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Uzbek Jihadists and the Ideal of the Caliphate: Understanding the Motives of Uzbeks to Join Daesh

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Pramod Raj Sedhain, 'Comprehensive view on IS's Khorasan province and future perspective' *The Daily Journalist*, November 27, 2016, http://thedailyjournalist.com/the-strategist/comprehensive-view-on-iss-khorasan-province-and-future-perspective/.

The region *Khurasan* on the image, which includes Central Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Iran, is also referred to as the 'Islamic State Khorasan Province'. Khorasan refers to the ancient name for Afghanistan and the surrounding parts of Pakistan, Iran and Central Asia. The Khorasan province was announced by a central spokesman of *Daesh*, named Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, on January 2015. The militants' first aim was to drive Taliban fighters out of the area and to counterbalance al-Qaeda's dominance in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), that was already present in the region, pledged allegiance to Daesh in August 2015.

When the power of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq weakened, a big group of fighters fled to Pakistan (in Balochistan) and Afghanistan in order to fulfill the envisioned Islamic State in the imagined Khorasan province.

Abstract

After five international attacks commited by Uzbek individuals in the name of Daesh in 2016 and 2017, many (news)articles have been quick to speak of a trend regarding radicalization in Uzbekistan and Central Asia. Research has shown that scholars either look at internal or external factors for the radicalization of Uzbek nationals. This study aims to explain the apparent recent interest of Uzbek nationals to join Daesh and if we can speak of a myth or a phenomenon regarding radicalization in Uzbekistan. Building on existing work on radicalization in Central Asia and Uzbekistan, this research both analyzes the internal and external factors. These internal and external factors have been applied on case studies of three Uzbek individuals committing the international attacks.

The analysis was based on a literature research on the history of the region, the Uzbekistan state since 1991 onwards and migration from Central Asia towards Russia, and a textual analysis of (1) videos, messages, and websites, and (2) interviews of journalists with friends, neighbors and family members of the Uzbek individuals in the case study. In addition, the social movement theory and social psychology theory were applied accordingly. The results indicate that we should not speak of a phenomenon regarding radicalization in Uzbekistan. Besides, the case study shows that external factors particularly explain the apparent recent interest of Uzbek nationals to join Daesh. Nevertheless, internal factors could indeed explain other radicalization processes, such as why Uzbek nationals decided to join the *Hizb ut-Tahrir* and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.

Table of content

Introduction

On 31 October 2017, a pickup truck drove into cyclists and runners in New York City, killing eight people. After the driver was shot by a policeman, the police found a black flag and a document in the truck in which the driver pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. In the hospital room the man asked for permission to display the flag of ISIS and stated that he felt good about what he had done. The attack was committed by Sayfullo Saipov, an Uzbekistan-born immigrant living in the United States.

Since the declaration of the self-proclaimed Islamic State in June 2014, countries outside of Iraq and Syria have been attacked by international terrorists who are inspired by the so-called Islamic State. In the years of 2016 and 2017, five attacks have been committed by Uzbek *Daesh*[1] supporters. The first attack was committed by three attackers of Russian, Uzbek and Kyrgyz origin at the airport of Istanbul in June 2016 and resulted in the death of 45 people. In January 2017, Abdulkadir Masharipov killed 39 people in an Istanbul nightclub. In April 2017, Akbarzhon Jalilov killed sixteen people in a subway in St. Petersburg. During the same month, Rakhmat Akilov killed five people with a truck in Stockholm. Lastly, the already mentioned Sayfullo Saipov killed eight people with a truck in New York City in October 2017.

As a result of these attacks, some (news)articles aimed at looking for answers by wondering if radicalism is a new trend in Central Asia[2] [Appendix A]. *Al Jazeera* asked 'Is Central Asia a hotbed for extremism?'. *Newsweek* wondered 'Why extremist groups are gaining strength in Central Asia'. *The Washington Post* wrote how 'New York attack suspect's Uzbekistan roots put focus on Central Asia battle with extremism'. Think tank *Combating Terrorism Center* connected the recent attacks to 'Violent Extremism among

[1] From here onwards I will refer to Daesh instead of to ISIS, ISIL or Islamic State.
[2] These are (in this thesis) the countries of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

Central Asians'. This narrative in which radicalism is connected to Central Asia is part of a broader development within literature and newspapers on Central Asia. Due to the Taliban's seizure of power in Afghanistan, 9/11, and the 'war on terror', religion has become a big part of security studies. With regard to Central Asian Islam, it has resulted in studies focusing on 'risks of radicalization' in Central Asia. This is also due to the emergence of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, al-Qaeda and Daesh in the region.

It is important to mention misconceptions on religion in Central Asia, which have been spread as a result of studies focusing on radicalization in Central Asia. Political scientist Pauline Jones Luong argues in her study on *The Transformation of Central Asia* (2004), which examines the emerging relationship between Central Asian state actors and social forces in the region, that prior to the independence of Central Asia in 1991, the region was not important in studies on the Soviet Union. After the fall of the Soviet Union, statesmen and scholars began with analyzing the region's past and present. According to Luong, these statesmen and scholars spread unverified assumptions that caused "a common set of misperceptions that pervaded the study of Central Asia, leading scholars to make a series of erroneous predictions both during Soviet rule and immediately following the Soviet Union's collapse."[3] This is also argued by Marlène Laruelle, a French historian, sociologist and political scientist, who argues in *Being Muslim in Central Asia: Practices, Politics and Identities* (2018) that the Western policy community and Central Asian regimes "tend, though to differing extents, to conflate Islamic practices, political Islam, and paths to violence, providing security-oriented explanations of local political and social changes."[4] The mentioned newspapers in the previous paragraph thus seem to be part of a development that

[3] Pauline Jones Luong, "Politics in the Periphery: competing views of Central Asian states and societies" in: idem, *The Transformation of Central Asia. States and Societies from Soviet Rule to Independence* (London: Cornell University Press, 2004), 5.
[4] Marlène Laruelle, *Being Muslim in Central Asia: Practices, Politics and Identities* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), 1.

connects Islam to the risks of radicalization, with the probability that it may consist misperceptions.

Research question

According to several reports, the largest group who has joined Daesh from Central Asia are Uzbek nationals.[5] The *International Crisis Group* (ICG)[6] estimated that between 2,000 and 4,000 people from Central Asia have travelled to fight for Daesh. A report of the *Soufan Center* of October 2017 spoke of 'more than 5,000 from Central Asia' and 'more than 1,500 from Uzbekistan'[7] [Appendix B]. *Radio Ozodlik* speaks of 3,000 to 3,500 Uzbek fighters only.[8] Although exact numbers on Uzbek fighters are unclear, however all of these reports agree on the conclusion that the majority of Central Asian fighters are from Uzbekistan. This could partly be explained through demographical reasons, as Uzbekistan has 30 million citizens, compared to 18,7 million in Kazakhstan, 8,6 million in Tajikistan, 5,8 million in Kyrgyzstan, and 5,4 million in Turkmenistan. Of these 30 million Uzbek citizens, 90% identifies as Muslim.[9] Nevertheless, demographical reasons do not only explain why the majority of Central Asian fighters are Uzbek nationals.

Because of the five 'Uzbek attacks' in 2016 and 2017 and because there is an Uzbek majority from Central Asia who has joined Daesh, this thesis primarily focuses on Uzbekistan. The main question of this research is: how can we explain the apparent recent interest of Uzbek nationals to join Daesh and can we speak of a myth or a phenomenon regarding radicalization in Uzbekistan? The relevant time period for this research is from

[5] "Syria Calling: Radicalisation in Central Asia" *International Crisis Group*, January 20, 2015, http://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/syria-calling-radicalisation-central-asia.
[6] The ICG is a global think-tank working on international and Central Asian affairs.
[7] Richard Barrett, "Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees" *The Soufan Center*, October 2017 http://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Beyond-the-Caliphate-Foreign-Fighters-and-the-Threat-of-Returnees-TSC-Report-October-2017-v3.pdf.
[8] "Suriyaga oilasi bilan borayotgan jihodchi o'zbeklar ko'paymoqda" *Radio Ozodlik*, March 25, 2014 https://www.ozodlik.org/a/25308969.html.
[9] "The World Factbook" *Central Intelligence Agency.* Accessed on November 28, 2018, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/.

1991 to 2019, with a special focus on 2014 to 2019: the rise and fall of the Islamic State.

This research question is relevant for a number of reasons. First of all, as has been mentioned, the highest amount of Daesh fighters from Central Asia are from Uzbekistan. This thesis aims to provide an answer to why there is a relatively high amount of Uzbek nationals joining Daesh and also if this high number implies that we can speak of a general trend of radicalization. Secondly, there is a lack of academic research on this topic due to the very recent emergence of Daesh. Literature and newspapers that did contribute to this topic are divided into two camps. According to political scientist John Heathershaw and anthropologist David Montgomery, some scholars tend to make claims about the threat of political Islam in Central Asia, which is a 'myth' according to them. Heathershaw and Montgomery do not deny in their research on *The Myth of Post-Soviet Muslim Radicalization in the Central Asian Republics* (2014) that a few radical groups exist. However, they argue that these are better understood "on a case-by-case basis and not as part of a supposed general trend of radicalization."[10] Some other scholars argue that radicalization is not a myth, but a phenomenon taking root in the region of Central Asia. For instance, Anna Matveeva, an academic researcher on conflict studies and practitioner on international peacebuilding, applies this argument in her research *Radicalisation and Violent Extremism in Kyrgyzstan: On the Way to the Caliphate?* (2018) on Kyrgyzstan and the states of Central Asia in general.[11] Thus there is a debate among different scholars regarding radicalization in Central Asia.

Hence, this thesis aims at answering the question if we can speak of a myth or a phenomenon regarding radicalization in Uzbekistan.

[10] John Heathershaw and David W. Montgomery, "The Myth of Post-Soviet Muslim Radicalization in the Central Asian Republics" *Russia and Eurasia Programme* (2014): 3.
[11] Anna Matveeva, "Radicalisation and Violent Extremism in Kyrgyzstan. On the Way to the Caliphate?" *The RUSI Journal* 163, no. 1 (2018): 30-36.

Scholarly debate

First, this part elaborates more on the debate between Heathershaw and Montgomery, and Matveeva. Then, the debate between scholars are discussed who, on the one hand, believe that the primary causes of radicalization are influenced by factors within the Uzbek state and scholars who, on the other hand, believe that the primary causes are better explained through external factors, such as migration.

Heathershaw and Montgomery believe that six general claims have been made on radicalization in media and policy communities. There claims are: (i) there is a post-Soviet Islamic revival; (ii) to Islamicize is to radicalize; (ii) authoritarianism and poverty cause radicalization; (iv) underground Muslim groups are radical; (v) radical Muslim groups are globally networked; (vi) political Islam opposes the secular state. Heathershaw and Montgomery challenge these six claims by arguing that "a relatively small number of Muslim individuals and groups committing violent acts in Central Asia in the name of Islam do not constitute a broader trend, nor does it establish a causal relationship."[12] According to Heathershaw and Montgomery, these six claims are present to some degree in reports of the ICG. For instance, Heathershaw and Mongomery argue that there is an assumed yet unproven relationship between Islamicization and radicalization in ICG reports. By countering these six claims, the authors aim at seeing through the myth of post-Soviet Muslim radicalization so that "it is possible to see that there is nothing essential to Central Asia that generates religious radicalization."[13]

Matveeva, however, argues that radicalization is not a myth but a phenomenon taking root in the region. Matveeva argues that scholars from the region stress the existence of jihadism. However, these scholars apply stereotypes of root causes for radicalization, such as poverty, underdevelopment, a lack of education, ignorance, insufficient economic

[12] Heathershaw and Montgomery, "Myth of Muslim Radicalization", 2.
[13] Idem, 15.

opportunities, a surplus of young males without responsibility, and restrictions on free political expression.[14] Matveeva counters these stereotypes by arguing that some of the most repressive and poor societies have experienced little violence, whereas many prosperous and stable countries have. Instead, explanations may lie in the evolution of social identity in the post-Soviet region, such as the 'brotherhood' bonds that joining groups provide, idealism, solidarity, and the emotional rewards for participating in action for a cause.[15] Matveeva states that violent extremism has a long tradition in the region. In her arguments, she also opposes the work of 'skeptical' scholars, such as political scientist and philosopher Edward Lemon and Heathershaw and Montgomery, who do not believe that this is a phenomenon taking root in the region.

Another debate within the literature is what possible causes for radicalization might be. Some scholars argue that the root causes are mainly explained through internal factors within the Uzbek state. The ICG argues that "the appeal of jihadism in the region is rooted in an unfulfilled desire for political and social change."[16] They argue that the reason why Uzbek nationals are joining Daesh is because they are socially and politically frustrated, as the Uzbek state suffers from poor governance, corruption, crime and does not promote religious freedom. Moreover, the ICG argues that the Central Asian states contribute to radicalization due to their repressive laws and police forces that conduct crackdowns.[17] The *Washington Post* argues that 'Islamist radicalism in Central Asia' could develop because of the lack of opportunities, political tensions and widespread corruption in Uzbekistan.[18] Journalist Ahmed Rashid argues in *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (2002) that a combination of poverty, authoritarian rule and skepticism of Central Asian leaders about manifestations of

[14] Matveeva, "Radicalisation in Kyrgyzstan", 30.
[15] Idem, 31.
[16] http://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/syria-calling-radicalisation-central-asia.
[17] Idem.
[18] "New York attack suspect's Uzbekistan roots put focus on Central Asia's battle with extremism" *The Washington Post*, November 1, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/origins-of-new-york-terror-attack-suspect-put-focus-on-central-asia-battle-with-extremism/2017/11/01/b0e223da-beda-11e7-af84-d3e2ee4b2af1_story.html?utm_term=.87f4ffaee7c1.

Islam have led to the rise of militant groups throughout the region.[19] Russian-trained Arabist Vitaly V. Naumkin argues in *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Between Pen and Rifle* (2005) that the causes for the rise of militancy in the region are a result of socioeconomic (such as poverty, lack of employment), political (repressive governments, corruption) and ideological (competing Muslim ideologies) issues.[20]

Other scholars, however, argue that Central Asia should not be 'blamed' but that we should focus on external explanations for radicalization. Lemon and Heathershaw argue that there is "no evidence that religious, economic or political root causes in Central Asia are responsible for the region's export of terrorism."[21] Instead, they argue that some Uzbeks have been recruited when they were working abroad. Additionally, an open letter from Central Asian scholars published in *The Diplomat* states that they oppose the ICG argument which assumes that Islam is part of the problem. These scholars from *The Diplomat* state that this is a problematic assumption. They argue that "empirical research shows that looking to Islam for identity and authority almost never leads to violent extremism; it is far more likely to lead to discussions around public morality and governmental reform than violent rebellion."[22] Besides, they argue that repression in Central Asia does not lead to resistance by religious groups. In addition, Eric Rosand – Senior Fellow of the Center for Middle East Policy – argues that there is little empirical evidence that religion (or ideology) is a main motivator for violent extremism. He argues that "radicalization is primarily a social issue that can provide

[19] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 8-11.
[20] Vitaly V. Naumkin, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Between Pen and Rifle* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield: 2005), 22.
[21] Edward Lemon and John Heathershaw, "How can we explain radicalisation among Central Asia's migrants?" *Open Democracy*, May 2, 2017, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/can-we-explain-radicalisation-among-central-asia-s-migrants/.
[22] "Understanding Islamic Radicalization in Central Asia (UPDATED)" *The Diplomat*, January 20, 2017, http://thediplomat.com/2017/01/understanding-islamic-radicalization-in-central-asia.

opportunities for drivers that are more fundamental, but often less visible."[23] Rather, we should look at non-religious and non-ideological grievances, such as injustice and political discrimination. Moreover, political scientist and historian Catherine Putz criticizes, in a different article published by The Diplomat, false assumptions in newspapers that link the words 'former USSR', 'poor', 'oppressive' and 'Muslim' with each other. According to Putz, this does not explain why some Uzbeks decided to join Daesh.[24] Political scientist Maria Omelicheva argues in her research on *The Ethnic Dimension of Religious Extremism and Terrorism in Central Asia* (2010) that "there has been a lack of evidence that convincingly demonstrates the existence of a relationship between various indicators of levels of development and political deprivation, on the one hand, and the rise of radical Islam and terrorism on the other.[25] Rather, the success of radical groups are explained through their structure of political opportunities, resource availability and their ability to frame their appeals in such a way that they resonate with the prospective members.[26]

Methodology

The main research question will be answered through four chapters. The first chapter gives an overview of the history of Central Asia. In order to understand post-Soviet Uzbekistan, the legacy of the Soviet past is unmissable. The chapter gives an overview of Central Asia as part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union and the position of Islam under Soviet rule.

The second chapter aims to answer how the post-Soviet period in Uzbekistan may have contributed to the current situation of Uzbek nationals joining Daesh. The already mentioned scholarly debate shows that scholars either look at the possible internal or external

[23] Eric Rosand, "In strategies to counter violent extremism, politics often trump evidence" *Brookings Institution*, May 6, 2019, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/05/06/in-strategies-to-counter-violent-extremism-politics-often-trumps-evidence/.
[24] Catherine Putz, "St. Petersburg and Stockholm Attacks Put Uzbeks in the News" *The Diplomat*, April 11, 2017, http://thediplomat.com/2017/04/st-petersburg-and-stockholm-attacks-put-uzbeks-in-the-news/.
[25] Mariya Y. Omelicheva, "The Ethnic Dimension of Religious Extremism and Terrorism in Central Asia" *International Political Science Review* 31, no. 2 (2010): 172.
[26] Idem, 174.

reasons for the radicalization of Uzbek nationals. This chapter analyzes the posed internal root causes for radicalization in Uzbekistan. This is done through analyzing Islam as part of nation-building after 1991, Uzbek state control of Islam, violent outbreaks in Uzbekistan, militant groups and the economic situation in the Uzbek state. It must be mentioned that no separate paragraph has been written on current president Shavkat Mirziyoyev. After former president Karimov passed away in 2016, Shavkat Mirziyoyev became the new president of Uzbekistan. Acknowledging the reforms undertaken by Mirziyoyev, such as the relaxation of state repression, combating corruption, and improving the private sector, no argumentation could yet be formulated whether president Mirziyoyev contributed in the past two years to the trend of Uzbek individuals joining Daesh or the trend or myth of radicalization.

