{123}, while China implements large-scale economic projects\textsuperscript{124}. Both states play an exceptionally important role in providing different types of foreign aid to Central Asian countries.

Further development of this cooperation should be focused on providing security, achieved, for example, through the SCO advisory groups; it is of particular importance in northern Afghanistan, with religious extremists and terrorists from Russia, Central Asia, China and camps in Northern Pakistan moving into the region. Russia needs to put the discussion of this subject on the SCO agenda. A closer coordination on fighting religious extremism is required within the SCO.

\textsuperscript{122}\texttt{URL:} http://topwar.ru/print:page,1,86315-yuzhnye-rubezhi-pod-ugrozoy-zaschitit-li-sebya-srednyaya-aziya.html
\textsuperscript{123}\texttt{URL:} http://izvestia.ru/news/592813
\textsuperscript{124}\texttt{URL:} http://afghanistan.ru/doc/77075.html
Another contribution to Russian-Chinese coordination, especially in fighting terrorism, was made by an agreement to integrate the EAEU with the Economic Silk Belt which was laid down in the Joint Declaration “on cooperation in coordinating development of EAEU and the Silk Road Economic Belt” dated May 8, 2015 and signed by Russian President Vladimir Putin and President of the People’s Republic of China Xi Jinping. The agreement on promoting bilateral cooperation in countering extremism and terrorism through the UN, BRICS, SCO, APEC, ARF, FATF and EAG\textsuperscript{125} made later that year can take such cooperation to a new level.

As far as the cooperation between Russia and China, the CSTO and SCO is concerned, there is no need for pursuing new agreements and new institutions. It is preferable to work on prompt adaptation of already existing ones to the current security challenges. Immediate counter-terrorism action plan includes finalizing the list of terrorist organizations and exchanging information on recruitment and movement of militants to Afghanistan and Middle East as well as their funding, through intelligence agencies.

Cooperation in fighting international terrorism should be a crucial part of the Russian-Chinese strategic dialogue (both bilateral and held within the SCO and the EAEU integration with the Economic Silk Belt). This dialogue needs development in all spheres, including expert consultations that imply establishing relevant scientific advisory boards (with the involvement of the CSTO, SCO, Afghanistan and the neighboring states). The Atlantic Councils in the EU countries assist cooperation with the US and can serve as an example of expertise integration. It is therefore apposite to create advisory councils and boards for such integration between the CSTO members having interests in the region, between Russia and China, China and the interested CSTO members.

Russia should keep providing aid to the legitimate Afghan government. In case of a sharp destabilization in the country it may be contemplated to support, as in the 1990s, the remaining elements of the Afghan Northern Alliance so as to mitigate the crisis. The CSTO, in its turn, should go on creating different “security zones” around the country to ensure stability in Central Asia however the situation in Afghanistan develops.

Pakistan is a key country having a major influence on stability in Afghanistan. This is why it is important to promote (through the Russian-Chinese strategic dialogue, taking account of the traditional Chinese military cooperation with Pakistan) the newly started cooperation between Russia and Pakistan. It may help isolate groups in Pakistan that are interested in destabilizing Afghanistan and post-Soviet Central Asia. India is a key ally of Russia in tackling the Afghan problem. A more active interaction between the countries is necessary in this sphere.

Russia needs to do the utmost to increase aid to Afghanistan and Central Asian countries coming from all international organizations (economic ones, primarily) of which it is a member.

As part of the Russian initiative to create a global anti-terrorism coalition under the auspices of the UN, an active dialogue on fighting terrorism in Afghanistan and Central Asia should be resumed with the United States, European countries and Japan. It is important to draw attention of all “healthy forces” in the world to the troubling processes in the region.

Central Asian republics (first and foremost, the CSTO members) may be advised to put forward their initiatives on reviving of the traditional Islam culture in order to prevent religious extremists from monopolizing the topic. It is to be mentioned, however, that any excesses in fighting religious extremism must be curbed and this work must not become an instrument for “clan politics”.

