

DERADICALIZATION IN CENTRAL ASIA: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

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Abstract

The Central Asian region is currently facing a grave challenge of repatriation of IS-fighters which has posed a serious threat to its socio-economic and political structures. The repatriates also include women and children who may need to be assessed to determine whether they have been radicalized. As a response to these returnees, Central Asian States have structured a CVE which focuses on changing the narrative through religious education, rehabilitation, reintegration, and promoting civil society. This study investigates CVE measures in Central Asia to prevent recruitment to terrorist organizations, reduce the number of fighters from this region and further contain the threat of radicalization caused by the influx of repatriates returning from Syria and Iraq. This study is divided into three parts. The first part outlines the threats posed by the return of foreign fighters; the second part explains the various theoretical models to understand process of radicalization and practices for deradicalization and the last part evaluates different CVE measures in Central Asia to eradicate further radicalization and extremism.

Keywords: Deradicalization, Repatriates, CVE, Foreign Fighters

Introduction

Central Asia is a region with a unique combination of Post-Soviet and Islamic elements and has dealt with radicalization up-close with the

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emergence of radicalizations such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan¹ (IMU) and over 4000 foreign fighters exported from this region². Central Asian states have also experienced authoritarian regimes which continue to contribute to political stability in the region³. The Hizb ut-Tahrir; founded in Jerusalem in 1953, has also been active in the region despite being banned⁴. The Hizb ut-Tahrir is not considered to be a terrorist organization⁵. Their ideology focuses on the formation of an Islamic Caliphate which although does not encourage violence to achieve their objectives but ultimately promotes Jihad⁶. It has been argued that although this particular organization is non-violent in nature, it acts as a conveyor belt⁷ by pushing its members to seek far more radical organizations. It provides easy access for radical organizations to target and persuade vulnerable individuals into becoming recruits⁸. On November 4, 2021, the leader and members of Hizb-ut-Tahrir was detained in Kyrgyzstan⁹. The argument made in this case is that due to the strict measures taken against a non-violent organization in Central Asia, it may lead to more cases of radicalization¹⁰. Central Asian states have

¹Emmanuel Karagiannis, "Political Islam in Uzbekistan: Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami" *Europe-Asia Studies* 58, no. 2 (August 16, 2006): 261-280. Accessed September 21, 2020. doi: [10.1080/09668130500481444](https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130500481444)

²Thomas F. Lynch III, Michael Bouffard, Kelsey King, and Graham Vickowski, "The Return of Foreign Fighters to Central Asia: Implications for U.S. Counterterrorism Policy" *Strategic Perspectives* 21, Institute for National Strategic Studies (October 2016) Accessed September 21, 2020 <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/inss/Strategic-Perspectives-21.pdf>

³ Catherine Putz, "Nations in Transit: Central Asia Remains Locked in Consolidated Authoritarianism" *The Diplomat* (April 28, 2021) Accessed December 7, 2021. <https://thediplomat.com/2021/04/nations-in-transit-central-asia-remains-locked-in-consolidated-authoritarian/>

⁴ Meerim Aitkulova, "Hizb Ut-Tahrir: Dreaming of Caliphate" *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review* 8, no.1 (2017): 95-106. Accessed 7 December 2021. doi: <https://doi.org/10.5840/asrr201731330>

⁵ Aitkulova, "Dreaming of Caliphate" 95-106

⁶ Aitkulova, "Dreaming of Caliphate" 95-106

⁷ Zeyno Baran, "Fighting the War on Ideas" *Foreign Affairs* 84, no.6 (November-December 2005): 68-78. Accessed September 21, 2020. doi: [10.2307/20031777](https://doi.org/10.2307/20031777)

⁸ Baran, "Fighting the War on Ideas"

⁹ "Alleged Leader of Banned Islamic Group Detained in Kyrgyzstan" *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty* (November 10, 2021) Accessed 7 December 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-hizb-tahrir-leader-detained/31555414.html>.

¹⁰Zeyno Baran, Radical Islamists in Central Asia, *Hudson Institute*, (September 12, 2005) Accessed September 21, 2020. <https://www.hudson.org/research/9830-radical-islamists-in-central-asia>

practiced strict laws against Islam as a response to the increase in recruitment to the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), IMU and IS¹¹. This is especially seen in the case of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. In Uzbekistan, during Islam Karimov's regime, religious freedom was limited¹². This has also been the case in Tajikistan where there have been prohibitions on headscarves/hijabs and beards and the ban placed on minors from attending prayers in mosques¹³. The moderate Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) was dissolved and listed as a terrorist organization in 2015¹⁴. Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have also been classified as states prohibiting religious freedom by the US Department of State¹⁵. The volatile political unrest has also made Central Asia vulnerable to radicalization. Kyrgyzstan witnessed two revolutions i.e., the Tulip Revolution in 2005 which saw the overthrowing of the President, Askar Akayev in 2005 and in 2010; Kyrgyzstan saw the removal of the President who succeeded Akayev, Kurmanbek Bakiyev.¹⁶

