



**CENTRAL ASIA:
A SPACE FOR “SILK DEMOCRACY”.
ISLAM AND STATE**

ALMATY 2017

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Almaty Club experts continue their reflections on Central Asia in the socio-political context in this paper, Central Asia: A Space for “Silk Democracy”, the second part of that process, with the authors, this time, considering the issue of the interaction between Islam and the state, and analysing the dynamics of changes in the countries of the region. Three distinct approaches form the basis for this work. The first concerns the nature of changes from 1991 to 2016, shown in infographics; the second covers the outlook and perspectives for individual countries; and the third provides a comparative picture of practices across four countries – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, giving insights into how these states’ policies have changed regarding Islam and other religions, across the entire period from independence to 2016, as well as providing insights into experience in the institutionalisation of religion. This paper is designed for political scientists, religious scholars and historians, as well as all other readers interested in the development of democratic processes in Central Asia, in general.

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INTRODUCTION

What is the role and significance of Islam in the countries of Central Asia – countries which were, until recently, atheist and Soviet? Is it:

- a regressive move, back to the source;
- a serious risk and threat;
- a social choice;
- a tool that governments can use to mobilise; or
- an illusion?

How is this to be viewed, through such prisms and lenses? Many researchers are, today, looking for the answers to these questions. But the rate of change is so great, and the subject itself so multifaceted and delicate, that a full analysis of this process has, thus far, proved difficult.

The CAPG “Almaty Club”, involving researchers from four Central Asian countries – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – offer their views, from three different perspectives:

- I. the rate of change, from 1991 through 2016, shown in infographics;
- II. country-based perspectives; and
- III. a comparative illustration of practice in all four countries

It is our hope that this approach will provide the impetus for a more in-depth analysis of the process of Islamisation. In what way is Islamisation taking place? How do states endeavour to regulate such processes? In what way does policy in national security impact the state and society’s attitudes to Islam?



A CHANGING PICTURE - POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

Laws and regulation governing religion

Legal Framework





KAZAKHSTAN
The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 1995



KYRGYZSTAN
The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, 1993, as amended 2016



UZBEKISTAN
The Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan of 8 December 1992



TAJIKISTAN
The Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan of 6 November 1994

Constitution

Laws, regulation, legal concepts



The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 483-IV "On Religious Activities and Religious Associations" of 11 October 2011

The Law "On Freedom of Religion and Religious Organisations in the Kyrgyz Republic" No. 282 of 31 December 2008

Presidential Decree No. 24 of the Kyrgyz Republic of 7 February 2014 "On the Implementation of Decisions of the Defence Council of the Kyrgyz Republic on State Policy in the Sphere of Religion"

The "Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations of the Republic of Uzbekistan" of 14 June 1991

Regulations on Procedure for Conducting Governmental Expert Analysis of Materials of Religious Content (Appendix No. 2 to the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan of 20 January 2014)

Law No. 489 of the Republic of Tajikistan of 26 March 2009 "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations"

Law No. 272 of the Republic of Tajikistan of 8 June 2007 "On the Regulation of National Traditions, Celebrations and Ceremonies in the Republic of Tajikistan"

The Concept of State Policy in the Religious Sphere of 2017

State policy in the religious sphere is, in general, driven by specialist state agencies, with the supervision of activities in the Muslim environment being the responsibility of non-governmental institutions designated in Central Asian countries as the "Spiritual Administration of Muslims" (NB: although in Tajikistan this role falls to the Islamic Council or "Council of Ulema").

5

Specialist Institutions

State and Non-state (Non-governmental)



State (governmental)

Non-state (non-governmental)



KAZAKHSTAN

Ministry for Religious Affairs and Civil Society



KYRGYZSTAN

State Commission for Religious Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic



UZBEKISTAN

The Office of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan had previously established the Service for Religious Affairs, headed by an advisor to the President

The Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan Committee for Religious Affairs (established 7 March 1992)



TAJIKISTAN

Committee on Religious Affairs, Regulation of National Traditions, Celebrations and Ceremonies under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan

Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan(SAMK), 12 January 1990

Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Kyrgyz Republic (SAMK)

The Iman Foundation for the Development of Spiritual Culture (an Initiative of the President of Kyrgyzstan, 2014)

The Islamic Council of Ulema of the Republic of Tajikistan

Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Uzbekistan (SAMU)

Religious affairs are also regulated by various conceptual documents, strategies and concepts.



Concepts, strategies and agreements



- ① *Concept for the Development of Religious Education to 2020 (SAMK, 2015)*
- ② *Concept of State Policy on Religion of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2017–2020*

- ① *Concept of State Policy on Religion in the Kyrgyz Republic, 2014–2020*



- ② *National Strategy for the Sustainable Development of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2013–2017*
- ③ *Draft Concept for Religious and Theological Education in Kyrgyzstan*



- ① *National Strategy for the Development of the Republic of Tajikistan to 2030*



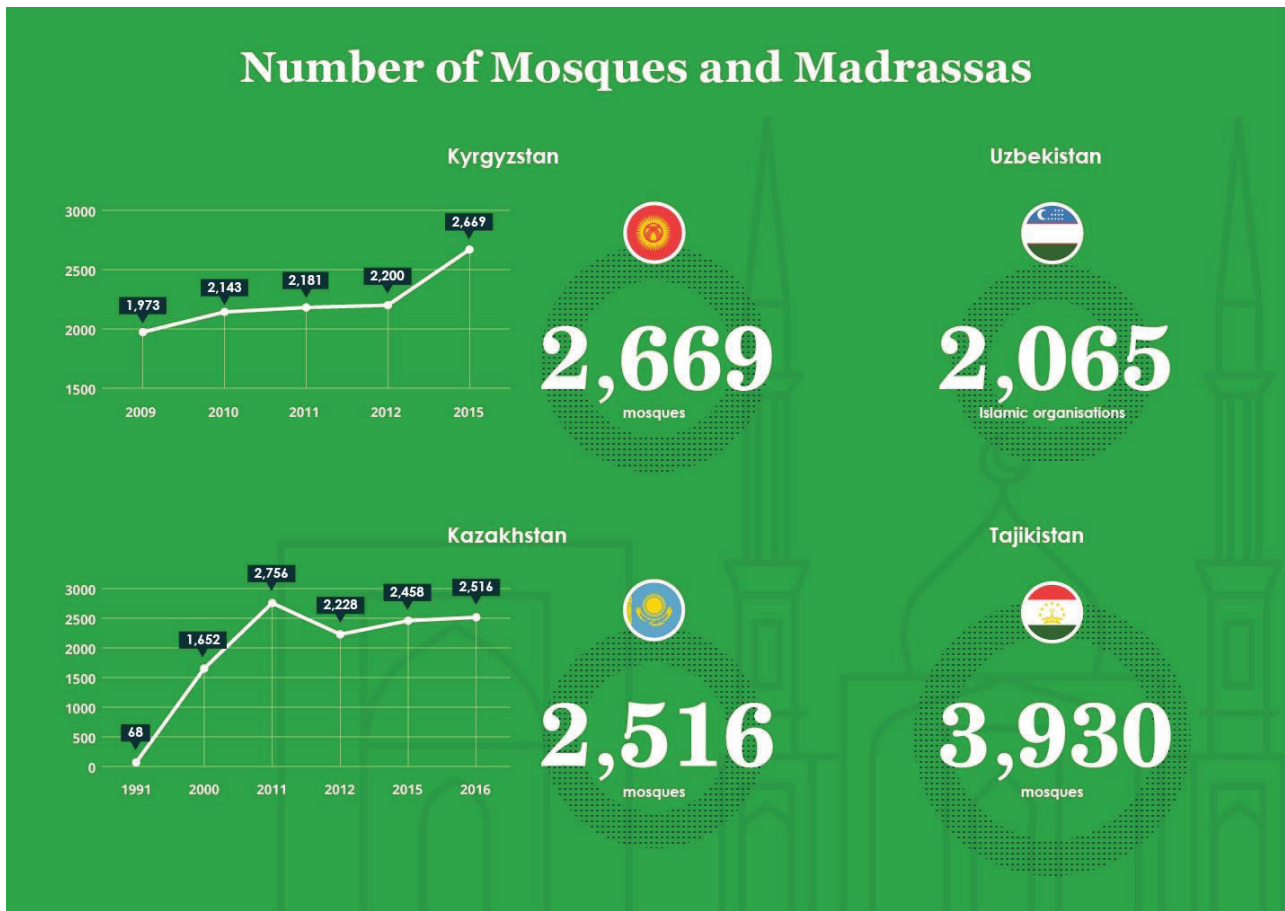
- ① *Strategy for the Development of Uzbekistan, 2017–2021, adopted by Presidential Decree, January 2017*

Indicative metrics regarding religious education and development throughout the four countries of Central Asia include:

I. The rate of growth in the number of mosques and madrassas.

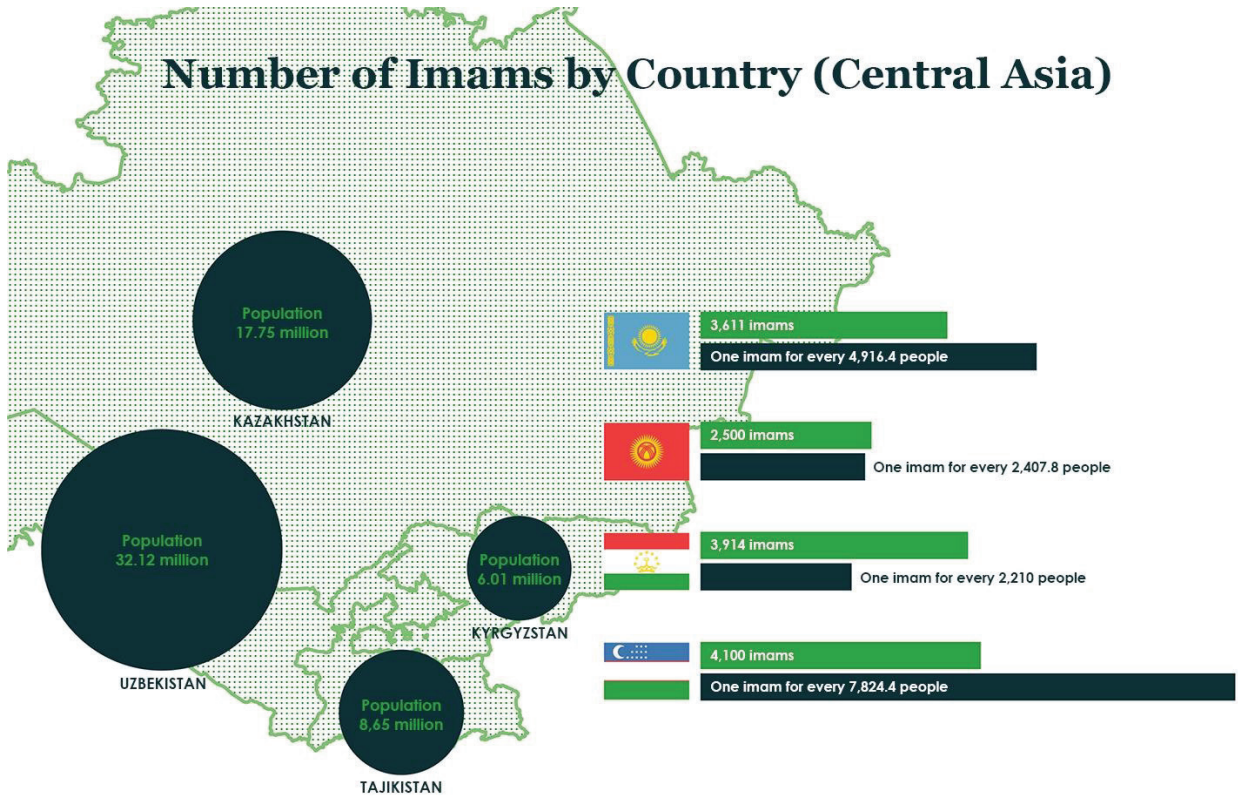
Information on this growth is only available with regard to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan:

- the number of mosques in Kyrgyzstan increased from 1,973 in 2009 to 2,669 in 2015, and
- the number of mosques in Kazakhstan increased from 68 in 1991 to 2,516 in 2016.