The third chapter analyzes the possible external factors that may have influenced Uzbek nationals joining Daesh. This is done through looking at the two main external factors that may have contributed to the radicalization of Uzbeks, which are the situation of Uzbek migrant workers in Russia and the 'appeal' of Daesh for Uzbek nationals. At the end of the 1990s, the Russian economy started to recover which resulted in an increase of labor migration from Central Asia to Russia. However, it is argued that these labor migrants often face xenophobic attitude by the Russian population. The second external factor, the 'appeal of Daesh', refers to the recruitment of Uzbek fighters by Daesh which is mainly done through the internet. There is a presence of three Uzbek militant groups in Syria and Iraq, namely the *Katibat al Tawhid wal-Jihad* (KTJ), the *Kateebat Imaam Al-Bukhari* (KIB) and the *Seyfuddin Uzbek Jamaat*. Several social media outlets focus on recruiting Uzbek citizens through Uzbek- and Russian-language propaganda. In these messages several forms of rhetoric and propaganda are used, such as a rhetoric of 'symbolic crusades' (political arguments aiming to convince the audience of the legitimacy of jihadists' goals) and propaganda aimed at legitimizing their ideology by using elements from the holy script, thereby interweaving

jihadist ideas with Islamic concepts.[27]

The fourth chapter consists of case studies and analyzes the possible motives of three Uzbek Daesh supporters who recently committed terrorist attacks. Although there have been five international attacks committed by Uzbeks in 2016 and 2017, this case study focuses on three of these individuals, namely Sayfullo Saipov, Rakhmat Akilov and Akbarzhon Jalilov. This research excludes the Istanbul nightclub attack (by Abdulkadir Masharipov) and the Istanbul airport attack (three attackers of Russian, Uzbek and Kyrgyz origin) because there is little information on these individuals. The reason why this thesis includes a case study is because there is a gap within the literature as scholars have yet not been researching these Uzbek individuals. Scholars have taken into account either the possible internal or external root causes for radicalization, or a combination of both. In order to verify these root causes, they have to be applied on individuals who have indeed radicalized. For instance, Heathershaw and Montgomery argue that "to consider the veracity of specific claims about the scale of violent extremism or who is responsible for a particular incident requires detailed case-by-case studies beyond the scope of this paper."[28] In addition, Matveeva argues that "research is hampered by a lack of empirical data on the phenomenon and detailed information on individual cases."[29] Matveeva also argues that radicalization affects individuals rather than broad social groups. However, although Matveeva criticizes the lack of information on individual cases, her research does not include a case study. Therefore, this thesis aims at answering the research question through including a case study on which the internal and external root causes for radicalization are applied.

Two methodologies are used to conduct this research. First of all, this is a literature research that analyzes academic sources, such as books, articles and think-tank reports, on

[27] Rositsa Dzhekova et al., *Understanding Radicalisation: Review of Literature* (Sofia: Center For The Study of Democracy, 2016), 31.
[28] Heathershaw and Montgomery, "Myth of Muslim Radicalization", 3.
[29] Matveeva, "Radicalisation in Kyrgyzstan", 31.

Central Asia under Soviet rule, the post-Soviet Uzbek state, Islam in Uzbekistan, migration from Central Asia to Russia, radicalism in Central Asia and Uzbek militant groups joining Daesh. The second methodology is a textual analysis of two parts: (1) research of videos, messages and websites that contain information on Uzbek jihadists who have joined Daesh; (2) interviews of journalists with friends, neighbors and family members of Uzbek individuals mentioned in the case study. The textual analysis of videos, messages and websites that contain information on Uzbek jihadists who have joined Daesh is done through analyzing two primary sources: websites and magazines. The websites 'Jihadology.net' and 'ChechensinSyria.com' contain translated messages and videos from Daesh fighters. Also, Daesh owns two magazines, *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*. These magazines have been published with an English translation on 'clarionproject.org'. The textual analysis on case studies in the last chapter is an analysis on newspapers who have reported on these individuals and have interviewed people who knew the Uzbek individuals. The interviews in these newspapers are considered as primary sources in this thesis.

Theory and definitions

This research combines two theories. First, this research uses the social movement theory as formulated by Tolga Türker in *Radicalization of Islam in Central Asia: Theory, Trends and Prospects* (2011). As argued by Türker, the social movement theory provides "a useful tool in understanding how radical groups managed to transform their mobilization potential into actual mobilization of supporters."[30] Three perspectives are part of the social movement theory:

i. **Political opportunity**: this perspective analyzes the history of and the current political context in which the radical movement takes place in order to understand the opportunities and

[30] Tolga Türker, "Radicalization of Islam in Central Asia: Theory, Trends and Prospects" *Journal of Central Asian & Caucasian Studies* 6, no. 11 (2011): 59.

constraints placed on a movement or group.[31] Exclusion from the political system could play a powerful role in radicalizing movements.

ii. **Resource mobilization**: this is based on the capacity and ability of the group to mobilize within the internal and external context of developments.[32]

iii. **Framing perspectives**: this is about modifying a group's goal due to multiple factors, such as changing dynamics of political opportunity or fluctuating membership status.[33]

The first perspective is mainly discussed in the first two chapters, as these chapters explain the history and current political context of Uzbekistan. In the second chapter, we see the exclusion of citizens by the Uzbek state who do express their religious life in a 'political' way according to the Uzbek state. The second perspective is mainly discussed in the third chapter. Activist groups in authoritarian regimes are mobilized through informal networks such as friendship- and neighborhood groups. In Uzbekistan, groups indeed mobilize through family- and friendship-based networks because of the importance of having a collective identity. For instance, in the third chapter we see friendship-based networks in the case of Uzbek migrants in Russia. The third perspective explains that the ability of a group to formulate a common framework is successful when it is able to gather more support. Türker formulates the examples of the slogans such as "Islam is the solution" or to target an enemy as such frameworks.[34] We see this perspective mainly in chapter 3.2 on 'the appeal of Daesh', but also in the fourth chapter.

The second theory aims at analyzing the context of the case studies of this thesis. This is the theory of social psychology, as formulated by Rositsa Dzhekova et al. in *Understanding Radicalisation: Review of Literature* (2016). The social psychology theory helps to explain possible causes for an individual to radicalize, such as psychological characteristics and/or

[31] Idem, 58.
[32] Idem, 58.
[33] Idem, 59.
[34] Idem, 59.

personal experiences.[35] This theory mainly focuses on how the environment influences individual behavior. Some of the explanations for radicalization are relative deprivation and social polarization.[36] Besides, this theory argues that there are also types of catalysts, such as recruitment and trigger events. Recruitment can accelerate radicalization. In the case of Central Asia, the role of internet in spreading propaganda and recruitment are important factors in the radicalization process.[37] The role of the internet is mainly discussed in the third and fourth chapter. Examples of trigger events are acts committed by the enemy, political calamities or events that call for revenge.[38]

Definitions

In order to understand radicalism, the distinction between radicalism and extremism must be clarified. Extremists are characterized by a strong emphasis on ideology, to create a homogeneous society based on dogma and strive to suppress opposition and minorities. They do not allow diversity and are therefore no democrats.[39] In contrast, radicals believe in reason and accept diversity. Radicals can be violent, but this is not always the case. Radicalism is also often linked with terrorism, however radicalism could lead to other conflicts. Besides the radicals inspired by religion, there are also right-wing and left-wing radicals who are inspired by an ideology. This thesis uses the definition of Alex Schmid of the *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*:

> ''An individual or collective (group) process whereby, usually in a situation of political polarisation, normal practices of dialogue, compromise and tolerance between political actors and groups with diverging interests are abandoned by one or both sides in a conflict dyad in favour of a growing commitment to engage in

[35] Dzhekova et al., *Understanding Radicalisation*, 21.
[36] Idem, 18.
[37] Idem, 6.
[38] Idem, 20.
[39] Alex Schmid, "Reflection on: Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation and Counter-Radicalisation" *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism* 4, no. 2 (2013): 10-11.

> confrontational tactics of conflict-waging. These can include either (i) the use of (non-violent) pressure and coercion, (ii) various forms of political violence other than terrorism or (iii) acts of violent extremism in the form of terrorism and war crimes.''[40]

Limitations

There are a few limitations in this research. First of all, the researcher does neither speak Russian nor Uzbek. Therefore the researcher has to rely on translated messages, for instance on the two websites of 'ChechensinSyria' and 'Jihadology' and translations of articles written in Uzbek, Russian and Swedish. The second limitation is that the researcher has to rely on interviews done by journalists, as I did not have the resources to interview individuals who have joined Daesh or family members of these individuals. The third limitation is the lack of research done on this specific topic of Uzbek individuals who have joined Daesh. Although many news articles commented on this topic, however some of them tend to generalize on the trend of radicalization in Central Asia. Nevertheless, taking this into account, many of these (news)articles were useful for the case study analysis.

[40] Idem, 18.

1: History of the region

1.1 Introduction

Prior to Central Asia's independence in 1991, the region was part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. The Russian Empire transformed the *Khanate* of Kokand into Russian Turkestan in the 1860s. The Bukhara *Emirate* and the Khiva *Khanate* were transformed into Russian protectorates.[41] Russia's domination over Central Asia was rather military and political, instead of social and cultural. Due to that, Central Asian Islam retained most of its key characteristics.[42] The first governor-general of Turkestan, K.P. Kaufman, instituted a policy of 'disregarding' Islam which lasted until 1917. This meant that Islam did not have an official status, but at the same time the state did not seek to control mosques and madrasas.[43] Islam thus kept its autonomy under Russian rule.

Central Asian Islam is a particular form of the religion as it has been shaped by multiple influences. For instance, the tribal nature of the population affected Islam in Central Asia, but also the Tengrian[44] and Zoroastrian[45] beliefs and practices influenced Islam during the centuries. Another influence is Sufism, or mystical Islam, and the oral, rather than book-based Islamic tradition. Central Asian Islam is also characterized by its fluid nature and the adaptability to shifting political and cultural environments.[46]

The year 1922 marked the beginning of the establishment of Soviet control in Central Asia which resulted in various reforms and reorganizations. For instance, the former khanates

[41] Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group 2001), 5.
[42] Galina Yemelianova, "How 'Muslim' are Central Asian Muslims? A Historical and Comparative Enquiry," in: Marlène Laruelle, *Being Muslim in Central Asia: Practices, Politics and Identities* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), 24.
[43] Adeeb Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR* (New York: Cornell University Press 2015), 30.
[44] Tengrism is a shamanistic religion mainly practiced among the Turkic population of Central Asia. Tengrists believe in one supreme God, spirits and demigods.
[45] Zoroastrianism is an ancient Persian religion that is centered in a dualistic cosmology of good and evil. Zoroastrians believe in one supreme god and believe that good deeds ensure happiness and prevent chaos.
[46] Yemelianova, "How 'Muslim' are Central Asian Muslims", 36.

were transformed into new regions which were based on arbitrary ethno-linguistic lines. Under Russian rule, the Central Asian population distinguished themselves according to clans- and tribal lineages as well as by cultural and linguistic differences.[47] The reason why these new borders were established was to develop national and socialist identities in Central Asia. The linguistic and tribal distinctiveness of the Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Turkmen and Uzbeks were in the end identified and transformed into national republics of the Soviet Union.

Under Soviet rule, the Central Asian Republics (CARs) could not govern themselves directly because the Russians were overrepresented in the local Communist Party organs. The CARs were also economically dependent on the Soviet Union because the economy of the region remained primarily agricultural instead of industrial. However, as argued by historian Galina Yemelianova in *How 'Muslim' are Central Asian Muslims? A Historical and Comparative Enquiry* (2018), the USSR invested much in "the involvement of Central Asians in the central political and economic bodies of power, its promotion of national political infrastructures and cultures, as well as the inclusion of Central Asians in the nation-wide comprehensive and free secondary and higher education and health care."[48]

1.2 Islam under Soviet rule

First of all, it is important to mention the misperceptions on Islam in Central Asia under Soviet rule. As Luong points out, "Islam was commonly viewed as the dominant social force in Central Asia and, more important, as purely an oppositional one. More specifically, because modernization was equated with secularization, Islam was depicted as the primary weapon against the forces of Soviet modernity."[49] However, Islam was neither the dominant social force nor an oppositional one. As argued by historian Adeeb Khalid *in Ulama and the State in Uzbekistan* (2014): "Most Central Asians did not see being Muslim as counterposed to

[47] Luong, "Politics in the Periphery", 7.
[48] Yemelianova, "How 'Muslim' are Central Asian Muslims", 29.
[49] Luong, "Politics in the Periphery", 9.

being Soviet."[50]

So what does characterize Islam during Soviet rule? According to Yemelianova, Central Asian Islam had a 'pluralistic and adaptable nature' which 'ensured its survival under state atheism.'[51] With an adaptable nature, Yemelianova means that Central Asian Islam took on different forms and mixed within national cultures of the Soviet Union. However, the different forms of Islam varied among communities in Central Asia. In the case of Uzbeks and Tajiks, Islam, especially the Sufi tradition[52], became a local tradition which also became seen as a political and military threat to the Soviet Union. However, historian Michael Kemper argues in his research *Studying Islam in the Soviet Union* (2009) that the importance of Sufi groups in resistance to the Soviet Union has been significantly overstated.[53]

The cultural revolution[54] under Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union (1928-1932) also had an enormous impact on Islam in Central Asia. Campaigns were launched on literacy, healthcare, women's rights and enlightenment. Due to the communist ideology of the Soviets there was no place for religion in society. For instance, the *maktabs* (traditional Qur'anic schools) were replaced by 'modern' schools and the Turkic and Iranian languages were replaced by the Latin alphabet.[55] Besides, even though visiting holy sites was a central feature of Islamic religious life in Central Asia, shrine visitations became to be seen as a sign of backwardness.[56] Moreover, a *hujum* (an assault) was launched in 1927 in order to 'unveil' women in Central Asia.[57] However, the *hujum* turned out to be counterproductive as society strongly embraced the markers of local identity which the *hujum* attacked in the first place.

According to Khalid, the *ulama* (a body of Muslim scholars) were the main victims of

[50] Adeeb Khalid, "Ulama and the State in Uzbekistan" *Asian Journal of Social Science* 42, no. 5 (2014): 518.
[51] Yemelianova, "How 'Muslim' are Central Asian Muslims", 26.
[52] Sufism is an esoteric dimension of the Islamic faith, the spiritual path to mystical union with God.
[53] Michael Kemper, *Studying Islam in the Soviet Union* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 11.
[54] A process of gradual ideological transformation to a socialist society. Characteristics of a cultural revolution are democratization of culture, equalization of cultural opportunity, rapid rise of the educational level of the population, and the formation of a new popular intelligentsia.
[55] Khalid, "Ulama and the State", 518.
[56] Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan*, 224.
[57] Kemper, *Studying Islam*, 7.

the cultural revolution.[58] Some of them were attacked or arrested. Their ranks lost importance as the Islamic educational institutions were abolished. Moreover, most of the mosques in Central Asia were closed: of the 26,000 mosques in 1912, there were no more than a thousand in 1941.[59] The knowledge of the *ulama* was also affected through the shift to the Latin alphabet. According to Khalid, "Muslim intellectuals, modernist and traditionalist alike, lost contact with their peers abroad as Soviet xenophobia cut off their links with the outside Muslim world."[60] If the *ulama*, or other elite, wanted to work for the state or party organs, they were told to separate their Islamic belief from their political ideology. Students and workers were controlled and discouraged from participating in the Ramadan. Even if they participated in periods of fasting, teachers and authorities forced the students and workers to eat or drink.[61]

With the outbreak of World War II, a new policy towards religion came into existence as the Soviet Union needed to gain popular support for the war effort. Instead of persecuting religion, the Soviet Union decided to control and supervise it. The Spiritual Administration for the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM) was therefore created in 1943. SADUM was a bureaucratic institution aimed at regulating religious observance throughout the region. For instance, mosques and madrasas were controlled by SADUM. SADUM also aimed at spreading a positive image among "potential comrade states within the Muslim family of nations."[62] Only a restricted number of people had access to religious education as SADUM was responsible for appointing and training religious scholars. SADUM was also the only authority that was able to decide who to send overseas for higher religious education.

[58] Adeeb Khalid, "Ulama and the State", 521.
[59] Amanda Erickson, "How the USSR's effort to destroy Islam created a generation of radicals" *The Washington Post*, January 5, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/01/05/how-the-ussrs-effort-to-destroy-islam-created-a-generation-of-radicals/?utm_term=.9fd82b2a3230.
[60] Adeeb Khalid, "Ulama and the State", 521.
[61] Vera Exnerova, "Radical Islam from Below. The Mujaddidiya and Hizb-ut-Tahrir in the Ferghana Valley" in: Pauline Jones Luong (ed.), *Islam, Society, and Politics in Central Asia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017), 57.
[62] Idem, 58.