The Ferghana Valley which shares borders in the East of Uzbekistan, the South of Kyrgyzstan and the North of Tajikistan has already been a problematic region where the IMU has been active.¹⁷ Due to Central Asia's geo-political proximity to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the IMU's active

¹¹ "Ferghana Valley - Five Year Humanitarian Trends Assessment" *Inter-Agency Regional Analysis Network*, (March 2017) Accessed 7 December 2021. <https://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Ferghana-Valley-Report.pdf>

¹²John R. Pottenger, "Civil society, religious freedom, and Islam Karimov: Uzbekistan's struggle for a decent society" *Central Asian Survey* 23, no. 1 (March 2004):55-77 Accessed September 27, 2020. doi: [10.1080/02634930410001711189](https://doi.org/10.1080/02634930410001711189)

¹³Alexandra Funk, "The Deterioration of Religious Freedom: Tajikistan's Attempt to Counter Violent Extremism" *Human Rights First*, (November 3, 2016) Accessed September 21, 2020. <https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/blog/deterioration-religious-freedom-tajikistan-s-attempt-counter-violent-extremism>

¹⁴ "Ferghana Valley - Five Year Humanitarian Trends Assessment" *Inter-Agency Regional Analysis Network*

¹⁵ "Ferghana Valley - Five Year Humanitarian Trends Assessment" *Inter-Agency Regional Analysis Network*

¹⁶ Alexander Tokmakov, "Kyrgyzstan: Two revolutions, but still no prosperity" *Deutsche Welle (DW)* (March 31, 2015) Accessed September 21, 2020. <https://p.dw.com/p/1F0Kp>

¹⁷ Mariya Y. Omelicheva, "Combating Terrorism in Central Asia: Explaining Differences in States' Responses to Terror". *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19, no.3 (September 2007): 369-393, Accessed September 21, 2020. doi: [10.1080/09546550701424075](https://doi.org/10.1080/09546550701424075)

role and involvement in these two states,¹⁸ it helps to explain why Central Asia has been linked with the exporting of foreign fighters. There have been fewer cases of terrorist attacks within Central Asia¹⁹ compared to the terrorist attacks which took place in other parts of the world but were linked to Central Asia. The Terrorist Attacks which gained notoriety associated to Central Asia were the “Boston Marathon Bombings” in 2013, as the perpetrators were Kyrgyz born citizens²⁰. In 2017, an attack was carried out in Stockholm, Sweden by an Uzbek Citizen²¹. Later that year, the “St. Petersburg Metro” bombing took place, which was also carried out by an ethnic Uzbek from Kyrgyzstan²². Apart from attacks in Europe and the US, Central Asia has also exported terrorists to the Middle East²³.

Since the demise of IS in 2019²⁴, Central Asia has seen an influx of foreign fighters returning home which also includes an alarming number of women and children²⁵. Central Asia had been urged to accept the repatriates as the U.S President Donald Trump directed states with the highest number of repatriates to do so which also included European states²⁶. This has led to a

¹⁸ Damon Mehl, “The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan Opens a Door to the Islamic State” *Combatting Terrorism Center* 8, no.6 (June 2015) 11-15. Accessed September 21, 2020. <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-islamic-movement-of-uzbekistan-opens-a-door-to-the-islamic-state/>

¹⁹ Józef Lang, “Exporting Jihad – Islamic terrorism from Central Asia” *Centre for Eastern Studies*. (April 12, 2017) Accessed September 21, 2020. <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2017-04-12/exporting-jihad-islamic-terrorism-central-asia>

²⁰ Max Fisher, “Boston bombing suspects: what the Kyrgyzstan connection means”. *The Washington Post*. (April 20, 2013). Accessed September 21, 2020 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2013/04/19/boston-bombing-suspects-what-the-kyrgyzstan-connection-means/>

²¹ David Gauthier-Villars and Drew Hinshaw, “Stockholm Attack Puts Focus on Terrorists from Central Asia” *The Wall Street Journal* (April 9, 2017) Accessed September 21, 2020. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/stockholm-attack-puts-focus-on-terrorists-from-central-asia-1491764083>

²² Gauthier-Villars and Hinshaw, “Stockholm Attack Puts Focus on Terrorists from Central Asia” *The Wall Street Journal*

²³ “Ferghana Valley - Five Year Humanitarian Trends Assessment” *Inter-Agency Regional Analysis Network*

²⁴ Elena Pokalova, “The Failure to Repatriate Foreign Fighters Is A Gift to ISIS” *The National Interest* (September 19, 2020) Accessed September 27, 2020. <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/failure-repatriate-foreign-fighters-gift-isis-169226>

²⁵ Lynch III, Bouffard, King, and Vickowski, “The Return of Foreign Fighters to Central Asia: Implications for U.S. Counterterrorism Policy”

²⁶ H.J Mai, “Why European Countries Are Reluctant to Repatriate Citizens Who Are ISIS Fighters” *NPR*. (December 10, 2019) Accessed September 21,

new crisis especially with the pandemic and the large number of refugees still stranded in Syria and Iraq²⁷. The Central Asian Republics have accepted repatriates with Kazakhstan repatriating 600 individuals including women and children in April 2020, under Operation Zhusan, specifically designed for this purpose²⁸. Uzbekistan repatriated 148 women and children in 2019²⁹. Tajikistan has been working to repatriate women and children³⁰. As of 2019, Kyrgyzstan has also made plans to identify Kyrgyz citizens stranded in Syria and Iraq and repatriate them³¹.

