

EXPERIENCE OF FIGHTING AGAINST RADICALISM AND EXTREMISM IN NEW UZBEKISTAN

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7810626>

Abstract. *The article is devoted to the study of the experience of fighting against radicalism and extremism in New Uzbekistan. The essence of the state strategy, the legal framework, as well as information and propaganda, preventive and social rehabilitation activities in this direction are revealed.*

Keywords: *radicalism, extremism, freedom of conscience, "Enlightenment against ignorance", social rehabilitation, resolution "Enlightenment and religious tolerance".*

Introduction

In the conditions of globalization, the fight against the threats of religious radicalism and violent extremism remains one of the urgent tasks for the world community, especially for the Central Asian republics.

In particular, from the first period of independence, Uzbekistan faced the threat of radical groups that arose with the support of various religious fundamentalist centers and extremist organizations abroad.

Among these groups, illegal Islamic movements and terrorist organizations such as "Union of Justice", "Islamic Army", Uzbek branch of "Islamic Revival Party", "Tawba", "Hizbut Tahrir", "Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan", "Islamic Jihad Union" can be mentioned.

Radical groups have put forward demands for the violent change of the legitimate government in the country and the rule of the state based on Islamic Sharia norms. A number of murders and terrorist acts were carried out in order to derail social and political stability in the republic.

Methods

The article uses general scientific methods, taking into account logical principles such as the method of historicity, structural and systematic approach, deduction, and synthesis.

Analysis

The government of Uzbekistan has had to face the threats of violent extremism and terrorism while ensuring the religious rights and freedoms of citizens in a society undergoing deep socio-political and economic transformation related to independence. In this regard, the Constitution adopted in December 1992 states that the country is a sovereign democratic republic and attempts to usurp the powers of state power in an unconstitutional manner were strictly prohibited.

In 1992, the Committee on Religious Affairs was established under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan in order to coordinate relations between the state and religion in a consistent and constructive spirit.

Article 5 of the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations" adopted in 1998 stipulates that religion cannot be used in propaganda against religious and other fanaticism and extremism, against the Constitution.

According to the Decision of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Uzbekistan on September 26, 2016, 22 organizations such as "Al-Qaeda", "Islamic State (IS)", "Tawhid and Jihad Secretariat", "Jabha al-Nusra" were recognized as terrorist organizations.

The measures taken made it possible to create stable socio-political conditions for the development of the society and the state in the country. At the same time, extremist and terrorist organizations remained active in the republic. Citizens of Uzbekistan, who allegedly left the republic under the ideas of "hijrat" (emigration) and "jihad", have been participating in hostilities as part of terrorist organizations in countries such as Syria. Also, in 2010, the citizens of Uzbekistan, who were under the influence of extremist ideas, carried out individual terrorist acts in the countries of England, USA, Sweden and Turkey.

Several external and internal factors are having a negative impact to the country's socio-spiritual condition. In particular, the following can be mentioned among the relevant external factors:

- the widespread penetration of radicalism and extremism ideas into the territory of the country through social networks on the Internet;
- the fact that young labor migrants fall under the influence of recruiters of extremist and terrorist organizations abroad;
- the favorable environment for the activities of terrorist groups remains in the Middle East region, neighboring Afghanistan;
- the fact that some fanatics who left Uzbekistan live abroad and promote radical ideas through social networks.

Among the internal factors causing the increase of violent extremism, it can be noted that marginalized groups, in particular, unorganized youth, labor migrants serve as convenient objects for the propaganda and recruitment of fanatical groups, as well as the fact that some citizens are becoming radicalized due to the fact that they do not rely on official religious sources and follow fanatics.

The above shows that the solution to the problems related to radicalism and violent extremism cannot be found today mainly by relying on the method of using force.

