INVESTIGATING THE CHALLENGES OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM IN CENTRAL ASIA AND ITS IMPACT ON THE NATIONAL SECURITY OF THE SURROUNDING NATIONS

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Abstract. Studies before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union indicated that the Bolsheviks have not been able to eliminate the growth and evolution of the intellectual-cognitive currents in Central Asia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, newly independent states faced unprecedented, cultural, social and economic difficulties; problems such as finding new sources of income for states that were deprived of subsidies from Moscow, fighting against widespread poverty, attempts to effectively control the country's territory, and in some cases the experience of a civil war or a war with neighboring countries, and other security threats that could have permeated to other countries. The Central Asian republics were forced to create national narratives to consolidate their independence and national sovereignty. The Soviet historians and ethnographers had provided material for this purpose to a large extent. However, there were many differences between the newly independent states; as a result of these differences, central Asian countries faced varying degrees of confusion in line with national identities. Therefore, global and regional powers began to quickly plan and set the agenda for regulating their relations with Central Asian countries. This was coupled with the cultural influence that the soft power and cultural influence in this region with the financial, military, and economic assistance to these countries by global and regional powers, paid attention to new identity and emerging countries of Central Asia, along with the above, export their culture to Central Asian countries."

Keywords: Extremism, Religion, National security, Central Asia.

INTRODUCCIÓN

Central Asia refers to the countries of the Republics of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (Falah, 2011: 13) and (Sanaie, 1997: 49). The greatest advantage of Central Asia in the past, which is, of course, its biggest problem in contemporary times, is that this region is limited to a part of the world without body of water: Iran and Afghanistan in the south, China in East and Russia in north and west of Central Asia. The vast Central steppe is bounded by the Caspian Sea from the west, from the south with the Hindu Kush mountains and Pamir, and from the east along the China border with the Tian Shan Mountains; Central Asia is also due to the presence of two great Amudarya and Sihoun rivers before they floated to the Aral Sea, they enclosed a large part of the Central Asian territory, the area also known as the "Transoxiana"; the river designates clear geographical, cultural and political borders that made Central Asia separate from the rest of the world, in spite of the silk road, for example, amuuddría separates Turkish empires and the Central Asia Mongol nomadic from the Iranian Empire in the south and, along with Afghanistan, acted as a buffer between the English empire in India and Russia, and the Amu Darya is still the border between Afghanistan and Central Asia (Rashid Ahmad, 2008, 30).

Thus, the main reason for the richness of Central Asia dates back to its geography: a vast territory located in the heart of the Eurasian continent; the Central Asian region in the old era, due to the fact that it was connected to Europe via Silk Road, was considered to be the center of the world; silk road was actually shaped in several ways, it enabled businessmen to better carry their goods with caravans of camels in the two continents, but travelers have something other than silk and spice; they also developed new technical achievements, new thoughts and new religions, "the religion of ancient Greeks," "Buddhism "," Judaism, "" Zoroastrianism, "" Christianity, "" Hinduism, "" Manichaeism, "and "Islam ", that these religions have been settled in this region with a strong relationship with the time. (Rashid Ahmad, 2008: 29). Islam is also part of the culture of the people of Central Asia, which has had an effective performance in the history of the regions. Although converting to the religion of Islam in different parts of Central Asia dates back to different historical periods, in some of these regions, the history of this process dates back to early centuries after the migration and in some other regions, such as the part of Kazakhstan, to eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Sheikh Attar, 1992: 32-41).

