

**RELIGION AND STATE RELATIONS IN KYRGYZSTAN:
THE DEBATE POSED BY RADICALIZATION**

By

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Abstract

The recent growth of Islamic radicalization is alarming to the secular part of Kyrgyzstani society. It is pushing local law enforcement to utilize force more frequently in order to tackle this growth of religiosity. Unable to determine the particularities of different religious groups, local police officers often mistake and arrest members of the muslim community for being members of destructive organizations, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and Jaishul-i-Mahdi, which aim to overthrow secular regimes and build a Caliphate in Central Asia. However, public agents find it hard to draw a line between religiosity and radicalism. The danger is that failing to differentiate these two notions at the state level and continuing to apply overt force in combatting radicalism will increase the growth of radicalism. When a state fails to break the stereotype of radicalization, the resulting uncertainty over the motives of ordinary muslim community members leads them to be socially marginalized and considered as extremists.

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List of abbreviations

SCNS	State Committee of National Security
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
SCRA	State Committee of Religious Affairs
SAMK	Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
CSPRA	Concept of State Policy in Religious Affairs

Introduction

In early December 2014, a press café was held about the media coverage of ISIS in Kyrgyzstan, where the author asked the panel --consisting of an expert and a member of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) – how the number of Kyrgyzstani citizens who have travelled to Syria in order to join ISIS is calculated.

Bakyt Dubanaev, an MIA official, and Kadyr Malikov, a renowned religious expert, provided contrasting answers. While Dubanaev's calculation was based on the number of families who had approached law enforcement to ask for help in returning their family members from Syria, Malikov repeated the words of the supreme mufti of Syria, Ahmad Badreddin, who claimed that "there are plenty of Kyrgyz citizens in the Syrian prisons".¹ These diverging answers from two people who claim to cooperate with each other, conveyed a feeling of doubt that caused the author to consider the threat of radicalization to national security to be less than certain.

Discussing the growth of Islamic religiosity in Kyrgyzstan after independence, it reveals that the discussion on Islam in Central Asia is comprehensive and is divided into two views. The first view, which is likely the official position of Kyrgyzstan's MIA, believes that a growing muslim community in Kyrgyzstan can pose threats to the public and should be feared as people leave for *jihad* in Syria. Additionally, the Ministry argues that the increasing growth of religiosity undermines the existence of a secular state because an increasing number of muslims will strive to change the political regime of the country. This view advocated by the state and the Tenth Unit of the MIA, which is tasked with combating religious extremism and terrorism, leads researchers toward investigating the growth of Islamic religiosity and Islamic radicalization.

¹ Kadyr Malikov said in "ISIS coverage by Kyrgyz media" press-café organized by "Search for Common Ground" international NGO in Bishkek on December 4, 2014, where the author was present as a participant.

In contrast, a number of international and local researchers present counter-arguments to the state position on radicalism in Kyrgyzstan. The representatives of this view argue that information provided by Kyrgyz authorities utilizes exaggerated rhetoric in order to construct a myth of radicalization and overemphasize its threats. Additionally, they suppose that the state fears a growing muslim community because it considers it a source of opposition to the current administration.² They also claim that actual manifestations of extremism in Central Asia remain thankfully rare and must be treated as such by security analysts.³

Based on a comparison of the two views, how credible is the evidence about Islamic radicalization presented by Kyrgyz authorities and its experts? The evidence about Islamic radicalization presented by the state tends to be sparse, inconsistent, and controversial. The main allegation is that a growth of Islamic religiosity entails an increase of radicalization. When the state authorities have no firm evidence of radicalization, they often confuse the growth of religiosity with radicalization. In addition, the statistics provided by the state tend to be uncertain and evidence provided by judicial authorities for the growth of radicalization appears to be weak.

Contradicting the position of the state, independent researchers believe that the increasing number of muslims in Kyrgyzstan does not present a danger to the secular state of Kyrgyzstan, but rather, that muslim communities often act as conflict mediators within local communities.⁴ Moreover, the development of muslim communities entails economic development. A growing number of muslim community members have started consuming islamic forms, such as Islamic

² David W. Montgomery, "Towards a theory of the rough ground: merging the policy and ethnographic frames of religion in the Kyrgyz Republic." *Religion, State & Society* 42, no. 1 (2014): 23-45. doi: 10.1080/09637494.2014.887265.

³ John Heathershaw, and David W. Montgomery, "The Myth of Post-Soviet Muslim Radicalization in the Central Asian Republics." Chatham House Research Paper (2014). PDF.

⁴ Alisher Khamidov, "The lessons of the 'Nookat events': central government, local officials and religious protests in Kyrgyzstan." *Central Asian Survey* 32, no.2 (2013): 148-160. doi: 10.1080/02634937.2013.805001.

banking, the *halal* food industry, and islamic forms of charity.⁵ Because of a lack of knowledge among local police officers and authorities to differentiate Islam from destructive Islam, the secular part of the public shares the position of the state officials through mass media and common rhetoric and the state fails to break this stereotype of muslims as radicals. However, the meeting of the Kyrgyzstan's Defense Council on November 3, 2014 in Bishkek, established the Concept of State Policy in Religious Affairs (CSPRA), in which the state is obliged to lay out a structural work with religions and strengthen control over religious organizations.

Research Design

This thesis is based on an extensive body of literature and interviews with state officials and experts. The work will acquire primary data from academic research papers and interviews. The questions for the interviews are obtained from a list of extensive literature about religious extremism and allegations of radicalization in Central Asia, which is dispatched at the end of this work. The interviews are of great significance to the study because they confirm the hypothesis. They are semi-structured, and have additional questions, which the author allowed her interviewees to cover in order to have a better picture of the subject-matter.

Interestingly, the status of the author as a female scholar facilitated the process of scheduling meetings via cell phone with male interviewees. The first appendix provides the list of interviewees. No women were able to be interviewed, although attempts were made to reach four of them: two religious studies experts and two lawyers. Due to their lack of time, far location (outside of Bishkek), and confidentiality of information, the female interviewees were unavailable to the researcher. However, some of their positions are presented through the examples of mass media and one court hearing.

⁵ Alexander Wolters, "The State and Islam in Central Asia: Administering the Religious Threat or Engaging Muslim Communities?" *Forschungspapiere Research Papers* 3 (2014): 10, doi: pfh.for.203.1407.

During the interviews, the author was able to apply a method of snowball sampling, as several interviewees advised connecting to more people who could help with additional information. Nonetheless, another limitation of the research appeared in terms of unavailability of in-person meetings with several officials of the State Committee of Religious Affairs (SCRA) due to their scheduling conflicts. As with the representation of the women's positions, their position is pulled out from mass media sources.

The author normatively explored the judicial cases of imprisoned people charged for religious radicalization and extremism in Kyrgyzstan in the case of the organizations Jaishul-i-Mahdi and Hizb ut-Tahrir. To obtain this data, the author highlighted mass media materials, which cover these cases and conducted one interview with a lawyer of an accused extremist in the Bishkek city court building. Additional data on the exaggeration in the discourse on radicalization are taken from mass media.

Definitions

Several definitions for this senior thesis are provided to provide clarity on the use of the terms extremism, violent extremism or destructive Islam, and growth of religiosity. It is important to emphasize these definitions as the greater part of secular society, including state representatives, often confuse these different terms.

This work partially agrees with the definition of “extremism” provided by Kyrgyz Republic law #150 “On Counter-Extremism Activity”, which was adopted by June 30, 2005. The law says that extremism implies the activity of public associations, religious organizations, other organizations, mass media, or physical entities aimed at forcible change of the constitutional order, undermining national security, stimulation of racial, national, or religious hatred.⁶ While

⁶ Law of the Kyrgyz Republic “On Counter-Extremism Activity,” SCRA website, accessed December 15, 2014, <http://www.religion.gov.kg/ru/%D0%9E%20%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%B9%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%B8%D0%B8%20%D1%8D%D0%BA%D1%81%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%BC%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%82%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B9%20>

some experts argue that a nuance exists between extremism and violent extremism, this definition mistakenly combines both terms. In light of debate between academia and state authorities, it is necessary to define the term “violent extremism” separately. Thus, violent extremism as well as destructive Islam implies forceful seizure of power to shift from a secular regime to a Caliphate whereas extremism implies the expression of extreme views without extreme or violent actions *per se*. Another important term, which is also often confused by state authorities, is the growth of religiosity. It is described as a process, in which people gradually tend to practice their religion more openly and dutifully in a broader scope.

Literature Review

A number of works of the view arguing for the myths of radicalization in Kyrgyzstan are included. The prominent authors of this view, Heathershaw, Montgomery and Khamidov, provide a number of arguments that the author considers for this work.

Heathershaw and Montgomery argue in their article, “The Myth of Post-Soviet Muslim Radicalization in the Central Asian Republics,” that the current discourse on radicalization in Central Asian societies is exaggerated, and in reality states in the region are presented with no serious Islamic threats.⁷ Both researchers classify their arguments into six myths of radicalization: the idea of a post-Soviet Islamic revival, Islamization is synonymous to radicalization, authoritarianism and poverty cause radicalization, underground muslim groups are radical, radical muslim groups cooperate within a global network, and political Islam opposes the secular state. Because there is a relatively small number of muslim individuals and groups committing violent acts in Central Asia in the name of Islam, there is a little evidence to support the idea of post-Soviet Islamic revival in Central Asia. They suggest that the danger of a post-

%D0%B4%D0%B5%D1%8F%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8.pdf

⁷ John Heathershaw and David W. Montgomery, “The Myth of Post-Soviet Muslim Radicalization in the Central Asian Republics.” *Chatham House Research Paper* (2014). PDF.

Soviet Islamic revival are broadcasted by the region's governments because they fear their political opponents and seek foreign security assistance in order to preserve the regime.⁸

Similarly, Montgomery in "Towards a theory of the rough ground: merging the policy and ethnographic frames of religion in the Kyrgyz Republic," supports the idea that state rhetoric is exaggerated; additionally, Montgomery conceptualizes the behavior of local politicians into the theory of rough ground.⁹ He argues that the rough ground of the theory is a place where people act and are acted upon, and where they collaboratively craft their own histories. In other words, the rough ground is the area where most people live and where people are impacted by both how they frame their lives and how others frame their lives. He draws his argument from both political and ethnographic frames, which act interdependently. According to him, the political frame constructs a feeling of threat and the ethnographic frame presents a real situation, in which Islam is not presented as a threat. He suggests that misguided policy can push people to a form of engagement contrary to policy intentions.