However, the *ulama* did not recognize the authority of SADUM. Therefore, as argued by Khalid, SADUM's authority was never fully accepted by the Muslims in the region.[63] As a result, and also due to the inconsistency of SADUM's implementation of state policies and laws, local government officials often ignored unregistered religious practice and sometimes participated in Muslim rituals themselves.[64]

Rituals of the Islamic religion were still allowed within local communities. According to anthropologist Vera Exnerova, Central Asian Muslims were able to study the basics of Islam in their neighborhoods which was taught by family members. Besides, there were also 'informal book markets' nearby mosques or madrasas that sold a variety of religious books.[65] Soviet rule transformed Islam into a local and primarily cultural identity marker across Central Asia. As Khalid argues, Islam became embedded within the cultural identity of Central Asia due to the Soviet repression of Islam's formal institutions in Central Asia.[66] Islam in Central Asia became disconnected with the surrounding regions. As argued by Khalid, "Central Asian Islam, cut off from its own past and from Muslims outside the Soviet Union, became a local form of being rather than part of a global phenomenon."[67] Islam thus became synonymous with tradition.

1.3 Islam in Central Asia from 1979 to independence

As a result of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the Soviet regime feared the spread of politicization of Islam to the USSR and the possibility of a mobilized resistance against the Soviet regime. This fear was reinforced by the Afghan *mujahideen* that took power in expense of the Marxist regime in Afghanistan in 1978. This event affected the way in which the Soviet regime controlled Islam in the region. Instead of controlling Sufism, the new primary threat

[63] Khalid, "Ulama and the State", 523.
[64] Johan Rasanayagam, *Islam in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan: The Morality of Experience* (University of Aberdeen: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 81.
[65] Exnerova, "Radical Islam from Below", 58-59.
[66] Adeeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014), 83.
[67] Idem, 83.

for the Soviet regime became individuals and groups inspired by Wahhabism.[68]

As a result of the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989), 'other' Islamic literature, that was not approved by the Soviet regime, appeared in Central Asia because it was brought into the region by Central Asian soldiers. Although thousands of Central Asians fought in the Russian Red Army against the Afghan *mujahideen*, some of these Central Asian fighters were affected by the Islamic dedication of the *mujahideen*. Some of them even left the Red Army and joined the *mujahideen*.[69] A small number of Central Asians also travelled to Pakistan or Saudi Arabia to study Islam, Arabic and the literature of Islamist thinkers.[70]

Under the Gorbachev years (1985-1991), the policy towards Islam again shifted. In 1988, Mikhail Gorbachev introduced the policy of *glasnost* ('openness') and *perestroika* (restructuring of the Soviet political and economic system) which relaxed the various restrictions on, for example, freedom of speech and the press. Activities of non-official religious organizations were tolerated by the Soviet regime. Moreover, Islamic symbols and observances were tolerated and Soviet authorities worked together with Islamic communities in order to build and restore mosques. As a result of these policies, people in Central Asia searched for their moral and spiritual past and values.[71] These events marked the last years of the Soviet Union.

In sum, the anti-religious campaign of 1927-1941 deeply affected Islam in Central Asia, as the infrastructure of Islamic learning and the authority of the *ulama* was marginalized and destructed.[72] Islam in Central became a private matter. In comparison with neighboring Muslim-majority countries, Islam in Central Asia took on its own form of the religion. In this

[68] A puritanical Muslim sect founded in Arabia in the 18th century by Muhammad ibn-Abdul Wahhab and revived by ibn-Saud in the 20th century. This term has become used by the governments in Central Asia in order to call out any 'dangerous' Islamic ideology that the state does not support. Wahhabism has been mistaken for fundamentalism, extremism or jihadism.
[69] Maria Elisabeth Louw, *Everyday Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia* (London and New York: Roudledge, 2007), 23.
[70] Exnerova, "Radical Islam from Below", 59.
[71] Khalid, "Ulama and the State", 524.
[72] Idem, 517.

form of Islam, personal piety was not necessary. People learned about Islam through their participation in different local events and rituals.

2: How may the post-Soviet period in Uzbekistan have influenced the current situation of Uzbek nationals joining Daesh?

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the internal factors that may contribute to Uzbek nationals joining Daesh and discusses the situation in Uzbekistan from 1991 onwards. Some scholars argue in favor of internal factors contributing to the radicalization of Uzbek citizens. For instance, the authoritarian regime of Uzbekistan, its repressive measures against Islam, the harsh police crackdowns, corruption, and the economic situation in especially the Ferghana Valley could, according to this camp, contribute to the radicalization process. As pointed out by Khalid, internal factors contributed to the emergence of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the *Hizb-ut-Tahrir* (HBT). The perspective of 'political opportunity' of the social movement theory is applied to this chapter as this perspective analyzes the history and current political context in which the radical movements takes place to understand the opportunities and constraints placed on a group.

2.2 Islam as part of nation-building after 1991

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Islam Karimov became the president of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 1991. The new government was confronted with tasks such as nation-building, establishing stability and dealing with the Soviet legacy. The Soviet legacy was significant as the new governments of Central Asia strategically incorporated the Soviet institutional and policy legacies of which they were an integral part into the new Central Asian states, such as bureaucracies, centralized economic planning and patronage networks.[73] Other Soviet legacies, according to political scientist Sally Cummings, are: initial international isolation, a politicized strong-weak state, a largely resource-based economic

[73] Luong, "Politics in the Periphery", 12.

development, environmental degradation and arbitrary borders between the countries (for instance, the Ferghana Valley is located in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan).[74] These Soviet legacies created challenges to the new governments of Central Asia, as they needed to consolidate new civic identities. Islam became one of the elements to legitimize the Uzbek national identity. This meant that the new governments were compelled to cope with elements that the Soviet regime had aimed to put in the background.[75]

In order to legitimize Islam as part of the Uzbek national identity, president Karimov made the *hajj* to Mecca, swore his presidential oath on the Qur'an, approved the state constitution that "explicitly maintains a special status for Islam" and made Islam important in the nation's history.[76] Moreover, hundreds of mosques and madrasas were built in the country. Islamic teachers and funds from Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey and the Gulf states were welcomed. For instance, Iran aimed at distributing religious books, opening religious schools and mosques and training religious figures.[77]

Some scholars, such as political scientist Sébastien Peyrouse, Khalid and anthropologist Maria Elisabeth Louw, speak of an 'Islamic revival' in the region after its independence.[78] However, instead of speaking of an Islamic revival, Luong argues that the increasing public and private manifestations of Islam in Central Asia since its independence are better explained as a transformation.[79] Luong argues that we cannot speak of revival, because it was not a reemergence of Islamic beliefs and practices which were suppressed

[74] Sally Cummings, *Understanding Central Asia: Politics and Contested Transformations* (New York: Routledge Ltd 2013), 4.
[75] Sébastien Peyrouse, "Islam in Central Asia: National Specificities and Postsoviet Globalisation" *Religion, State and Society* 35, no. 3 (2007): 245.
[76] Luong, "Politics in the Periphery", 17-18.
[77] Yemelianova, "How 'Muslim' are Central Asian Muslims", 32.
[78] See, for instance: Sébastien Peyrouse, "Islam in Central Asia: National Specificities and Postsoviet Globalisation" *Religion, State and Society* 35, no.3 (2007): 245-260;
Adeeb Khalid, "A Secular Islam: Nation, State, and Religion in Uzbekistan," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* no 35 (2003): 573-598;
Maria Elisabeth Louw, *Everyday Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia* (New York 2007).
[79] Pauline Jones Luong, *Islam, Society, and Politics in Central Asia* (Pitsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007), xiii.

under Soviet rule. Instead, it was a transformation, because it was an alteration in the form, nature and appearance of Islam "as individuals and communities gain direct access to ideas and information concerning … Islam via a variety of new sources, encounter an evolving range of state policies toward religion, and come into contact with multiple and sometimes competing sources of religious authority."[80]

The new governments in Central Asia have been built on the Soviet legacy. However, there are differences between the new governments in terms of the Soviet legacy. The degree of continuity of the Soviet past has been greater in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan than in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.[81] In Uzbekistan, the Soviet legacy continued to aim at religion and dissent. Islam as part of nation-building after 1991 was not only aimed at state legitimation, but also aimed at self-legitimation of Central Asian state leaders and preventing opposition to their rule.[82] All autonomous appeals to or manifestations of Islam were suppressed by president Karimov, as he feared opposition. According to Luong: "He has moved beyond the notion that the state should simply 'manage' Islam by institutionalizing and depoliticizing it, however, to the conviction that it must be eliminated as an independent social force."[83] Islam, as part of the Uzbek national identity, was only embraced by the Uzbek regime if this was apolitical or 'traditional'. Consequently, the Uzbek regime suppressed all forms of 'political Islam'.

2.3 Uzbek state control of Islam

Uzbekistan proclaimed itself as a secular state and declared in its Constitution that the state secured the separation of state and religion. Although Uzbekistan proclaimed itself as a secular state, Islam became part of the national identity while at the same time it became to be

[80] Idem, xiii.
[81] Luong, "Politics in the Periphery", 21.
[82] Idem, 20.
[83] Idem, 22.

perceived as a potential ideological competitor of the secular state.[84] In order to legitimize this, the Uzbek regime took an authoritarian turn and explained that, in order to cope with the "threat of political and social destabilization", they needed to control Islam.[85] Several laws have been implemented by the Uzbek state in order to regulate religious life of its citizens. These laws prohibited religious parties, headscarves and beards in public institutions, and the sale of religious clothing.[86] Also, religious practices and sermons in the mosques became increasingly controlled.[87] Another implemented law is that Islamic education has been forbidden, unless it is approved by the state.[88] Students that studied abroad, in for instance Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, were recalled by the state in the late 1990s, as the state aimed at controlling all expressions of Islam by its citizens.[89] Karimov especially feared Wahhabist influences from Saudi Arabia. According to Karimov, "radical Islam is poised to penetrate Central Asia", and "such people must be shot in the head."[90] The Uzbek regime has been quick to link any interpretations of Islam that do not fall in line with the state discourse with 'extremism' of 'Wahahbism'.[91] As argued by Türker, this exclusion from the political system could play a significant role in the radicalization process of Uzbek movements.[92]

However, the rise of radical and militant forms of Islam has been exaggerated by the governments in Central Asia, as argued by Omelicheva.[93] Heathershaw and Montgomery also counter these claims and argue that "in the assumption that to Islamize is to radicalize is a misunderstanding of the relationship between religion and politics in Central Asia."[94] They

[84] Peyrouse, "Islam in Central Asia", 245.
[85] Idem, 246.
[86] David Abramson and Noah Tucker, "Engineering Islam. Uzbek State Policies of Control" in: Pauline Jones Luong, I*slam, Society, and Politics in Central Asia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press: 2017), 80.
[87] Laruelle, *Being Muslim in Central Asia*, 4.
[88] Dilshod Achilov and Renat Shaykhutdinov, "State Regulation of Religion and Radicalism in the Post-Communist Muslim Republics" *Problems of Post-Communism* 60, no. 5 (2013): 22.
[89] Khalid, "Ulama and the State", 528.
[90] Cummings, *Understanding Central Asia*, 114.
[91] Rasanayagam, *Islam in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan*, 96.
[92] Türker, "Radicalization: Theory", 58.
[93] Omelicheva, "Ethnic Dimension of Religious Extremism", 170.
[94] Heathershaw and Montgomery, "Myth of Muslim Radicalization", 7.

claim that there is little evidence to support the idea of post-Soviet Muslim radicalization in Central Asia and refer to this as a 'myth'. Furthermore, they state that:

> "While increasing expression of Muslim piety is a general trend, 'radicalization' is difficult or impossible to access. We find no basis to link increased observance of religious ritual to critical attitudes toward the state. There is no clear evidence that increased observance of Islam is consistent with increased engagement in political opposition."[95]

In order to regulate religious life, the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan (MBU) was established by the Uzbek state. Officially, the MBU aims at acting as a mediator between the authorities and religious population.[96] However, the MBU plays an important role in 'normalizing' what to accept by the Uzbek government when it comes to Islamic practices.[97] The MBU is controlled by the Uzbek state, as the state hires and fires imams of mosques, controls what is taught in the madrasas and mosques, and censors religious literature. Moreover, the *ulama* need to pass a test in 'political literacy', i.e. to know the national anthem, know the writings of president Karimov and to express support to Karimov.[98] The MBU thus serves as a long arm of the government.

Another way to control religious life in Uzbekistan is through the use of security services. Uzbek security services have been described by the ICG as "underfunded, poorly trained and inclined to resort to harsh methods to compensate for a lack of resources and skills."[99] As described by the ICG, the security services use torture and repression on a large scale. According to *Human Rights Watch*, president Karimov imprisoned thousands opponents and critics of the regime based on the government's identification of them as

[95] Idem, 7.
[96] Peyrouse, "Islam in Central Asia", 248.
[97] Laruelle, *Being Muslim in Central Asia*, 4.
[98] Khalid, "Ulama and the State", 528.
[99] https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/syria-calling-radicalisation-central-asia.

"enemies of the state," and on charges of extremism.[100] According to the *Washington Post*, the imprisonment of political opponents and independent religious groups "encourages the growth of radicalism among some Muslims."[101] They argue that this is furthermore encouraged by poverty, corruption and the rule of an autocratic leader. This argument is supported by the ICG, who argues that the laws implemented on religious life and the "harsh methods" of the security services further fuel radicalization in the country.[102] The ICG believes that a relatively large proportion of Uzbeks decided to join Daesh is because they have "an unfulfilled desire for political and social change." Peyrouse also argues that Islamist movements in the region developed as a result of the authoritarian regime of Uzbekistan.[103] This camp thus believe that the main reasons for radicalization are mainly because of the situation within the Uzbek state.

The mahalla structure

In order to deal with possible opposition against the Uzbek regime, the *mahalla* structures were given the tasks to take care of ethnic tensions. Officially, the *mahalla* is a neighborhood community or an indigenous institution in Central Asia. In Uzbekistan, village committees provide local self-government in small rural communities, while *mahalla* communities are the local self-government bodies in urban areas and larger rural villages.[104] Prior to Uzbekistan's independence, the *mahalla* used to serve the family structure in the private sphere, for instance in the case of weddings. In post-Soviet Uzbekistan, the *mahalla* committee became a

[100] "'Until the Very End' Politically Motivated Imprisonment in Uzbekistan" *Human Rights Watch*, September 25, 2018 https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/09/25/until-very-end/politically-motivated-imprisonment-uzbekistan.
[101] https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/origins-of-new-york-terror-attack-suspect-put-focus-on-central-asia-battle-with-extremism/2017/11/01/b0e223da-beda-11e7-af84-d3e2ee4b2af1_story.html?utm_term=.810e56c2bd46.
[102] https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/syria-calling-radicalisation-central-asia.
[103] Peyrouse, "Islam in Central Asia", 257.
[104] Marianne Kamp, "Between Women and the State. Mahalla Committees and Social Welfare in Uzbekistan", in: Pauline Jones Luong, *Islam, Society, and Politics in Central Asia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017), 31.

local organ entrusted with functions that had been provided by Soviets and bureaucracies.[105] The *mahalla* became institutionalized into the government structure and leaders of the *mahalla* are now elected by its community which must be approved by city officials.[106]

During the first years of independence of the Uzbek state, the *mahallas* were supported by the government in promoting Islam as a national identity marker.[107] However, the *mahallas* quickly became reorganized. For instance, the government created a 'neighborhood watch' after the first 'terrorist' bombing in Tashkent in 1999.[108] As a result, this means that elected officials in the m*ahalla* have to report any irregularities when it comes to "potential terrorist activities" or any sign of opposition to the regime. Officials in the *mahallas* are also given administrative tasks for several districts. The *mahallas* are thus used by the Uzbek state as an instrument for social control. The shift of the *mahalla* to becoming a governmental institution has all kind of consequences. The reorganized *mahallas* started to lose its attachment to the community. Besides, the *mahallas* are used by the state for their governmental agenda and are also viewed as part of the government by the local communities.[109]

2.4 The violent outbreak of Andijan

In 2005 a violent event occurred in the city of Andijan, which is located in the Ferghana Valley. Members of a Muslim community took over a local government building and freed members of their community from prison.[110] As a result, the government ordered Uzbek security forces to open fire. This resulted in the death of hundreds of protestors.[111] After the

[105] Idem, 39.
[106] Dadabaev, Timur. "Community life, memory and a changing nature of mahalla identity in Uzbekistan" *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 4, no. 2 (2013): 184.
[107] Idem, 191.
[108] Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, 181.
[109] Dadabaev, "Mahalla identity in Uzbekistan", 178.
[110] Jeffry Hartman. "The May 2005 Andijan Uprising: What we Know" *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program* (Silk Road Paper, May 2016), 9.
[111] David Lewis, "'Illiberal Spaces': Uzbekistan's extraterritorial security practices and the spatial politics of contemporary authoritarianism" *Nationalities Papers* 43, no. 1 (2015): 144.

violent outbreak, over 150 people were convicted of terrorism charges.[112] Some of the freed members from prison were (former) members of the *Hizb-ut-Tahrir*.[113] However, the government claimed it to be actions by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).

