

**Raisa K. Kadyrova**

## **PROTECTION OF POWER IN CENTRAL ASIA: USING TERROR AS A PRETEXT? A KYRGYZ NGO'S VISION**

One of the major factors determining the policies of the international community in the Central Asian region is the fear of the possibility of this region turning into a centre of extremism, terrorism, and drug trafficking.

If economic and political reforms in Central Asia fail and domestic and cross-border conflicts develop and break out, the region may become a nest of terrorism, a fireplace of religious and political extremism and an arena of international violent conflicts.

### **Power in Central Asia**

Speaking of the political reforms in Central Asia, one should note that the institutions of power in the region themselves were a product and successor of the Soviet totalitarian system of governance.

During the first years of independence the power in the region's countries was transferred to the former Communist Party members. Thus, not only did the old Communist cadre not leave the political arena, but the former political elite actually recaptured without any struggle their familiar niche under new political realities.

Having mastered the new structures of power, the former Party bosses gained access to virtually unlimited opportunities for the redistribution of material and human resources in their countries.

The main reasons for state formation for the new political elite became on the one hand the transformation of the entire social, political and

economic system, and on the other hand, the simultaneous adaptation of this system to new requirements.

Almost all constitutions of the countries of Central Asia define the current systems as “sovereign democratic republics” whose goal is to build a democratic and fair civic society. However, taking into account the formation of such independence, a certain trend toward totalitarianism emerged in the Central Asian countries. One can often hear that allegedly, the region’s population is not yet ready to accept the Western-type of democracy. Some observers compare the current situation with the system of “developed feudalism”<sup>66</sup>, drawing an ironic analogy with the infamous “developed socialism” of the former Soviet Union.

One should note that almost all reforms of political systems and governance, such as the transition to the two-chamber parliaments in some countries of the region, relative decentralisation, etc, were primarily initiated to meet the requirements of a circle of international organisations and governments of Western countries which were providing support to the reforms in Central Asia.

One should also note that tribalism and nepotism became fixtures in today’s system of governance in the region, while a high level of corruption became a normal feature of all Central Asian countries.

International experts believe that corruption became most evident in Kyrgyzstan in 1994-1995 when representatives of the upper echelons of power started actively participating in profit-making, turning into either businessmen or stockholders of numerous formerly state-owned enterprises and started abusing their power and authority. As early as in 1996 President Akayev had to admit that corruption penetrated the higher echelons of power.

There is a common practice of getting government positions not on the basis of merits, but rather through personal connections or financial

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<sup>66</sup> Davlet OZODI, [http://www.rosvesty.ru/numbers/1721/sng/article\\_24.phtml](http://www.rosvesty.ru/numbers/1721/sng/article_24.phtml)

advantages. Corruption became particularly acute in law enforcement agencies, customs bodies and courts.

According to the Head of the OSCE Centre in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan holds one of the first places among all Central Asian countries with regards to the level of corruption.

The campaigns against corruption, as a rule, are initiated as a response to the requirements of Kyrgyzstan's donors. The main goal of these campaigns is to attract new funding. In reality, the government merely imitates a fight against corruption.

Another bothering trend observed to be taking place among the leaders of Central Asian countries is their desire to retain power by any means. In order to do that numerous and various ways and means are used, from persecuting leaders of the political opposition to fabricating election results and/or initiating various referenda that serve the sole purpose of legitimising unlawful retention of power by certain individuals.

### **Context Factors Leading to Aggravation of Social Tension**

In order to further consider the issue of protection of power in Central Asia one needs to take into consideration all the factors that essentially make up and characterise the Central Asian region.

The peoples of Central Asia have a lot in common: common history, religion, ethnicity (except for Tajiks), style of life, societal structure, mentality and world outlook.

### **Demographic Factor**

One of the major factors affecting the region's development is the latter's demography. According to statistical data more than 57 million people live in Central Asia (Uzbekistan – 26 million, Kazakhstan – 15 million, Tajikistan – 6 million, Turkmenistan – 6 million, Kyrgyzstan – 5 million). If the current population growth rate stays the same, by the

year of 2025 more than 65-70 million people will constitute Central Asia's population<sup>67</sup>.