Heathershaw and Montgomery write on a subject that was initially described in the works of a local researcher, Khamidov. In his "The lessons of the 'Nookat events': central government, local officials and religious protests in Kyrgyzstan," Khamidov argues that informal conflict-resolution arrangements, such as kinship and neighborly ties, bind local government officials with members of religious communities, and that in those regions where such ties are weak, external triggers provoke collisions between the secular state organs and religious communities.¹⁰ He elaborates that a lack of personal connections and kinship obligations, which would have encouraged local officials to go easy on their community during the Nookat events, caused authorities to forcibly disperse muslim community members from the celebration of the

⁸ Heathershaw and Montgomery, "The Myth of Post-Soviet Muslim Radicalization in the Central Asian Republics."

⁹ David W. Montgomery, "Towards a theory of the rough ground: merging the policy and ethnographic frames of religion in the Kyrgyz Republic." *Religion, State & Society* 42, no. 1 (2014): 23-45. doi: 10.1080/09637494.2014.887265.

¹⁰ Alisher Khamidov, "The lessons of the 'Nookat events': central government, local officials and religious protests in Kyrgyzstan." *Central Asian Survey* 32, no.2 (2013): 148-160. doi: 10.1080/02634937.2013.805001.

religious holiday of Orozo Ait (*Eid al Fitr*) on the center square to their houses. Because local police officers thought Hizb ut-Tahrir members were among the crowd, they banned the celebration on the day of the holiday without notifying the local administration first, which resulted in the entire town moving to the square and requesting an explanation. The author explains that muslim authorities rather than local police ultimately calmed down the riot, demonstrating that the absence of state collaboration with local muslim communities creates problems.

Heathershaw, Montgomery and Khamidov all agree that exaggeration of rhetoric with regards to the growth of Islamic religiosity exists. Heathershaw provides a good example of arguments that explain why the spread of Islamic religiosity does not severely destabilize the region. It aids in understanding the different reasons why the state often securitizes this issue. Meanwhile, Montgomery explores the theory of threat construction by a state, as well as the logic behind why the fear of radicalization is more frequently securitized than other concerns of society. Finally, the fieldwork of Khamidov appears to break the stereotype that Islamic growth means radicalization. In fact, it is moderate muslim communities themselves which can reconcile religious conflicts, conduct outreach work, and persuade local youth to abandon activity within Hizb ut-Tahrir and other radical groups.¹¹

Theoretical Framework

This study of the exploration of the state's discourse on radicalization relies upon the theory of threat construction. Firstly, the findings of other works contribute to enrich and sharpen the body of the literature review. The author explores different reasons behind the exaggeration present in the discourse on radicalization, for example using career advancement opportunities to

¹¹ Alisher Khamidov, "The lessons of the 'Nookat events': central government, local officials and religious protests in Kyrgyzstan." *Central Asian Survey* 32, no.2 (2013): 148-160. doi: 10.1080/02634937.2013.805001.

incentivize local police officers to arrest alleged members of Hizb ut-Tahrir.¹² Secondly, the arguments used by the aforementioned authors influenced this thesis to adopt the theory of threat construction as the primary theoretical framework for the work. Security experts assert that states securitize threats in order to construct collective identity against a fear, employ a strategy of social control, and distract the public from more complex and pressing issues.¹³

Richard Jackson in his *Writing the War on Terror: Language, Politics and Counter-Terrorism* argues that within the human imagination, a threat is often not attributed to enemies outside the borders of a community, but to individuals inside the community as well.¹⁴ Because a “discourse of danger” dominates public rhetoric about a subject and normalizes public anxiety, it poses a threat to a clear perception of truth to a society by obscuring it with stereotypes.

Jackson provides a comprehensive outlook demonstrating how the foreign policy of the United States influenced the foreign policies of all other states. More importantly, he provides valuable information on the formulation of state-constructed threats and on the power of psychological intimidation of words and actions on citizens. Applying the context of the “war on terror” doctrine of the United States to the actions taken by Kyrgyzstan’s MIA against radicalization reveals similarities that question the necessity of threat creation by the state.

American political scientist Corey Robin, in his *Fear: The History of a Political Idea*, recounts Thomas Hobbes’ main arguments on fear in order to highlight the importance of considering the classical political philosophers who first advocated the use fear as a tool of social control.¹⁵ Hobbes argues that fear is a rational and moral emotion; fear can be thought as the touchstone of a people’s life. Though Hobbes understood that can be a reaction to a real danger

¹² Khamidov, “The lessons of the ‘Nookat events’: central government, local officials and religious protests in Kyrgyzstan.”

¹³ Richard Jackson, “Writing Threat and Danger,” in *Writing the War on Terror: Language, Politics and Counter-Terrorism* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), 94-120.

¹⁴ Jackson, “Writing Threat and Danger.”

¹⁵ Corey Robin, “Fear,” in *Fear: The History of a Political Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 33.

in the world, he also appreciated its theatrical qualities with regards to imagined dangers, which provides a basis for the exaggeration of fear by a state. Corey refers to Hobbes' words that once ordinary people understood the moral importance of fear, they would collaborate in its cultivation.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis consists of three chapters with introduction and conclusion. In the first chapter, the author presents a discourse on the literature about the topic in question. The second chapter enhances the core research with semi-structured interviews of law enforcement officials and local experts in religious studies. The third chapter is devoted to the credibility of the evidence provided by law enforcement officials and the Prosecutor's office in their decisions related to alleged extremists. It also provides a timeline of acts of extremism and terrorism in Kyrgyzstan. The chapters are supplemented by a conclusion made out of conducted work, the appendixes and a list of interview questions, which are attached at the end of the thesis.

CHAPTER I

Literature Discourse on Radicalization in Kyrgyzstan

This chapter aims at discussing the theoretical implications of the radicalization debate in Kyrgyzstan. Although the literature of post-Soviet Islam in Central Asia is rich, it primarily focuses on radical Islam.¹⁶ It is important to emphasize Kyrgyzstan's initiative in tackling global terrorism in order to first understand how rapidly radicalization spreads. Similar to many other countries around the world, Kyrgyzstan has joined a common call to fight terrorism after the events of September 11th 2001 and agreed with the verbal approval of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, a Russia-led regional security organization,¹⁷ to host an American military air base in Kyrgyzstani territory to transport fuel for military operations in Afghanistan at Manas International airport. In addition to proliferation of rights and freedom of religion caused by the break-up of the Soviet Union, the ten-year existence of an American military base on Kyrgyzstani territory, from 2001 to 2010, provided the exigency for the development of public discourse on the Global War on Terror and Islamic radicalization.

A diversity of religious movements that appeared after Kyrgyzstan's independence caused the current discourse on religious growth as well as a debate of radicalization. Mathijs Pelkmans, a professor of Anthropology in the London School of Economics, in his "Asymmetries on the Religious Market in Kyrgyzstan" considers religious movements in Kyrgyzstan as goods for different kinds of consumers. According to Pelkmans, an individual can choose which kind of religious affiliation to follow in a religious marketplace similar to how a good is purchased in a regular marketplace. He argues that the unrestricted freedom of religion established in Kyrgyzstan in 1991 created religious marketplaces where different religious

¹⁶ Eric McGlinchey, "Islamic Revivalism and State Failure in Kyrgyzstan," *Problems of Post-Communism* 54, no. 3 (2009): 16-28, PDF, doi: 10.2753/PPC1075-8216560302.

¹⁷ Kemel Toktomushev, "Regime security, base politics and rentseeking: the local and global political economies of the American air base in Kyrgyzstan, 2001–2010," *Central Asian Survey* 34, no.1 (2015): 57-77, accessed March 27, 2015, doi: 10.1080/02634937.2015.1008796.

groups compete with one another in a pluralistic competition for followers.¹⁸ Although he warns that some political forces regulate these markets, Pelkmans' comparison of goods and religious movements in Kyrgyzstan reveal a liberal atmosphere.

In addition, Pelkmans supports the view which exposes the state's fear of religion. His analysis in his "Paradoxes of Religious Freedom *and* Repression in (Post-) Soviet Contexts" reveals a religious situation in Kyrgyzstan that demonstrates the contradiction between the law on religious freedoms and repressive measures taken by the state to control religion.¹⁹ He claims that Kyrgyz politicians treat religious proliferation as a threat to the collective good, and that the secular state will use restrictive laws and the unstable political situation to apply the force more frequently.²⁰ As other representatives from the same view, Pelkmans kindly warns the community to pay closer attention to the development of muslim communities in Kyrgyzstan.

While the Muslim communities continue to grow, religious study experts have analyzed how they could be assimilated and integrated within a secular society. Khamidov and Alexander Wolters provided clear examples for how the integration of these communities into secular society can positively resolve conflict and further business development. Thus, Khamidov argues that villages and towns in Kyrgyzstan, where kinship and neighborly ties bind the local government with religious community members, tend to have less religious protests.²¹ Hence, the closer local police and local administration integrate with Muslim communities, predominantly in Kyrgyzstan's south, the more they cooperate in coping with religious conflicts, including mitigating radicalization. According to Khamidov, local clerics in small Uzbek communities in

¹⁸ Mathijs Pelkmans, "'Asymmetries on the Religious Market' in Kyrgyzstan," in *Postsocialist Religious Question: Faith and Power in Central Asia and East-Central Europe*, ed. Chris Hann (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2006), PDF, 43.

¹⁹ Mathijs Pelkmans, "Paradoxes of Religious Freedom *and* Repression in (Post-) Soviet Contexts," *Journal of Law and Religion* 29 (2014): 3, PDF, doi: 10.1017/jlr.2014.23.

²⁰ Pelkmans, "Paradoxes of Religious Freedom."

²¹ Alisher Khamidov, "The lessons of the 'Nookat events': central government, local officials and religious protests in Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asian Survey* 32, no.2 (2013): 148-160. doi: 10.1080/02634937.2013.805001.