For this purpose, deradicalization, rehabilitation and reintegration need to be necessary to contain and intercept the problem. Radicalized repatriates pose a threat of further radicalizing others if they are not dealt with immediately and accordingly.

Process of Radicalization

Fathali M. Moghaddam, in his work *Staircase to Terrorism – a psychological perspective on the radicalization process*, explains how there are six metaphorical staircase steps an individual goes through which eventually lead to acts of violence³². Moghaddam stressed the importance of

2020. <https://www.npr.org/2019/12/10/783369673/europe-remains-reluctant-to-repatriate-its-isis-fighters-here-s-why>

²⁷ H.J Mai, “Why European Countries Are Reluctant to Repatriate Citizens Who Are ISIS Fighters” NPR

²⁸ Anna Gussarova, “Repatriating Foreign Fighters: The Case of Kazakhstan” *European Eye on Radicalization*, (April 17, 2020) Accessed September 21, 2020. <https://eeradicalization.com/repatriating-foreign-fighters-the-case-of-kazakhstan/>

²⁹ Staff writer with AFP, “Uzbekistan repatriates 148 women and children linked to ISIS from Syria” *The Defense Post*, (May 30, 2019) Accessed September 21, 2020. <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2019/05/30/uzbekistan-repatriate-isis-women-children-syria/>

³⁰ Farangis Najibullah and Mumin Ahmadi, “Why Tajikistan Is Fighting to Bring Its Islamic State Widows Back Home” *RadioFreeEurope/Radio Liberty*, (February 21, 2019) Accessed September 21, 2020. <https://www.rferl.org/a/why-tajikistan-is-fighting-to-bring-its-islamic-state-widows-back-home/29782787.html>

³¹ Munara Borombayeva, “Kyrgyzstan plans operation to repatriate families of militants from Iraq, Syria” *Caravanserai* (September 4, 2019) Accessed September 21, 2020. https://central.asia-news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_ca/features/2019/09/04/feature-01

³² Fathali M. Moghaddam, “The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration.” *The American Psychologist* 60, no 2. (February-March 2005): 161-169. Accessed September 21, 2020. doi: [10.1037/0003-066X.60.2.161](https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.60.2.161)

contextualized democracy³³ which essentially implies that for democracy to be successful in Muslim states, the norms and values of society to create a form of democracy which better suits a Muslim state as the western version cannot be apply to these states. When there is lack of contextualized democracy it may lead to displacement of aggression³⁴. Displacement of aggression in relation with contextualized democracy takes place when an individual may feel that their voice and opinion is not heard and this may cause this individual to find alternative sources to release this pent-up aggression, which may include further radicalization and moving upwards on the staircase.

Moghaddam explained the importance of anti-west sentiments that exist in Muslim states³⁵. These anti-west sentiments contribute to the “Us vs Them” style of thinking which further pushes an individual towards radicalization³⁶. This is especially evident in the case of Central Asian states have had a rocky relationship with democracy with the existence of authoritarian regimes such as that of Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan³⁷ and Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan³⁸. Due to these authoritative and rigid governments, the citizens may feel that their voices are irrelevant and not acknowledged which may lead to displacement of aggression. Central Asian States have also had a history of suppressing the right to practice religion freely which may lead to individuals perceiving it as a threat to their identity causing cognitive dissonance. The process of radicalization is a slow process with various ideological and psychological factors involved making it crucial for us to understand the mechanisms to reach a better understanding of the concept of deradicalization.

³³Moghaddam, “The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration.”

³⁴Moghaddam, “The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration.”

³⁵Moghaddam, “The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration.”

³⁶Dina Al Raffie, “Social Identity Theory for Investigating Islamic Extremism in the Diaspora” *Journal of Strategic Security* 6, no. 4. (Winter 2013): 67-91 Accessed September 27, 2020. doi: 10.5038/1944-0472.6.4.4

³⁷Nate Schenkkan, “Islam Karimov and the Dictator’s Playbook” *Foreign Policy*, (August 20, 2016) Accessed September 21, 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/08/30/islam-karimov-and-the-dictators-playbook-uzbekistan/>

³⁸Austin S. Matthews, “What happens to Kazakhstan’s dictatorship now that its dictator has quit?” *The Washington Post* (April 25, 2019) Accessed September 21, 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/04/25/kazakhstans-year-leader-resigned-heres-how-transition-is-playing-out/>