Consequently, the increase in the number of mosques has been accompanied by an increase in the number of imams. The correlation between the number of imams and population size shows that:

- Tajikistan has by far the greatest concentration of imams, with one imam for every 2,210 people; and
- Uzbekistan has the lowest concentration of imams, with one imam for every 7,824 people.



Religious – in this instance, Islamic – education is also showing a tendency towards growth, particularly in Kyrgyzstan, which has one Islamic university, nine institutes, and 102 madrassas (of which 88 are currently active).

Islamic Educational Institutions



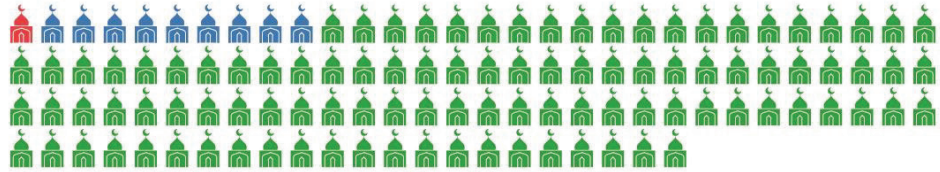
13



1 university, 1 institute of higher education/further training, 9 madrassas, 2 centres for training in the recitation of the Koran – total currently in operation: 13



112



1 Islamic university, 9 Islamic institutes, 102 madrassas – total currently in operation: 112



1



1 state Islamic institute – total currently in operation: 1



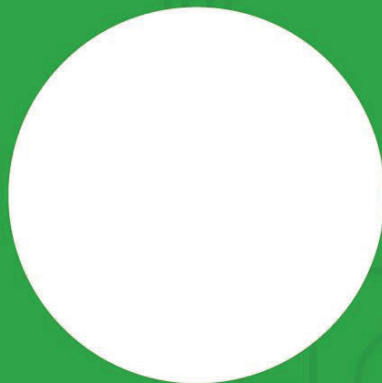
11



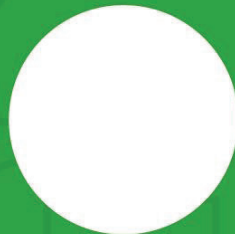
2 Islamic institutes, 9 madrassas – total currently in operation: 11

88

Number of Islamic Educational Institutions (by population)



1 per 68,400
people
KYRGYZSTAN



1 per 1.36 million
people
KAZAKHSTAN



1 per 3.21 million
people
UZBEKISTAN



1 per 8.65 million
people
TAJIKISTAN

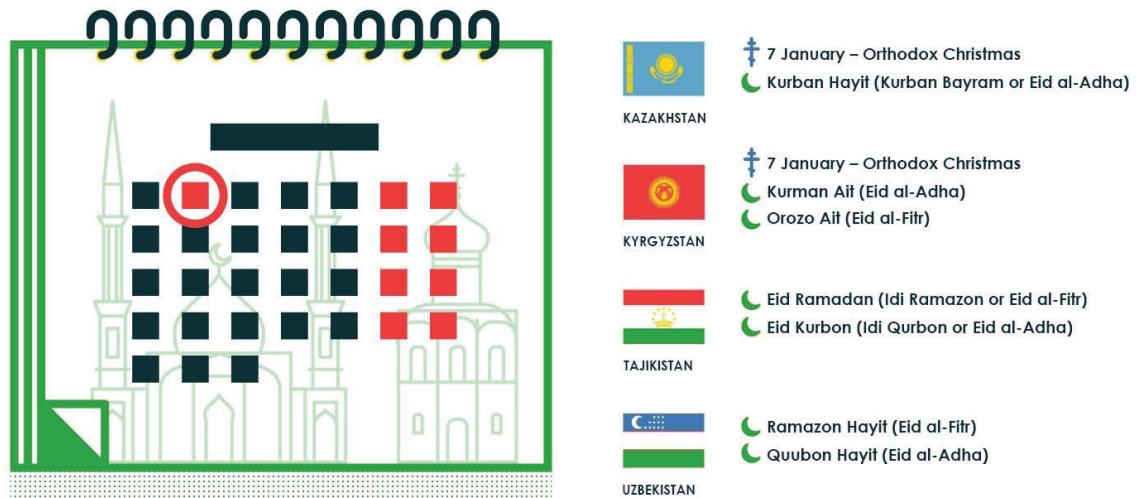


Religion and Everyday Life: Religious Festivals

Kurban-Hayit (or Eid-al-Adha – the “Feast of Sacrifice”) is officially celebrated in all four countries. Three countries (with the exception of Kazakhstan) celebrate Ramadan (Ramzan). The Orthodox Christmas is celebrated in two countries.

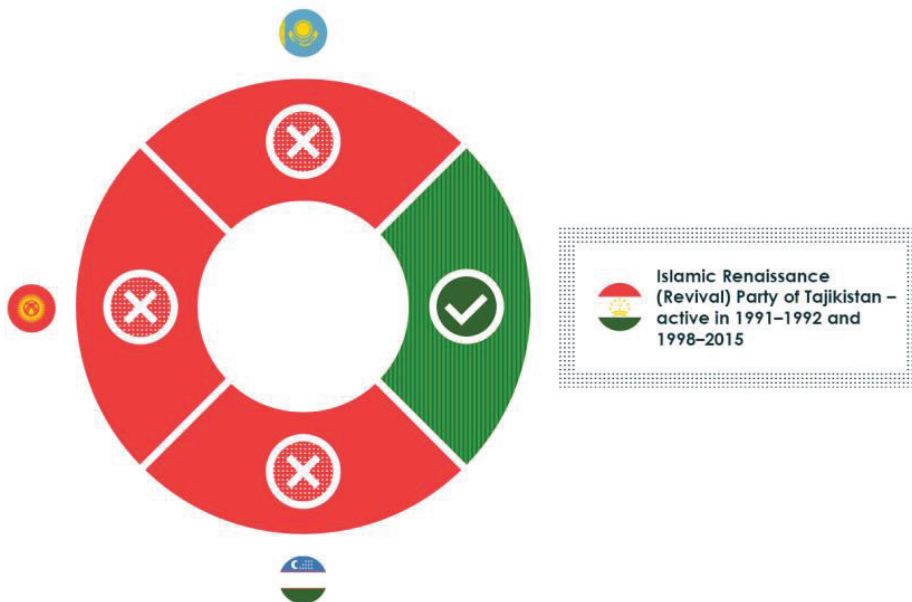
Religious Holidays

(Officially recognised public holidays)



Religious parties are officially banned throughout the countries of Central Asia. The Islamic Renaissance (Revival) Party of Turkestan (IRPT), however, has operated in Tajikistan at different times, before being banned in September 2015.

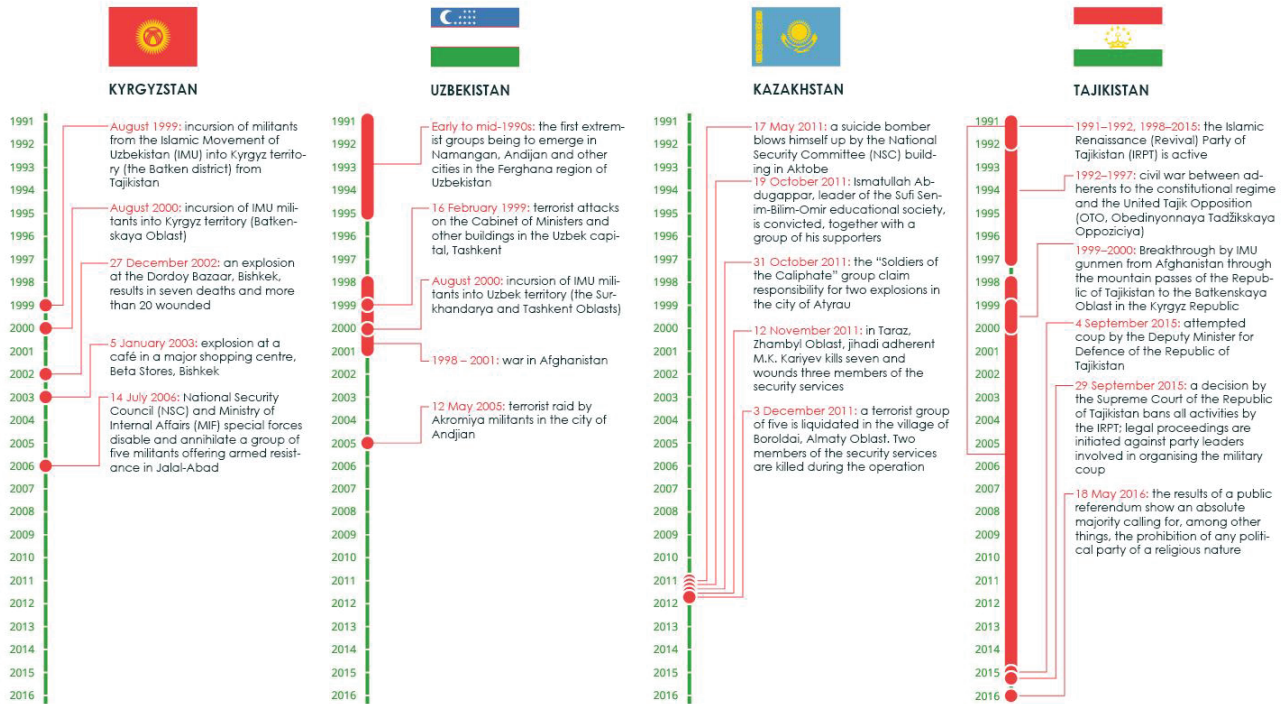
Religious Parties



In all four countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan), state policy on religion is managed in the context of the objectives and interests of national security.

Security Initiatives Against Islam in Central Asia

Key events related to terrorist activities and religious extremists, giving rise to security initiatives against Islam in the countries of Central Asia





GOVERNMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA: POLITICS AND ISLAM

Over the course of three centuries (the XVIII–XX centuries), Islam in Central Asia has experienced a whole series of challenges – the most significant being the anti-religious policy of the Soviet era. Huge resources invested in grandiose Soviet modernisation projects (attitudes thereto notwithstanding) envisaged, among other things, the secularisation of religious consciousness: which meant large-scale projects in education, in the promotion of Soviet ideals of “national cultures”, in the film industry, in the emancipation of women, and so on. Whole institutions were created to support these projects, which could not help but leave their mark on consciousness, and on the lifestyles of the indigenous population – part of which, incidentally, was not only the object, but also the subject (that is, an active initiator) of grandiose changes. It was

expected that serious political changes and industrialisation would force local residents “to throw religion into the dustbin of history.”¹

Today’s re-Islamisation, however, almost a century after the beginning of “successful” atheism, reflects the fact that Islam has always remained an ether permeating social relations and people’s worldview. The contrast between the post-Soviet process of headlong re-Islamisation (de-atheisation) and the Soviet period of ongoing de-Islamisation (atheisation) is interesting here. The historical turning point between these two realities undoubtedly being Gorbachev’s perestroika, which, among other things, freed up religious identity for all the peoples of the former Soviet Union.

The striking contrast between the Soviet offensive against Islam and its post-Soviet revival has revealed a rather contradictory socio-political situation and spiritual atmosphere in Uzbekistan. On the one hand, the local population embraces Islam as practiced locally, while, on the other, the country has become part of the global Islamic world, with the particular challenges inherent to such practices. Which has meant, on the one hand, the revival of Islam as a faith, value, culture, and so on, and, on the other – its protection and containment from excessive euphoria and external influences.

