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**The relations between political
Islam and the state in central
Asia “The case of studying the
islamic renaissance party (IRP),
hizb ut-tahrir (Ht), and the
islamic movement of uzbekistan
(IMU)”**

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ABSTRACT

The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 has prompted the resurgence of Islam and the appearance of Islamic movements in Central Asia. Although most of these Islamic movements share the same goal, i.e., creating an Islamic caliphate, they differ in their attitude to achieve this goal. Thus, these movements were treated differently by the ruling regimes. This study expounds on the emergence of political Islam in Central Asia with the focus on three movements, namely the Islamic renaissance party (IRP), Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), and the Islamic movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The study highlights the complex relationship between these political movements and the state and oversees the future of political Islam in Central Asia.

Keywords: Central Asia; Political Islam; Islamic Renaissance Party; Hizb ut-Tahrir; the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan

المخلص

تركز هذه الدراسة على العلاقة بين النظم السياسية في آسيا الوسطى وحركات الإسلام السياسي ومستقبل هذه الحركات من خلال المنهج التحليلي. وتلقي الضوء على أهم حركات الإسلام السياسي في آسيا الوسطى، وهي حزب النهضة الإسلامي وحزب التحرير، والحركة الإسلامية الأوزبكية وعلاقتها بالنظم السياسية، ومستقبل الإسلام السياسي ومستقبل هذه الحركات في ظل الأنظمة السلطوية في آسيا الوسطى.

الكلمات المفتاحية: وسط آسيا، الإسلام السياسي، حزب النهضة الإسلامي، حزب التحرير، الحركة الإسلامية الأوزبكية.

INTRODUCTION

Islam emerged in Central Asia – the area which lies to the north of today's Iran and extends from the Caspian Sea in the West to China's Xinjiang Province in the east – at the beginning of the seventh century, where people embraced it gradually until it became the dominant religion by the ninth century. Since the Bolshevic revolution and after centuries of non-interfered Islamic practices, Muslims in Central Asia started to encounter political and social challenges by the ruling regime (Senia Makna, 2016:2-9).

In the mid- 1920s, a full-scale assault on Islam was launched where most of the Central Asian mosques were destroyed, and the Islamic clergy was decimated. However, Islamic beliefs and practices of everyday life

survived until world war II, which brought a softening of the regime's anti-religion campaign. While the clergy was formally prohibited from proselytizing and was deeply compromised by the political police, the Islamic establishment was legalized, and some signs of Islamic renaissance started to appear. A Muslim Religious Board was established in Tashkent for Central Asia and Kazakhstan, emerging as the most prestigious Muslim religious board in the Soviet Union (Anastasia Ganich, 2006:21).

Despite official hostility, Central Asian Muslims preserved their non-politicized Islamic practices such as daily prayers, shrines visiting, and Islamic life cycle rituals such as circumcisions, marriages, and funerals. However, Islamic revival was more evident during Gorbachev's reforms, specifically after endorsing a liberal Union Law in 1989. The number of Central Asian people making the hajj to Mecca increased dramatically. Hundreds of imams and mullahs, as well as students in Islamic schools within Central Asia and abroad, multiplied. Notably, the Islamic revival in Central Asia was non-political, and it was represented as an element of traditional culture rather than political ideology. The cultural and political intelligentsia of the Muslim peoples of the Soviet Union, trained in Soviet institutions of higher learning, tended to be highly secular as they refrained from embracing Islam as a tool for political mobilization.

Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, which was an unwelcome surprise, the Central Asian republics were forced to sudden independence without prior preparedness. They had many daunting challenges, including huge population, ethnicity, poor political and economic condition. Therefore, the republics chose Islam as a doctrine and social identity against Russian ideology and Soviet policies (Rafi's Abazov, 2007:42).

Soviet dissolution prompted the resurgence of Islam and helped the appearance of Islamic political movements, which refilled the prevailing ideological vacuum. As a result, Central Asia experienced the mushrooming of various Islamist groups such as the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). These groups existed clandestinely during the Soviet era, but they came into the open during Gorbachev's reforms. Other groups came into the scene and became more active, like Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT). All of these groups share the same objective

– the building of the Islamic Caliphate– but they have different approaches to achieve their goals.

Study problem

What is the relationship of political Islamic movements in Central Asia to their political systems and Is it a peaceful or violent relationship?

Study methodology

The paper used the historical and analytical method to know the political history of Islam and the nature of political system, and then analyze the relationship between political Islamic movements and their political system in Central Asia

Study questions

- What is political Islam and how it appear in Central Asia?
- What is the nature of political systems in Central Asia?
- What is the relationship of political Islamic movements in Central Asia to their political systems?
- Is it a peaceful or violent relationship between the political Islamic movements and their regimes?
- What is the future of political Islam in Central Asia?

Literature review

1- The nature of political systems and the origin of political Islam in Central Asia.

There are many researchers who dealt with political Islam and the nature of political systems like (Soadat Olimova, 2011) whose article is “Islamic revival in Central Asia “. It focused on the nature of Asian states and political Islam in Central Asia. The researchers tried to answer how traditional Islam has influenced the present political culture of the Central Asian elites and societies. He also focused on the nature of political systems in Central Asia.

