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Jihad Strategies in Central Asia

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Jihad Strategies in Central Asia

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Executive Summary

In the early 1990-s Central Asia (CA) was the perfect ground for any kind of Islamic religious movements, due to the religious ignorance of its traditionally Sunni Muslim population.

So Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Iran started to send their cultural and religious “agents” to Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and the other CA republics. The Saudi-Egyptian program seemed to have the most prominent impact on the people, since they managed to build many mosques and schools. They also arranged a high number of evening lessons for men, women and children and to “recruit” many supporters within the local population, who were deeply impressed by the “real Islam” that filled the ideological vacuum which was left after the decay of the Socialist regime.

CA citizens were open to all suggestions, so along with the Wahhabis from Saudi Arabia and the Egyptian Moderate Sunni scholars, they welcomed many different Islamic movements, which were mostly radical, and, sometimes even listed as terror organizations, such as the worldwide spread, radical and dangerous Hizb al-Tahrir which is now considered as the most popular Islamic movement in CA.

At the same time, the process of CA Islamization worked in both directions, and the people of Uzbekistan and the other ex-Soviet Muslim republics gave birth to a few Islamic movements and parties of their own. During the past 15 years dozens of local Islamic movements were founded. Some of them, like the Islamic Renaissance Party in Tajikistan, were interested in political power and, therefore chose not to fight the non-Islamic regimes of their states, but join them and try to promote the law of the Shari’ah in democratic ways. The others, like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, became very radical and, while dreaming about establishing a Caliphate in CA, and then in the whole world, they embarked on a war against the secular regime in their republic. IMU is a terror organization and its leaders are close to al-Qai’dah and other international terror networks. Altogether, the strategies of these movements, radical or not, had a lot of similarities. All these movements had one thing in common: the wish to implement the Shari’ah as the official law, and Islam as the official regime.

A slightly different process happened in Chechnya, where a national struggle for separation from the Russian Federation (RF) was transformed into an Islamic-oriented Jihad against the “infidels”. There are almost no local powers or authorities in Chechnya, since the first Chechen War. Nowadays, Chechen “Jihad leaders” manage to create a unique Wahhabi-Chechen synthesis – the result of a the forces of Saudi Arabian Wahhabism providing the Chechen warriors with a sufficient ideology basis for their national war against the RF.

Chechens discovered that this kind of Islamic ideological basis can serve as a common factor that all the Muslims in the world can relate to. This way their local struggle turned into a moral issue for all the Muslims in the world, who, according to the Koran, are obliged to help other Muslims in case they are being oppressed by non-Muslims.

Chechens obviously had to pay a price for the Wahhabi support and, therefore they were deprived of most of the power in their own homeland. Since 2002 most of Chechen authorities and political or military figures have Arab names. Chechens who managed to stay in positions of power in Chechnya are a minority and most of them are either appointed by the RF, or figure heads whose mission is to show the world that Chechens are still the ones who lead the struggle against RF's infidels, who have occupied their homeland.

What is the most significant in the strategies of Jihad in CA is the role of Russian Federation in the process of Islamization. Even though RF is a non-Muslim state, it has a considerable Muslim population of about 20 million. Russian Muslims are one of the main targets for radical Islamists from any kind. Muslims in RF transfer different Islamic trends to the non-Muslim RF citizens. Only in Moscow in the last few years more than 20,000 ethnic Russians converted to Islam. Some of them do not realize they have converted into Wahhabi radical Islam, or into Shiite Islam. In fact, the new trend of "Shiitization" in Russia became an issue for non-Muslims and Sunnis in RF. The Iranian organization "Ahli-Beit" gains power and supporters in Moscow, Yekaterinburg and other RF cities without proclaiming its Shiite nature. Most of the supporters are ethnic Tatars or Bashkirs (traditionally Sunnis), but some of the "new-Shiites" are ethnic Russians and Ukrainians, who have no idea they have become Shiites, because the movement calls itself plain "Muslim local organization". It seems that until now this phenomenon has not drawn special attention and RF government does not seem to be bothered by the Iranian intervention in the lives of its citizens.

In conclusion, all these different movements and organizations thrive in CA and RF because of the same reasons:

- The Soviet Union's decay and the failure of the Socialist ideology left millions of people without ideology or reasons to live for. While experiencing the Western way of life that did not fit their humble incomes, or their Soviet mentality, CA Muslims longed to be a part of something significant and to fill their lives with meaning.
- The forgotten Islamic and national traditions had to be revived, but after 70 years of atheism, the people of CA and RF did not have enough sources of religious authorities of their own to do it by themselves. Along with the need came the radical movements from the Middle East, that brought with them the "real Islam" which could be anything-from moderate Sunni, to radical Wahhabi, Slafi-Jihadi or even Shiite. It did not matter, as long as these radical

movements called themselves “Islamic” and built mosques and schools and gave free education to the poor people of CA and RF.

- The economical decay and the expensive higher education left most of the population without means to give their children proper education. Therefore, the parents preferred to send their children to Wahhabi-oriented schools and encouraged them to become Muslim scholars, so they would get scholarships and would be included in student-exchange programs in Saudi Arabia or Egypt.

There are many other reasons, and on the whole, the tendency to Islamization in CA and RF is growing rapidly. The multiplicity and variety of the movements and organizations only makes it easier for Islam to spread, because RF and CA people can choose the organization they relate to.

Most of these movements have a strong basis of Da’wa (Islamic propaganda) and they use it to promote their aims-to convert as many non-Muslims as possible to “their” Islam and to bring as many Muslims as they can to their side. The final goal is to establish an Islamic state or a Caliphate by all means, starting with democratic ways and concluding with terror and killing. All these means are considered (violent and non-violent) Jihad.

Introduction

Within a few years of the break-up of the secular and atheist Soviet Union, a strong resurgence of local nationalism has taken place amongst the ex-Soviet nations. This tendency has been accompanied by a strong attraction to religion that was prohibited for more than 70 years in the once anti-religious state. Russians and Ukrainians began wearing crosses again and churches started to prosper, a high number of enrollees were registered in priest-seminaries. The nations in the Central Asian (CA) republics were no different and started rediscovering their national roots, which were connected to their religious affiliations, naturally, mostly Sunni-Muslim.

Decades of Soviet anti-religious policies had all but eradicated the Islamic traditions of those regions; the Sunni religious establishments had been either co-opted (thus de-legitimized in the eyes of their constituencies) or suppressed. Local syncretist and relatively moderate traditions generally linked to the strong Sufi presence in those countries had faded into oblivion. Tatars, Bashkirs, Uzbeks, Tajiks and other nationalities, traditionally identified as moderate Sunni Muslims, awoke after 70 years in an atheistic state, which excluded and prohibited any demonstration of religion to an almost total ignorance of the basic tenets of their religion. Thus, the Russian and Central Asian Muslims found themselves in the throes of an ethnic and religious identity crisis, with little indigenous tradition or religious leadership. The solution came from two sources: from both the inside and the outside. Local parties were mostly based on a national factor with pro-Islamic tendencies, whilst the forces that came to the Republics from the outside, were predominantly radical Islamic international movements, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir in CA or the Saudi-Wahhabi movement in Chechnya. Even though these movements are very different from the local parties, their strategies of Jihad are often similar, mostly because they inspire and learn from each other.

Today, almost 17 years after the process of re-Islamization in Central Asia has begun, it is possible to classify the movements and make an evaluation of their popularity and efficiency among the CA nations. A brief analysis shows that there are more radical groups in CA, Russian Federation (RF) and Chechnya than one can count. Beyond the classification of local CA and imported Middle-Eastern radical movements, there must be a distinction between local outlawed groups like the Islamic Movement in Uzbekistan (IMU) and radical parties that play a prominent role in the republic's political life, like the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP).

This study will focus on typical representatives of every type of Islamic movement in the CA countries:

1. An imported radical movement – Hizb ut-Tahrir – which is arguably the most influential Islamic movement in the CA at present.
2. A local Islamist movement - IMU (Islamic Movement in Uzbekistan) that openly uses terror to achieve its aims.
3. A local Islamic party IRP (Islamic Renaissance Party) that attempts to gain support and power through democratic elections.
4. A curious blend of external Saudi-Wahhabi and Chechen “warriors of Jihad,” that since 2002 officially led the national struggle in Chechnya.
5. A Shiite movement acting within the Sunni communities in CA and the Russian Federation – the Iranian organization “Ahli-Beit” (Ahl al-Bayt).

Despite the obvious differences, these movements have more in common than it seems at first sight. This study will attempt to describe the interaction between the different Islamist tendencies in developing an Islamist strategy towards Central Asia.

Hizb ut-Tahrir: The Dominant Islamic Party in CA

Historic, Regional and Local Orientation

Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) is the most powerful and popular Islamic party in CA. It has a strong impact on citizens of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan altogether. Although the HT is banned in these Republics, it gains more power and supporters every year due to its pro-Islamic ideology that involves local interests in CA.

The Sunni religious-political organization “Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami”, widely known as “Hizb al-Tahrir”, is an offshoot of the Jordanian–Palestinian organization Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami – The Islamic Liberation Party (ILP). The CA manifestation of the party, similar to the Arab party, treads a thin line between political Islam and a military organization, with a growing tendency towards a more militarized formation.¹

The ILP was established in 1953 by Sheikh Taqi al-Din al-Nabahani al-Filastini, (1909–1979) a judge (*qadi*) from Jerusalem HT aims to “liberate” the Muslim lands from what it considers to be a "neo-colonialist Western control” and return to a government based on the *Shari’ah*. Its first base was in Jordan. There, due to the party’s terrorist actions, the local authorities did what they could to limit its activities, infiltrate its services, and arrest its leaders. HT subsequently spread in many other countries in the Arab and the Muslim world: Syria, Lebanon, Kuwait, Iraq, North Africa, Turkey and Iran. At the same time, it also began to operate in Islamic communities in Europe, especially in Britain and Germany, in North America, Central and East Asia, and Australia. Today, because of its subversive political activities and radical opinions, HT is forbidden in most countries in the Middle East, including Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria.² HT is also banned in

¹ “The main aims of Hizb ut-Tahrir”, Jahon (Uzbeki news agency). <http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=1833>

² Asaf Maliach, "The Islamic Liberation Party - From Pragmatism to Radicalism?" <http://www.instituteforcounterterrorism.org/apage/5204.php>.

Russia and in Central Asian republics.³ In Europe HT is barred from operating in Holland, Denmark, and Germany.⁴

In the CA context, HT's main goal is to establish a pan-Islamic Caliphate (throughout the world). Its CA branches are set on establishing a Caliphate in Ferghana Valley. It has formulated a three-stage plan of simultaneous action to achieve this goal, which was summarized by Dr. Dosym Satpayev, Director of the Assessment Risks Group in Almaty, Kazakhstan:

1. Establish a community of HT members who work together in the same way as the Companions (*Sahaba*) of the Prophet Muhammad. Members should accept the goals and methods of the organization as their own and be ready to work to fulfill these goals.⁵
2. Build public opinion among the Muslim masses for the Caliphate and the other Islamic concepts that will lead to a revival of Islamic thought.
3. Once public opinion is achieved in a target Muslim country through debate and persuasion, the group hopes to obtain support from army generals, leaders, and other influential figures or bodies to facilitate the change of the government. The government would be replaced by one that implements Islam "generally and comprehensively", carrying Islamic thought to people throughout the world.⁶

Activity in Central Asia

Though a small number of HT cells nurtured by foreign missionaries existed throughout the early and mid-1990s in Central Asia, mostly in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, the organization began to expand dramatically in the late 1990s and even more in the last few years. Many believe that HT owes its expansion in Central Asia to the new leader 'Abd al-Karim Zallum (Jordan) who after the death of the founder Taki al-Din Nabahani started the formation of of the HT's new branches in CA.

