

**ISLAMIC RADICALISM IN KYRGYZSTAN:
MISINTERPRETATION AND THE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE**

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ABSTRACT

The question of religious security of Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia is one of the highly discussed topics in the academic sphere and the media. However, the monolithic description of Islam as being either violent or non violent has been misleading us. The oversimplifications by scholars, media and politicians have led to distorted understanding of the social phenomena taking place in our society. Moreover, throughout the time independent Kyrgyzstan has been existing, there has not been a major case where religious extremists have taken part as instigators, however, the state asserts the contrary. Lastly, the new state policy on religion is to have radical changes. It is of paramount importance that Kyrgyzstan not follow the path of oppressing religious organizations, or else the similar outcome which neighboring states come to is inevitable.

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Introduction

When I hear the phrase ‘radical Islam’, despite the fact that I am a resident of Central Asian state, involuntarily, an image of a bearded man holding AK 47 pops up in my mind. I feel a little bit uncomfortable about the fact that I have seen a man who poses threat to my life.

Probably, my experience of living nearby to the village during the IMU militants’ infiltration in 2000s in Batken region makes me feel so. However, the press review in Kyrgyzstan by Montgomery indicates that 25 percent of all articles treated Islam or radical Islamic groups as a security threat whilst 11 percent questioned these associations. Some articles did both.¹

Then, what is radical Islam? How has it shown itself in Kyrgyzstan? How the state has been and will be responding to it? These are some of the questions which will be attempted to be answered. I maintain that the nature of threat from Islamic extremists is relatively milder than it is being interpreted by the state and the media. Government oppressions of nontraditional Islamic groups will end up in their radicalization.

Since the independence in Kyrgyzstan, there have been three major events which are asserted by the media, some politicians and experts to have a relationship to religious extremists. The first one being the IMU infiltration in 2000s denominated as Batken events², the second one being Nookat events in 2008 where Hizb ut Tahrir members were alleged of instigating riots³, and the third one is the Osh events in 2010 when the Interim Government alleged radical Islamist groups of taking part in initiating the unrest.⁴ All of these events makes one think that the danger from radical and violent Islamists is high in Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, with independence the Muslim states in Central Asia turned to Islam as a religion and a cultural

¹ David W. Montgomery and John Heathershaw, “Islam, Secularism, and Danger: A reconsideration of the link between religiosity, radicalism, and rebellion in Central Asia,” 9.

² Alisher Khamidov, “The lessons of the ‘Nookat events’: central government, local officials and religious protests in Kyrgyzstan,” in *Central Asian Survey*, (2013), 20.

³ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴ “The Pogroms In Kyrgyzstan,” *Crisis Group Asia Report*, (2010), 19.

tradition to confirm ethnic and national identities.⁵ The processes of Islamization and a search for identification of people belonging to a certain group within the society were started. And here, with an increased role of Islam, especially after the September 11 attacks, threat was felt from certain religious groups. A causal relationship is purported between Islam and politics where, put crudely, an increase in public displays of religiosity -> radicalization -> rebellion against the state.⁶

However, before passing to the analysis of Islamic radicalism, the way it has/ is alleged to have shown itself in Kyrgyzstan, it is of paramount importance to analyze and discuss what is implied by terms that are related to Islamic extremism, radicalism and terrorism. Also, the definition of secularism and the role of the state- religion relationships in present day Kyrgyzstan are essential to be defined. It is also common place in the Central Asian press and political discourse to juxtapose unofficial Islamic groups against the secular state.⁷

Conceptualizing the secular and the Islamic as mutually exclusive is not a fair reflection of the nature of religion and religious groups in Central Asian. Moreover, it crucially misses the formation of a Central Asian Islamic secularism that is more widespread than the militancy that is so-often exaggerated in the region.⁸ Whilst some groups make specific challenges to a given state (the IMU) or the state in general (Hizb ut-Tahrir), most Muslims and clerics in Central Asia respect the authority of the secular.⁹

Given that Kyrgyzstan has to further deal with issues related to religion in the position where two neighboring states- Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have repressive policies on organizations considered radical and the decreased authority of the Board of Religious Affairs of Kyrgyzstan which has had numerous changes of leaders and has been alleged of corruption,¹⁰

⁵Ibid., 13.

⁶Ibid., 6.

⁷Ibid., 7.

⁸Ibid., 7.

⁹ David W. Montgomery and John Heathershaw, "Islam, Secularism, and Danger: A reconsideration of the link between religiosity, radicalism, and rebellion in Central Asia," 12.

¹⁰ Chinara Asanova, "What Is Religion For People?" *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 28 March 2014, <http://slovo.kg/?p=32344>.

the Council of Defense initiated reforms in the sphere of state policy towards religion. A more stricter control of religion by the legislative and executive bodies is awaited.¹¹ More importantly, the traditional Hanafi school of Islam has been ordered to be the only flow, members of which will be permitted to occupy positions in the Board of Religious Affairs of Kyrgyzstan and other Islamic institutions. Generally speaking non traditional models of behavior, appearance and clothing will not be tolerated.¹² These are just some of the several demands from the Council of Defense to the committee which is to work on a new state policy on religion which includes a new Concept of Policy on Religion. A crucial part of the reforms in this sector is not to over tighten the control which might lead to radicalization, according to such experts as Kadyr Malikov.

In order to critically analyze key concepts related to radical/political Islam, I have used definitions and discussions of experts on the concepts which have led to identify fallacies regarding their interpretations. Moreover, for a review of Islamic radicalism in Kyrgyzstan I have relied on secondary data analysis. In terms of the government response to radicalism and the adoption of the new state policy, I have referred to official report by the Council of Defense and the opinion of experts. Even though talks on a new Concept of Policy on Religion have finished, there is no official version of a complete document yet. For this reason, I had to rely on the Council of Defense report and opinions of experts to learn the direction the state is going to take to deal with religion and religious issues in the future. I did not find it useful to take interviews from experts because the necessary information regarding the discussed themes was already included in the articles and books used in the thesis.

In the first chapter I discuss concepts related to Islamic radicalism. A critical analysis is presented which includes several key terms used in the media and the academic sphere to describe different interpretations of Islam and that which wants to show itself as Islam.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

Furthermore, I discuss secularism and religious radicalism in Central Asia and Kyrgyzstan. In discussing radicalism in Kyrgyzstan, I derive from the literature that since independence radical Islam has not shown itself. Finally, I discuss the policies on Islam the state has been adopting and those which are to be adopted.