The region's most populated area is the Ferghana Valley. The population density in the Ferghana Valley is 360 people per square kilometre, and in the Uzbek part of the Ferghana Valley this figure reaches 500-600 people per square kilometre (higher figures in the world can only be found in South China and Bangladesh). The birth rate is very high. For instance, the annual population growth in Uzbekistan is about 450'000-550'000 people<sup>68</sup>. According to the experts' forecasts, this subregion's current population of 11.2 million people will reach 14-15 million as early as 2010. At the same time, one should remember that every other resident of this subregion is under 18 years old.

A lack of economic resources, including land, water and energy, and the lack of international investments limit the opportunities of the governments of Central Asia to provide the Valley's population with jobs which results in a fall of the population's incomes.

Given the fact that the Kyrgyz parts of the Ferghana Valley are less densely populated and that the process of delimiting the state borders is uncompleted, unpopulated and underused lands of Kyrgyzstan can trigger a whole series of unlawful capture of these lands. To date one can witness so-called "creeping migration" as a tool of illicit occupation of Kyrgyz lands (purchase and settlement in empty Kyrgyz houses by citizens of cross-border districts of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan which experience an acute lack of lands).

In addition, the presence of overdensely populated areas aggravated by socioeconomic hardships entails an active migration of labour from the region. Officials in Bishkek don't even attempt to hide the fact that more than half a million of the entire Kyrgyz population of 5 million work in Russia alone. As for Tajikistan, of 6 million of its population about a million are in migration. This process commenced with the collapse of

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<sup>67</sup> "Trud" newspaper, issue as of 04.03.2004

<sup>68</sup> International Institute for Humanitarian and Political Research, <http://www.igpi.ru/info/people/kulchik/uzb.html>

the Soviet Union and as sources evidence, has reached its culmination today<sup>69</sup>.

## **Poverty**

The transition to market economy in the Central Asian countries was accompanied by an increase in the scope and scale of poverty. The economic decline and disintegration of the region's countries resulted in a high level of unemployment and a decrease in the population's real income. According to some estimates the level of poverty in Central Asia is about 40-83% which is mostly linked to inefficient governance and corruption<sup>70</sup>.

According to UN data in 2004, Tajikistan cannot provide for the basic needs of every sixth person of its 6 million people without external assistance. At the same time, about a third of all children don't have enough food causing their underdevelopment and of 1000 newborns about 72 don't get 5 years old. The 5-year civil war and the drought of 2000 and 2001 left about 83% of the Tajik population below poverty line.

In Kyrgyzstan today almost all social and demographic groups of the population are affected by poverty. According to the data of the Centre for Economic and Social Development of the Ministry of Finance of Kyrgyz Republic more than 55% of the population fall into the category of "poor". About 23% of the country's population live in conditions of severe impoverishment.

In Uzbekistan, the level of poverty triggered by relocation of population, unemployment and lack of land is growing as well as evidenced by the increase in the flow of illegal labour migrants to the neighbouring countries who oftentimes have to do the toughest job at minimum wages.

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<sup>69</sup> Sultan JUMAGULOV, Navigator.Kz, 06.05.02

<sup>70</sup> Oleg SIDOROV, <http://www.gazeta.kg/view.php?i=776>

As a result of the deterioration of the populations' living conditions and the level of social protection the majority of the people doesn't have access to basic educational and medical services.

Despite the measures undertaken by the region's governments and the economic support provided by international organisations and the governments of several Western nations, the level of poverty remains steady and negatively affects social tension within the societies, thus, only enhancing the potential of violent conflicts.

### **Territorial Disputes**

Inter-state relations in Central Asia are also negatively affected by territorial disputes. Administrative borders set rather arbitrarily during Soviet times do not correspond to the real distribution and physical location of the region's ethnicities. This factor is the reason for interethnic conflicts especially in the Ferghana Valley between the Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Tajik people. According to the opinions of analysts, the issue of territorial disputes represents a serious and real threat to stability and security in the region.