\textsuperscript{125} URL: http://tass.ru/politika/2391244
Global experience in using non-violent methods to counter religious extremism is also of importance. It is vital to recapture the initiative from the extremists who are capitalizing on the issues of social support and fighting corruption. Favorable conditions are needed for cooperation between existing civic society and religious institutions to work on solving social problems; these institutions might be oriented on shaping common action on preventing alcoholism and drug abuse.

**In opposing radical Islamism adopted by the terrorists in Central Asia, ideological fight is as important as military action.** Education and instruction can and should be its key elements.

In case with religious education, one could use both the Central Asian states’ experience in establishing Islamic educational institutions (e.g. Tashkent Islamic University) and the experience of the republics of Russia with largely Muslim population. Of great value can be the experience gained by the republic of Tatarstan, where in October, 2015 the Bulgar Islamic Academy was opened. One might remember that Tatar imams are the traditional carriers of Islamic wisdom in Central Asia. What is more, in the 19th century Islamic Modernism (in the form of Jadids, Young Bukharians, Young Khivans movements) originated in and spread from a part of the Russian Empire territory with majorly Tatar population.

New educational institutions, especially those of higher education, in Russia (and, possibly, Kazakhstan) may give grants for students coming from Central Asian countries so as to compete with religious education in the Middle East and in Pakistan that “poisons” the region with radical Islamism ideas.

Russia may admit more course participants from Central Asia in Muslim educational institutions. Religious literature published in Russia needs to be distributed in Central Asian establishments, adopted curricula need to be shared as well.

Russian religious leaders are advised to popularize the constructive cooperation between different denominations among political, cultural elites and religious leaders in Central Asia, using Russian experience as an example. It is preferable to organize periodic international conferences and seminars on the subject. A wide participation of young religious activists from Central Asian countries in these events is more than welcome.

In terms of countering radical Islam secular education deserves much attention as well. It is yet another alternative to religious extremism. Russia should give more grants to foreign students from Central Asia that would cover not only the tuition, but also some basic needs. These students often face safety problems, such as street violence and acts of primitive nationalism. They become more frequent as the existing crises become deeper. One more alternative may be to increase funding of Central Asian campuses of Russian universities as well as to enhance the work of Slavic University in Dushanbe and Bishkek.

In the context of fighting terrorist ideology through informational mechanisms some other recommendations can be given:

- development of international legal mechanisms to protect the media sphere of the CSTO from the dissemination of extremist and terrorist ideology, propaganda of violence, terrorism and radicalism;

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creation of the basis for the international system to counter informational terrorism;
- curbing terrorist and extremist propaganda on the Internet by the CSTO members;
- development of international legal measures to protect CSTO countries’ citizens from indoctrination, with an emphasis on protecting the youth as the most vulnerable to propaganda of violence and terrorism;
- coordination between social, cultural and other humanitarian working bodies of the CSTO members on countering extremist and terrorist ideology.

There is a certain link between the propagation of religious extremism and weak control of migration from Central Asia to Russia. That said, it is necessary, along with strengthening control on the part of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, to assist social and cultural adjustment of the Central Asian migrants. This work should be the responsibility of regional authorities rather than the central ones, especially in centers of culture like Moscow and Saint-Petersburg.¹²⁷

In the context of growing influence of radical Islamism, especially among the youth, more attention needs to be attached to joint events and media projects aimed at popularizing the common past of Russia and Central Asian countries, particularly their fighting against fascism during the Great Patriotic War.

It is necessary for Russia to have a more advanced expert review in Central Asia and Afghanistan, to come up with mechanism to provide support through grants (by the model of NATO’s research grants), to work on better cooperation in the field. All this can partially remedy the difficult situation resulting from the lack of relevant expertise in Russia. There is no countering such threat as international terrorism without this expertise. It is therefore crucial to further develop such forms of cooperation between experts in scientific community and those doing practical work as the CSTO Analytical Association.

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