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RELIGION AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN MODERN UZBEKISTAN

Abstract: *The article examines the issues of politicization and radicalization of religious consciousness in Uzbekistan in the first years of independence, the emergence of political Islam and the consequences of this fact for the development of civil society.*

Key words: *political Islam, threat, pluralism, religious values, civil society, conscience, security, paramilitary, illegal, extremist, liberalization, democratization, Qur'an, Sunna, radical interpretations.*

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Introduction

It is well known that one of the most dramatic consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union was the change of the place and role of religion in the spiritual, cultural and socio-political life of the new independent states. A lot of research has been devoted to the specifics of this process. Most of them emphasize that this happened as a result of the loss of spiritual and ideological guidelines and the formation of some kind of ideological vacuum, which was bound to be filled with new ideology, based on a massive social base and powerful integrative potential. In Uzbekistan, which is considered one of the influential centers of Islamic civilization and where Muslims make up almost 90 percent of the population, the Islamic religion claimed the role of such an ideology. Perhaps, this was one of the main threats to the formation of civil institutions based on the principles of democratic pluralism and free thinking [1-3].

Materials and methods

The dynamic revival of religious values also contributed to the enhancement of the role and significance of religion in public and political life. And this revival was due to a number of specific factors. The most important of them should be considered a fundamental change in the attitude of the state institution to religion. As a result of the constitutional recognition of the right of religion to

participate in public life, not formally, as was the case in Soviet times, but the actual introduction of freedom of conscience into practice, the adoption of legislative acts designed to regulate religious life in accordance with the rules of law, a legal field was formed, in which religion began to function freely.

Of course, the formation of this field did not develop smoothly all time. Religious freedoms that appeared quite spontaneously were also used by destructive forces [4-8]. In the new situation, radical religious authorities, acting on behalf of the Islamic religion, have become more active. In their practice, the desire to expand the sphere of Islamic jurisdiction began to be clearly manifested, not limiting it only to the area of religious rituals and spiritual and moral education. The religious views of such figures organically fit into the general idea for foreign radical religious movements that have intensively penetrated into Uzbekistan that Islam is both a religion and a state.

One of the dangerous consequences for national security of such a mutually stimulating coincidence of interests was the emergence of political Islam in Uzbekistan and the emergence in the early 90-s of the XX century the first Islamist organizations in the Fergana Valley. The most famous of them were "Adolat" ("Justice"), "Odamiylik va insoniylik" ("Humanity") and "Islom lashkarlari" ("Warriors of Islam"). The ideological centers of these movements

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were the cities of Namangan, Andijan and Kokand, the population of which is more religious than other regions of Uzbekistan. The illegal paramilitary detachments created by them began to arbitrarily appropriate the functions of official law enforcement agencies to maintain public order and observance of morality.

It is known from recent history that, the socio-political crisis reached its apogee on December 8, 1991, when the Islamists, led by the notorious person Tahir Yuldashev, seized the building of the hakimiyat of the Namangan province and publicly demanded that Uzbekistan should be declared as an Islamic state. Then for the new Uzbekistan, which had just embarked on the path of independent development, a truly fateful moment came. And in that dangerous situation for the future of the country, the decisive role was played by the personal qualities of the first president of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov, who came to the raging Islamists and came into direct contact with them. Here his political wisdom, patriotism and human fearlessness were fully manifested. In fact, this was the first decisive blow dealt to the radical Islamist movements, which openly announced their intention to create the theocratic state in the Fergana Valley called "Kokand Khanate".

The result of this evolution of the religious situation was the clash of the traditional for the peoples of Uzbekistan understanding of Islam, characterized by deep tolerance and exaltation of enlightenment, with its extremist interpretations, actively promoted by radical local religious leaders and Islamist movements infiltrating from abroad. This clash has become, without any exaggeration, a deadly threat to the possibility of building a legal democratic state and a pluralistic civil society in Uzbekistan.

The evolution of the religious situation required urgent improvement of legislation designed to regulate the religious life of society and ensure its compliance with the highest national interests. Moreover, in the actions of Islamist groups, as well as religious and sectarian movements associated with other religions that penetrated the country, signs of violation of the provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan on guarantees of freedom of conscience for all citizens, inadmissibility of the forced imposition of religious views (Art. 31), the prohibition of the creation of political parties on religious base, the inadmissibility of the creation of paramilitary, secret societies and associations (Article 57), the principle of separation of religious organizations and associations from the state (Article 61) and much more.