Deradicalization

“CVE or PVE refers to the “soft” side of counterterrorism strategies that tackle the drivers which lead people to engage in politically or ideologically motivated violence”³⁹. By taking up soft approaches, the idea is to prevent radicalization or intercept the process of radicalization before it reaches to the point where violence occurs. CVE or PVE is geared towards home-grown terrorism⁴⁰ as it had been on the rise in the United States of America shortly after the War on Terror in 2001 followed by the September 11th Attacks⁴¹, and still continues to pose a threat globally⁴². Instead of harsh methods of Counterterrorism however, strategies were devised geared towards countering the ideology preached by Terrorism for example, the infamous lectures of Anwar Al-Awlaki as his lectures preached an “Us vs Them” style of thinking coupled with anti-west sentiments drawing individuals towards terrorism⁴³. CVE aims to deter individuals from radicalization that may cause violence and hence operates on a micro level⁴⁴. For this purpose, radicalization is defined as the process of developing extreme ideology and beliefs⁴⁵ and CVE aims to prevent radicalization from moving towards violence. CVE comes in direct competition with the ideas of jihadist ideology and hence why the phrase Battle of Ideas⁴⁶ has been used.

³⁹ Owen Frazer and Christian Nünlist, “The Concept of Countering Violent Extremism” *CSS Analysis in Security Policy* no. 183. (November 2015) Accessed September 27, 2020. <https://css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/publications/publication.html/195322>

⁴⁰ Frazer and Nünlist, “The Concept of Countering Violent Extremism”

⁴¹ Seth G. Jones, Catrina Doxsee and Nicholas Harrington, “The Escalating Terrorism Problem in the United States” CSIS Briefs, *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (June 17, 2020) Accessed September 27, 2020. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/escalating-terrorism-problem-united-states>

⁴² Aisha Javed Qureshi, “Understanding Domestic Radicalization and Terrorism” *National Institute of Justice* (August 14, 2020) Accessed September 27, 2020 <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/understanding-domestic-radicalization-and-terrorism>

⁴³ “In quotes: Anwar Al-Awklaki” Middle East, *BBC News* (September 30, 2011) Accessed September 27, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-15124351>

⁴⁴ Frazer and Christian Nünlist, “The Concept of Countering Violent Extremism”

⁴⁵ Randy Borum, “Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories” *Journal of Strategic Security* 4. no.2 (Winter 2012): 7-36. Accessed September 27, 2020. doi: 10.5038/1944-0472.4.4.1

⁴⁶ Baran, “Fighting the War on Ideas”

Deradicalization is a CVE measure which seeks to reverse radicalization⁴⁷. The premises required for deradicalization to take place include a controlled environment which may involve governmental and non-governmental entities⁴⁸. Lindsay Clutterbuck explains how the term “deradicalization” should only be attributed to efforts to prevent violence and reintegrate individuals in a post-surrender, post-detention and post-conviction setting⁴⁹. Any efforts to prevent radicalization before this fall into the categories of anti-radicalization and counter-radicalization⁵⁰. Deradicalization is complex it aims to adjust an individual’s ideology and addresses an individual’s frame of mind, hence it aims to bring out about a cognitive shift⁵¹. When compared with disengagement, which is merely a behavioral shift as explained by John Horgan, who states that disengagement only removes an individual from a situation where they can commit acts of violence⁵². This may take place in the event of imprisonment or in the removal of an individual from a terrorist organization. Disengagement is, however, linked with deradicalization as for the latter to take place the former also needs to occur.

Deradicalization and the approaches adopted to achieve differ in the West and Muslim States. In Muslim States such as Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Indonesia, radicalized individuals are tackled with from a theological angle and are engaged in debates aimed at making an individual realize that their interpretation of Islam is inaccurate⁵³. In the United Kingdom, there is a

⁴⁷ Lindsay Clutterbuck, “Deradicalization Programs and Counterterrorism: A Perspective on the Challenges and Benefits” *Middle East Institute* (June 2015) Accessed September 21, 2020. <https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/Clutterbuck.pdf>

⁴⁸ Clutterbuck, “Deradicalization Programs and Counterterrorism: A Perspective on the Challenges and Benefits”

⁴⁹ Clutterbuck, “Deradicalization Programs and Counterterrorism: A Perspective on the Challenges and Benefits”

⁵⁰ Clutterbuck, “Deradicalization Programs and Counterterrorism: A Perspective on the Challenges and Benefits”

⁵¹ John Horgan, “Deradicalization or Disengagement?”, *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2, no. 4, (February 2008): 3-8. Accessed September 21, 2020.

<http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/32/65>
<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL30294.pdf>

⁵² Horgan, “Deradicalization or Disengagement?”