Thus, for instance, the length of the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border is 1,295 kilometres. By the end of the year 2004, 1,000 kilometres of this border will be delimited. The Kyrgyz and Uzbek sides only have to delimit the rest of the 260 kilometres which include the Uzbek enclave of Sokh and the Kyrgyz enclave of Barak<sup>71</sup>.

Of the 970 kilometres of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border not a single kilometre was delimited. The negotiations between the two countries have been suspended twice already due to the inability to agree upon the negotiating principles.

To date, about 20 sectors with the total area of more than 40,000 hectares between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and additional 40 sectors between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are being disputed. The problematic

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<sup>71</sup> [www.pr.kg/articles/n0211/00211.htm](http://www.pr.kg/articles/n0211/00211.htm), a reference to the speech of N. Tanayev, the Prime Minister of Kyrgyz Republic

areas are mostly those which were given for temporary use by Kyrgyzstan, from which Uzbekistan extracts oil, gas, and on which it has built several industrial, agricultural and social objects. In addition, several sectors of land were given for self-sustainable farming to Uzbek military garrisons. Uzbekistan has repeatedly undertaken unilateral steps to demarcate several sectors of this land including mining of disputable territories. The victims of mine explosions in all three countries were ordinary civilians who resided in the cross-border areas of the Ferghana Valley.

It will be fair to note that the process of demining on the border of Uzbekistan in the Ferghana Valley which started in 2004 has contributed immensely to the reduction of tensions between the cross-border communities of the two countries.

Another aspect of the problem is the concealment of information on the negotiations on the delimitation of borders which creates a lot of rumours among the cross-border population and a public perception in the neighbouring countries that are often far from reality. This also seriously affects the increase of tension between the neighbouring countries and influences on the destabilization of the political situation in the region. A lack of objective information on the issues of disputable territories is viewed by the region's citizens as a violation of their right to access to information.

The border conflicts continue to be the primary source of tension among the three Ferghana Valley countries. Soviet authorities didn't take into consideration either geographic peculiarities or complex interethnic mix in the region when arbitrarily determining the borders of the Republics.

The establishment of customs and border checkpoints at the borders of the newly independent Central Asian states has significantly affected the freedom of transit that existed in this so recently economically and culturally developed region. One should note that despite the disintegration processes, the region still feels an acute need for economic and other cooperation.

However, contradictions and imperfection in the customs legislations and procedures of the countries lead to several demeaning and exhausting procedures at the customs and border control checkpoints. There are frequent cases of extortion and bribery by representatives of the law enforcement agencies. At the same time representatives of various ethnicities get discriminated. All this only aggravates the interethnic mistrust and hinders mutual respect and understanding.

Moreover, several cases of transformation of conflicts into open violent hostilities at the customs checkpoints have been reported. For instance, in the year 2003 about 300 residents of Isfara district in the province of Sogdiy in Tajikistan destroyed the customs checkpoint in province of Batken in Kyrgyzstan. During the assault, 2 Kyrgyz law enforcement officers were injured. In response about 100 local Kyrgyz residents destroyed a Tajik customs and border control checkpoint in Tajikistan. Only thanks to rapid response of Kyrgyz and Tajik special security services a further escalation of violence was stopped. Kyrgyz people, for example, started expressing discontent when Tajik authorities unilaterally established two border protection checkpoints in Isfara district in Tajikistan and started levying customs duties on local traders. As a response Kyrgyz authorities established a customs checkpoint of their own.

At the same time one Tajik media source says that the incidents called “provocative” actions are undertaken by Kyrgyz border guards who were inspecting Tajik buses and other vehicles for the purposes of getting the bribe.

### **Joint Use of Water Resources**

The need for joint use of cross-border water resources is one of the major conflict sources that represent a real threat to regional security of Central Asian countries. A lack of water and energy in any country of Central Asia is perceived as a direct threat to national interests and security.



Due to a cease of centralized compensatory supplies for the irrigation operations of Toktogul Water Reservoir in Kyrgyzstan and the transition to mutual offsetting of carbohydrogen raw materials at international prices, Kyrgyzstan had to increase the production of hydro energy for irrigation needs of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan during the summer period.