2. Religious extremism

The issue of religious fundamentalism, especially Islamic fundamentalism, is one of the concepts that have been widely recognized throughout the world in the last century. This concept is a phenomenon that there is no background for it in the Muslim world. Although in the past Islamic tradition, there were similar concepts to express the meanings close to it, but never such an interpretation has been used in Islamic tradition. This concept, due to the historical roots, was first used in the form of Latin (Fundamentalism) in the early 20th century in the United States and about a group of Protestant Christians by believing in the revelation of the Christian Bible terms and phrases, emphasized observing its contents and rejected the attitude of Western modernism to religion. Since then, the West has used these words in its experience of encountering Muslims, regardless of the differences existing and the fundamentals of Islamic thought and reflection. Accordingly, the interpretation of Islamic fundamentalism has a Western origin and the modern Western mentality has been taken. With such a mentality and according to the principles of Western modernism, and in particular the principle of the separation of religion from politics, religion gets a certain definition and function (Behrooz Lak, 2003: 61).

In the Western perspective, the wave of Islamism is widespread and complex and this complexity is due to the fact that new fundamentalists are trying to use the means of democracy to advance their goals. If they succeed, they can be an alternative to Western civilization. Otherwise, there is the possibility of use of violence by them. If older fundamentalists emphasized violence, new nuclei insist on freedom of expression and elections and Religious civilization (Jean Daniel, 1993: 44).

Islamic extremism has been evaluated in three different perspectives:

The first perspective, Islamic extremism emerges as a response to the crisis of nation-state confrontation in the Middle East. The crisis includes social exclusion, persistent poverty, corruption, nepotism, dependence on the West in terms of security and defense and economics, the lack of political legitimacy and the degradation of law sovereignty. This crisis is also exacerbated by the general political instability of irresponsible and unreliable political systems of maintaining political power in Islamic countries.

The problems in recent years have been compounded by population growth, urbanization, and the environment. From this perspective,

therefore, fundamentalism can be an extreme response to a broad and comprehensive crisis. It is assumed that a form of cultural nationalism that reflects a kind of transitional and incomplete populism can have little risk for the West.

The second perspective, this perspective indicates Huntington's view; he considers the emergence of Islamic extremism as the subject of civilization. In the sense that the Dar Al-Islam on one side and the Jewish-Christian civilization on the other side. The militancy between civilizations replaces the former Cold War system and the ideological competition of the Cold War era.

The Third perspective, extremism is linked to political Islam, which is defined as a prestigious force for positive change, and is decorated with the slogan "Islam is the solution" (Ehtesham, 1994).

Therefore, from the perspective of the West, extremism has the following characteristics:

1. Fundamentalists are fanatical, traditionalist, and extremist people.
2. They are prejudiced towards what is said in the texts of the holy books, and they do not pay attention to other interpretations.
3. They have conflict and contrast characteristic and disruptive behavior (Pazoki, 2003: 23 to 32).

Shireenhunter writes in this regard: "Fundamentalism means Orthodox in religious affairs and the application of laws in their original and pure form. But Islamic fundamentalism is different from other types and this difference is related to its political feature (Shireenhunter, 1998).

3. Religious identity and culture in Central Asia

Central Asian people, in their everyday life, like to identify their identity with fewer and more limited institutions and places. In Soviet times, Soviet officials have become confused by this issue, as they say, the people of Asia Central, in the first place, consider themselves Muslim, and in the next step, the region or city of life are important to them. The idea of belonging to a particular nation does not matter to them; in other words, they did not care about titles like Uzbek, Tajik and Azeri, which were seen in the terminology of Russian scholars. These urban, rural and suburban communities in Central Asia have been multi-ethnic and are located outside of the Persian-Turkish boundaries. In addition, Turkish or Iranian ancestors have not played a role in the imagination of these local communities. Therefore, the concepts of Uzbeks, Tajik, Kyrgyz, etc. in the period of tsarist and communist did not matter, besides the secular identity derived from the place of life,

Islam was the central source of Central Asian identity in the nineteenth century.