There are others who have taken this point like (Mariy Y. Omelicheva, 2020) whose book is “Democracy and Dictatorship in Central Asia “. She focused on the nature of political regimes in Central Asia and she prospected for their democratic transformation has grown considerably since the second half of 1990s. She also focused on comprehensive overview of the region’s soviet past and the post independence trajectories of Central Asian systems.

There are other researchers like (Christian W. Haerfer, 2014) whose article is “Values and transformation in Central Asia” the aim of the article is to interpret post – soviet political changes in Central Asia from the prospective stability versus change of political values especially how support for democracy freedom, acceptance of authoritarianism. He answered the question: Do self expression values have changed or remained stable over time? And how this has fueled the dynamics of post-soviet policies transition?

Also, (Jalym Zhussipbek, 2017) whose article is “political Islam in Central Asia”. He focused on an overview on the notion of political Islam and how it appear in Central Asia and the relation between political systems in Central Asia and political movements.

And (Sebastien Peyrous, 2018) whose article is “The rise of political Islam in soviet Central Asia.” His article proposed to challenge the idea that the appearance of Islamists in Central Asian states were made possible and occurred only after the collapse of soviet union. He also focused on the current trends in islamists ideology and the relation between Asian states and political Islamic movments in Central Asia

2- The relation between political Islamic movements and their political Asian regimes.

There are many researchers have addressed this point like:

- (Adam Saud, 2016) whose article “Islamic renaissance party of Tajikistan : past, present, future” he focused on how Islamic revival in Central Asia and how traditional Islam has influenced the present political culture of the Central Asian elites and societies. He also focused on Islam Renaissance party from where the origin of the party, its objectives and its relation with Asian political regimes.
- Also, (Titiana Panchenko, 2017) whose article is “Central Asia : a space for silk democracy”. His article focused on the nature of Asian regimes in Central Asia. He also concentrated on the most important political Islamic movements and their relation with Asian regimes.
- (Emmanuel Karagianuis, 2010) whose book is “political Islam in Central Asia”. His article concentrated on the Hizb Ut Tahrir (HT) from where background of the party, the relation between HT and its political regimes and the prospects for the future of (HT).
- And (E. Karagianuis, 2010) whose essay focused on the ideology of Hizb Ut Tahrir and its political methodology. The essay also explained

its internal organization and its relation with other political Islamic movements in Central Asia.

There are many researchers pay attention to the Islamic movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) like:

- (Jacob Zenn and Kathleen Kueanst,2012) whose article is “violent Extremism in Kyrgyzstan. He focused on the history of violence in Central Asia and he concentrated on the origin of Islamic movement of Uzbekistan and Hizb Ut Tahrir. He analyzed the reasons of violent in Central Asia and the relation between Asian political regimes and IMU. Also he focused on the role of the regional powers to prevent violence in Central Asia.
- (International crisis group, 2010) whose article is “Radical Islam in Central Asia”. The article analyzed the most important political movements in Central Asia like Hizb ut Tahrir, Isalmic Renaissance party and Islamic movements of Uzbekistan. It concentrated on the relation between them and the relation between these movements and their political regimes.
- (Ulan Sadibekov, 2014)whose book is “Science in defense analyze”. He explained Islamic movements of Uzbekistan (IMU) through social movements theory and analyzing its potential threat to Kazakhstan. He focused on IMU from its background, mobilizing structure and the future of IMU in Central Asia. He also focused on the relation between IMU and other violent Islamic movements in Central Asia.
- And (Zeyno Baran, 2006)whose book is “Islamic radicalism in Central Asia and the caucasus” he concentrated on the current of islamic radicalism in Central Asia. He also explained socio economic factors that help to create islamic radicalism in the region. He analyzed the relation between the radical islamic movements and their regimes.
- Also (Vitaly V. Naumkin, 2003) whose article is “Militant Islam in Central Asia :the case of Islamic movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)”. He focused on the causes of islamic radicalism. He also concentrated on the ideology of IMU and their terrorist attacks in Central Asia. He explained the relation between IMU and its political regime and the relation with Muslims in the Middle East

3- Future of political Islam and political Islamic movements

- There are many researchers contributed to this point like :

- (Ghadbeigy and M. Ahangarian, 2020) whose article is “Future of political Islam in Central Asia in the light of Syrian crisis”. This article is focused to explain the thoughts of Islamic movements in Central Asia and the future of Islamic movements in the light of the Syrian Civil War. He explained how Syrian civil war may lead to a possible extension of the wave Islamic extremism to Central Asia region. He focused on the future of political Islam in Central Asia and Middle East.
- (Emmanuel Karagiannis, 2019) whose article is “The new face of political Islam in Central Asia”. He focused on the history of political Islam in Central Asia region. He also concentrated on the Islamic movements in Central Asia. He explained how political Islam is currently undergrowing a transitional phase and there is a new face of political Islam in Central Asia so he focused on the rise of Islam-democrats phenomena in the Asian region.
- (Sania Makna, 2020) whose article is “Islam and politics in Central Asia”. She focused on the historical relation of Islam in Central Asia and its influence on the current politics of Central Asia. The study tries to reveal that soviet rule could not separate Central Asian people from its traditional religious practices.

The paper is an attempt to analyze how Islam had created religious extremism and political extremism in Central Asia and how the current governments are tackling the situation of Islam and politics and religious extremism in Central Asia.