⁵³ Angel Rabasa, Stacie L. Pettyjohn, Jeremy Ghez and Christopher Boucek, “Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists” Santa Monica, CA: *RAND Corporation* (2010) Accessed September 21, 2020. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2010/RAND_MG1053.pdf

focus on the societal role of radicalized individuals⁵⁴. Operation Constrain in the UK aimed to provide radicalized individuals with council houses, employment, psychological assistance and education⁵⁵. The UK has a Counter Terrorism Strategy; PREVENT which aims to prevent individuals from turning towards or supporting terrorism⁵⁶. It is difficult to assess the success and the long-term effects of CVE measures such as deradicalization.⁵⁷

In the literature regarding deradicalization, an emphasis has been placed on cognitive openings which refers to an individual's ability and willingness to transform their current mental state and this can take place due to an internal or external conflict of interests⁵⁸. The importance of cognitive openings implies that there needs to be a willingness to change. Koehler presented 7 Types of Deradicalization Models taken up by both Western States and Muslim States, but ultimately came to the conclusion that there is no right method for deradicalization⁵⁹. Each state has its own unique political culture and contributing factors which are taken into account when designing a deradicalization program, however, the success of deradicalization may be calculated by evaluating the cases of recidivism.⁶⁰

For this purpose, Horgan and Braddock used Multi-Attribute Utility Technology (MAUT) or Multi-Attribute Evaluation (ME) to assist the designing of deradicalization⁶¹. In order to understand MAUT in Central

⁵⁴ Antonia Ward, "To Ensure Deradicalisation Programmes Are Effective, Better Evaluation Practices Must First Be Implemented" *The Rand Blog* (March 4, 2019) Accessed September 27, 2020. <https://www.rand.org/blog/2019/03/to-ensure-deradicalisation-programmes-are-effective.html>

⁵⁵ Lizzie Dearden, "Home Office plan to give jihadis council houses and support part of 'overdue' strategy to combat terrorism" *Independent* (October 31, 2017) Accessed September 27, 2020. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/home-office-jihadis-council-houses-isis-support-fight-terrorism-strategy-operation-constrain-returning-government-a8030321.html>

⁵⁶ Ward, "To Ensure Deradicalisation Programmes Are Effective, Better Evaluation Practices Must First Be Implemented"

⁵⁷ Ward, "To Ensure Deradicalisation Programmes Are Effective, Better Evaluation Practices Must First Be Implemented"

⁵⁸ Rabasa, Pettyjohn, Ghez and Boucek, "Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists"

⁵⁹ Daniel Koehler, "*Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, Tools and Programs for Countering Violent Extremism*" (London: Routledge, 2016), 134

⁶⁰ Koehler, "*Understanding Deradicalization*" 135

⁶¹ John Horgan and Kurt Braddock, "Rehabilitating the Terrorists? Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs" *Terrorism and*

Asia's case and the main objectives which have proved important to the stakeholders associated with deradicalization in Central Asian States, a trickle-down tree has been formed adapted from Horgan and Braddock, which identifies the major objectives on a macro level and the minor objectives on a micro level, which are designed to achieve the major objectives⁶². After considering the initiatives taken by Central Asian States whilst also keeping in mind the culture of radicalization in this region, it can be said that the main priority of Central Asian States is to prevent the cases of foreign fighters and public opinion on this subject. Table 1. Shows a basic trickle-down formula under MAUT.

Cases of Foreign Fighters	Public Opinion
Deradicalization of Repatriates	Image Control of Repatriates
Preventing Radicalization in the Youth	Pro-Government Sentiments

Table 1. MAUT trickle-down tree for Central Asia

To prevent the cases of foreign fighters it is important for Central Asian States to deradicalize repatriates and take preventive measures to avoid the radicalization of the youth. To make sure the public opinion remains positive, measures for image control of the repatriates need to be taken and due to the history of unstable governments in Central Asia, riots and uproar against the governments need to be controlled to promote pro-government sentiments.

CVE in Central Asia

The governments of Central Asian States have been heavily involved in the CVE measures along with non-governmental organizations to prevent and counter radicalization. This, however, may not be enough at this point in time as there is a growing rate of prisoners arrested for radicalism and extremism along with the problem of repatriates⁶³. States that saw an influx of repatriates had been directed to try foreign fighters at home as the International Criminal Court does not have the jurisdiction to do so, there is a lack of evidence for crimes committed abroad, preventing long term

Political Violence 22 no.2 (March 9, 2010): 267-291. Accessed September 21, 2020. doi: [10.1080/09546551003594748](https://doi.org/10.1080/09546551003594748)

⁶²Horgan and Braddock, "Rehabilitating the Terrorists? Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs"

⁶³Lynch III, Bouffard, King, and Vickowski. "The Return of Foreign Fighters to Central Asia: Implications for U.S. Counterterrorism Policy"

imprisonment⁶⁴. This leads to the only suitable option which is to adopt deradicalization programs to prevent further damage. The measures that are in action in Central Asia as of now include:

- Preventing Radicalization in the Youth
- Encouraging Civil Society
- Religious Guidance through Islamic Clerics