Kyrgyzstan, *mahalla*, work closely with young people in order to persuade them to abandon a dangerous activity in destructive religious groups.

Alexander Wolters, a visiting German scholar in Kyrgyzstan and an instructor at the American University of Central Asia in Kyrgyzstan, argues that such sectors of the economy as Islamic banks and sharia-based food products, *halal*, must be properly developed in Central Asia as a growing number of Muslims gradually start to use them. In addition, the state may not only provide these services to their citizens, but also receive economic benefits from it.²² His critique of Central Asian states' fear of radicalization is that in reality radical ideas from the Arabian Peninsula do not seriously threaten the existence of secular states in Central Asia, but rather that the Global War on Terror causes states to create a discourse on the threat of radicalization, which has been comprehensively applied by Kyrgyzstan.²³

Especially after September 11, many states around the world have started to incite fear of radicalization. American political scientists, Francois Debrix and Alexander D. Barder, suggest the concept of *biopolitics* to explain this process in which state officials and state agencies mobilize the danger, threat, insecurity, and enmity based on human feelings.²⁴ In other words, humans as biological and social beings are responsible for threat construction and setting an agenda to securitize certain issues. Human beings formulate the politics of danger by using the techniques of threat creation that impose constructed threats on ordinary citizens. Their colleague, Richard Jackson, supports this and adds that a "discourse of danger" continues to surround virtually all public rhetoric about the subject, which in turn normalizes public anxiety.²⁵

²² Alexander Wolters, "The State and Islam in Central Asia: Administering the Religious Threat or Engaging Muslim Communities?" *Forschungspapiere Research Papers* 3 (2014): 10, doi: pfh.for.203.1407.

²³ Wolters, "The State and Islam in Central Asia."

²⁴ Francois Debrix and Alexander D. Barder, "Nothing to Fear but Fear: Governmentality and the Biopolitical Production of Terror," *International Political Sociology* 3, no.4 (2009): 398-413.

²⁵ Richard Jackson, "Writing Threat and Danger," in *Writing the War on Terror: Language, Politics and Counter-Terrorism* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), 94-120.

In a context of Central Asian politics, one of these constructed threats is an exaggerated rhetoric on the growth of religious radicalization in society. Once ordinary people understand the moral importance of fear, they will cooperate in its cultivation.²⁶ In the case of Kyrgyzstan, a secular part of society tends to absorb the vision of growing Muslim communities as a threat. As the official position of the state is to cultivate a fear of growing religiosity, it is possible that public opinion adopts the picture of the religious situation in the country provided by the state.

David Montgomery, an ethnographer and professor of Anthropology at University of Pittsburgh, indicates that little attention is given to the structure of the policy frame, because policymakers appear to be unconcerned with the actual conditions of local life.²⁷ In other words, the ethnographic view looks closely at a local community to reveal a different picture on muslim communities from the one built by public discourse. In addition to Montgomery, who lived in Kyrgyzstan for nine months conducting his research on the religious situation, Khamidov supplements and suggests that the eruption of religiously based mobilization depends on the structure of local politics.²⁸ Because the interaction between public policy and religious communities remains weak, public agents do not fully understand daily life in muslim communities as close as ethnographers do. This lack of understanding compels members of those marginalized religious societies to express their social concerns through religious mobilizations. As a result the misguided policy governing relations with religious groups, many members of muslim communities feel alienated, by the common public discourse on Islam stipulated by the secular sectors of society and secular politicians. Heathershaw, a professor of International Relations at the University of Exeter, together with Montgomery lay out the myths that obscure the character of Muslim communities in public discourse. It is important to repeat

²⁶ Corey Robin, "Fear," in *Fear: The History of a Political Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004): 40.

²⁷ David Montgomery, "Towards a theory of the rough ground: merging the policy and ethnographic frames of religion in the Kyrgyz Republic," *Religion, State, and Society* 42, no.1 (2014): 23-45, doi: 10.1080/09637494.2014.887265

²⁸ Alisher Khamidov, "The lessons of the 'Nookat events': central government, local officials and religious protests in Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asian Survey* 32, no.2 (2013): 148-160. doi: 10.1080/02634937.2013.805001.

that rough ground and myths are a result of the insufficient interaction between the state and religious communities. As the representatives of the academic view, Heathershaw and Montgomery emphasize that the exaggerated rhetoric of the state is an obstacle for cooperation, and the cause of the confusion between the concepts of “Islamization” and “radicalization.” Although some experts argue that “Islamization” is another politically incorrect word because of its linguistic ending, which has a negative and artificial connotation, the authors of the research paper regard this term as synonymous with a growth of religiosity. As a result, they claim that there is no evidence which proves a relationship between radicalization and Islamization.

As evidence, they bring statistics of terrorist acts in Kyrgyzstan since 2001. From 2001-2013, there were three attacks that have been claimed by extremist groups, which total 11 deaths - just 0.1 per cent of all terrorist attacks that have taken place in Central Asia.²⁹ In contrast, Eric McGlinchey, a professor of government and politics at George Mason University, considers that Islamic radicalism in Central Asia is not a myth, but a response to authoritarianism.³⁰ He argues that because the Central Asian states see growing Muslim communities as domestic opposition, they oppress religious groups as they do other dissident groups.³¹ In another work, he critically assesses the religious situation in Kyrgyzstan and emphasizes that the state’s initial religious laissez faire³² and a distant attitude toward muslim groups created a situation where muslim community members cooperated with each other closely and created common ground. Because Muslim values deepen interpersonal trust that manifests as capital aggregation, which yields effective Islamic charities and businesses, an Islamic identity spreads further.³³ As in Andijan

²⁹ John Heathershaw and David W. Montgomery, “The Myth of Post-Soviet Muslim Radicalization in the Central Asian Republics.” *Chatham House Research Paper* (2014). PDF.

³⁰ Eric McGlinchey, “Autocrats, Islamists, and the Rise of Radicalism in Central Asia,” *Current History* (2005): 336-342.

³¹ McGlinchey, “Autocrats, Islamists, and the Rise of Radicalism in Central Asia.”

³² A term mentioned in Mathijs Perkman’s “‘Asymmetries on the Religious Market’ in Kyrgyzstan.”

³³ Eric McGlinchey, “Islamic Revivalism and State Failure in Kyrgyzstan,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 54, no. 3 (2009): 16-28, PDF, doi: 10.2753/PPC1075-8216560302

events in 2005 in Uzbekistan, many locals saw arrested businessmen as good, religiously motivated individuals seeking to assist their community in ways the government was not.³⁴

³⁴ David W. Montgomery, "Islam beyond Democracy and State in Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asian Affairs* 2 (2015): 35-50, accessed October 15, 2014, doi: 10.1163/22142290-00201003.

CHAPTER II

Debate between Two Views on Radicalization in Kyrgyzstan

This chapter aims to cover the two sides of the debate: the position of government and an academic view on the issue of religious growth in Kyrgyzstan. Providing accurate information on the security threat posed by the politicization of Islam by any Central Asian countries remains difficult.³⁵ Many, including a Central Asian analyst from Carnegie Endowment Center, Martha Brill Olcott, believe that by using political rhetoric, the state focuses public attention on radicalization threats in order to complement the policies they undertake to reduce the threat.³⁶ In other words, by using rhetoric, public officials want to demonstrate that they are able to deal with an issue that undermines national security.

During public announcements on the threat of Islamic radicalization, officials refer to the numbers of citizens who have left for Syria to fight for ISIS, and measures they take to prevent further recruitment. For example, the SCNS announced in February 2014 that fifty Kyrgyzstani citizens left for *jihad*.³⁷ Later this year, Kyrgyzstan's MIA announced that seventy people had left.³⁸ Meanwhile, experts provide their own statistical data. Kadyr Malikov, a well-known local expert in religious law and also the head of a local NGO, Religion, Politics and Right, claims that around 450 or 500 citizens of Kyrgyzstan have left.³⁹ When explaining this number, Malikov divided his answer into two components. The justification of the first part relies on the fluctuations in official statistics. Four months after the statistics – seventy people – for February 2014 were announced, the number increased to one-hundred-fifty people today.⁴⁰ Because of ups

³⁵ Martha Brill Olcott, "Religion and State Policy in Central Asia," *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 12, no. 4 (2014): 1-15, accessed April 3, 2015, doi: 10.1080/15570274.2014.976087.

³⁶ Olcott, "Religion and State Policy in Central Asia."

³⁷ Roman Veitsel, "Pochemu grazhdane Kyrgyzstana edut v Siriya na voynu?" *Islam v SNG*, July 7, 2014, accessed April 4, 2015. <http://www.islamsng.com/kgz/analytics/8009>.

³⁸ Veitsel, "Pochemu grazhdane Kyrgyzstana edut v Siriya na voynu?"

³⁹ Kadyr Malikov said in "ISIS coverage by Kyrgyz media" press-café organized by "Search for Common Ground" international NGO in Bishkek on December 4, 2014, where the author was present as a participant.

⁴⁰ Kadyr Malikov said in "ISIS coverage by Kyrgyz media" press-café organized by "Search for Common Ground" international NGO in Bishkek on December 4, 2014, where the author was present as a participant.

and downs in statistics, he calculated that the growth implies a total number of 450 to 500 people since the beginning of 2014. The second part of the answer relies on the independent research Malikov conducted himself in Syria and from conversations with the supreme mufti of Syria, Ahmad Badreddin. According to the mufti, there are many more imprisoned Kyrgyzstani citizens in Syria now compared to the two Kyrgyzstani prisoners on record in 2012. Exploring these claims, Malikov led to suggest the 450 to 500 figure.