Soviet politicians sought to replace a new identity with a Muslim identity in order to prevent the emergence of Islamic-political challenges; this new identity was the first collective identity of most of the natives of Central Asia; in other words, different republics based on language or accent, adopted a new non-religious identity; Moscow ignored the fact that Central Asia is a multi-ethnic region and most of its residents have a common culture and with Turkish and Persian elements; in fact, the people of Central Asia identity have no ethnic identity based on the land (Karagiannis, 2012: 28 to 38).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Muslim clerics came to the region from other countries to send their readings of Islam, and extremist Islamic literature or religious fundamentalism came to mosques, libraries, universities and cultural centers. Central Asian leaders initially welcomed the resurgence of Islam, because they considered Islam an integral part of national culture and the strengthening of patriotism. However, it soon became apparent that contributions from Muslim countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, has unintended side effects that could potentially weaken their religious stability. Extremist Islamists turned against the government in these countries and called for the implementation of the Shari'a laws in society. Thus, from the beginning of the 1990s till now, many times the word Wahhabism and religious scholars have been heard from the speeches of the central government officials, as well as religious leaders and scholars in the region, when they were describing and criticizing radical Islam and radicalism (Karagiannis, 2012: 38 and 39).

4. Points of focus of extremist religious activities in Central Asia

An overview of the five countries situation in the Central Asian region shows that in this region, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan have had more problems with the growth of radicalism and religious extremism than Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Among the three above-mentioned countries, the "Fergana Valley", located on the border with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, is the central area of extremist Islamist groups. The reason for the focus of extremist Islamist groups in this region is its geographical situation for hiding, its proximity to the three countries of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, and the strength of the beliefs of its inhabitants. The Sogdia and Khujand regions in northern Tajikistan and "Osh" in southern

Kyrgyzstan are also major centers of Islamist groups in the Central Asian region. Some experts cite the ethnic origin as the main factor in analyzing the willingness of Uzbek, Tajik and Kyrgyz ethnics to radicalism and the weakness of this desire among Turkmen and Kazakh ethnic groups. According to this group's beliefs, folks who have lived as nomads throughout history were religiously milder than tribes who lived in one place. As a result, Kazakh and Turkmen peoples have more flexible religious beliefs than Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Kyrgyz because of their tribal history.

5. Extremist Indicators in Central Asia
5.1. The tendency toward Salafist Islamism and Wahhabi traditions
Most supporters of violence in the Islamic world have a Salafi fundamentalism and Anti-self trend. In line with analyzing social issues they are political, community-based and arrogant, who consider the violence to be intrinsic and absolute, and they in a totally closed system they judge issues.

5.2. Following social, emotional and value-based activities
If, according to a categorization, we divide social actions into emotional actions, and rational actions, there are more emotional actions in Islamic violent groups. Emotional actions are actions that are based on personal dedication to leaders such as Osama bin Laden and his elites and have created a charismatic kingdom in terrorist and violent groups.

5.3. Following the originality of Islamic pragmatism and hasty pragmatism
Extremist radical supporters consider action as a necessary condition and use empiricism trend. The elites of violent groups believe that thought and reflection must be for pofit and benefit purposes.

5.4. Creating a militant political otherness by using Takfir weapon
Radical Islamic violent extremism, due to the adherence to arrogance and superficiality in social and political affairs, constantly redefine the otherness concept, and after political otherness, create political face for it, and from the relation of contradiction, and they use relation of conflict and opposition which is a kind of insight and physical removal is used.

5.5. Processing and Theorizing Violence Discourse
Islamic violent extremism considering that has no reasonable intellectual background, and lacks a coherent socio-political theory, currently in its blind assassinations, in order to justify its goals and

negative values, has begun to make superficially thought-provoking theories (Pourfard, 2007: 55).
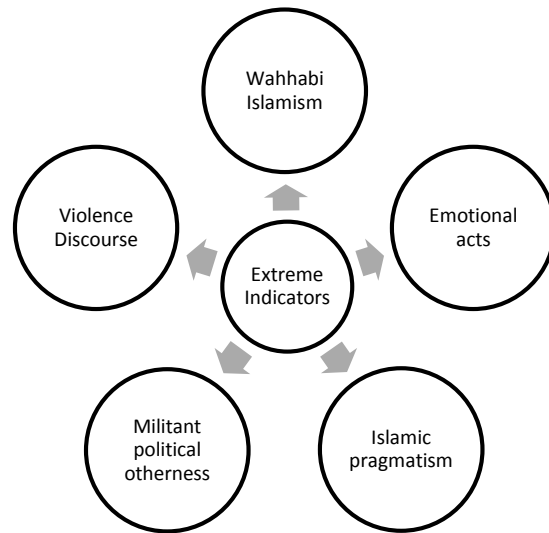