This study focuses on three groups as representatives of Islamic political movements, providing deeper insight into the political Islam phenomena and Islamic movements in Central Asia and their relation with the ruling regime.

1. Overview of political Islam

The term Political Islam, that is, Islam as a political ideology rather than a religion, has multiple, somewhat overlapping definitions. At the most basic level, adherents of political Islam believe that Islam as a body of faith has something important to say about how politics and society should be ordered in the contemporary Muslim world and they seek to implement this idea in some fashion (Graham Fuller, 2005:15).

However, this generalization does not get very far in explaining the political activity undertaken in the name of Islam. A more analytical definition for political Islam is that it is a form of instrumentalization of Islam by individuals, groups, and organizations that pursue political objectives. This definition indicates that political Islam provides political responses to today's societal challenges by imagining a future on appropriated and reinvented concepts retrieved from the Islamic tradition (Guilian Denooux, 2002:45). Others define political Islam as the phrase used to denote a wide range of individuals and associations dedicated to the creation of the Islamic State and society. The term also refers to Islam conceived as a set of beliefs, a code for conduct, or a repertory of images and metaphors relevant to politics, as well as to various attempts to define an "Islamic State" or "State Order" (Ayub Nazih, 1991:37).

Others argue that political Islam should be understood in the broadest sense possible as the range of modern political movements, ideological trends, and state-directed policies concerned with giving Islam an authoritative status in political life (J. Esposito, 2006:61).

Islamist trends can range from left-leaning protest movements to ultraconservative ones aiming to have social control over morality. Also, Islamist political groups differ in their attitudes towards existing political regimes, ranging from quietism to the desire to be a rival participant in politics and, in extreme cases, to engaging in militant violence. While some Islamist political groups are willing to work within *un-Islamic* political systems, some propagate radicalism.

2. The political system in the Central Asian States

During the early years of independence within the Central Asian States, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, there was considerable optimism about the future of these new countries. At the same time, western governments devoted important resources to the consolidation of democratic politics and institutions in the region. By the late 1990s, however, it became hard to avoid the conclusion that rather than participating in a broad movement towards democracy, almost all Central Asian States had bucked wider trends by the engagement in regular and widespread violation of human rights. There were attempts to repress not simply opposition forces but almost any independent voice. In 1998, Freedom House ranked many of the Central Asian States as among the most

authoritarian in the world, alongside regimes such as Iraq, North Korea, and Yugoslavia (Freedom House, 1998,p.30). Clear evidence of a shift towards authoritarianism was apparent in all the five Central Asian States.

Four elements distinguish the current regimes of Central Asia:

i) Facade democracy

Authoritarianism – facade democracy – serves as a mechanism for legitimating a new relationship between state and society in Central Asia. The Central Asian states have established the formal institutions of modern democracy by writing the constitution, holding elections, establishing parties, and developing legal systems. However, these political institutions and activities were ignored and overridden by the leaders of Central Asian states. Indeed, these institutions and practices were exploited to support the new political orders of Central Asia, and the facade of democracy legitimated a new relationship between state and society in Central Asia where the newly born Asian system has taken away the people’s right to democracy (Neil J. Melvin, 2004: 22).

ii) Executive Power

Executive power concentrated in the hands of a single figure within each Central Asian state. The new rulers depended mainly on patronage networks rather than parties or formal institutions to reinforce their power. Thus, neo-patrimonial regimes have emerged, leading to the loss of accountability, lessened effectiveness of new institutions, and destruction of the Soviet-era institutions (Paul Kubicek, 1998:122).

iii) Unitary States

Under the guise of state-building, the leaders of the Central Asian states have concentrated power in the new national capitals to an unprecedented level. Political space has been reordered, and the power of regional elites has been undermined, and their relationship to the center was refashioned (Neil J. Melvin, 2001:11).

iv) Radical Policies

The new regimes in Central Asia have adopted a series of radical policies that transform the nature and distribution of political power. These regimes have fastened new national ideologies, reshaped identities, transferred wealth, reorganized the state in each republic, and refashioned elite structures. All these measures have been put into practice by force and compulsion (Frank Everars & Jeannette Klotzer, 2018:24).

However, force and compulsion adopted by the regimes of Central Asian States differ. While the political order in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan resembles the Soviet Union Sultanic regime with exceedingly powerful rulers, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have important spaces of more liberal politics. There are opportunities for pluralism and opposition in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. However, all Asian regimes could be classified as authoritarian ones, and the difference among them indicates that authoritarian policies may vary according to policy choices, institutional design, traditions, and culture.

3. The emergence of political Islam in the Central Asian states

Islam in the times of the Soviet Union featured less space for development (Volpi, 2011:48). Islamic faith practices had been subject to state control and strict supervision. The practices of assaulting the religious communities and abolishing their infrastructure initiated by Stalin and aggravated by Lenin moved devout Muslims into the shadow. Soviet policies toward Islam changed with Gorbachev's policy of "openness" that resulted, among other things, in the cessation of state persecution of religion in the country. The whole of the Soviet Union witnessed a religious revival, as people of all religious backgrounds began to seek the moral values that have been under attack for so long in Soviet times (Wolter, 2014:55).

The collapse of the Soviet Union, the official ideology in Central Asian countries, created an atmosphere of political, economic, and social crises coupled with an ideological vacuum. These daunting circumstances have prompted many Central Asian Muslims to adopt Islam as the only alternative to communism (M.B. Olcott, 2007:17).