This outbreak was used by the government as an excuse to repress any opposition in the country. The Uzbek government blamed radicals for the outbreak which justified, according to the Uzbek government, the use of violence. Another reason for the violent response of the government was because of the recent developments in the region. After parliamentary elections in 2005 in Kyrgyzstan, demonstrations emerged throughout Kyrgyzstan. These demonstrations are also known as the 'Tulip Revolution' and it resulted in the breakdown of the Kyrgyz government in April 2005. In the same period, the Uzbek *Islamic Jihad Union* (IJU) conducted a series of attacks in Tashkent in 2004. They also planned on attacking Bukhara, which failed. These events alarmed the Karimov government and influenced the aftermath of the Andijan revolts.[114]

As a result of these events, Karimov controlled the information flows in the country, censored the news and expelled several journalist from the country. The event fitted in the notion that radical Islam was the primary threat in the country and it drew away the attention from the harsh repression of the Karimov regime. Some scholars argue that this harsh repression has been counterproductive. Naumkin states that Karimov's harsh repression is "feeding radical sentiments and widening the IMU's base of support."[115]

2.5 Militant groups operating in Uzbekistan

According to Luong, militant Islamic groups developed in response to the political repression of the Uzbek state. Luong also argues that these groups developed due to being close to the

[112] Cummings, *Understanding Central Asia*, 81.
[113] More on *Hizb-ut-Tahrir* in paragraph 2.5.
[114] Cummings, *Understanding Central Asia*, 23.
[115] Naumkin, *Radical Islam in Central Asia*, 110.

borders of Afghanistan.[116] As a result, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and *Hizb-ut-Tahrir al-Islami*, or Party of Islamic Liberation, (HBT) were established. These groups initially launched their activities in the Ferghana Valley. As argued by Omelicheva, the membership of these groups are predominantly Uzbek.[117]

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)

The IMU was formed in 1998 by Uzbek nationals who called for Islamization in Uzbekistan. The IMU was, according to Khalid, mainly motivated by its hatred towards Karimov and his regime.[118] The IMU aimed at overthrowing the Karimov regime and to replace this with an Islamic caliphate. Accordingly, the IMU funded its activities through drug trade in the region.[119] In 1999 and 2000 the IMU tried to realize its aims by launching a series of attacks in Uzbekistan. However, as a result of the repression by the Karimov regime, the IMU decided to move the organization. The IMU expanded its activities to fighting in Afghanistan and Pakistan with Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. This also affected the aims of the IMU. With the exception of an attack in 2010, no IMU offensives have been witnessed in Uzbekistan. With the emergence of the Islamic State, the IMU pledged allegiance to Daesh and stated 'to create a caliphate' in the Ferghana Valley.[120] The IMU is currently located in the eastern and northern part of Afghanistan.

The IMU was created as a result of a demand for changes in the social and political systems in Uzbekistan. Many members of the party originate from the Ferghana Valley. During demonstrations in Namangan (Ferghana Valley), the IMU demanded the implementation of Islamic law and to forbid drugs, prostitution, the use of alcohol and corruption. Many protestors were sentenced to heavy imprisonment afterwards. Hence, we

[116] Luong, "Politics in the Periphery", 17.
[117] Omelicheva, "Ethnic Dimension of Religious Extremism", 170.
[118] Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, 157.
[119] Abizaid, Dana. "Tackling the Roots of Uzbek Terror" *Terrorism Monitor*, April 23, 2018 https://jamestown.org/program/tackling-the-roots-of-uzbek-terror/.
[120] "Uzbekistan: In Transition" *International Crisis Group*, September 29, 2016, http://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/uzbekistan/uzbekistan-transition.

can conclude that the IMU was created as a result of internal factors. Türker claims in his social movement theory that "in the case of Central Asia's authoritarian regimes, opportunities to recruit adherents have emerged because the repression of the opposition contributes to an environment that provides a potential success for groups like the IMU."[121]

Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HBT)

This party was founded in Palestine in 1952 and is a transnational group. HBT are passionate about global themes, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, the relations of the Arab states with the United States and the economics of oil.[122] After the independence of the CARs, the HBT set foot in the region. By 1999 the group had attracted between 6,500 and 7,000 followers.[123] The group is characterized by its non-violence principle. They aim at peacefully overthrowing governments across the region and establishing an Islamic caliphate throughout the Muslim world.[124] In the CARs, the HBT settled in the Ferghana Valley. At first, the group members focused on studying Islam in order to create a deeper awareness of the Islamic religion.[125] Then, the group members started to interact with the local community. They aimed at convincing society to adopt the party's ideas, through transforming the consciousness of individual Muslims through education. For instance, "members have staged demonstrations in defense of their imprisoned fellows and used the trials and the release of those detained to expose the moral shortcomings of the ruling elite."[126]

However, as argued by Exnerova, many locals were confused with the ideas of the HBT. The *muftiate* in Kyrgyzstan also issued a *fatwa* against the HBT in which they

[121] Türker, "Radicalization: Theory", 66.
[122] Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, 162.
[123] Omelicheva, "Ethnic Dimension of Religious Extremism", 170.
[124] Cummings, *Understanding Central Asia*, 115.
[125] Exnerova, "Radical Islam from Below", 71.
[126] Idem, 72.

instructed the imams to speak out against the party during their Friday prayers.[127] The organization has also been banned throughout Central Asia. The Uzbek state does not see a difference between the IMU and HBT and blamed the HBT for various violent acts in the country, even though the HBT denounces violence. Accordingly, thousands of people suspected of being HBT members have been imprisoned as a result.[128]

Hizb-ut-Tahrir was founded outside Central Asia, so internal reasons did not lead to the creation of HBT in Central Asia. The group set its foot on the region during the 1990s. According to Khalid in *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (2014), motivations of members to join HBT vary. However, "most of the party's members are attracted not by its religious argument but by its activist political message."[129] In HBT' propaganda, former Uzbek president Karimov was the main target as they described him as "an agent of American and Jewish interests out to subjugate the Muslims of Uzbekistan."[130] Even though internal reasons did not lead to the creation of HBT, it did have a big impact on the attraction of Uzbek individuals to join the group. Khalid argues that as a result of the authoritarian regimes in Central Asia, its weak economy and corruption of the state, individuals joined the group with a utopian vision of a just and moral society.[131] Naumkin argues that the development of the HBT is explained through "extremely serious socioeconomic problems, including poverty and unemployment, the lack of real prospects of the situation improving, government incompetence, corruption and … the lack of other political alternatives."[132]According to the social movement theory of Türker, the HBT serves as an example to apply this theory, as the HBT "managed to politicize grievances, with careful consideration of opportunities, a collective identity rooted in religion was developed

[127] Idem, 74.
[128] Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, 161.
[129] Idem, 163.
[130] Idem, 163.
[131] Idem, 163.
[132] Naumkin, *Radical Islam in Central Asia*, 194.

and successful use of potential movement resources led people to reinterpret their social and political environment."[133]

2.6 The economic situation in Uzbekistan

When the CARs became independent, this had consequences to their economy. The CARs were economically dependent on the Soviet Union and with its collapse, it also meant the end to its all-union economy. Leaders of the CARs therefore had to promote policies in order to stimulate the economy. Karimov developed the economic policy of import-substitution, which resulted in restrictions on the movement of goods across its borders. The policy of import-substitution meant that there was limited foreign investment in the economy. According to anthropologist David Lewis, as the Uzbek state provided significant rents for a small elite, "the whole politico-economic system became an all-embracing system of rent-seeking and patronage."[134] As a result, many laborers left the country and migrated outside of Uzbekistan.

Karimov also had to deal with other structural problems, such as the corruption of regional elites and environmental problems. Moreover, Karimov aimed at centralizing control over land distribution. As a result, local and regional farmers lost their share of revenue extracted from the agricultural sector.[135] Especially the regional elites who were involved with the cotton production had to find alternative sources of income. This was due to Karimov's policy of establishing and stabilizing power in the country. Although Karimov's policy was mainly aimed at possible opponents of the regime, Karimov also distrusted regional elites in the political and economic spheres.[136] As a result, it became very difficult for the Uzbek economy to progress.

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[133] Türker, "Radicalization: Theory", 65.
[134] Lewis, "Illiberal Spaces", 144.
[135] Alisher Ilkhamov, "The Limits of Centralization. Regional Challenges in Uzbekistan." in: Pauline Jones Luong (ed)., *The Transformation of Central Asia. States and Societies from Soviet Rule to Independence* (London: Cornell University Press, 2004), 167.
[136] Idem, 179.

The Ferghana Valley is a perfect example of the visible negative economic consequences. The Ferghana Valley is not only located in Uzbekistan, but also in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Its population density on average is 360 persons per square kilometer.[137] Under Soviet rule, the economy in the Ferghana Valley was mainly focused on agriculture. The Ferghana Valley served as an important region for the transportation of goods through Central Asia. However, when Uzbekistan became independent, it closed its border with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and introduced visas for the citizens of these countries. As a result of the Tashkent bombings of 1999, the Uzbek state adopted a far stricter approach towards border control.[138] Due to the closure of the borders, economic problems emerged. One of the main issues in the region are population growth and the high unemployment rate. Historian Dana Abizaid argues in *Tackling the Roots of Uzbek Terror* (2018) that a combination of the repression of religious dissent and economic hardship has turned Uzbekistan into a 'fertile ground for Islamic radicals'[139] Political scientist Anchita Borthakur nonetheless states in *An Analysis of the Conflict in the Ferghana Valley* (2017) that "it is hotly debated whether economic problems and poverty are a significant cause of radicalization, or whether it owes more to repressive government policies and people's aspirations to find and develop their religious and cultural identity."[140]

The ICG states that because of the poor economic prospects in the country, many turned their back to the secular state and "sought a radical alternative."[141] In addition, the *Washington* Post argues that the lack of opportunities, a poor labor market and widespread corruption in the government system marginalized the population.[142] Naumkin states that poverty, unemployment, relative deprivation, social inequality, the collapse of the welfare

[137] Anchita Borthakur, "An Analysis of the Conflict in the Ferghana Valley" *Asian Affairs* 48, no. 2 (2017): 335.
[138] Idem, 339.
[139] Abizaid, "Uzbek Terror".
[140] Borthakur, "Conflict in the Ferghana Valley", 346.
[141] https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/syria-calling-radicalisation-central-asia.
[142] https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/origins-of-new-york-terror-attack-suspect-put-focus-on-central-asia-battle-with-extremism/2017/11/01/b0e223da-beda-11e7-af84-d3e2ee4b2af1_story.html?utm_term=.810e56c2bd46.

state, corruption, and harsh authoritarianism have created "fertile ground for recruiting new members to the ranks of Islamic radicals".[143] Although Matveeva declares that we can speak of a phenomenon with regard to radicalism in the region, she does not agree with the argument that the economic situation in Uzbekistan is the root cause of radicalism. Matveeva also argues that this argument does not apply to income inequality as "many recruits come from countries with highly developed political institutions."[144] One of her main arguments is that socioeconomic characteristics do not explain the phenomenon. Rather, these are explained through non-material factors, such as the 'brotherhood' bonds and emotional motivations, such as the disappointment in what life offers them.[145]

[143] Naumkin, *Radical Islam in Central Asia*, 262.
[144] Matveeva, "Radicalisation in Kyrgyzstan" 31.
[145] Idem, 35.

3: What are the external factors that may have influenced Uzbek nationals joining Daesh?

3.1 Introduction

This part elaborates on the external factors contributing to Uzbek nationals joining Daesh. One of these external factors are Uzbek labor migrants in Russia who experience discrimination and feelings of alienation in Russia. As a result, these labor migrants look for protection and sense of belonging within their own community. The social movement theory, which argues for the significance of friendship- and neighborhood-based communities to create a collective identity, applies to this situation. These communities are approached by Daesh recruiters as they are aware of the frustration felt by Central Asian migrants living in Russia. The second major external factor contributing to the issue is the appeal of Daesh, in which the pull-factors for Uzbek nationals joining Daesh are explained. Of significance is the recruitment of Uzbek nationals through social media in the Uzbek- and Russian language. Of another importance is the already presence of three Uzbek national groups in Syria which makes it easier for Uzbek nationals to join Daesh. Even though the ICG argues that "Recruitment to the extremist cause is happening in mosques in namazkhana (prayer rooms) across the region… the internet and social media play a critical but not definitive role,"[146] I would argue the opposite. My analysis will show that social media does play a definitive role in the recruitment of Uzbek nationals.

3.2 Uzbek labor migrants in Russia

3.2.1 Reasons to migrate

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union but also as a result of globalization, the number of Central Asian migrants moving to Russia has grown enormously. It is estimated that between

[146] https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/syria-calling-radicalisation-central-asia.

four and five million migrants from Central Asia move to Russia every year – in comparison with 60,000 in total during Soviet times.[147] Official numbers from 2014 of the Russian Federal Migration Service (FMS) estimated that 2.32 million Uzbek citizens were residing in Russia.[148] It must be noted that these numbers do not include the number of Uzbek migrants who work unregistered in Russia. Migration from Central Asia to Russia has been a phenomenon since the Soviet period. Therefore, the current migration flow is not an entirely new trend. In the past, Central Asian migrants mainly moved to the hinterlands of the Soviet Union to cultivate them.[149] Nonetheless, there is a big difference in migrant patterns between the Soviet period and post-Soviet period. In the Soviet period, labor migration used to be perceived as low quality and an unreliable source of income. In the post-Soviet period, labor migration became looked upon as stable and well-paid employment by the Central Asian population.[150]

When the CARs became independent, the migration pattern shifted. As argued by Delia Rahmonova-Schwarz, policy officer for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), labor migration increased as a result of the transition to a market economy, that has occurred since the post-independence transformation of Central Asia. Migrants left the CARs because of economic changes, for instance because individuals had a large amount of debt or because of corruption in the country. Some private small traders also left for Russia because of the Uzbek government's decision to close down markets.[151] According to Schwarz, "faced with financial hardships, family members see themselves as left with no other choice than leaving for Russia to make a living."[152] These processes in the region challenge and redefine relations within kinship. One transformational factor is the

[147] Sophie Roche (ed.), *The Family in Central Asia. New Perspectives* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2017), 25.
[148] Lewis, "Illiberal Spaces", 145.
[149] Delia Rahmonova-Schwarz, *Family and Transnational Mobility in Post-Soviet Central Asia. Labor Migration from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to Russia* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2012), 74.
[150] Idem, 123.
[151] Idem, 126.
[152] Idem, 126.

changed role of migrants within the family. Young male migrants, who are the eldest or only sons, have a big responsibility and are eventually expected to migrate. Parents believe that migration is a way of gaining maturity. Successful migrants are treated as adults, regardless of their marital status.[153] Besides, their earnings are seen as central for sustaining their families. Another reason for young men to migrate is because they have to pay for their wedding and, after the wedding, to be able to finance their house. Some female migrants who come from broken marriages also choose to migrate, instead of living with their parents after a divorce.[154] They work as cleaning ladies, waitresses and day care workers in Russia. However, labor migration to Russia is still largely dominated by men.

The older generation of men migrates in order to finance family celebrations, such as weddings of their children or the extension of family property.[155] Migrants from Central Asia mostly originate from the Ferghana Valley. Due to overpopulation and a high percentage of unemployment in the region, many young people migrate to Russia. According to Laruelle, Central Asians mostly settle in the countryside of Russia, which indicates their low skill level.[156] Migrant networks play an important role in facilitating migration in Russia. These networks consist of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants and non-migrants in receiving and sending areas through bonds of kinship, friendship and a shared community origin. These networks help migrants in finding jobs and housing and send money via unofficial channels. As argued by sociologist Elena Sadovskaya, the emergence of such

[153] Sophie Roche, "From youth bulge to conflict: the case of Tajikistan" *Central Asian Survey* 29, no. 4 (2010): 408.
[154] Schwarz, *Mobility in Post-Soviet Central Asia*, 152.
[155] Marlène Laruelle, "Central Asian Labor Migrants in Russia: The Diasporization of the Central Asian States?" *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 5, no.3 (2007): 106.
[156] Idem, 108.

informal networks between migrants, communities, and regions enhances human capital and facilitates mobility.[157]

3.2.2 The reality of migration

There are differences between the experiences of the older and younger generation of migrants in Russia. The older generation, who has lived under Soviet rule, has a good command of the Russian language and are therefore able to find more skilled labor. However, the younger generation has less knowledge of the Russian language and get low-paying jobs.[158] The younger generation especially works in the illegal sector. As argued by Laruelle, "low wages, difficult working conditions, and jobs with little prestige do not attract Russian citizens and thus create many vacancies."[159] Many of the Central Asian migrants practice high-risk physical work in the construction sector. Accordingly, these migrants are not covered by health insurances and are not assisted in basic security requirements by their employees, such as security belts and helmets.[160] In some cases it can even take human lives. Recent, official numbers spoke of the death of 'at least' 14 migrants from Central Asia in 2014 and five in 2015. Moreover, 29 migrants were injured in 'ethnically-motivated attacks' in 2014 and 16 in 2015.[161] This is due to the lack of decent housing, the absence of access to hygiene, industrial accidents, the lack of health insurance and exhausting work conditions. Furthermore, because these migrants send large sums of their money back home to their families, they cannot ensure better living conditions.

There are also other factors that contribute to the difficult living conditions of Central Asian migrants in Russia. Some migrants, who are not able to find a job, are recruited by

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[157] Elena Y. Sadovskaya, "Contemporary International Migration in Central Asia and the Rise of Migrants' Diasporas and Networks," in Marlène Laruelle, *Migration and Social Upheaval as the Face of Globalization in Central Asia* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 39.
[158] Laruelle, "Central Asian Labor Migrants in Russia", 106.
[159] Idem, 108-109.
[160] Schwarz, *Mobility in Central Asia*, 105.
[161] Marta Ter, "Radicalism Thrives Among Exploited Migrant Workers in Russia" *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, May 19, 2016, http://jamestown.org/program/radicalism-thrives-among-exploited-migrant-workers-in-russia/.