3 Gulnoza, Saidazimova, "Kazakhstan: Government Moves To Add Hizb Ut-Tahrir To List Of Terror Groups," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, (March 18, 2005), <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/03/787f50df-ca55-4f36-b54b-a1407c2c2dd8.html>; "This is how the butcher of Andijan executed his crime," <http://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org/english/english.html>, (May 21, 2005); On November 25 the central Russian court of Nizhniy Novgorod convicted three members of the Liberation Party on charges of distributing pamphlets of the Party in the area of Nizhniy Novgorod. The leader of the group, Al-Julaidi Ammar Hahmoud, was sentenced to four years and eight months imprisonment for his role. The other two members, Magomed Nurmagomedov and Yusup Magomedov - both Dagestan nationals - was each sentenced to three years and two months imprisonment. See:

<http://www.khilafah.com/home/category.php?DocumentID=12308&TagID=2>.

⁴ Michael Whine, "The Mode of Operation of Hizb ut- Tahrir in an Open Society," *ICT Articles*, (February 20, 2004), <http://www.ict.org.il>.

⁵ <http://www.risala.org/books/1.Hizb-ut-Tahrir-new.pdf>.

⁶ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4531848.stm>.

HT's activists claim they recruited Muslims from the region already in the late 1980s.⁷ On the other hand, according to Uzbeki and Kirgiz security services' data the first actual activity of HT cells in Central Asia was spotted in 1994-95. The main goal of these activists was to establish an Islamic Caliphate in the Ferghana Valley.⁸

Nowadays, HT's cells operate in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. It is considered to be the most powerful Islamic fundamentalist organization in CA. The authority of other fundamentalist organizations such as the Wahhabi movement, Taliban, Islamic movement of Turkestan, etc. is undermined as a result of the repressive actions of the governments, the failure of Taliban in Afghanistan or because of ideological and political mistakes they have made in the region. Nevertheless, HT has managed to maintain its positions in spite of the government's repressions, mainly due to its principles of dissimulation (*taqiyya*), various and reliable financing sources and well-developed ideology.

After years of work in the underground, HT's activists started to go public in CA cities. In January 21, 2005, while celebrating *Qurban Bayram* (*Id al-Adha*) in Almaty, a meeting of HT activists took place in front of the central mosque. This was the first vocal announcement of HT's presence in the southern capital of Kazakhstan. Many of the activists were arrested by the local police forces.⁹

In spite of this, HT has been active all over Kazakhstan for a few years now. About a year earlier, Kazakh mass-media delivered information about HT activists who "launched their activity in Baykonur space centre."¹⁰ The incident on Baykonur is not just a successful liquidation of a terror attack. Infiltration into governmental and military structures is the third and last stage of HT's activity towards the main goal of world domination.

Main Sources of Ideology and Da'wa

The main focus of HT activity at present is *da'wah* or Islamic propaganda. To implement this strategy, HT uses in Central Asia the same methods that characterized it in other theatres. It relies heavily on leaflets, which usually contain the movement's religious theory, passages from the Koran, description of events in the region and discussions of issues such as the Palestinian conflict and Chechnya as means to mobilize local support. The notion of world-wide Muslim unity has been a central element in its mobilization efforts, and it has tried to use its

⁷ Zurab Todua, "Hizb ut-Tahrir in Central Asia", Institute of Religion and Policy, <http://www.i-r-p.ru/page/stream-trends/index-8725.html>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ <http://zonakz.net/articles/4print.php?artid=7980> (Kazakh web newspaper).

¹⁰ Ibid.

worldwide involvement to lend its cause moral authority. For example, leaflets will commonly argue that all Muslims have common problems and that conflicts in Chechnya, Israel and Afghanistan are relevant to Central Asian Muslims.

Since the 9/11 events HT has embarked its third stage of activity (as they call it) and started recruiting people who work for the government, and also workers from juridical and military forces in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and other parts of CA. For example, Kyrgyz HT members campaigned unsuccessfully for a candidate affiliated with the organization in Kyrgyzstan's presidential election in July 2005.¹¹

In 2002-2003, as a part of a worldwide struggle against religious extremists, the Uzbek government made some progress in restriction of HT's activity. In the spring of 2002 the head of a political fraction supported by HT (his name was not announced) in Uzbekistan and other leaders of the HT cells were arrested. 15 underground printing-houses where HT activists used to print their materials were revealed during the operation. Uzbek police also managed to destroy several smuggling channels for radical Islamist literature into Uzbekistan. Nevertheless, these operations and many others did not manage to stop HT from spreading their propaganda and active cells all over Uzbekistan and other parts of CA.

In its *da'wah* activity HT mostly uses brochures, religious literature, secret meetings, and Friday sermons in illegal or unregistered mosques. In their propaganda in Central Asia HT activists are mainly guided by the following books:

1. Nizam ul Islam - The Islamic order.
2. Hizb ut-tushunchalary - The concept of HT.
3. Hizb ut-Uyushma- United movement.
4. Khalifalyk- a book about caliphate's structure.
5. Demokratiya kufr nizomi - Democracy- a heretic regime.
6. Khalifalyk kanday tugatildy- How the Caliphate disappeared.
7. Manhadj- Method. This book is about how HT intends to change the society and to establish a Caliphate.
8. Izaat va Sharaf sary- a book about the modern condition of the Islamic world.
9. Siesiy fikrlar- Political thoughts.
10. Muslomiyy shahsiya- Islamic personality.
11. Al-Wa'i- a periodical that publishes in the Uzbeki language materials published by HT all over the world.

There are about a dozen more periodicals that HT publishes and uses for its *da'wah* in Central Asia.¹²

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² <http://www.i-r-p.ru/page/stream-trends/index-8725.html>.

There has been an increasing interest in Uzbekistan for HT propaganda materials. For instance, 58 radical- religious books were smuggled into Uzbekistan in 2002. A year later the number of books smuggled into Uzbekistan increased to 275. All these books are translations of Arabic and Turkish authors, who suggest their interpretations of the Koran and the *Shari'ahh*. They were checked by the Committee of Religious Affairs of Uzbekistan and more than 200 of them were prohibited in the Republic because of the extremist ideas they contained. About two thirds of the books were imported from Russia, Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. The others came from Turkey and Saudi Arabia.¹³

HT continues its activity in Uzbekistan and other countries of Central Asia. Since 2004 and until now HT has been spreading its brochures and leaflets in Tashkent, Ferghana and other regions of Uzbekistan. The leaflets also found their way to parts of southern Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Numerous underground mosques are being activated in Central Asia by HT. The number of HT supporters constantly grows in CA, especially in the Namagan and Andijan regions in Uzbekistan and in the southern part of Kyrgyzstan.

It is obvious that the ideological work is bearing fruit in the Central Asian case. Most of the observers, who met HT activists in different times, point out the extraordinary belief of these people in HT's doctrines and most of them do not doubt the necessity of any of HT's activities, as fanatic as they are sometimes. This kind of total persuasion affects the plain citizens of Central Asia. Many of them, especially the poor people, say they agree with HT ideology. "Maybe we should establish an Islamic state based on the *Shari'ah*, where there will be no corruption, clanship, theft, prostitution, drugs and other maladies of the Modern life," says one of the interviewed Uzbeks on the Uzbek website www.ferghana.ru.¹⁴

Role of Military Jihad vs. Da'wa

HT's program, the content of its leaflets in CA, and also the leading role of HT activists in the Andijan attacks¹⁵ gives us a clue that the intentions of HT leadership, do not exclude a violent takeover of the regime.¹⁶

Moreover, there are reasons to believe that HT and its allies, like the Akromiya movement¹⁷ and others, have launched the active stage of struggle with official

¹³ <http://www.i-r-p.ru/page/stream-trends/index-8725.html>.

¹⁴ <http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=3927>.

¹⁵ The Andijan events in Uzbekistan in May 2005. Uzbek Interior Ministry troops fired into a crowd of protesters in [Andijan, Uzbekistan](#). Estimates of those killed on [May 13](#) range from between 187, the official count of the government, and 700 people. The Uzbek government claimed that the [Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan](#) organized the unrest and the protestors were members of [Hizb ut-Tahrir](#).
<http://www.expert.ru/printissues/expert/2005/19/19ex-uzbekn/>.

¹⁶ <http://www.i-r-p.ru/page/stream-trends/index-8725.html>.

authorities. It seems that they wish to take advantage of the weakening position in the region after the Kyrgyz so-called “revolution”¹⁸ and the discontent people in CA feel as a result of the bad socio-economic conditions they have been suffering from.¹⁹

HT leaflets report that: “Hizb ut-Tahrir has been established as an answer to Allah’s call: “And from among you there should be a party who invite to good and enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong, and these it is that shall be successful.” (Koran 3:104). HT gives its own interpretation to this verse and claims that HT is this specific “party” that is supposed to “invite to good and forbid the wrong”. HT’s activists convince their followers and supporters that by saying “party” (*hizb*) Allah meant Hizb ut-Tahrir.²⁰

According to official documents and statements HT adheres to the evolutionary theory of the Islamic state’s structure through propaganda (*da’wah*) and increasing number of followers. At the same time, if one reads carefully HT’s program (written in 1989 on a conference in the US) one can easily understand that HT intends to use all means, even violent if needed, in its struggle. It states: “The Party...wages war against Arab and Muslim leaders...and intends to replace them whenever they deny the *Umma*’s rights or disregard their responsibilities towards it or even conflict with Islam. Actions will be made in order to dethrone such regimes and restore Islamic rule.”²¹ The word “dethrone” obviously does not intend non-violent actions, but a violent intervention.

The main topic that HT deals with in its propaganda literature is the need for all Muslims to be united by one kingdom-Caliphate based on the *Shari’ahh* rules.

These brochures and books are often translated from Arabic to Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Russian languages. Many of the subjects that are discussed in this literature do not have anything to do with Central Asia’s problems and deal with Muslims all over the world.

For example, in February 2002 leaflets that were spread in Tashkent and other parts of Uzbekistan were dedicated to a cooperation contract signed by Sheikh al-Azhar Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi and by representatives of the American Protestant Church. The leaflet gave information about the document, telling the

¹⁷ Akromiya-a local Uzbek Islamic movement connected to Hizb ut-Tahrir.

¹⁸ "The Tulip Revolution" took place in March 2005, when the opposition took control over the regime in Kyrgyzstan in the aftermath of the parliamentary elections, in which President Akayev was blamed for corruption.). For more information, see: *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, October 10, 2005.