In contrast to these figures, Bakyt Dubanaev, the MIA official and the doctor of MVD⁴¹ Academy of the Russian Federation as well as a representative of the Anti-terrorist Center of CIS⁴² in Bishkek said neither country can provide precise information on number of fighters.⁴³ According to him, Kyrgyz citizens leave Kyrgyzstan for Turkey under the pretext of doing business or go to Russia as labor migrants and then later move from those places to Syria to fight, and this statistics is not officially documented. Because it is impossible to differentiate Kyrgyzstani migrants and businessmen from those with the motive of *jihad*, he forms his official statistics from the number of families who approached law enforcement about missing family members. Ikbalzhan Mirsayitov, a local expert in conflicts in the Ferghana Valley, augments Dubanaev's argument by assuming that the number can be drastically higher because of the Nookat events in 2008, which most likely pushed many ethnic Uzbeks in the south of Kyrgyzstan to leave the country and fight in other belligerent zones.⁴⁴ In addition, most statistics do not account for the children of recruits who have left Kyrgyzstan together with their adult family members.⁴⁵

⁴¹ MVD, a Russian acronym for Ministerstvo Vnutrennih Del, Ministry of Internal Affairs (eng).

⁴² Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)

⁴³ Bakyt Dubanaev said in "ISIS coverage by Kyrgyz media" press-café organized by "Search for Common Ground" international NGO in Bishkek on December 4, 2014, where the author was present as a participant.

⁴⁴ Ikbalzhan Mirsayitov said in "ISIS coverage by Kyrgyz media" press-café organized by "Search for Common Ground" international NGO in Bishkek on December 4, 2014, where the author was present as a participant.

⁴⁵ Ikbalzhan Mirsayitov said in "ISIS coverage by Kyrgyz media" press-café organized by "Search for Common Ground" international NGO in Bishkek on December 4, 2014, where the author was present as a participant..

State officials in accordance with the global discussion on terrorism and violent extremism are afraid of the growing number of citizens who leave to fight for extremist groups, and consider it an indicator of radicalization. Concurrently, McGlinchey assumes that radical Islam in Central Asia demonstrates a social response to the injustice of authoritarian rule.⁴⁶ Here the use of authoritarian rule is not necessarily limited only to Uzbekistan's dictatorial regime, which has forced many dissidents to seek a haven for their activities with organizations like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan. These authoritarian and repressive practices can be found throughout the region by considering the religion and state relations in Central Asia.

As a result of Soviet ideology which repressed Islam and sent imams and other Islamic religious leaders to Siberia⁴⁷, a vast majority of current politicians became skeptical of the growth of religiosity. The experiences of ethnic Uzbeks residing in Southern Kyrgyzstan who compose a significant majority of Muslim communities provide an example of this post-Soviet legacy. A fear of growing religiosity has resulted in local police officers in south to not only confuse but also abuse the distinction between religiosity and radicalization. Thus, local police officers are motivated by career advancement rather than the duty to maintain order when arresting alleged extremists in muslim communities in the Kyrgyzstan's South.⁴⁸ This focus on advancing their career when reporting their efforts to combat extremism⁴⁹ breeds mistrust between muslim communities and the state because citizens assume those arrested did not truly commit violent acts of extremism. Though not all police officers are motivated by personal gain, some local police officers are instead intimidated by the fear of being sacked for not contributing to increase the annual statistics detailing efforts to reduce crime. Indeed, many officers have

⁴⁶ Eric McGlinchey, "Autocrats, Islamists, and the Rise of Radicalism in Central Asia," *Current History* (2005): 342.

⁴⁷ Kadyr Malikov said in "ISIS coverage by Kyrgyz media" press-café organized by "Search for Common Ground" international NGO in Bishkek on December 4, 2014, where the author was present as a participant.

⁴⁸ From the interview with Alisher Khamidov, an independent researcher.

⁴⁹ Alisher Khamidov, "The lessons of the 'Nookat events': central government, local officials and religious protests in Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asian Survey* 32, no.2 (2013): 148-160. doi: 10.1080/02634937.2013.805001.

been fired for furnishing low arrest numbers of religious extremists.⁵⁰ Another example of police officers influenced by personal gain are accounts of officers who mistakenly believe that all Uzbek community members are wealthy,⁵¹ and extort the alleged – and predominantly Uzbek – extremists they incarcerate for money to secure quick release⁵². Because ethnic Uzbeks, the largest ethnic minority in Kyrgyzstan, are underrepresented in local law enforcement and public administration, these illegitimate arrests and extortions deteriorate trust and widen the gulf between Uzbek muslim communities and the state.⁵³

Even though one state official indicates in his interview that religious extremism and terrorism are the biggest threats to the national security of Kyrgyzstan,⁵⁴ a local expert on Islamic law instead believes that leaders who came to power through corruption are threats of greater importance.⁵⁵ The expert concludes that the incompetence of such people creates an obstacle for effective and efficient work in state bodies,⁵⁶ which contrasts to the big work the SCNS and the MIA engage in to combat violent extremism.⁵⁷ The example of Jalil Atambaev, the chief of Nookat police, whose order for residents to celebrate the Muslim holiday in their houses caused public riots, can be explained as an act of abusing his power because his counterparts characterize him as an outsider and a careerist.⁵⁸

The collaboration between the SCNS and local police officers is weak. When Kyrgyzstan adopted the CSPRA on November 3, 2014, many experts and the SCNS accepted that state law

⁵⁰ “V Oshskoi oblasti za plohu yu raskryvaemost prestuplenii ot dolzhnostei osvobozhdeny dva zammachalnika UVD i nachalnik ROVD, *Turmush Akipress*, February 16, 2015, accessed February 16, 2015, <http://www.turmush.kg/ru/news:113263>.

⁵¹ Evgeny Pogrebnyak, “Vracha obvinayut v prichastnosti k religiozno-ekstremistskoi organizatsii,” *Golos Svobody*, August 8, 2012, accessed April 7, 2015, <http://vof.kg/?p=6095>.

⁵² From the interview with Alisher Khamidov, an independent researcher.

⁵³ Ikbalzhan Mirsayitov said in “ISIS coverage by Kyrgyz media” press-café organized by “Search for Common Ground” international NGO in Bishkek on December 4, 2014, where the author was present as a participant.

⁵⁴ From the interview with a representative of the 10th Unit of the MIA of Kyrgyzstan, who requested anonymity

⁵⁵ From the interview with a local expert in Islamic law, who requested anonymity

⁵⁶ From the interview with the same local expert, who requested anonymity

⁵⁷ From the interview with Emil Nasritdinov, an independent researcher and an instructor of “Anthropology of religion” course at the American University of Central Asia

⁵⁸ Alisher Khamidov, “The lessons of the ‘Nookat events’: central government, local officials and religious protests in Kyrgyzstan,” *Central Asian Survey* 32, no.2 (2013): 148-160. doi: 10.1080/02634937.2013.805001.

enforcement would use the concept as a basis to improve the work between state bodies and religious groups. Along with approval of the Concept, Kyrgyzstan's Ministry of Finance decided to increase the salaries of people working for law enforcement and included in the annual budget one billion Kyrgyz soms (approximately \$15 million) for that purpose.⁵⁹ It could be assumed that defense and law enforcement agencies might have more work to do in 2015. However, there are doubts on the effectiveness of the new CSPRA. Abdymomun Mamaraimov, the editor of *Golos Svobody*, a regional Internet portal covering human rights in Central Asia, as well as one of the developers of Sustainable Human Development Concept in Kyrgyzstan of 1995, does not believe the CSPRA will be implemented.⁶⁰ According to him, public officials are only dissembling their commitment to improve the religious situation.

Contrasting with Mamaraimov's criticism of the Concept, a representative of the Tenth Unit of the MIA believes in the implementation of the Concept as a model for future protocol, but he notes that the laws "On Police" and "On combatting extremism and terrorism" are the primary documents dictating the functional duties of police officers.⁶¹ Another local expert who was previously mentioned and requested anonymity, doubts the Concept because law makers have already started to introduce amendments to the law "On freedom of religion," which contradicts the *raison d'être* of the Concept.⁶² While some public officials promote restricting religious freedoms, the Concept aims at regulating state-faith relations.⁶³ This expert also

⁵⁹ "Na povyshenie zarplat sotrudnikam silovogo bloka Kyrgyzstana v 2015 godu predusmatrivaetsya bolee 1 milliarda somov," *24.kg*, December 3, 2014, accessed December 4, 2014, http://24.kg/parlament/2775_na_povyshenie_zarplatyi_sotrudnikam_silovogo_bloka_kyrgyzstana_v_2015_godu_predusmatrivaetsya_bolee_1_milliarda_somov/.

⁶⁰ From the interview with Abdymomun Mamaraimov, an editor of *Golos Svobody* Internet portal covering human rights issues in Central Asia

⁶¹ From the interview with a representative of the Tenth Unit of the MIA of Kyrgyzstan, who requested anonymity

⁶² From the interview with a local expert who requested anonymity

⁶³ Concept of State Policy in Religious Affairs, SCRA website, accessed April 23, 2015, <http://www.religion.gov.kg/ru/%D0%9A%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%86%D0%B5%D0%BF%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F%20%D0%B3%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%83%D0%B4%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B9%20%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B8%20%D0%9A%D1%8B%D1%80%D0%B3%D1%8B%D0%B7%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B9%20%D0%A0%D0%B5%D1%81%D0%BF%D1%83%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B8%20%D0%B2%20%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B3%D0%B8%D0%BE%D0%B7%D0%BD%D0%B>

mentions that insufficient funds are the biggest obstacle to implementation of the Concept. Similarly, Khamidov doubts the Concept by sharing that a document created “by experts for experts” reveals the state’s attempt to control religion.⁶⁴ He explains that responsibility for combatting violent extremism rests on local police officers, not on the SCNS and MIA personnel from Bishkek who actually drafted the concept and that those local police officials have their own directions and understandings for combatting extremism separate from those included in the Concept.

If the Concept cannot regulate state-faith relations, then the question remains of how to differentiate the growth of religiosity and radicalization. Begizhan Akhmedov, a retired SCNS officer specializing in religious issues, emphasizes that in order to charge a person with extremism, an officer must match the actions of the suspect with the law’s text and analyze his rhetoric and actions.⁶⁵ Additionally, an expert group under the SCRA, which is the only authoritative agency in Kyrgyzstan that conducts expert analysis of religious literature, must examine material evidence before passing them on to a court, but the problem is that a judge in the court might not share the SCRA experts’ opinions.⁶⁶ Thus, the problem exists in the court system, too. While Akhmedov considers it unacceptable to stealthily plant extremist literature and disks on innocent people in order to charge them with extremism and extort money from their release, another expert recounts how a person he knew was arrested by local police officers in the southern town of Aravan “for connection with terrorists” and asked to pay \$10,000 for his release.⁶⁷

A number of state officials do not attempt to distinguish between religiosity and radicalization. An official from the Tenth Unit of MIA shared that he and his colleagues recently

E%20B9%20D1%81%D1%84%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B5%20D0%BD%D0%B0%202014-2020%20D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4%D1%8B.pdf

⁶⁴ From the interview with Alisher Khamidov, an independent researcher.

