

# On the Eve of 2014: Islamism in Central Asia

*By Jacob Zenn*

**I**N 1991, AFTER MORE THAN 70 YEARS UNDER SOVIET RULE, THE FIVE CENTRAL Asian Soviet Socialist Republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan became independent countries for the first time in their histories. To the north of these five countries, the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSRs) of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan became sovereign states, but remained within the Russian Federation that succeeded the Soviet Union. To the east of these new countries, in China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, there were demands for greater linguistic, cultural and religious autonomy for the Uighurs and, in one town near Kashgar, the creation of a separate Islamic State, but Xinjiang continued as an officially autonomous province of China with no administrative changes.<sup>1</sup>

These eight geographic entities—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Xinjiang—are situated at the core of the Asian landmass, with Kashgar nearly equidistant to mainland Asia's westernmost city, Istanbul, Turkey, and easternmost city, Busan, South Korea.<sup>2</sup> These entities have common Turkic ethnic and linguistic roots, with the exception of Tajikistan, whose ethnic and linguistic roots are shared with the Persians of Iran and the Dari-speaking Tajiks of Afghanistan. All eight entities also have a common religious heritage, with the majority of people practicing Sunni Islam. There are, however, also significant minorities in Central Asia who migrated to the region in large numbers in the twentieth century: the Han Chinese of Xinjiang, who mostly adhere to Confucian traditions and speak Mandarin Chinese; and the ethnic Russians of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and the five Central Asian countries, who mostly practice Orthodox Christianity.

The heartland of Central Asia is the Fergana Valley, where the borders of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan meet and twenty percent of Central Asia's 70 million people live. The last enduring Islamic state in Central Asia, the Kokand Khanate, was based in the city of Kokand in the Fergana Valley and covered parts of present-day Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The khanate was home to sedentary Uzbeks and Tajiks, nomadic Kazakhs and Kyrgyzs, as well as Uighurs, Persians, Indians, Turks, Arabs, Jews, Chinese and Tatars. The khanate was abolished by Czarist Russia in 1876, and replaced by the Russian Governor-Generalship of Turkistan, which means "Land of the Turkic Peoples."<sup>3</sup>

Since the end of the Kokand Khanate, the subsequent states in the Fergana Valley—including Czarist Russia, the Soviet Union, and the independent Central Asian republics—have sought to limit the role of Islam in government and society. However, the two major political transitions in the region—from Czarist rule to Soviet rule in 1917, and from Soviet rule to independence in 1991—saw resurgences of Islamist movements calling for the restoration of Islam in government and society. These movements included the *Basmachis* in 1917 and the Islamist Movement of Uzbekistan and other revivalist groups in the early 1990s.

In the next ten years, political transition will likely take place in several Central Asian countries and power will shift from the first generation of post-Soviet leaders to a new generation. It is unclear whether this transition will be sudden or gradual, whether it will be brought about by state collapse or by uprisings, or whether it will be facilitated by elections, presidential appointment, or internal consensus. What is clear is that political Islam will be a factor in this transition. The growing tide and attraction of Islamism emanating from the Middle East and the resurgence of Islamist movements in nearby Afghanistan and Pakistan will invariably embolden and strengthen Central Asia's Islamists in their efforts to restore the role of Islam in government and society.

This article reviews the political history of Central Asia since 1991 and shows how the region's leadership is still closely connected to the Soviet-era past. The article then analyzes the Islamist-nationalist groups that arose in Central Asia when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, and how these groups have evolved into internationally oriented groups in exile. It examines the appeal of Central Asia's most widespread Islamist group, Hizb ut-Tahrir, as well as how the historical religious fault-lines in Central Asia affect each country's susceptibility to Islamist influence. The article concludes with an assessment of how ongoing Arab uprisings may impact Islamism's future in Central Asia.

# The Soviet Legacy

THREE OF CENTRAL ASIA'S FIVE LEADERS, NURSULTAN NAZARBAYEV, ISLAM KARIMOV and Emomali Rahmon, are the same leaders who were in power in their countries after obtaining independence more than twenty years ago. Nazarbayev is the president of Central Asia's economically strongest country, Kazakhstan; he won Kazakhstan's last presidential election in 2011 with 96 percent of the vote. Karimov is the president of the most populous and most militarily formidable country in Central Asia, Uzbekistan. He won Uzbekistan's last presidential election in 2007, with 91 percent of the vote. Both presidents were in power when their countries gained independence in 1991.

Emomali Rahmon has led Tajikistan since 1992. His rule has withstood the country's civil war from 1992 to 1997, in which up to 100,000 people were killed, an assassination attempt in 1997, and two coup attempts in 1997 and 1998. He won the presidential election in Tajikistan in 1999 with 97 percent of the vote. After a referendum in 2003 allowed him to run for two more seven-year terms, he won the 2006 presidential election with 79 percent of the vote.

The president of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimuhammedov, succeeded Saparmurat Niyazov, or "Turkmenbashi (Leader of the Turkmen)," after Niyazov died of a heart attack in 2006.<sup>4</sup> Niyazov was Turkmenistan's president at independence in 1991, won the country's presidential election in 1992 uncontested, and in 1999 changed the Constitution such that it made him President for life. Six years after Berdimuhammedov succeeded the late Niyazov, Berdimuhammedov ran in Turkmenistan's presidential election in 2012 and won with 97 percent of the vote. Although Berdimuhammedov was not in power at the time of Turkmenistan's independence, his centralized and demagogic leadership style is a continuation of the system of his predecessor, Niyazov.

Askar Akayev was President of Kyrgyzstan from independence in 1991 until his overthrow in the 2005 Tulip Revolution, which was driven by rising public resentment over government corruption and nepotism.<sup>5</sup> Akayev's successor, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, was overthrown and fled to Belarus after protests against his rule turned deadly in 2010. Kyrgyzstan's interim president, Roza Otunabayeva, guided the country from a presidential system to a parliamentary system from 2010 until she stepped down in 2011. Almazbek Atambayev won Kyrgyzstan's presidential election in 2011 with 63 percent of the vote and remains Kyrgyzstan's president today. Kyrgyzstan, therefore, is the only Central Asian country to have experienced a major political transition since independence.