All Central Asian States use Soviet style institutional mechanism of dealing with Islam. During Soviet era, an Islamic institution called SADUM was established in Tashkent in 1973. It was the state control to Islamic affairs and served as an indicator for reduced role of Islam in Soviet Central Asia. SADUM split into national administrations between 1990 and 1992 like "The Muslim Board of Uzbekistan", and after a brief period of independence, were brought back under state control. The tasks of these Islamic institutions are regulating and managing all observance of Islam and Islamic education. Since independence, even as the states celebrate the place of Islam in their cultural history, they retain strict control over Islamic expression through these institutions (Ern Murat Tasar, 2011:68-69).

There is a general assertion that Islam as an ideology is like any other religion in the Soviet Union neither served as a point of departure for political critique nor as an alternative to organize everyday life. However, this viewpoint has been questioned. "Soviet Muslim" created ways to preserve, develop and evolve the need to practice Islam. These devote Muslims were able to combine Soviet doctrines of Marxism-Leninism with Islamic values and practices (Kamp, 2010:27). After the independence of Central Asian States, there was a surge of interest in Islam, including the emergence of Islamist Political groups seeking to challenge the secular nature of these new states. The heavy-handed repression of early manifestations of political Islam led to confrontation, violence, and the appearance of extremist and terrorist groups (ICG, 2003:211).

Early political Islam emerged in some parts of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan under these circumstances at the beginning of the 1990s. There were two Islamic movements in Central Asia the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).

These societies were culturally Muslims that had been deprived of a formal Islamic education system and Islamic intellectual life for seventy years. However, political Islam, being a popular rather than an elitist movement or ideology, needs to have more or less solid intellectual and social underpinning. Political Islam cannot represent the public visibility of religious Muslims simply because the public sphere is wider than the political sphere and the Soviet ideals of national cultures were deeply settled in the minds of Asian people (Emmanuel Karagiannis, 2012:90).

4. The relation between the Islamic political movements in Central Asia and their political regimes

This paper will concentrate on three Islamic movements in Central Asia and their relations with the Asian political regimes, namely, the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).

4.1. The Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP)

The origin of the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) goes back to Muhammad Rustomov Hindustani who is regarded as the most influential underground spiritual leader in the Soviet era. He had studied at the Madrassa in Deoband, in India, then he returned home to open a clandestine madrassa in Dushanbe, in Tajikistan in 1970s. The party was founded and headed by

the most prominent students of Hindustani, Muhammad Sherif Himmat Zada and Sayyid Abdullah Nuri. The latter was arrested and charged of organizing a protest against Russian occupation of Afghanistan. After a year he was released and resumed his political activities and became the leader of the IRP after the death of Himmat Zada (Abdeeb, K., 2007:129).

IRP was officially established in 1990 in Tajikistan as a branch of the Soviet Union-wide IRP, which was formed three months earlier in Russia. IRP was given some support by the to take support away from nationalists while pushing against the communist Kremlin party in Tajikistan that was giving the Kremlin problems. The IRP received legal recognition as a political party in the changed political climate that existed after 1991. Although the party existed before the disintegration of the Soviet Union with widespread branches, IRP focused explicitly on republic level politics and national identity rather than supranational issues (Adam Saud, 2010:59).

The party which is considered the second-largest party in Tajikistan has started with an opening membership of about 10,000 members and nowadays its membership is about 40,000 members under the leadership of Muhiddin Kabiri. IRP presented itself as a socio-political organization that denounce ethnic and national conflicts. It was firm in the view that it respected the state's constitution and rejected terrorism. The party's initial platform, which was made public, clearly demonstrates its comprehensively religious orientation as follows (Muhiddin Kabiri, 2016:3)

- To explain to people the real meanings of Holy Quran and Hadith.
- To call to Islam by all means of mass media.
- To fight national and radical discrimination, impudence, crime, alcoholism and all other things that are forbidden by Islamic Law through understanding and appeal.
- To educate young people on the principles of Islam and for this purpose, to create instruction and training centers and madrassah.
- To strengthen Islamic brotherhood, develop religious relations with the Muslim world and seek for a relationship of equal rights with representative of other religions.
- To cooperate with other democratic parties and state organizations in all fields.
- To ensure the distribution of food according to the Sharia.
- To solve the problems of people according to Holy Quran and Hadith.

- To implement the principles of Islamic economy.

IRP has adopted tranquil manners for the removal of morally wrong practices of Tajik society. These manners incorporate holding symposiums and conversations on community wicked actions, conferences, and discourses. Furthermore, women have been given an energetic part in party activities. The party concentrated on intellectuals and students in addition to individuals from religious background. The party convened its conference and cleverly was taken part in politics, conscripting young people and wonderfully struggling with the executive authorities.

4.2. 4.1.1 The relation between IRP and the political regime in central Asia

The party tried to be lawfully recognized during the Soviet era, but could not achieve this end. It continued its struggle till it was recognized by the authorities in Tajikistan after independence and was legally registered as a political party in 1991. In 1992 a civil war broke out and lasted for five years when the party protested against the presidential elections. IRP headed a grouping of opposition parties and made use of mass mobilization and political agitation to form an alliance with the name of the United Tajik Front. The civil war had greatly affected Tajikistan's infrastructure and around 1-2 million people were refugees and nearly 100,000 were killed. A peace treaty was signed in 1997, where the political opposition was given a quota of 30% of the government bodies (Alaxey Malashen ko, 2010:81).