Misinterpreted Concepts

All knowledge that is about human society, and not about natural world, is historical knowledge, and therefore rests upon judgment and interpretation. This is not to say that facts of data are nonexistent, but facts get their importance from what is made of them in interpretation.¹³ In the western part of the world, in some countries, a person may commit a severe crime because of his drug addiction. If the journalists find out, while investigating that person's background, that he is of a Muslim ethnicity, there is a high probability that other people of the same ethnicity will be regarded as prone to commit crimes alike, notwithstanding the drug addiction. Moreover, the language and images that the media have used in conjunction with ideas of Muslims and Islam have been value loaded and lack context... portraying Islam as a dangerous religion rooted in violence and irrationality. While the world moves on and new ideas develop we still use the same words, in relation to Islam, that we used 10 and 20 years and even 30 years ago.¹⁴

According to some experts, the generalizations and interpretations of information pose a threat. An army of 'combative and woefully ignorant policy experts', according to Edward W. Said, continue to persuade themselves and the public about the reality of their abstract schemas, reproducing old and engendering new conflicts.¹⁵ The trend of generalizing the specific, that which needs scrupulousness has been one of the main culprits which has been

¹³Sergei Abashin, "The Logic of Islamic Practice: a Religious Conflict in Central Asia," *Central Asian Survey*, (2006), 266.

¹⁴ Warren Conte, "British Media Portrayals of Muslims. In the Wake of the September 11 Attacks," <http://web.mit.edu/cms/reconstructions/communications/ukmuslims.html>.

¹⁵Ibid., 269.

misleading the public from the real facts. More importantly, those policy experts, instead of making efforts to reduce conflicts, have been acting in a reverse manner. The media, citing those experts takes ‘dangerous interpretations’ to a higher level broadcasting it to the public. As a result, the public forms a distorted understanding of the reality.

The widely used terms in mass media such as Islamic fundamentalism, radicalism, etc. have become commonplace in everyday life of people. Consequently, those concepts are being utilized by individuals to interpret and perceive issues related to religion in the era of socio-political transformations taking place within the state. Thus, those terms are important to research... as socially constructed concepts which have an influence on our perception of the religious situation in the country.¹⁶ It is the meaning we give to those terms and what we perceive by them which shape our understanding of Islam.¹⁷ Too often we are exposed in the media and the literature to a sensationalized, monolithic approach which reinforces facile generalizations and stereotypes rather than challenging... the specific causes or reasons behind the headlines.¹⁸ Besides, the widely circulated substitutes for Islamism such as fundamentalism, Jihadism, or Islamic extremism, are themselves subject to even greater ambiguities.¹⁹ These terms reduce ‘a heterogeneous, dynamic, and complex human reality’ to simple abstractions formulated ‘from an uncritically essentialist standpoint’.²⁰ It is not difficult to separate an unripe apricot from the ripe one when collecting it due to its green color. What many politicians and experts have been doing is similar to that practice of excluding the non ready fruits, however, the intricacy of the human identity and the religion demands a deeper analysis of the terms utilized to describe the social phenomena related to Islam.

¹⁶Emil Nasritdinov and Nurgul Esenamanova, “Religious security in the Kyrgyz Republic,” (2014), 16.

¹⁷Hastings Donnan, “Interpreting Islam” *SAGE Publications*, (2002), 130.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 131.

¹⁹ Richard C. Martin and Abbas Barzegar, “Islamism Contested Perspectives On Political Islam,” (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2010), 34.

²⁰Sergei Abashin, “The Logic of Islamic Practice: a Religious Conflict in Central Asia,” *Central Asian Survey*, (2006), 259.

Not surprisingly, scholars are examining Islamic fundamentalism and actual or possible connections between Islamic movements and violence or terrorism in the region, especially since 11 September 2001. The September attack of the World Trade Centers and the Pentagon has had a substantial influence on the minds of its witnesses.²¹ More importantly, it is the public display by the politicians, experts and the media of Islam as a religion and Islamic movements, notwithstanding of their peacefulness, which formed a misleading perception equating them to terrorism. Thus, after the 9/11 attacks, Islam has been associated with violence and terrorism which has caused fear in people. This fear is based on an image of Islam as radical and violent. It is the perception rather than the reality that matters.²² For instance, state A which has hostile relationships with state B may initiate a nuclear program. In the reality, that might be done with an intention of meeting the energy demand, however, the perceived threat and a potential of the hostile state to create nuclear weapons may induce state B to take some measures and even attack state A. Our perceptions have been shaped by the research of a variety of academic disciplines on radical Islam and the attention such work has been given in the popular representation of Islam through the media in the current age.²³

There is very little agreement either within the policy community in the United States or in Central Asia itself as to what Islamic radicalism is and who among devout Muslims should be considered as posing a threat to the secular regimes.²⁴ Martha Brill Olcott provides her definition of the notion of a radical Muslim. According to that definition, any religious activist rejecting the leadership of the official religious establishment would be a transgressor. ...one potentially useful government approach would be to label any Muslim activist or cleric who rejects the leadership of the official religious establishment in Central Asia as a radical Muslim. Because the state appoints the official religious establishment, to reject the

²¹Ibid., 155.

²²Ibid., 156.

²³Hastings Donnan, "Interpreting Islam" *SAGE Publications*, (2002), 141.

²⁴ Martha Brill Olcott, "Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia," *Russian and Eurasian Program*, (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007), 29.

establishment's leadership is to question the authority and the legitimacy of the state.²⁵ On the other hand, one can see that the official religious establishment does not have autonomy which is necessary to ensure the proper functioning of the institution. To what extent should the official religious establishment of a state be dependent on and controlled by the state and whether it is necessary given that it is totally under the influence of the state are the essential questions that need to be answered.

Devin DeWeese contends that sovietologists in the West based their description of Islam on inadequate data and problematic sources, and that they merely reproduced the language of Soviet experts... engaged in the project of managing the Muslim territories of the Soviet Union.²⁶ Soviet experts differentiated 'official' and 'unofficial' Islam posing the former as a benign form of the religion. DeWeese argues that this opposition implies 'an essentially abstract ideal of Islam defined in quite narrow terms that would exclude much of the daily substance of religious life in most traditional Muslim societies'.²⁷ Now in place of the 'official' and 'unofficial' dualism is an opposition between 'traditionalism' and 'fundamentalism'. The first is described as moderate, liberal, rooted in the local history and national traditions of a specific society. The second is characterised by adjectives such as aggressive, radical, dogmatic, alien to the region, and dangerously cosmopolitan.²⁸ An inference which can be derived from the above categorization is that it may serve one's interests. Today, all of the challenges to the political system of a state are to be demonized because it is an effective way to keep a strong grip on power and manipulate the public. One scholar writes that national leaders have used campaigns against 'radical Islam' as a pretext to oust local figures and centralise political control. In part, this has been a device to cement their own control,

²⁵ Ibid., 14.