¹⁹ <http://www.i-r-p.ru/page/stream-trends/index-8725.html>

²⁰ Hizb ut-Tahrir’s political program, p.1

²¹ Ibid.

readers that 40 Muslim scholars from the al-Azhar University will go to America to a conference concerning the consequences and effects of the 9/11 attacks.

The authors of the brochure criticize Sheikh al-Azhar and call him a traitor for cooperating with other religions and with America in particular²²: "There can be no cooperation between Islam and other religions. Islam is the perfect religion. It is the most important and the last religion in the world. Claiming that all religions are equal is against the Koran. People of other religions do not believe in Allah, Koran and *Shari'ahh*, hence there can be no dialogue with them. Tantawi should be treated as a traitor, because he advocates dialogue with the West, the Vatican and other religions."²³ In the end of the leaflet the authors wrote about a certain Imam, who was executed for betraying Islam. Therefore, one can assume that the authors imply what could happen to Tantawi for his "betrayal".²⁴

According to HT, states like the US, the UK and Israel are "from the Devil". Altogether it does not disturb HT leaders to guide their party's activities from Britain.

For a long time HT activists had claimed that the Caliphate would be established first in the Middle East and then the republics of Central Asia would join it. Last years' events led to the fact that Uzbeki and Kyrgyz activists of HT now suppose that first the Caliphate should be established in CA in the Ferghana Valley and would include territories of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, parts of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

Immediate, Mid-term and Long-term Goals

The main goal HT aspires to achieve is to establish a traditional Caliphate according to the rules of the *Shari'ah* throughout the Muslim world.

Unlike the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)²⁵, HT is a real transnational movement with considerable support among young Muslims in Western Europe and a large organizational base in London. The resources and membership of HT are obviously difficult to estimate, though its membership is clearly in the thousands across Central Asia.

HT promotes a utopian view of political Islam under which social problems such as corruption and poverty would be banished by the application of Islamic law and

²² Al-Wa'i in Uzbeki language, February 2002, p.2.

²³ Al-Wa'i in Uzbeki language, February 2002, p.2.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. A local Islamic party in Uzbekistan. Will be widely discussed in the chapter about local movements in CA.

government. Its public statements tend to be vague on how this will be achieved and do not address the many difficult questions raised by political Islam. Statements are often strongly anti-Western, anti-Semitic and anti-Shiite. Indicative of the vagueness of many of the movement's views is that most members of HT who are asked on the subject usually cannot explain how the Caliphate would operate, how people of other faiths would be treated or how the economy would be managed.²⁶ Mostly HT activists use elements from the *Shari'ah* to explain how the future Caliphate would be like, using examples from the past.

In general, HT propagandists use a blend of arguments about local socioeconomic and political conditions, and call for international Islamic solidarity to advance the party's case for a struggle against the authorities and the establishment of a more egalitarian Caliphate.²⁷

There is little information available about HT's future plans, however, and there should be some concern in that regard. Many of those within HT's ambit feel that the potential for HT to resort to force is considerable. Many members have expressed sympathy with the IMU, although they did not agree with its use of violence. Having said that, several members indicated that they personally regretted the HT decision not to use violence, particularly given the thousands of HT members incarcerated in Uzbekistan and the increasing pressure being placed on the group by governments throughout the region. Senior HT leaders usually demonstrate a certain ambiguity in the organization's attitude toward the use of force: "HT wants a peaceful jihad that will be spread by explanation and conversion, not by war. But ultimately there will be war because the repression of the Central Asian states is so strong."²⁸

Attitude towards WMD

There is not much material about HT's attitude towards WMD. Nevertheless, some of the sources explain that Muslims should use any kind of weapon against the infidels if the latter intend to use it against Muslims.

According to Imran Wahed, the leader of the London-centered HT, the main source of funding and support to Central Asian branches of the movement, in the HT journal "al-Wa'i": "...According to the *Shari'ah*, a Muslim is allowed to use all means and methods against the *kuffar* (infidels) if he intends to destroy them. When a Muslim blows himself up this act is considered as a jihadic act in the name of Allah. If a [non-Muslim] woman is considered a fighter, a Muslim has the right (according to the *Shari'ahh*) to kill her. If the enemy uses WMD as it happens

²⁶ Hizb ut-Tahrir's leaflet, January 2003, p.2.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Hizb ut-Tahrir's leaflet, January 2003, p.2.

nowadays in Palestine, we will definitely use these kinds of weapons too.”²⁹ Wahed indicates in the article that HT *'ulama* (religious scholars) support the use of WMD in theory and though they see no need to use it in the present they may use it in the future.

Attitude towards Non-Muslims in the Future Regime

According to HT's propaganda literature in Central Asia, after the establishment of the Caliphate, the first problem that should be resolved is the relations with non-Muslim countries or *Dar al-Harb*. In accordance with HT views on this matter, all non-Muslims will be obliged to render tribute (*jizya*) to the Muslim Caliphate and in exchange for that, they will enjoy the Caliphate's protection. If someone or some nation will refuse to pay *jizya*, the Caliphate will declare jihad against them.

Obviously, HT's activists intend to renew the juridical status of *dhimmi* in Islam. According to the *Shari'ahh* non-Muslims in a Muslim Caliphate are considered to be second-rate citizens and their rights are being restricted by numerous laws, like the duty to pay *jizya* and other humiliating restrictions.

HT leadership, though, tries to be as vague as possible while discussing the status of *dhimmi* in the future Caliphate. Instead of setting a clear system of rules, rights and obligations, they give examples of just treatment of the Caliphs towards the Christians and Jews: “The rights of Jews and other non-Muslims are enshrined within *Shari'ahh*. These were laid down by the Prophet Muhammad when he established the first Islamic State in Medina. He said, "Whoever harms a *dhimmi* (non-Muslim citizen) has harmed me.”³⁰ Under subsequent Caliphs, these rights were protected. During the reign of the second Caliph – 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, some Muslims stole a piece of land belonging to a Jew and then constructed a mosque upon it. This clearly violated the rights of the Jew, so 'Umar ordered the demolition of the mosque and the restoration of the land to the Jew.

The leaders of Hizb ut-Tahrir go on and describe the rights non-Muslims will have under the Islamic rule of the Caliphate: "Non-Muslims in the *Khilafa* (Caliphate) will have established channels to air any grievances or denial of their rights. All citizens will be empowered with the right to speak out where necessary. Non-Muslims will enjoy an elevated status with respect and tolerance shown to their beliefs and places of worships. The *Khilafah* will look after the needs and protect the rights of all its citizens-Muslim, Jews and Christians.”³¹

²⁹ Al-Wa'i, No.170 (June 2001).

³⁰ Minorities in the New Middle East of the Caliphate,” <http://www.hizb.org.uk/hizb/resources/issues-explained/minorities-in-the-new-middle-east-of-the-caliphate.html>.

³¹ Ibid.

In conclusion, the authors of the draft of future HT Caliphate's "constitution" promise Christians and Jews a living in much better conditions under their regime than under Western governments: "Muslim organizations have been singled out by some as anti-Semitic due to their criticisms of Israel. Hizb ut-Tahrir's vision for a "new Middle East" is one where Muslim, Christian and Jew live together peacefully under an Islamic Caliphate. The West uses Israel and its Jewish population as pawns in their colonial Middle Eastern policy. Once Israel has served its purpose Western governments will abandon Israel and the Jews as it abandoned them in Medieval Spain and during the holocaust. If a Caliphate had existed during the 2nd World War, it would have been a safe-haven for Jews fleeing Nazi Germany. The future of Jews in Israel and in the Middle East lies in the soon to be established Caliphate, and not with Zionist Israel and its colonialist backers."³²

³² Ibid.

Local Parties in Central Asia

There are different kinds of local parties in CA, but most of them can be divided into two main groups. The first group includes radical Islamic movements that aspire to become legal in their countries, and the second group contains political Islamic parties, that are represented in a state's parliament and, therefore, are legal. I will present in this paper one case of each typical group: a radical illegal movement in Uzbekistan and a political Islamic Party in Tajikistan.

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan

Background

One of the biggest radical Islamic movements in post-Soviet Central Asia today is The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). This military radical group appears in the US State Department lists as one of the most dangerous international terror organizations.

The IMU was founded in 1996 by former activists in other Islamic organizations in Uzbekistan. Most of these organizations (such as "Adolat Uyushmasi" from Namaghan, Islamic Party of Turkestan - IRP, "Islam Lashkorlary", also from Namanghan, etc.) were outlawed by the Uzbeki President Islam Karimov in 1992-93 for their terror activities. When Karimov's campaign against Islamic parties began, about 2000 of the future IMU activists immigrated to Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Many of them took part in the Tajik civil war, fighting for the Islamic-oriented United Tajik Opposition (UTO).

After both sides had agreed on a settlement, future IMU leadership refused to implement the peace treaty signed by the Tajik government and the UTO, claiming it was against Islam.³³

In August 1999 IMU troops invaded Kyrgyzstan and after a couple of months they crossed the border back to Uzbekistan. After the IMU activists returned home, Tahir Yuldashev became the movement's leader, Dzhumbay Khodzhev headed the IMU military wing and Zubair Ibn-Abdurahman (Abdul Rahim) became the movement's speaker and Yuldashev's deputy. Before 2002 IMU headquarters were placed in Kandahar, Afghanistan, when it still was the actual capital of the Taliban. IMU leadership collaborated with many international and regional Islamic

³³ <http://www.nationalsecurity.ru/library/00016/00016idu.htm>.

movements and organizations, such as al-Qa'ida, Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Muslim Brothers and others.³⁴

IMU activities in and outside CA are being sponsored mostly by the global Islamic movement and by wealthy members of the Uzbeki diaspora in Afghaistan, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Beside this, IMU gets a regular financial aid from Pakistani special services.³⁵

IMU's aims and strategies on local level

The IMU, like Hizb ut-Tahrir, aims to establish an Islamic state on the territory of Ferghana Valley. Its activists and ideologists do not have a clear vision of this state or Caliphate. Moreover, it seems that they do not even know how to achieve their final goal, since they have no ideology or theoretical basis of their own.

In spite of the similar intentions, IMU, unlike HT, is trying to achieve its goals in different, more violent tactics and perhaps, because of that, it has little chance to survive as a movement.

During the last year, its leader Tahir Yuldashev, persecuted by all the regimes in Central Asia, has been hiding somewhere between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Uzbeki secret services believe he is in touch with Osama Bin Laden, who has been one of the most prominent IMU sponsors before 9/11.³⁶

It was also noticed that IMU had been tightening its ties with al-Qa'ida in Vaziristan since 2005, after al-Qa'ida started to gain back its power in Afghanistan. Some sources even suggest that Taliban and al-Qa'ida are getting stronger due to the foreign Muslim worriers that joined them and started a new phase of cooperation in training future *shahids*. It is possible to maintain that some of these "foreigners" are Uzbekis from IMU, in particularly from its military wing, known as Islamic Jihad Group (IJG).³⁷

For the time being, the movement's strategy is concentrating on fighting the CA regimes, as Yuldashev says in a video tape from September 2006: "...The Mujahids did not forget the Muslims who were killed in Andijan last year. We will keep on responding...and seek revenge for persecutions of Muslims in CA and Russia. We demand from all governments in the region to stop persecutions, terror and repressions against Muslims. We would like to remind Karimov, Rahmonov

³⁴ <http://www.nationalsecurity.ru/library/00016/00016idu.htm>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ <http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=4705>. Many sources claim that Bin Laden gave Yuldashev 3 million US dollars per year until the 9/11 attacks.