In contrast to the five Central Asian countries, the People's Republic of China (PRC)

since 1991 has seen two peaceful transfers of political power: from Jiang Zemin, who became General Secretary of the Communist Party in 1989, to Hu Jintao in 2002; and from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping in 2012. However, the Communist Party has ruled virtually uncontested since 1949. It survived a major crisis to its legitimacy in 1989, when hundreds of pro-democracy protestors were killed by National Guard troops in Tiananmen Square.

After the turbulent 1990s saw Russia's economy and international power weaken, Russian politics since 2000 have been dominated by Vladimir Putin, whose political style, if not ideology, resembles the one-party state of the Soviet era. Therefore, the dramatic changes that have occurred in Central Asia since the collapse of the Soviet Union notwithstanding, their governments still strongly resemble those of the Cold War era.

Central Asia's centralized governments and lack of political dynamism reflect the enduring legacy of the Soviet Union, in which political opposition and elections were not allowed to exist, and civil society was restricted. The region's post-Soviet leaders have continued to suppress challenges to their rule, including, most of all, the challenges posed by political Islam. Indeed, the experience of the early 1990s, when Islamists in the Fergana Valley tried to seize political power in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, instilled in the region's leaders the belief that politicized Islam would threaten national governments and undermine economic and social progress. Today, the opposition ideology that Central Asia's leaders have sought to contain more than any other ideology is Islamism, which they believe undermines their countries' indigenous religious moderation, secular politics, and generally pro-Western orientations. As Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov said in 1998:

We will never admit religious slogans to be used in the struggle for power, or as the pretext for intervention in politics, economy and legislation, because in this we see a serious potential threat to stability and security for the Uzbek state.<sup>6</sup>

Since the 1990s, Central Asia's Muslims have generally been allowed to practice their faith privately, but their governments have resisted religious influences perceived to come from outside the region, as well as most expressions of religion in social life and politics. It is in this context that Central Asia's Islamist movements have emerged. They have developed and gathered strength either clandestinely or while in exile outside the region, awaiting their opportunity to resurface and to refashion the post-Soviet regional order into an Islamist one.

# Declining Nationalism, Rising Internationalism

## *Adolat and the IMU*

MANY OF THE FIRST ISLAMIST MOVEMENTS TO ARISE IN CENTRAL ASIA AFTER 1991 CAN be traced to the competition that emerged in Uzbekistan between, on the one hand, the secular government of Islam Karimov and pro-government clerics and, on the other, an opposing movement of *mujadidiya* (reformist) Islamic scholars.<sup>7</sup> The *mujadidiya* scholars' goals since the 1970s were to re-Islamize Central Asian society, reverse the influence of sixty years of Soviet secularism, and establish an Islamic State in Central Asia called "Musilmonabad," or "Land of the Muslims."<sup>8</sup> They also advocated for a stricter interpretation of the *Quran*, *hadiths*, and *Sunna*, and rejected the traditional form of the *Hanafi* school of Islamic jurisprudence, which was practiced by most Central Asians, as well as the "pre-Islamic rituals" that were accepted by mainstream Hanafi scholars.<sup>9</sup>

There were also two events that unfolded in the late 1970s and early 1980s that strengthened the morale and influence of the *mujadidiya* scholars: first, the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, and second, the resistance of the Afghan *mujahidin* to the Soviet Union in Afghanistan from 1980 to 1989. These events, in which Islamists successfully overthrew an ally of the West and secular monarch in Iran, and expelled the Soviet Union from Afghanistan, enabled the *mujadidiya* scholars to envision Central Asia for the first time as a unified Islamic State, no matter the odds against them.<sup>10</sup>

However, even as the *mujadidiya* scholars hoped for the end of the Soviet Union, their interests also converged with the Soviet authorities in Central Asia. Like the atheist Soviet authorities, the *mujadidiya* scholars wanted to reduce the influence of their ideological rivals—the mainstream and politically restive Hanafi scholars. As a result, the Soviet authorities allowed the *mujadidiya* scholars access to officially censored Islamist works, such as the writings of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers Muhammad Qutb and Said Qutb, as well as other scholars influenced by Wahhabism. Armed with the works of these Islamists, the Soviet authorities believed the *mujadidiya* scholars could more effectively oppose the Hanafi scholars in the public sphere and their indigenous practices of "polytheism," "saint worship" and pilgrimages to holy sites, which contravened Soviet atheism.<sup>11</sup>

During the final years of the Soviet Union, as *perestroika* created greater political opening in Central Asia, the *mujadidiya* scholars began speaking out more aggressively

against the Hanafi scholars, especially in the Fergana Valley. When the Soviet Union ended in 1991, the mujadidiya scholars became active politically, and their young followers provided security and law enforcement in towns where the Soviet retreat left a power vacuum. In cities such as Namangan, these young followers formed vigilante groups, the most prominent of which was called “*Adolat Uyushmasi*,” or Justice Union. Adolat would later evolve into the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).

Adolat’s spiritual leader, Tahir Yuldash, and its military leader, Juma Namangani, were neither Islamic scholars nor formally affiliated with the mujadidiya movement. In fact, these two leaders identified themselves as Hanafi as late as 1999. Nonetheless, they were welcomed by the mujadidiya scholars, and in the early 1990s, one of the leading mujadidiya clerics, Obidxon Qori Nazarov, described Yuldash as “one of our deputies.”<sup>12</sup> In 1991, Yuldash gained prominence when on national television he held a meeting with President Karimov in Namangan and berated the president while demanding that Karimov implement Sharia law in Uzbekistan. On the defensive, Karimov responded to Yuldash saying that introducing Islamic law would not be within his Constitutional powers.<sup>13</sup>

Over the course of the 1990s, President Karimov cracked down on political opponents, especially Adolat and Islamist groups, using laws which allowed the government to prohibit “unsanctioned” religious activity.<sup>14</sup> By 1998, Adolat, which by then became known as the IMU and incorporated other vigilante movements, had cells in the Fergana Valley capable of carrying out attacks, including the bombings of the U.S. and Israeli embassies and government facilities in 2004 and the attempted assassination of President Karimov in Tashkent in 1999. Nonetheless, by 2001 most IMU members had fled the Fergana Valley to northern Afghanistan, where they set up bases out of Karimov’s reach under the protection of the Taliban. The Islamists who remained in Uzbekistan were either silenced or imprisoned, while in neighboring Tajikistan, the Islamists from the country’s civil war were incorporated into the government and eventually lost influence. This left the IMU as the main surviving indigenous Central Asian Islamist group, albeit one primarily in exile.