¹ Sukhareva O.A. and Bikdzhanova M.A., (1955), Past and Present in the Village of Aikyran (Experience in Ethnographic Research into the “Stalin” Collective Farm in the Chartak District, Namangan Oblast), Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR.



UZBEKISTAN – THE ISLAMIC RENAISSANCE AND THE INTERNAL SECURITY DILEMMA

Uzbekistan is clearly distinguished from the other Central Asian countries by its large Muslim population, a far greater concentration of religious institutions and historical monuments, and by its more deep-rooted religious traditions in terms of local forms of Islamic practice. On which basis, it can be stated that the post-Soviet religious renaissance in independent Uzbekistan has largely been expressed through the continuity of pre-existing and persistent practices, through its world view, and through the interrelationships between Islam and the state.

The Soviet atheist political system and ideology did not, entirely, erase the population's Islamic identity – neither its Islamic clergy, Islamic institutions, nor Islamic social relations in the republic. Local Muslims have been able to overcome the “Soviet challenges” to their religion by responding to these with adaptations of various kinds.

A very revealing example of “unfinished” Soviet modernisation in terms of atheisation concerns the “Hujum” movement established in 1920s

Soviet Uzbekistan, thanks to which thousands of Muslim women threw off their veils and revealed their faces. This was considered a progressive achievement by the new Soviet authority in the traditional and backward Turkestan. In the first years of national independence in Uzbekistan there was indeed a certain liberalisation in religion and governmental–religious relations. Thus, the country's Muslims had more opportunities for making pilgrimages (the Hajj and Umrah) to Mecca and Medina.² Even before gaining independence, in June 1991, Uzbekistan adopted the law on “Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations”, albeit this law was subsequently subject to amendments and modifications.

The religious revival in Uzbekistan was accompanied, as it were, by the legalisation of existing mosques, and their emergence from the shadows. Thanks to which, the number of mosques in the country saw a sharp increase, from 300 in 1989 to 6,000 in 1993. During the years of independence hundreds of mosques, churches and prayer houses were built and restored, including Orthodox churches in Tashkent, Samarkand and Navoi, a Catholic church in Tashkent, and an Armenian church in Samarkand. According to a Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers, 15 facilities – religious complexes, places of pilgrimage and tombs – have been transferred to the Spiritual Administration of Muslims. Concurrently with this, however, the thousands of mosques that were functioning in the early 1990s did not undergo official re-registration in the late 1990s, and were closed. At present, in a republic with a population of almost 32 million people, more than 94 percent of whom consider themselves to be Muslims, there are about 2,450 mosques.

² It is worth noting that if, in the Soviet era, the number of Uzbek Muslims completing the Hajj reached barely 100 per year, then, in the first years of independence, this figure approached 1,000 people.



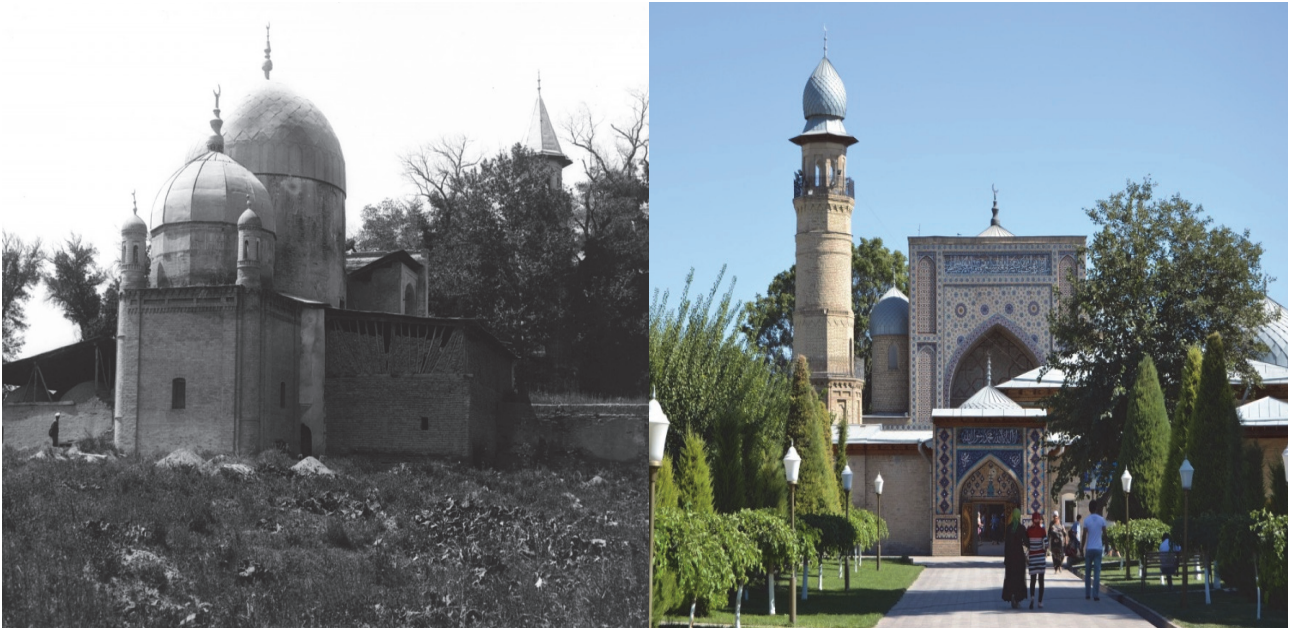
Although government policy on religion in Uzbekistan is systemic and strict, there are, however, also contradictions. There is a whole body of relevant laws and regulations, government structures, media, the education system, and a huge ideological arsenal, including non-profit organisations affiliated to government, in the service of the state. Thus, the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the “Law On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations of the Republic of Uzbekistan” and other regulation confirm freedom of religion – and the freedom to

reject any faith – as well as the equality of all religions in Uzbekistan, and the secular nature of the state. There is also a ban on proselytism (the propagandisation of religion) in place, and a ban on the establishment of political parties of a religious nature. The Committee for Religious Affairs has been established under the government, the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Uzbekistan is in operation, and the Office of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan had previously established a service for religious affairs, headed by an adviser to the President.³



President of the USSR Mikhail Gorbachev and the first Mufti of Uzbekistan, Sheikh Muhammad Sadik Muhammad Yusuf

³ The position of adviser was abolished in 2014. Work in this area under the Office of the President has now been transferred to the Security Council. On which basis, issues of an exclusively religious and cultural nature have become issues of national security; which may indicate a certain degree of difficulty around this problem.



The Zangi-Ota Memorial Complex (Tashkent), before and after Uzbekistan gaining independence

In contrast to neighbouring countries in the region, the principle of the secularity of the state is missing from the Constitution of Uzbekistan: nevertheless, religion and religious organisations do not openly exert any serious influence on political processes, although they are far from excluded from the public arena and community life. At the same time, the secularity of Uzbek statehood is guaranteed under the principle of the separation of religious organisations from the state (Article 61 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan). Two thousand two hundred and 38 religious organisations, from 16 different denominations, have been registered in the country; 2,065 of these being Muslim.

The law explicitly prohibits activities aimed at converting believers from one faith to another (proselytism), as well as any other missionary activity within Uzbekistan. A key regulatory issue concerns that of state registration.

In Uzbekistan, religious organisations are obliged to undergo mandatory registration at the Ministry of Justice, in consultation with the Cabinet Committee on Religious Affairs. The Ministry of Justice, and not the courts, can also curtail the activities of any religious organisation, by mandatory order.

Religious organisations have various rights, by law – the main ones of which include the right to conduct religious meetings, services, and ceremonies. Religious organisations have the right to conduct such activities at such religious organisations’ own premises, at places of religious worship or prayer, and in any areas allocated to them, at places of pilgrimage, at institutions of religious organisations, in cemeteries, and in citizens’ homes (apartments) (Article 14, the Law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations of the Republic of Uzbekistan”).



The next crucial point concerns religious education, which can be considered at two levels: the training of religious ministers, and the provision of religious knowledge for general educational purposes. In Uzbekistan, as regards religious education, this mainly refers to religious organisations' activities in training pastoral staff and ministers, to which end religious organisations have the right to establish religious (spiritual) educational institutions, albeit subject to a number of stringent requirements.

If, in the Soviet era, religious knowledge was available at only two Islamic educational institutions, it can now be obtained at the Tashkent Imam Bukhari Islamic Institute, the Miri Arab Madrassa, and at nine specialist Islamic secondary educational institutions – education and training at which is fully compliant with state standards, their students acquiring secular as well as religious and theoretical knowledge. Pursuant to a Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of August 22, 2003, diplomas issued to graduates of religious educational institutions match equivalent state educational diplomas.

As regards the teaching of religion as a general educational discipline, this is not possible under the state education system. The establishment of non-state educational institutions by religious organisations is also forbidden in Uzbekistan. The teaching of religion in private is prohibited.

Students at the above-mentioned educational institutions, in addition to religious subjects, also study both secular science and foreign languages. The evolution of the Tashkent Islamic University, founded by Presidential Decree in 1999, also bears the marks of the policy pursued. The main goal of

the Islamic University in 1999 was to educate the modern Muslim intelligentsia, destined to serve Uzbekistan's Muslim community, by training specialists in Islamic theology, as well as highly qualified specialists in history, law, languages, and Islamic finance. Over time, the university has become a secular educational institution providing limited religious knowledge to programmers, economists and historians.

Within the global community, the idea of religious freedoms being severely curtailed in Uzbekistan – with religious organisations controlled by the state, excluded from political and public activism, and their religious leaders and believers closely monitored, etc. – is widespread. Many believe that a policy of strict control could lead to Muslims becoming alienated from the state, and to tensions between government and religion. However, this is a rather complicated issue that should be considered in the context of the overall development of the state and the nation under the contemporary realities of globalisation and modernisation, as well as taking into account all those changes

that have occurred since the beginning of reform – i.e., since gaining independence. The first president of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, in his magna opus, *Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the 21st Century* (1997), stated that “Islam, the religion of our ancestors strengthens people's faith, purifies and elevates, and makes them stronger in overcoming the trials of human existence; it has also contributed to, and sometimes been the sole means of preserving and transferring, universal and spiritual values from generation to generation. That is why religion is a reliable companion to human beings, and a natural part of human life.”

⁴ However, Karimov's policy was driven by the



notion of the diversity, complexity, contrariety, and polarity of the phenomena foreshadowed by the revival of Islamic values.⁵ Hence the sense of circumspection, if not anxiety, regarding the growth of religious sentiments in Uzbek society, where religious activity is often viewed through the prism of terrorist or extremist threats – and which, accordingly, have influenced state policy.

Islam Karimov is of the view that “These days, ideological firing grounds are stronger than nuclear ones,” arguing that military, economic and political threats can be easily seen and prevented, but it is far more difficult to identify ideological threats and their impact.⁶

Such anxiety has, in fact, not been without justification: Uzbekistan has repeatedly experienced the challenges of Islamic extremism and religiously motivated terrorism. The terrorist activity of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in the 1990s, the bombing in Tashkent in February 1999, the terrorist attack of the Akromiya group in Andijan in May 2005, as well as other incidents, have, to a large degree, all contributed significantly to tighter state control over religious life in the country.

Today, the situation within the country – in terms of reducing the threat of violent extremism – is relatively stable. However, in Uzbekistan, as in many countries around the world, the

conceptual issue of how to resolve the dichotomy of “secularism vs. re-Islamisation” remains open, and is manifested in some form or another in various aspects of day-to-day life. For example, high school (lycée) and university students are not allowed to leave their studies on Fridays, should these end at 12–12:30 pm, in order to limit young people’s attendance at mosques for Friday prayers, which start at 1 pm. Women and girls are not allowed to wear religious clothing in public places, particularly in universities. Cases have been reported of girls in hijabs being expelled from highereducational institutions.⁷

This practice, incidentally, contrasts with rules adopted by international organisations in Uzbekistan, where local female employees are allowed to wear such clothes, although it has to be conceded that either control over what is, for Muslims, a sensitive issue, remains weak, or the state is having to put up, so to speak, with the inevitable reality, since there are many instances of hijabs being worn at certain universities and government institutions. The state would seem to be simply trying to keep the situation under control – which, again, points to the ambiguity and even precariousness of the situation.