One should note that Kyrgyzstan itself consumes only 7% of the water accumulated in its reservoirs. The rest of the accumulated water is used by the neighbouring states: Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

At the same time, annual losses of Kyrgyzstan from underproduction of energy during the winter period connected to the accumulation of water for the vegetation period amount to \$61.5 million<sup>72</sup>. The compensatory supplies of carbohydrogen fuel by the bilateral inter-governmental agreements are often not executed in full.

The forced release of water during winter results in water logging of soil and an increase in the danger of destruction of the dams of Kazakh and Uzbek water reservoirs which hypothetically may result in a lot of victims and demolitions.

Another important cause of water problems is the unsatisfactory condition of the irrigation channels due to which the water doesn't reach the farmers' fields in its entirety.

One thing is certain – in order to effectively resolve this problem the region's governments need to abandon their approach of orienting solely on national interests and instead seek ways of satisfying interests of all of the region's countries affected by this problem.

The issues of disputable territories and joint use of water resources have often resulted in inter-community and interethnic conflicts between farmers of cross-border areas. Such conflicts may easily gain ethnic and political nature and become subject to an escalation of radical and

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<sup>72</sup> T. U. Usubaliev, "International Regulation on Water Management"

nationalistic moods which have repeatedly led to violent conflicts among the farmers.

Under the conditions of totalitarian rule the effect of these factors only aggravates social tension in the region. The populations of the Central Asian countries wishing to change the existing order and living conditions are forced to express their dissent with the policy pursued by their governments in various forms of protest.

At this point, it is appropriate to mention that people who are satisfied with their living conditions do not strive for any drastic change. Conversely, a lack of means and opportunities for the satisfaction of basic human needs results in active protests and activities aimed at changing the existing living conditions.

Total impoverishment of the majority of the people, toughening of political persecutions and a high level of corruption – these are the premises for the required future changes that are oftentimes uncontrollable for the incumbent authorities.

### **Forms of Expression of Dissent with the Authorities**

It is widely known that one of the most important attributes of and conditions for the functioning of a democratic society is the institution of political opposition. In this case we are rather talking about the legitimate form of expression of political dissent with the government, about the constitutional ways of political struggle by opposition politicians, groups and political parties representing interest of certain layers of society.

The need for a presence of opposition parties has been confirmed at various times by the leaders of almost all Central Asian countries. Nonetheless, the process of development of political opposition in the Central Asian countries has been going at differing dynamics dependent on the real stances of official authorities, the overall development of the civil society, population's support and external factors capable of affecting the mode of political development in some countries and in the region.

The factor affecting the specificity of the development of opposition is the lack of historical traditions of a strong political fight in Central Asia which is mostly explained by peculiarities of this region's historical development.

Political oppositions of all countries in the region can be divided into two categories: the first being a so-called "secular" opposition and the second being the opposition formed on the basis of religious organisation putting pro-Islamic doctrine in the first place.

Let us have a look at the development of opposition in each Central Asian country separately.

### *Turkmenistan*

Officials in Turkmenistan state that the country's development strategy is one of a democratic, secular state and declare a total absence of any political confrontation, thus, meaning an absence of opposition. However, it is no secret that the international community has long been expressing its concern about the absolute repression of any opposition in this Central Asian state. Political leaders of the country have artificially hindered this process and have actively prevented the legitimate political opposition from emerging in Turkmenistan, including any political parties or movements. Representatives of the West don't hide that "the leadership of Turkmenistan is one of the most repressive regimes in the world with an administrative economy of the Stalin era and a cult of personality similar to the one in North Korea"<sup>73</sup>.

The late 80's and early 90's of the past century one can call the period of the newest Islamic renaissance. Uzbek people restored and built more than 5,000 new mosques with their own money while the sermons of young Islam specialists with independent views attract huge audiences in the mosques. It is at this point when Uzbekistan saw the emergence of a semi-religious and pro-Islamic opposition which was expressing dissent with the official authorities in Tashkent.