²⁶ Sergei Abashin, "The Logic of Islamic Practice: a Religious Conflict in Central Asia," *Central Asian Survey*, (2006), 259.

²⁷ Ibid., 277.

²⁸ Ibid., 253.

although localised events have indicated that militant Islamist groups such as Hizbut-Tahrir and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan have used violence in the region.²⁹

One of the most popular terms used in the media which needs a clear definition so as not to be misled is Islamism. It usually refers to those Muslim social movements and attitudes that advocate the search for more purely Islamic solutions (however ambiguous this may be) to the political, economic, and cultural stresses of contemporary life.³⁰ ... Islamism is often a label applied broadly to some (and sometimes all) Muslims. This rhetorical move is known by the Greek term of art synecdoche— letting the part stand for the whole, as when Athens means all of Greece or Osama bin Laden is made to characterize all Muslims.³¹ One will not be mistaken if said that the term Islamism has been popular in the West since the 9/11 attacks. Despite being a limited group within (but not the whole of) Islam, the strength of those referred to as Islamists in some areas, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Taliban in Afghanistan, gives them a disproportionate voice that has brought them to global attention in the public sphere.³² Such sorts of groups are representing all Muslims thanks to the media and experts. As a result, the term ‘Islamist’ is associated with something negative, rebellious and violent. It is of paramount importance to keep in mind a critical look which can enable one to look deeper to the political phenomena the term describes.

If it is to have validity, Islamism must be a neutral term.³³ The term should not merely be used to describe violent acts of people, but should include both ends of the spectrum where each extreme form of the term will imply either a positive or a negative meaning associated with Islamism. Islamism should not be associated strictly with violence, any more than with nonviolence. Islam may be a “religion of peace,” but no more or no less than most other religions— some of whose followers can often be quite violent and brutal in the name of the

²⁹ Eric Freedman and Kuang-Kuo Chang, “Religious News And Controversies In Central Asia: A Case Study Of A Western ‘Christian Initiative’ News Service,” *Religion, State & Society*, (2007), 28.

³⁰ Richard C. Martin and Abbas Barzegar, “Islamism Contested Perspectives On Political Islam,” (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2010), 46.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

³² *Ibid.*, 55.

³³ *Ibid.*, 76.

faith.³⁴ The representation of Islam in the media, literature and public has instilled association of the religion with violence with no other alternative. Until scholars start thinking for themselves, the transformation of perception about Muslims is not possible in the academic sphere which is the source of information and explanation of the variety of the phenomena taking place in the society for the media and people.

The widely used notion of a 'political Islam' has been analyzed by the International Crisis Group. Much of the research and writing that appeared on the revolution in Iran continued to characterize political Islam as a wholly radical and violent phenomenon.³⁵ Interestingly, the term, in the context it has been elaborated, implies that Islam was politicized by the political leader of Iran, that Islam, as a religion, was not involved in politics. To be more specific,

"...the conception of 'political Islam' inherent in this dichotomy is unhistorical as well as self-serving. The term 'political Islam' is an American coinage which came into circulation in the wake of the Iranian revolution. It implied or presupposed that an 'apolitical Islam' had been the norm until Khomeini turned things upside down. In fact, Islam had been a highly politicized religion for generations before 1979. It only appeared to have become apolitical in the historically specific and short-lived heyday of secular Arab nationalism between 1945 and 1970".³⁶

Thus, according to the ICG perspective, the concept of 'political Islam' had been a tool to show the Khomeini regime to have 'gone astray'. This interpretation of Islam is somewhat monolithic, drawing, for instance, on studies of the Iranian revolution to show that 'Islam' is inherently revolutionary (while ignoring critical differences between Sunni and Shi'a) and, by placing so much emphasis on politics, even squeezing out its ethical and religious significance. Islam thereby becomes equated not just with radical politics, but with a radical politics associated only with violence and mayhem.³⁷ Political decisions of the regime displayed inconvenience for the USA by an antagonist attitude and the latter reacted by posing it in a negative light. Had there not been a threat posed by the regime, demonization of Khomeini would be less likely.

³⁴ Ibid., 79.

³⁵ Hastings Donnan, "Interpreting Islam" *SAGE Publications*, (2002), 167.

³⁶ "The Pogroms In Kyrgyzstan," *Crisis Group Asia Report*, (2010), 23.

³⁷ Ibid., 177.

In Marx's influential essay "On the Jewish Question", he is responding to Bruno Bauer's claim that political equality can only come in a secular state that does not afford identities such as religion to be manifest. For Marx, the secular state gives a way for the individuals to be understood as disaggregated from their religious identities.³⁸ Indeed, it is this interpretation of secularism which has been utilized by the Soviet regime to let its ideology flourish. However, the collapse of the USSR did not bring about a different type of relationship for Central Asian states that the religion and the state can have. It is probable that state authorities of newly independent states had deeply instilled visions of what the state attitude towards "the opium" should be. Additionally, the "Western" model of secularism sees religion as a totally separate entity from the state. With the inflow of the western ideas and international organizations, the newly emerged post Soviet states had not many alternative ways of dealing with religion but as something which needs to be kept totally separate from politics. Liberal hegemonic visions of the state and governance tend to leave religion out, either viewing it as something people will "get over" or as something that belongs to the private. ...Because for them it is not a lived category.³⁹ Thus, the status of a religion as a separate entity from politics has been set in both influential models that have partly shaped the current Central Asian states' policies and attitudes towards religion, which are the Soviet and the Western ones. Nevertheless, for Central Asia, where the predominant majority of the population is Muslim, the transformed version of secularism which intertwines Islam is necessary. All serious research on the region takes it as given that the relationship between religiosity and secularity should not be understood as an either/or choice.⁴⁰

Even when the new Central Asian states turned to Islam as part of an identity that distinguished them from the predecessor government and in part legitimated their claims of sovereignty, the understanding of religion was, pro forma, very much a continuation of the

³⁸ David W. Montgomery, "Islam beyond Democracy and State in Kyrgyzstan" 9.

³⁹ David W. Montgomery, "Islam beyond Democracy and State in Kyrgyzstan" 7.