⁶⁵ From the interview with Begizhan Akhmedov, a local expert in Islamic studies and a former officer of the SCNS.

⁶⁶ From the interview with Begizhan Akhmedov.

⁶⁷ From the interview with Alisher Khamidov.

arrested Rashot Kamalov, the *imam* of the Kara-Suu mosque located in the south, in January, because they allege that he made calls to go to Syria. When justifying his motive for arresting the imam, the interviewee admitted that “this imam did not call for recruitment directly but he was giving general directions to do so.”⁶⁸ Because of this tenuous justification, a representative of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan (SAMK), who also requested to be anonymous, ironically wondered why Rashot Kamalov was arrested now, four year after the beginning of the civil war in Syria in 2011.⁶⁹ Additionally, the SAMK representative emphasized that none of the students from 65 religious educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan has gone to Syria.⁷⁰ Remarkably, Emil Zheenbekov, the deputy head of the Tenth Unit of the MIA, claimed that 70% of imams in Kyrgyzstan do not have a higher education.⁷¹

During the conversation with the Tenth Unit of MIA official about the type of people who tend to leave for Syria, he mentioned that even wealthy people in the town of Aravan had left for war zones because of ISIS ideology. This answer led the author of this work to believe that the interviewee and his colleagues in local police stations in Aravan and other Uzbek populated areas, know the true financial status of residents there, which can debunk the popular belief of Uzbeks as well-to-do.

The justifications used to determine whether an individual is extremist appear to be inconsistent among cases. While some settle to judge extremism by the rhetoric rather than the actions of religious leaders, Emil Zheenbekov, who defended his PhD in religious extremism in the MVD Academy in the Russian Federation, explains his own method. He indicates there is no common method to determine the level of extremism as each law enforcement body employs its

⁶⁸ From the interview with a representative of the Tenth Unit of the MIA of Kyrgyzstan, who requested anonymity

⁶⁹ From the interview with a representative of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan (SAMK), who requested anonymity

⁷⁰ From the interview with a representative of the SAMK

⁷¹ From the interview with Emil Zheenbekov, a deputy head of the Tenth Unit of the MIA of Kyrgyzstan

own set of criteria.⁷² Zheenbekov explains that he asked twelve questions to alleged Salafists⁷³ to reveal if they tolerate the four Sunni *madhhabs*, one of which, Hanafi, is present in Central Asia.⁷⁴ According to him, Salafists do not tolerate these moderate religious Sunni schools (Hanafi, Maliki, Hanbali, and Sharifi), and they want to expand the Salafi movement in Kyrgyzstan in order to incite a *jihad*, punish infidels, and establish a Caliphate.⁷⁵ For example, in response to these questions, a suspect criticized the Hanbali Sunni School, thus exposing his extremist views.⁷⁶

The openness of Kyrgyzstan toward different religious groups hinders the ability of the state to distinguish radical groups from moderate Islamic movements. The SAMK representative argues that a commitment to absolute religious freedom in Kyrgyzstan during the early 1990s facilitated young people to leave Kyrgyzstan and obtain a religious education abroad in countries including Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkey. Upon their return to Kyrgyzstan, they disseminated radical religious ideas alien to native muslim community.⁷⁷ He agrees that this brand of Islam does not comply with the moderate Islam found in Central Asia, and indicates that the state's indifference toward religious affairs after the independence allowed the establishment of radical groups.⁷⁸

However, state interference in religious affairs causes negative sentiments among muslim community members who oppose control over religion. Several experts argue that the state itself creates conditions for radicalization by repressing moderate religious communities. Kyrgyzstan follows the repressive policies on religion dictated by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

⁷² From the interview with Emil Zheenbekov.

⁷³ Salafism is a direction in Islam aim at uniting religious leaders to orient on early Muslim community life, call for return to initial sources of Islam, and combine all movements of political Islam. Kadyr Malikov, *Kratkoe posobie po Islamu* (Bishkek: no publisher's name, 2013), 75-76.

⁷⁴ Kadyr Malikov, *Kratkoe posobie po Islamu* (Bishkek: no publisher's name, 2013), 58.

⁷⁵ From the interview with Emil Zheenbekov, a deputy head of the Tenth Unit of the MIA of Kyrgyzstan

⁷⁶ From the interview with Emil Zheenbekov.

⁷⁷ From the interview with a representative of the SAMK

⁷⁸ From the interview with a representative of the SAMK

(SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) both of which consider Kyrgyzstan a member.⁷⁹ The debate over banning the moderate Islamic movement, Tablighi Jamaat, has been active since 2009 when Kyrgyzstan's Defense Council recommended that the Supreme Court ban it.⁸⁰ Then head of the SCRA, Kanybek Osmonaliev, announced that it must be banned because all other Central Asian states had banned it and that consequently, Kyrgyzstan should too.⁸¹ The academic community opposes this view and considers Tablighi Jamaat, or *davatchik*, to be the only moderate religious force opposing and offsetting the Salafi movement.⁸² Emil Nasritdinov has drawn the line between radicalization in terms of Salafi movement and religiosity in terms of the *davatchiks*. He explains that the *davatchiks* and the Salafists are diametrically opposed groups with different goals: Salafists aim at implementing a fundamental practice of Islam, while the *davatchiks* practice community work and encourage young people to abandon extremist thoughts and turn toward moderate forms of Islam.⁸³

Ikbalzhan Mirsayitov has noticed that, remarkably, the *davatchiks* were the only party which attempted to reconcile Kyrgyz and Uzbeks during the 2010 interethnic conflicts in Osh.⁸⁴ According to him, authorities understood that religious leaders could promote reconciliation and mediate the conflict by calling people to stop the bloodshed. However, when the government asked the *kazys*, religious judges in the South's *kazyys* - Islamic courts, to do it, the judges divided along ethnic lines. As a result, the *davatchiks* were the only Muslim community members representing both Uzbeks and Kyrgyz who went into the vulnerable zones of the conflict in Osh and Jalal Abad to reach out people and reconcile both sides.

⁷⁹ Dmitry Kabak, Gulshayir Abdirasulova, and Galina Kolodzinskaya, alternative report of "Open viewpoint" Public Foundation on the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights related to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion by the Kyrgyz Republic, http://www.ccprcentre.org/doc/2014/03/INT_CCPR_CSS_LVA_16484_R.pdf.

⁸⁰ "Sovbez KR rekomendoval VS rassmotret vopros o priznanii nezakonnymi religioznye organizatsii," *CA-news*, September 23, 2009, accessed February 17, 2015, <https://ca-news.info/2009/09/23/46>.

⁸¹ "Sovbez KR rekomendoval VS rassmotret vopros o priznanii nezakonnymi religioznye organizatsii."

⁸² From the interview with Emil Nasritdinov, an independent researcher and an instructor of "Anthropology of religion" course at the American University of Central Asia.

⁸³ From the interview with Emil Nasritdinov.

⁸⁴ Ikbalzhan Mirsayitov said in "ISIS coverage by Kyrgyz media" press-café organized by "Search for Common Ground" international NGO in Bishkek on December 4, 2014, where the author was present as a participant.

Another prominent expert in religious affairs considers that Tablighi Jamaat is a security service of Pakistan, which aims at following the development of the religious situation in Kyrgyzstan through the *davatchiks* and then cooperate with the Kyrgyz government.⁸⁵ The SCRA very likely supports this view and places state-backed *imams*,⁸⁶ in order to continue its supervisory policy over religion. In November 2014, the SCRA submitted for consideration an amendment to the law “On freedom of religion,” that bans *davatchiks* from conducting *davaat*, or house visits.⁸⁷

Kanybek Mamataliev, the head of the analytical department of the SCRA, noticed that the committee regularly receives complaints from residents to stop house visits.⁸⁸ According to Nasritdinov, the ban will significantly worsen the religious status-quo because the *davatchiks* themselves will not be well-informed about the new amendment because they do not visit the website of the SCRA to see actual amendments and some of them do not have access to the Internet. If they are arrested during *davaat*, it would cause a significant conflict between law enforcement and the religious movement. Nasritdinov points out that the *davatchiks* submit not to the law nor to defense authorities but to the main spiritual body of Tablighi Jamaat named *mashvara*. Unless *mashvara* issues the ban on *davaat*, the *davatchiks* will continue visiting houses. He suggests that such religious groups like Tablighi Jamaat are not dangerous, but will oppose the government if they are treated as dangerous by public authorities.

⁸⁵ From the interview with a local expert who requested anonymity

⁸⁶ Mushfig Bayram and John Kinahan, “Kyrgyzstan: religious freedom survey,” *Forum 18*, November 4, 2014, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://www.forum18.org/>.

⁸⁷ From the interview with Emil Nasritdinov, an independent researcher and an instructor of “Anthropology of religion” course at the American University of Central Asia.

⁸⁸ Roman Veitsel and Robert Nagimzyanov, “Neobhodimo otkazat’sya ot liberalizma i pereiti k kooperatsionnoi modeli vzaimootnoshenii gosudarstva i religii, - ekspery,” *Islam v SNG*, November 30, 2011, accessed April 4, 2015, <http://www.islamsng.com/kgz/news/3469>.