'labor traffickers' who offer migrants work in illegal activities. This contributes to the stereotype amongst Russians that Central Asians work alongside mafia networks.[162] Moreover, migrants are subject to random police controls. Although the police threatens them with fines and deportation, the Russian police is actually more interested in receiving payments by these migrants. It is part of 'fake controls' by Russian police officers who arrest mainly persons with a non-Slavic appearance. Central Asian migrants are also confronted with xenophobic attitudes by the Russian society as they are faced with discrimination in the housing market and unfair treatment when attempting to access social services.[163] Furthermore, as argued by Sadovskaya, threats from nationalist groups and law enforcement bodies in Russia are commonplace.[164] However, not all migrants face discrimination in Russia. As shown in a case study by Schwarz, a woman from Uzbekistan shared that she was satisfied with her situation as a migrant worker in Russia because she did not have to deal with the "dishonest way she was making a living in Uzbekistan anymore."[165]

In addition to (work)accidents, exhausting work conditions and xenophobic attitudes by the Russian population, some migrants increasingly look for protection within their own community. As already has been mentioned, migrant networks play an important role to facilitate migration in Russia. Muslims from Uzbekistan look among Muslim communities because it provides them a sense of belonging to a community that supports them.[166] Lemon and Heathershaw argue that the "stigmatising experience of migration" is the blame for radicalization, and not the religious, economic or political root causes in Central Asia.[167] According to Lemon and Heathershaw, *Daesh* recruiters have targeted those working abroad. These migrants are experiencing daily economic hardship, discrimination and are away from

[162] Laruelle, "Central Asian Labor Migrants in Russia", 111.
[163] Idem, 112.
[164] Sadovskaya, "International Migration in Central Asia", 46.
[165] Schwarz, *Mobility in Central Asia*, 137.
[166] Ter, "Radicalism Among Migrant Workers in Russia".
[167] https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/can-we-explain-radicalisation-among-central-asia-s-migrants/.

their families. Therefore, these migrants are vulnerable. At home, local ties and ethnicity played a more significant role than religion, but in Russia it is rather the other way around. Some male migrants from Central Asia integrate with religious friends and practice Islam more often in Russia than they used to in the country of origin.[168] This is also illustrated by the research of Paul Goble, an American specialist in ethnic and nationality questions in the Soviet Union and Russia:

> "On the one hand, the mosques, although the mullahs were still mostly Tatar in background, began using Russian as the language in their services, thus unifying the *umma* (Muslim community) under that international language. And on the other hand … many of the members of these diasporas opened dozens of prayer rooms and converted nominally public facilities like restaurants and clubs into centers of Muslim instruction. This trend especially picked up as the Muslim diasporas began to form residential ghettos. It was further fueled by the Russian authorities' refusal to increase the number of officially registered mosques in the city – there are still only five in the capital."[169]

An increased interest in Islam of course does not equal radicalization. It must also be noted that radicalization only happens to a minority of the many millions of migrants living in Russia. However, over 80% of the known Tajik Daesh fighters were recruited while working as labor migrants in Russia.[170] As argued by Lemon and Heathershaw: "What happened to these men in the transnational spaces of migration is therefore more important than root causes in Central Asia. We need to know the specific pathways of attackers in their lives beyond Central Asia to explain why the region is exporting terrorism."[171] This is also shown in chapter 4, as the three individuals in the case studies were also migrants. According to Marta Ter, a Slavic philologist, the average Central Asian migrant who has joined Daesh is a

[168] Schwarz, *Mobility in Central Asia*, 225.
[169] Paul Goble, "Muslim Migrants Become More Religious After Arriving in Moscow" *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, March 22, 2018 https://jamestown.org/program/muslim-migrants-become-religious-arriving-moscow/.
[170] https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/can-we-explain-radicalisation-among-central-asia-s-migrants/.
[171] Idem.

young male in his twenties, who used to work seasonally in Russia as an illegal laborer and who was exploited by its employee. Some of them try to legalize their residency status in Russia and during this process are approached and offered help by radicals. Others have been recruited at work places and are promised jobs in Turkey or Syria and are told that fighting for Daesh is not compulsory.[172] Here, we see the second perspective of the social movement theory, namely resource mobilization. In the case of Uzbek migrants in Russia, we see friendship- and neighborhood-based communities because of the significance of creating a collective identity.[173] The recruiters are aware of the frustration felt by Central Asian migrants living in Russia and aim at creating friendships with these migrants while sharing the vision of Daesh that falls in line with the perceptions of injustice perceived by Central Asian migrants. The recruiters use an utopian language when describing Daesh, for instance that Daesh would offer many opportunities and social justice. Thus, the vision of Daesh and experiences of Central Asian migrants are combined into a common perception. There are perceptions of injustice, human rights violations, social-political exclusion, widespread corruption and sustained mistreatment of certain groups.[174]

3.3 The appeal of Daesh

3.3.1 Pull-factors for Uzbeks to join Daesh

According to lawyer and Arabist Maurits Berger and anthropologist Masha Rademakers, there are several reasons for an individual to join Daesh. These pull-factors are[175]:

i. Giving meaning to your life and a quest for adventure: An individual could be frustrated when it comes to his or her own social position in society.

[172] Ter, "Radicalism Among Migrant Workers in Russia".
[173] Türker, "Radicalization: Theory", 58.
[174] Ter, "Radicalism Among Migrant Workers in Russia".
[175] Maurits Berger and Masha Rademakers, "Allahoe Akbar! – de jihadisten" [Allah Akbar – the jihadists] *Tijdschrift voor Religie, Recht en Beleid* 6, no. 1 (2015): 16-19.

ii. Social exclusion: An individual could experience social exclusion and discrimination by its society. As a result, some project feeling socially excluded on international relations, in which they criticize the West for its dominant position in expense of the Islamic world.

iii. Threat to someone's identity: In combination with social exclusion, individuals might feel that their Islamic identity is threatened (mainly in the West) or rejected by society. As a result, some might turn to Salafist thoughts in order to criticize democracy, capitalism and secularism in the West.

iv. Political motivation: Many Daesh supporters are politically frustrated when it comes to injustice in the Middle East. They blame the 'hypocritical' involvement of the West in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Syrian civil war.

v. Religious motivation

    a. The wish to spread the only right way of Islam through mission (*da'wa*) and, in case that does not succeed, through waging *jihad*.

    b. Prophecies of the Apocalypse in case of the Syrian civil war

vi. The Islamic State as an utopia: Daesh supporters believe in the notion that the caliphate is their homeland. This caliphate would not know any injustice and is a place where Muslims can be themselves.

With regard to Uzbek nationals joining Daesh, some of these pull-factors seem to be more significant than others. In terms of 'internal factors' why an Uzbek individual may join Daesh, individuals could feel that their identity is threatened by the Uzbek regime as many forms of Islam are controlled or repressed. Some of them could feel frustrated by the officially declared secular state of Uzbekistan. In terms of 'external factors', Uzbek migrants could feel socially excluded when they live in Russia as a result of their negative experiences with Russian society. As a result, migrants rely on their friendship- and neighborhood networks. Some might give more meaning to their religious life and, when recruited, could feel religiously, but also politically, motivated to support Daesh.

Reasons to join Daesh are mainly presented through social media platforms, propaganda videos and magazines. An important factor is the ability of Daesh to spread its propaganda in Russian and Central Asian languages. Because of the relatively high number of Central Asians who have travelled to Syria and Iraq, there are means of sending propaganda material to compatriots at home. Central Asian fighters use different social-networking platforms, such as *Odnoklassniki, VKontakte*, Telegram and YouTube. An important pull-factor is the already-mentioned use of an utopian language when describing Daesh. Views on social injustices around the world are spread through propaganda materials and are countered by the promise of Daesh that they would offer individuals social justice if they join to live in the caliphate.

Besides many propaganda videos that focus on spreading a positive image of Daesh, some videos from Tajik individuals criticize the Tajik regime and their secular policies. In one video, a Tajik militant declared that the "Tajik regime is kufr [infidel]. They unveil our women and force our men to shave. They [government officials] do not pray, yet call themselves Muslims."[176] Here, we see the formulated factor of Berger and Rademakers in terms of that individuals might feel that their Islamic identity is threatened by their secular regime.

More propaganda material has been published on *Jihadology.com* and *ChechensinSyria.com*. For instance, the IMU criticizes the Soviet past and current regimes in Central Asia. As the IMU argues:

> "Then in 1965 the communist police government came that was supported by China and Russia and the oppression and aggression reached its peak. The communists who brought the slogan of equality leveled them to the ground and totally expelled them from the government posts, and even the Muslims were banned from working in the

[176] Edward Lemon, "Tajik Government Hypes the Islamic State Threat, Uses it to Control Population" *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 12, no. 82 (2015) https://jamestown.org/program/tajik-government-hypes-the-islamic-state-threat-uses-it-to-control-population/.

> factories. … And to this day Muslims are banned from studying in the government schools, as well as the government posts."[177]

According to the view of the IMU, Muslims were oppressed by the communist regime of the Soviet Union. The IMU feels that the Soviet' message of equality was not meant for Muslims in the Soviet Union.

A different trend in recruitment through Russian- or Uzbek-speaking propaganda are videos and photographs of young children who carry guns and talk about fighting on camera. For example, on 24 April 2014 in Aleppo, a video was shot by *Imam Bukhari Jamaat* (paragraph 3.3.2), a group composed of primarily Uzbeks and fighting alongside the al-Nusra Front.[178] In this video, the young boy says the following:

> "We are waging jihad … Thank Allah, we have captured several areas where the infidels are … The brothers here are wounded but it's like they don't feel any pain. We don't think that this is hard, we will fight until the end. What the infidels are doing isn't scary. Every day they come with airplanes, choppers, it's not scary. They are bombing but it won't help them because we have Allah and that's the best faith. We will fight to the end."[179]

In Syria, several Uzbek militant groups were lectured on jihad and on the Arabic language, which is apparent from this quotation. The young boy clearly has been instructed on how to talk to the camera and how to formulate his sentences as he states that he is not afraid of bombardments.[180] These videos are a way of recruiting Daesh fighters through using an utopian language.

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[177] "'A Lost Nation' A speech for Abu Zar – Azzam – Mufti of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan" *Jihadology*, December 2, 2012, http://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/abc5ab-dhar-al-bc5abrmc4ab-22a-lost-people-about-the-tragedies-of-burma22-en.pdf.

[178] A Salafist jihadist organization fighting against Syrian government forces aimed at establishing an Islamic state in Syria.

[179] Joanna Paraszczuk, "Syria: Uzbek Jamaat Publishes Video Of Child "Mujahid" in Layramoun" April 25, 2014, www.chechensinsyria.com/?p=21805#more-21805.

[180] Joanna Paraszczuk, "Syria: Sayfullakh Shistani's Jamaat Learns Arabic" March 30, 2014, http://www.chechensinsyria.com/?p=21372.

Another important propaganda outlets are the two magazines of Daesh: *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*. *Dabiq* was the first magazine to be published, in English and Arabic, by Daesh on July 2014. The magazine mainly focuses on the differences between Muslims and non-Muslims and why it is justified to attack non-Muslims by relying on religious Islamic texts. The magazine also portrays victories of Daesh and why Muslims should pledge allegiance to Daesh. One section in the magazine focuses on 'the military actions of the Islamic State'. This section also covers the military actions of *Wilayat Khurasan*[181] several times. It comments on attacks committed by Uzbek Daesh fighters in Afghanistan and Pakistan. They do not only fight against the so-called "infidel regimes" of Afghanistan and Pakistan but also against the Taliban. In order to justify their fights against the Taliban, the magazine had an interview with the "Wali of Khurasan". The magazine asks if there is fighting between the "Uzbeki mujahid brothers" and the nationalist Taliban movement. According to the *wali*[182], the "Uzbek mujahid brothers" are truthful in their jihad. However the Taliban are a "treacherous, deviant and nationalist movement" that started fighting against the Uzbek fighters. According to the *wali*:

> "A number of the Uzbek brothers were martyred and wounded because of the Taliban's criminal assault against them, and the Taliban movement increased in its tyranny and criminality by purposely killing their defenseless women and children, with the movement's fighters executing them, sparing no one they could find. And there is no power or strength except with Allah. They killed them for no sin, but only because they declared their support for the Shari'ah and their war against the tawaghit [anything or anyone worshipped apart from Allah]."[183]

In another edition of *Dabiq*, attention is paid to the fight between Uzbek Daesh fighters and the Taliban in Afghanistan. They even issued a *fatwa*, an Islamic authoritative

[181] For more information, see the first part of the thesis which explains the photograph on the front page.
[182] The governor of a province in the caliphate.
[183] "Interview With: The Wali of Khurasan" *Dabiq* no. 13, 51, https://clarionproject.org/islamic-state-isis-isil-propaganda-magazine-dabiq-50/.

legal opinion, in order to legitimize their fight against the Taliban. In the *fatwa* they advise the fighters in Afghanistan to not support the Taliban, because they are a nationalist group. Instead, they are encouraged to join Daesh because they believe in an international caliphate. In *Dabiq*, they advise:

> "Finally we invite the people of Khurasan to hasten to obey the command of Allah and His Messenger, to unify the world, to join the ranks, and pledge allegiance to the Khalifah of the Muslims, and to distance themselves from the deviant desires that turn them from this good and throw the doubts into the hearts and souls, and to not be supporters of our enemies from the crusaders and the apostates against us, by abandoning support of the Khilafah that Allah's Messenger gave glad tidings of."[184]

On July 2016 the last edition of *Dabiq* was published. Daesh decided to publish a new magazine called *Rumiyah*. This was not only published in English and Arabic, but in multiple languages such as German, French and Russian. This magazine focuses more on how to commit an attack. For example, they advise their fighters to commit an attack with a knife because these are easy to obtain. They also advise on how to rent a truck and how to commit an attack with many deaths. Furthermore, they give instructions on how to make bombs.[185] These instructions may have been used by the Uzbek individuals who are analyzed in Chapter 4. In comparison with *Dabiq,* there is a significant rise in mentioning *Wilayat Khurasan* in *Rumiyah.*

Even though the ICG argues that recruitment and radicalization rather occur in mosques and *namakhana* (prayer rooms) across Central Asia[186], this analysis shows that social media outlets have been useful tools for Daesh recruitment in regions of the former Soviet Union. These platforms share messages in several forms of rhetoric, such as 'symbolic

[184] "A Fatwa for Khurasan" *Dabiq* no. 10, 20, https://clarionproject.org/islamic-state-isis-isil-propaganda-magazine-dabiq-50/, 24.
[185] "Just Terror Tactics" *Rumiyah* no.3, 10-12, https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2016/11/rome-magazine-3.pdf.
[186] https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/syria-calling-radicalisation-central-asia.

crusades' in order to legitimize their goals, and propaganda which uses verses of the Qur'an that would justify their actions.

3.3.2 Uzbek militant groups in Syria

In order to understand why individuals join Daesh or join groups who have pledged allegiance to Daesh, these groups need to be analyzed. The first Central Asian fighters who arrived in Syria and Iraq became part of al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate *Jabhat al-Nusra*. However, after the split between *al-Nusra* and Daesh in 2014, Central Asians established their own groups.[187] Three of these Uzbek militant groups are *Katibat al Tawhid wal Jihad* (KTJ), *Kateebat Imaam Al-Bukhari* (KIB) and *Seyfuddin Uzbek Jamaat.*

Abu Saloh and the Katibat al Tawhid wal-Jihad (KTJ)

Abu Saloh is the supposed mastermind behind the attacks in St. Petersburg on 3 April 2017 and in Stockholm on 7 April 2017. Both Jalilov and Akilov (see Chapter 4) seemed to have been inspired by propaganda materials spread by Abu Saloh. Abu Saloh is on the wanted list of Interpol with charges of terror acts and terror financing.[188] He is leader of the Uzbek militant group *Katibat al Tawhid wal Jihad* (KTJ).[189] The group is known for recruiting Uzbek citizens through spreading propaganda materials on social media. These recruitment efforts are visible in the amount of social media platforms of the group: two websites, a Facebook page, a YouTube channel and Telegram [Appendix C]. In September 2015, the group pledged allegiance to the *Al-Nusra* Front. It is directly subordinated to Ayman al-Zawahiri, the leader of *Al-Qaeda*, to which the KTJ publicly renewed its oath of allegiance in January 2019. The group has also been in contact with *Hizb ut-Tahrir* and discussed the

[187] Jacob Zenn, "Istanbul and Aktobe Attacks Highlight Central Asians' Role in Transnational Terrorist Networks" *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, July 1, 2016 https://jamestown.org/program/istanbul-and-aktobe-attacks-highlight-central-asians-role-in-transnational-terrorist-networks/.
[188] Emelie Rosén, "Akilov kopplas till nätverk kring efterlyst jihadistledare" [Akilov connects to networks around wanted jihadist leaders] *Swedish Radio News*, May 12, 2017, https://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=83&artikel=6694397.
[189] The group is also referred to as *Tawhid wal-Jihod* (TWJ) or *Jannat Oshiqlari*.

possibility of building a caliphate in Uzbekistan. HBT is also involved in recruiting individuals from Uzbekistan to join the KTJ.[190]

The KTJ prefers using Telegram, because the application offers chats that use end-to-end encryption, meaning that the chats are secured.[191] The KTJ also had its own website, *jannatoshiqlari.net*, which is offline now. This website placed links to several (news)articles from Al Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban-linked Central Asian group called Islamic Jihad Union (IJU).[192]

On 29 January 2018 Abu Saloh was interviewed by Faruq Shami (a journalist of media group *Golos Shama* – 'Voice of Sham' on shamcenter.site) which was published and translated on *chechensinsyria.com*. Abu Saloh commented on losing territories in Idlib (Syria) in the interview. He blamed jihadist individuals for abandoning the territories and refers to them as a "cancerous tumor" in the Islamic *ummah*.[193] Another reason given by Abu Saloh for the loss of territories is because these territories are open areas and can easily be attacked by the "heavy weapons of the infidels". Commenting on the battlefield, Abu Saloh argues that these fighters only seek "the contentment of Allah" and seek "to attain His Paradise". According to Abu Saloh, the ultimate goals are to achieve *shahada* – thus converting people to Islam – and to destroy the "infidels".[194]

The rise of the KTJ and leader Abu Saloh are best explained through the second perspective of the social movement theory, which is resource mobilization. This perspective focuses on the capacity and ability of a group to mobilize given internal and external

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[190] Joanna Paraszczuk, "Uzbeks Arrested For Allegedly Trying To Join Al-Qaeda Group In Syria" *Radio Free Europe,* November 6, 2015, https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbekistan-al-qaeda-group-syria-jannat-oshliqari/27349840.html.
[191] Joanna Paraszczuk, "Why Are Russian, Central Asian Militants Vanishing From Social Networks?" *Radio Free Europe*, November 5, 2015, https://www.rferl.org/a/russian-central-asian-militants-vanish-social-networks/27347535.html.
[192] Rohan Gunaratna, Stefanie Kam and Yee Li, *Handbook of Terrorism In The Asia-Pacific* (London: Imperial College Press, 2016), 420.
[193] "Translation of Interview with HTS Uzbek Jamaat Tawhid Wal Jihad Amir Abu Saloh" February 2, 2018, http://www.chechensinsyria.com/?tag=abu-saloh.
[194] Idem.

dynamics.[195] The ability of a group to accomplish this is when a group is able to use grievances to mobilize resources to take necessary action. In this case, social media platforms are important resources to mobilize a group. Other necessary resources of this group are a strong ideology and efficient organizational structure.