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<sup>73</sup> Acting First Deputy Special Advisor to the U.S. Secretary of the State for CIS Affairs, Clifford Bond, September 4, 2001.

The response of the authorities was painfully clear-cut: the opposition, both secular and religious, was repressed. Mass arrests of heads and members of the religious wing of the opposition ensued. The leaders of the opposition left Uzbekistan and an armed Uzbek opposition started forming. In 1992 an assault on the **secular opposition** started and by the end of 1992 certain leaders of that opposition had to leave the country too. Eventually, not a single opposition party was registered in Uzbekistan.

### *Tajikistan*

In Tajikistan the political opposition was initially formed around the Democratic Party of Tajikistan and a set of Islamic parties and movements. These parties were fighting against the old Communist cadre and were often called the Islamic-Democratic Opposition. Nonetheless, the fight for power that led to the civil war reflects intra-regional contradictions among the regional and political elite. As a result of the civil war more than 50,000 people died.

During the military standoff a need for an establishment of dialogue became clear. In 1997 the government (assisted by several international organisations) came to an agreement with Islamic and Democratic opposition groups and agreed to form a coalition government.

### *Kazakhstan*

Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, admits that the existence of opposition parties in Kazakhstan is a sign of a healthy development of the society. Nevertheless, as mentioned in materials of the Islamic Commission for Human Rights<sup>74</sup>, persecution of the opposition became a common practice in the country. The government keeps an eye on the movement and contacts of the opposition activists, political opponents are arrested and certain leaders of the opposition had to leave the country.

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<sup>74</sup> S. Janomohamed, <http://www.kub.kz/article.php?sid=4239>

There is information about manipulation and intervention by the executive branch into the election process. The authorities are actively countering the attempts of the opposition to achieve accountability of the government and the leaders of the opposition get excluded from the elections. Complication of the requirements for the registration of political parties was a pretext for prohibiting the registration of the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan and the Republican People's Party of Kazakhstan. Moreover, independent media become subject to repressions as well<sup>75</sup>.

### *Kyrgyzstan*

In the early 90's of the past century Kyrgyzstan was often called "an island of democracy" in Central Asia. However, in the second half of the 90's the trend towards political repression of unwanted opposition politicians, parties and media became also evident in this country.

The Kyrgyz parliamentary elections of 1995 and 2000 showed that the abundance of parties in Kyrgyzstan (43 registered political parties) is not yet a sign of the formation of a well-functioning political opposition. The parliamentary elections of 1995 were held with serious violations of the legislation and were accompanied by clear and acute territorial tribalism, bribery and manipulations of the Central Election Commission's operations. In this connection the candidates who lost were discussing the possibility of having the election results annulled and holding another election based on a new election system.

The opposition parties Adilet and Ar Namys were not allowed to participate in the elections of 2000 based on the claims that less than one calendar year had passed since the date of their registration.

The election commissions' dependence on the administration and prejudice on the part of the media allowed the creation of barriers and obstacles for certain political parties and candidates.

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<sup>75</sup> S. Janomohamed, <http://www.kub.kz/article.php?sid=4239>

Thus, an arbitrary interpretation of the election code by the Central Election Commission led to the fact that candidates were deemed automatically elected in the second round of voting provided that his/her opponent from the first round decided to withdraw from the second round. That resulted in numerous opportunities of pressing the candidates and thus several prominent representatives of the opposition were disqualified from the election or their registration was simply eliminated even before the second round. The best example is the leader of the People's Party Daniyar Usenov who actually received more than 50% of the popular vote in the first round of the elections.

Those who declined to cooperate became object of the authorities' oppression. For instance, based on the fabricated evidence the chairman of the People's Party, Daniyar Usenov, the chairman of the Ar Namys Party, Felix Kulov, and the leader of the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan, J. Jeksheev, were all arrested. Similar methods were used against the leader of the ErK Party, T. Turgunaliyev, and against the current Kyrgyz Ombudsman, Tursunbai Bakir uluu. Such practice with regards to the opposition leaders has unfortunately become a fixture in the politics of modern Kyrgyzstan.