³⁷ <http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=4705>.

(President of Tajikistan) and Bakiev (President of Kyrgyzstan), that they will be punished for their crimes against Islam.”³⁸

One of the goals is “to help Muslims all over the world to fight the corrupted West”. As already mentioned, IMU activists help al-Qa'ida in Afghanistan against the US and the UK. Many of them take part in the fighting in Chechnya and were trained in Amir Ibn al-Khattab's³⁹ special training camp “Uzbekistan front”. Following the war in Iraq the number of new recruits to IMU started growing rapidly. The same process was noticed in HT and other Islamist movements in CA.

In conclusion, IMU is one of the most radical and violent organizations in Central Asia and it would not hesitate to use any means to gain power. While there is no indication in IMU writings that it is attempting to acquire WMD, due to the close connections to al-Qa'ida and other radical Islamist movements, it may be assumed that it would not eschew such weapons if it could acquire them.

The Islamic Renaissance Party

Background

The Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan was the first Islamic political party in Post-Soviet CA. The Party grew from a small core of activists who since 1976 started to organize demonstrations against the Soviet war in Afghanistan.

When Tajikistan became independent, the IRP was banned in 1993, but re-legalized following the peace accords in 1998. A year later it became the second largest party in Tajikistan. At the recent legislative elections in 2005, the party won 8% of the popular vote and 2 out of 63 seats.

IRP, unlike IMU, does not feel any need to cooperate with HT or any other radical Islamic movement. On the contrary, IRP leaders opposed to HT presence in Tajikistan, because young Muslims sometimes chose to join HT instead IRP. IRP supports democracy and is legal in Tajikistan unlike other Islamic organizations, like HT or IMU.

By 2000 the IRP had become one of the most powerful political parties in Tajikistan. The IRP is unique in the region as an Islamist movement participating peacefully in the political life of a secular state. Although it has expanded from its regional base and now has branches almost all over the country, the IRP has been unable to overcome the problem of regionalism and this has limited its influence. Also, some people question the concept of an 'Islamic party'. Khoji Akbar

³⁸ <http://www.ferghana.ru/news.php?id=3350>.

³⁹ Amir Ibn al-Khattab is one of the Chechnyan terror leaders. See chapter 3 about Chechnya.

Turajonzoda left the IRP, arguing that Islam is incompatible with a limited political party. He promotes instead the integration of Islamic principles into the political system to encourage Tajikistan's evolution into an Islamic state.⁴⁰

Since the death of IRP's long-running leader, Said Abdullo Nuri, in August 2006,⁴¹ the Party has no religious leader. Its political leader, Muhiddin Kabiri is considered to be "the Party's face for America and Europe".⁴²

Kabiri is the leader of the Tajik opposition and he openly questions the legitimacy of Emomali Rakhmonov's reelection as the President of Tajikistan. "He won the elections only because there was no real competition among other politicians."⁴³ IRP's political leader claims that Rakhmonov's pro-Russian position must change, because "Tajikistan has a big potential that can attract other important players on the international arena. More than China or the US, the country that has the biggest interest in Tajikistan - is Iran. Considering the same language, religion and, of course, cultural connections between our countries, Teheran should be our first priority."⁴⁴

IRP's aims and strategies on local level

IRP aspires to see Tajikistan united by Islamic principles, but when asked about its possible goal to establish a Caliphate, IRP's political leader answered: "Organizations like HT have very radical views. They dream about some kind of an Islamic Utopia, about a Caliphate. There are other Islamic groups in the world that make *da'wah* and call on people to establish a Caliphate. But it is impossible to solve the problem by repressions and banning these organizations in CA. We need to find some kind of a combined solution for these groups that pose a hazard to our existence."⁴⁵

So, if not a Caliphate, what does IRP expect to achieve in the nearest future? It appears that the Party's leaders are rather pragmatic and have a clear vision of their plan to unite Tajikistan under the principles of Islam. IRP aspires to take part in Tajikistan's political process as a parliamentary party, while conducting a long-term educational work on reviving Islam in the Republic. According to their official documents, IRP's main goals are:

1. Religious renaissance of the Republic's citizens.
2. The Republic's economical and political independence.

⁴⁰ http://www.toptj.com/ShowNews.aspx?news_id=DEE8A41C-7065-4870-9F79-5A13E05A4B21.

⁴¹ http://www.ia-centr.ru/public_details.php?id=104.

⁴² Nezavisimaya Gazeta, November 27, 2006.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

3. Involving Islam in every aspect of the citizens' lives, starting from political and juridical aspects.⁴⁶
4. IRP hopes to attain these goals by the following means:
5. Agitation and propaganda of Islam among the citizens through mass-media.
6. Bringing in more Muslims to the economical, political and religious aspects of life in the Republic.
7. Observance and implementation of Islamic principles in every-day lives of all IRP's members.
8. Establishing youth organizations.⁴⁷

Their propaganda is very appealing to the elder generations, because it offers them a compromise: they can stay loyal to traditional Islamic principles without being considered extremists. IRP has also invested a lot in a special Muslim educational program for the younger generations and has given them a legal alternative to such radical organizations as HT.

Kabiri, the Party's leader, estimates that IRP's future is in the hands of the younger generations, who, as he says "have developed a strong interest in religion. Our future depends on our ability to find common language with the youngsters."⁴⁸

IRP obviously does not intend to use violence in this phase of its existence. In fact, it seems that of all large Islamic organizations in CA, IRP is the only one that is capable of making a real impact.

⁴⁶ Muzaffar Olimov and Saadat Olimova for the Moscow branch of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "Political Islam in Contemporary Tajikistan," <http://www.carnegie.ru/ru/pubs/books/volume/36597.htm>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Victoria Panfilova, "Iran can take Russia's place in Tajikistan," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, November 27, 2006.

Chechnya – the Jihad of Central Asia

The Chechen Jihad – Local and Imported Sources

There are few Russian sources about the War in Chechnya, mostly because of Putin's policy of veiling everything that happens in the Caucasus for the last few years. The few journalists, who managed to cross into Chechnya, rarely came back with valuable materials, and some of them even lost their lives, like Anna Politkovskaya.⁴⁹ Furthermore, it is also extremely difficult to find Chechen materials from the last years. Most of the available information about Chechnya is to be found in *fatwas* and speeches translated to Russian from Arabic. This is strong evidence of the profound Wahhabi impact on Chechnya.

Islam in Chechnya has been traditionally Sufi and in a certain way it has stayed that way until today. During the Soviet regime there were no official mosques in the Republic and there was lack of religious leaders. The only religious and social uniting factor in the Chechen life, were Sufi *virid* fraternities that still existed in the Soviet anti-religious reality.

New Chechen leaders, just like the national hero Shamil⁵⁰, used Islam not as a religion, but as pure ideology. Dudaev⁵¹ and his followers only continued what Doku Zavgaev⁵² started. Zavgaev managed to build more than 200 mosques in Chechnya in only two years. He was also the one who turned all the Islamic attributes and ceremonies into a political weapon. For instance, ritual “*zikr*” ceremonies and public prayers were used for political purposes. They turned out to be a good substitute for former Soviet ceremonies, such as demonstrations and 1 May parades. Political opponents were marked as “infidels”, while the leaders called themselves “soldiers of Allah”.⁵³

Dudaev followed traditional Chechen Islamic patterns when he insisted on showing his relation to the most influential *virid* of Kunta-Haji. He has also emphasized the connection of his older brother to the *virid* of Vis-Haji. Eventually, his assistant Zelimkhan Yandarbiev has created a unique “politburo” that consisted of Sufi elders who gave spiritual legitimacy to Dudaev's regime. Later the same

⁴⁹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5416238.stm>.

⁵⁰ Shamil was a notorious leader of the tribes of Dagestan and Chechnya. He was the first leader who united these tribes against the Russians fighting for independence. For more information see Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnya and Daghestan*, (London: Frank Cass, 1994).

⁵¹ Dzhokhar Musayevich Dudayev (1944-1996) was a Soviet Air Force general and a Chechen leader. He was considered the first elected President of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, an unrecognized breakaway state in the North Caucasus. He advocated sovereignty for Chechnya as a separate republic within the Soviet Union.

⁵² Doku Gapurovich Zavgaev was a former Soviet leader of the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. For more information see: <http://eng.kavkaz.memo.ru/persontext/engperson/id/559358.html>.

⁵³ <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/analit/sobytia/parallislam.htm>.

political method was used by anti-Maskhadov⁵⁴ forces that have formed their own “*shura*” (consultation) under the rule of Shamil Basayev⁵⁵

During Dudaev’s rule religious organizations of the “official” Islamic leadership (that was imported into the Republic because there were no religious authorities in Chechnya) were accused of collaboration with the Special Forces and disbanded.

Their place was taken by radical Islamic organizations from abroad, such as the “Muslim Brothers”, “Jamaat Islami”, “Islamic Youth”, etc. These movements were imported into Chechnya mostly by Saudi Arabia and Egypt and they had tight connections with Saudi, Pakistani and Lebanese radical organizations. They also had close relations with “Jamaat al-Tabligh”, the Worldwide League of Muslim Youth, the Islamic Center in Japan and other worldwide Islamic organizations that supported and financed them.⁵⁶

There are many versions regarding the way Saudi Arabia started importing Wahhabism into Chechnya. One of them is about Johar Dudaev’s journey in search for a “new Chechen religion”. Dudaev, who knew how important it was to gain support from the Muslim world, was in a search of a state religion, when he came to Saudi Arabia for a *hajj* in 1992. It was there that he sensed his transformation from a Soviet general into a “spiritual guide of the Islamic nation”. After his *hajj*, Dudaev held an Islamic meeting in Grozny, where his rhetoric had become Wahhabi. Some experts claim that was the turning point for Chechen Islam - the point where it transferred from a peaceful, moderate Sufism into a radical Wahhabi model of a political religion.⁵⁷

Many Chechen leaders refused to see the changes in their nation’s religion. One of them was Maskhadov, who has defined his position in an interview to the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*: “...They try to represent us as Afghan Taliban - an obedient tool in the hands of the West. We are Sunnis of Naqshabandiya and Qadiriya and there will be no other Islam in Chechnya.”⁵⁸

Nevertheless, maybe it was due to the bloody war that refused to end, or perhaps, because of other reasons, one of them might be that the most important role in Chechnya was given to the Wahhabi “guests”, who have become the main authority of Chechnyan Jihad since the summer of 2002, after what some experts call “the

⁵⁴ Aslan Aliyevish Maskhadov (1951-2005) was a leader of the separatist movement in the Southern Russian Republic of Chechnya. For more information, see: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/459302.stm>.