Furthermore, the third perspective of the social movement theory, 'framing perspectives', is of importance in the development of the movement. As the example of the interview of 29 January 2018 shows, Abu Saloh is capable of framing issues and goals in a way that evokes solidarity with potential participants. For instance, the goal of achieving *shahada* and to seek the contentment of Allah are examples of such frames. Framing creates a target to blame (the 'infidels'), offers a vision of a desirable world (the Caliphate) and provides logic for the movement for collective action.

Kateebat Imaam Al-Bukhari (KIB)

This group is also known as *Imam Bukhari Jamaat*. The leader of the unit was Salahuddin Haji Yusuf and the unit was founded in Syria in October 2013. After the death of Salahuddin in 2017, he was replaced by Abu Yusuf al Muhajir, also an Uzbek. They aimed at defeating the regime of Syrian president Assad through *jihad* and to establish s*hari'a* in Syria and Central Asia.[196] The group pledged allegiance to the, former, Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar. They started their fight against the Afghan national forces since late 2016.

Their own social media wing is called *Al-Fath Studio* in which they also published propaganda in the Uzbek-language on the website of *albuxoriy.com*, which has been put offline. Their videos show that they joined the *al-Nusra* Front. When the Kyrgyz security services interviewed six detainees who fought for the KIB, they claimed that the unit had about 150 to 200 fighters in February 2014.[197] Other videos show children in training camps,

[195] Türker, "Radicalization: Theory", 58.
[196] Yee Li, *Handbook of Terrorism*, 420.
[197] Idem, 420.

both in Syria and Afghanistan, who are taught to fire weapons and taught to read the Arabic language.[198]

More recent videos of the KIB are videos from Afghanistan, as the caliphate in Syria and Iraq has lost almost all of its territories. In September 2018, the KIB released photos of Afghan military posts, which they conquered after a battle. In this battle, the KIB fought alongside the Taliban. Recently, the KIB also referred to itself as the 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan – Katibat Imam al Bukhari'.[199] Most recent known activity of the group is an attack on several Syrian Arab Army positions in the Kurd Mountains in northwestern Syria on the 18th of February, 2019.

Seyfuddin Uzbek Jamaat

The *Seyfuddin Uzbek Jamaat* was the first Uzbek jihadist unit that pledged allegiance to the *al-Nusra* Front. It was also receiving help from the IMU, as the IMU recruited and trained fighters from Central Asia and helped them travel to Syria. The leader of the group is Abu Hussein, a former IMU militant. However, in a video from 2015, Abu Hussein calls Uzbek fighters to leave the *al-Nusra* Front and to join Daesh. According to Abu Hussein, the al-Nusra Front is lying to its members and treats foreign militants badly.[200] Unfortunately, no more information is available on this group.

[198] Bill Roggio and Caleb Weiss, "Uzbek group in Syria trains children for jihad" *Long War Journal*, December 29, 2015, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/12/uzbek-group-in-syria-trains-children-for-jihad.php.
[199] Caleb Weiss, "Uzbek group shows spoils from Afghan base" *Long War Journal*, September 20, 2018, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/09/uzbek-group-shows-spoils-from-afghan-base.php.
[200] Joanna Paraszczuk, "'Leave Nusra, Join IS,' Uzbek Militant Urges In New IS Video" *Radio Free Europe*, June 20, 2015, https://www.rferl.org/a/islamic-state-video-urges-uzbeks-others-to-leave-al-nusra-front/27082876.html.

4. Case study: what can we say about the motives of three Uzbek Daesh supporters who committed terrorist attacks in 2017 and 2018?

4.1 Introduction

This chapter consists of case studies and analyzes the possible motives of three Uzbek Daesh supporters who recently committed terrorist attacks. After researching the possible internal and external reasons why Uzbek nationals may radicalize, this chapter zooms into three individuals and analyzes their motives and radicalization process. In order to verify possible root causes for radicalization, three individuals who have indeed radicalized are analyzed in this chapter. The ICG argues that "The appeal of jihadism in the region is also rooted in an unfulfilled desire for political and social change … there is no single profile of an IS supporter, but fatigue with social and political circumstances is an important linking thread. Uzbekistan is particularly exposed."[201] The ICG is indeed correct in stating that there is no single profile of an IS supporter. However, these case studies will show that these Uzbek individuals were not frustrated with the Uzbek state. In order to analyze these individuals, the social psychology theory has been applied. This theory focuses on possible causes for an individual to radicalize, such as psychological characteristics and/or personal experiences. The case study analysis again shows the importance of the role of the internet in spreading propaganda and recruitment.

4.2 Akbarzhon Jalilov

4.2.1 The attack

On 3 April 2017, the 22-year-old Akbarzhon Jalilov placed two bombs in two metro stations in St. Petersburg, of which one exploded. The bomb killed fifteen civilians, including Jalilov himself. Investigations by the Russian Investigate Committee (SKR) in his apartment led to

[201] https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/syria-calling-radicalisation-central-asia.

the conclusion that he started making the bombs a month before the attack. The SKR investigated the attack and this led to the identification of eleven people. The SKR concluded that the *Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad* (see more in §3.3.2) was behind the terror attack, the group that is known for recruiting Uzbek citizens to join the militant group in Syria.[202]

Some news articles linked the origins of Jalilov to the general threat posed by radical groups in Central Asia. Lemon and Heathershaw both disagree with the argument that the root causes for Daesh radicals, or similar radical groups, can be found in Central Asia itself. They support their argument with the example of Jalilov who left his home many years before he was radicalized.[203]

4.2.2 Migration to Russia

Jalilov was an ethnic Uzbek, but Kyrgyz-born and a Russian citizen. He came from the city of Osh, the second-largest city of Kyrgyzstan in the Ferghana Valley nearby the borders of Uzbekistan [Appendix D]. Statistics of the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) show that 52% of the population from the province of Osh are ethnic Uzbeks, whereas 42% ethnic Kyrgyz.[204] Osh knows a history of ethnic clashes between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek population which, for instance, resulted in the violent events of 1990/91 and 2010. During the violent event in Osh in 2010, 420 people were killed and 111,000 people were temporarily displaced to Uzbekistan while 300,000 people were internally displaced.[205] The Kyrgyz government blamed the Uzbek population for the violent confrontation. The Uzbek population was accused by the Kyrgyz government of corruption and militancy. After the event, a nationalistic policy was launched by the Kyrgyz government in which Uzbeks were

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[202] "Investigation into 2017 St. Petersburg terrorist attack in final stage – agency" *Russia Today*, April 3, 2018, http://www.rt.com/newsline/423034-petersburg-investigation-terrorist-metro.
[203] https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/edward-lemon-john-heathershaw/can-we-explain-radicalisation-among-central-asia-s-migrants.
[204] "Kyrgyz Republic: Ethnic Minorities Issues" *OSCE*, date unknown, https://www.osce.org/bishkek/14200?download=true.
[205] Aksana Ismailbekova, "Coping strategies: public avoidance, migration, and marriage in the aftermath of the Osh conflict, Fergana Valley" *Nationalities Papers* 41, no. 1 (2013): 112.

depicted as a dangerous group that is closed, uncivilized and an Islamic threat. According to anthropologist Aksana Ismailbekova, Uzbek signs were vandalized and Uzbek's businesses were seized. Moreover, the Uzbek population became the victim of arrests, disappearances, torture and illegal detention.[206]

As a result of the event in 2010 and the Kyrgyz policy against ethnic Uzbeks in Osh, many Uzbeks left for Russia. Because young Uzbek men were persecuted by the Kyrgyz government without evidence, parents chose to send their sons away.[207] Among these migrants were Jalilov and his father who moved to Russia in 2010. Eventually his father returned to Kyrgyzstan but Jalilov stayed in St. Petersburg. Jalilov had been granted the Russian citizenship during the same year he moved there.[208]

4.2.3 Signs of radicalization

In order to understand why and how Jalilov radicalized, interviews with family members, neighbors and friends are discussed and analyzed below.

According to independent Latvian consultant Sergei Zamascikov, Russian authorities revealed that Jalilov was recruited by Abror Azimov, who gave him the final orders for the attack in St. Petersburg.[209] According to Jalilov's neighbors in Osh he never visited a mosque in his hometown.[210] On his social media page on *VKontakte*, the Russian alternative of Facebook, he showed more interest in religion. His page had links to a Russian website called 'I love Islam' and to IslamHouse.com. Jalilov's page also had links to a website on Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of Wahhabism. Jalilov's family members stated that they have never noticed any signs of radicalization. His family said that he visited Osh

[206] Idem, 113.
[207] Idem, 118.
[208] Sergei Zamascikov, "Three Uzbek Nationals and Three Different Faces of Terror" *Bulgaria Analytica*, July 28, 2017, http://bulgariaanalytica.org/en/2017/07/28/three-uzbek-nationals-and-three-different-faces-of-terror/.
[209] Idem.
[210] Polina Nikolskaya and Denis Pinchuck, "Russia bomb suspect rented apartment in St. Petersburg month before attack" *Reuters*, April 5, 2017, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-blast-metro-investigation/russia-bomb-suspect-rented-apartment-in-st-petersburg-month-before-attack-idUSKBN1770ZT.

two months prior to the attack and that he "wanted to get married and settle back in Kyrgyzstan."[211]

Jalilov seemed to most likely have radicalized in 2015. Reporters from *Reuters* spoke to a Turkish official who said that Jalilov traveled to Turkey in late 2015. According to the Turkish official, Jalilov "was deemed suspicious due to some connections he had, but no action was taken as he had not done anything illegal and there was no evidence of wrongdoing."[212] The same Turkish official spoke to two acquaintances of Jalilov who noticed that Jalilov seemed to acquire more interest in Islam prior to moving to Turkey. After leaving Russia, the two acquaintances lost contact with Jalilov. Because Jalilov violated migration rules in Turkey, he was forced to return to Russia in December 2016. Four months later he committed the attack.

Zamascikov reported that Jalilov received money from a 'well known terrorist organization in Turkey' and from Akram Azimov, the brother of Abror Azimov who gave the final orders for the terrorist attack.[213] These brothers are also from Osh, the hometown of Jalilov, and also moved to St. Petersburg. Jalilov was connected with the brothers through social media. The Russian SKR announced that the eleven involved persons in the attack were guided by the *Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad* via Telegram, Whatsapp and other encrypted messenger apps. The involved persons were virtually recruited and radicalized by Abu Saloh, the leader of the group. They were guided in every aspect of preparation for the attacks.[214]

In this case, we see the practice of resource mobilization, as formulated by Türker. The

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[211] https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/edward-lemon-john-heathershaw/can-we-explain-radicalisation-among-central-asia-s-migrants.
[212] Orhan Coskun, "Suspect in Russia metro bombing was deported from Turkey: Turkish official" *Reuters*, April, 4 2017, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-bomb-metro/suspect-in-russia-metro-bombing-was-deported-from-turkey-turkish-official-idUSKBN17E253.
[213] http://bulgariaanalytica.org/en/2017/07/28/three-uzbek-nationals-and-three-different-faces-of-terror/.
[214] Oved Lobel, "Is al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate adopting Islamic State tactics in Russia?" *The New Arab,* July 4, 2017, https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/comment/2017/7/5/is-al-qaedas-syrian-affiliate-adopting-is-tactics-in-russia.

involved persons mobilized through informal networks, such as neighborhood groups.[215] Jalilov was connected with the Azimov brothers who were from the same neighborhood, Osh. Mobilization in this case also happened through internet, as they were all recruited online by Abu Saloh. According to social psychology theory as formulated by Rositsa Dzhekova et al., "perhaps the most feared consequence of online jihadism is the purported possibility for terrorist organization to recruit undetectably new operatives globally and to elicit 'self-radicalisation' responses to their propaganda."[216] Furthermore, Rositsa Dzhekova et al. state that "there is also evidence to suggest that internet chat rooms are virtual meeting points for individuals to come together not only to enroll in the cause, and be further radicalized and recruited in the terrorist organisation."[217] This seems to have happened in the case of Jalilov.

In sum, Jalilov seemed to have radicalized in Russia where he was not surrounded by his family. It could be suggested that Jalilov needed to gain a sense of belonging.[218] In Russia he could have made connections to a group that motivated him to leave the country for Turkey in 2015. According to Matveeva, "A network of Central Asians based in Turkey is viewed as playing a key role in mobilization and travel facilitation."[219] Matveeva argues that these networks are connected to recruiters in big Russian cities with large Muslim communities. Because of the entry ban from Turkey, he could not return to the country. However, he still maintained his connections who most likely shared the same ideas about, for instance, Russia's intervention in Syria. Because Jalilov returned to Russia, he seemed to be in the right position to serve the interests and goals of his connections. What his exact ideas behind the attack were is unclear and we can only make speculations on why and how Jalilov radicalized.

Other life events should be taken into accounts as well. First of all, the events of Osh

[215] Türker, "Radicalization: Theory", 58.
[216] Dzhekova et al., *Understanding Radicalisation*, 32.
[217] Idem, 32.
[218] Idem, 32.
[219] Matveeva,"Radicalisation in Kyrgyzstan", 33.

in 2010 could have made a huge impact on the then 16-year-old Jalilov, as Uzbeks in Osh were forced to leave the country. As argued by the ICG on recruitment, "the problem is acute in southern Kyrgyzstan, where the risks are amplified by the alienation of the Uzbek community since the violence in Osh in 2010."[220] Migration to a new country could have alienated Jalilov, especially after his father left Russia. This is also argued by the head of the SKR who said that "the core component of the current terrorist threat was Central Asian migrant workers being recruited and radicalised."[221] Certain is the impact of the relations between Jalilov and the brothers Azimov and the impact of social media.

4.3 Rakhmat Akilov

4.3.1 The attack

On 7 April 2017, Rakhmat Akilov drove with a truck into a crowd in a shopping street in Stockholm. Five people were killed and fourteen were injured. There was also a homemade bomb found in the truck but, although the truck hit fire, the bomb did not go off. The then 39-year old Akilov survived the attack and was arrested a few hours later. On 7 June 2018, Akilov was sentenced to life in prison and will be deported from Sweden once his sentence is served, in 2028.[222]

During the trial, Akilov said that he believed that it was an unsuccessful attack because he survived. The homemade bomb was meant as a suicide-bomb as Akilov also poured acetone over himself. Akilov argued during a court trial on 20 February 2018 that he "wanted Sweden to stop sending soldiers to war zones where the Islamic State is being

[220] https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/syria-calling-radicalisation-central-asia.
[221] https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/comment/2017/7/5/is-al-qaedas-syrian-affiliate-adopting-is-tactics-in-russia.
[222] "Rakhmat Akilov sentenced to life imprisonment for Stockholm terror attack" *The Local*, June 7, 2018, https://www.thelocal.se/20180607/rakhmat-akilov-sentenced-to-life-in-prison-for-stockholm-terror-attack.

attacked" and that Sweden should stop "sending gigantic sums of money to combat the caliphate".[223]

4.3.2 Migration to Russia and Sweden

Before moving to Sweden in 2014, Akilov was a migrant laborer in Russia – just like Jalilov. A journalist from *Fergana News* visited Akilov's *mahalla* in Samarkand and interviewed his neighbors. According to their information, Akilov moved to Russia in 2009.[224] According to his brother Olim, Akilov was a legal guest worker for four years in Russia. His wife Zukhra Istamova regularly traveled to Turkey for work reasons. Their four children stayed in Samarkand with an aunt. Akilov and Istamova divorced somewhere between 2010 and 2012.[225] Not only men left Central Asia to work as a laborer, but women also worked abroad, for instance in Russia and Turkey. As argued by Schwarz, "women in Central Asia seem to show an increased tendency towards engaging themselves in labor migration after a failed marital relationship", as was also the case for Akilov's wife.[226]

In 2013 Akilov lost his job in Russia. Akilov decided to move to Turkey where his radicalization process seems to have begun.[227] His brother mentioned that Akilov was bothered by the corruption and lack of freedom in Russia. When he moved to Sweden, Akilov told his brother that "everyone was much friendlier than in Russia and that he wanted to start a new life."[228] His brother said that Akilov was a very calm man but that only his wife could make him upset. "I think he was jealous. Maybe there was another man there. I do not know.