⁴⁰ David W. Montgomery and John Heathershaw, "Islam, Secularism, and Danger: A reconsideration of the link between religiosity, radicalism, and rebellion in Central Asia," 18.

past: the people can have religion, but religion should not interfere with governance.⁴¹

Interestingly, the distorted perception of secularism has been a hindrance to effective cooperation between the state and the religious institutions within Kyrgyzstan since independence. Yet, the institution representing Muslims was established in the early years since independence. Policies of the Soviet regime having an attitude towards religions as “an opium for the people” and harassments due to their ideological potential have had an impact in state policies even after the collapse of the union. Kadyr Malikov states that “the problem is in ideological interpretation of the notion of ‘secularism’ (to be more precise, complete separation of religion from the state and society). This creates an artificial barrier for effective cooperation among state and religious organizations...⁴² While religion was to be a challenge to the state during the USSR, it was no more to be feared by the state after gaining independence but rather, in case directed to proper channels, could be an effective means of state building. The Soviet heritage of policymaking embedded in minds of politicians has impacted in treating Islam as a separate entity from the state which was to have private connotations. Maintenance of old positions does not resolve problems of interrelationships between Islam and the state. The state, as in the past, will see in Islam an ideological rival, a threat to the development of democracy and principles of secularism. This will result in deep antagonism and a high level of conflict between the two ideational systems in one national state.⁴³

Looking deeper into the concept of secularism lets one see that the newly independent states of Central Asia have accepted it as given primarily due to the Western standards and an experience of communism. ...the idea of the secular is a concept that comes out of a particular tradition, in a particular time, and in response to a particular context.⁴⁴ All of these particulars are not inherently Central Asian, but rather dominant in Western understandings of what

⁴¹ Ibid., 8.

⁴² “Government in Secular States with a Muslim Majority”, International Round Table, (2008), 16.

⁴³ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁴ David W. Montgomery and John Heathershaw, “Islam, Secularism, and Danger: A reconsideration of the link between religiosity, radicalism, and rebellion in Central Asia,” 18.

modern governance implies and reflect the secularist culture-building foundational to the Soviet project.⁴⁵ Taking into account the religiosity of the population in Kyrgyzstan and the increased Islamization, the concept of secularism needs to be reconsidered to a version which will incorporate elements of the dominant religion. Because...the state power cannot separate from religion of its society. Along with the Islamic population and its elites Islam is a civilization and political magnitude of a strategic character. For the political power this has a concrete meaning, since on the loyalty of the Islamic majority depends the stability and legitimacy of the state power.⁴⁶ Those who feel disaffected by the state and turned deeper to Islam to offer a just vision of community and care are guided by moral convictions as much as anything else. And in some instances, they cease to recognize the legitimacy and relevance of the state to their lives.⁴⁷

According to Fund for International Toleration, official state policies reflect an old ideologized stance to the place and the role of religion in the society and the state. The state sometimes... wants to control religious organizations but does not let participation of the religion in the socio political life of the country. Ideologized attitude of the state is an obstacle in utilizing the positive sides of religion as a powerful resource of state building: strengthening position of the secular power, resolving spiritually moral problems in the society.⁴⁸ Indeed, in case the state establishes positive relations with religious organizations, new prospects for boosting the state legitimacy will be open. All of that requires thoroughly built policies and the ‘reconceptualization’ of the state- religion relationships.

Today, a strict division of the state from religion is to generate negative outcomes, especially due to increasing Islamization of the population. The religious masses are a significant power which can be directed to maintain and strengthen stability. A problem arises when the people

⁴⁵ David W. Montgomery, “Islam beyond Democracy and State in Kyrgyzstan” 9.

⁴⁶ “Government in Secular States with a Muslim Majority”, International Round Table, (2008), 16.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁸ “Analysis of Contentious Factors In The Religious Sphere In Southern Kyrgyzstan,” *project "Early Warning for Violence Prevention,"* (Foundation for Tolerance International, 2010), 17.

see the political authorities as illegitimate and corrupt. The lost trust in the political institutions might lead people to find the desired solutions to problems in radical and extremist organizations. The population is naturally sympathetic to the Islamists' criticisms of governmental corruption. ... the governments (while ignoring or denying their own responsibilities) overstate the Islamist threat and use it as a pretext to suppress a wide range of domestic dissidents and human rights activists. The use of sweeping arrests and imprisonments is having the counterproductive result of alienating and radicalizing the population.⁴⁹ According to this logic, exaggeration of the threat by Islamic organizations and an actual suppression are producing counter productive effect.

According to Montgomery, Islamization taking place in post-Soviet central Asian states had not started just after the collapse of the Union but was a process that had been evolving in the mid-20th century.⁵⁰ Since at least the 1950s, there were increased opportunities for religious practice, which were formally institutionalized in the late-1980s with Glasnost. Thus, the portrayal of Islamization as a perestroika-era and post-Soviet phenomenon is more a reflection of Western policy concerns than the recent history of Islam in Central Asia.⁵¹ The increased practice of Islam by the people which may be unifying factor for a political power is equated to radicalism by the elites and thus challenges the state⁵². After the demise of the Soviet Union, more prospects for practicing Islam were opened as a result of the constitutional permissibility and inflow of foreign organizations. Over the past decade the independence of the new states in Central Asia has been marked by a surge in Islamic following.⁵³ This picture of revival is also a reflection of the self-images of the elites of the newly independent states who used this representation in an attempt to make the very Soviet

⁴⁹ Jeremy Gunn, "Shaping an Islamic Identity: Religion, Islamism, and the State in Central Asia," *Sociology of Religion*, (Oxford University press, 2003), 397.

⁵⁰ David W. Montgomery and John Heathershaw, "Islam, Secularism, and Danger: A reconsideration of the link between religiosity, radicalism, and rebellion in Central Asia," 20.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵³ Farideh Heyat, "Re-Islamisation In Kyrgyzstan: Gender, New Poverty And The Moral Dimension," *Central Asian Survey*, (2004), 278.

claim of the existence of national and secular Muslim societies.⁵⁴ That this was largely successful is not indicative of Islamic revival but of the gradual transformation of Islam in the Soviet period so that it comingled with secular government, modernization and nationalism.

Islamic Radicalism

Claims regarding the increase in numbers of radical Islamic groups stem from official reports and prosecutions by Central Asia's groups and interpretations of Islamist websites. Both are extremely problematic sources.⁵⁵ Official reports are prone to exaggerate facts about threats and actual numbers of extremist groups because this 'strategy' is an effective way of justifying harsh governmental policies which are usually the result of a willingness to get a firm hold on power. Moreover, the extremist groups may be scapegoats in political games of political authorities as happened recently in Kyrgyzstan. To be more specific, after the Osh 2010 events, the state Commission which made its investigation of the conflict claimed that several militant Islamic groups were involved in instigating the inter ethnic clashes.⁵⁶ Given that those groups are less likely to be believed even in the case of refuting, the allegation demonized the militant groups. Islamic organizations have become actors for Central Asian states to accuse of violence which has political and sometimes even religious connotations. Montgomery and Heathershaw state that when political violence does occur, and is widely identified as Islamic, closer examination invariably reveals that Islam is at most a secondary causal factor of the conflict. This has been shown with respect to: the Tajik civil war; the Andijan uprising; outbreaks of violence in Kyrgyzstan since 2002, some of which have been identified as Islamic.⁵⁷ Moreover, the Nookat riots of 2008, according to Hamidov⁵⁸ stemmed

⁵⁴Ibid., 16.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁶ "The Pogroms In Kyrgyzstan," *Crisis Group Asia Report*, (2010), 19.

