

POLITICAL ISLAM IN CENTRAL ASIA

Aigerim Zholdasbek

Suleyman Demirel University

Abstract

The proposed working paper aims to achieve an understanding of this approach. Mostly, I want to investigate the trends and reasons for the rapidly growing popularity of political Islam in Central Asia.

Introduction

The foreign policy circles of the Central Asian states neighboring Afghanistan are worried about the consequences for the Afghan authorities after 2014 of the transfer of military and political responsibility in the sphere of security and politics. First of all, they are worried about the impact this can have on the balance of power between the Taliban and the Tajik, Uzbek, and other national groups in the north of Afghanistan, and which of them will prevail in the north of the country. It is not forgotten that the Taliban once held power there between 1996-97 to 2001 and the consequences of this were also felt in neighboring states. For example, they influenced the course of the Tajik civil war (1992-1997) and provided the rear with extremist Islamist forces, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which in 1999 and 2000, invaded from there to Uzbekistan and provoked bloody battles. To these forces, the Taliban still provide asylum to this day and allow their attacks on neighboring Central Asian states.

Internal political conflict potential. Particular concern in the Central Asian states is the internal political situation. At least in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, we are dealing with a significant conflict potential, including the extremist-Islamic underground. How much it is strong, no one knows for sure. Nevertheless, it should be taken into account that in view of the high socioeconomic and political stratification of problems in these countries, this

background can become a significant mobilizing potential for the Muslim majority of the population. It has long been known that the underground has as its purpose the violent way to change the balance of forces in the country. The re-emergence of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan, even if only in the north, can contribute to its mobilization. The situation is exacerbated by the lack of an adequate Islamic counterweight to extremist organizations. Such a counterweight must be created by progressive forces aimed at consolidating its young state. Such forces exist, we met them at our symposia in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. They belong to the younger generation, they are well-educated and differ in the symbiosis of the practice of Islamic values and national interests, and the fact that they are politically unimportant is primarily due to the fact that secular authorities hinder their formation as legal political players.

Challenges for Europe. These challenges could unite all those forces that are interested in maintaining stability in the Eurasian space: secular and reformist Islamic forces in the region, European politics, in general and primarily the OSCE as the only all-encompassing Eurasian European. They should concentrate on solving, first of all, those problems, the reasons of which lie in more or less subjective and at the same time changing positions. This mainly concerns the harmonization of relations between the existing secular state power and Islamic institutions, such as mosques, madrassas, universities, political parties and movements. First and foremost, we are talking about building confidence, reducing a huge mutual distrust, and fully granting freedom of religion.

1. On the development of political Islam in Central Asia

1.1 Political Islam – definition.

In this study, the term "Islamic factor" is used as the general term technicus. It pragmatically includes Islam, political Islam, the Muslim population, Islamic organizations, parties and movements. Thus, we avoid ambiguity of the definition of the concept of "political Islam" (Malashenko, p.201) which can be observed in both Western and Islamic arguments. In the Islamic context, including in the report on Central Asia, we meet as a denial of this concept ("There is only one, indivisible Islam"), and conscious articulation

("Islamists"). So, strictly speaking, there is no non-political Islam. Therefore, with the use of the term "political Islam" we terminologically emphasize the main element, while not neglecting the integrity of Islam. Since one who recognizes the peacekeeping and humanistic power of Islam, as well as other religions, one can not deny the possibility of using it in the political sense.

1.2 Politicization of Islam

In these conditions, the politicization of large segments of the population is almost inevitable. Because of this, it can be understood as a "normal" phenomenon. Besides, it turns out, not the politicization of the religious sphere, but its radicalization, can lead to a huge social conflict. We should agree with the evaluation of experts who believe that the politicization of the religious sphere is primarily due to factors of social order, the unresolved basic problems of development, the reluctance and inability of the authorities to address the problems of backwardness, poverty, unemployment, corruption, and others, especially in the the borders of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the Fergana Valley, the north and the west of Tajikistan, the southeast of Kazakhstan, and the western parts of Kyrgyzstan.(Peyrouse, p. 257-259) At the symposium of the Center for OSCE Studies (CORE) in November 2008 in Bishkek, Kyrgyz participants stated that "the struggle for the resources of Islam is inflaming, and the process of its politicization can not be stopped. The question should again be asked which side can best use these resources for itself: internal or external forces. Fears of confrontation between state power and religion were assessed as real. On average, one should expect for 5-7 years, so that hostile to the state tendencies could prevail. In view of the instability of such development, an important task is to direct the politicization of religion on a peaceful course. Appeal to religion as a reaction to poverty, impoverishment and social futility for centuries is a well-known phenomenon. It is important to pay attention to the correlation between the religious element and social driving forces and possible political forms of expression. For Central Asia, it should be borne in mind that political Islam has so far used the available social energy little to mobilize believers to address social issues.(Saliyev, p. 122-153)

1.3 The reaction of secular authorities

Secular governments have a significant influence on the above-described processes. At the same time, they understand with great difficulty the connection between social driving forces, religious deepening and potential political mobilization. Influential circles of the secular intelligentsia have not parted with anti-religious and anti-Islamic views, they understand religion invariably as "opium for the people." (Marx, p.10) True, governments send their secret agents into the religious sphere, but mostly with repressive missions. Governments focus their attention shortsightedly on the politicization segment of the religious environment and try to subordinate, control and prosecute Islamic activists under the pretext of fighting terrorism. The result is assumed: it consists in the further radicalization of Islam.