The Parliament member A. Beknazarov who criticized the transfer of Kyrgyz lands to China was arrested as well. 317 people participated in the protest hunger-strike. One of the protesters Sheraly Nazarkulov died from the strike. 13 Parliament members made a statement that called for President Akayev's resignation.

The subsequent actions of protest resulted in police shooting at the peaceful demonstrators in Aksy district in Kyrgyzstan when 6 people were killed by police gun fire and several citizens were wounded. Still not a single official was held responsible for this tragedy.

The authorities have been fighting the political opposition by all available means as evidenced by a recent scandal that broke out in the Kyrgyz Parliament.

In May 2004, the Parliament Commission prepared a report on the political role of the National Security Service (successor of the former KGB). The report was developed as a result of the fact that at the end of 2003 wiretapping devices were found in the offices of certain Parliament members. The report included extracts of NSS documents that provided descriptions of political and business connections of certain Parliament members and listed their relations with informal leaders in their constituency areas who could support them. According to the report, the NSS had dossiers on all international organisations operating in the country such as the OSCE and the NDI in addition to dossiers on all particularly active members of the Parliament and human rights activists.

The suppression of the independent and free media is conducted using a rich arsenal of means. These include litigations over “damaging words and defamation” allegedly used against certain officials and the “entire Kyrgyz people”, huge fines, “purchasing” popular independent newspapers and TV channel, and etc.

There are reported cases of persecutions, illicit detentions and threatening of representatives of human rights activities (Kyrgyz Committee for Human Rights and Civic Society against Corruption) and other organisations of the civil society on the basis of political motives.

Nevertheless, such selected facts of restriction of legal political opposition and examples of repressions against representatives of the public that disagree with the notions and policies of the authorities say a lot about the bothering situation in the area of the development of democratic institutions both in Kyrgyzstan and the Central Asian region as a whole.

One should note an important victory of the civil society in October 2004. Under the pressure of the public and based on the initiative of human rights activists the Constitutional Court of the Kyrgyz Republic deemed unconstitutional and contradicting to the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic several articles of the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic “On Citizens’ Rights to Assemble Peacefully, without Weapons, and Freely Hold Rallies and Demonstrations”. The Constitutional Court confirmed

the citizens' constitutional right to hold rallies, meetings and demonstrations without any sanctions or permission from, and notification of, the authorities. Such a decision by the Constitutional Court is a positive impulse for democratic changes implemented in Kyrgyzstan and is supported by public and democratic forces.

### **Islamic Opposition**

The phenomenon of Islamic opposition demands special consideration by the governments of the region. The region's predominant religion is Islam.

More favourable conditions for the emergence and development of activities of Islamic organisations exist in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan whose populations, unlike the historically nomadic and semi-nomadic Kyrgyz people, have approached religion more formally throughout history.

The experience shows that radical Islam normally emerges where the position of orthodox Islam is weak. The lack of the system of classical and religious education and upbringing and of sufficient intellectual layer among the clergy also factors in.

The ideas of the Islamic extremists find their supporters. This is also enhanced by the lengthy socioeconomic crisis, high unemployment and poverty, persecutions of free thought, repressions and an absence of forms of expression of protest.

In the conditions of separation of personality from the state, the ideology that positions itself as oppositional to the official ideology has all the chances to become the means of expression of protest against the perceived unfairness.

One should not forget that the ultimate (and the only real) goal of the leaders of extremism is the capture of power or at least getting a piece of that power. The politicization of Islamic movements resulted in a civil war in Tajikistan to which thousands of people fell victims. Currently,



representatives of the United Tajik opposition, formed around the Party of Islamic Renaissance of Tajikistan, play an important role in the Tajik political arena.

A whole different situation emerged in Uzbekistan. Having faced severe repressions on the part of the authorities the religious and extremist organisations have escalated their activities significantly. The Islam that went underground became the only way of expression of protest against authoritarianism which has developed a very dangerous nature on the way.