Television programmes, advertisements, even the Internet and mobile phones, strangely enough, are being used by dyed-in-the-wool secularists, since they divert believers’ attention from the “other-worldly”. At the same time, the state and

⁴ Karimov, I. (1997), *Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the 21st Century: Challenges to Stability and Progress*. Tashkent, Uzbekistan, p. 35.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁶ Karimov, I. *Yuksak ma’naviyat – yengilmas kuch*, Tashkent: Ma’naviyat. p. 113.

⁷ The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations” states: “The appearance of citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan (with the exception of ministers of religious organisations) in public places in religious attire is not allowed.”



the political elite make use of Islamic rhetoric. Public condemnation of Western pop culture, luxurious weddings, girls' mini-skirts, all the way up to denying concert licences for certain artists known for their outspoken views and onstage performance, etc., are justified by references to national traditions and Islamic values; but such measures either do not work, or their effectiveness is very low. The contrast between religious life (with its mosques, places of worship, Koranic dictates, and religious rituals) and modern urban life (with its discotheques, nightclubs, and drinking dens)⁸ reveals a very complicated picture of the contradictory coexistence of these two realities – secular and religious – and their “state of flux”. Uzbek society, consequently, appears, thus far, to be somewhere between “mayishat” and “zhudat” (between killing time in high-spirits and drinking in the chihana (traditional Uzbek tea house) and praying in the mosque), under the concurrent impacts of re-Islamisation and westernisation.

A distinctive feature of the current political elite in Uzbekistan, brought up under the Soviet development paradigm (itself an offshoot of the developmentalism that prevailed in 19th-century classical social thought) is their belief in the inevitability of modernisation, the one-directional nature of its course. Hence the simplistic notion of a direct link between the secularisation of society and modernising processes, and the view that modernisation inevitably leads to a decrease in religion's influence, both in society and on people's minds.

Under President Karimov, the state tried to offer its vision of “modernity”, in which religion's role was, primarily, that of cultural guardian. But

this policy of active secularisation was carried out at a time when a kind of spontaneous de-secularisation of public life was ongoing. For example, more and more people need and are visiting mosques at prayer times. The celebration of Ramadan and Kurban Hayit (Eid al-Adha) in Uzbekistan is becoming ever more large-scale and spectacular. It must be recognised that Islam, like all world religions, is a philosophical system, a worldview, defining the meaning of life and one's way of life. From that point of view, people's socialisation, in terms of their attitudes to religion, can be deemed to be secular, religious, or secular-religious. This means that Uzbek society is a complex series of interactions between those who are, so to speak, socialised to be secular, those who are socialised to be religious, and those who are socialised to be secular-religious.

Against this background, re-Islamisation, as such, and for the purposes of discussion, goes through three mutually intertwined stages in its development. The first stage, focussed on identity, is associated with the revival of Islamic culture, and people's identity as Muslims. During this period, the former atheistic system is dismantled, political rhetoric is saturated with religious expressions, historical places associated with the Islamic past are reconstructed, an Islamic university is established, mass pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina begins, and so on.

The next stage is, so to speak, intellectually oriented – a thirst for knowledge. During this period, the need for and interest in understanding the meaning of Islam, the content of the Koran and the Sunnah (the example and teachings of the Prophet) become vitally important. More and

⁸ From the Persian and Tajik “mai”, an alcoholic drink or wine.



more believers will not just engage in ritual prayer, but will also try to understand what they are saying, in Arabic, during prayer. More and more people will read the Koran, and understand its canons. Finally, more and more believers will become pious Muslims. At this stage, there will be an increasing demand for a correct interpretation of Islamic rules and Quranic surahs and ayahs. Such requests can now be observed ever more frequently at mosques during the Friday Khutbah, when, on the one hand, the imams themselves relate this and, on the other, worshippers pass notes to the imam, with questions on various topics.

Once a “critical mass” of educated, mature Muslims appears, a third stage – that might be described as action- or even politically oriented – will commence. More and more Muslim activists will now be ready to demand that government policy be conducted in accordance with, and the country be governed by, Islamic values. This does not mean that the principle of secularism will be rejected at this point, but secularists will come up against new challenges from those of their compatriots who will be openly discussing this problem.

In this context, attention is drawn to a major interview given by the Deputy Head of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Uzbekistan (SAMU), Sheikh Abdulaziz Mansur, on Radio Ozodlik, explaining a whole series of questions. It would have been difficult to imagine such an interview a short while ago. The sheikh, in particular, drew attention to the fact that on the current president, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, coming

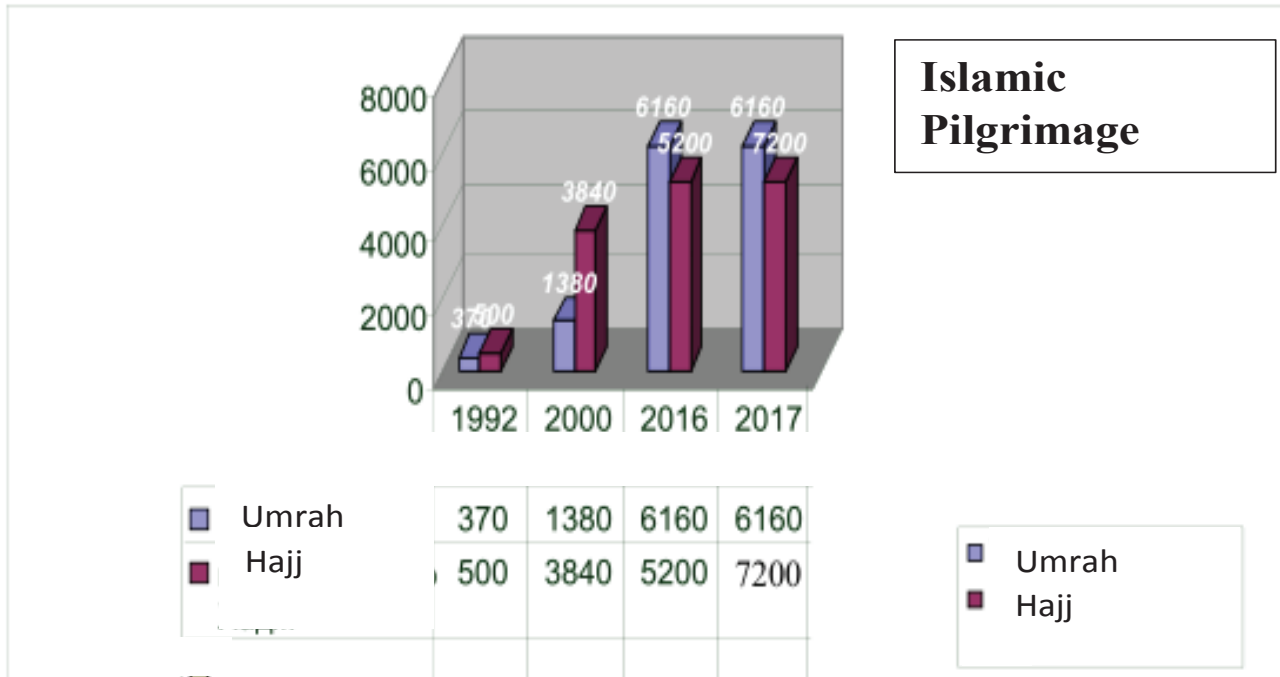
to power, a “virtual reception” was opened, and that numerous appeals from members of the public regarding religious issues are being received there. The President has responded to various and questions including: the legality – or otherwise – of prayers being read, and salutations made, on the streets; whether it is permissible to wear a beard; the problem of hijabs; legal and illegal convictions on religious grounds; the sounding of the azan (the Muslim call to prayer) through a microphone; pressure on religious organizations; the wearing of kerchiefs and shawls; quotas on making the Hajj and Umrah; and more.⁹

On which basis, the sheikh drew attention, in particular, to the continuous increase in quotas for the Hajj. Under Islam Karimov, Uzbekistan allowed from 3,800 to 5,200 pilgrims to make the Hajj. In 2017, with the arrival of Shavkat Mirziyoyev, this quota was 7,200 people.

And so, Uzbekistan is now entering a new stage in its development. It is important to note that the re-Islamisation of society and the state is not a phenomenon isolated from other aspects of national development, but is dialectically connected with these, as part of day-to-day life. In this context, it is also important to engage in discourse not only on the relationship between secularism and religiosity, but also on the relationship between democracy and religion.

At his inauguration, on 14 December 2016, the new President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, swore an oath, as is traditional, on both the

⁹ Interview with Sheikh Abdulaziz Mansur, Deputy Head of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Uzbekistan (SAMU), Radio Ozodlik, 27 October 2016. Available at: <https://soundcloud.com/ozodlikradiosi/abdulaziz-mansur-dindor-mabuslar-dardiga-ulo-solish-kerak>.



Koran and the Constitution of Uzbekistan. A new atmosphere is developing across the country, including in relation to religion.

Thus, in inspecting the country’s various regions, he will – every time, without fail – visit historical holy sites and places of worship, as well as engaging with the clergy. Speaking to attendees at a meeting of imams in Tashkent on 15 June 2017, Mirziyoyev stressed the need for more flexible policy in religion, calling, for example, for a review of lists of individuals deemed to be “politically unreliable”, with a view to reducing them. A new leaf is clearly being turned in the post-Soviet history of the relationship between power and religion.

On which basis, analysing the problems of developing and formulating state policy in religion leads to the conclusion that, by way of analogy with the dilemma of security in the international (regional) system, one can also speak of a dilemma in terms of internal security – the essence of which can be

summarised as follows: the post-Soviet freeing-up of religion (Islam), or the re-Islamisation of society and the state, also brings with it –in addition to the values arising from the principles of cultural and spiritual revival – the challenges of religious extremism and terrorism. These challenges put the state in a difficult situation: for the sake of security and public stability (i.e., the fulfilment of the main functions of any state), the state uses varying degrees of control, restriction, coercion and punishment. But for the sake of fully ensuring believers’ freedom of religion and right to a religious life, the state itself is required to show a degree of limitation and restraint.

However, interpreting the situation in terms of a dilemma could be the result of an over-simplified view of the issue, since it would appear to divide state and religion, somewhat mechanically, into two different entities, inevitably alienating each from the other while they – with the same inevitability and mutual interdependence are bound together in their modus vivendi, are separated only in their modus operandi.



Funeral prayers for the sheikh



7 October 2016 – the Islom Ota Mosque, named in honour of Islam Karimov, the first President of Uzbekistan, opens in the capital, Tashkent



ISLAM IN KAZAKHSTAN: BETWEEN COMMUNITY AND DISASSOCIATION

Islam in Kazakhstan, as in other countries throughout the region, is becoming an important part not just of traditional culture, but, taking historical specifics into account, also an increasing factor in social and political discourse. It should be noted, however, that

Islam has not, traditionally, been a defining phenomenon in the life of ethnic Kazakhs, although it is, undoubtedly, an important part of their identity. In the 1990s, the Islamic factor did not play any noticeable role in domestic politics. In the very beginning there was no Islamic alternative, as such, in choosing the path for the development of an independent Kazakhstan, although, not unexpectedly, the social role of religion has expanded during this time.

Beyond the Limits of Secularity

Despite the separation of state and religion having been officially declared, observers and experts notice a range of contradictions in the implementation of this principle in Kazakhstan.