Figure 1. Religious extremist indicators

6. Roots of extremism in Central Asia
The events of Afghanistan and its occupation by the Soviet Union should be considered as a milestone in the activities of Islamic movements. The Military occupation of Afghanistan by Soviet Union was an exceptional event in the Islamic world since for the first time an Islamic land was occupied by global communism. Hence, Islamic groups favored jihad movements, which had global arguments against the enemies of Islam and viewed communism as their enemies, were very sensitive to the occupation of Afghanistan.

Thus, figures such as Jordanian-Palestinian "Abdullah al-Azam", Egyptian "Ayman al-Zawahiri" and "Saudi Osama bin Laden " gradually began to organize and form al-Qaeda as a global organization. The Afghan war, in addition to accelerating the formation of a radical organization called "al-Qaeda", also marked the meeting between Arabic East and West Islamists. This meeting brought together the ideological and organizational perspectives of the Islamists. Meanwhile, the radical Arab Maghreb movements (Egypt) provided their own organizational and institutional skills to the Islamists of Saudi Arabia, and through their extensive financial influence, the Saudis succeeded in integrating their Wahhabi and sectarianism views into the current intellectual Islamist framework in Afghanistan.

Thus, since the mid-1980s, the scope of radical Arabic activities in the Arab countries was decreased, and by moving the radical activities center to Afghanistan and Pakistan, these countries have become the focal point for the growth of

Islamic movements in the 1990s (Ghorbani, www.qafqaz.ir).

7. Consequences of Neglecting Religious Extremism in Central Asia

The anti-terrorist waves created after the events of September 11, 2001, along with some of its positive consequences in the context of intensifying the security of the various countries and the increased vigilance of the security Special Forces, have also had bad consequences. Since the inception of the anti-terrorist coalition, Central Asia has played a major role in counter-terrorist operations. The basic point about Central Asia's role in the counter-terrorism process is that, at the beginning of this process, the region was more likely to support military operations by providing its military bases for invading the most important center for the development of terrorism after the 9/11 attacks, Afghanistan, but after the end of the military invasion of Afghanistan, the region became the target of counterterrorism operations. Therefore, the study of terrorism in the Central Asian region has two completely different and conflicting aspects. The first aspect is the increase of movements and activities of radical Islamist groups in the Central Asian region, and secondly, the limitations to the people in line with fighting against terrorism and Islamic radicalism (Shekary, 2006: 17) and (Shakary, Abdul-Qayum, 2006: 56).

8. Religious extremism threatening modern processes in contemporary Central Asia

As Holsti says, security among countries in the Third World, among the Soviet republics, and elsewhere, increasingly is based on security inside these countries (Holsti, 2003, p. 15). This issue is more obvious, especially when probable threats have transnational characteristics. In weak countries, the lack of socio-political solidarity and internal challenges lead to political instability and, in many cases, to military confrontation with the state structure; therefore, weak countries are vulnerable with regard to the internal threats and their main objective is to consolidate and strengthen domestic stability and political control and they do not focus on external threats. In other words, the major concern of policy makers in developing countries is in fact security at the level of state structures and regimes; that is, weak countries are threatened by the domestic threats as much as threats from other countries; these security threats come in many different ways, but all of them threaten the stability and power of existing regimes. Mr. Boozan has created a structure for analyzing security threats from the perspective of poor countries:

Table 1. Security Threat Analysis

Power	Socio-political solidarity	
	Weak	Strong
Weak	High vulnerability to threats	Specific vulnerability to military threats
Strong	Specific vulnerability to political threats	Somewhat vulnerable to most threats

It is clear in this pattern that the political solidarity of countries and the government's power play an important role in defining security threats; many countries that suffer from complex weaknesses are on the verge of historical patterns, economic recession, religious radicalism, and terrorism. And many others have a colonial past and a weak national identity. (Office of Political and International Studies, 2004: 123 to 135).