While in exile, the IMU gained notoriety for the militant operations that its cells carried out in the Fergana Valley and Uzbekistan. At the same time, the movement adapted its ideology to reflect its new circumstances. The IMU’s goals of implementing Sharia law in Uzbekistan and overthrowing the Karimov government began to merge with the broader internationalist goals of the IMU’s hosts in Afghanistan, the Taliban and al-Qaeda. From 1999 to 2001, IMU radio broadcasts from northern Afghanistan as well as the *Islom Ummati (Community of Islam)* publication that it distributed to new recruits showed that the movement’s ideology came to emphasize six main themes, including martyrdom (*shahidlik*); the need for armed *jihād* to overthrow the

government of Uzbekistan; the Western and Jewish oppression of Muslims around the world; the incompatibility of democracy with Islam; empathy with Islamist militants in the Russian North Caucasus, particularly Chechnya and Ichkeria; and the IMU's roots in Uzbekistan.<sup>15</sup>

In October 2001, the IMU was driven further into exile when it relocated from northern Afghanistan to Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. Over the next decade, the IMU's ideological focus continued to evolve as the movement's approximately 5,000 fighters blended with militants from other countries. These ideological changes within the movement were reinforced as the IMU became more dependent on the Pakistani Taliban and al-Qaeda, and as most of the rising generation of IMU leaders were not Uzbeks who remembered the movement's founding in Uzbekistan.

While in Pakistan, the IMU recruited members from different countries, including Pakistan, Tajikistan, Russia, Turkey, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, China, as well as Uzbekistan.<sup>16</sup> Uzbeks from Uzbekistan became the minority of IMU members, a fact which became apparent in their operations. In 2011, of the 87 "martyrs" that the IMU listed on its website, *alfurqon.com*, only four were Uzbeks, while 64 were from Afghanistan, 10 from Tajikistan, six from Kyrgyzstan, and one each from Tatarstan, Germany and Pakistan. The biographies of the "martyrs" included descriptions of their attacks on U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan and the Pakistani and Afghan armies, while operations in Uzbekistan were not mentioned at all.

As the IMU became allied with the Pakistani Taliban, the main threat to its existence was no longer Uzbekistan, but rather the Pakistani army and the U.S. and NATO forces operating in Afghanistan. As a result, IMU leader Tahir Yuldash further reduced the IMU's focus on fighting for Sharia law in Uzbekistan in order to support the internationalist goals of the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Pakistan.<sup>17</sup> As early as 2003, Yuldash announced to his followers that the IMU would shift its focus to fighting Pakistan and its allies in the U.S. and NATO.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, in Pakistan, the IMU's propaganda and statements were centered on four main themes: justification of suicide-bombings;<sup>19</sup> *bayaan* (allegiance) to the Taliban, which Yuldash gave in-person to Mullah Omar; war against the "infidels;" and the prioritization of jihad against NATO and the U.S. over jihad in Central Asia.<sup>20</sup>

Yuldash's death in a U.S. drone strike in Pakistan in 2009 enabled the new generation of IMU leaders to take center stage within the organization. This generation's memory of the IMU's formation in Uzbekistan is minimal, if it existed at all, and it was reflected in the movement's post-Yuldash ideology. The IMU's mufti since 2011, Abu Zar al-Burmi, a Pakistani national of Burmese Rohingya descent, incorporated the Taliban's vendettas as well as his personal grievances with the People's Republic of



China into the movement's ideology. He condemned the PRC for supporting the Burmese government's treatment of its minority Muslim Rohingya population and also warned Pakistan to cut relations with Burma or risk attacks.<sup>21</sup> The IMU had previously never focused on South Asia before al-Burmi's rise.

At the same time, new European commanders became prominent in the IMU. These men included Abu Ibrahim al-Almani (a.k.a Yassin Chouka), a German national of Moroccan descent, who further enmeshed the IMU with the Pakistani Taliban. In February 2013, al-Almani issued joint statements sponsored by IMU's Jundullah media wing and the Pakistani Taliban's Umar media wing. One such video featured Yassin Chouka, Abdul Hakim, a Russian IMU commander, and Adnan Rashid, a Taliban commander who was rescued from death row in Bannu prison for conspiring to assassinate former Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf in a Chouka-led operation. In the video, the three militants announced the creation of a special unit called "Ansar al-Asir" (Supporters of Prisoners), whose aim was to free more militants imprisoned in Pakistan and to target Pakistani intelligence agents, army personnel and prison staff.<sup>22</sup>

Currently, the IMU's dependence on the Pakistani Taliban compels the movement to focus on operations in Pakistan and Afghanistan to support its hosts. However, after the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops from Afghanistan, there will be less pressure on the Taliban in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region, and the IMU will be most useful for the Taliban in northern Afghanistan or Central Asia. As a result, the IMU is beginning to shift its operations to northern Afghanistan. In the first five months of 2013, the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) conducted more than 30 operations against IMU fighters in northern Afghanistan, which is more than the total number of anti-IMU operations in all of 2012.<sup>23</sup> In a post-2013 security environment, when the U.S. and NATO forces will have mostly withdrawn from Afghanistan, the IMU and its Uzbek members will likely continue to play a key role in helping the ethnic southern Afghanistan- and Pashtun-dominated Taliban to assert control over northern Afghanistan, and possibly lead the effort to extend Islamist influence into Central Asia either on the Taliban's order or independent of the Taliban.<sup>24</sup>

As the IMU said after six of its members, including two from Uzbekistan and one from Kyrgyzstan, carried out a suicide operation on the governor's office in Panjshir, Afghanistan, on May 31, 2013, "The IMU is continuing its jihadi activities in the Khorasan region [the ancient name for Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Iran] which started 12 years ago...and we hope from Allah that future conquests are very near in the Mawarounnahr region [the ancient name for modern-day Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan]."<sup>25</sup> If the IMU realizes this goal, the movement may well come full circle and return its ideological and operational focus to the movement's homeland in Uzbekistan.