One of the causes of instability in the region is the ongoing instability in Afghanistan and a growth of militant Islamic groups, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in particular. Armed invasions by Islamic guerrillas of the territory of Kyrgyzstan occurred from 1999-2001 which, on the one hand, strengthened the cooperation and coordination of security between the regions' governments, and on the other hand aggravated the tension among them due to differing interpretations and understanding of the issue of national security.

These invasions by Islamic extremists were deemed as expressions of international terrorism by the international community and again demonstrated the imminent link between terrorism and religious extremism.

#### *Khizb ut-Takhrir*

The declared goal of yet another religious movement called Khizb ut-Takhrir is a non-violent overthrow of the governments of Central Asia and the creation of an Islamic caliphate.

The stances of officials of Central Asia with regards to Khizb ut-Takhrir are identical – all Central Asian governments believe that Khizb ut-Takhrir is an evil that needs to be eradicated before it destroys peace and stability in the region and, following this policy, these governments have toughened repression directed at the members of this movement.

Moreover, according to the stance of official Tashkent, the members of Khizb ut-Takhrir are responsible for a series of explosions in Tashkent and other cities of Uzbekistan and for the attempt to assassinate President Karimov.

In his speech at the meeting of the Security Council of Kyrgyzstan in 2004, President Akayev called the propaganda of ideas by Khizb ut-Takhrir ideological terrorism and denied all allegations of persecuting dissidence.

Kyrgyzstan's ombudsman believes, however, that the authorities exaggerate the threat on the part of Khizb ut-Takhrir in order to justify their restrictions of individual rights and to obtain additional funds from donor nations.

Thus, society has seen the formation of a dual attitude toward this problem: on the one hand repressions by the authorities and informational pressing on public conscience through the media. On the other hand – human rights activists' organisations and proponents of legalisation of Khizb ut-Takhrir are against persecutions of this religious political party that seeks to achieve legitimisation.

From certain analysts' point of view, such oppression of individual liberties by the government only enhances the popularity of Khizb ut-Takhrir. The narrowing of opportunities and possibilities of expression of political dissidence directs the public discontent to the channel of religious extremism.

President Akayev in his speech at the meeting of the National Security Council in 2004 named yet another sign of extremism – ideological extremism.

In his speech the Kyrgyz President mentioned that “certain opposition groups, organisations, and media participating in the political struggle impose their own understanding and vision of the ways of development of the country and standards of democracy on society... And we are not talking about mere harmless propaganda here but about a determined

preparation for a capture of power. Certain printed publications that call themselves opposition newspapers immediately turn their pages into instructions on destabilisation as soon as a slightest opportunity to aggravate the situation presents itself”.

Some of the representatives of the civic society and international organizations became very concerned over this statement by the President. Probably the officials see the current trend as “a determined preparation for a capture of power” by opposition newspapers and certain representatives of the political opposition who dissent with “the vision of the ways of development of the country and standards of democracy on the society”.

The opposition members believe that the newspapers do not call for any violent “capture of power”; rather they merely express their dissent with the actions and stance of the current administration. In the meantime one of the major principles of democracy - pluralism and freedom of speech - probably became an obstacle on the incumbent administration’s way of protection and retention of their power.

However, it is clear that forced suppression of a conflict is not an effective or efficient solution. Neither air raids, nor captures of terrorist leaders, nor repressions are effective in eradicating the deep causes of Islamic terrorism in the region.

### **The Role and Policies of International Organisations**

Speaking of security in Central Asia one can’t help but mention the role and policies of international organisations.

During the recent years governments of several Western countries and international organisations have maintained a dialogue with the region’s authorities on the need for political reforms and liberalisation. However, the actual policies of the leading Western countries in the region led to that the impression of circles of the ruling elite and the region’s population that these issues became of less importance to certain

Western countries. The following term is oftentimes used with regards to the policies of international organisations: a double standard.

According to the notion of certain region's analysts, Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia is more of a reaction to unfair power distribution and poverty rather than in any sort of a serious threat to the West.

The Western interpretation of this situation - the so-called threat to regional security – has resulted in overreacting on the part of the international community. International organisations started to actively participate in capacity building of military and government bodies.