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[223] "Attack Meant To Stop Sweden Fighting IS, Uzbek Defendant Tells Court" *Radio Free Europe*, February 20, 2018, https://www.rferl.org/a/sweden-uzbekistan-tajikistan-islamic-state-suspect-truck-attack-trial/29050201.html.
[224] "Узбекистан: В квартале, где жил «стокгольмский террорист» Акилов, говорят, что он был далек от религиозного экстремизма" [Uzbekistan: In the mahalla where the ''Stockholm terrorist'' Akilov lived, they say that he was far from religious extremism] *Fergana News*, April 4, 2017, http://www.fergananews.com/news/26274.
[225] Idem.
[226] Schwarz, *Mobility in Central Asia,* 134.
[227] "Grannarna i Akilovs hemstad: Hans barn är i chock" [The neighbors of Akilov's hometown: His children are in shock] *Expressen*, April 4, 2017, https://www.expressen.se/nyheter/grannarna-i-akilovs-hemstad-hans-barn-ar-i-chock/.
[228] http://www.fergananews.com/news/26274.

He hung up on it, saying that if someone left the country to work, which is common here, the other must be home with the children."[229] His brother denied the suspicious activities of Akilov in Turkey, and believed that Akilov traveled to Turkey with the purpose of persuading his wife to return. However, this could not have been the case as his wife returned to Uzbekistan after their divorce.

On 10 October 2014, Akilov applied for a Swedish residency permit but this was denied in June 2016. The Swedish Migration Agency informed Akilov on December 2016 that he had four weeks to leave the country. This was due to Akilov losing his job in Sweden, as a result of using drugs and falling asleep at work, while being surrounded by dangerous construction sites. Secondly, although Akilov claimed in his asylum application that the Uzbek security services "tortured him and accused him of terrorism and treason",[230] the Swedish Migration Agency did not find any evidence of this. Nonetheless, Akilov stayed in Sweden. Therefore, he was put on the wanted list by the Swedish authorities in February 2017.

4.3.3 Signs of radicalization

After the attack, the Swedish police confiscated Akilov's phone and went through his videos, photos and messages. In one of these videos Akilov pledged allegiance to Daesh. In other messages Akilov expressed his ideas such as: "I am working and saving money and God willing I will carry out the martyr operation."[231]

According to Akilov's brother, Akilov was not interested in religion when growing up.

[229] "Akilovs bror i Uzbekistan: 'Är det san tatt han erkänt?'" [Akilov's brother in Uzbekistan: 'Is it true that he acknowledged?'] *Aftonbladet*, April 26, 2017, https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/OxE4E/akilovs-bror-ovetande-om-terrordadet-ar-det-sant-att-han-har-erkant.
[230] "Rakhmat Akilov – övertygad islamist eller arbetslös missbrukare?" [Rakhmat Akilov – convinced Islamist or unemployed addict?'] *Dagens Nyheter*, April 12, 2017, https://www.dn.se/nyheter/sverige/rakhmat-akilov-overtygad-islamist-eller-arbetslos-missbrukare/.
[231] https://www.rferl.org/a/sweden-uzbekistan-tajikistan-islamic-state-suspect-truck-attack-trial/29050201.html.

They were a typical 'Soviet family'[232], according to the words of his brother, meaning that they grew up speaking Russian, they were sent to Russian schools and that they did not attend the mosque. Akilov's neighbors in Samarkand told the reporters of *Fergana News* that they were surprised that Akilov committed the attack. Accordingly, Akilov stood "far from politics and from the ideas of religious extremism."[233] One neighbor believes that he should have been under the influence of drugs or that he was somehow 'zombified'. Based on these stories from his family members and neighbors, Akilov did not radicalize in Uzbekistan.

Experiences in Russia seemed to have influenced Akilov's changed behavior. In Russia, he went through a divorce with his wife and, according to his brother, Akilov was concerned with the lack of freedom of Russia. Additionally he lost his job and then visited Turkey. The Turkish *Daily Sabah* spoke to Russian agencies[234] who reported that Akilov tried to travel to Syria in 2015 but that he was detained at the Turkish-Syrian border and after that deported back to Sweden.[235] After the attack on 7 April 2017, the foreign minister of Uzbekistan announced that he had warned the 'West' about Akilov for being recruited by Daesh. The foreign minister said: "According to the information that we have, he actively urged his compatriots to travel to Syria in order to fight at Islamic State's side."[236] The foreign minister also stated that the Uzbek authorities added Akilov on an international wanted list of people suspected of religious extremism. However, the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied receiving any information from Uzbekistan or security services. Although it is unsure whether the Swedish government received this information, it is confirmed by Akilov's brother and the foreign minister of Uzbekistan that Akilov traveled to Turkey. It is most likely

[232] https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/OxE4E/akilovs-bror-ovetande-om-terrordadet-ar-det-sant-att-han-har-erkant.
[233] "http://www.fergananews.com/news/26274.
[234] The article does not mention the name of the agency, as it spoke on the condition of anonymity.
[235] "Turkey had deported Stockholm, St Petersburg attackers for trying to join Daesh" *Daily Sabah*, April 13, 2017, https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2017/04/13/turkey-had-deported-stockholm-st-petersburg-attackers-for-trying-to-join-daesh.
[236] "Uzbekistan says told West that Stockholm attack suspect was IS recruit" *Reuters*, April 14, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sweden-attack-uzbekistan-idUSKBN17G0J1.

that Akilov did not tell his brother of his actual activities in Turkey and instead fabricated a made-up story on visiting his (ex-)wife.

The radicalization process of Akilov is best understood through the social psychology theory. Akilov radicalized because of personal experiences, while his environment influenced his behavior. In a short period of time Akilov experienced traumatic experiences. First of all, he went through a divorce with his wife. According to Akilov's brother, Akilov was a jealous husband, he did not trust her and he did not agree with her choice of traveling and leaving the children in Uzbekistan.[237] Secondly, Akilov criticized the corruption and lack of freedom in Russia. On top of that he also lost his job in Russia. Thus, while Akilov was living in Russia, he lost both his wife and his job. According to his former colleagues, he also used drugs. In sum, Akilov was influenced by negative personal experiences and consequently travelled to the Turkish border.

Akilov seemed to be content in Sweden, based on his application for a residency permit and getting a job. This was, however, of short notice. In court Akilov reported on spending three months preparing the attack.[238] Three months prior to the attack we see the same pattern of developments in comparison with his experiences in Russia: Akilov was denied a residency permit, lost his job and was forced to leave the country. His personal experiences seemed to have the same effect as in 2015. However, instead of traveling to Turkey, Akilov now turned to social media where he came into contact with extremist networks. On *Odnoklassniki* – a Russian social network launched in 2006 meant for maintaining online contacts – Akilov received jihadist propaganda by several Uzbek jihadist accounts. According to *Swedish Radio News* the material consisted of "sermons encouraging violent resistance, bloody images from bomb attacks and links to an extremist Uzbek-

[237] https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/OxE4E/akilovs-bror-ovetande-om-terrordadet-ar-det-sant-att-han-har-erkant.
[238] "Stockholm terror suspect wanted to 'kill Swedish citizens'" *The Local*, February 20, 2018, https://www.thelocal.se/20180220/stockholm-terror-suspect-wanted-to-kill-swedish-citizens.

language military training website".[239] The material was published by Abu Saloh, who also recruited the already mentioned Jalilov. Abu Saloh used intermediaries in order to recruit and maintain contacts. The KTJ uses social media in order to recruit migrants from Central Asia and in order to teach them how to use various weapons.[240]

On 19 January 2017 Akilov wrote to someone online: "I am working and saving money and God willing I will carry out the martyr operation."[241] He also elaborated on his plans by making a list of potential targets, such as a synagogue and a nightclub, because these places would have 'plenty of infidels'. Furthermore, social media played a big role when Akilov asked for permission from several online members in these platforms to commit an attack. These members encouraged Akilov to film the attack. In court Akilov said that he never met any of these contacts and that he was not sure what their real identity was. Before and immediately after the attack, Akilov had a conversation with one of these contacts. These conversations were published through screenshots on a Russian Twitter account called 'Tvjihad'. This contact called himself Abu Fatyma ad-Dagestani. *Nyheter24* (a Swedish news agency) spoke to the Twitter account with regard to the authenticity of the screenshots. The screenshots were first posted on *Odnoklassniki* by ad-Dagestani. The Twitter account was able to see the pictures because they infiltrated in a group of Daesh followers on *Odnoklassniki*. In the conversation, Akilov asks ad-Dagestani how to make a bomb and mentions that he is looking for a big car in order to fulfill his plan of driving into a crowd. He writes that he already has acetone, a cigarette lighter and gas for the explosion. After the attack Akilov wrote: "It went bad, I drove over some, but the car drove wrong. Now I'm at the

[239] "Stockholm terror attacker linked to extremist leader" *Swedish Radio News*, May 12, 2017, https://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=2054&artikel=6695038.
[240] Malin Nilsson, "Rahkmat Akilov kopplas till terrorefterlyst jihadistledare" [Rahkmat Akilov is linked to terrorist jihadist leader] *Nyheter24*, May 12, 2017, https://nyheter24.se/nyheter/inrikes/884326-rahkmat-akilov-kopplas-till-terrorefterlyst-jihadistledare.
[241] https://www.rferl.org/a/sweden-uzbekistan-tajikistan-islamic-state-suspect-truck-attack-trial/29050201.html.

airport, a dead end," and "I drove over ten people in the center of Stockholm."[242] [Appendix E].

Akilov explained to the court why he chose to attack Stockholm: "I did this because my heart and my soul aches for those who have suffered from the bombings of the NATO coalition."[243] Although Sweden is not a member of the NATO, it had 70 people of the Swedish military in Iraq to provide training against Daesh. Therefore, Akilov wanted to 'murder Swedish citizens' in a central street in Stockholm during the weekend as there would be many tourists and representatives of NATO. Akilov also searched online for information on Sweden's activities against Daesh. Akilov aimed at pressuring Sweden to end its fighting against Daesh. This attack would "remind them all the evil they have done."[244]

Akilov thus seemed to have radicalized outside of Uzbekistan. His radicalization process started in Russia, continued in Turkey and further evolved in Sweden. Social media seemed to have played a big role in his radicalization process. There, he seemed to have found like-minded individuals who shared his grievances. In this case study there is again the pattern of an Uzbek individual working in Russia and radicalizing because of external factors. In Akilov's case, his personal experiences seemed to have influenced this process and social media served a platform to express his feeling of being resentful.

4.4 Sayfullo Saipov

4.4.1 The attack

On 31 October 2017, Sayfullo Saipov rented a truck and drove it down a bike path in Manhattan, New York and killed eight people and injured twelve. Besides running down cyclists, Saipov also hit pedestrians and a school bus. He left the truck with a paintball gun

[242] Agnes Källén and Leonid Androsov, "Otäcka bevisen: Rakhmat Akilovs hemliga IS-chatt kan vara äkta" [Nasty evidence: Rakhmat Akilov's secret IS chat can be authentic] *Nyheter24*, April 10, 2017, https://nyheter24.se/nyheter/inrikes/881794-han-kan-vara-is-anhangaren-som-rakhmat-akilov-chattade-med
[243] https://www.thelocal.se/20180220/stockholm-terror-suspect-wanted-to-kill-swedish-citizens.
[244] Frank Radosevich, "Akilov: It will remind them that all the evil they have done will not be forgiven" *Swedish Radio News*, February 20, 2018, https://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=2054&artikel=6890739.

and pellet gun, but was shot by a policeman. He left a document in the truck in which Saipov pledged allegiance to Daesh and claiming that Daesh would 'endure forever'.[245] After his arrest he was transferred to the hospital where he requested the display of the Daesh flag in his room. On 3 November 2017, Daesh claimed responsibility for the attack, calling Saipov a 'soldier of the caliphate'. Saipov has been charged with murder and providing support to a terrorist organization. However, Saipov pleaded not guilty to murder and other criminal charges on 28 November 2017. On 28 September 2018, federal prosecutors told a judge that they intend to seek the death penalty if a jury convicts Saipov. The trial is scheduled on 13 April, 2020.[246]

4.4.2 Migration to the United States

Saipov was born in Tashkent in 1988, then part of the Soviet Union, which is now the capital of Uzbekistan. He grew up in a middle-class family. *Radio Free Europe* contacted two neighbors of Saipov after the attack. They described the family as "secular and ordinary Uzbeks who don't stand out in any particular respect."[247] *Al Jazeera* spoke to Saipov's sister, Umida Saipova, who told them that Saipov attended a private school and afterwards studied at the Tashkent Financial Institute.[248]

Saipov applied for a U.S. Green Card through the U.S. Diversity Immigrant Visa Program in 2010. At the age of 22 Saipov moved to the United States. Saipov lived in Ohio and Florida, working as a truck driver. Additionally, he also registered two transport

[245] Yair Ettinger, "Police: NY Terrorist Suspect Followed ISIS Plan" *Jerusalem Post*, November 2, 2017, https://www.jpost.com/International/Police-NY-terrorist-suspect-followed-ISIS-plan-512121.
[246] Benjamin Weiser, "U.S. Seeks Death Penalty in Terror Attack on Manhattan Bike Path" *The New York Times*, September 28, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/28/nyregion/sayfullo-saipov-death-penalty.html
[247] Khurmat Babadjanov and Farangis Najibullah, "What We Know About New York Attack Suspect's Life, Family in Uzbekistan" *Radio Free Europe*, November 1, 2017, https://www.rferl.org/a/what-we-know-about-new-york-terror-suspect-life-family-uzbekistan/28829647.html.
[248] Mansur Mirovalev, "Sayfullo Saipov: From golden boy to ISIL supporter" *Al Jazeera*, November 29, 2017, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/11/sayfullo-saipov-golden-boy-isil-supporter-171129091454515.html.

companies. Prior to the attack, he lived in New Jersey where he worked as a taxi-driver.[249] In the U.S. he met his Uzbek wife, Nozima, with whom he has three children. The reason why Saipov moved from Ohio to Florida to New Jersey is mainly because he lost his driving jobs as a result of having a bad temper.[250] An Uzbek immigrant who met Saipov in Florida reported that "he liked the United States. He seemed very lucky and all the time he was happy and talking like everything is OK."[251]

4.4.3 Signs of radicalization

There are no signs that Saipov radicalized while he was living in Uzbekistan. According to his family and the Uzbek officials he did not any have problems with the law nor did he have any history of radicalization.[252] According to his neighbors in Tashkent, Saipov's family was not a religious family because, according to them, "they never prayed".[253] Saipov's sister agreed by stating that Saipov never had time to go to the mosque because he was only focusing on studying.

When Saipov moved to the United States he did not seem to be a religious person according to his acquaintances in the U.S. However after his marriage in 2013, he started to grow a beard.[254] To be sure, growing a beard does not indicate that an individual is radicalizing. However, the Uzbek state outlaws this facial factor, as it could be seen as a sign of religious extremism according to the regime.[255] His sister first saw his beard on Skype after

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[249] Idem.
[250] Eli Rosenberg, Devlin Barrett and Sari Horwitz, "Sayfullo Saipov's behavior behind the wheel of an empty truck raised suspicion before attack" *The Washington Post*, November 1, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/before-the-new-york-attack-practicing-turns-in-a-truck-and-watching-isis-videos/2017/11/01/39c7b380-bf40-11e7-8444-a0d4f04b89eb_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.9f24d4701fdb.
[251] "New York truck attack: Who is suspect Sayfullo Saipov?" *BBC News*, November 2, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-41828714.
[252] "Uzbek Suspect In New York Truck Attack Pleads Not Guilty" *Radio Free Europe*, November 29, 2017, https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbek-suspect-saipov-new-york-truck-attack-pleads-not-guilty/28885351.html.
[253] Tony Wesolowsky, "Taskhent Washes Its Hands Of Radicalized Uzbeks" *Radio Free Europe*, November 2, 2017, https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbekistan-distances-itself-uzbek-terror-attack-suspects/28831746.html.
[254] https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/11/sayfullo-saipov-golden-boy-isil-supporter-171129091454515.html.
[255] Idem.

the marriage. She was in shock: "When we first saw him on Skype with a beard, we got scared, honestly. We were terrified. I cried and called him and asked him why."[256] Saipov responded that he was mugged in his car and that he grew a beard in order to look older and to scare people. However his sister believed him to be brainwashed.

It was after his marriage that his acquaintances started to notice changes in his behavior. These acquaintances, who are ethnic Uzbeks, stated that Saipov started to express radical views after his marriage and that he became aggressive. He also isolated himself from his friends.[257] He met Mirrakhmat Muminov in Ohio in 2011, an ethnic Uzbek human rights activist, who described Saipov as "a very aggressive, depressive and unstable guy … he couldn't find a job for a long time, he couldn't go back to Uzbekistan to see his parents."[258] Additionally, Muminov argued that Saipov would have been radicalized in the U.S. and not in Uzbekistan. Muminov also said that Saipov became depressed after failing to find work as a driver. Moreover, he became separated from his community: "Because of his radical views he frequently used to argue with other Uzbeks and moved to Florida."[259]

It was this background of depression, being unsuccessful in finding a job and failing in having a wealthy and successful life – as he was used to back home in Tashkent – which put Saipov in an instable situation. It was during this period when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi[260] released a video questioning "what Muslims in the United States and elsewhere were doing to respond to the killing of Muslims in Iraq."[261] In court Saipov said that he was inspired by this video. Besides being inspired by videos of Daesh, Saipov's acquaintances also said that he

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[256] "Uzbek Sister of NYC Suspect Fears Saipov 'Brainwashed', Pleads For Time and 'Fair Trial'" *Radio Free Europe*, November 3, 2017, https://www.rferl.org/a/new-york-terror-attack-uzbek-saipov-sister-brainwashed-trial/28833491.html.
[257] https://www.rferl.org/a/what-we-know-about-new-york-terror-suspect-life-family-uzbekistan/28829647.html.
[258] Deirdre Tynan, "Today's Uzbekistan and Manhattan's Deadly Truck Attack" *International Crisis Group*, November 3, 2017, https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/uzbekistan/todays-uzbekistan-and-manhattans-deadly-truck-attack.
[259] http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-41828714.
[260] Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is the self-proclaimed leader of Daesh.
[261] "Uzbek Suspect in New York Truck Attack Faces New Charges, Possible Death Penalty" *Radio Free Europe* November 22, 2017, https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbek-suspect-new-york-city-truck-attack-saipov-faces-new-charges-possible-death-penalty/28868925.html.

radicalized because his dreams of being successful did not work out in the U.S.