# The Struggle for Xinjiang

LIKE THE IMU, A NUMBER OF OTHER NATIONALISTIC CENTRAL ASIAN ISLAMIST GROUPS have also become more internationally focused since the end of the Soviet era. The East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) is such an example.<sup>26</sup> ETIM's development has mirrored the IMU in three main ways. First, when ETIM was formed in the early 1990s, it advocated a greater social and political role for Islam in the movement's national homeland, the PRC-ruled province of Xinjiang, which ETIM refers to as "East Turkistan." Second, China's crackdown on the group's activities drove ETIM's members out of their homeland and into Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. Third, following the 2001 U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan, ETIM's members fled to Pakistan's tribal areas where they increasingly blended with militants from other countries. During ETIM's exile in Pakistan, the movement's ideology has become observably more internationalist; although it has retained as its ultimate goal "liberating" Xinjiang from its "Communist Chinese oppressors."<sup>27</sup>

ETIM's early evolution was shaped by an uprising that took place in the township of Baren, Kashgar prefecture, in Xinjiang in 1990. With the fall of the Soviet Union, ETIM's members became emboldened. They demanded greater autonomy in Xinjiang, and aspired to establish a fully independent East Turkistan like the five new Central Asian countries to the PRC's West. Similar uprisings in other cities in Xinjiang followed the uprising in Baren, such as Yining, Aksu and Hotan. Although these uprisings were small in scale, they did threaten Chinese rule at a time when pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square in Beijing were undermining the legitimacy of the Communist Party. As a result, the PRC launched a "strike hard" campaign beginning in 1996 to root out what it would later term the "three evils" of "terrorism, separatism and religious extremism."<sup>28</sup>

One prominent ETIM leader, Hasan Mehsum, served time in prison in Xinjiang for his role in the Baren uprising, and then twice more in the 1990s. By 1998, Mehsum and other ETIM leaders fled to Afghanistan after traveling to Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan, where they attempted but failed to solicit support from the Uighur diaspora and other Muslim groups to launch an insurgency against China.<sup>29</sup> Under the protection of the Taliban, however, Mehsum set up a base for Uighur exiles in Kabul, as well as several other poorly equipped training camps in other Afghan towns and in the Tora Bora region along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Mehsum pledged bayaat to the Taliban leader Mullah Omar and ultimately became dependent on the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Yet, he said in an interview in 2002 that ETIM did not have "any organizational

contact or relations with al-Qaeda or the Taliban.... Maybe some individuals fought alongside them on their own.”<sup>30</sup> The Uighurs who participated in the ETIM trainings camps before American forces captured them in Pakistan and sent them to Guantanamo Bay also alleged that Mehsum’s focus was on China, even if the organization itself and some of its members were affiliated with al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

Mehsum was killed in a Pakistani army raid on an al-Qaeda compound in South Waziristan in 2003.<sup>31</sup> His successor, Abdul Haq al-Turkistani—who, according to Uighurs—is detained at Guantanamo Bay, ran some of Mehsum’s camps in Afghanistan—adopted a comparatively more internationalist ideology.<sup>32</sup> Abdul Haq wrote in *Islamic Turkistan*, the Arabic-language print and online magazine produced by the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), that Taliban leader Mullah Omar designated the IMU to be the umbrella group for Uighur “immigrants” in Afghanistan in 2001.<sup>33</sup> However, under Abdul Haq’s leadership, the Uighur militants formalized themselves as the TIP, which was distinct from the IMU. In 2006, the TIP began promoting “jihad in East Turkistan” through a propaganda campaign that involved the publication of dozens of Arabic, Turkish, Russian and Chinese videos through its media wing, *Islom Awazi* (Voice of Islam) and *Islamic Turkistan*. Through this outreach, the TIP introduced its Islamist struggle in East Turkistan to the internationalist jihadist community and attempted to solicit funding and support from abroad.<sup>34</sup>

The TIP first released *Islamic Turkistan* in July 2008; the al-Fajr online forum confirmed it as “legitimate” in 2009 (as opposed to a Chinese government fabrication, which some jihadists suspected).<sup>35</sup> The magazine covered themes ranging from Salafist doctrine to appeal to funders from the Arab World to articles about “The Responsibility of the Ulema to Defend East Turkistan” as the Ulema [Islamic legal scholars] have other Islamist groups against “infidel” powers. However, a number of other articles and video statements focus on issues which pertain exclusively to Xinjiang. In October 2011, for example, one of the TIP’s leaders, Abdul Shakoor al-Turkistani, highlighted Uighur grievances about Xinjiang in a TIP video, which also showed evidence of TIP involvement in attacks in Kashgar and Hotan in July 2011. These grievances included: mandatory education, which he says has caused the apostasy of Muslims from their religion; the policy of enforced bilingual education (Mandarin Chinese is required for Uighurs); the exodus of Muslim females from Xinjiang to the “Chinese region;” the policy of birth control; Chinese “immigrants” to Xinjiang who are “marginalizing” the province’s Muslim population; China’s “looting” of Turkistan’s resources by “night and day;” and the testing of nuclear weapons in Xinjiang.<sup>36</sup>

Like the IMU, however, the non-Uighur members of the TIP and the group’s deepening involvement with the Pakistani Taliban shifted the TIP’s ideology towards international issues beyond Xinjiang. For example, in February 2013, a leading Turk-

ish member of the TIP, Nuruddin, offered “advice to the Muslim Brothers in East Turkistan” in a TIP video in which he called for Uighurs and Turks to raise “Islamic flags at the White House and Beijing’s Tiananmen Square,” and for the TIP “to return the honor of the days when the Muslims ruled in Central Asia.”<sup>37</sup> The following month, in March, Nuruddin carried out a suicide attack on U.S. forces in Afghanistan, becoming the sixth Turkish TIP operative to carry out a “martyrdom” operation.<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, in a separate video, Usman Batir, an ethnic Kazakh TIP member, threatened revenge against Kazakhstan for supporting the U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan. He also highlighted how TIP rejects the concept of nationality:

There is a line personally drawn by the infidel in between us—saying you are Kazakhstan, you are Turkistan, you are Uzbekistan and you are Kyrgyzstan—there is a line drawn personally by the infidel, my brothers... The religion never came only to Kazakhs, it did not come only to Uighurs, and it did not come only to Arabs... Do not separate. Allah said, you do not separate and say that ‘you are Kazakhstan, you are Turkistan and you are Uzbekistan.’<sup>39</sup>

Nuruddin and Batir furthermore both stressed that their ultimate goal was the creation of a unified Islamic State in Central Asia, as opposed to Xinjiang.