From this point of view, from the second half of 2010, in the era of New Uzbekistan, a unique "Uzbek model" "Enlightenment against ignorance" was developed and put into wide practice as basis of fighting against extremism and terrorism. The new model focuses on **creating a solid legal basis for combating threats, organizing active information-propaganda, preventive and social rehabilitation activities aimed not at the consequences of extremism, but at eliminating its causes and factors, as well as at ensuring the inviolability of the religious rights and freedoms of citizens, and religious tolerance in society.**

In particular, in recent years, a number of conceptual guidelines, legal and regulatory documents were adopted defining the main directions of the new model in the fight against violent extremism. In particular, strengthening of civil, inter-ethnic and inter-confessional peace and harmony was defined as one of the most important tasks in the "Strategy of Actions on Five Priority Areas of Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2017-2021", approved by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated February 2017.

In January 2022, the "Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022-2026" was approved by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. In this document improvement of preventive mechanisms aimed at preventing the factors that cause extremism and

terrorism, prevention of the influence of foreign ideas and social rehabilitation of those affected by such influences, formation of stable immunity against the ideology of terrorism and extremism among the population, especially the young generation.

In 2018, the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Fighting against Extremism" was adopted. The law envisages methods and tools such as preventing extremism, eliminating the causes and conditions that lead to its occurrence, strengthening prevention, organizing legal training and education, and developing relevant literature.

By the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated July 1, 2021, the "National Strategy of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Fighting Extremism and Terrorism for 2021-2026" was approved, and among the priorities, the following were considered:

- promoting the ideas of patriotism, traditional values and tolerance, preventing the spread of extremist ideas among minors and young people;
- protecting women's rights and strengthening their role in fighting extremism and terrorism;
- ensuring the participation of civil society institutions and mass media in the fight against extremism and terrorism;
- improvement of measures of legal prosecution and accountability for extremist and terrorist actions, as well as their financing, etc..

On July 5, 2021, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan signed the Law No. 699 "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations". In this law, in the field of ensuring freedom of conscience, the principles of ensuring mutual harmony between confessions, guaranteeing the principle of secular statehood, fighting against the introduction of foreign ideas into the minds of the population through enlightenment have been strengthened.

With the decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan in September 2021, the spiritual and educational activities of the Committee on Religious Affairs were radically improved. Spreading the ideas of religious bigotry and extremism, taking measures to prevent actions aimed at creating enmity between different confessions, strengthening inter-confessional harmony and religious tolerance among the population were included among the main tasks of the committee.

At the same time, the UN's Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy fighting against extremism and terrorism was adopted by the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2006 and 14 international conventions and protocols on combating extremism have been ratified and are being followed in practice.

As part of the new approach, the factors that create a favorable environment for the spread of violent extremism ideas in the republic are identified and preventive measures are being implemented against them. This activity is carried out on the basis of social cooperation by organizations such as the Committee on Religious Affairs, the Office of Muslims of Uzbekistan, the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan, and the Ministry of Neighborhood and Family Support. The following works are defined as the main directions in educational work:

- providing explanation and support of the main goals, tasks and principles of state policy in the field of religion to the general public;
- to convey to the population that pure Islamic teachings are distorted and interpreted in the ideology of religious radicalism and extremism;
- strengthening the atmosphere of patriotism and religious tolerance among the population, especially among the youth;

- Providing quick and scientific refutations to information in the spirit of radicalism and extremism on Internet networks, etc.

Labor migrants are covered by special outreach because of their high probability of being influenced by religious fanaticism and extremism. Propaganda groups consisting of representatives of the Office of Muslims of Uzbekistan and other organizations have been systematically holding religious and educational meetings with the citizens of the republic in countries such as Russia, USA, South Korea, and Kazakhstan.

"Soft power" based on the policy of humanity and forgiveness characteristic of our people is also widely used in the direction against extremist ideas. In particular, in recent years, more than 20,000 citizens considered to be related to extremist groups in the republic have been subjected to preventive and educational activities and have been excluded from the special account.