Again, as in the cases of Jalilov and Akilov, Saipov radicalized outside of Uzbekistan and this process mainly happened through social media. According to the *Washington Post*, investigators found 90 videos and 3800 images on his phone which were labeled as propaganda material of Daesh, beheading videos and instructions on how to make bombs.[262] These 'how-to' instructions videos were also found on the phones of Jalilov and Akilov. Counterterrorism officials in the U.S. investigated Saipov in 2015 because he was listed as a point of contact for two men who were sought by federal agents as 'suspected terrorists'. However a case was never opened against him and federal agents never interviewed him.[263]

Saipov's mother visited him between late 2016 and early 2017. According to Saipov's mother, she did not notice anything suspicious. A day before the attack the family had a phone conversation with Saipov. Accordingly, Saipov was in a good mood. After the attack, Saipov's sister told *Al Jazeera* that it was unexpected what Saipov did and that they "are waking up from a nightmare".[264] Saipov's wife was interviewed by the FBI and she told them that she did not know he was planning the attack. In the hospital he said that he planned the attack for about a year. One week before the attack, he rented a truck and made 'test drives'. Saipov chose to attack during Halloween because he believed that it would be busy on the streets.[265]

Again we can apply the social psychological theory of Rositsa Dzhekova et al. (2016). The environment of Saipov changed when he moved from Uzbekistan to the United States. In

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[262] Devlin Barrett, Matt Zapotosky and Mark Berman, "New York truck attack suspect charged with terrorism offense as Trump calls for a death sentence" *Washington Post*, November 2, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2017/11/01/new-york-attack-probe-expands-to-uzbekistan-as-possible-militant-links-explored/?utm_term=.20ef5c981d60.

[263] Aaron Katersky, Josh Margolin, Michele McPhee and Brian Ross, "Feds interviewed accused NYC truck attacked in 2015 about possible terror ties" *ABC News*, November 1, 2017, https://abcnews.go.com/US/feds-interviewed-suspected-nyc-truck-attacker-2015-terror/story?id=50859185.

[264] https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/11/sayfullo-saipov-golden-boy-isil-supporter-171129091454515.html.

[265] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2017/11/01/new-york-attack-probe-expands-to-uzbekistan-as-possible-militant-links-explored/?utm_term=.20ef5c981d60.

Uzbekistan he lived in a relatively rich environment. In the United States Saipov's profession was below his education level, working as a truck- and taxi-driver. On top of that, he lost his job several times and had to move each time. Saipov became depressed and felt isolated, not only from his former country and the environment he was used to, but also from his community. This influenced his behavior as he became aggressive, grew a beard and started to feel inspired by Daesh propaganda videos. It is thus a combination of catalysts, namely personal experiences, trigger events and recruitment, which radicalized Saipov.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed at understanding the motives of Uzbek individuals to join Daesh by answering how we can explain their apparent recent interest to join Daesh and if we can speak of a myth or a phenomenon regarding radicalization in Uzbekistan. This was done through focusing on three levels. First, the situation inside Uzbekistan was analyzed and possible (root) causes for radicalization were explained. The second level focused on the external root causes, that mainly discussed the migration of Uzbek nationals to Russia and recruitment of Uzbek nationals through internet and neighborhood- and friendship networks. The third level focused on the individual level. Three Uzbek nationals who committed attacks in 2017 were analyzed.

In the second and third chapter, I mainly aimed at discussing the possible internal and root causes for Uzbek nationals to radicalize. Due to the lack of portraying root causes on individual cases within the literature, this thesis included a case study. These case studies could be used in order to give an explanation why Uzbek nationals may have joined Daesh. In order to answer the research question, the social movement theory and social psychology theory were important tools.

As the interviews with family members, neighbors and friends of these Uzbek nationals show, the individuals in the case studies all radicalized when they were working abroad as labor migrants. Indeed, these three individuals cannot speak for all Uzbek nationals who have joined Daesh. However, I argue that few of the Uzbek nationals who have joined Daesh were radicalized in Central Asia itself. Rather, they radicalized when they were working abroad. Migrants from Central Asia are connected through bonds of friendship, kinship or a shared community origin. As a result of xenophobic attitudes by the Russian population towards Central Asian migrants, they aim at belonging to a community that supports them. The vulnerable position of these migrants make them relatively easy targets

for recruiters who target those who have little experience of Islam so that they can be manipulated into jihadist teachings. Moreover, personal experiences influenced these individuals in their radicalization process, which is supported by the social psychology theory. Another contributing factor are three Uzbek groups that pledged allegiance to Daesh, which were capable of recruiting a relatively high number of Uzbek nationals. This is supported by the social movement theory, as these groups were capable of mobilizing their members through informal networks. Of importance are propaganda videos, social media platforms, and the two magazines of Daesh. In these platforms, the groups could frame their perspectives by using slogans related to targeting the enemy and justifying their actions through Islamic verses.

Possible root causes for Uzbek nationals to radicalize could also be internal factors. The examples of the IMU and HBT show that internal factors could contribute to the radicalization of some individuals. These groups were mainly developed in response to the political repression of the Uzbek state. However, especially in the case of Daesh supporters, external causes seem to play a more significant role. Although internal causes could play a role in forcing an individual to leave Uzbekistan, they do not explain the main root causes for an individual to radicalize.

There are indeed examples of Uzbek nationals who have radicalized. However, the disputed number of 2,000 to 4,000 Uzbek nationals who would have joined Daesh does not speak for the entire Uzbek population. This means that 4,000 of the total Uzbek population of 30 million, of which 90% identifies as Muslim, would account for 0,01% of the total population who have joined Daesh. Although there are clear signals of radicalized individuals, I would argue that the trend of radicalization is rather a myth than a phenomenon taking root in the region.

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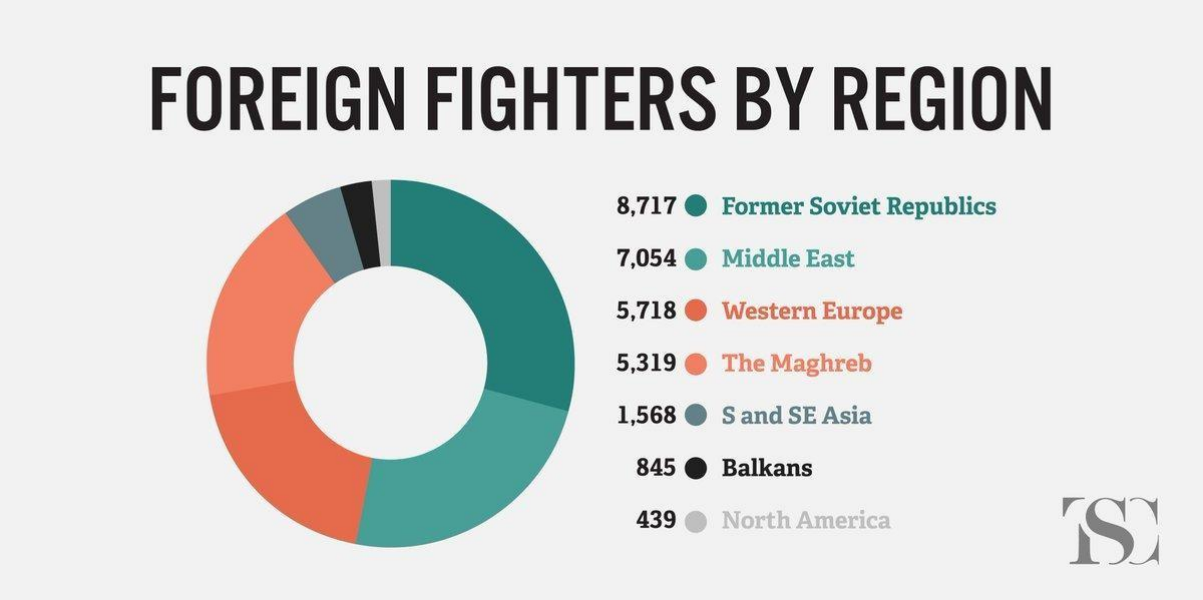
Appendix A

Map of Asia, with a focus on Central Asia, which includes the countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Source: https://www.mapsofworld.com/asia/regions/central-asia-map.html

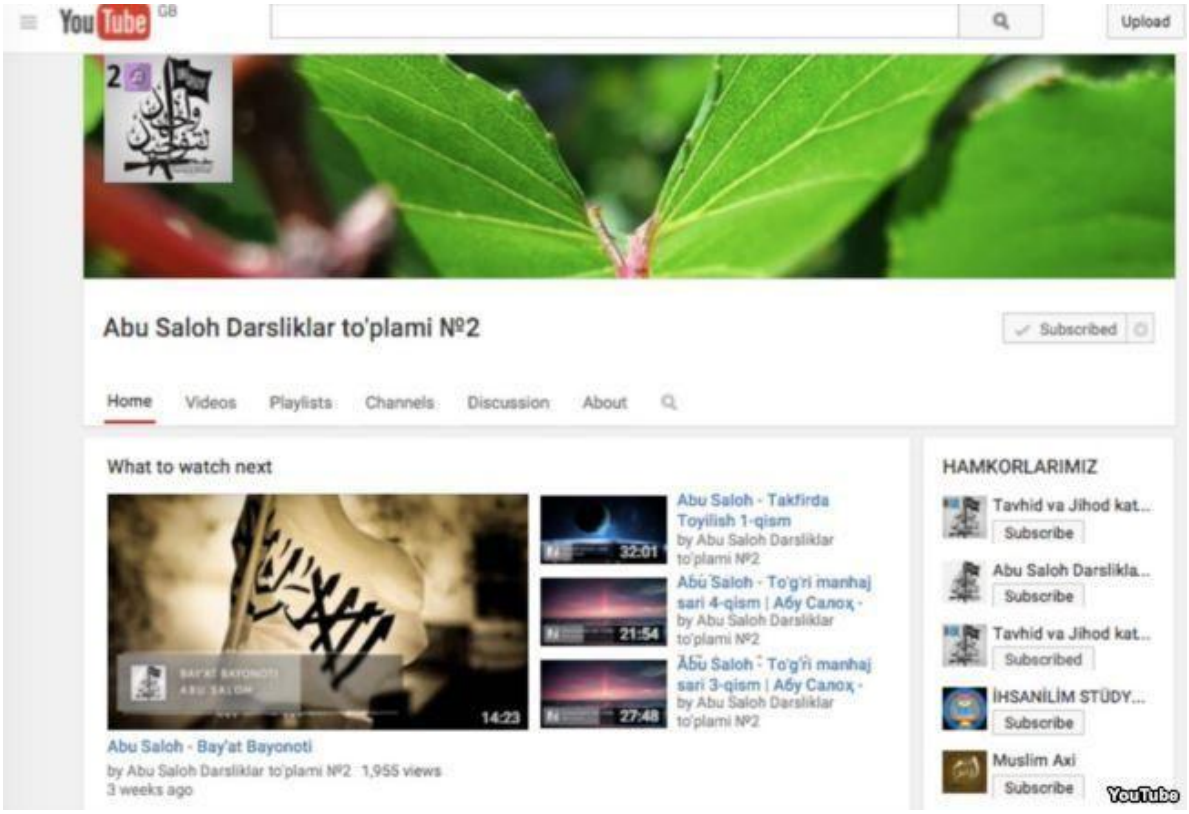
Appendix B



Statistics from the Soufan Center (October 2017) which show the division in foreign fighters by region who have joined Daesh. According to these statistics, the highest amount of fighters are from the former Soviet republics.

Source: Richard Barrett, 'Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees' *The Soufan Center*, October 2017 http://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Beyond-the-Caliphate-Foreign-Fighters-and-the-Threat-of-Returnees-TSC-Report-October-2017-v3.pdf

Appendix C



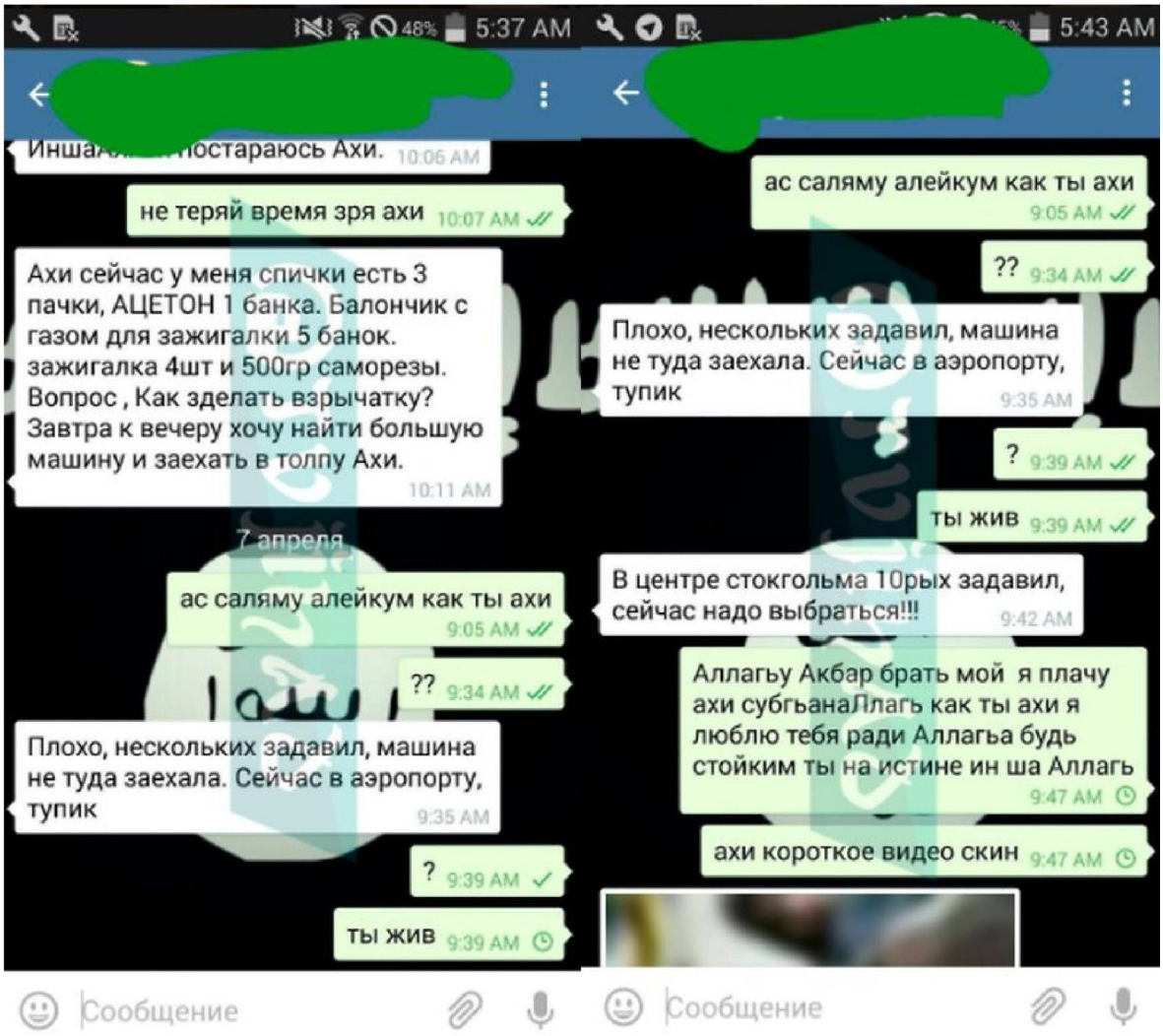
A screenshot of Abu Saloh's YouTube channel. On this channel he posted speeches and audio messages in the Uzbek language on various aspects of jihad.

Source: Joanna Paraszczuk, 'Uzbeks Arrested For Allegedly Trying To Join Al-Qaeda Group In Syria' *Radio Free Europe*, November 6, 2015 https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbekistan-al-qaeda-group-syria-jannat-oshliqari/27349840.html

Appendix D

Akbarzhon Jalilov is an ethnic Uzbek from Osh (Kyrgyzstan). Osh is a place in the Ferghana Valley and very close to the Uzbek border.

Appendix E



Screenshots of the chat between Akilov and Abu Fatyma ad-Dagestani before (left screenshot) and after the attack (right screenshot) as originally posted on *Odnoklassniki* by ad-Dagestani.

Source: Agnes Källén Leonid Androsov, 'Otäcka bevisen: Rakhmat Akilovs hemliga IS-chatt kan vara äkta' [Nasty evidence: Rakhmat Akilov's secret IS chat can be authentic] *Nyheter24*, April 10, 2017 https://nyheter24.se/nyheter/inrikes/881794-han-kan-vara-is-anhangaren-som-rakhmat-akilov-chattade-med