In such conditions, measures were taken to improve the legislative framework for the religious life, which played a positive role in changing the general situation in the country. However, religious and educational activities were of fundamental importance for the further evolution of the general

situation. It put a reliable barrier on the path of further radicalization of the religious consciousness of the Muslim part of the population, which was dangerous for national security. In Uzbekistan, this alarming reality was timely realized. Accordingly, widespread religious and educational activities were launched throughout the country [7-10].

The spectrum of religious educational work and the components involved in it is very extensive and varied. It includes the popularization of the primary sources of Islam – the Koran and Sunna, the revival of the religious heritage of the Uzbek people, active work in translating important theological, legal and historical works on Islam into the Uzbek language, the development of a network of educational institutions designed to train religious personnel, etc. The purely religious wing, represented by the structures of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan and enlightened religious figures, governmental, women's and other public organizations, research institutions, NGOs, etc.

Religious elements with radical and extremist views also sought to influence this process. The religious-political party "Hizb al-Tahrir" has shown particular activity in this. Leaflets and other printed materials actively disseminated by the party at the end of the 20th and first years of the 21st centuries were replete with open calls for extremism in public and political life and terrorist actions directed against the established law of public order, including armed struggle against the legitimate constitutional order. The negative consequences of such activities were not limited to Uzbekistan alone, but went beyond its borders, creating a real threat to the processes of liberalization and democratization of public and political life, the establishment of the principles of pluralism throughout the Central Asian region.

The first fundamental steps of a religious and educational nature were initiated by influential local theologians. They considered that it is necessary to start, figuratively speaking, with the "legalization" in Uzbekistan of the written primary sources of Islam – the Qur'an and Sunna. It is noteworthy that most of the Uzbek ulema' remained faithful to the traditions of a tolerant understanding of Islam in the spirit of the Hanafi school of fiqh, which prevailed from the early stages of the spread of Islam in Central Asia. During the years of independence, the most famous of these scholars-theologians carried out three translations of the meanings of the Qur'an into the Uzbek language. These translations were published in mass circulation.

This was a natural and logical step, for the more and more active Islamist movements, when arguing their ideas, appealed primarily to these sources, arbitrarily interpreting their positions to please their selfish aspirations. The Hizb al-Tahrir party distinguished itself with particular radicalism in this. It stuffed the consciousness of Muslims with a radical interpretation of the Qur'anic verses and hadiths, tried to incite them against representatives of non-Muslim

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confessions. The fact that some of the leaflets distributed by the party with similar content were in Russian and English clearly indicated that the target of Hizb al-Tahrir's activities was not only the local population, but also foreign citizens. This was another dangerous clash between radical and traditional Islam in modern Uzbekistan. The power of its influence on national security was like a time bomb.

Another fundamental project that played a special and, at the same time, controversial role in the popularization of the primary sources of Islam in Uzbekistan, was the translation into Uzbek of the hadith collections. The choice of specialists who carried out this difficult religious and educational project naturally fell, first of all, on those collections of hadiths that were compiled by outstanding muhaddiths who were born and raised in Mavarannahr – al-Imam al-Bukhari and al-Imam al-Termizi. The full versions of the collections "al-Jami' al-Sahih" and "Sunan al-Termizi" were translated into the native language of their great compilers and published for the first time in the shortest time.

As life shows, along with the translated version of hadiths, the Muslim population of Uzbekistan received a large portion of religious ideas that did not correspond to their traditional understanding of Islam. This circumstance was also skillfully used by the supporters of radical and political Islam for their particular purposes.

The above-mentioned large-scale religious and educational projects, carried out in cooperation with religious, state and, in part, non-governmental organizations, have played a positive role in the evolution of the religious situation. Their main effect was to switch the attention of significant social strata from the religious-populist ideas of radical Islamist movements to a conscious and serious study of the primary sources of Islam. These projects, widely supported by the state and actively promoted by influential representatives of the local Muslim clergy, in addition to their religious and educational effect, put a reliable barrier on the path of further intensification of radical interpretations of the ideas of Islam.