⁵⁵ Shamil Salmanovich Basayev (1965-2006) was a Vice-President of the internationally unrecognized separatist government of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, Islamist guerrilla leader, self-admitted terrorist and a national hero for many Chechens. For more information see: <http://www.mosnews.com/mn-files/Basayev.shtml>.

⁵⁶ <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/analit/sobytia/parallislam.htm>.

⁵⁷ <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/analit/sobytia/parallislam.htm>.

⁵⁸ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, March 26, 1999.

Wahhabi Revolution”. It happened after Majlis al-Shura⁵⁹ of Chechnya decided to bring changes into its constitution in a form of a document named “Nizam” (from Arabic: order, regime). The decisions were made during a conference that was held in the Arabic language in the presence of the “president” Aslan Maskhadov, who did not know Arabic and in the presence of Maskhadov's deputy Shamil Basayev who knew little Arabic. The “Nizam” states that the source of every political decision in Chechnya must be the Koran and the Sunna. In other words, from that day Chechnya was to become a state that lives by the laws of *Shari'ahh*, just like Saudi Arabia or Afghanistan during the Taliban regime.

The main purpose of the state according to this document is: “To lead eternal jihad against “infidels”. Two of the means to defend Islam and Muslims from the *kuffar* and the *munafiqun* are preparation and jihad in the way of Allah.”⁶⁰ It is worth mentioning that the Arabic words “*kuffar*” (infidels) and “*munafiqun*” (hypocrites) have become a part of the Chechen rhetoric after the Nizam and nowadays, in 2007 they are used by every small jihadic group.

Another interesting paragraph in the “Nizam” talks about the role of Chechens in the new Chechnya: “All the *Ansar* Muslims that take part in jihad in the name of freedom and independence of Chechnya, are considered its competent citizens.”⁶¹

This remark is very important, because it refers to original Chechens as *Ansars*, just as the natives of Yathrib (later Medina) were considered competent citizens of the state that Prophet Muhammad had established in their own city.

All the key roles were given to the Arab foreigners, just like in Muhammad's state in Medina. Some of the names of these figures included: Abu al-Walid (head of the Eastern Front), 'Abd al-Halim (Head of the *Shari'ah* Committee), Muhammad bin 'Abdallah al-Sayf, widely known as Abu 'Umar ('Abd al-Halim's deputy) and many others. Most of these people were Saudis, who were friends and followers of Amir Ibn al-Khattab, a *mujahid* from Saudi Arabia, who was already dead when the 2002 “Wahhabi Revolution” took place.⁶² Most of these people have been killed by the Russian Special Forces during the last five years.

Today, in 2007, the variety of different jihadi groups in Chechnya seems infinite and their religious authorities are mostly imported Wahhabi jihad fighters

⁵⁹ Majlis a-Shura-(lit. Islamic council). A religious-political institute in Chechnya, headed by foreigners, mostly Saudis.

⁶⁰ Nezavisimaya Gazeta, July 16, 2003.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² After the Afghanistan War, Ibn al-Khattab went to Tajikistan to take part in the civil war between Islamists and the supporters of the Soviet regime. He Came to Chechnya in 1995 after he had heard about the war there from a CNN news break. In 1996 he established a terrorist training center Kavkaz, where he trained thousands of warriors every year. In the terrorists' center there was also a faculty of da'wa along with the military faculties. In 2002 Ibn al-Khattab died after opening a poisoned letter sent by the Russian Special Forces.

(*mujahids*) and not scholars. These *mujahids* claim that they are the only ones who can interpret the Koran and the Sunna “the right way”. For instance, one of the last calls for jihad came from Amir Sayfullah, one of the leaders of Chechen jihad right now, who says: “In our times everybody knows a lot about Islam. Numerous *tafsirs* (commentaries) on the Koran, *Hadith* books and papers of worldwide known experts on the subject are being published. In the Arab countries there are many scholars, who give lessons in mosques and universities. Everybody can get all the information they need about Islam from the Internet. In spite of that, many Muslims turn with questions on Islamic matters to scholars-*mujahids* or even to uneducated *mujahids*.” It happens because of various reasons, says Sayfullah: “First of all, scholars, who participate in jihad, are considered to be closer to the Truth than the ones, who do not fight for Allah’s sake. Sheikh al-Islam, Ibn Taymiyya, tells us that noted scholars like Imam 'Abdallah bin Mubarak, Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal and others used to say: “If there is a disagreement between people, check what the *mujahids* do, because the Truth is on their side. For Allah said: 'And those who strive in Our (cause) - We will certainly guide them to our Paths: For verily Allah is with those who do right.' (Koran, Surat al-'Anqabut, 29:69)" quoted by Ibn Taymiyya, in al-Jihad,(Vol.2, p.81)⁶³

The second reason Amir Sayfullah gives is even more comfortable for the Wahhabi foreigners who came to fight on the Chechen land: “Scholars, who live under the rule of infidel regimes, including the Arab countries, lack the possibility to give unprejudiced legal rulings on many different matters in the religion of Allah.”⁶⁴

The third reason according to Sayfullah is simple: “Nowadays jihad is every Muslim’s personal duty. People, who without any reason choose not to participate in jihad, are sinners. No one should follow people like that in matters of Islamic jurisdiction and legal ruling. Everybody should prefer the one, who participates in jihad, even if he is less knowledgeable.”⁶⁵

Strategic Guidelines

Role of military jihad vs. da’wah

Very noticeable is the fact that there is no *da’wah* in the regular meaning of the word in Chechnya. The jihad itself serves as the only form of Islamic propaganda. The fighters of jihad are the ones who are supposed to make *da’wah*, since they are the only source of authority Chechnya has and uses. This situation has persevered

⁶³ <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2007/03/10/49937.shtml>.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2007/03/31/50294.shtml>.

for the last few years, probably because of the war that Chechnya leads with the RF for the last 7-8 years.

Chechens prefer to refer to their national struggle as a “jihad for Allah’s sake”, in order to use all the opportunities that a war in the name of Islam could offer to the plain Chechen national fighters. (For instance: recruits and volunteers from different Islamic movements and countries, Saudi funding, etc.). Therefore, it is obvious that the only *da’wah* the *mujahids* use is a call for jihad. A good example would be the last speech of Doku Umarov, a “leader of Chechen resistance”, who calls himself “president” of Chechnya, where he explains how to make *da’wah* for jihad. Umarov quotes the Koran and various *hadiths* regarding jihad, for instance: “A person, who died without making jihad or even without intentions to make jihad, has died with one of the qualities of hypocrites.”⁶⁶ Umarov goes on: “Jihad is a part of worshipping Allah, one of the most important duties and an answer to Allah’s call. Allah calls upon us in the holy Koran: “Go ye forth, (whether equipped) lightly or heavily, and strive and struggle, with your goods and your persons, in the cause of Allah. That is best for you, if ye (but) knew.”⁶⁷ His message to “the struggling Muslims of the Caucasus and the oppressed Muslims of Russia” is presented as his “duty to Allah, as a legal Amir of the Muslims”. It is as follows:

1. Every adult Muslim must take part in jihad.
2. Muslims are obliged to form military groups (*jamaat*) in Russia and North Caucasus in order to conduct military actions. These groups must carry out jihad operations, but in case a Muslim does not have a possibility to form such a group, he must fight on his own, to rely on Allah, to plan and carry out military operations.
3. Muslims, who have material resources, must finance jihad and supply the fighters with everything they need for their military action. These Muslims also must help families of *mujahids* and *shahids*.
4. Muslims, who serve in the enemy’s forces are obliged to leave their positions. If they are unable to do so, they must help *mujahids* by giving out valuable information and cooperating with the fighters of jihad.
5. Muslims, who are good in rhetoric must make *da’wah*, and spread the word of Islam and jihad in every possible way.”⁶⁸

Even though Umarov is emphasizing the role of *da’wah*, the only *da’wah* that is done is a call for military jihad, not just Islamic propaganda like in most of the other movements and ideologists in CA republics.

⁶⁶ Sahih Muslim, quoted by Umarov in <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2007/03/05/49856.shtml>.

⁶⁷ Koran 9:41.

⁶⁸ <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2007/03/05/49856.shtml>.

Immediate, mid-term and long term goals

Despite the fact that there is almost no *da'wah* for anything but jihad in Chechnya, there are also clear political goals among the different Chechen Wahhabi-oriented military groups.

For instance, one of the terrorist cells of the Caucasian Front, "Jamaat Shariat", defines its main goal while using a quotation of the national hero Shamil: "Imam Shamil, when asked by a Russian general what he wants, answered: More than anything I want to implement the *Shar'ia* among my Muslim brothers." The Jamaat speakers go on: "Muslims' honor and dignity lie in jihad. Our Jamaat was established in 1999 with only one purpose - to reestablish the Islamic state on the territories of the Caucasus. Jamaat Shariat has given a *bay'a* (an Islamic oath of fealty) to the Caucasian *Amir al-Muslimin* Dokka Umarov."⁶⁹

These radical movements do not set clear mid-term goals. Instead, they describe their vision of a utopian Islamic state: "Our main goal is to free Muslim lands from Russian occupation and then establish a Muslim state. As opposed to the heretics' political programs, our plans and aims are clear to everybody. Every person, who defines himself as a Muslim and wishes to set Allah's word on the land of Dagestan and Chechnya, who wishes to live by the laws of the *Shari'ah* in freedom and justice, may join our troops. We do not pay money or buy votes. The most valuable promise is given to us by Allah, who will reward our *jihad fi sabilih* (Jihad in His way) - Paradise."⁷⁰

Therefore, there is a final goal of establishing an Islamic state on the territory of North Caucasus, but no description of how this state will look, except for the wish to implement in it the *Shari'ah*. Another point that is not emphasized enough in the works and speeches of these groups is how this state will implement the laws of *Shari'ah* on a traditionally Sufi-oriented population. Wahhabism does not accept Sufism, and native Chechens do not accept any external force, as one can learn from their history, so the result if ever achieved should be unique.

Attitude towards rules of engagement in jihad

The only rule in Chechen engagement in jihad is that there are no rules. Every military group and every Islamic movement has its own interpretation of War for Allah and his religion - Islam.

Most of the groups agree that jihad is every Muslim's duty in case of Muslim lands' occupied by non-Muslims. Jamaat Shariat explains: "Jihad is the Sunna of

⁶⁹ <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2007/03/31/50294.shtml>.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

our Prophet, who has abandoned the methods of political struggle and negotiation with infidels in favor of armed confrontation. Besides, what the infidels call 'political struggle' is nothing but a farce, no matter where it took place: in America, Russia, Chechnya or Dagestan.”⁷¹

Jihad has become a way of life in Chechnya and Chechens feel they are obliged to wage war against the "enemy". But the term “enemy” varies from one Chechen citizen to another. In a personal talk with Salih from Grozny (he refused to give his last name), one of the founders of the Russian-language site “Islamic renaissance” www.zamanaonline.com, I found out that he does not belong to any group or *jamaa*, but supports jihad against “the enemy”. When asked, who was the enemy Salih said: “The Russian occupants, who came to our land.”