These actions are nearsighted because the authorities by their repressions puzzle those Islamic pragmatists who agree with the secular nature of the state and based on their political behavior and experience are democratic. A convincing example of this is the above-mentioned IRP. It recognizes the secular nature of Tajikistan's state power, declares itself a supporter of democracy and parliamentarism. Despite this, the secular authorities, while "appointing" only two seats in parliament, refused to represent it, which would correspond to its unofficially estimated share of votes from 30 to 35% during the parliamentary elections, with which it would be the second most powerful parliamentary force after presidential party in 2010.

2. Implications for the governance of states in Central Asia

2.1 Changed policy options

In Kyrgyzstan, it can be considered an important result of the April 2010 revolution that Muslim circles for the first time expressed a demand to create a party or movement. Also in Kazakhstan, Muslim activists expressed their desire to create a parliamentary political party in the foreseeable future, following the example of the Turkish Islamic Justice Party. One can agree with Naumkin about the importance of Uzbekistan for the process of Islamization in Central Asia, which writes: "Uzbekistan is central to the future of Islam in Central Asia." (Naumkin, p.264) Here political Islam is subjected to the most severe persecution. His adherents are waiting in secret for the "moment of weakness" of the regime, which they hate. Such a moment can come when the

question of the successor of the president arises. What impulses will come from such a moment for the mobilization of political Islam in Central Asia, no one predicts. The forecast would be even more difficult if the "moment of weakness" of the Uzbek regime coincided with the inability of the Western alliance to initiate in Afghanistan a political stabilization process that would include significant Taliban circles. A high degree of political uncertainty stems from the fact that NATO can not cope with the first major military test in their history - and precisely against the anti-Western resistance movement of the Islamic world, which takes very close note of these facts. This new quality of the Islamic factor will determine the parameters of the political space of Central Asia, and should be taken into account by regional leaders as well as taken into account in European politics.

2.2 Impact on politicians of Central Asian states

The result of transformational state-building processes can be considered the fact that the performance of political power in Central Asia in the future will be inseparably linked with the Islamic factor. The attitude towards Islam becomes the Achilles' heel of secular power, since it is Islam that increasingly becomes the generally accepted basis of national identity, and not the concept of secularism separating the state from religion. At the symposium of the OSCE Center for the Exploration of the OSCE in Almaty in December 2007, Islamic and secular participants unanimously agreed that "the concepts of secularism practiced by the ruling elites do not correspond to the Muslim character of the majority of the population or the pace at which it moves forward under the pressure of internal contradictions and external factors re-Islamization of society. None of the secular elites in power has been able to develop a concept consolidating national identity that would correspond to the high degree of fragmentation of the Central Asian societies and states." (Zvegalskaya, p.90) Thus, the old, but existing Soviet understanding of secularism is in a crisis of legitimacy. Consequently, the need to adapt to the factor of Islam, and its representatives - to secular state power, will become a condition for their political survival.

In this new situation, the usual control tools and management resources are exhausted, repression is ineffective. On the other hand, at the disposal of the

state authorities, especially in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, there are no means for a noticeable improvement of the social and economic situation. It is also noticeable that the holders of secular power lose in the "struggle for the minds" of young people to radical fundamentalist forces with external patrons. But it is here that the key issue for the further balance of forces is being decided, namely, which side will be able to attract nationally oriented Muslims to their side.

2.3 Implications for the Islamic side

Political Islam in the region is still far from summarizing its growing social influence in the political and conceptual scale of the scales. To a greater extent, there is a struggle between the national-Islamic forces and the pan-Islamic strata that make up their competition. And we are talking mainly about theological interpretation of Islamic doctrine and practices in young Central Asian states, and the issue of orientation to someone else's radical fundamentalist line or to their traditional, Hanafi, Islam. Disputes around this issue in the Islamic community are gaining momentum and may carry the danger of a split.

Politically relevant processes of differentiation are driven by two main factors: one is an ever-increasing social divide between the poor and the rich, which leads to a split within the Islamic community itself. At the same time, increasing poverty is playing into the hands of [38] the extremist Islamic movement and limits the potential for the influence of moderate Islamic forces. Another factor is the inability of the Islamic elite to create its own concept for the formation of national statehood. This task it has not set itself up until now in any of the Central Asian states. But it did not occur to the secular elite to involve the Islamic side in joint reflections. This conceptual vacuum is met with a radically Pan-Islamic wing with its appeal to the struggle of Central Asian Muslims for the Caliphate. It would be in the national interest if the secular elite decided to cooperate in the conceptual aspects of building the state, for example, in the modernization of religious education. A joint state-Islamic reform program in the sphere of religious education could open the way, along with credible effects, to the return to the ganafite roots of Islamic teaching in Central Asia. Only when the Islamic side can promote national self-

identification with the help of a religious approach, it will become an equal partner in dialogue with the secular state.