After basing itself in Pakistan, the TIP, like the IMU, has become more deeply entangled with the Pakistani Taliban’s networks, ideology and operations. The TIP leader, Abdul Haq, for example, was killed in a U.S. drone strike in North Waziristan in a vehicle with Taliban militants in 2010. Abdul Haq’s successor, Abdul Shakoor al-Turkistani, who was also al-Qaeda’s leader in FATA, was killed in 2012 in a U.S. drone strike on a Taliban training camp in North Waziristan.<sup>40</sup>

More recently, the TIP has also become entangled ideologically with the IMU and other international groups. The IMU’s German member, Yassin Chouka, issued a video statement through the TIP’s *Islom Awazi* media wing that praised two leaders of the proscribed German Salafist group, *Millatu Ibrahim*, including, Denis Mamadou Cuspert (Abu Talha al-Almani), who was reportedly killed or arrested by Bashar al-Assad’s forces on the Turkish-Syrian border in March 2013.<sup>41</sup> The TIP also praised the “jihadists” in Syria, and responded directly to Chinese accusations that the TIP is sending fighters to Syria with the help of Turkey-based Uighur human rights organizations. In the twelfth edition of *Islamic Turkistan*, for example, the TIP wrote, “If China has the right to support Bashar al-Assad in Syria, we have the full right to support our proud Muslim Syrian people.”<sup>42</sup> Although the Chinese Muslims fighting in Syria, including Uighurs, appear to be independent of the TIP, their operations with other Central Asians

and Caucasians in the “*Muhajirin* [Immigrant] Battalions” in Syria will likely further enmesh Xinjiang in the international jihad.<sup>43</sup>

There are signs that the TIP’s strategy to promote its cause is working; al-Qaeda has taken increased notice of the TIP’s appeals since 2009. Leaders such as Khalid Al-Husaynan and Abu Yahya al-Libi, for example, have recorded speeches for the TIP comparing the need for patience and the inevitability of victory in waging jihad against a more powerful enemy like China to the Afghan mujahidin’s twelve-year war in Afghanistan against the U.S. and before that against the Soviet Union in the 1980s.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, militants from other Central Asian groups appear to be adopting the TIP’s cause, such as one North Caucasian and one Uzbek in the IMU, who the Pakistani authorities arrested in North Waziristan while plotting attacks in Xinjiang or against Chinese interests in Pakistan.<sup>45</sup>

All in all, the TIP places greater emphasis on its Islamist struggle in Xinjiang than the IMU does on the fight in Uzbekistan. A likely explanation for this is that the IMU’s cooperation with the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Pakistan has been deeper and more substantial than the TIP’s. Furthermore, the TIP has managed to preserve its distinctively Uighur character as Uighurs are still the majority in their ranks. Nonetheless, the TIP’s connections to international jihadism have clearly grown, and it now represents the primary militant group representing the Islamist struggle to liberate Xinjiang from the People’s Republic of China.

The TIP is, however, one of many Uighur groups, most of which are non-violent and secular, that seek independence, or at least greater autonomy, for Xinjiang. There are no established links between the TIP and any other group; but it is possible that the TIP could function as the militant wing and other organizations in Turkey as the political wing of the Xinjiang independence movement. In 2003, this is what Turkey-based East Turkistan Liberation Organization (ETLO) leader, Mehmet Amin Hazret, predicted when, amid pressure from Turkey and the U.S.-led Global War on Terror, he announced that the ETLO, which carried out attacks on Chinese diplomats and businessmen in Turkey and Kyrgyzstan in the late 1990s, would lay down its arms. He said the ETLO would “seek to achieve independence for East Turkistan by peaceful means,” but that the creation of a military wing was “inevitable.”

## Jund al-Khilafah

IN AUGUST 2011, A NEW KAZAKH-LED MILITANT ISLAMIST MOVEMENT, JUND AL-KHILAFAH (JaK, Army of the Caliphate), emerged with ties to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Before

the group's appearance, Kazakh Islamists were often organized into lesser-known militant groups, such as the North Caucasus-based Ansar al-Din (Supporters of the Faith). Other Kazakh Islamists remained formally unaffiliated or referred to themselves simply as the "Kazakh mujahidin" in the North Caucasus, where Kazakhs (possibly including ethnic Chechens) formed the largest contingent of fighters from Central Asia.<sup>46</sup> In Afghanistan, Kazakhs have been known to operate with the IMU and its offshoot, the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), which is notorious for carrying out attacks against Western forces in Afghanistan and Central Asia, Russian forces in the North Caucasus, and recruitment in Germany and Turkey.<sup>47</sup> Kazakhs have also joined the Taliban, IMU and TIP. In a December 2011 video called "Appeal of the Kazakh Mujahedin to the Muslims of Kazakhstan," a Kazakh member of the IJU pointed out that the fighters in the Caucasus Emirate are from different republics and ethnic groups, but that they are united ideologically. He then lamented that, "the mujahidin of Central Asia have not been able to do the same." This suggests that the formation of JaK may have represented an attempt by Kazakh Islamists to forge greater linkages with other Central Asian regional movements around the common ideological agenda of creating a unitary Islamic State, or "Caliphate," in Central Asia with the Caucasus Emirate as their model.<sup>48</sup>

The founders of JaK include three Kazakhs inspired by Said Buryatsky (a.k.a. Aleksandr Tikhomirov). Buryatsky was a Russian-born convert to Islam who became a jihadi ideologue in the North Caucasus; a Russian special forces operation killed him in 2010. The JaK announced its formation in September and October 2011, when it released two videos of its members attacking U.S. forces in Afghanistan. These videos emerged seven months after a leading Mauritanian al-Qaeda ideologue, Shaykh Abu Mundhir al-Shinkiti, issued a *fatwa* saying that it is legal to attack police and fight jihad in Kazakhstan even though "the Muslims there are weak and small in number," and four months after the Taliban issued a statement to Kazakhstan's government accusing it of supporting Western efforts "to eliminate Islam."<sup>49</sup> It is therefore possible that JaK's formation is tied to a broader Taliban- and al-Qaeda-directed effort to cultivate a group focused on starting a jihad in Kazakhstan.