In Uzbekistan, the existence of the Mahalla System has contributed to the prevention of radicalization and promoting deradicalization⁶⁵. The Mahalla System provides citizens with a voice and addresses the issues faced by the people on a day to day basis. Mahalla Committees are local bodies which also collaborate with Organizations for Women and the Youth to enhance the quality of life in Uzbekistan⁶⁶. Uzbekistan has also shut down the infamous Jaslyk Prison which was known for inhumane torture methods and poor conditions of its inmates⁶⁷. Shavkat Mirziyoyev the President of Uzbekistan has also removed 16,000 names in relation to radicalism and extremism in 2017 and he stated that 9,500 of these individuals had been provided with employment in hopes of reintegrating and rehabilitating them⁶⁸. Islamic Education through religious clerics or Imams has been prevalent in Uzbekistan which essentially aims to guide individuals regarding questions related to Islam, in an effort to negate citizens from violence⁶⁹. For this purpose, religious centers have been set up to address queries and promote non-violent teachings of Islam under the Hanafi

⁶⁴Mubin Shaikh. "ISIS Repatriation in North America: Importing the Threat or Dissipating the Danger? Counter Terrorism, *The Investigative Journal*. (October 23rd, 2019) Accessed September 14th, 2020. <https://investigativejournal.org/isis-repatriation-in-north-america-importing-the-threat-or-dissipating-the-danger/>

⁶⁵Sarah Lain, "Strategies for Countering Terrorism and Extremism in Central Asia" *Asian Affairs* 47. no.3 (October 24, 2016): 386-405. Accessed September 21, 2020. doi: 10.1080/03068374.2016.1225899

⁶⁶Lain, "Strategies for Countering Terrorism and Extremism in Central Asia"

⁶⁷"Has Mirziyoyev Really Brought Religious Liberty to Uzbekistan?" *Freedom House*, (January 16, 2019) Accessed September 21, 2020 <https://freedomhouse.org/article/has-mirziyoyev-really-brought-religious-liberty-uzbekistan>

⁶⁸Country Reports on Terrorism 2017 - Uzbekistan, *US Department of State* (19 September 2018) Accessed September 21, 2020. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5bcf1f734.html>

⁶⁹Navruz Melibaev, "Policy of Countering Terrorism and Extremism in Uzbekistan: How Did It Change Over the Past Few Years?" *Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting*, (April 5, 2020) Accessed September 21, 2020. <https://cabar.asia/en/policy-of-countering-terrorism-and-extremism-in-uzbekistan-how-did-it-change-over-the-past-few-years/>

School of Thought which prevails in Central Asia⁷⁰. Uzbekistan still has a long way to go to eradicate the remnants of Islam Karimov's policies. The shutting down of the Jaslyk Prison may have been a step in the right direction as far as prison conditions go, however, the psychological aid needed by the inmates should be addressed along with reintegration through employment. To contain the threat of further radicalization through repatriates in prisons, there needs to be a formal deradicalization strategy. Shavkat Mirziyoyev addressed that citizens involved in terrorist activities in Syria and Iraq would have their citizenships revoked⁷¹ to further deter potential foreign fighters.

Kyrgyzstan has worked with Search for Common Ground and the US to deradicalize areas known for having higher tendencies of radicalization⁷² – the Jalal-Abad region, where social media campaigns deemed as successful while working with the local bodies⁷³. As this area is in proximity to the Fergana Valley and Uzbekistan, it has more potential for radicalization. Search's efforts were also effective in Aravan, which employed the method of religious leaders using social media to counter hate speech and violence⁷⁴. Premature attempts have been made for prison deradicalization but there is no solidified course of action, however, consulting with imams has led to deradicalization in a few cases⁷⁵. Deradicalization needs to be prioritized in Kyrgyzstan to prevent prison radicalization of other inmates and cases of recidivism. Kyrgyzstan has 204 inmates in prisons for terrorism related

⁷⁰Melibaev, "Policy of Countering Terrorism and Extremism in Uzbekistan: How Did It Change Over the Past Few Years?"

⁷¹"Uzbekistan repatriates dozens from war-torn Middle East" *Eurasia.net* (May 30, 2019) Accessed September 21, 2020. <https://eurasianet.org/uzbekistan-repatriates-dozens-from-war-torn-middle-east>

⁷²Kanykey Jailobaeva and Gulnara Asilbekova, "Social Media for Deradicalization in Kyrgyzstan: A model for Central Asia" Final Project Evaluation, *Search for Common Ground* (November 2017) Accessed September 21, 2020. https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/KGZ007_Evaluation_Report_Final_Nov_2017.pdf

⁷³Jailobaeva and Asilbekova, "Social Media for Deradicalization in Kyrgyzstan: A model for Central Asia"

⁷⁴Jailobaeva and Asilbekova, "Social Media for Deradicalization in Kyrgyzstan: A model for Central Asia"

⁷⁵Bolo Isaev, "Number of Prisoners Charged with Extremism and Terrorism in Kyrgyzstan Triples in Five Years" *Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting*, (October 21, 2019) Accessed September 21, 2020. <https://cabar.asia/en/number-of-prisoners-charged-with-extremism-and-terrorism-in-kyrgyzstan-triples-in-five-years/>

crimes, which poses a threat of radicalizing other inmates⁷⁶. The radicalized inmates can have visitors and may also make phone calls which may aid in keeping inmates in touch with their families and may provide for some relief and possibly a cognitive opening.