Conclusion.

The huge mutual distrust that exists between the state power and Islamic political forces can be explained by the fact that both sides do not see a guarantee that none of them, as soon as they come to power, try to exclude, depending on the circumstances, an unwanted partner from political process. Secular leaders fear that the Islamic parties, having come to power democratically, will build a theocratic state in which there will be no place for secular forces. Islamic leaders are concerned not only with the fact that their organizations under secular rule will be included in the list of terrorist associations and will be banned, and that even the political legitimization of their parties will not guarantee their preservation in a political structure that has not resolved the issue of peaceful coexistence with political Islam. (Rahnamo, p. 191-193) This "distrust dilemma" also has a European dimension. The question is whether the European OSCE participating States will accept the legitimacy of the democratically elected Islamic government, fearing that it can begin a radical change in existing constitutional norms. It is also unclear whether the moderate Islamic parties will be able to guarantee the stability of the constitutional order in the event of coming to power, or they will act undemocratic, being directed by radical Islamic forces. So far neither of the two sides has offered a guarantee of its "behavior towards the enemy", which would be acceptable to the other party. The Islamic elite wants to believe that it will indeed have political and religious perspectives on the basis of equal rights, both in its own country and in the large Eurasian space. The secular side, also of Europe, wants, in turn, to be sure that the recognition of OSCE principles and commitments by moderate Islamist leaders is not just a tactical maneuver. Since overcoming this mistrust can be a lengthy process, in the short term positive signals are required with impact on the Islamic world and the Eurasian political region. Such signals could be sent by the European side by entering into consultative dialogues with Central Asian Islamic organizations and secular forces. The position of both groups, the type and mode of their interaction, significantly affect stability in the entire OSCE region.

Mechanisms. Such dialogues should be launched with democratically and nationally minded representatives of political Islam, who already have experience of cooperation with the state party, as in Tajikistan, as well as in Kyrgyzstan. At the same time, first of all, it would be necessary to determine which topics are recommended as paramount, and with the help of which mechanisms it is possible to guarantee peaceful cooperation. This general task can be considered along with specific steps:

The task of confidence building measures is to initiate an understanding process that will eliminate the danger of escalation of the conflict, determine common goals and interests and help to overcome differences and misunderstandings as much as possible. In the short term, steps must be taken to prevent the radicalization of political representatives of Islam, as well as joint initiatives for the development of the integration, peacemaking potential of Islam. In the long term, efforts must be made to finally ease tensions and create a situation of self-sustaining stability. It is necessary to persuade the secular state to constructively rethink its position towards Islamic institutions and organizations, such as mosques, madrassas, universities, political parties and movements, and, accordingly, to reform the legislation and executive structures of power. The dominant concept of the "separation of religion from the state" should be adapted to the special socio-political and religious conditions of the existence of the Muslim majority. It turned out that for the Tajik politicians of the IRP, the concept of "separation of church and state", interpreted as "separation of religious organizations from the state", is more acceptable than the old Soviet concept of "separation of religion from the state". It is necessary to find out whether the Islamic forces recognize this approach in other Central Asian states.

The next priority field of activity is religious education. It is extremely important that the holding of dialogues in this direction in the short and medium term leads to convincing results that will be realized and will become the basis for further development.

Signal from Europe. Europe should contribute, sparing no effort, overcoming the "distrust dilemma" between Central Asian political Islam and secular authorities. For this purpose, it would be important for Europe to signal its readiness to recognize Central Asian political Islam as an integral part of the political process in Central Asia. "Europe" in this context can be individual

European states, international organizations, such as the European Union or the OSCE, as well as European non-governmental organizations.

Of course, one should not lose sight of the fact that there are differences with Islamic concepts in the field of state and national construction, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, women's equality in society, education and many other areas. But in the interests of stability and peace in the Eurasian region, nevertheless, there is no alternative to such a dialogue.

References

1. Karl Marx, «Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right», Berlin, 1972, vol. 1, p.10
2. Malashenko, Aleksey, «Islamic alternatives and Islamic project», Moscow, 2006, p. 201.
3. Rahnamo, Abdullo, «Transformation of the political culture of "political Islam" in Tajikistan», Center for Strategic and Political Studies (Moscow), Center for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Moscow, 2009, p. 191-193.
4. Saliyev, Aman, «Modern role of Islam in the socio-political space of the Kyrgyz Republic», Moscow, 2009, p. 122-153.
5. Sebastien, Peyrouse, « Islam in Central Asia: National Specificities and Postsoviet Globalisation », Religion, State and Society, vol. 35, 2007, p. 257-259
6. Vitali V. Naumkin, «Radical Islam in Central Asia, Between Pen and Rifle», New York, Oxford, 2005, p. 264.
7. Zvegalskaya, Irina, «Formation of the states of Central Asia, political processes», Moscow 2009, p. 90.