President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev visiting the Khazret Sultan mosque, Astana, on the festival of Kurban Hayit (Eid al-Adha), 24 September 2015



Obviously, it is difficult to implement this in any “pure” form. The Muslim festival of Kurban-Hayit (Eid al-Adha), for example, is, by law, a public holiday – as is the Orthodox Christmas, on 7 January. Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of Kazakhstan, noted in one of the country’s key policy documents, the “Kazakhstan 2050 Strategy” that: “We are proud to be a part of the Muslim Ummah. These are our traditions. But we must not forget that we have a tradition of a secular society, and that Kazakhstan is a secular state. The secular character of our state is an important condition for the successful development of Kazakhstan. This should be clearly understood by current and future Kazakhstani politicians, and all Kazakhstani people.”¹⁰

Ultimately, this declaration notwithstanding, it is, in practice, extremely difficult to isolate

the principles of secularism and religiosity, which are very mercurial.

As Islamic scholars point out, the proportion of Muslims in Kazakhstan and performing all rituals and observing Islamic principles in their day-to-day lives has remained at between seven and 11 percent in recent decades. These indicators of the level of piety clearly distinguish Kazakhstanis not just from societies in the Middle East and South Asia, but even from their neighbours in Central Asia, which are, historically, more religiously oriented. The general conclusion to be drawn is that, as a political factor, Islam in Kazakhstan is marginal.¹¹ One can, at the moment, concur with this, but modern dynamic processes, not just in the Muslim world, show that a number of countries in which political Islam was, until only recently, on the periphery of social processes, have come up against its rapid “return” or “revival”.

Number of Mosques 1991 – 2016

1991	2000	2011	2012	2015	2016
68 ¹²	1652	2756	2228 ¹³	2458	2516 ¹⁴

As is evident from the above table, the number of mosques has increased 37-fold in the 25 years from 1991 to 2016, with the greatest number of mosques, moreover, being registered in 2011. But even after the adoption of the new “Law on

Religious Activities and Religious Associations” that same year, not all mosques were able to resume their activities, and those that did were incorporated into the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan (SAMK).

¹⁰ http://www.akorda.kz/ru/official_documents/strategies_and_programs

¹¹ <http://sayasat.org/articles/1008-islam-v-kazahstane-kak-politicheskij-faktor-marginalen>

¹² <http://e-islam.kz/ru/component/k2/item/900-eislam>

¹³ Agency for Religious Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2012), Religious Associations in the Republic of Kazakhstan, November.

¹⁴ Agency for Religious Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, The Outcomes of 25 Years of Independence in Kazakhstan: Religion and Inter-faith Consensus.



Disassociation in the Islamic Environment

Since the late 1990s the country's authorities have seen a challenge in religious activity and the emergence of informal religious communities and leaders. The evolution of the state's attitude, moreover, from vigilance to active opposition, has been rapid. This concerns not just the so-called non-traditional movements and groups in Islam – such as Tablighi Jamaat, Hizb ut-Tahrir, and the Salafis – but also those Sufi groups that have relatively long-established roots in the in the traditional Kazakh environment.

Along with non-traditional religious ideologies introduced from abroad (the Caucasus, Middle East, and South Asia), Sufism has, unexpectedly, become the focus of state attention. Accordingly, 2011 saw the trial of Ismatulla Abdugappar, leader of the Sufi Senim-Bilim-Omir (Сенім-білім-Өмір or Faith-Knowledge-Life) association which was, at that time, gaining popularity among the Kazakh intelligentsia. As early as 2012, this organisation was recognised as extremist, and banned in the country. Perhaps one of the most important arguments in favour of banning the organisation was the fact that its leader, while an ethnic Kazakh, was a native of Afghanistan – a former mujahidin who had received religious education in Pakistan.

It should be noted that Senim-Bilim-Omir, as it gained popularity, increased its network throughout the country. This organisation's growing community of supporters was even able to act as a kind of parallel or alternative structure to the government-supported SAMK. It is significant that the entire process against the leader and a group of his associates was supported by an informational campaign – biased in favour of the prosecution – in pro-government media.

This Sufi group's line of defence, in turn, attempted to blame Salafi followers for persecuting them. One of the advocates for the accused, in fact, claimed that “this case has been raised by senior civil servants, allied to the Wahhabis”¹⁵

It is interesting that an open letter to President Nursultan Nazarbayev, sent by a group representing the Kazakh humanitarian intelligentsia, requesting the release of Ismatulla Abdugappar, also highlighted the involvement of the Salafis, including those in power.¹⁶

The guilty verdict, with a long prison sentence for leader Ismatulla Abdugappar and his followers, provoked a controversy that continues to this day.¹⁷

¹⁵ http://www.dn.kz/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=24%3Al-r&Itemid=1%20

¹⁶ <http://www.spik.kz/articles/tolk/2011-08-25/otkrytoe-pismo-v-zashchitu-ismatully-abdugappara>

¹⁷ <http://www.altyn-orda.kz/razzhigali-li-sufii-mezhreligioznuyu-rozn-ili-o-pravovom-bespredele-sledstvennyx-organov-i-suda-vokrug-164-stati/>



The case of this Sufi group, as well as the increasing number of other non-traditional religious movements, demonstrates the clear dissociation of the Muslim Ummah (community) in Kazakhstan and the growing politicisation in this area. It should be noted that local Salafi also hold a variety of views, from those who recognise authority and power, to those who radically challenge the existing establishment. Various movements, based on different schools of thought and differing approaches, can also be observed within the SAMK.

Although the risks of politicisation through Islam are seen by most experts as relatively low, they should, nonetheless, not be underestimated. As can be seen in the 2016 terrorist attacks in Aktobe and Almaty, a small group of radicals – or even one person – can present a challenge to the system. It should be noted that most of these radicals are neophytes, and their path to religion chequered. As the experience of various Muslim countries shows, religiously motivated protests are inevitable, if no other means of expression exists. The viral ideology of the Islamic State organisation (ISIS, or Daesh) with its simplistic and, accordingly, readily accessible answers to religious questions (for even the least intelligent), is an example of this.

Along with the increasing involvement of Kazakhstani believers in the global Muslim Ummah, the risk of the greater dissemination of radical religious ideologies, which the authorities, collectively, identify as

unconventional religious movements, is also growing. According to official data, more than 400 people were imprisoned for involvement in terrorist and extremist activities in 2016.

The ideology of Salafism is a vivid example of influence at the transnational level. The debate on the prohibition of Salafism in Kazakhstan has been ongoing since 2011, intensifying, periodically, against the backdrop of terrorist attacks.

Another risk also arises: in response to calls from radicals, the state will also counteract these with extreme measures, i.e., a disproportionate increase in administrative control and enforcement. In this context, it is quite appropriate to give voice to warnings from theologians that “the harmony of secular–Islamic relations in Kazakhstan could be violated both as a result of provocations by religious radicals, and as a result of ill-considered actions on the part of individual representatives of state agencies.”¹⁸

Many experts rightfully suggest not rushing to use prohibitive measures. For example, A. Urazbayev, Chairman of the Presidium of the “Counter-Terrorism Committee”, a republic community organisation, has correctly noted that “There could be various consequences – including negative ones – from a ban. After all, the number of adherents to this movement is estimated, according to the SAMK, at somewhere in the order of about 16,000. And these, after all, are our compatriots – who could well be lost, or astray.”

¹⁸ Kozyrev, T. (2016) “Islam in Kazakhstan – Identity, Community and State”, *Kazakhstan Spectre*, No. 2, p. 5.



The country's authorities take a position of restraint on this issue, with the Minister for Religious Affairs and Civil Society, N. Ermakbaev, in November 2016 announcing that "The joint efforts of the society and the state can be more effective than any formal ban at the legislative level. If the application of these measures does not lead to the right outcome, the Ministry will raise the question of an injunction against Salafism and other religious movements."²⁰

On which basis, the government has chosen a targeted and, in the long-term, more productive approach, in which state agencies will suppress the spread of Salafi literature, will prevent unlawful assembly and preaching by representatives of Salafism, block radical Internet sites, and prohibit any organisations that propagate the ideology of Salafism. At the same time, the state is seeking to rely on the republic's only registered religious association – the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan – in this struggle.

The Risks of "Institutionalising" Religion

It should be noted that Kazakhstan, like a number of other post-Soviet countries, largely inherited the Soviet system of state interaction with religion. The SAMK has retained many of the "birthmarks" from that

era and, as A. Sultangaliyeva has correctly noted: «Islam is being institutionalised, and the state is fighting its opponents for Islam, claiming not just control over Islam but, instead, 'religious authority'»²¹

It is interesting that the extraordinary congress of the SAMK, held on 19 February 2013, at which Yerzhan Mayamerov was elected Supreme Mufti, should have been held in Astana at the "Nazarbayev Centre". On the same day, the Kazakh president held a meeting with the new head of the Muftiate and noted "The necessity of issuing fatwas on topical issues – this has been in practice in all Muslim countries, for a long time." In addition to which, Nursultan Nazarbayev has emphasised that "The only recognised structure for traditional Islam in our country is the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan. The recently adopted law governing religious relations stipulates that the state recognises the place and role of the Hanafi Madhhab in the spiritual life of our people. And that is quite right."²²

The Kazakh "Law on Religious Activities and Religious Associations" emphasises the "historical role" of the Hanafi Madhhab. As has been noted, the authorities, in strengthening the SAMK, are seeking to maintain control over religion.

¹⁹ <https://www.zakon.kz/4825693-zapreshhat-li-v-kazakhstane-salafizm-za.html>

²⁰ https://informburo.kz/novosti/v-pravitelstve-ozvuchili-usloviya-zapreta-salafizma-na-zakonodatelnom-urovne.html?_utl_t=fb

²¹ Sultangaliyeva, A.K. (2012), *The "Return of Islam" in Kazakhstan*, Almaty, p. 33.

²² https://www.kt.kz/rus/state/prezident_vstretilsja_s_predstaviteljami_duhovnogo_upravlenija_musuljman_kazahstana_1153568969.html



In the same context, attempts need to be made to strengthen the administrative status of the Muftiate by transferring its central apparatus to the capital. Encouraged to actively oppose illegal religious movements, the President of Kazakhstan has posed the question: “If we give way to young Muslims, then why are we sitting here? Young people need to avoid going the wrong way.”²³

For example, after the terrorist attacks in Aktobe and Almaty in 2016, and in response to the Muftiate’s appeals to the authorities, two advocacy groups were established. One of these – at the national (republic) level – comprises 33 Islamic theologians. The second group comprises 295 Islamic leaders, working throughout the regions. The objective for both groups is the same – to prevent the spread of religious extremist ideas, through close engagement with Akimats (or Khakimiyats, local religious organisations), religious agencies, and local government on the ground, by engaging with mosque attendees in direct discussion of extremist ideas. At the same time, the SAMK recognises the shortcomings here arising from poor communication with Russian-speaking Muslims.

According to E. Engarov, Secretary of the SAMK’s Council of Ulema, “We are forced to admit that an informational vacuum has arisen in the minds of young people, precisely because of the language barrier. A huge amount of questionable religious literature in

Russian is distributed not only on paper, but also in electronically.”²⁴

It should be noted that the disengagement within the Muslim community can be clearly discerned in the appeals from a number of Kazakhstani theologians “to cherish and promote the religion of our ancestors, not to follow the ‘sheikhs overseas’”.²⁵ In addition to which, this is also indicative of the acute shortage of religiously literate spiritual leaders. Often, imams (literally “leaders”) under the SAMK system do not have any genuine authority in the eyes of believers. Spiritual and/or intellectual authority requires authority (as well as independence) in rulings and interpretations, whereas – for the state and the authorities – the loyalty of religious leaders is more important.

Those distinctions used by the authorities in ongoing discussions to define “traditional Islam” as having positive connotations and “non-traditional Islam” as being negative, are also symptomatic of generalised or often selective interpretations, which, frequently, do not lead to greater clarity. Indeed, in such instances, the state’s proactive determination of something as “traditional” might well be perceived as a synonym of an official definition. Such arguments are relative, however, since traditions were also once innovations.