⁵⁷ David W. Montgomery and John Heathershaw, "Islam, Secularism, and Danger: A reconsideration of the link between religiosity, radicalism, and rebellion in Central Asia," 13.

⁵⁸ Alisher Khamidov, "The lessons of the 'Nookat events': central government, local officials and religious protests in Kyrgyzstan," in *Central Asian Survey*, (2013), 24.

from weak relationships between the central authorities in Bishkek, city administration and leaders of the local communities instead of political activities of radical Islamist groups.

Interestingly, an underground Muslim group is equated to radical one by the state and the media. It is the attitude of the state, which turns later into the attitude of the people towards a certain group, which define the relationships with the ‘lawful’ and ‘unlawful’ religious groups. In survey of the press, 27 percent of articles about Islam in the Kyrgyzstani press associated Islam with danger. ...by the very fact that they are unsanctioned and unregistered, they are considered threatening and declared illegal by the state.⁵⁹ Indeed, there are some Muslim groups which have totally incompatible ways of how the state should be run and there are extremist groups as well. But the practice of tagging all unregistered Muslim groups as radical ones is not a practice which will enable the state to reach harmonious relationships with those groups which are not radical in nature. Furthermore, Montgomery states that ‘Whilst the equation of “underground” with “radical” might seem commonsense, our survey and ethnographic research finds that it is a misleading simplification and distortion. Groups go underground with reason.’⁶⁰ Whatever reason that might be, if it is not radicalism, then the state must look deeper into the reasons for a particular group to abstain from registering. Moreover, Montgomery asserts that some Muslim groups are forced to hide due to the government restrictions. So, some Islamic groups may be deprived a right to exist by the officials which leads them to go underground. For many Islamic groups that have gone underground in Central Asia, however, the clandestine nature of their organization is not driven by their religion but rather by restrictions of freedom of association. Being underground cannot be explained by the character of Islam but rather by an understanding of public space and the restrictiveness of the political environment.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 15.

⁶¹ David W. Montgomery and John Heathershaw, “Islam, Secularism, and Danger: A reconsideration of the link between religiosity, radicalism, and rebellion in Central Asia,” 16.

According to Ghoncheh Tazmimi, Islam can grow as a vehicle of protest against Central Asian regimes, when they are oppressive and incapable of meeting economic and social needs. Economic and political failure would discredit the governing elites' ideology, and thus create an opportunity for an Islamic regime to emerge as the only alternative.⁶² Even if an Islamic regime will not replace the secular one, there will be more incentives for Muslims to radicalize in case there will be calls from such groups as Hizb ut Tahrir. Furthermore, Jessica Trisko comes to a conclusion from his research that the severe repressive measures (as in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan) did not manage to destroy Islamic threat, but served as a temporary mechanism, which has pushed it underground.⁶³ In terms of religious security, Kadyr Malikov thinks that violence and repressions are not to be helpful. As Malikov asserts, an open dialogue and a broad dissemination of peaceful and constructive vision of the religion is necessary to minimize the threat.⁶⁴ Trisko maintains the idea that governments of Central Asia must be supported by non radical Islamic groups and those groups, which are open to dialogue in order to achieve success and survive.⁶⁵

An evidence for inefficiency and counterproductive effect of state repressions of religious groups can be seen by radicalization of Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and extremist organizations in Kazakhstan. An influence of members of radical groups such as the IMU, who have fled from repressions in Uzbekistan, can be detected in South Kyrgyzstan.⁶⁶ In the North Kyrgyzstan, according to the research of Esen Usubaliev, there is a probability of an influence of Salafi organizations, which are repressed in Kazakhstan.⁶⁷ Taking into account the reforms in the sphere of religious policy of Kyrgyzstan and its direction being a stricter control of the religious sector, there is a likelihood that the same phenomena will take place in

⁶² Ghoncheh Tazmimi, "The Islamic revival in Central Asia: A potent force or a misconception?" *Central Asian Survey*, (2001), 69.

⁶³ Jessica Trisko, "Coping with the Islamist Threat: Analyzing Repression in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan," *Central Asian Survey*, (2006), 379.

⁶⁴ Emil Nasritdinov and Nurgul Esenamanova, "Religious security in the Kyrgyz Republic," (2014), 19.

⁶⁵ Jessica Trisko, "Coping with the Islamist Threat: Analyzing Repression in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan," *Central Asian Survey*, (2006), 379.

⁶⁶ Michael Kalishevsky, "Kyrgyzstan: Islamization Irreversible?" *International news agency "Fergana,"* Jan. 2014, <http://navoine.ru/krgz-islam.html>.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Kyrgyzstan, unless the state policy will be carefully planned and its outcomes predicted. Emil Nasritdinov has come to a conclusion that the relative freedom of religion, existing in Kyrgyzstan for the last 22 years has not led to an increase in religious extremism. Kyrgyzstan suffers from extremist elements coming into the country from neighboring republics, where religious freedom is much more limited.⁶⁸

Religion is perceived to have a potential to play simultaneously negative and positive roles during conflicts. "Religion ... is considered by many to have caused division and discord among human beings while for others it contains the messages of unity and harmony found in its moral and spiritual values. To this effect, scholars have perceived religion to be Janus-faced."⁶⁹ There are numerous factors affecting flow of events in areas of political instability. To be more precise, "the ways, however, in which religion influences the lives of people, are determined by social, economic, historical and, to some extent, geographical factors."⁷⁰ In Kyrgyzstan, since 2000s, there have been several significant events where religious groups are believed to have played a contributing and mitigating roles.

Moreover, religion plays a significant role in shaping identity of an individual and the society. "Such identities contributed by the religious traditions fulfill an "individual's need for a sense of locatedness - socially, geographically, cosmologically, temporally, and metaphysically."⁷¹ Taking that into account, it is essential to note that religion, depending on its role in lives of people, can be directed towards peace building and stability.