CHAPTER III

Credibility of Court Decisions for Religious Extremism Cases

This chapter aims at revealing and substantiating the allegations of the displays of extremism in Kyrgyzstan. The SCNS, much as law enforcement and defense bodies, follow the developments in the religious realm of the country and maintain a timeline of bombings and other acts considered as extremist since the country's independence. The table mentioned below was obtained by the author from participating in a presentation for local journalists covering religious extremism and terrorism issues⁸⁹ presented by a representative of the SCNS.⁹⁰

Year	Displays of radicalism, extremism, and terrorism in Kyrgyzstan ⁹¹
1997	Recruitment attempts of Kurdistan Workers' Party in Talas town
1998	Osh bombings
1999 and 2000	Batken events
2002	Bombings on "Oberon" market
2003	Talas cell
2005	Revolution
2006	Cells of Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Union of Islamic Jihad
2008	Disorder in Nookat
2010	Revolution and tragic events in the South
2011	Jaishul-i-Mahdi
2012	Terrorist activity in the South and in Bishkek
2014	Incident on the Kyrgyz-Chinese border

Table 1

Although many of these events would prove worthy of investigating, this chapter covers the Nookat events and the "Jaishul-i-Mahdi" destructive group only as they exemplify the issues raised in this thesis and expose inconsistent and sparse information about extremism provided by

⁸⁹ "Religious extremism and terrorism combatting through mass media of the Kyrgyz Republic," training for local journalists organized by Search for Common Ground international NGO in Bishkek on August 21-22, 2014, where the author was present as a participant.

⁹⁰ Name is not written as this person initially refused to be interviewed, but the author used his PowerPoint presentation on the training as an alternative.

⁹¹ "Pravovye aspekty problem rasprostraneniya radikalizma, ekstremizma i terrorizma i protivodeistviya etih yavlenii," presentation of the SCNS on the training for local journalists organized by Search for Common Ground international NGO in Bishkek on August 21-22, 2014, where the author was present as a participant.

state authorities. Before describing the events, it is necessary to highlight the extremist and terrorist organizations, which are banned on the territory of Kyrgyzstan.⁹²

#	Name of the organization
1	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
2	Eastern Turkestan Liberation Organization
3	Islamic Movement of Eastern Turkestan
4	Hizb ut-Tahrir
5	Taliban Movement
6	Al Qaeda
7	Kurdistan Workers' Party
8	Jihad Group
9	Takfir-jihad movement of Salafi directionality
10	Jaishul-i-Mahdi
11	Jund-al-Halifat
12	Ansarulloh
13	At-Takfir wal-Hijra
14	Akromiya
15	Sect of Mun

Table 2

Nookat Events and Hizb ut-Tahrir

The Nookat events in 2008 characterized the growing religious intolerance in Kyrgyzstan. Before analyzing the effect these events have on the discourse on radicalization, a short summary of the events which occurred in Nookat town will be provided. On October 1, 2008, the residents of the southern city of Nookat planned celebrate the important Muslim holiday of *Eid al Fitr* with festive food on the main town square, but were redirected by local administration to instead celebrate it at the town's sport stadium. When the residents approached the stadium and saw that the doors were closed and secured by local police officers, they gathered at the local administration building again to demand the celebration of the holiday. The *akim*, the head of local administration, requested residents to disperse within thirty minutes, or

⁹² "Religious extremism and terrorism combatting through mass media of the Kyrgyz Republic," training for local journalists organized by Search for Common Ground international NGO in Bishkek on August 21-22, 2014, where the author was present as a participant.

the police would force them to disperse. Persisting to celebrate the holiday after the given thirty minutes, local police officers sprayed tear-gas and threw stun grenades into the crowd of civilians. As a result of clashes, local police officers arrested thirty-two residents and charged them with ties to Hizb ut-Tahrir afterwards.⁹³

Khamidov precludes the Nookat events by mentioning how the Uzbek-Kyrgyz anti-terrorist alliance forced Kyrgyz security forces to be engaged in hundreds of search-and-seizure operations and to arrest Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Hizb ut-Tahrir members.⁹⁴ According to Khamidov, two months before the events in July of 2008, the Kyrgyz government adopted an ‘inter-departmental plan on the prevention of religious extremism and fundamentalism, which claimed that Hizb ut-Tahrir was using various holidays such as *Eid al Fitr* to advance its ideology in southern Kyrgyzstan.⁹⁵ Additionally, the Nookat events coincided with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization’s regional annual meeting in Bishkek,⁹⁶ where the agenda focuses on combatting the threats of religious extremism, terrorism and separatism.

The judicial proceedings for the thirty-two who were arrested were incomplete with severe violation of human rights. For example, the state hired one lawyer, Kanybek Sarpashov, to represent eighteen detainees, and another state lawyer, Erkebaev, participated only in imposing a pre-trial restraint for six detainees and ceased providing state legal defense afterwards. None of the lawyers mentioned in court that the detainees were tortured in temporary detention centers, which implies that the legal counsel provided by the state did not truly defend the accused.⁹⁷ For instance, the SCNC officers in the prison in Osh, which detained some of the

⁹³ Dmitry Kabak, Gulshayir Abdirasulova, and Galina Kolodzinskaya, alternative report of “Open viewpoint” Public Foundation on the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights related to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion by the Kyrgyz Republic, accessed March 27, 2015, http://www.ccpcentre.org/doc/2014/03/INT_CCPR_CSS_LVA_16484_R.pdf.

⁹⁴ Alisher Khamidov, “The lessons of the ‘Nookat events’: central government, local officials and religious protests in Kyrgyzstan,” *Central Asian Survey* 32, no.2 (2013): 148-160. doi: 10.1080/02634937.2013.805001.

⁹⁵ Khamidov, “The lessons of the ‘Nookat events’: central government, local officials and religious protests in Kyrgyzstan.”

⁹⁶ Kabak, Abdirasulova, and Kolodzinskaya, alternative report of “Open viewpoint” Public Foundation.

⁹⁷ Dmitry Kabak, Gulshayir Abdirasulova, and Galina Kolodzinskaya, alternative report of “Open viewpoint” Public Foundation on the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights related to freedom of

Nookat residents, forcibly poured vodka into a throat of Rakhmonberdi Juraev, an alleged Hizb ut-Tahrir member, and beat the genitals of Akhmadillo Ergashev in order to prevent him from having “children of an Hizb ut-Tahrir member.”⁹⁸ The same Ergashev was detained only because his father, who no longer lived with the family, was a Hizb ut-Tahrir member. The well-known “Memorial” Human Rights Center documented from the words of the suspects’ relatives that the price to avoid criminal charges for “Islamic extremism” reached 100,000 Kyrgyz soms (approximately \$2,500).⁹⁹

The appellate courts, as well as Kyrgyzstan’s Supreme Court did not take into account the claims of local and international human rights activists about instances of torture, and the Osh city court ultimately charged the thirty-two Nookat residents with six different crimes with sentences ranging from 15 to 20 years imprisonment.¹⁰⁰ Such long sentences had never been used before by Kyrgyzstan’s post-Soviet court system.¹⁰¹ Even though the Nookat events can be described further, specific aspects of this case should be mentioned, such as bribery among local police officers and dismissal of the Nookat administration head, Abdygany Aliev, and his deputy afterwards.¹⁰² The widespread instances of extortion by police officers reveals wealth accumulation as the primary motive for combating “Islamic extremism” at the local level. Additionally, the dismissal of Aliev can be understood as the government implicitly admitting that Aliev committed grave errors in his handling of the events of October 1 in Nookat.¹⁰³

After serving two years in prison, all those convicted were ultimately pardoned by the new government in 2010, but no investigations were opened against those officers who committed serious human rights violations and no compensation has been provided to the

thought, conscience, and religion by the Kyrgyz Republic, accessed March 27, 2015, http://www.ccpcentre.org/doc/2014/03/INT_CCPR_CSS_LVA_16484_R.pdf.

⁹⁸ Kabak, Abdirasulova, and Kolodzinskaya, alternative report of “Open viewpoint” Public Foundation.

⁹⁹ Kyrgyzstan: narusheniya prav cheloveka v svyazi s delom o “Nookatskih sobytiyah. “Memorial” Human Rights Center, January 27, 2009, accessed February 2, 2015, <http://www.memo.ru/2009/01/27/2701091.htm>.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ From the interview with Begizhan Akhmedov, a local expert in Islamic studies and a former officer of the SCNS.

¹⁰² Kyrgyzstan: narusheniya prav cheloveka v svyazi s delom o “Nookatskih sobytiyah. “Memorial” Human Rights Center, January 27, 2009, accessed February 2, 2015, <http://www.memo.ru/2009/01/27/2701091.htm>.

¹⁰³ Kyrgyzstan: narusheniya prav cheloveka v svyazi s delom o “Nookatskih sobytiyah.

Nookat residents.¹⁰⁴ Even though the possibility exists that Hizb-ut Tahrir members were indeed among the convicted residents, this event exposed the religious status-quo and relationship between religious communities and the state. Because all Nookat residents were eventually released, it is worth investigating if they were truly guilty. Ikbalzhan Mirsayitov argues that the Nookat events increased the social disorder in the already turbulent religious situation in the country, that ethnic Uzbeks continue to feel marginalized in social life of Kyrgyzstan,¹⁰⁵ and that the events persuaded many such Uzbeks to leave for Syria. Tellingly, the representative of the Tenth Unit of MIA assumes that many of those civilians who participated in the Nookat events avoided arrest and imprisonment by leaving for Syria.¹⁰⁶

The state's repressive policy toward the suspects without conducting adequate investigation, intimidates the religious communities of the South, and continues breeding mistrust of public administration, which has refused to punish the unwarranted use of torture. Consequently, the state itself has been creating fertile ground for radicalization by failing to deliver justice, adequately investigating, disrespecting the celebration of Muslim holidays, abusing Muslim community members' human rights, and allowing local police officers to be motivated by personal gain rather than promoting safety. Because of these reasons, the state allows public rhetoric to inaccurately portray all Muslims as radicals, and pays little attention to rights of Muslims to freely practice their religion.

The 2010 Bombing in Bishkek and Jaishul-i-Mahdi

Much as the Nookat events did, the case of Jaishul-i-Mahdi advances the argument that public officials incorrectly follow their duties. The court case of thirteen suspected extremists and terrorists has been ongoing since 2011, and will likely continue until enough comprehensive evidence is gathered. The Pervomaysky district court of Bishkek city banned Jaishul-i-Mahdi in

¹⁰⁴ Kabak, Abdirasulova, and Kolodzinskaya, alternative report of "Open viewpoint" Public Foundation.