The peace agreement resulted in reintegrating the military formations of the party into the state's military police and civil government frames. Yet, a crack had occurred within the party's leadership concerning the peace agreement as it was not fully agreed upon. IRP has changed a lot, the party shared parliamentary elections getting only two seats and although it alleged government for rigging, it accepted the results and continued its political struggle peacefully, showing a change from radical to moderate reforming tendency. Moreover, the successive leaders of the party declared that armed struggle could not be the only function of the Islamic movements of Central Asia (Elmira Nogoybayeva, 2017:37).

party was prominent and got widespread fame among the people in 2000, and was officially attached to The the large body of the national legislature of Tajikistan. Nevertheless, it was suppressively treated and in 2010 the authorities closed the party's women mosque. The IRP took part in

the parliamentary elections in 2000, 2005 and 2010 and won 2 out of 63 seats, refusing to acknowledge the election results. At the election held on March 2015, the party failed to surpass the 5% vote barrier losing its only 2 seats in parliament according to statement issued by Tajik Justice Ministry on August 2015. The Justice Ministry declared that the party did not have enough members to qualify as an officially registered party and it could not legally continue its activities and, accordingly, all the parties branches in 58 cities and districts across Tajikistan had been closed. The leadership of the party declared in 2015 that the government of Tajikistan was trying to cease the activities of the party on the ground that the Deputy Minister of Defence – Abdul Halim Nazarzod – was a member of the party and was responsible for Vadhat district police station's attack. The party rebuked this allegation and thirteen of its top members were arrested (Marianne Laruelle, 2016:29). The people's democratic party on Tajikistan won the March 2015 parliamentary elections and it was the first time since Tajikistan's independence that the IRP failed to meet the 5% threshold needed to win parliamentary seats. In September 2015, the Tajik Supreme Court called the IRP a terrorist organization and banned its activities in the country. The government alleged that the IRP was involved in a deadly attack on the main police station. The Tajik Government has jailed several top IRP, while many former opposition fighters have been gradually forced out of position in the Tajik security services. Kabiri, who is currently in exile, had already accused the government of closing a number of mosques and banning women and children from attending mosques (Nazarali Pirnazovi, 2016:21).

A year after its ban, Tajik authorities prohibited the establishment of any political party based on religious objectives, effectively preempting any attempt to reorganize the party. In 2018, the leaders of IRP fled to Poland and they became one of the founding organization of National alliance of Tajikistan. National alliance is a group uniting several opposition Tajik political movements and parties (Malgosia Krakowska, 2018:58). Currently, IRP is planning to build a constructive relationship that is interested in a stable and democratic Tajikistan, where it set up members and supporters of the party and the National Alliance for a difficult, possibly long battle that is, most importantly, waged by peaceful means (Bruce Pannier, 2019:139).

4.3. Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT)

Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) was founded as a political organization in 1953 in Jordanian-controlled Jerusalem by Taqiuddin an-Nabhani, a Palestinian Islamic scholar who served as a religious court judge in Mandatory Palestine and died in 1977. Abdul Qadeem Zallum, the author of 'How the Khilafah was destroyed', held the party's office after an-Nabhani's death. Zallum died in 2003, and he was succeeded by Ata Abu Rashta, a Palestinian Islamic jurist, scholar, and writer. Abu Rashta succeeded in establishing the party's intellectual leadership and representing HT as an international organization popular in nearly fifty countries throughout the world (Ahmed Aktab, 2021:33).

first HT started in Central Asia in Uzbekistan, and it began to expand into other places in Central Asia. Currently, HT is the fastest-growing Islamic organization in Central Asia, with almost one million members. The reason for this rapid spread might be due to the absence of other competitors (Susane Olsson, 2021:49).

does HT not view itself as a religious organization but as a political party based on Islamic values. HT's political doctrine is founded on two principles; the need for Islamic Law and the need for an authentic Islamic State to reestablish the caliphate (Taqi al Din-Nubhani, 1998:129). HT may be the only self-described political party that calls for the unity of the Umma (unity which seeks to establish the original caliphate and Islamic law). According to Nabhani, the prophet's work was performed in clearly defined stages, each stage was used to perform specific actions that led to the creation of Shari'a (Ahmed Rashi, 2003:19). To achieve its goals of creating Islamic form of state, there were three distinct stages: the first stage is reaching to many muslims to persuade them to accept the goals of the party. The second stage involves interaction with the Muslim community, where HT attempts to persuade the *Umma* to embrace its view of Islam, so that the Islamic way of life becomes an everyday practice for each Muslim. The third stage sees the establishment of an Islamic government that will implement the norms and practices of Shari'a, generally carrying it as a message to the world (Taji-Farouki, 2003:179).

HT effectively combines Marxist-Leninist methodology and western slogans with Islamist ideology to shape internal debate within Islam. HT also bears striking similarities to the early Bolshevik movement as both the

caliphate and communism have utopian political goals, and both dislike liberal democracy. HT insists on non-violence to achieve its goal, and its party's leaflets, accessible over the internet in various languages, provide coherent explanations of current events that fit its ideological framework. The language of these leaflets is simple and direct. On the other hand, the party was keen to keep the information about the organizational and monetary structure secret. Besides, the party members take oaths not to reveal any information even under interrogation (Michael, Whine, 2004:42).