After the Osh 2010 June conflict, the interim government has made its declaration on initiators of the clashes. According to the official report, the extremist religious groups were involved in the conflicts. The interim government had to show its effectiveness in fulfilling its duties in the situation of instability within the state. After the conflict, the bodies of internal

⁶⁸ Emil Nasritdinov and Nurgul Esenamanova, "Religious security in the Kyrgyz Republic," (2014), 19.

⁶⁹ Jeffrey R. Seul, "Ours is the Way of God!: Religion, Identity, an Intergroup Conflict," *Journal of Peace Research*, (Sage Publications, 1999), 567.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 561.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 559.

affairs made investigations to find out instigators of the conflict. In late June the State National Security Service issued what is essentially the official version of the Osh and Jalalabad pogroms. By their account, three groups had been involved: the Bakiyev family; representatives of “national cultural centres” – Uzbek organizations in this instance – and a broad alliance of Islamic terrorists, including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the Islamic Jihad Union, the Taliban and the United Tajik Opposition.⁷² The official version of the June conflict indicates an intricate explanation where family members of the ex president, influential Uzbek people and several terrorist groups were involved. By this account the Bakiyev family had met twice with Islamists: the president’s younger son Maxim negotiating with them in Dubai in April, and two unnamed Bakiyev family representatives finalising a \$30 million deal in Gorno-Badakhshan, Tajikistan...⁷³ Later warnings about the threat of extremism by UN Special Envoy Miroslav Jenca and U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake helped to reinforce the view that Islamism played a role in the unrest.⁷⁴ On the other hand, since there is no clear evidence that orchestration of the Osh conflict was made as a result of an agreement between the Bakiev family and the extremist groups, it is likely that the Bakiev family is in the position of being a scapegoat for the inability of the interim government to prevent or stabilize the situation in Osh with minimum losses.

According to the Crisis Group Report, there is an inconsistency between the official report and incentives of both the Uzbek organizations and terrorist groups to organize the pogrom. The government did not explain why the Taliban would be interested in pogroms in Osh; the IMU and Islamic Jihad Union do not see eye to eye on jihadist tactics, and, as organisations with a strong ethnic Uzbek component, would seem to have little reason to kill their own people.... The United Tajik Opposition ceased to exist with the end of the Tajik civil war in 1997....⁷⁵ Lacking evidence, many local people are skeptical about a possible role for Islamist

⁷² “The Pogroms In Kyrgyzstan,” *Crisis Group Asia Report*, (2010), 23.

⁷³ “The Pogroms In Kyrgyzstan,” *Crisis Group Asia Report*, (2010), 20.

⁷⁴ Neil Melvin, “Promoting a Stable and Multiethnic Kyrgyzstan,” *Occasional Paper Series*, (Open Society Foundations, 2011), 35.

⁷⁵ “The Pogroms In Kyrgyzstan,” *Crisis Group Asia Report*, (2010), 21.

groups in the violence. Experts also point to a lack of previous efforts by the region's Islamist movements to foment interethnic violence and instead have suggested that Kyrgyzstan's security forces may have been seeking to shift the blame for the violence onto religious groups as justification for future crackdowns.⁷⁶ Most research suggests that the linkages between Hizb ut-Tahrir cells, or between Tajikistan's ex-commanders and the IMU, are tenuous at best.⁷⁷

A report by International Crisis Group released after the June events in 2010 cites some sites with a response of IJU and IMU members on the conflict. In response to the pogroms, the IJU stressed the need for greater faith, and offered no sign they were preparing to intervene in support of southern Kyrgyzstan's Uzbeks. It seemed, in fact, somewhat embarrassed by the outbreak of Muslim upon Muslim violence.⁶⁷ The IMU promised its Islamic fraternal assistance would be at some point extended to the oppressed Muslims of Central Asia "if that is Allah's will".⁷⁷ Shortly after that, the IMU's new leader, Usmon Odil, described the bloodshed in Osh as the sort of "low, evil intrigues organized against Muslims by heretic governments".⁷⁸ The statements by the extremist groups does not imply their participation in the events. This, however, does not exclude the possibility of the extremists' making a deal with Bakiev family. On the other hand, the absence of confirmation and taking a responsibility for instigating the conflict in the media creates more suspicion about the official statement by the head of the intelligence forces of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Undoubtedly, after the 2010 Osh conflict, the Islamic identity of the people involved in the conflict played a role in reconciliation process. The extent of their religiosity did have an impact on the acceptability of mediatory activities by the clergy and other Islamic representatives. However, the extent of the identity factor's influence on peace building

⁷⁶ Ibid., 38.

⁷⁷ David W. Montgomery and John Heathershaw, "Islam, Secularism, and Danger: A reconsideration of the link between religiosity, radicalism, and rebellion in Central Asia," 12.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 23.

remains unknown. From my perspective, data on the potential of Muslim identity to play a role in restoring peace, despite the fact that it is dynamic, would lead to realization of Muslim identity's capacity to accept the peace building principles by faith based mediators i.e. local clergy. Moreover, after the Osh conflict, members of the Tabligi Jamaat were actively involved in the process of peace restoration. "Contrary to the official Muslim clergy (probably local), in which there was an ethnic division, among members of 'davatchi' movement division did not take place. After the June events, the core demand in the formation of 'davatchi' groups for sermons within the population were ethnically mixed groups."⁷⁹ Overall, the role of Islam being a triggering factor of the conflict is debatable. Also, there is no evidence of involvement of radical Islamic groups in the conflict. Thus, the major event with an asserted involvement of Islamic extremist groups since independence of the state has no grounds.

The State Response

In the early years of independence, Kyrgyzstan continued the liberal approach to religion which was initiated by Moscow's perestroika policies in the late 1990s. As a result, the number of mosques, madrassahs and seminaries quadrupled in the early years of independence and various kinds of religious missionaries established presence in the cities and towns of the country.⁸⁰ Unlike other Central Asian states, religious groups in Kyrgyzstan enjoyed more freedom and non interference from authorities. One could get an impression that principles of freedom of religion and noninterference of the state in religious affairs were being followed. Nevertheless, a series of events in the late 1990s and the early 2000s – the infiltration of South Kyrgyzstan by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in 1999 and 2000, and a rise in the public visibility of Hizb-ut-Tahrir – ushered in a tougher government

⁷⁹ "Analysis of Contentious Factors In The Religious Sphere In Southern Kyrgyzstan," *project "Early Warning for Violence Prevention,"* (Foundation for Tolerance International, 2010), 17.