¹⁰⁵ Ikbalzhan Mirsayitov said in "ISIS coverage by Kyrgyz media" press-café organized by "Search for Common Ground" international NGO in Bishkek on December 4, 2014, where the author was present as a participant.

¹⁰⁶ From the interview with a representative of the 10th Unit of the MIA of Kyrgyzstan, who requested anonymity

October 2012 and declared it a terrorist organization¹⁰⁷ because its members were found responsible for a number of alleged crimes. The constructed table below indicates those crimes and dates them.¹⁰⁸ Crucially, the timeline provided by the state appears unrealistically short considering that Jaishul-i-Mahdi was created in 2010 (month is unavailable to the author).¹⁰⁹ Taalai Zhaparov, the deputy director of the Anti-terrorist center of the SCNS, names Jaishul-i-Mahdi as a new terrorist and radical organization that was formed in Kyrgyzstan under the influence of extremist ideas spread on the Internet.¹¹⁰

#	Displays	Date
1	The bombing in a Bishkek synagogue	September 9, 2010
2	The two bombings in Tokmok town (70 km from Bishkek)	Date is unavailable to the author
3	The bombing near Sport's Palace in Bishkek	November 30, 2010
4	A murder of A. Alferov who allegedly was a witness of reconnaissance on the automobile track opposite of the US Embassy in Bishkek	On the night of December 20, 2010
5	An attack at the US citizen, Norton J. Richard's, house in Sokuluk town (Bishkek surrounding), burglary, and carjacking	December 24, 2010
6	An attempt of bombing near GUV ¹¹¹ in Bishkek with an improvised explosive device in the jacked car	On the night of December 25, 2010
7	A murder of three police officers of Oktyabrsky ROVD, ¹¹² N. Ysmanov, M. Sydykov, A. Sulaimanov in eighth micro-district of Bishkek city (is in composition of the Oktyabrsky district)	January 4, 2011
8	A murder of "Alpha" special unit member, J. Babraimov, during special operation on terrorists' seizure in Besh Kungei village (Bishkek surrounding)	January 5, 2011

Table 3

¹⁰⁷ "Zapreshennye religioznye ob'edineniya," Gosudarstvenny komitet po delam religii (the website of the State Committee in Religious Affairs), accessed April 13, 2015, http://www.religion.gov.kg/ru/not_registration_union.html.

¹⁰⁸ Artur Isaev, "Jaishul-i-Mahdi prigovorili," *Delo #*, July 25, 2013, accessed April 15, 2015, <http://delo.kg/index.php/iz-zala-suda/6121-zhajshul-makhdi-prigovorili>.

¹⁰⁹ Isaev, "Jaishul-i-Mahdi prigovorili."

¹¹⁰ Burulkan Sarygulova, "Zaputannoe delo Jaishul-i-Mahdi," *Azattyk*, May 2, 2013, accessed January 23, 2015, http://rus.azattyk.org/content/kyrgyzstan_sarygulova/24974316.html.

¹¹¹ Gorodskoe Upravlenie Vnutrennih Del (GUV) – City Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs

¹¹² Rayonnoe Upravlenie Vnutrennih Del (ROVD) – City's District Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs

In July 2013, the Oktyabrsky court of Bishkek city accused thirteen people of committing these crimes, but none of the suspects have pleaded guilty and some claim that they have never met the other accused individuals¹¹³. Lawyers point out the psychological disorders of some suspects,¹¹⁴ and one lawyer even considered Jaishul-i-Mahdi to be a fabrication of the SCNS.¹¹⁵ The lawyers emphasize that the case has been ongoing since 2011 because the judges do not have enough evidence to formally charge the suspects of the crimes.¹¹⁶

On July 18th 2013, when the Oktyabrsky district court in Bishkek sentenced life imprisonment for three suspects, 23 years imprisonment for four suspects, 22 years for two, 8 years for one, 7 years for another and 4 years for two,¹¹⁷ their defense launched the process of appealing the convictions, which is still ongoing today. Cholpon Dzhakupbekova, the lawyer of one of the suspects sentenced to life imprisonment, has requested for additional psychiatric analysis of her client's behavior, because she believes he has a psychological disorder that renders him ineligible for a life-long sentence.¹¹⁸ The crimes her client is convicted for include the murder of an "Alpha" special unit member, the murder of three police officers, financing terrorism, unauthorized appropriation of the rank or power of a state official, organizing activities aimed at inciting national, racial, religious or interregional hatred, dereliction of duty for educating minors, the use of violence against a government representative, organizing a of a criminal group, illegal manufacture or repair of weapons, and deliberate destruction or damage of property.¹¹⁹

¹¹³ Zairbek Baktybaev, "Jaishul-i-Mahdi: novye obshchestvennyye i beskonchnyye sud," *Azattyk*, June 19, 2012, accessed April 14, 2015, http://rus.azattyk.org/content/kyrgyzstan_mahdi/24619045.html.

¹¹⁴ From the court hearing at the Bishkek city court on February 13, 2015, where the author participated as a listener.

¹¹⁵ Baktybaev, "Jaishul-i-Mahdi: novye obshchestvennyye i beskonchnyye sud."

¹¹⁶ Burulkan Sarygulova, "Zaputannoe delo Jaishul-i-Mahdi," *Azattyk*, May 2, 2013, accessed January 23, 2015, http://rus.azattyk.org/content/kyrgyzstan_sarygulova/24974316.html.

¹¹⁷ Marat Uraliev, "Advokaty osuzhdennykh za terakty v Bishkeke zayavili otvod sudebnoi kollegii," *Vecherny Bishkek*, March 27, 2015, accessed April 14, 2015, http://www.vb.kg/doc/307909_advokaty_osyjdennykh_za_terakty_v_bishkeke_zaiavili_otvod_sydebnoy_kollegii.html.

¹¹⁸ From the court hearing at the Bishkek city court on February 13, 2015, where the author participated as a listener.

¹¹⁹ Marat Uraliev, "Po delu terroristov pyaterym podsudimym poprosili pojiznennoe lishenie svobody," *Vecherny Bishkek*, July 4, 2013, accessed April 15, 2015,

At a glance, it appears logistically difficult for a single individual to commit these crimes in so short a period of time. For example, two pairs of crimes occurred only a single day apart from each other: a house attack and a bombing attempt as well as the murder of three police officers of Oktyabrsky ROVD and the murder of “Alpha” special unit member. Dzhakupbekova’s request to conduct additional psychiatric examination to build a psychological portrait was not granted in February 2015 and she has appealed to Kyrgyzstan’s Supreme Court, the last court of appeal.¹²⁰

Lyudmila Sabelnikova, the lawyer of alleged suspected extremist sentenced to 23 years of imprisonment, also requested for specific psychological-psychiatric examination for her client.¹²¹ According to her, the first psychiatric examination of her client which took place on December 25th, 2011 and was conducted by investigative expert of the SCNS, resulted in a depthless and inconclusive psychological portrait due to the pressure of the SCNS investigator. This SCNS examination contains a contradiction.¹²² The section labelled “Psychological status” in the report, which Sabelnikova obtained in 2013, states that the suspect admitted his guilt and his membership in Jaishul-i-Mahdi and confessed to being in a car near Sport Palace during the 2010 bombing and committing the bombing attempt near GUV. Sabelnikova argues that instead of analyzing the psychological and psychiatric state of the suspect, the experts exploited the psychological review to coerce the suspect to admit guilt. She is puzzled by how psychological experts claimed the suspect’s involvement in the crimes and describe Jaishul-i-Mahdi as a terrorist when they were tasked to psychologically analyze the suspect. Even more puzzling is that the Pervomaysky court in Bishkek only recognized Jaishul-i-Mahdi as terrorist in 2012 whereas “the psychological portrait” with the “terrorist” allegation was composed in 2010.

http://www.vb.kg/doc/234890_po_dely_terroristov_piaterym_podsydimym_poprosili_pojiznennoe_lishenie_svobody.html.

¹²⁰ Uraliev, “Advokaty osuzhdenennyh za terakty v Bishkeke zayavili otvod sudebnoi kollegii.”

¹²¹ From the court hearing at the Bishkek city court on February 13, 2015, where the author participated as a listener.

¹²² From the court hearing at the Bishkek city court on February 13, 2015, where the author participated as a listener.

The lawyer informed the Bishkek city court that because an independent expert as well as the SCNS's own doctors verbally confirmed the personality disorder, adjustment disorder, delayed action, and a drain of life energy of the suspect, the panel of judges of the Bishkek court should allow the Republican Center of Psychiatric Health to organize an ambulant commission of psychological-psychiatric to officially examine her client. While describing in court his psychological particularities, which include talking to himself and hearing inner voices which call him to do certain actions, another suspect asked the judge to consider his comment that his cellmate, Sabelnikova's client, does not allow him sleep well as he frequently talks to himself. The lawyer indicates that Oktyabrsky district court, which tries initial cases, denied her motion to conduct psychological-psychiatric examination. According to her, the examination would have revealed whether the suspect willingly admitted to being a member of Jaishul-i-Mahdi or was pressured by criminal authorities and hypnosis, and also whether his individual psychological particularities could have affected his actions before he was arrested. Although all suspects were recognized mentally healthy by doctors of Kyzyl-Jar psychiatric hospital in Jalal-Abad,¹²³ the results are disputable because the Republican Center of Psychiatric Health in Bishkek could have performed an examination also.

Marat Abdyl daev, the lawyer of a suspect sentenced to 22 years of imprisonment, describes a number of improper actions taken by the SCNS, the Prosecutor's office, and the Oktyabrsky court regarding his client.¹²⁴ He argues that his client was arrested *de facto* on December 27th 2010, but the official documents, obtained by the lawyer in April 2014, claim the arrest occurred on December 29, 2010.¹²⁵ Abdyl daev claims the SCNS fabricated this date in

¹²³ Artur Isaev, "Jaishul-i-Mahdi prigovorili," *Delo #*, July 25, 2013, accessed April 15, 2015, <http://delo.kg/index.php/iz-zala-suda/6121-zhajshul-makhdi-prigovorili>.