HT is more active in rural areas where poverty and unemployment are widespread. Moreover, family and other informal network ties are more potent in these areas, providing more access to potential recruits and more safety. Anyone rejecting HT's overtures is unlikely to report a family or clan member who supports HT to authorities. HT is also popular among the commercial class, especially those who are engaged in wholesale trading operations. HT's call for unifying the Central Asian states appeals to cross-border traders and others frustrated by the rigid and dysfunctional borders in the region (Abdul Qadeem Zallum, 2016:57). Also, HT is highly active in prisons, which are among the best places to convert people to radical Islam. Relatives of the imprisoned, especially women, are particularly easy to recruit.

4.2.1 The relation between Hizb ut-Tahrir and the political regime in central Asia

The relation between HT and its political regime went through three stages. During the first stage (early 1993 till February 1999), the group mainly engaged in religious and socio-economic propaganda activities to recruit new members. These new members were organized into self-reliant groups of three to seven people, called *halkan*. These members were ordered to bring all their family members, including females, into the organization. The authorities stifle channels for legitimate civic expression or securing practical change through democratic means has empowered HT's campaign.

The second stage (February 1999 till April 2003) followed the terrorist attacks in Tashkent in 1999. In June 2001, HT stated clearly in its *Al-Waie Journal* that it is acceptable to carry out suicide attacks with explosive belts. In 2002, HT argued that suicide bombs in Israel are a legitimate tactic of war. In addition, HT leaflets emphasized jihad against the Americans and the

Jewish people. HT has entered the third stage, during which it attempts to overthrow governments and build an Islamic caliphate.

Although it claims to be nonviolent, HT acknowledges that violence may eventually be necessary in order to overthrow the regimes standing in the way of the caliphate. Several groups have split from HT and challenged HT's commitment to nonviolent methods. One of them is Al-Muhajiroun, an extremely radical organization founded in 1996 by Omar Bakri Muhammed, a former HT member. Another group is Akramiylar, established in 1996 in Uzbekistan under the leadership of Akram Yuldashev. Akamiylar aims to gather enough strength to greatly influence the regional authorities. A third group Hizb un Nusrat that was founded in Tashkent in 1999. Its current leader and founder is Mirzazhanov Sharipzhon. Hizb un Nusrat was accused by the Uzbekistan government of engagement in radical Islamic activities (Kathy Gannon, 2005:49).

Political authorities of Central Asia have responded differently to the existing challenge posed by HT. Authorities in Uzbekistan keep religion and government separate and Uzbek authorities have taken a particularly harsh stance against HT, accusing the group of organizing terrorist attacks. In mid-2005, President Karimov claimed that the group orchestrated riots in Andizhan, a city in Ferghana Valley, which led the country to a new phase of instability. Karimov regime has portrayed itself as a pro-western bastion of secularism and democracy, fighting its own war on terrorism against Islamic militants. However, Tashkent has failed to persuade western governments to declare HT a terrorist organization. Repression by the Uzbek government has given HT a certain mystique among some of the population. Additionally, poor economic policies and a vacuum of ideology have increased support for a group that advocated a universal Muslim state with no national distinctions (Zeyna Baran, 2006:115-127). Nowadays, the Uzbek leadership punishes anyone suspected of HT activity. In Kyrgyzstan, HT takes advantage of the country's relatively relaxed political atmosphere to launch public relations campaigns. In Tajikistan, authorities jailed many members of HT and punished anyone in HT party. In Kazakhstan, HT is still growing its cadres while avoiding a confrontation with the authorities (Rich Dave, 2015:90).

Although Hizb ut-Tahrir is banned throughout Central Asia and accused by the governments of Central Asia of terrorist activity, it succeeded to spread in all over Central Asian states. Indeed, HT is in a good position to increase

its popularity for many reasons; First, HT calls for a return to Islamic values that would fill what is perceived as a dangerous moral vacuum. Second, It casts itself as an organization bent on achieving justice by reinstating the Islamic law in Central Asia countries where the rule of law is weak and corrupted. Third, the party's rejection of violence as a political means is a highly significant factor in HT's popularity (Susanne Olssen, 2021:73).

4.4. Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)

IMU was formed in 1992 by Tahir Yuldashev in the Namangan region of Uzbekistan. Yuldashev's views were shaped by extensive travel to Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. His radical view spread throughout the network of mosques and madrassas in the Ferghana Valley. Yuldashev unified the four radical Islamist groups Adolat, Islam Laskarlari, Barak, and Tauba, under the framework of the IMU (Michael Fredholm, 2003:119). Yuldashev's ally, Juma Namangani, became the military commander of the IMU. By 1998, before that there were hundreds of Uzbek mujahidin training and operating between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, taking advantage of Tajikistan civil war.