⁸⁰ Alisher Khamidov, "The lessons of the 'Nookat events': central government, local officials and religious protests in Kyrgyzstan," in *Central Asian Survey*, (2013), 23.

approach in dealing with religious militancy.⁸¹ Also, the global war on terror after the 9/11 attacks induced authorities to take certain preventative measures which would minimize risks of religious extremism. At the same time, the growing number of religious missions in the country lasted until about 2005-2006.⁸² Therefore, the state approach of dealing with religion had changed, following significant events and a realization of a need to securitize from threats emanating from extremist groups.

Day-to-day relations between the state and Islam are established in two distinct institutions: the Board for Religious Affairs of Kyrgyzstan (BRAK hereafter), composed of clerics who appoint imams and organize religious ceremonies; and the State Committee for Religious Affairs (SCRA hereafter), which operates like a ghost Ministry of Religion, composed of bureaucrats who have no specific knowledge or training in religion and who are in charge of regulating religion with the secular state organs.⁸³ However, there is low credibility among Muslims for the largest religious organization - the Board for Religious Affairs of Kyrgyzstan, which, since 2010 has changed three heads because of corruption and sex scandals.⁸⁴

Version of the Law “On freedom of religion and religious organizations” as of 1991 did not contain definitions of the terms. New Law of 2008 introduced special article for the main terms and definitions.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, the newly introduced terms and definitions created more difficulties in solving problems and dealing with religious organizations. The terminology used is not coordinated, which apparently complicates understanding, causes different interpretation and contradiction with effective norms of civil, criminal and

⁸¹ Ibid., 18.

⁸² Chinara Asanova, “What Is Religion For People?” *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 28 March 2014, <http://slovo.kg/?p=32344>.

⁸³ “Between Islam and Traditions,” *Azattyk*, 26 February 2014, <http://www.radioazadlyg.org/content/article/25277353.html>.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Dmitry Kabak and Almaz Esengeldiev, “Freedom of Religion and Belief in the Kyrgyz Republic,” *Open Viewpoint Public Foundation*, (2011), 27.

administrative legislation.⁸⁶ For instance, “religious radicalism” prohibited by the state does not have legal definition. Introduction and definition of “proselytism” serves to establish prohibition for “pressing actions aimed at conversion of believers of one confession to another.”⁸⁷ Even though the state may endeavor to prevent people from conversion of religion, justifying this undemocratic action as a tactic for securitization, it is impossible to control this practice. Furthermore, the 2008 Law has not been brought into line with the Constitution. The requirement of State registration of religious organizations is one of the tools sometimes used to put pressure on active religious organizations and to obstruct the formation of new ones. After adoption of this Law and through 2011, 3 Orthodox and 135 Islamic organizations received official registration and for the period from 2009 to 2011 there have been no registered organizations of other faiths.⁸⁸

Because the state fears political opposition by radical Islamic groups, in January 2009 the SCRA modified the law governing all religious organizations and their activities in the country so as to tighten official control over them all and impose restrictions on religious freedom.⁸⁹ Even though there is a threat from such nonviolent movements as Hizb ut Tahrir, looking at whole picture of the religious groups one can see that their share is trivial. By repressing the non violent and non radical Islamic organizations, the state was creating grounds for extremists to gain more power. Besides, authorities stigmatise as radical and fundamentalist any group that does not fall within the scope of official Islam.⁹⁰ According to the 2012 bill, “On Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations in the Kyrgyz Republic”, the SCRA proposed to legalize the decisive role of the Islamic Hanafi movement and

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁸⁸ Stuart Kahn, “Limitations and restriction of freedom of religion and religious organizations in the Kyrgyz Republic,” *Freedom House Kyrgyzstan*, 22 March 2013, <http://freedomhouse.kg/en/newsletters/180-limitations-and-restriction-of-freedom-of-religion-and-religious-organizations-in-the-kyrgyz-republic>.

⁸⁹ Dmitry Kabak and Almaz Esengeldiev, “Freedom of Religion and Belief in the Kyrgyz Republic,” *Open Viewpoint Public Foundation*, (2011), 34.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

emphasize the specific and traditional role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the “historical formation and development of spiritual, cultural and state traditions of the Kyrgyz people”.⁹¹

Analysis of recent events in the world, our own experience in the years of independence, when the Kyrgyz Republic faced extremism, gangs invasion "of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan" in 1999-2000, and the terrorist attacks showed that the position of non-interference, the weakening of the regulatory functions of the state in the religious sphere are misguided strategy. Attempts by certain circles to use Islam for political purposes are fraught with unpredictable consequences.⁹²

New state policy in the sphere of religion has been planned to be implemented which is to have radical changes in comparison to previous ones. A new concept of development of religion, reconsideration of legislative norms and rules, legislative and preventative measures of dealing with extremism, radicalism and terrorism, and a functional analysis of activities of a religious community of the state are to be worked on by experts, government officials, members of BRAK and other.⁹³ Thus, a decision on a new state policy adopted on February 3 concerns not only the new concept of development of religion in Kyrgyzstan, but the fundamental relationship of the state and religion. Nonetheless, experts from the analytical center Prudent Solutions state that, ‘in general, the decision on a new state policy in the sphere of religion is declarative. Essentially, measures undertaken by the State and authority to gain control over the activities of religious associations and organizations are not effective due to the lack of real mechanisms to impact on the processes occurring in the religious sphere.’⁹⁴

⁹¹ Stuart Kahn, “Limitations and restriction of freedom of religion and religious organizations in the Kyrgyz Republic,” *Freedom House Kyrgyzstan*, 22 March 2013, <http://freedomhouse.kg/en/newsletters/180-limitations-and-restriction-of-freedom-of-religion-and-religious-organizations-in-the-kyrgyz-republic>.

⁹² “Decision of the Council of Defense Of The State Policy In The Sphere Of Religion,” *Kabar*, 7 February 2014, <http://www.kabar.kg/rus/society/full/71222>.

⁹³ Chinara Asanova, “What Is Religion For People?” *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 28 March 2014, <http://slovo.kg/?p=32344>.

⁹⁴ “The Religious Situation In The Context Of Public Policy In Kyrgyzstan,” *Prudent Solutions*, 20 February 2014, <http://analitika.org/kyrgyzstan/kg-islam/2642-religioznaya-situaciya-v-kontekste-gosudarstvennoy-politiki-kyrgyzstana.html>.