Under the Operation Zhusan in Kazakhstan, 17 rehabilitation centers were set up to contain the repatriates returning to their homeland⁷⁷. The rehabilitation centers are facilitated by psychiatrists, counselors and religious clerics and have also collaborated with Kazakh NGOs – Ak-Niet and Pravo⁷⁸. Kazakhstan’s strategy has been centered on 3 R’s which are repatriation, reintegration and rehabilitation⁷⁹. For prison deradicalization, there is no solid strategy, however, counseling is available through psychiatrists and religious clerics to provide radicalized inmates with guidance⁸⁰. According to the Deputy Chairman of the Committee of Religious Affairs, 256 members of radical organizations have left radicalism behind since the formation of Ak-Niet in 2014⁸¹. Kazakhstan has also pushed for youth centered preventive measures towards radicalization and encouraged civil society whilst advocating for overall secularization. Kazakhstan has quickly addressed the growing crisis of repatriates; however, the imprisoned persons also need to be catered to whilst devising strategies in the event that prisoners are released, to help find employment and reintegrate into society. Kazakhstan has also had to deal with missing birth certificates, proof of identity and nationality for repatriates, it is crucial to handle the situation of women and children as to prevent radicalization and the separation of children from their mothers⁸².

Tajikistan granted amnesty to prisoners convicted of charges related to extremism and radicalism, under the condition that they are not to re-offend

⁷⁶Isaev, “Number of Prisoners Charged with Extremism and Terrorism in Kyrgyzstan Triples in Five Years”

⁷⁷Stevan Weine, “Rehabilitating the Islamic State’s Women and Children Returnees in Kazakhstan” *Just Security* (December 12, 2019) Accessed September 21, 2020. <https://www.justsecurity.org/67694/rehabilitating-the-islamic-states-women-and-children-returnees-in-kazakhstan/>

⁷⁸“Kazakhstan: repatriation of 595 citizens from Syria” *Bulan Institute for Peace Innovations*, (April 23, 2020) accessed September 20, 2020. <https://bulaninstitute.org/kazakhstan-repatriation-of-595-citizens-from-syria/>

⁷⁹Gussarova. “Repatriating Foreign Fighters: The Case of Kazakhstan”

⁸⁰Kazakhstan: repatriation of 595 citizens from Syria” *Bulan Institute for Peace Innovations*

⁸¹“More than 300 groups on religious work with youth of Kazakhstan” *Human Capital, Kazakhstan 2050 Our Power*, (September 23, 2018) Accessed September 21, 2020. <https://2018.strategy2050.kz/en/news/39124/>

⁸²Gussarova, “Repatriating Foreign Fighters: The Case of Kazakhstan”

and were encouraged to opt for education and employment⁸³. The public opinion was in favor of this decision⁸⁴. Tajikistan has worked to prevent radicalization in the youth and promoting civil society by promoting sports and spreading awareness via social media⁸⁵. Several repatriates have worked with the government to promote messages regarding the dangers of terrorism⁸⁶. After experiencing two prison riots linked to IS in 2019⁸⁷, the need for prison deradicalization has grown, however, there is no solid scheme, despite the growing number of inmates arrested for violence related to radicalism. Tajikistan has also pushed for secularization and imposed strict prohibitions on the practice of Islam⁸⁸ hoping of preventing radicalization which may have the opposite effect as repatriates may find this to be threatening to their beliefs. There have been talks regarding the separation of terrorism related prisoners from “ordinary” prisoners to prevent the flourishing of radicalism in prisons as there have already been reported factions of “Hizbs” within the prisons and distribution of content that may lead to radicalization⁸⁹.

Turkmenistan has strict control over the information that reaches the rest of the world. Turkmenistan is part of the C5+1, as well as the OSCE and has

⁸³Farangis Najibullah and Mumin Ahmadi, “Why Tajikistan Is Fighting to Bring Its Islamic State Widows Back Home” *RadioFreeEurope/Radio Liberty*, (February 21, 2019) Accessed September 21, 2020. <https://www.rferl.org/a/why-tajikistan-is-fighting-to-bring-its-islamic-state-widows-back-home/29782787.html>

⁸⁴Najibullah and Ahmadi, “Why Tajikistan Is Fighting to Bring Its Islamic State Widows Back Home”

⁸⁵ “Towards a comprehensive implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia Mapping of PVE and CT Initiatives in Central Asia” *United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia*. (March 21, 2019) Accessed September 21, 2020. https://unrcca.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/pve_ct_mapping_2019_-_21-03-2019.pdf

⁸⁶Najibullah and Ahmadi, “Why Tajikistan Is Fighting to Bring Its Islamic State Widows Back Home”