IMU has been an active organization in Central Asia since 1998. Before that time, it was not well-organized and consisted of different unnamed groups. After the U.S invasion of Afghanistan that followed the September 11 attacks in New York, IMU shifted to the Afghan and Pakistan border. During this invasion, its leader Juma Namangani was killed in 2001, and Tahir Yuldashev was killed in 2009. The group was forced to change its location and deviate from its original goals of attacking the Uzbek government. Despite those changes, IMU continued to operate in Pakistan against coalition forces. Today, IMU takes the form of a decentralized network that has become stronger. Even though it was displaced from its original location, the IMU continues to gain strength (Ulan Sadibekov, 2014:89).

The headquarter of IMU is in Afghanistan. Its leaders were Juma Namangani (1998-2001), Tahir Yuldshev (2001-2009), Abu Usman Adil (2010 to 2012), Usman Ghaz (2012-2015), Aziz Yuldash (2015-2020). The current leader of IMU is unknown and its membership size is currently about 500-3000 members (Roggio Bill, 2018:23).

The goal of IMU was to overthrow the Uzbek regime and replace it with an Islamic State. However, the IMU's goals have broadened to include

establishing a radical Islamic caliphate in Turkestan that stretches from the Caspian region to Xinjiang in Western China (Hassan Abbas, 2014:3).

Some members split from IMU, founding the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU). IMU and IJU have their bases of operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan. IMU was closely allied to Al Qaeda, the Afghan Taliban, and the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and frequently conducted joint military operations in Afghanistan. In August 2015, after a period of declining relations with the Afghan Taliban, the IMU pledged loyalty to the Islamic State (IS). This was a controversial move that had resulted in hostile relations with the Afghan Taliban in the Afghan-Pakistan region. The IMU subsequently began fighting against government forces in Afghanistan's northern provinces and Pakistan alongside IS's regional affiliate, the Islamic State Khorasan province (IS-KP) (Azamy, Hekmatullah, 2015:33).

4.3.1 The relation between IMU and the political regime in central Asia

In 1991, IMU moved to challenge the Uzbek government, where an Agitated mob stormed government offices and public buildings in Namangan. The Uzbek president, Islam Karimov, was able to end the unrest, initially using negotiations and then applied force. IMU has carried out several attacks in various parts of Central Asia.

In February 1999, militants launched five simultaneous car bombs in Tashkent, the Uzbek capital, one of which almost killed president Karimov. The Uzbek government blamed the IMU for the attack.

In August 1999, IMU guerrilla group kidnapped the mayor and three officials from a small village in western Kyrgyzstan. Within a week, the Kyrgyzstani government fulfilled IMU demands for a ransom payment and for a safe passage to Tajikistan. In August 23, the IMU took four Japanese and eight Kyrgyz soldiers hostages in Kyrgyzstan (Ahmed Rashi, 2018:61).

From December 2002 till May 2003, the IMU launched four explosions in the Kyrgyz cities of Osh and Bishkek that killed eight people. In July 2004, IMU launched multiple suicide strikes against the embassies of Israel and the U.S in Tashkent (Galsser, Susan B., 2004:11).

In June 2007, IMU allegedly participated in the Red Mosque siege in Islamabad, Pakistan. Militants held at least 250 people in hostage as they fought Pakistani forces for control of the mosques (Walsh, Declan, 2007:17).

In September 2010, IMU claimed responsibility for the ambush of a convoy of Tajiki soldiers in the Rasht Valley in Tajikistan, Killing 25 (Roggio Bill, 2010:55).

In April 2012, IMU, with Pakistani Taliban and TTP militants, attacked the Bannu prison in Pakistan and freed 383 prisoners (Adeel Fida, 2012:29).

In June 2014, the IMU participated in the attack on the Jinnah International Airport in Karachi, Pakistan, alongside the TTP and Pakistani Taliban (Cilly, Rob., 2018:211). In September 2014, Usman Ghazi pledged his support to the terrorist militia in Syria and Iraq. IMU had begun to transform itself into an umbrella organization that encompassed groups and recruited people from Tajikistan to fight in Syria. IMU also began recruiting for Islamic State (IS) in the Ferghana Valley. In August 2015, IMU had dissolved itself, placing its structures under the control of IS (Merhat Sharipzhan, 2015:11).

In February 2015, IMU took around 30 Hazara men hostages in Zabul province, Afghanistan (Mehal, Damon, 2018:56). In October 2017, An Uzbek militant crashed a truck into civilians on a bike path in Manhattan. Some sources said that he was affiliated with IMU (Kramer, Andrew, 2017:71).

In July 2018, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for an attack on foreign cyclists in Tajikistan's Danghara district and the attackers were affiliated with the IMU (Luhn, Alec, 2018:28).

Today, IMU takes the form of a decentralized network though the original objective of the movement was to overthrow president Islam Karimov and to create an Islamic state. IMU could not achieve its objective as it had no solid bases or support in Uzbekistan because of several reasons: First, IMU is more engaged in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Syria, with less focus on Central Asia as the majority of its leaders joined the Islamic State. Second, the IMU was fragmented into different groups. Third, the security apparatus and the religious policies did not change. Fourth, the majority of Uzbek public did not want political Islam to be implemented in their society and they were happy with the existing social systems. Although IMU does not pose any immediate or near-future real threat to Uzbekistan, it would remain a constant headache to the Central Asian States (Galym Zhussipbek, 2020:290).

