

Militant Islam in Central Asia: The Case of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.

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Militant Islam in Central Asia: The Case of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan

2003 |

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Abstract

This paper examines the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), one of the three key

Islamic groups active in Central Asia. The IMU is a militant and extremist Islamic organization, one that has been listed by the US State Department as a terrorist organization. It has been linked to terrorist activity and to the attempted overthrow of Uzbek President Islam Karimov. This paper discusses the roots and causes of Islamic radicalism in general; clarifies the terms "Salafism" and "Wahhabism"; and examines violence as culture. In discussing the emergence of radical Islam (Islamism) in Uzbekistan, the author covers Salafism in Central Asia; the early Salafi ideologists; specific teachers and their disciples; and Uzbek militants abroad, in such places as Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. In describing the rise of the IMU, the paper presents the IMU's early activities; the February 1999 terrorist bombings in Tashkent; terrorist networks in Central Asia; the conviction of the leaders of the Erk political party for terrorist acts; and regional and clan rivalries. In discussing trans-border violence, the paper covers the fighting in Tajikistan in 1999; the hostage taking in Kyrgyzstan in 1999; and the IMU's adventures in Tajikistan and Afghanistan in 1999-2000. The author goes on to discuss the ideology of the IMU, first reviewing the roots of radical Islamic organizations in the Ferghana Valley and then examining "Lessons of Jihad," which is reportedly a document of the IMU that discusses the stages and objectives of jihad. The author then discusses the IMU after September 11, 2001, including its possible connections to the Taliban and to the Al Qaeda network. This analysis of the IMU concludes with a number of empirical and theoretical insights into the nature of organized extremism in Central Asia: that Islamic militancy is likely to persist in Central Asia; how no single theory is satisfactory to explain the phenomenon; how external factors play a role in Islamist mobilization in the region; how organized crime and political extremism are essential components for these groups; how Uzbek President Karimov's repression of ordinary Muslims is counterproductive in the struggle against Islamists; and finally, that printed materials are not of primary importance in the recruitment of members of supporters.

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