¹²⁴ From the interview with Marat Abdyl daev, a lawyer of suspected extremist, in the Bishkek city court building after the court hearing on February 15, 2015

¹²⁵ From the interview with Marat Abdyl daev, a lawyer of suspected extremist, in the Bishkek city court building after the court hearing on February 15, 2015

order to avoid admitting to detaining him for more than 48 hours.¹²⁶ Remarkably, the Oktyabrsky court ordered a pre-trial detention on December 30, 2010, not giving the lawyer a chance to defend his client in the court before the decision.¹²⁷ Additionally, according to Abdyldaev, the investigators of the SCNS beat and tortured his client in order to coerce him into admitting guilt, which caused the suspect's attempt to commit suicide on the day after the arrest.¹²⁸ What also undermines the position of the state authorities is that on June 3rd, 2013 Abdyldaev obtained an official letter from the chief doctor of the SCNS, which declared that Abdyldaev's client did not seek medical attention from December 27th to December 30th, 2010, in the time period he was detained in a temporary detention center. The date of December 27 directly reveals that the suspect was in fact arrested on December 27th and, thus, his right to a defense had been violated.

The official of the Tenth Unit of MIA shared that procrastination of legal procedure occurs due to the gaps the lawyers have found in the work of state authorities.¹²⁹ Having asked to be anonymous, the state official revealed that security services could have invented Jaishul-i-Mahdi artificially. "When you talk to the arrested members of Jaishul-i-Mahdi, they do not admit they are the members; some say that they have heard the word "Jaishul-i-Mahdi" for the first time," the official said.¹³⁰ He explains that the alleged extremists may not identify with Jaishul-i-Mahdi because even though they may not act as a specific group, they can still act in the name of God. The MIA representative adds that Kyrgyz security services could have invented this group just as Russian security services have done. For example, in order to prevent the proliferation of the Salafists, the Russian security services attack potential Salafist targets that result in the deaths of innocent civilians. In order to avoid a public outcry and the need to justify their actions, security services assign those inadvertently killed to artificially created terrorist organizations.¹³¹

¹²⁶ From the interview with Marat Abdyldaev

¹²⁷ From the interview with Marat Abdyldaev

¹²⁸ From the interview with Marat Abdyldaev

¹²⁹ From the interview with a representative of the 10th Unit of the MIA of Kyrgyzstan, who requested anonymity

¹³⁰ From the interview with a representative of the 10th Unit of the MIA of Kyrgyzstan, who requested anonymity

¹³¹ From the interview with a representative of the 10th Unit of the MIA of Kyrgyzstan, who requested anonymity

In conclusion, the suspected members of Jaishul-i-Mahdi might actually have committed the crimes, but were then labelled as terrorists after the fact. Therefore, their actions should not necessarily be considered as acts of terrorism. Akin Toktaliev, the lawyer of one of the accused, argues that the suspects committed the acts of hooliganism and battery, but not terrorism; and he suggests that Jaishul-i-Mahdi is an SCNS fabrication intended to publicize anti-terrorist activity.¹³²

¹³² Burulkan Sarygulova, "Zaputannoe delo Jaishul-i-Mahdi," *Azattyk*, May 2, 2013, accessed January 23, 2015, http://rus.azattyk.org/content/kyrgyzstan_sarygulova/24974316.html.

Conclusion

Emil Zheenbekov, the deputy head of the Tenth Unit of the MIA, reveals that the expert community in Kyrgyzstan is not developed enough to identify extremists and terrorists in addition to conducting psychological examinations.¹³³ When linguists translate extremist literature, they often do not understand nuances of argument, while judicial and investigative expertise in the area is limited.¹³⁴ The opinions of two law enforcement representatives, the anonymous official of the Tenth Unit of the MIA and Zheenbekov, reveal a lack of insight on the situation between law enforcement and defense agencies and the religious parts of society. State authorities have difficulty in understanding new trends in Islamic practice because of the young people who left Kyrgyzstan after independence to study abroad in Arabic countries and returned with Salafi views, which differ from the moderate Islam that has existed in Central Asia for centuries in the form of the Hanafi Sunni School.¹³⁵ According to the SAMK representative, these groups discredit Islam in Kyrgyzstan and cause the SCNS and the MIA to develop a culture of “Islamophobia” because they were not taught religious education in school and are skeptical toward any religious displays. Comparing the two views, the state’s view and the view of academic community, this work tried to prove that the growth of radicalization is exaggerated and self-imagined in Kyrgyzstan due to actions taken by mentioned state officials.

When such claims as career advancement opportunities to arrest alleged members of destructive organizations, local police officers’ fear of being sacked for not contributing to increase the annual statistics detailing efforts to reduce crime, utilization of threat to distract the public from bigger concerns of national security, publicizing anti-terrorist activity happen to be, it creates inconsistency of information about radicalization processes and reveals religion and state relations in Kyrgyzstan. When the state itself creates conditions for religious

¹³³ From the interview with Emil Zheenbekov, a deputy head of the 10th Unit of the MIA of Kyrgyzstan

¹³⁴ From the interview with Emil Zheenbekov.

¹³⁵ From the interview with a representative of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan (SAMK), who requested anonymity

radicalization¹³⁶ by delivering improper justice as in the Nookat case when local police officers tortured suspects instead of thoroughly investigating the case both during the event and after the suspects' release under the new government, and in the Jaishul-i-Mahdi case when lawyers provided evidence disputing the public prosecution's suspicious claims of the existence of a new terrorist organization that committed crimes in an unrealistically short period of time, the moderate religious community of Kyrgyzstan remains vulnerable both externally and internally.

Among the evidence presented by the state to expose the growth of radicalization is the number of recruits who left Kyrgyzstan for Syria and a timeline of acts of radicalism, extremism and terrorism. To explain these arguments, the following logic should be applied. When the voices of muslim community members are not heard and there are no sophisticated tools to administer and assimilate muslim communities into the secular society of Central Asia,¹³⁷ then the predominantly Uzbek religious community experiences social marginalization. Because the states has adopted a restrictive and hostile policy toward the growing muslim community, religious muslims cannot rely on the state and instead turn inward to focus locally on their communities.¹³⁸ When social tension continues to occur, especially in the South of Kyrgyzstan, marginalized groups become more likely to seek external support by leaving their residences for Syria. The scant improvement in the religious situation and the lack of knowledge needed to differentiate religious groups cause a dearth of precise information on the numbers of people who leave for Syria and who are involved with destructive groups, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and Jaishul-i-Mahdi. This situation demands closer attention to the muslim communities as the growth of Islam is a legitimate aspect of new identity of states in Central Asia.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ From the interview with a local expert in Islamic law, who requested anonymity

¹³⁷ Alexander Wolters, "The State and Islam in Central Asia: Administering the Religious Threat or Engaging Muslim Communities?" *Forschungspapiere Research Papers* 3 (2014): 10, doi: pfh.for.203.1407.

¹³⁸ David Montgomery, "Islam beyond Democracy and State in Kyrgyzstan," in *Central Asian Affairs* 2 (2015): 35-50.

¹³⁹ Oliver Roy, *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

There was little research available that could have provided the evidence of the growth of radicalization and illustrated the acts of violent extremism and terrorism in Kyrgyzstan. The inconsistency of information provided by state authorities still hinders researchers' attempts to verify state-provided information. The work has tried to fill a gap in literature on Jaishul-i-Mahdi organization by exposing the perspective of lawyers. Although the literature of post-Soviet Islam in Central Asia is rich, it primarily focuses on radical Islam,¹⁴⁰ the particular insight on Jaishul-i-Mahdi organization has contributed to the research table on religious situation in Kyrgyzstan.

¹⁴⁰ Eric McGlinchey, "Islamic Revivalism and State Failure in Kyrgyzstan," *Problems of Post-Communism* 54, no. 3 (2009): 16-28, PDF, doi: 10.2753/PPC1075-8216560302.

Appendix I

List of individuals interviewed

1. A local expert, who requested anonymity. Tape recording. Bishkek. February 11, 2015.
2. Marat Abdyldaev, a lawyer of a suspected extremist in the Jaishul-i-Mahdi case. Tape recording. Bishkek. February 13, 2015.
3. Abdymomun Mamaraimov, an editor of *Golos Svobody* regional website covering human rights issues. Tape recording. Bishkek. February 13, 2015.
4. A representative of the Tenth Unit of the MIA of Kyrgyzstan, who requested anonymity. Tape recording. Bishkek. February 17, 2015.
5. Emil Nasritdinov, an independent researcher and an instructor of “Anthropology of Religion” course at the American University of Central Asia. Tape recording. Bishkek. February 19, 2015.
6. Begizhan Akhmedov, a local expert in Islamic studies and a former officer of the SCNS. Tape recording. Bishkek. February 19, 2015.
7. A representative of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan, who requested anonymity. Tape recording. Bishkek. February 20, 2015.
8. Emil Zheenbekov, head of the department for combating extremism and terrorism at the MIA of Kyrgyzstan. Tape recording. Bishkek. February 20, 2015.
9. Alisher Khamidov, an independent researcher and a local expert in religious studies. Tape recording. Bishkek. February 27, 2015.

Appendix II

Questions asked to interviewees

1. Please name the main threats to Kyrgyzstan's national security.
2. What kind of activity do religious groups or leaders do to think they are extremists?
3. Which activity do law enforcement bodies do to combat extremism?
4. How many people in Kyrgyzstan left the country for the so-called *jihad* in Syria?
5. Which events display religious hatred in independent Kyrgyzstan?
6. Which spheres of life can Islam touch?
7. What is radical Islam? What discredits Islam in Kyrgyzstan?
8. Which indicators exist to determine if a person is an extremist?
9. Why do Kyrgyz courts not have enough evidence for suspected extremists?
10. What is your attitude toward the Concept of State Policy in Religious Affairs?

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<http://www.religion.gov.kg/ru/%D0%9A%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%86%D0%B5%D0%BF%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F%20%D0%B3%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%83%D0%B4%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B9%20%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B8%20%D0%9A%D1%8B%D1%80%D0%B3%D1%8B%D0%B7%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B9%20%D0%A0%D0%B5%D1%81%D0%BF%D1%83%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B8%20%D0%B2%20%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B3%D0%B8%D0%BE%D0%B7%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B9%20%D1%81%D1%84%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B5%20%D0%BD%D0%B0%202014-2020%20%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4%D1%8B.pdf>

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