Another definition of the “enemy” is given by Musa Mukhojev, one of the leaders of Caucasus Front. He claims that “all Russian infidels are the enemy, and, therefore, Muslims must claim their blood everywhere, in Chechnya and on the enemy’s playground, the Russian Federation.”⁷²

Attitude towards WMD

Just like HT and other radical Islamic movements in Central Asia, there are various Chechen military movements like Jamaat Shariat that believe they can and should use any weapon against non-Muslims. When asked whether they would attack non-combatants or civilians, they have answered: “Definitely. Occupants kill non-combatant Muslims. Allah calls us to fight the heretics the same ways they fight us.”⁷³

If we compare this attitude towards using any kinds of weapons to Hizb ut-Tahrir’s attitude, we can see that HT leader Imran Wahed claims that there is use of WMD in Palestine: “If the enemy uses WMD as it happens nowadays in Palestine, we will definitely use these kinds of weapons too.”⁷⁴

This example is evidence to the readiness of the Islamic radicals to use any weapons against non-Muslims based on fictional information, (that is believed to be true), that non-Muslims use that kind of weapons against Muslims.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2006/09/23/47159.shtml>.

⁷³ <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2007/03/31/50294.shtml>.

Interview with Jamaat Shariat, March 31, 2007.

⁷⁴ Al-Wa’i, No.170 (June 2001).

Attitude towards non-Muslims in the future regime

The future regime is still very unclear, but if anything, it is supposed to be an Islamic state that will implement the laws of the *Shari'ah*. According to the *Shari'ah*, non-Muslim citizens of the Islamic state will be in a juridical status of a *dhimmi*. Meanwhile, though, Chechen Wahhabi *mujahids*, who are the main religious authority today, do not write or say anything regarding the role of non-Muslims in the future regime. They are referred on this stage of jihad as “enemies” and “infidels” that must be killed for Allah’s sake during jihad, or as a revenge for the Chechen victims of the war that is being waged for the past 7-8 years.

In conclusion, strategies of jihad in Chechnya differ from the ones in Central Asia, mostly because Chechnya is still a part of the Russian Federation and goes through a murderous war for the last decade. The war is a perfect opportunity for all the groups in Chechnya to implement jihad in its every aspect. Despite this war, and maybe, because of it, whereas the tactics of jihad are very clear, its strategies are vague and do not have distinctive lines. Perhaps it happens because there is no time to develop strategies during a war, or because the strategists are warriors, rather than religious scholars or ideologists.

Ahli-Beit – “Shiitization” (Tashayyu') in CA and Russia

One of the most interesting new Islamic tendencies in the post-Soviet republics and even more in the Russian Federation is the phenomenon of conversion to Shiite Islam.

The "Soviet" Muslims were predominantly Sunni. At the end of the Soviet era "Soviet" Shiite Muslims were to be found only in Azerbaijan (about 4 million) with a few thousand in Dagestan. Most of them, like the Sunnis of the USSR did not have a clue about real Shi'a or about Islam for that matter.

While all the attention was given to the Sunni fundamentalist organizations and movements, like Wahhabiyya or Hizb ut-Tahrir, Iran has succeeded in activating a Shiite movement in Central Asia and in Russia; this movement is more discrete than the radical Sunni Wahhabi stream, but the impact it has on Muslims and even non-Muslims in these areas is highly noticeable.

Iranian religious infiltration into the former Soviet Union began in the early 1990s. In its search for political and economical influence in the former Soviet Union, it dispatched its religious agents first in Azerbaijan (because of the large Shiite community) and Tajikistan (because of the Tajik language which is akin to Farsi). Later, Iran began to infiltrate other Central Asian republics, and Russia itself. In these Sunni communities Iran launched a campaign for converting the Sunnis into Shiites, or, “bringing them into the light” (*istibsar*⁷⁵). During the early 1990s Iran did not achieve significant success in these efforts, mainly due to the strength of the better financed and organized Sunni Wahhabi movements. The latter had greater appeal for most of the ex-Soviet Muslims while Iranian missionary activity remained relatively restrained.

However, in the mid-90s Shiite organizations began to gain strength. Shiite proselytizers who arrived in Central Asia were mainly Iranian preachers affiliated with the Iranian regime, who came on dedicated missions of proselytization to the former Soviet Union. These preachers gathered a following based on immigrants from Azerbaijan to Ural or Moscow in search of work who often found themselves impecunious and unemployed. Not unlike Middle-Eastern immigrants in the West, their expatriate status often has an effect of bringing them closer to Islam and of radicalization. For such immigrants, a job as a cleaner in a Shiite mosque or club funded by Iran was a godsend, not to mention a position as a preacher or a religious clerk.

⁷⁵ Shiites call Sunnis who became Shiites “Mustabsirun”, which means the ones who saw the light.

Ideology and Da'wa

In 1996 a Shiite society by the name of Ahli-Beit opened in Russia its first branch headed by Musa Kurbanov. The organization already boasts a membership of thousands of Muslims, many of them Sunnis by birth. The organization advocates unification of all Sunni and Shiite *madhhabs*⁷⁶ in general and in the Russian Federation in particular. On its "about us" website page Kurbanov claims that his organization aims to "struggle with religious extremism and terrorism". The main aim of Ahli-Beit is "to call to make righteous deeds and to estrange from bad deeds."⁷⁷

Ahli-Beit has since grown and has become highly active in Muslim communities in Russia. The organization founded a youth community "Sahib az-Zaman" ("The Lord of Time" – an allusion to the "Hidden Imam") and a women's association "Fatima-Zahra" (named for the Prophet's daughter and the wife of Imam 'Ali). Also, due to Kurbanov's efforts, dozens of "Husseiniyya" parades were organized in Moscow in the memory of the first and foremost Shiite martyr, the grandson of Muhammad, Imam Hussein Ibn 'Ali.⁷⁸ To avoid unnecessary attention from governmental structures, these parades were kept modest and did not include the usual violent and bloody special effects that usually accompany 'Ashura⁷⁹ parades in Muslim states like Lebanon.

Ahli-Beit does not suffice with leading the existing Shiite communities, but dedicates great efforts to "*istibsar*". As noted above, Ahli-Beit has as its main goal the unification of all Muslim *madhhabs*, but it does not indicate how this could be achieved. The modus operandi of the organization can be deduced from its activities in one of the largest Shiite communities - Yekaterinburg⁸⁰.

In a speech given by Thulencov, the 28-year old leader of the Yekaterinburg Shiite community – the largest in the Russian Federation - he related to the way that

⁷⁶ Madhhab (Madhaheb-pl.): Islamic school of thought and law. There are 4 Sunni schools. Some call the Shiite Ja'fari madhhab "the fifth Muslim school of law".

⁷⁷ This is a paraphrase on the famous verse from the Koran: "And from among you there should be a party who invite to good and enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong, and these it is that shall be successful." (3:104) The obligation to enjoin that which is right and forbid the wrong (al-amr bi-al-ma'ruf wa-al-nahi 'an al-munkar) is the basis for groups in both Saudi Arabia (mutawwa'un – decency committee/police) and Iran (Hizballah) that deal in imposing Islamic norms as they see them. The tradition regarding this obligation is that a Muslim must "command good" and prevent evil first by his tongue, if he cannot then by the sword.

⁷⁸ www.ahlibeyt.ru- The official site of Ahli-Beit in Russia.

⁷⁹ <http://www.ashura.com>.

⁸⁰ Yekaterinburg belongs to Sverdlovsk oblast (region).

the celebration of the martyrdom of the Imam Hussein has become more and more central in this community over the last eight years:

"In the past we used to gather in my office and in people's houses and apartments. Today, in the new democratic Russia, where there is freedom of faith and the government supports the believers and helps them to celebrate their holidays, we have gathered here. It is the first time in the history of Russia, that LRMO (Local Religious Muslim Organization) Ahli-Beit has been officially registered... We invited and will invite everybody, no matter what their confessions are and what they believe in. Our guests have heard, witnessed and understood today what Imam Hussein died for. They understood that Hussein was willing to give up his life for his family's sake. He was beheaded by his worst enemies when he was only 58 years old. ...Imam Hussein has witnessed by his own blood that people should worship only Allah and no one but him, especially not Yazid⁸¹... We have guests from Azerbaijan and the Islamic Republic of Iran: Karbalai Tahir Shirvani, Karbalai Sakit and Karbalai Zulfigar."⁸²

The Russian government's support of the Yekaterinburg branch of Ahli-Beit as a "Local Muslim organization" is indicative of the growing strength and legitimization of the organization. It is not clear however to what extent the Russian authorities are aware of the nature of the organization. The Russian government is concerned mostly about the growing numbers of immigrants from the Central Asian republics but does not show any specific interest in the increasing numbers of the Russian and Tatar converts to Shi'a. Russia's policy of supporting Muslims in the Russian Federation who are ostensibly anti-Wahhabi facilitates the activity of organizations like Ahli-Beit that hide their real identity under the neutral mask of "Local Religious Muslim Organizations" in order to prosper.

In his *'Ashura* address, Thulencov did not refer even once to Shi'a or Shiites. This was not an oversight. The strategy of Ahli-Beit is to obfuscate and not to accentuate the differences between Sunnis and Shiites, thus bringing Sunnis unwittingly into the Shiite fold. While there is no statistical data about the number of Shiite converts in Russia or the Republics, whatever the number of "declared" converts is, the actual number of "neo-Shiites" is much greater due to the fact that many of them do not realize they have crossed the lines and accepted religious tenets which have, in fact, converted them. If asked, they would probably describe themselves, in the spirit of Ahli-Beit as plain Muslims.

⁸¹ Yazid Ibn Mu'awiya Ibn Abu Sufyan was the second Caliph of the Umayyad Dynasty. He ruled from CE 680 to 683. He is also notable as an object of Shi'a Muslim animosity; they reject his legitimacy and condemn his role in the Battle of Karbala which resulted in the death of Hussein Ibn 'Ali.

⁸² <http://www.ek-shia.org/>.

This trend of de facto "Shiitization" is evident in other areas as well. The editor of the (Sunni) Islamic journal, "Risalat" published in Ufa, Bashkortostan,⁸³ Bulat Yuldashev, revealed in an interview that nobody knows how many Shiites live among the 400,000 Muslims living in Ufa, but the Sunnis in the city have been following "a new tradition" of celebrating Nouruz (Iranian New Year; Nouruz means "New day" or "New life") for the last few years by visiting one of Ufa's renowned mosques and holding special prayers. This holiday is indeed known among Central Asian Muslims; however, it had been practiced more in the breach than in the observance during the Soviet era. Its revival – so it seems – is more related to the Iranian influence than to this community's ancient traditions. This "Neo-Nouruz" custom can be distinguished from the old local custom by customs that seem to be imported from Iran.⁸⁴ The old, traditional Nouruz-Bayram was celebrated mostly in Azerbaijan only as a national holiday, almost without any religious or symbolic features. The festival begins on March 20 or 21, follows the vernal equinox, and lasts 13 days.