Unlike the IMU and ETIM/TIP, JaK did not emerge from a nationally-oriented Islamist movement focused on the liberation of its homeland. Rather, JaK's founders fled Kazakhstan in 2010 or 2011 to Pakistan's tribal areas and established the group there, while maintaining connections to Salafists in Kazakhstan and the North Caucasus.<sup>50</sup> According to one report, one of the founders intended to study Islam in Saudi Arabia; however, the Kazakh government prohibited him from doing so and he decided to take up arms against the country as a result. However, like the IMU and TIP, JaK's leaders became immersed in the international jihadist milieu of Pakistan's tribal areas. As they mixed with militants from around the world, the Kazakhs soon began

focusing on international jihadist issues and on forming new collaborative ties with other Central Asian militants who ultimately joined the JaK.<sup>51</sup>

At first, JaK's propaganda was focused mostly on overthrowing the Government of Kazakhstan, and the movement used its resources to carry out at least three attacks in Kazakhstan between October and December 2011. In a Russian-language video released on October 26, 2011—five days prior to JaK's first attempted bombing in Atyrau—JaK threatened to attack the Kazakh government if it did not repeal laws that JaK alleged forbid prayer in public institutions and the wearing of headscarves.<sup>52</sup> JaK's next statement appeared on the Ansar al-Mujahideen Islamic Forum on November 17, 2011. Its focus was also on Kazakhstan, alleging that the government was closing down mosques, showing subservience to Russia, engaging in corrupt activities, and torturing Muslims in prisons.<sup>53</sup>

On December 18, 2011, JaK issued yet another video statement about Kazakhstan called "Overthrow the Tyrant." The video concerned a labor protest in Zhanaozen a day earlier in which more than a dozen protestors were killed. JaK said, "From the massacre that happened in Zhanaozen where dozens in the general public were killed, it appears to us that the regime of Nazarbayev does not fight the mujahidin only, but rather he fights the whole Kazakh people.... We won't let this event pass quietly. We call you to continue your revolt against the regime of Nazarbayev."<sup>54</sup> This statement showed that JaK differed from other Kazakh Salafist groups, who did not exploit the unrest in Zhanaozen for political purposes or issue statements of any kind about what was ultimately an issue between the state and laborers—not Islamists.

While clearly focused on inciting a rebellion in Kazakhstan, JaK has also shown that it identifies ideologically with the global Islamist movement. In a November 10, 2011 statement, JaK said, "Know that the policy that you [President Nazarbayev] are following is the same that was applied in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt; however, as you have seen, it only caused suffering to those who implemented them."<sup>55</sup> Moreover, in explaining the reason for the name Jund al-Khilafa, one of JaK's leaders, Rawil Kusaynuv of the Zahir Baibars Battalion (named after the legendary Kazakh, Baibars, who became the Sultan of Egypt in the 13th thirteenth century), said,

This name reminds Muslims of their duty to revive the Islamic Caliphate as a system.... It is the system of Shariah-based governance that must prevail in every Muslim country from the east to the west.... We believe that the region of Central Asia, in addition to the Islamic Maghreb and Yemen, are candidates to be the nucleus for the return of the Caliphate State in the future.<sup>56</sup>

One of the likely reasons for JaK's internationalist orientation was its trainer and *emir* Moez Garsallaoui, an al-Qaeda member and Tunisian-born Swiss citizen. In October and December 2011, Garsallaoui (who was not yet known to be JaK's *emir*) issued statements online criticizing the democratic transition in his native Tunisia and praising JaK for its three attacks in Kazakhstan in late 2011. Then, in March 2012, JaK unexpectedly issued a statement claiming responsibility for the attacks of the French citizen of Algerian descent, Mohammed Merah, in southwest France, in which he killed 3 Jews and 4 French paratroopers.<sup>57</sup> Garsallaoui followed the JaK statements with his own statement under the pseudonym Abu Qaqa al-Andalusi (a common pseudonym for North Africans), in which he claimed to have known Merah "up close" and to have "sat with him on many occasions and for a short time guided him."<sup>58</sup> Western intelligence sources later corroborated these statements after al-Qaeda eulogized Garsallaoui's death in October 2012 as JaK's "emir, who trained Kazakh militants in explosives so they could return home to wage jihad."<sup>59</sup>

Since Garsallaoui's death, JaK has not issued any statements or claimed any attacks. However, Kazakhs in Afghanistan and Pakistan continue to operate with the Taliban and Central Asian groups and have been involved in major operations, including an attack on a checkpoint in Bannu in February 2013.<sup>60</sup> Kazakhs also continue to operate with fellow Russian-speakers in the Caucasus Emirate in the North Caucasus, including the former Kazakh vice emir of the Khavsayurt Wilayat in Dagestan, who was killed by Russian Special Forces in November 2012.<sup>61</sup> With reports of more than 100 Kazakhs in Afghanistan and Pakistan, many of whom were recruited by North Caucasians but initially radicalized in the western provinces of Atyrau and Aktobe, there is growing concern in Kazakhstan about their return to Central Asia. They might re-connect with underground Salafist brotherhoods in Atyrau and Aktobe, the North Caucasus, or Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and other Russian republics in the Urals where the Caucasus Emirate seeks to expand.<sup>62</sup> These Salafist brotherhoods first emerged in Kazakhstan in the late 1990s, particularly in areas near the Uzbek border, and became hardened when they interacted with other Salafists from the North Caucasus and now are believed to have several thousand youth followers, including the founders of JaK.