All of this demands a serious review of engagement, both on the part of the state, and,

²³ <http://www.ktk.kz/ru/news/video/2013/2/19/21378>

²⁴ <https://365info.kz/2016/12/v-kazahstane-defitsit-russkoyazychnyh-imamov-dumk/>

²⁵ <https://camonitor.kz/26016-tradicionnyy-islam-po-kazahski-protiv-vahhabitskoy-ideologii.html>



in fact, within the Muslim community itself. The strengthening of intellectual discourse, including within the Muslim environment, as well as flexibility and adaptability, rather than the alienation of believers and the state, would seem to be quite possible and necessary ways of harmonising relations in this respect.

Very often, the state's response to these challenges is largely due to the continuing neo-Soviet practice of state control over religion. For example, in just the last 10 years, the state body for religious affairs has been restructured five times – on each occasion involving reactive or expedient changes caused by the state's response to immediate problems. The authorised state organisation has, several times, held the status of a committee and, thereafter, an agency. In September 2016 the Ministry for Religious Affairs and Civil Society was created in response to terrorist attacks. It is obvious that its elevation to the status of a state agency is a reflection of the authorities' concern over the situation in this area, but, as has been noted, the tools available – and often the steps taken – reflect a different era.

Debates on Religious Dress and Rituals

Discussions on the attributes of Islamic clothing have periodically intensified in the country, particularly since the beginning of the 2010s. With increasing numbers of adherents (with hijabs for women, beards and short trousers for men) in stark contrast to the secular majority, this social disengagement has become clear.

Religious dress, and the debates around this, have become a symbolic watershed. Since, essentially, the imported Islamic dress code is not appropriate for the traditional Kazakh environment, and is borrowed from the countries of the Middle East or Pakistan, dressing in this way creates an additional line of separation from the secular environment. It should be noted that this is typical of many states, and not just Muslims. The total number of people wearing religious clothing is not, in any case, that significant, although bitter disputes have raised the question of its acceptability in state and educational institutions.

It is revealing that even certain deputies in the Kazakh parliament have expressed opposing views on this matter, with mazhilisman (a member of the lower house of parliament) A. Muradov, for example, citing the following arguments: “In Kazakhstan, 80 percent are Muslims, and they choose to wear what is allowed by their faith. But the hijab is an Arabian garment; indigenous Kazakhs have never worn it. The emergence of a special regulation or law in Kazakhstan that prohibits wearing it in public places is wrong. Each school has the right to make its own decision with regard to schoolchildren's appearance. I think that short skirts for schoolgirls are worse than a hijab.”²⁶

On the other hand, another deputy, G. Baimakhanova, pointed out that “School is a secular institution, and should stick to secular rules, including with regard to clothing.

²⁶ http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31441265#pos=1;-173

But there are religious schools – and in those, by all means, religious affiliation can be demonstrated. If parents are so deeply religious – let them hand the child over to the madrasah.”²⁷

School uniform was introduced in public schools throughout Kazakhstan in 2011, by order of the Ministry of Education and Science. Despite this, conflicts with parents of hijab-wearing students have occurred periodically, with more than 5,000 appeals to the ministry by 2016 – this being the total number of those opposed, and conversely, in favour of wearing the hijab.²⁸ The ban on wearing religious clothing (the hijab) was detailed in a ministerial decree in 2016, subsequently confirmed by the Office of the

General Prosecutor. The SAMK supported the authorities’ decision to ban the wearing of hijabs in school. A few protests disagreeing with this decision were expressed through an appeal to the President, and attempts to organise a rally in the capital.

In addition to religious dress, the question of prayer has also been debated – engaging in which is prohibited in state institutions, educational institutions and military units under the “Law on Religious Activities and Religious Associations.” The view is that a practising believer can leave the workplace – an educational institution, say – for an after-dinner namaz (prayer), but this will depend on various circumstances, including, for example, the attitude of the head of such organisation.



Friday prayers at the Khasret Sultan mosque, Astana

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ http://www.inform.kz/ru/odezhdu-s-religioznyoy-atributikoy-deti-mogut-nosit-vne-shkoly-minyust_a2960533



25 October 2016 – President Nursultan Nazarbayev visits the Prophet's Mosque (Al-Masjid an-Nabawi), Medina

The growing role of Islam and, correspondingly, its accompanying rituals, can be demonstrated through the increasing numbers of those – including civil servants – observing the fast during the month of Ramadan, performing the Hajj, and attending Friday prayers. It is significant that officials and civil servants often try to avoid business meetings on Friday afternoons.

On which basis, the ritualistic aspect of Islam becomes an important factor, socially. One of the most important collective Muslim rites is, undoubtedly, the pilgrimage to Mecca. As is well known, the prestige of the Hajj means many politicians undertake it, in an attempt to improve their reputation. In which context, the evolution in Central Asian leaders' attitudes to religious

rituals – leaders whose career trajectories in the Soviet era were connected to their membership of the Communist Party, and their demonstrative atheism – is revealing.

During his first visit to Saudi Arabia in 1994, Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of Kazakhstan, performed the “minor pilgrimage (hajj)”²⁹ to Umrah. In 2003, he cautiously noted that he might perform the full Hajj, but not at that time since he was “not yet ready for it”.

He stressed then that, “As a Kazakh, I, naturally, identify with Islamic culture – and, for that reason, feel the call of the Hajj. I take it very seriously, perhaps. When I decide I am ready to set out on that path, I will make the real Hajj.”³⁰

²⁹ <https://zonakz.net/articles/4593>

³⁰ <http://rus.azattyq.org/a/nursultan-nazarbaev-hadzh-mekka/25154245.html>



The Kazakh leader undertook the minor pilgrimage (Umrah, hajj) during the course of his next visit to Saudi Arabia, in March 2004. Unofficial videos of the Kazakh leader making the minor pilgrimage (Umrah, hajj) only emerged online in October 2013.³¹ The longstanding absence of any official confirmation has been justified on the basis that the President wishes to preserve his “neutrality”.

Nonetheless, informational strategy on this issue has evidently changed. In October 2016 the President’s press services covered President Nursultan Nazarbayev’s visit to Saudi Arabia extensively and, in particular, his visit to the Prophet’s Mosque (Al-Masjid an-Nabawi) in Medina, as well as his taking part in prayers.³²

Images of the Kazakh leader’s previous visits to Mecca have also appeared in official reports.

It should be noted that the first President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, made the Hajj ahead of all of his regional colleagues, back in 1992. Since then, a series of infamous events in both the country and the region (the emergence of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the civil war in Tajikistan, the 1999 terrorist attacks in Tashkent), seems to have prompted the Uzbek leader to radically reconsider his attitude to the role of Islam. The third regional leader to

make the Hajj, in June 1997, was Emomali Rahmon, President of Tajikistan, who also made the pilgrimage to Kaaba in 2001 and 2005. Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow, President of Turkmenistan, made the Hajj in April 2007, combining it with his first official visit abroad.

It is noteworthy that most of the Central Asian leaders have made a demonstrative pilgrimage to Mecca in recent years,³³ with Almazbek Atambayev, President of Kyrgyzstan, performing this religious ritual in December 2014, and Emomali Rahmon, President of Tajikistan, making the pilgrimage for the fourth time, together with members of his family, in January 2016. Turkmen leader Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow’s second Hajj, in May 2016, received extensive coverage.

It is obvious that this trend is the result of both strengthening ties with the Muslim world, and the increasing role of Islam and religious identity in life in Central Asian societies. The second president of Kyrgyzstan, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, being (as was Akayev) the true child of the Soviet era, nevertheless paid more attention to the issue of Islam. Emil Nasritdinov, a scholar and researcher of religion in Kyrgyzstan, believes that “religion, as a political issue, began to come under consideration in Bakiyev’s time – the first law approved by Kurmanbek Bakiyev being the “Law on Freedom of Religion.”

³⁰ <https://zonakz.net/articles/4593>.

³¹ <http://rus.azattyq.org/a/nursultan-nazarbaev-hadzh-mekka/25154245.html>.

³² <http://ru.sputniknews.kz/politics/20161025/883826/nazarbaev-sovershil-namaz-v-mecheti-prorokamuhammada-v-medine.html>.

³³ It should be noted that the religious aspect of the legitimisation of power has also played a significant role in the history of the region. There are many examples of regional rulers – khans, emirs, beks – having sought to enlist the support of influential religious classes, through marital unions with the Sa’idi or Khadir clans or other famous holy names, to strengthen their bloodlines and legitimacy.



TAJKISTAN: ISLAM AND POLITICS

Islam plays a major role in Tajikistan, with religious identity (“I am a Muslim”) competing – sometimes successfully – with national self-identification. There are several reasons behind this situation.

- Tajiks, as an ancient and settled regional people, cherish their centuries-old traditions and customs, which have deeply religious (specifically, Islamic) roots.
- The Tajik people, who have given the Muslim world a whole plethora of Islamic thinkers (Abu Hanif, Jaliliddin Rumi, Abdurahman Jami and dozens of other outstanding imams of the Islamic Ummah), retain their deep religiosity and piety.
- The Tajik people have been able to maintain their adherence to the Islamic faith, in its moderate, (not militant) Hanafi form, throughout 70 years of Soviet power.
- The incomplete consolidation of the Tajik people – either on a national basis (“I am a Muslim”).
- “I am an Iranian”, “I am a democrat”, or “I am a communist”, and so on) or in terms of local and territorial self-identification (“I’m from Khujand”, “I’m from Kulob”, “I’m from

Badahajan” and so on) has a strong impact on this process, creating barriers.

- The traditional religious elite of the Tajik people (the Saizod, Hodzhagon, Eshonzoda, etc.), has – the atheistic nature of Soviet power notwithstanding – retained its Islamic identity and worldview.

The announcement of the Republic of Tajikistan as a secular state in the early days of independence went against the expectations of that more traditional part of the population who had sought not only to revive the ideas and values of people’s Islam, but also to create an Islamic state. The lack of any idea, concept, or state programme for harmony between a secular state and a predominantly Islamic society became a heavy burden in the first decade of the Tajik people’s life as an independent nation.

Key Stages in Cooperation between Government and Political Islam

The national awakening of the Tajik people in the final years of the Soviet Union was closely intertwined with an Islamic awakening, since the historical memory of the Tajiks had an indissoluble connection with those Islamic values that had been severely suppressed during the years of Soviet power.

Therefore, national democratic community and social movements were closely involved with the rapid and sweeping Islamic revival. The unwillingness of the ruling communist nomenklatura to engage with secular reformist forces and movements forced the democratic forces to enter into an alliance with the forces of political Islam.³⁴ In Soviet Tajikistan, one of the first in the region was the Tajik branch of the Islamic Renaissance Party

³⁴ Mamadazimov, A. (2000), *A Political History of the Tajik People*. Dushanbe, pp. 283 – 298.



(of the Soviet Union), which, after the country gained independence, became the most powerful opposition party in the republic. The first months after the recognition of independence in Tajik society saw an uncontrollable and chaotic process of Islam being politicised and politics being Islamified.

The history of almost a quarter of a century of interaction between political Islam and secular state power in Tajikistan can be divided into three stages: the uncompromising struggle for the character of national statehood (1991–1997, the civil war); the maintenance of the status quo under the framework of the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan (1997–2010); and the displacement of political Islam from the country’s socio-political arena (2010 to date).

The first stage saw Soviet (secular) discourse and communist slogans replaced by Islamic rhetoric. The uncompromising confrontation between political Islam and the existing power structure – which, because of its atheistic nature and incompetence, could not engage in dialogue – provoked a civil confrontation that lasted more than five years (1992–1997). The consolidation of armed groups of political Islamists in the mountainous areas of the country bordering Afghanistan, where they could not be ousted by supporters of the constitutional (secular) system, created a stalemate in the country. The sharp deterioration in the situation in neighbouring Afghanistan, which provided military and logistical and support to supporters of political Islam, together with the positive attitude of the guarantors of the inter-Tajik settlement in favour of an early resolution of this crisis, saw peace and national harmony restored.