The customs of the mosque also facilitate Iranian influence. Since most of the prayers are in Arabic and the Friday sermon (the *khutba*) is in Azeri or the Tatar language, many people do not even understand the words they hear during the prayer, so it is not difficult for the Shiite movement that organizes these festivals, to bring unwitting Sunni Muslims closer to Shi'a. Muslims all over Russia, mostly in the Ural region (Ufa, Chelyabinsk, Yekaterinburg), visit "Islamic clubs" and mosques without knowing they belong to the Shiite movement in Russia or being subsidized by Iran. Furthermore, Russians, who want to convert to Islam and come to these mosques and clubs, are being automatically converted to Shiite Islam after saying the *Shahada*. They learn about Shiite principles that do not exist in Sunna, such as "*mut'a*" marriage⁸⁵, recite stories about the life of Khomeini and read interviews with Muqtada al-Sadr, and thus, without noticing they become Shiites.

In spite of its ostensibly innocuous intentions Ahli-Beit is, in essence, a political Iranian organization that supports Shiite revival throughout the world. The principal role model in this context is Hizballah. Therefore the new Russian Shiites demonstrate a militant, anti-American and anti-Israeli bias and are eager to demonstrate their political affiliations. A prime example is that of the Russian

⁸³Bashkortostan is an autonomic Muslim republic inside the Russian Federation. Ufa is the capital of Bashkortostan. Ufa's population is more than a million, about 400,000 of the population is Muslim.

⁸⁴ The "Neo-Nouruz" involves Iranian New Year's customs: A "*haft seen*" table is set with seven foods that begin with the letters in Farsi: *samanoo* (wheat pudding), *sumac* (berries), *serkeh* (vinegar), *seeb* (apple), *sekkeh* (gold coin), *sombol* (flower), and *sear* (garlic). The Koran, pictures of relatives, pomegranates, colored eggs, 94 pennies, and a bowl of goldfish are placed on the table. Noodle soup is eaten. The holiday meal is usually being held during the festival in the local mosques. Other symbolic Iranian features almost never appear in the "Neo-Nouruz" version in Russian cities.

⁸⁵ *Mut'a* marriage: a marriage that is signed by a contract for limited time. These kinds of marriages could last a year or an hour, depending on the will of both sides. *Mut'a* marriages are being sometimes used in Shiite states such as Iran as a kind of legalized prostitution.

journalist, Anastasia Fatima Ezhova, who converted to Shiite Islam. She is a loyal supporter of Ahli-Beit and signs most of her articles under the pseudonym "Fatima Hizbulla" and maintains a blog on the Internet under the name "The Black Banners of Khorasan".⁸⁶ Her slogan, which appears at the end of all her articles, is: "Every day is 'Ashura, all the World is Karbala"⁸⁷. Her loyalty to Shiite Ahli-Beit notwithstanding, Fatima Hizbulla has a column in the official Russian-Islamic website www.islam.ru. The fact that this website is Sunni and quotes those of the Prophet's companions (the *Sahaba*) who are maligned in Shiite historiography does not seem to bother her at all. Fatima's positions are anti-Semitic and anti-Western. She openly declares: "...I hate Jews. They are filthy creatures, as written in the Koran."⁸⁸

Another example of "the new Shiite" is Fatima's friend and colleague Daniyal Thulencov, who is the founder of "Ahli-Beit"'s branch in Yekaterinburg. Daniyal is a Tatar by nationality, who converted into Shiite Islam a few years ago. He moderates a Shiite website: www.ek-shia.org, where he publishes articles about Shiite rituals, traditions and leaders, such as Musa al-Sadr and Hussein Borujerdi. Thulencov also publishes biographies of important Shiite historical persons, such as Fatima al-Zahra or the Shiite Imams, from Hussein Ibn 'Ali and concluding with the Imam Mahdi al-Muntazar, the Hidden Imam who is awaited along with Armageddon.

Relations with Iran and Iran's Interests in the Region

Ahli-Beit does not give any indication in its formal writings of its Iranian orientation. However, the organization in Russia and CA is not in essence a local organization. It is in fact a branch of the Iranian government organization of the same name – "Ahlu Beit". Shortly after the Islamic Revolution the regime formed organizations for promoting the idea of unity of all Islamic "schools" and legitimizing the Shi'a as the *Ja'fari* school within a generic Islam – neither Sunni nor Shiite. The *raison d'état* behind these efforts though was clear: a Sunni Muslim may accept the authority of any Sunni Sheikh – whatever the school he and the Sheikh follow, and if the *Ja'fari* (Shiite) school is just another school, any Sunni Muslim may follow the authority of a Shiite scholar without having to cross the lines and become a Shiite. The two main organizations operating under the Iranian regime in this spirit are *Majma'-e jahani-ye ahl-e beit (Ahlu Beit)*, headed until 1999 by Hojjat al-Islam 'Ali al-Taskhiri, then by 'Ali Akbar Velayati, and since October 2002 by Sheikh Mohammad Mahdi Assefi; and the *Majma'-e jahani baraye taqrib-e bein-e mazaheb-e eslami* (Society for Reconciliation between the Schools) under Hojjat al-Islam Mohammad Va'ez-Zadeh Khorasani. Both

⁸⁶ This is an allusion to the banner of Shiite Islam.

⁸⁷ <http://fatima-hizbulla.livejournal.com/profile>.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

organizations convene conferences of Sunni and Shiite Muslims and organize studies for Sunni Muslims in the *madrasas* of Qom. The target of much of this activity is non-Arab Muslims, many of whom have been later accused in their home countries of operating for the Iranian intelligence.⁸⁹

Iran has numerous interests in the Russian Federation, and especially in Central Asian Republics that surround the RF. Lately Iran's officials make it clear that diplomatic relations with Russia are one of Teheran's foreign policy's first priorities. That happened after Iran's former President Khatami came for a visit in Moscow in March 2001 and signed an agreement for economical and cultural cooperation with the RF. The tendency has continued, when on a meeting with RF President Putin, Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad proclaimed Russia as Iran's best and closest friend.

Iran's interests in Russia are not only economical even though Russia supplies Iran with everything it needs for its nuclear program. Iran is a multi-confessional and multinational state⁹⁰ and, therefore one of Iran's biggest problems is stability. Regional stability, especially in the "post-Soviet" territories, plays an important role for Iran.

Every minor de-stabilization in the RF or CA could have a destructive effect on the ethno-confessional situation in Iran and become a threat to its territorial integrity. That is why cooperation with Russia that still has an enormous effect on political and economical levels in CA is absolutely crucial for Iran.⁹¹

Beyond its obvious economic and geographic interests, Iran aims to become a "regional leader" in CA and achieves its goal in the region by what Russian journalists call "propaganda of the Farsi language and promotion of ideas of cultural unity."⁹²

By gaining more ideological supporters inside the Republics and the RF, Iran will be able to get the inside lobby it needs to promote its interest in the region. The

⁸⁹ Shmuel Bar, "Sunnis and Shiites: Between Rapprochement and Conflict," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Hudson Institute, Center on Islam, Democracy and the Future of the Muslim World, Vol. 2, September 2005, pp. 87-96. See also Wilfrid Buchta, "Teheran Ecumenical Society (Majma' al-taqrib): a Veritable Ecumenical Revival or a Trojan Horse of Iran?", in: R. Brunner and W. Ende (eds.), *The Twelver Shi'a in Modern Times, Religious, Culture and Political History*, (Brill: Leiden, 2001), p. 349. The use of the concept ahl al-Bayt (the household of the Prophet) derives from the *Hadith al-Thaqalayn* in which the Prophet is said to have told the believers that he leaves them with two precious things: the Koran and his household. <http://rafed.net/aalulbayt>.

⁹⁰ The main ethnic groups are Persians (51%), Azeris (24%), Gilaki and Mazandarani (8%), Kurds (7%), Arabs (3%), Baluchi (2%), Lurs (2%), Turkmens (2%), Qashqai, Armenians, Persian Jews, Georgians, Assyrians, Circassians, Tats, Pashtuns and others (1%).

⁹¹ L. Gusev, "Iran and Russia - the Common Things," http://www.rau.su/observer/N1_2006/1_10.HTM.

⁹² A. Pylev, "Iran and Russia as Strategic Allies," http://cge.evrazia.org/islam_2.shtml.

increasing number of Shiites in Russia and CA helps Iran to gain political support and strength in these areas.

A prominent example of a political support is the fact that many of the new Shiites are organizing demonstrations in the heart of Moscow in favor of Iran's interests in the Middle East. In February "new Shiites", most of them from Ahli-Beit organized a demonstration that supported "Iran's right" to develop nuclear weapons. They scanned: "Atom for Iran" and burned American and Israeli flags with the words "oppressors" and "infidels" written on them. These new Shiite converts were also holding Hizballah's and Iran's banners in their hands, showing their affiliation with Teheran and its global and religious politics.

Shiitization of ex-Soviet Muslims is a new trend that has been taking place only for the last decade. This trend though is not unique to Central Asia. The Arab Sunni world has become more and more aware of a trend of "*tashayyu*". For example, during 2006 in traditionally Sunni Egypt more than a million citizens were registered as Shiites. This trend has evoked strong responses from Sunni public figures, including such "ecumenists" as Sheikh Yousuf al-Qaradawi. Other Sunni states such as Jordan, Tunisia and Syria have also shown concern over growing numbers of Sunnis who convert to Shi'a.

The situation in Central Asia and mostly in Russia is different, because most of the population is not Muslim. Nevertheless, most of the new converts are ex-Sunni Muslims and only a small part of the new-Shiites are Russians, Ukrainians and the like.

As Iran gains status in the political arena, and particularly if it is perceived in the Muslim world as a new nuclear power, the trend of *tashayyu*' in the Sunni world – including the former Soviet Union – will probably grow even faster. This may emerge in the light of the connection which has been observed between demonstrations of power by a certain religion and the growing numbers of converts into it. Thus, for example, after the 9/11 terror attacks the number of converts to Islam in the United States alone has increased by four times (!),⁹³ while in Russia, after the Chechen terror attack in Beslan, more than 30 thousand new Muslim converts were added in the registration lists.⁹⁴

The full picture regarding *tashayyu*' in Russia and Central Asia remains sketchy and it is very difficult to estimate the actual numbers of converts to Shi'a in the region. The above is an analysis of a limited area and it is quite possible that there are other Shiite or Iranian organizations in Russia and Central Asia hiding under plain and harmless labels like "Local Muslim Organization". It remains to be seen

⁹³ The New York Times, January 7, 2002.

⁹⁴ www.islam.ru/newmuslim.

whether the Russian government is truly unaware of the Iranian activity inside its borders or perceives it as useful counter-balance to Wahhabi penetration, and whether it will continue to accept such a significant Iranian intervention in social and religious lives of Russian citizens.

Summary

Common Factors of the CA Islamist Movements

Looking at the five significant movements that were discussed in this paper, it seems there is little in common between Chechen *mujahids* and Tajik activists of the political Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP). At first sight there appears to be nothing in the strategy of the silent, almost hiding Shiite Ahli-Beit that would remind of the militant outlaw Islamic Movement in Uzbekistan (IMU) or the Sunni worldwide spread Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT).