In recounting JaK's rise, the group likely represented but one of the several Kazakh Islamist groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the North Caucasus, and Kazakhstan. What distinguished JaK from these other Salafist groups, however, is that it operated closely with al-Qaeda. Nonetheless, the goal of JaK and many other Kazakh Islamists is to achieve "victory" in Afghanistan and then engage in jihad in Kazakhstan—similar to the short- and long-term objectives of the IMU and TIP.<sup>63</sup>



# The Contrarian Case of Hizb ut-Tahrir

WHILE THE IMU, TIP AND JAK WERE BORN IN CENTRAL ASIA BUT ARE NOW BASED OUTSIDE OF THE REGION, Hizb ut-Tahrir (HuT), which means “Party of Liberation” in Arabic, has made deep inroads in Central Asia since its first proselytizers entered the region after the end of the Soviet Union. In contrast to the IMU, TIP and JaK, HuT was formed outside of Central Asia, yet has been able to thrive within the region largely due to the success of its clandestine recruiting operations and small cell structure. HuT is also effective at using the Internet for propaganda purposes and recruiting; formerly it specialized in door-to-door pamphlet drops.

HuT focuses its recruiting activities in rural districts where police presence is minimal and on women. Women are seen as the center of the family and thus the key to converting husbands, siblings and children, and whom the police are less likely to suspect of being members of HuT.<sup>64</sup> HuT recruitment of those is targeted especially at women whose husbands have been arrested for their religious activities; in turn, they often receive financial support during their husbands’ detainment.<sup>65</sup> HuT requires that new members cut ties with non-members and implements various forms of psychological, economic and social pressure to prevent them from leaving.<sup>66</sup>

HuT differs from the IMU, TIP and JaK in that it professes to be non-violent and has a more clearly articulated ideology. In the words of a HuT leader, “the aims of Hizb ut-Tahrir and the IMU are for the Caliphate in Central Asia, but the ways to achieve a Caliphate are different just as one doctor might use surgery while another uses herbs.”<sup>67</sup> Despite these differences, all four groups—HuT, IMU, TIP and JaK—are united in the ultimate goal of establishing an Islamic Caliphate in Central Asia and overturning what they consider to be the Western-dominated world order across the Muslim World.

Founded by diaspora Palestinians in the Middle East in 1952, HuT believes it is obligatory for every Muslim to work toward the reestablishment of the Islamic Caliphate; that no other system of law but Sharia is permissible; and that it is *haram* (forbidden) for Muslim states to seek protection from America or other *kufir* (non-Islamic) states.<sup>68</sup> HuT spread to Uzbekistan and the Fergana Valley in the 1990s, but has since been suppressed to near extinction in Uzbekistan, as well as in neighboring Kazakhstan. However, HuT has reemerged with an estimated more than 20,000 members in Kyrgyzstan, and its membership has increased in the country since the ethnic riots between Uzbeks and Kyrgyzs in Osh and Jalalabad in 2010.<sup>69</sup> In Kyrgyzstan, HuT has largely

evolved into a political opposition movement, styling itself as the Islamic alternative to governmental corruption. Ideologically, however, HuT declared that its goal is “the restoration of the Islamic way of life and dissemination of the call (*da'vat*) to Islam in the world.”<sup>70</sup>

One of the main paradoxes with respect to HuT ideology is its resemblance to Soviet Communism by the ways that it attracts Central Asians. For instance, for Central Asians dissatisfied with land reform, particularly in Tajikistan, HuT’s envisioned state would limit ownership rights, with goods, services and resources that serve the interests of society, such as utilities, public transport, health care, energy resources and unused farm land owned by the state. For the unemployed, HuT’s envisioned state would, according to a sample Constitution written by a HuT leader, “guarantee employment for all citizens,” “provide free health care for all,” and “restrict by the permission of Shari’a... capitalist companies, cooperatives, and all other illegal transactions such as *Riba* [usury].”<sup>71</sup>

For Central Asia’s “born-again Muslims,” who have rekindled their faith in the post-Soviet era, the vision of an all-powerful Islamic state is an ideal replacement for the former powerful Soviet State and with the same enemy—the U.S. and the West—as during Soviet times. HuT argues that, like the Soviet Union, “the geographic area of distribution of Islam has the necessary geostrategic position, the natural resources, the economic and industrial potential, the military strength, the demographic share, and the common ideological framework to become a superpower in the ‘new world order’ that shall emerge” from what the organization perceives as the “ongoing decline of the long-dominant West”<sup>72</sup>

For the ethnic Uzbeks of Kyrgyzstan, who suffered the most displacement after the ethnic clashes in Osh and Jalalabad in 2010, HuT offers a vision of a society that does not emphasize ethnicity and promotes Muslim solidarity, as well as the prospect of a single Islamic state in Central Asia that would amalgamate Kyrgyzstan’s Uzbeks with their compatriots in Uzbekistan and make Uzbeks the plurality in that state. Meanwhile, for all Central Asians, HuT’s call for the elimination of Central Asia’s artificially created borders would allow all people in the region to travel and move freely throughout the region, as during Soviet times.

At the same time, HuT ideology is vastly different from Soviet ideology. Whereas the Soviet Union portrayed religion as an evil, HuT portrays the social and economic problems in Central Asia as a result of secularism, widespread corruption, and Western cultural influence and “Jewish domination.” A strong universal Islamic State that applied Sharia law, according to HuT, would eliminate all problems. Furthermore, HuT’s record of not resorting to violence has won it supporters among Central Asians who feel alienated by the violent tendencies of other groups, such as the IMU.<sup>73</sup> For

the religiously devout in Central Asia, with few options to choose from outside of monitored government channels, HuT, or other similar Islamist organizations, such as the South Asian-inspired Tablighi Jamaat, is often their most reliable option.<sup>74</sup>

## State Susceptibility to Islamism

OF ALL THE EXILED CENTRAL ASIAN GROUPS, THE IMU NOW APPEARS MOST LIKELY TO rapidly regain influence in Central Asia because with the Taliban's support it has already established bases bordering the region in northern Afghanistan. The TIP and JaK, in contrast, are primarily based in Pakistan's FATA, distant from their homelands. While there are signs that Kazakh Islamists are beginning to return to Central Asia, the TIP appears to be gaining traction in Afghanistan and Pakistan. There, it could emerge as the premier group representing the unitary Islamic State in Central Asia. As such, the TIP could become similar to the "Islamic Movement of Turkistan," as was expected of the IMU in the early 2000s, before it became situated in Pakistan and enmeshed with al-Qaeda in the tribal areas.<sup>75</sup>

The IMU is capable of infiltrating Central Asia directly or, more likely, through connections with affiliate groups like Jamaat Ansarullah in Tajikistan.<sup>76</sup> However, the IMU has largely lost its focus on Uzbekistan and Central Asia in its ideology; thus, it is questionable whether it can still appeal to people in the country. Moreover, the IMU's violent ways mean it will likely not win support from Central Asians, who have witnessed the violence and instability of Afghanistan to the south. In the early 1990s, it was Yuldash's demands for justice, economic equality and an end to corruption that resonated with people in the Fergana Valley—similar themes to those HuT espouses today. Whether or not the IMU is capable of finding a new leader with Yuldash's charisma and capable of appealing to Uzbeks, will be a key question for the group; but, this will be difficult given the movement's leadership and ideological changes.