An important segment of the religious and educational work carried out in modern Uzbekistan is the activity to revive the spiritual and religious heritage of local people. Over the years of independence, with the broad support of the state, jubilee celebrations of outstanding Islamic scholars who were born on the land of Uzbekistan have been held. A special resonance was caused by the anniversary celebrations of the prominent muhaddiths – al-Imam al-Bukhari and al-Imam at-Termizi, the Muslim theologian-founder of one of the two theological schools in Sunni Islam - Maturidiyya Abu Mansur al-Maturidi, an outstanding Muslim jurist, author of the famous work on Muslim law "al-Hidaya" Burhanuddin al-Marginani, Sufis

Abdulkhalik Gijduvani, Bahauddin Naqshband, Najmuiddin Kubro, Khoja Ahror Wali and others.

Such anniversaries, held with the active support of the state, have given a powerful impetus to religious and educational work, filling it with a philosophical and humanistic content and a spirit of deep tolerance. On the other hand, they have noticeably intensified a serious scientific study of the religious heritage of the Uzbek people. Carried out in the course of preparing and holding events dedicated to certain spiritual and religious personalities of the past, scientific research of Islamic studies and educational character serves to strengthen the scientific base of religious enlightenment of the population, and through this the propaganda of enlightened Islam. Large number of religious and sacred places were restored with the effective material and moral support of the state, including the mausoleums of al-Imam al-Bukhari - in the Samarkand region, Abu Mansur al-Maturidi and Shahi-Zinda - in Samarkand, Bahauddin Naqshband - in Bukhara, al-Imam at-Termezi - in Termiz, Najmuiddin Kubro in Khorezm and dozens of other places throughout Uzbekistan, are becoming influential centers for educating the population in the spirit of enlightened Islam. This, as the experience of the past years shows, serves as an important means of educating the population, especially the youth, of reliable spiritual and ideological immunity against various radical interpretations of Islam.

It should be admitted that the religious and educational work in the first years of independence was carried out rather chaotically. Often this important activity was carried out by people who did not have elementary knowledge in the field of religion in general, and Islam in particular. The continuation of such a situation was fraught with a great danger for the further evolution of the religious situation and threatened with a complete seizure of the initiative in religious and educational activities by radicals. As the experience of the years after gaining independence shows, political Islam, represented by such organizations as Hizb al-tahrir al-Islami, was able to partially take advantage of this circumstance.

All this has accelerated the process of formation and development of a network of specialized institutions that are engaged in the promotion of traditional Islamic religious values for the peoples of Uzbekistan. This network, which today has become a powerful tool for influencing the evolution of the religious situation in the country, includes a number of specific segments. They can be conditionally grouped according to the following principle:

- The most large-scale of them are more than two thousand mosques functioning today throughout Uzbekistan. Most of them are run by imam-khatibs with special religious education. Effective measures are being taken to constantly improve their professional knowledge.

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- An important segment of the continuously expanding network of religious and educational activities are specialized Islamic educational institutions under the direct jurisdiction of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan. Today their number is approaching twenty. They fulfill the vital function of training the religious cadres who are constantly joining the ranks of modern Muslim educators.

- A special place in the network of religious and educational activities is occupied by the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan, founded on the initiative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev. As a secular educational institution, the Academy seeks to synthesize purely theological and scientifically based knowledge about religion in general, and Islam, in particular. It is a place for training religious scholars and improving their qualifications. The Academy is dynamically developing into an influential center for scientific research on Islam, as well as a center for the dissemination of scientifically based knowledge about religion in general.

- Another link of institutions that have been actively involved in religious and educational

activities in recent years are non-governmental non-profit organizations whose interests lie in the field of spiritual and religious values. They seek to contribute to the religious enlightenment of the population of Uzbekistan.

Conclusion

The foregoing makes it possible to draw two fundamental conclusions: First, religious and educational activity to promote enlightened Islam has become a determining factor in the formation of a correct religious situation in modern Uzbekistan. It acts as the main mechanism for countering radical and extremist religious movements. Secondly, in the light of a fundamentally new attitude towards religion in the new Uzbekistan, the state provides all-round support for religious and educational activities and considers it a major factor in ensuring the religious security of society. The state seeks to provide all possible assistance in the implementation of the constructive potential of religion, which may be in demand for the formation and further development of civil society in modern Uzbekistan.

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