

Revisiting Politics of Religion in Muslim Republics of Former Soviet Union and Rise of Extremism, Global Jihadi Terrorism

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Abstract : The breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1991 has led to a considerable rise in the religious self-consciousness of Muslim population of the Central Asia. Additionally, huge amount of money spent by various states further facilitated the spread of religious ideas. According to some sources, Saudi Arabia spent 87 billion dollars to propagate Wahhabism abroad during two decades, whereas the Communist Party of the Soviet Union spent just over 7 billion dollars to spread its ideology worldwide between 1921 and 1991. As the result, today once a remote area from international politics has turned into third major source of recruitment of fighters for global terrorist organizations. In order to illustrate to scope of the involvement of the Central Asian residents in international terrorist networks it is enough to mention the name of Colonel Gulmorod Khalimov, the former head of the Tajik special police forces who served as ISIS war minister between 2016 and 2017. The importance of the topic stems from the fact that the above-mentioned republics with a territory of 4 million square km and the population of around 80 million people borders Russia, Iran Afghanistan and China. Moreover, the fact that political and military activities motivated with religious feelings in those countries have implications not only for domestic but also for regional and global political relations and all of them has root in politics of religions adds value to the research. This research aims to provide an in-depth analyses of the marked features of the state policies to regulate religious activities and approach this question both from individual, domestic, regional and global levels of analyses. The research will enable us to better understand what implications have the state of religious freedom in post-Soviet Muslim republics for international relations and the rise of global jihadi terrorism. The paper tries to find a linkage between the mentioned terror attacks and underground rise of religious extremism in Central Asia. This research is based on multiple research methods, mainly on qualitative one. The process tracing method is also employed to review religious policies implemented from 1918-1991 and after the collapse of the Soviet Union in a chronological way. In terms of the quantitative method, it chiefly will be used in a bid to process various statistics disseminated in academic and official sources. The research mostly explored constructivist, securitization and social movement theories. Findings of the research suggests that the endemic problems peculiar to authoritarian regimes of Central Asia such as crackdown on the expression of religious believe and any kind of opposition, economic decline, instrumental use of religion and corruption and tribalism further accelerated the recruitment problem. Paper also concludes that the Central Asian states in some cases misused counter-terrorism campaign as a pretext to further restrict freedom of faith in their respective countries.

Keywords : identity, political Islam, religious extremism, security, terrorism

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