The ability of the IMU—as well as the TIP and JaK—to influence Central Asia will also likely depend on whether the Taliban consolidates control of northern Afghanistan after the U.S. and NATO withdraw from the region in 2014. The Taliban could then free up these three groups to focus on Central Asia instead of using their resources to combat the Afghan army. As the former Russian Interior Minister, Army General Anatoly Kulikov, argued in February 2013, "The Islamists' principal forces have been occupied with Afghanistan and Pakistan for the past 10-15 years, where they suffered great losses. After 2014, they might look at the surrounding territories and provide

support to people living there who share their views.”<sup>77</sup> Even if the Taliban seeks to limit the Central Asian groups’ activities to Afghanistan, it is unclear if the IMU will oblige. Turkmen authorities have reported “special units” of the Taliban comprised of IMU members with an “independent political program” to infiltrate the country from Afghanistan’s Faryab province even while the Taliban concerns itself with internal issues in Afghanistan.<sup>78</sup>

In contrast to the IMU, TIP and JaK, HuT is already based in Central Asia, with most of its members in Kyrgyzstan, but also with networks throughout the region. While some Central Asians support HuT simply as an alternative to their current governments, HuT’s general policy of non-violence is attractive. One of HuT’s challenges, however, is overcoming the fact that the region’s governments blame it for violent incidents, whether or not there is proof of HuT involvement. If HuT is to continue to extend its influence into Central Asia, it will likely have to not only be perceived as non-violent, but also benefit from ineffectual governance or unstable political transitions.

The extent to which HuT, the IMU, JaK, and the TIP have an ideological impact in Central Asia also depends as much on their own agendas as on their homelands’ traditional and historical religious practices. The Arabs introduced Islam into Central Asia in the seventh century; however, among the nomadic tribes in the region, Islam developed into a more tolerant and mystical faith. Such was the case among the Kazakhs, Kyrgyzs, and Turkmen. A more institutionalized Islam developed in settled urban communities, like those in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kashgar, Xinjiang. The nomadic way of life was less conducive to established institutions, doctrines and clergy, but was suited to Sufi spiritualism. As a result, the doctrines of Islamism have historically resonated less in Kazakhstan, northern Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan than in the Fergana Valley, including parts of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and southern Kyrgyzstan, as well as Kashgar. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that the region’s first Islamist movements in the post-Soviet era, the IMU and ETIM, emerged from the Fergana Valley and Kashgar.

The Uzbeks and Tajiks received Islam in the 10th century from the Arab as well as the Persian world, and in the 21st century they are liable to draw from both influences. The nomadic people of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, however, received Islam mostly through the work of Tatar missionaries in the 17th and 18th centuries and therefore may not feel a need to look towards the Arab world for spiritual guidance. Since 2010, Tatarstan has come under increasing pressure from Islamists as new groups affiliated with the Caucasus Emirate and HuT have made inroads into the region. However, the religious authorities there have been quick to prevent the Salafist influences from the Caucasus of diluting “Tatar Islam” even as more Caucasians migrate to Tatarstan from the North Caucasus.<sup>79</sup>

The question remains, however, whether the traditions of nomadic Islam in an increasingly urbanized and less nomadic Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan can withstand the pressures of Islamism. Western Kazakhstan's proximity to the North Caucasus and southern Kyrgyzstan's disaffection with the government in Bishkek have permitted the Islamist influence of JaK and HuT to gain traction in recent years, while the Arab uprisings in the Middle East have helped to make the politicized Islam that Central Asian governments have rejected a mainstream phenomenon.

## Conclusion

ISLAMISM IN CENTRAL ASIA HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY LINKED TO BROADER INTERNATIONALIST trends. After the NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan, some of these movements may begin to return to their earlier nationalist orientations. This would involve a shift in their ideologies away from their fight against the U.S. and NATO and back towards their initial goals of "liberating" the governments in their homelands for the purpose of establishing an Islamic State in Central Asia.

The main competing ideologies in Central Asia are democracy, nationalism, and Islamism. The first and third are diametrically opposed, while the second is dangerous, too. Given that the governments are yet to take significant measures towards instituting democracy—and the U.S. may withdraw from the region—it appears that the chances for democracy in the region are minimal. The status quo with the current governments, however, is unlikely to last not only because the region's first generation of post-Soviet leaders are aging, but also because the idea of centralized leadership and intra-family power transfers has become increasingly delegitimized, including by the Arab uprisings in the Middle East.

Central Asia is now surrounded by Islamic governments like the ones in Iran and (presumably) in Afghanistan and Pakistan, by Islamist insurgencies like the one in the North Caucasus, and by post-Communist centralized governments like the ones in China and Russia. The lack of better political options for Central Asia's youth does not mean Islamist movements will necessarily come to power, but it does make it easier for their ideologies to find followers. Movements like HuT and other Salafist groups may very well be paving the way for Islamism to gain grassroots acceptance. However, it remains to be seen whether Islamism will seek to shape the next political order through the ballot box, by inspiring mass movements in the streets, or by imposing itself on the population through force. The latter becomes more likely should exiled Islamist militants return home after 2013.

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their ideological goals and priorities, way of life, way of thinking, access to power and resources as well as in elements of competition between Taleban and residents of Central Asia, Yoldosheva says.” However, the same article also notes that, “regional countries should give a special attention to the border with Afghanistan because extremist movements such as the IMU are on the other side of the border and for many years have been dreaming of entering their motherland Uzbekistan.” Excerpt from *Imruznews* [Dushanbe], May 22, 2013.

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