It should be emphasised that during the years of civil confrontation, the informal expansion of the rituals and practices of locally-practised Islam (which saw local communities starting to establish mosques and prayer houses instead of clubs or other public places), the number of people attending mosques, observing fasting (Ramadan), and wishing to make a Hajj to the sacred sites of Mecca and Medina, increased manifold. State agencies, while fiercely battling political Islam, at the same time, did not interfere with these tendencies.

During the second stage, following the signing of the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord (June 1997), armed groups from the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) were integrated into the national army and other law enforcement structures. After this, the Islamic Renaissance (Revival) Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), which had been banned during the years of civil confrontation (like the Democratic Party), was again registered with the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Tajikistan. The IRPT again began publishing its weekly newspaper “Najot” (“Salvation”), a magazine, “Nayson”, and launched an official website.³⁵ A paradoxical situation developed in Tajikistan between 1997 and 2015: on the one hand, the national state was declared as being secular while, on the other, a powerful religiously oriented party functioned just as legally – with, moreover, a number of its representatives becoming people’s deputies.

The process of building mosques and prayer houses continued to accelerate both during the years of civil confrontation (1992–1997) and under post-conflict reconstruction (1997–2008), reaching a point at which their number exceeded the total number of secondary schools throughout the country.

³⁵ Mamadazinov, A., Kuvatova, A. (2012), *The Regulation of Political Parties’ Activities and Women’s Involvement in the Political Life of Tajikistan*, Dushanbe, Morif va Farkhang, p. 311.



*The Official Signing of the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord
(27 June 1997, Moscow)*

Certain local experts began calling for the regulation of religious life. The authorities responded by adopting legislation including the “Law on the Regulation of National Traditions, Celebrations and Ceremonies in the Republic of Tajikistan”, the “Law on Parental Responsibilities in Raising Children”, and so on.

The Council of Ulema of Tajikistan, a public organisation, began to come under the control of the state. Imam-khatibs at Friday mosques were assigned a fixed wage, which meant giving them the status of civil servants. At the third stage, from spring 2015 (after the last parliamentary elections), when the IRPT began to seriously challenge the election results, the situation changed dramatically, with local (district and city) IRPT branches starting to be disbanded, or to disband independently. According

to the “Law on Political Parties”, any political party must have regional offices in more than half of the cities and regions throughout the country. Failure to comply with this regulation results in the closure of the entire party.

Concurrently with this, in September 2015, Deputy Minister of Defence General Abdukhalim Nazarzoda and a group of like-minded individuals attempted a military coup which, according to the authorities, involved the IRPT leadership. This military coup was suppressed, and those involved put on trial. On 29 September 2015, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Tajikistan banned all activities by the IRPT.³⁶ The entire leadership of the IRPT, except for Chairman Muhiddin Kabiri, who, by that time, had left the country, were involved in this attempted coup.

³⁶ <https://news.tj/ru/node/215519>



On 18 May 2016 a nationwide referendum was held in the Republic of Tajikistan, posing the question, among others, of banning nationalist and religious political parties – which was approved, by an overwhelming majority.³⁷ The IRPT’s activities will now remain part of the history of sovereign Tajikistan as an unsuccessful attempt at the creation of a functioning political party of a religious (Islamic) nature, under an environment of national secular statehood: the creation of such political parties now being prohibited by law.

The Nature of the Authorities’ Engagement with Islam after the Referendum of 18 May

The secular nature of the national state is not, any longer, subject to competition from political Islam, and the government’s agenda in terms of its engagement with strict Islamic society has undergone considerable transformation. If the IRPT had, previously, been the key opponent and/or partner to the authorities and, in tandem, if all relations based on “secular power–Islamic society” had been put on the back burner, then the authorities did not, now, have any kind of priority partner with whom relations might eclipse all other efforts and activities relating to popular (“people’s”) Islam.

Following the banning of the IRPT, and particularly after the national referendum of 18 May 2016, the picture began to change drastically. No single organisation or structure whose activities are in any way connected to religious life has enjoyed the status that the IRPT had during the presidency of Sayid Ab-

dulloh Nuri in the post-conflict era (from 27 June 1997 until his death).

This new situation – of one party having power, and, on the other hand a multitude of problems relating to its policy on religion, without having another major player or partner – has both positive and negative aspects.

Many questions from local experts and government agencies have raised the following issues:

- the presence of religious people within society subject to the influence (propaganda) of Salafism and Wahhabism;³⁸
- the presence of followers of the extremist and terrorist movement “Islamic State”;
- the de-urbanisation and deindustrialisation of a number of regions, particularly in the mountains, creating a breeding ground for provincial (unenlightened) Islam;
- the dilemma facing the clergy, of “loyalty” (to the state) and professional integrity (in religious affairs); and
- public discussions regarding Islamic dress and rituals (the hijab for women, beards for men).³⁹

According to experts, the initial involvement of Tajik citizens in extremist groups occurred, to a greater extent, among refugees and internally displaced persons ending up in Afghanistan. It is well known that during the years of civil confrontation more than half a million migrants were forced to leave the country and cross the Panj-Amudarya riv-

³⁷ <https://news.tj/ru/news/v-tadzhikistane-prokhdit-referendum-po-izmeneniyu-konstitutsii-respubliki>

³⁸ http://islamio.ru/news/society/na_yuge_tadzhikistana_osuzhdeny_shest_salafitov/

³⁹ <https://news.tj/ru/news/okhota-na-khidzhaby>, http://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2015/05/150511_tajikistan_beards



er. The United Tajik Opposition (UTO) did not have a sufficiently powerful and diffuse structure to manage the daily life of Tajik refugees and internally displaced persons. This situation served as a starting point for various extremist groups in Afghanistan, who recruited supporters among Tajik refugees. This involvement of Tajik nationals in extremist and terrorist groups was conducted through the following channels:

- through religious institutions in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and a number of Arab countries, in which aggressive tendencies (as opposed to moderate and tolerant Hanafism) can be found, calling for violence against secular authorities;
- through insufficient literacy regarding Islamic academic doctrines and learning, and the recognition of “jihad” in only its most basic form; and
- the use of religion as a means of escape from difficult living conditions, and the use of weapons to expropriate others’ property, material wealth and possessions.

It was precisely these groups of people who did not return to Tajikistan after the signing of the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in June 1997, instead filling the ranks of international extremist groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Ansarullah, the Taliban, and many others. This constituted the first wave of Tajik nationals in the international extremist movement, which, becoming increasingly marginalised, disappeared into the numerous groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The second wave, consciously attaching itself to ISIS (ISIL), caused particular concern and alarm to both the authorities and the public:

- unable to reconcile themselves to the retention of various atheistic manifestations in state affairs (awkwardness about wearing the hijab, or having a beard), these people deliberately emigrate to Syria and join ISIS; and
- as part of the unofficial (semi-legal) assimilation of the foundations of Islam (tradition-



ally not from the moderate Hanafi Ulema, but from adherents of dissident schools of thought (madhhabs) such as Salafism and Wahhabism), a certain section of religiously minded youth is, concurrently with this, beginning to develop anti-state behaviours in relation to secular authorities and power. These people typically join underground extremist groups or emigrate to Islamic countries, as a result.

Official authority is not, currently, being disturbed by the internal religious life of the community, where, apart from discussions about the hijab and the war, there are no other acute problems.

This view is further supported by the fact that the country’s political leadership under Emom-

ali Rakhmon has, since the beginning of last year, grasped the “religious initiative”, as evidenced by:

- his making the “minor pilgrimage” (Umrah) with his family in early 2016;
- his participation in the funeral procession of the first President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, in Samarkand (September 2016), at which Emomali Rakhmon was not only involved in the official part of funeral proceedings, but also took part in traditional Islamic prayers during the raising of the deceased’s coffin (considered an important compassionate and charitable act among believers); and
- his reading prayers before the closing off of the Vakhsh river by the Rogun Dam (October 2016) – broadcast repeatedly on all television channels.



KYRGYZSTAN. POLITICS AND ISLAM

The atheistic Soviet regime, which for a long time existed under the slogan “Religion is the opium of the people” never quite eradicated the long-standing religious identity of the region. This preservation of religious identity was, presumably, a way of not losing distinctive characteristics (including ethnically) as well as, albeit to no great extent, expressing resistance to the communist system. The religiosity of a certain part of the population of Central Asia was, to some extent, present throughout the entire Soviet period, despite the revolution of 1917, the persecution and suppression of religious institutions, totalitarian ideology, and massive cultural change. Nevertheless, during the Soviet period, such religiosity did not play any significant role in either the ideological, or, to an even greater extent, the political arena.

By the end of the Soviet period the situation was, concurrently with the growing ideological problems of the communist regime, gradually beginning to change. The avalanche-like growth of economic and social problems – and related issues – demanded answers. Communist ideology was already in a state of crisis. Against this background, it would seem logical that one of the key “discoveries” of this time should be the rapid reversion of an ever-increasing part of the population to Islam and its postulates.

Independence and Discussions Around Islam

It cannot be said that Islam was the only ideological paradigm to which citizens of sovereign Kyrgyzstan turned their attention. The ideas of democracy, the liberal state, human rights and personal freedom were – and remain – quite attractive. However, these ideas, did not, for one thing, gain universal acceptance and, for another, became corrupted – in some instances beyond all recognition, evoking, in a certain part of the population, the same aversion as had communism. Islam, on the basis of its historical roots in the region, and in the context of the current crisis of “isms,” began to occupy the vacuum in the country’s ideology. Kyrgyzstan’s search for ideological identity is, therefore, ongoing, and Islam is playing an increasing role in this process.

It is interesting to note how the rhetoric of the country’s top officials – for example, the first and second presidents of Kyrgyzstan – has changed: it is becoming increasingly obvious that attention to Islam, and its role in society, is gradually growing.

Speeches by the first President of Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akayev, were distinguished by a cautious attitude toward Islam.

He, quite deliberately, did not distance himself from other religions. Islam came more from the cultural sphere than from the ideological and, still less, political one. The President did not pray, and did not perform Salat (Namaz), at least in public. In 2000, addressing the country’s Muslim population on Orozo Ait (the festival of Ramazan/Ramadan) he stressed that the festival being celebrated, representing “a bright and holy ritual of the Islamic religion,” also has a “universal spirituality, the essence of which is based in justice, goodness and forbearance”.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Religion and Society (2000), 26 December. Available at: <http://txt.newsru.com/religy/26dec2000/oraza.html>.



A photograph taken from the rear of the State History Museum of Kyrgyzstan, the former Lenin Museum, where his pedestal, as former chief ideologist, has again been pressed into usage on the Republic of Kyrgyzstan's becoming independent. In front of the museum itself is the country's main square, with the main symbol of independence – the national flag

The second president of Kyrgyzstan, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, being (as was Akayev) the true child of the Soviet era, nevertheless paid more attention to the issue of Islam. Emil Nasritdinov, a scholar and researcher of religion in Kyrgyzstan, believes that “religion, as a political issue, began to come under consideration in Bakiyev’s time – the first law approved by Kurmanbek Bakiyev being the “Law on Freedom of Religion.”⁴¹

This specialist believes that the issue of religion, and the state’s interest in it, mainly from the point of view of security, acquired special relevance with the withdrawal of coalition troops from Afghanistan.⁴²

The issue of Islam, not often articulated in state rhetoric, has become increasingly pronounced

⁴¹ The Law “On Freedom of Religion and Religious Organisations in the Kyrgyz Republic”, 31 December 2008, available at: <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/202498>.