5. Prospects of political Islam in Central Asia and the future of its main Islamic political movements

The Central Asian elites, particularly in the authoritarian states, are wary of political Islamic movements. In the short- and mid-term, classic political Islam will probably not be represented in the political life of the countries. Nonetheless, if handed down peacefully and new cadres come to power in Central Asia, some changes can be expected concerning the systemic visibility of Islam in the public sphere. There are two possible scenarios that can be foreseen in the public sphere in Central Asia concerning Islam. The first scenario concerning the future of Islam is the Muslim Politics phenomenon which means that faithful Muslims do not seek to establish an Islamic state or Islamic caliphate; nevertheless, they maintain traditional religious beliefs and values, such as the Nahda party in Tunisia and Turkish AKP. This concept does not terrorize the regimes of the Muslim countries and offers at the same time an alternative to political Islam. Moreover, the concept of "Muslim Politics" can go with Liberalism and western institutions (Zohreh Ghadbeigy, 2020:93).

The second scenario concerning the future of Islam is that Central Asian states need to examine their policies towards Islam to avoid future instability. Seventy years of Soviet rule did not crush Islam but it had a profound effect in secularizing society and political elites. After independence there was a surge of interest in Islam, including the emergence of political Islamist groups seeking to challenge the secular systems. The heavy-handed repression of early manifestations of political Islam led to confrontation, violence, and the appearance of extremist and terrorist groups. Central Asian states should benefit from southeast Asian countries, Indonesia and Malaysia convey positive examples of Islam ordinance, tolerance and democracy to the people of central Asia. Islamism in Indonesia has preponderantly been driven by civil society forces after the era of Suharto. Whereas there has been a blossoming of a diverse, yet mostly conservative Islam across the society, in the party systems that Islamization of politics has been moderate. In Malaysia, Islamization has been much more actively planned and stimulated by the Central bureaucracy. Religion in Political society has been strongly politicised, while Islamic civil society organizations and groupings had a strong impact only briefly and civil society mass organizations have structured the discourse on Islam to a large extent.

5.1. Prospects for the future of Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)

After studying the Islamic movements in Central Asia, the paper predicts that the most significant of them is HT. It is the fastest-growing Islamist organization in Central Asia because it faces almost no competition. HT has been especially attractive to young men, who suffer from high unemployment rates and a lack of opportunities. It campaigns for a caliphate by distributing CDs and engaging in online propaganda. There is a great deal of receptiveness to the claim that only an Islamic state can solve the region's economic and social problems (Susanne Olsson, 2021:111).

Although IRP is still the only legal Islamist party in Central Asia, the significance of the IRP has been declined for years. The government has also succeeded in marginalizing the party, classifying it as "fundamentalist" since 2011. The IRP is no longer represented in parliament since the 2015 elections (Ilyalozovsky, 2018:88). IRP may split into a more radical branch. It may emerge in the future which could lead to more conflict after the government's crackdown on it.

IMU could not make solid bases in Central Asia because the ideology of IMU does not suit the current social and economic conditions in Central Asia. The majority of the Asian public do not want political Islam to be implemented in their society. Therefore, IMU has shifted its focus from Central Asian states, especially Uzbekistan, to Afghanistan. It can regroup, reorganize, and strengthen itself to chart out a new future strategy. Although IMU had fragmented and it does not pose any immediate threat to the central Asian states, it would remain a constant headache to Asian states especially after the movement's declaration of allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) which could drive it to be a global militant organization (Vinay Kaura, 2018:21).

More importantly, the sudden rise of the Taliban which took control of Kabul in August 2021 would affect the fate of political Islam in Central Asia. Since Taliban's foundational ideology is based on the most radical thoughts of Islam, that may push IMU, an already radical movement, to a more radical version and this would be catastrophic for the secular Uzbekistan State which has fought a protracted civil war with IMU (Aditi Bhaduri, 2021:46).

CONCLUSION

This paper examined the relationship between the Central Asian states and their Islamic political movements. The region of Central Asia has remained long under the influence of Islam which got revived after Soviet disintegration. Despite Soviet efforts to spread communism among Central Asian republics, the people of Central Asian states remain contacted with Islam. After independence in 1991, these republics chose Islam as their national identity. Islam became a major challenge to Asian leaders as some of the religious extremist groups used it against the current regimes to overthrow them and create Islamic states. The leaders of Central Asian republics had chosen the Soviet style authoritarian rule with Islamic identity which led to dissatisfaction among people. Moreover, problems like unemployment, poverty, ethnic disturbances, border disputes, authoritarian rule that Asian systems are unable to tackle supported the existence of the Islamic political movements that incite against current regimes. The paper concentrated on the main three Islamic political movements, and their political regimes. It found that the relationship between IRP and its political regime is the least aggressive, HT and its political regime is moderate, while IMU is the most contentious. Political Islam in Central Asia is currently undergoing a transitional phase. There is a new generation of Islamist Asian leaders that advocate a public role for Islam without overthrowing the secular regimes. They can be called Islamo-democrats because they participate in elections and recognize the constitutional process (Sanio, Makna, 2020:89).

Future research

Future researchers who are interested in the relation between political Islamic movements in Central Asia and their Asian political systems should focus on the relation between the Sufism and political system in Central Asia. Future researchers should focus on the recent events of Taliban and how these events will affect political Islamic movements in Central Asia. Future researchers who are interested in this point should focus on the regional powers in Central Asia and their relation with Islamic political movements .

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