Such international interventions – implemented for the sake of security – can inadvertently provide justification of human rights violations and repressions by the incumbent totalitarian regimes, thus only supporting the cycle of violence.

Such a focus on security facilitates the shift from state development-oriented programmes to defence-enhancement programmes. Thus, the climate of insecurity in the region only intensifies which hinders long-term investing in development programmes in the region.

Excessive focus on security can in the long run aggravate the hidden political and economic tensions in Central Asia. The security apparatus in each Central Asian country tends to strengthen its influence, oppressing political institutions and processes and simultaneously intensifying the repressions and thereby motivating the support of Islamic groups among ordinary citizens.

Contrary to this notion, according to the statements by the U.S. Department of State, during the meetings with the leaders of Central Asian countries the latter are consistently reminded of the need for keeping their promises given to their people as well as of the international pledges on ensuring human rights and democratic pluralism of opinion.

The problem is also rooted in the fact that Central Asian regimes, through the controlled media, present some whole different information to their populations, saying that everything “is just fine” and that there is no need for a change in the current political course.

Repressions and terror implemented by the government as well as political unfairness, economic inequalities and social disturbances are the main reasons for expressing through violence on the part of certain individuals once all other means use in order to change the existing situation proved to be ineffective.

## **Conclusions**

- If economic and political reforms in the Central Asian countries fail to achieve success and domestic and cross-border conflicts develop and break out, the region will indeed become a nest of terrorism, a fireplace of religious and political extremism and an arena of international violent conflicts.

### *Reasons for the Support of Religious Extremism in Central Asia*

- Radical Islam normally emerges where the positions of orthodox Islam are weak and the freedom of conscience is restricted by the prevailing regime.
- The security apparatus in each country of Central Asia only intensifies the repressions and its influence and oppresses political institutions thereby triggering support rendered to Islamic groups by ordinary citizens.
- The narrowing of opportunities and possibilities of political dissidence directs public discontent to the channel of Islamic extremism.
- The lack of trust in the government breeds the attitude of the population to see terrorists and extremists as “victims” of the violence on the part of the authorities.
- The suppression of individual liberties by the government only enhances the popularity of extremism.

- The dissemination of ideas of religious extremism is facilitated by the authorities' loss of image as in the eyes of the people they look like they had failed to meet the people's hopes and expectations.

#### *Repressions by the Government as a Reason of Extremism*

- Repressions and terror implemented by the government are the main causes for expression through violence on the part of certain groups and individuals.
- The existing corrupted governments are scared of retribution on the part of the people and, therefore, make all efforts to retain power by all means necessary.
- Some people believe that public discontent emerges due to actions of authorities rather than terrorists. Therefore, in order to change things in the lives of citizens one needs to struggle with inappropriate actions of the governments in the first place rather than of terrorists and extremists.

#### *Authorities Using Terrorism as an Excuse*

- The authorities knowingly exaggerate the threat of terrorism in order to shift public discontent from the actual causes of aggravation of the situation to the issues of terrorism and extremism.
- The struggle against "informational terrorism" and "political extremism" are just means of getting back at political opponents.
- The security services' statements that "radical politicians will go as far as to establish contacts with representatives of extremists in order to satisfy their election interests" provide an opportunity for legitimising repressions.
- The authorities exaggerate the threat on the part of Khizb ut-Takhrir in order to justify the introduction of restrictions of human rights and to obtain additional funding from donor nations.

#### *Influence of Western Politics*

- Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia is rather a reaction to unfair power distribution and poverty than a real threat to the West.

- International interventions undertaken for the sake of so-called security can also provide justification for human rights violations and repressions.

### *Effective Struggle*

- Using force for the suppression of conflicts is not an effective or efficient solution.
- Terrorism is evil. The real fight against terrorism is possible only under conditions of mutual trust, popular support and the consolidation of efforts of both sectors of society: the authorities and the people.
- As long as the governments do not get votes of confidence from the population, they will have to fight against extremism and terrorism by themselves without any popular support, thus, dooming such a fight to ineffectiveness.

Raisa K. Kadyrova

President

Foundation for Tolerance International, Head Office Bishkek  
Bishkek