8.1. The problem of fighting Salafism and extremism in Central Asia

In Central Asian countries, there is a problem of active ideological and intellectual struggle with extreme currents. When some of the Islamists' elites are in the position of the perpetrator of the will of the rulers of the region, sometimes issue fatwa opposes the basic religious principles, the words of the followers of extremist religious movements in the eyes of the people, especially the youth, appear to be pure truth.

If there were political open-mindedness and real freedom of thought in these countries, at least Muslim scholars with influence over the people tried to counter extreme currents. However, in the Salafist worldview, there is not only a place for secularists, but also for followers of other religions. In the Caucasus and Tatarstan, the Salafist groups have repeatedly done terrorist acts against the clercs, in which more than 50 religious figures have been killed by extremist religious groups over the past 10 years.

In Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan, several suicide bomber operations have also taken place in recent years, which is a worrying message for stability and security in the region. The core of the Salafists and the religious radicalism of Central Asia and Russia are those who have been educated in Saudi educational centers as well as Kuwait and Qatar. Some of them have an official status in official religious institutions of these countries, which has greatly increased the danger of the influence of Salafies and radicalism in these

countries (Safavi, 2014: 23) and (Vitaly, 2004) and (Peyrouse, 2007, 248) and (Lang, 2013).

8.2. ISIL Influence in Central Asian Countries

Imam Ali Rahman, The President of Tajikistan has announced the number of ISIL dead bodieswith Tajik nationality more than 100, in an analysis of reason for the presence and powers as the backers of extremist groups, especially ISIL in Central Asia and Afghanistan, although experts have different reasons and consider these movements beyond the influence of regional and trans-national powers, but there are experts who assess the separatist movements of these groups in the interests of some regional powers. For example, one of the senior experts from the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs considers one of the main reasons of the ISIS group actions is related to policies of governments such as Qatar and Turkey in the region to stop the pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan from running through Afghanistan. As for Qatar, this country is analyzing this route in line threatening its potential markets in the South Asian region, and in the case of Turkey, the country sees the new pipeline as a threat to East-West pipelines where Turkey is located, and as a result of its involvement in this pipeline Turkey does not know that it is trying to defeat it.

CONCLUSION

In order to investigate the developments in Central Asia, it is possible to use the theoretical subjects of this area, especially the theory of sub-systems, to make the necessary studies coherent; on this basis, Central Asia is considered as a sub-system of the region, because there is a general proximity between actors and its general components, also the occurrence of any change, upon a tribal conflict in Central Asia can affect other parts of the region; not only this but also the internal and external viewpoint has also been identified as a distinct unit, with regional and trans-regional actors playing a role in it. It should further be noted that all Central Asian laws expressly state that the government of these countries has a common or secular form and does not accept any religion as an official religion. This common orientation of the basic laws of Central Asia has several reasons: first of all, the leaders of these countries that have been founders of Central Asian countries have completed their education in the Soviet era and, as a result, are influenced by Marxist thinking about religion. So, as noted, today the basic laws of all Central Asian countries refer to the principle of separation of religion from politics. However, Islam has been identified as a state ideology throughout the region.