In spite of this, these organizations and parties have much more common factors in their strategies than it seems. Besides the obvious fact that they are all Islamic organizations, these movements and parties aspire to the same final goal: to establish an Islamic entity that will be ruled by Muslim leaders.

Both HT and IMU have a vision of establishing an Islamic Caliphate on the same territory - Ferghana Valley. Wahhabi-oriented *mujahids*, who are currently the only religious authority in Chechnya, also aspire to found an Islamic Caliphate, but on the territory of North Caucasus.

Ironically, IRP activists, who do not talk about a Caliphate, are, in fact, closer to it than the militant Chechens or Uzbeks, because IRP, as a legal party, works on establishing an Islamic state with Islamic education in Tajikistan.

The only ones who do not intend to establish an Islamic entity are the Shiites of "Ahli-Beit", probably because they already have a big Shiite motherland, where the *Shari'ah* is implemented on every aspect of citizens' lives - The Islamic Republic of Iran. On the other hand, Iran, the source of Shiite expansion in the RF and CA, still has territorial and religious ambitions that are obvious due to its constant efforts to convert as many Sunnis and non-Muslims to Shi'a as possible.

Shari'ah plays a significant role in all the movements' agendas, even if they do not specifically bring it out. In Hizb ut-Tahrir's program, *Shari'ah* is the Law that everybody must obey in the future Caliphate. The same with IMU, that implements the laws of *Shari'ah* on its members (just like HT) even nowadays, when the Islamic Caliphate is still a concept. Chechen *mujahid*-thinkers are so obsessed with the need to connect the *Shari'ah* to everything they represent, that they even called one of Chechen Front's military wings-"Jamaat Shariat" (The Shari'a group).

As for the IRP, the fact that it does not use the exact term "*Shari'ah*", does not mean it is absent from its political and educational program. A party that has the following paragraph in its agenda: "Observance and implementation of Islamic principles in every-day lives of all IRP members", definitely wishes to bring the Islamic law to the Islamic state, that is yet to be born.

The Shiite movement in Russia and CA does not speak about *Shari'ah* as much as the other groups, but on the other hand, Ahli-Beit is also not eager to reveal its true Shiite nature and keeps calling itself “Local Islamic Movement”. And so, in its propaganda *Shari'ah* laws play a vital part without being mentioned as “*Shari'ah*”. Therefore, Ahli-Beit, while promoting the Iranian version of Shi'a, cannot restrain itself from promoting the *Shari'ah* as the main part of their “becoming a real Muslim” program that is offered to non-Muslims and Sunnis who join their lines.

Three of the five movements (HT, IMU and the Chechen-Wahhabi resistance) in this paper encourage use of any weapons, including WMD to achieve their goals and support violent struggle against non-Muslim or non-Islamic regimes in order to create an Islamic Caliphate according to the laws of the *Shari'ah*.

Thus, all the five movements claim that Islam is the only solution to correct the wrong in the world. All of the propagandists turn to Muslims and non-Muslims and call upon them to join the “right” religion or the “right” Islam. Shiites, Wahhabis and plain – define plain Sunni fundamentalists, every one of them states that his way is “the right way”.

The similarity between all the movements' strategies can be explained by the fact that they are (in addition to their being radical Islamic movements with almost the same aims), after all, turning to the same target group. The population these organizations address (despite its multicultural and multinational nature) has a common past, and unified common cultural features:

Due to the Soviet Union's decay and the demolition of the Soviet ideology, many people in these regions found themselves without a decent job, means to survive and no hope for a better living. Taking part in the activities of radical organizations seems to them as a chance for a job and gives their lives a new, “heroic and romantic” meaning.⁹⁵

The horrible deterioration in educational standards has created in the last 16 years a whole generation of narrow-minded youth. This generation of mal-educated youngsters easily falls into the extremists' ideologies and indoctrinations. This happens as a result of a massive reduction in the number of kindergartens, schools, libraries, summer camps and other educational programs and facilities for children that were active before the fall of the USSR. In addition, high education is no longer for free, which makes it unavailable for the masses.

Massive ideological attack of radical centers and groups through distribution of radical literature, sending students to religious universities in the Middle East - all that brings to a popularization of radical ideologies that are presented to the

⁹⁵ <http://www.i-r-p.ru/page/stream-trends/index-8725.html>.

uneducated masses as “the real Islam” that will help to bring “the right order in the world”.

These (and many other) field factors contribute to the resemblance between the movements’ strategies, that have to take into consideration the unique qualities of the post-Soviet regions they appeal to.

Ideological Links between CA and the ME

Central Asian Islamic movements are directly connected to Middle Eastern *‘ulama*, who supply them with legal rulings on every aspect of their lives and inspire them with new and old ideas. The real cooperation between these regions started when the well documented Wahhabi penetration into Central Asia took place.

The Saudi religious establishment, coupled with the Egyptian Islamic establishment of al-Azhar, answered the call to revive Islam in those lands. The Muslim scholars from the heartland of the Muslim world, who could claim to have an uninterrupted Islamic tradition, had almost no indigenous Islamic establishment outside the center of the Muslim world in the ME to challenge their hard-line interpretation of Islam. In any clash between the indigenous traditions and “the real Islam” imported from the Middle East, the former were at a clear disadvantage. Sunni fundamentalist movements took advantage of ex-Soviet Muslims’ religious ignorance and their desire to fill the ideological vacuum that appeared after the Socialist agenda had almost vanished from their lives. The Wahhabis managed to found and maintain numerous mosques, Islamic clubs and societies that provided the people with Islamic-oriented activities and ultimately injected a new element of uncompromising Islamic ideology into the national struggle in Chechnya.

Most of the movements in CA are imported from the Middle East: HT, Wahhabiyya, the Muslim Brothers, Salafiyya, etc, and therefore, the ideology they promote is the same radical Islamic ideology these movements promote in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and other Middle Eastern countries. More significant is the fact that even local Central Asian movements, such as the IMU use similar fundamentalist ideological lines, such as establishing a Caliphate through the use of jihad and conducting a lifestyle similar to *al-Salaf al-Salih* (the good ancestors, the first Muslims who lived in the age of Muhammad). They quote the same scholars and *fatwas* that the Muslim Brothers quote (Sayyid Qutb, Abu al-A’la al-Mawdudi) and use the same *tafsirs* (commentaries to the Koran) that are being used in the Middle East. Ibn Taymiyya is considered to be the main authority for legal rulings in Grozny or Moscow, just like it happens in Mecca or Medina.

New Muslim scholars in CA usually obtain their Islamic education in the Middle East, preferably in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. In addition to this one-way connection, there is a whole line of Muslim scholars from the Middle East, who make legal rulings especially for Muslims under non-Muslim regimes, like Naser al-Fahd (who

openly supports terrorists and is considered to be an extremist even by the Wahhabis) or Yusuf al-Qaradawi (who is thought to be a moderate Muslim scholar, even though his legal rulings often encourage jihad and suicide attacks against non-Muslims).

The same process is observed in the Shiite movement in Russia and CA. Ahli-Beit is directly connected to Iran and its scholars, just like the Wahhabi movement in Chechnya has a direct connection to Saudi Arabia. Therefore, all the ideas that Ahli-Beit promotes in the RF and CA naturally serve Iran's interests in the region.

Islamist Nationalism or Nationalist Islamism?

Most of the movements that operate on the territory of CA and Chechnya are imported movements from the Middle East, such as Wahhabiyya, Hizb ut-Tahrir and others.

All these organizations are fundamentalist Islamic movements, based on getting back to the ways of *al-Salaf al-Salih* and on the doctrines of the Muslim scholars, who have developed this principle, like Hasan al-Banna (the founder of the Muslim Brothers in 1929), Sayyid Qutb (the most prominent ideologist of the Muslim Brothers), Sayyid Abu al-A'la al-Mawdudi (the founder of Jamaat al-Islami in 1941) and others.

Since all the movements mentioned above are based on Islamic principles, their strategies are mostly based on religious ideology. For instance, Chechen jihadi websites give us many examples of religious legal rulings that quote Ibn Taymiyya (died in 1328 CE; he is considered to be the primary intellectual source of the Wahhabi movement and the spiritual father of other fundamentalist ideologists, such as Sayyid Qutb), and also different *hadiths* and verses from the Koran, in order to permit or forbid something.

There are numerous quotations of Wahhabi sheikhs like Nasir al-Din al-Albani⁹⁶, Muhammad Ibn Salih al-'Uthaymin⁹⁷, 'Abd-al-'Aziz Ibn 'Abdallah Ibn Baz⁹⁸, Salih Ibn Fawzan al-Fawzan⁹⁹ and others. The *fatwas* (legal ruling) given by these radical Wahhabi sheikhs compose an ideological basis to the Chechen strategy of jihad against Russia and non-Muslims in North Caucasus.

⁹⁶ <http://www.albani.co.uk/>.

⁹⁷ <http://www.ibnothaimen.com/>.

⁹⁸ <http://www.britannica.com/eb/topic-649/Abd-al-Aziz-ibn-Abdallah-ibn-Baz>.

⁹⁹ <http://www.famousmuslims.com/SHEIKH%20SALEH%20IBN%20FAWZAN%20AL-FAWZAN.htm>.

Hizb ut-Tahrir's strategy is based on the same Islamic fundamentalist ideas as the Wahhabi movement's strategy in Chechnya with a small difference - the *fatwas* that HT relies on are homemade legal rulings of its own clerics, in particular the rulings of its leader Imran Wahed, who is based in London.

It is not surprising, that the Shiite movement Ahli-Beit is also based on religious fundamentalist principles. Iran is the first and only country where Shiite fundamentalist Islam is the official state religion. Therefore, its efforts to export the "Islamic Revolution" through a *taqiyya* organization to other territories, in this case to RF and CA, are characterized by a religious strategy.

Although the two local movements mentioned in this paper, IMU and IRP, differ from one another in their final goals and the level of violence they choose to use in order to achieve those goals, IRP's secular image, their Western-style suites and choice to participate in Western-style democratic elections to the Parliament, could be deceptive.

IRP strategies are focused on the establishment of an Islamic state with implementation of the *Shari'ah* in every aspect of this state's being. Therefore, in spite of their secular appearance, IRP activists are definitely promoting a religious view of Islamic life in the future of Tajikistan, where they are based.

In conclusion, all radical movements in CA and Chechnya have a unified ideological basis of Islamic fundamentalism. They rely on the same principles, and, sometimes, even on the same *fatwas*. The only significant difference between them is that they interpret and implement these *fatwas* in slightly different ways.

At the same time, it would be wrong to assume that secular strategy does not have any impact on these movements, because, after all, they operate in areas that are conducted according to secular rules and are under secular regimes. This definitely obliges the religious movements to play by secular rules, if they want to win this game.

And finally, mere existence of some of these movements represents real danger on the international level, because of their long-term intentions and ideologies.

Central Asian radical movements represent a possible alternative to the secular or semi-secular regimes in this region. Some of these organizations have a clear vision of the aims they pursue and most of them have distinct strategies of jihad that will help them to achieve their goals.