⁸⁷ Mazhab Djuma. “Tajikistan: How to Prevent the Spread of Extremism in Prisons” *Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting*, (April 10, 2020) Accessed September 21, 2020. <https://cabar.asia/en/tajikistan-how-to-prevent-the-spread-of-extremism-in-prisons/>

⁸⁸Funk, “The Deterioration of Religious Freedom: Tajikistan’s Attempt to Counter Violent Extremism” m

⁸⁹Djuma. “Tajikistan: How to Prevent the Spread of Extremism in Prisons”

collaborated with the two on CVE training⁹⁰. The issue regarding foreign fighters had been discussed at a conference in Ashgabat in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Terrorism Prevention Branch (TPB), the Regional Office for Central Asia (ROCA) and the Programme Office in Turkmenistan⁹¹. Turkmen crossing the border to fight alongside IS was discussed, however, it did not address the cases of repatriates and Turkmenistan's strategy regarding repatriates as there is a higher number of foreign fighters from Turkmenistan⁹². Turkmenistan is not equipped to deal with radicalized individuals or repatriates which may be alarming coupled with the isolation policy and the corrupt government and the economic crisis⁹³. Turkmenistan needs to prioritize the repatriate's crisis and accommodate and facilitate the repatriates accordingly which may be possible in cooperation with other Central Asian States.

Recommendations

For Central Asia, the crisis of foreign fighters returning may cause further complications if the repatriates are not dealt with swiftly. The women and children may have been radicalized as they have been accompanied by foreign fighters who may have been imprisoned upon returning. Prison deradicalization needs to be prioritized as this can cause radicalization amongst other inmates. The rehabilitation, reintegration and deradicalization should be dealt with to prevent cases of recidivism and although Central Asian States have made efforts to do so, they need to be more thorough and solidified whilst recording the cases of recidivism to effectively measure the success of deradicalization and CVE efforts. Inter-regional cooperation may also prove to be effective as Central Asian States can adapt policies and models implemented after evaluating what has been successful and what has failed in neighboring states. Central Asia has also had a history of inhumane prison conditions which require reformation to prevent psychological damage and further displacement of aggression.

Displacement of aggression may also be caused by the strict laws regarding the practicing of religion in Central Asia which are although designed to

⁹⁰ Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Turkmenistan, *US Department of State*, (2019) Accessed September 21, 2020. <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2019/turkmenistan/>

⁹¹ Akram Umarov, "How Serious is Religious Radicalization in Turkmenistan?" *European Eye on Radicalization*, (June 18, 2019) Accessed September 21, 2020. <https://eeradicalization.com/how-serious-is-religious-radicalization-in-turkmenistan/>

⁹² Lynch III, Bouffard, King, and Vickowski, "The Return of Foreign Fighters to Central Asia: Implications for U.S. Counterterrorism Policy"

⁹³ Umarov, "How Serious is Religious Radicalization in Turkmenistan?"

prevent radicalization may in fact be counter-production as the Hizb ut-Tahrir remains to be a popular organization in Central Asia despite being banned⁹⁴, hence the religious impositions and bans may be further pushing individuals towards radicalization. The problem of imprisonment of political opposition is a recurring trend in Central Asia where political prisoners are often accused of extremism related charges which may lead to confusion and the neglect of individuals who are in fact radicalized and need to be facilitated accordingly. The costs and resources needed for deradicalization programs and the reintegration of repatriates and ex-convicts must be addressed accordingly. The women and children need to be dealt with extra care and preparations must be made for the adoption of orphans. The issue of missing documents may also need to be addressed as this causes problem due to lack of evidence and proof of identity which is a growing problem for each state around the world⁹⁵, that has accepted repatriates in the aftermath of the demise of IS. With the aid of repatriates i.e. addressing the public, potential foreign fighters or radicalized individuals can be deterred from committing similar crimes due to fear of prosecution and the horrors of war.

Conclusion

With the growing number of repatriates in Central Asia, deradicalization seems to be a sure way to contain the growing threat. Deradicalization takes place if radicalization has already taken place and seeks to undo the radicalization process, hence why importance is placed on the ideological and psychological factors which contribute to radicalization eventually progressing towards acts of violence. This may be the reason why disengagement is differentiated from deradicalization as disengagement has more to do with the behavioral and social changes whereas deradicalization deals with bringing about a cognitive change in the psyche of an individual, making deradicalization more complex and requiring extra clarification and assessment to design programs which are equipped with the crucial resources needed for deradicalization. In Central Asia, there is a growing number of prisoners and for this purpose deradicalization programs in this region need to be implemented with precision and accuracy as Central Asia is already a region that has been vulnerable to radical organizations, along with poor governing may lead to crises which may be difficult to contain if ignored for a longer period.

⁹⁴ Galina M. Yemelianova. "Political Islam in Central Asia: The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir" *Central Asian Survey* 32, no.1 (January 17, 2013):109-111. Accessed September 21, 2020. doi: [10.1080/02634937.2012.754606](https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2012.754606)

⁹⁵ H.J Mai, Why European Countries Are Reluctant to Repatriate Citizens Who Are ISIS Fighters

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