Islam that is supported by the current governments of Central Asia, is based on Sunnis and Hanafi Islam, and in Hanafi's religion cooperation with the rulers is basically encouraged. And order and security are more important than other issues. Therefore, any action that undermines the security of the community is illegitimate in this regard. During the Soviet Union era, the government tried to control them by establishing a unified religious management for all Muslims in the region. It was responsible for administering Muslim affairs in the Soviet Union and maintaining official contact with Muslims abroad. But in the early 1990s, there was a separate national management in each of the Central Asian states, called Muftiat, each headed by a Mufti. Mufti's activities were controlled by a committee or religious affairs council. An institution that operates in Turkmenistan, for example, between the government and religious groups, the Mufti and the committee are virtually merged into one entity. In addition to the duties mentioned above, the Muftians have other duties, such as the official training of Muslim clerics and the registration of their names. Therefore, non-registered clerics are subject to criminal prosecution for this purpose. The purpose of this measure is apparently to stop the radicals and lack of competence individuals from the authority of religious authoritie (Ackins, 2004: 120 to 125).

Many of the topics that are currently being discussed in Central Asian Islamic circles are topics that may have been discussed in Middle Eastern Muslim societies in the past thirty or forty years and are not considered as hot topics. Of course, this issue is considered largely natural because the Central Asian Muslims have been away from the main body of the Islamic world for almost two centuries, due to the domination of Tsarist rule and the domination of communism, in a totally different situation. If we consider political Islam as an attempt to establish an Islamic state, the history of political Islam in these societies is very small, so if we want to begin the history of political Islam, we must return to the end years of the Soviet Union, and to the Gorbachev's political reform epoch. (Mousavi, 1388: 72).

The security-political future of the Central Asia

In Central Asia, there is a great potential for revolution; with loyalties in the racial, regional and religious categories, differences in the area may cross the borders; the racially complex population, regional differences, as well as difficult social and economic conditions and Islamic regeneration, create a favorable environment for conflict and extremism in all Central Asian countries.

In this framework, the probability that some factors will lead to a widening crisis of religious fundamentalism and security problems will determine the main variables of the region, among which one can be Tajik factor, Uzbek factor and Afghan factor;
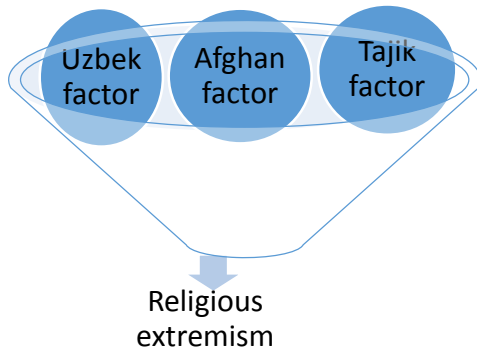

Figure 2. The factors leading to the spread of the crisis of religious extremism

Tajik factor: it originates from the fragile Tajik society that was destroyed by the civil war; this is a risk factor that brings about the collapse of the radicalization of political forces and hence the consequences for the wider region; the root of Tajik civil war was largely regional and these categories remained in the community; given that the Islamic and moderate Islamic opposition in this country has some extremist Islamic elements, another political religious dimension is present; the existence of a vast Tajik population in Uzbekistan and Afghanistan raises the wider racial dimension of the Tajik factor;

Uzbek factor: Has readiness to transform Uzbekistan into a regional power in Central Asia, thus changing the balance of power in the region; there is also the risk that the rising tensions in Uzbek society between the government and its critics, that first and foremost, are radical Islamists, will make the situation harder for neighboring countries.

Afghan agent: This is the source of the infiltration of radical Islam to Central Asia.

Nevertheless, it is not thought that these movements will have more future than they already have. The possibility of witnessing the formation of a religious government in these countries to revive the Islamic caliphate is very small. In fact, the causes and factors such as the prevalence of secular social and individual culture among a large segment of Central Asian societies, the bad experiences of Central Asian nations with the formation of a religious and fundamentalist government in the Middle East by the Taliban in Afghanistan, the consensus of international forces to confront Radical radicalism and ... greatly reduced the likelihood of the emergence of a Salafi political system and prevented any possibility of occurrence (Mousavi, 1388: 78).

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