Generally, the Council of Defense decided to recognize developed in recent years the practice of distancing government bodies from regulating processes in the religious sphere as incorrect.⁹⁵ This implies that religious institutions and organizations are going to be regulated to a higher extent which might lead to increased dissatisfaction by the religious practitioners. The decision of tighter control of the religious sphere is justified by the authorities as the only way of maintaining security of the state and the people. Moreover, taking the relevant parts of the order by the Council of Defense to the themes discussed, the BRAK is recommended: to increase the transparency of financial activities through relevant amendments to the Charter of the Muslim Board which includes an electronic system payments for Hajj; to appoint imams of mosques, Imam-Khatib, kazi and elect members of the Council of Ulema and Mufti only from the adherents to traditional Muslims of the Hanafi madhhab; to resist the spread of models of behavior, clothing and appearance alien to Kyrgyzstan.⁹⁶ On the one hand, such a strategy of prioritizing the dominant Hanafi school of Muslims over others seems helpful in withstanding the influence of extremist organizations, on the other hand, this strategy, forcing those who do not fit the category of ‘benign ‘ Muslims to go underground, will aggravate the situation within the state. According to the Country Director of Freedom House, Stuart Kahn, the prioritization of the Hanafi school of Muslims implies that the State does not honor principles of neutrality and often resorts to methods of administrative pressure on religious organizations.⁹⁷ The fundamental decision of controlling the religious sphere by the state might generate similar outcomes as it did in neighboring Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

According to the head of department of legal support services and personnel of the SCRA Mamataliev Kanybek, decisions of the Council of Defense will have fundamental implications for the improvement of the spiritual sphere of Kyrgyzstan. The conversation at

⁹⁵ “The Religious Situation In The Context Of Public Policy In Kyrgyzstan,” *Prudent Solutions*, 20 February 2014, <http://analitika.org/kyrgyzstan/kg-islam/2642-religioznaya-situaciya-v-kontekste-gosudarstvennoy-politiki-kyrgyzstana.html>.

⁹⁶ Chinara Asanova, “What Is Religion For People?” *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 28 March 2014, <http://slovo.kg/?p=32344>.

⁹⁷ Stuart Kahn, “Limitations and restriction of freedom of religion and religious organizations in the Kyrgyz Republic,” *Freedom House Kyrgyzstan*, 22 March 2013, <http://freedomhouse.kg/en/newsletters/180-limitations-and-restriction-of-freedom-of-religion-and-religious-organizations-in-the-kyrgyz-republic>.

the Council of Defense was tough, but is uniquely effective in the results.⁹⁸ Mamataliev K. is involved in the group which is responsible for development of the new Concept of the state politics in the sphere of the religion. One of the first tasks of the group is to give a definition of a secular state: delineate where the boundaries of non-interference start; what should be efficient and effective interaction between government and religious organizations, etc.⁹⁹ This is a good beginning for cooperation and interaction of the two bodies in case the definition of secularism will be different from that which has been used to perceive the role of religion during the USSR and the independent Kyrgyzstan.

Analyzing the state decision to make reforms in the sphere of state-religion relationships, Esen Usubaliev, director of the analytical center “Prudent Solutions” has come to a conclusion that 'the state now has not yet formed a team that would implement it in a professional manner and with the knowledge of religion. And if we touch a scrupulous and sensitive topic such as religion, on which depends the interethnic peace and stability in our country, it should be approached very cautiously and attract professional people with knowledge in the field of religion.'¹⁰⁰ He added that if the state instead of dialogue and control over the situation in the religious sphere begins to interfere with the fundamental ideology of religious organizations, whether it be wearing of headscarves or performing certain canons, or if the state prohibits non threatening organizations such as "Tablighi Jamaat", the state is to be rebuffed, and many civilians and believers are likely to become radicals.¹⁰¹ The Co-Chair of Program " Religion, Society and Security " at the Moscow Carnegie Center Alexei Malashenko refers to the negative experience of the authorities of the neighboring countries of Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia, opting for dialogue rather than power control methods that do not give results. Alexei Malashenko reminded that the rise of

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ “Between Islam and Traditions,” *Azattyk*, 26 February 2014, <http://www.radioazadlyg.org/content/article/25277353.html>.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

extremism is affected by the socio-economic situation of the country - the worse the higher the threat.¹⁰²

According to Usabaliev, the fact that the Islamic identity, Islamic idea will be developing further does not need to be seen as a threat. It is necessary to support the government in its endeavors, if we do not control the religious situation, then other organizations that are outside the country will do it, and it is even a greater threat. It is much better if our state will control religion, than it will be done in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia or any other country.¹⁰³

Moreover, a doctor of Historical Sciences and a theologian Nazira Kurbanova asserts that ‘the state must proceed from the fact that it needs to build partnerships with the religious body. The current administration has enough political will and common sense not to go too far in this area, and if the government will be too oppressive, it will lead to a third Islamic Revolution in Kyrgyzstan’¹⁰⁴.

Conclusion

The generalizations in determining some Islamic groups as totally radical or as opposite to that and perceiving them as monolithic is what has been and will be misleading us. Terms describing Islamic groups should not only be used to describe negative activities that some of them might be engaged in, but should also admit the contribution of some religious movements made to the stability within the country. Inherent in the rhetorical move of framing Islam as dangerous is the emergence of a presumed relationship between religion and politics where the complexity of everyday religion gets lost amid the necessity for simple axioms. Religion here is treated, simply, as a challenge to the secular state and thus a security matter.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ David W. Montgomery and John Heathershaw, “Islam, Secularism, and Danger: A reconsideration of the link between religiosity, radicalism, and rebellion in Central Asia,” 17.

In order for the state to succeed in dealing with religious issues through the BRAK and other institutions, it is crucial that the definition of the word secularism be reconsidered. The reconceptualization in this sphere is necessary because the old radical division of religion from the state where the latter can interfere in the former so as to provide security has become outdated and the growing number of distress within the Muslim population which is ceasing to see legitimacy of state power may not have a positive outcome.

In terms of radicalism, as mentioned previously, in Kyrgyzstan, the non repressive state policies so far there have not been a ground for extremists to enhance their influence and presence.¹⁰⁶ The analysis of 2010 Osh events and several claims of scholars such as Montgomery have shown that Islam has not been the primary factor for the unrests. Moreover, experts, such as Malikov, assert that the tightening of the state control over religious groups will not enable the state to solve the problem of religious extremism.¹⁰⁷

In case the new state policy on religion is to be more repressive in relation to some groups (which can already be seen by the decision of the Council of Defense to see the Hanafi school of Muslims as the primary school),¹⁰⁸ radicalization may increase as it has in neighboring repressive regimes.

¹⁰⁶ Emil Nasritdinov and Nurgul Esenamanova, "Religious security in the Kyrgyz Republic," (2014), 19.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 29.

¹⁰⁸ Chinara Asanova, "What Is Religion For People?" *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 28 March 2014, <http://slovo.kg/?p=32344>.

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