It has been widely introduced to give a new opportunity to citizens who are serving a sentence for a crime committed by straying into the banned terrorist organizations, who deeply regret their actions, to return them to a healthy lifestyle, family and society. In particular, in 2017-2021, in accordance with the relevant decrees of the Head of State, 4955 persons were forgiven from the persons who were deprived of their freedom due to such illegal behavior and other crimes.

Social rehabilitation works are being carried out in the form of mental and material support, employment, social support, help in raising and providing for children with persons returning to a healthy lifestyle.

The Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, published on September 19, 2018, which has strayed into extremist groups, including those outside the territory of the Republic of Uzbekistan. It allows citizens who have realized the illegality of their actions and are on the road to recovery to return to their homeland and family.

Uzbekistan conducted five "Mehr (Mercy)" operations to return children and women in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan since 2019. A total of 531 people were brought to the country from the conflict areas, and targeted social adjustment works are being carried out.

Especially today, by the Office of Muslims of Uzbekistan, explaining pure Islamic enlightenment to the population, radicalism under the guise of religion and a large-scale, and important social activity is being carried out in the directions of protection from the influence of the ideas of violent extremism. In the fight against violent extremism, the Office of Muslims of Uzbekistan carries out special TV and radio broadcasts, coverage of topics against radical ideas on the Internet, mosques and social events, publishing fatwas, as well as social rehabilitation of citizens affected by the ideas of violent extremism.

In particular, on the central TV channels of Uzbekistan, educational conversations are conducted by the religious scholars on the TV programs "Hidayat", "On the way to the strength of faith", "Lessons of Imam Bukhari", "Light (Knowledge) of Islam", "Enlightenment conversations: attitude to current topics".

More than 60 websites and more than 1,000 channels and pages in social networks of organizations and system employees under the jurisdiction of the Office of Muslims of Uzbekistan promote enlightened Islamic ideas based on holy sources and refute radical religious ideas. In 2022 alone, 5,089,013 people saw information on these addresses, and 9,334,984 people saw materials on social networks.

Also, the religious office publishes books and booklets on the topic of warning against the threats of religious radicalism and violent extremism and distributes them free of charge to the population.

At the same time, gradual work is being carried out aimed at in-depth research of the teachings of Islam, in-depth analysis and wide promotion of its humanistic content such as goodness, humanity, peace, tolerance, as well as training of qualified personnel in the religious field.

In particular, the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan was established. The Center of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan, international research centers named after Imam Bukhari, Imam Termizi and Imam Moturidi were opened. The activities of scientific schools of Aqeedah, Kalam, Hadith, Fiqh, Sufism, as well as courses for teaching the Qur'an and Tajweed have been launched in the Office of Muslims system.

Experience of fighting against extremism and terrorism based on the strategy "Soft power" of Uzbekistan is being promoted not only in the country, but also in the international arena.

In particular, on the basis of the initiative put forward by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh.M. Mirziyoyev at the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly, on December 12, 2018, the resolution A/Res/73/128 "Enlightenment and religious tolerance" was unanimously adopted by the General Assembly at the 51st meeting of the 73rd session. The resolution recognizes the importance of mutual respect, human rights, reconciliation and mutual understanding in order to strengthen world peace. This document serves to strengthen peace, tranquility and stability in the world.

Conclusion

The experience of the New Uzbekistan is not only fully supported by the society and has been giving positive results, but is highly appreciated by the international community. In particular, in December 2018, the US State Department removed Uzbekistan from the "List of Countries of Special Attention" regarding religious freedom. In 2020, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) recognized the positive steps taken in Uzbekistan regarding religious freedom and announced that it was removed from the "Special Watch List" regarding religious freedom.

According to the conclusion of the Global Terrorism Index study published by the University of Sydney (Australia) Institute of Economics and Peace, in 2022, Uzbekistan was ranked 93rd in the list of the lowest level of terrorism threat.

New Uzbekistan's experience of combating radicalism and violent extremism serves to stabilize the socio-spiritual environment in society, to strengthen inter-ethnic and inter-religious harmony, and to fully ensure the freedom of religious rights of citizens.

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