⁴² Mengu Discussion Club, “The Religious Model of Kyrgyzstan: Achievements and Challenges,” interview with Emil Nasretdinov, Senior Lecturer in Anthropology, American University of Central Asia and a founder of the Anthropological Club, available at: <http://analitika.akipress.org/news:5167>.



since 2000. On the one hand, Islam – as part of discussions on legitimacy – is becoming a popular trend within society; on the other hand, religiosity has increasingly come to be seen – albeit not publicly – as a potential threat to the officially secular state.

The situation in Kyrgyzstan has not just been impacted by internal and regional events. The terrorist acts of 11 September 2001 in the United States led to changing attitudes towards Islam throughout the world, including in Kyrgyzstan.

According to a range of experts, it was the events in New York that brought discussions around Islam to the fore, creating a new wave of discussions and evaluations. A major paradox engulfed the world, and Kyrgyzstan was not left out. On the one hand, Islam has come to absorb more and more new followers, engaging them by offering an opportunity to find answers to difficult questions, as well as through a wider social adjustment in which one is not simply

standing alone, but part of a large community of likeminded believers. On the other, Islam has increasingly been designated a “negative factor”, somewhat sweepingly characterised as “extremist” and “terroristic”. Confrontation here, moreover, strengthens radicalisation.

State and Islam in Kyrgyzstan

It should be noted that, the greater role of Islam notwithstanding, all of the countries of Central Asia, with the exception of Uzbekistan, continue to define themselves, constitutionally, as secular states.

These processes are taking place against a backdrop in which Islam in Kyrgyzstan, as elsewhere in Central Asia, is becoming more and more popular within society – demonstrated by the rapid growth in the number of mosques and madrassas in the country, particularly in the regions, where mosques are the main and most accessible places for social interaction.

Number of Mosques

2009	2010	2011	2012
1973	2143	2181	2200

Geopolitics has, over time, become an increasingly influential factor on religious commitment – the geopolitical location of a country largely determining the religious processes that take place within it. If one considers Islam from this point of view then Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Syria, Iran, western countries, and the Indian subcontinent are having the most active impact on the countries of Central Asia.⁴³

Religious belief is becoming an increasingly popular and open means of positioning and legitimisation for political leaders. In 2010, MP Tursunbai Bakiruulu, the former Akyikatchy or Ombudsman of Kyrgyzstan, who previously headed “Erkin Kyrgyzstan”, took the oath in the Kyrgyz Parliament not on the Constitution of Kyrgyzstan, but on the Koran. In 2017 he announced his nomination for the presidency of

⁴³ Emil Nasritdinov, N. and Esenamanova, A, (2014), Religious Security in the Kyrgyz Republic, Bishkek.



the Kyrgyz Republic, without making any attempt to hide his religious commitment.

The first prayer room – namazkana – in the country’s parliament building opened in 2011. A second, with a larger floorspace, was later built in 2015.

According to Nazira Kurbanova, ex-chairman of the State Commission for Religious Affairs (SCRA), this situation is in breach of state policy on religion: “First of all, if you open a new namazkana, you also need to build prayer rooms for members of other religions. Concurrently with this, such premises will also need to be opened in other public institutions. In addition to which, the financing of the agency responsible for government policy by sponsors from an Arab state could be in breach of state policy. If a namazkana is really that necessary, it should have been built at the expense of the “Iman Foundation” established by the President.⁴⁴

The experience of the Iman Foundation for the Development of Spiritual Culture– an attempt by the government to influence the religious situation in what is, officially, a secular state – is interesting. The Foundation was opened in 2014 at the initiative of the president of the republic. Its main objective is to develop spiritual and religious culture, and to support initiatives directed at increasing citizens’ spiritual and intellectual potential. The Foundation’s website states that it is a “legal entity pursuing social, charitable, cultural, educational and other socially useful goals, of an exclusively non-commercial nature”⁴⁵

In addition to various spiritual and cultural projects, such as book publishing, and the “Kalem Zhana Iman” project supporting writers and poets, the Foundation conducts seminars on the further education and training of imams. On which basis, seminars were held at Osh State University,⁴⁶ over a period of 12 days, in 2015. The Iman Foundation for the Development of Spiritual Culture has also been paying religious leaders (imams) a monthly stipend since 2017 – the first of these being paid to those imams passing an examination. A mufti, for example, might expect KGS15,000, his deputies KGS10,000, leading imams at a mosque about KGS10,000, and other imams KGS5,000.

Pursuant to the Constitution, Kyrgyzstan is a secular state and the law, therefore, does not allow religious ministers and organisations’ activities to be financed. The Foundation is not a government entity, and was only initiated at the direction of the president – that is, the President of Kyrgyzstan, Almazbek Atamaev, having signed a decree on the establishment of the Iman Foundation for the Development of Spiritual Culture.⁴⁷

Given the growing influence of Islam on people’s hearts and minds, the state, naturally, has become concerned at the quality of education received at religious educational institutions. The State Commission for Religious Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, together with the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan (SAMK) is active in religious education. The “Concept of Religion and Religious Education in Kyrgyzstan” has been initiated, and is actively discussed. Thus far, however, the level of knowledge of Kyrgyz religious leaders in direct contact with the faithful leaves much to be desired.

⁴⁴ Radio Azattyk (2014), “New Namazkana Being Built in Jogorku Kenesh”, 19 February. Available at: <http://rus.azattyk.org/a/25267864.html>.

⁴⁵ The website for the Iman Foundation for the Development of Spiritual Culture is available at: http://ru.iyman.kg/about_us/.

⁴⁶ Akipress (2015), “The Presidential Iman Foundation Holds Seminars for Imams in Southern Kyrgyzstan”, 28 December, available at: <https://kg.akipress.org/news:628998>.

⁴⁷ Radio Azattik (2015), “Imams to be Paid a Stipend”, 17 August, available at: <http://rus.azattyk.org/a/27192770.html>.



According to Zakir Chotaev, PhD, Deputy Director of the State Commission for Religious Affairs, “Only 20 percent of the imams have a basic religious education – so two pilot projects have been launched. The first of these being a theological college, combining secular subjects and religious disciplines. A further project concerns the training of senior staff at the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan. The Institute for the Training and Retraining of Management Staff of the SAMK has been established within Arabaev University, under state control.”⁴⁸

Almazbek Atambayev has, during course of his presidency, demonstrated his adherence to Islam, to a greater or lesser degree.

Of all the presidents of Kyrgyzstan, he has done this most evidently. In his interviews, he often speaks about religion, identity and security. Candidates for the presidency (presidential elections in the Kyrgyz Republic being due this year, 2017) are also actively positioning themselves as faithful Muslims – including the

Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic, a candidate from the party in power, the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK), Sooronbay Jeenbekov.

Commenting on the religious situation in the country, Almazbek Atambayev noted: “Islam is the right religion, if you’re going in the right direction. We can, in fact, see how demarcations are occurring, on religious grounds, in other countries, in which religious extremism has taken root. Within two or three months we will put this matter to the Defence Council. But we will not be using proscriptive measures, as was the case under the Soviet Union. On this issue, we need ongoing dialogue.”⁴⁹

Against a backdrop of worsening terrorist threats by various radical movements and Islamic State, religious discourse, specifically Islamic discourse, is increasingly being forced into the sphere of security policy, with references to “extremism” and “terrorism.” For a long time, politics in Kyrgyzstan was, in terms of religion, consid-

⁴⁸ KNEWS (2016), “The Future of Religious Education in Kyrgyzstan”, 9 September, available at: <http://knews.kg/2016/08/budushhee-religioznogo-obrazovaniya-v-kyrgyzstane/>.

⁴⁹ Azan.kz., interview with Almazbek Atambayev, available at: <https://azan.kz/article/show/id/4049.html>.



ered the most liberal in the Central Asian region. Recently, however, the policy of the Kyrgyz Republic has become tougher, with religion being increasingly discussed at the State Security Council, and with government agencies dealing ever more frequently with the problems of radical Islam.

Kadyr Malikov, a theologian well known in Central Asia, believes that “Kyrgyzstan will, increasingly, be threatened by various trans-national terrorist groups that will replenish their human resources by constantly recruiting young people already inside the countries of Central Asia and the Russian Federation. In the meantime, the fight against terrorism in the countries of Central Asia goes on, not for reasons of principle, but because of consequences. There are two tactics in combating Takfiri terrorism: the first is the scientific and educational approach, and the second is – pure power and repression.

Civil servants and law enforcement agencies in our countries basically see an administrative and security solution to solving security issues. Although, if you look properly, it has the appearance of being more superficial in suppressing the external manifestation of extremism and protest movements.”⁵⁰

Despite certain attempts by the state to limit religious influence, especially in politics, these processes somehow gain momentum, and religion in Kyrgyzstan is increasingly penetrating politics. Among high-ranking officials, too, and among competing political groups, Islam is increasingly becoming if not a means of legitimisation, then a resource for mobilising voters. Islam, at the country’s current stage of development, is increasingly tangible both in people’s daily life, and in political competition.



Campaign poster for city elections, Baktan, 2017

⁵⁰ Malikov, K. (2016), “Why Information will Lose the Government the War on Terror”, K-NEWS, 30 August, available at: <http://knews.kg/2016/08/kadyr-malikov-pochemu-gosudarstvo-budet-proigryvat-v-borbe-s-terrorizmom-idejno-i-informatsionno/>.



CONCLUSIONS

- In the face of stronger statehood, on the one hand, and the strengthening of certain factors behind re-Islamisation, on the other, there is a tendency whereby authorities in the Central Asian states are increasingly active in regulating the religious sphere. This is reflected in the increasing volume of statutory legislation and regulation.
- The adoption of similar statutory legislation and regulation throughout the Central Asian states is testament to the frequency of threats and provocations, particularly from religious extremism.
- The various Spiritual Administrations of Muslims can be seen as a continuation of the Soviet practice of centralised control over religion, in each of the Central Asian states. The current Spiritual Administrations of Muslims have, to a certain extent, become the successors to the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM).
- State policy on religion does not, entirely, boil down to those regulatory methods and traditions that have existed in the recent past (which would be impossible, in principle), but is consistent with the new demands of the times. Significantly, the regular meetings between the political leaders of the region testify to attempts to modify state policy here, as well as to attempts to formulate a new dialogue with Islam.
- The modification of state policy in this area, as well as the formulation of a new dialogue with Islam, are determined by two key tendencies that can, for the purposes of discussion, be designated as: a) fighting for hearts and minds (in particular, for legitimising regimes); and b) fighting for the votes of the electorate. These tendencies often contradict each other.
- There is an obvious and objective process in the growing number of religious organisations (mosques) in the countries of Central Asia. In the first years of independence, this process had an uncontrolled character, with the state subsequently taking steps to streamline this process by strengthening control and coordination mechanisms.
- Initially, the relatively liberal religious policy of the Kyrgyz authorities led to a sharp increase in the number of mosques and religious schools (madrassas), in comparison with other countries in Central Asia.
- In Central Asia, only Tajikistan has extensive and multilateral experience in the activities of a religious political party.



The trend of containing and protecting society against Islam, however, has led to the fact that, now, such organisations' participation in the political life of Tajik society has become impossible. On which basis, activities by religious political parties are banned by law in all countries throughout the region.

- There is also an ongoing process of regulated development in education. This trend is becoming increasingly important in the context of the ever more intense

global intellectual and informational battle, including in terms of gaining a knowledge and understanding of Islam.

- The urgency of the problems raised by the challenges and threats arising as a side effect of re-Islamisation are driving the need for protection against the impacts of Islam, in public policy. This, in turn, raises the issue of the need for government measures to regulate religion, as well as the need to identify the principles and basis for establishing mutual trust between Islam and the state.

Cover photo: the main square in the city of Osh, 24 June 2017.

This and the majority of other photos have been sourced from the Internet, the photographers being users of Facebook.



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**Central Asia:
A Space for “Silk Democracy”
Islam and State**

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