Uzbek Islamic Extremists in the Civil Wars of Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan: From Radical Islamic Awakening in the Ferghana Valley to Terrorism with Islamic Vocabulary in Waziristan

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The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan—Origins of the Movement

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), or O'zbekiston Islomiy Harakati as it is known locally (Harakat al-Islamiyyah in Arabic), had its origin in the Islamic movement called Adolat ("Justice"), a faction of a larger group known as Islam tashkari ("Islamic Warriors"). This group arose in the city of Namangan in the Uzbekistani part of the Ferghana Valley in about 1990 as a response to what was perceived as widespread corruption and social injustice exposed by the liberal perestroika era as well as the resurgence in religious activities no longer prohibited by the Soviet government. The movement was reportedly founded, or at least inspired, by Abdulhakim Qori, the well-known preacher of radical Islam. Supported by imams and preachers such as Obidkhon Qori Nazarov from Tashkent, and Umalkhon Domla and Davudkhon Qori from Namangan, who also contributed funds from their mosques, the movement grew rapidly.

However, funded by sources in Saudi Arabia, the movement became increasingly radicalized by the variety of Salafism known as Wahhabism, thus producing a form of Islamic extremism by then rare in the Central Asian region. Yet, few of the movement’s members had the theological skills to recognize the differences in various types of Islam, so these names are of little value in analyzing their religious beliefs. For practical purposes, perhaps the best definition of Islamic extremism is that proposed by the Council of the Muftis (Islamic religious leaders) of Russia on
June 30, 2000. The council then singled out as extremist those movements that (1) rejected the basic Islamic traditions, (2) claimed the right to brand as “non-Muslims” traditional believers who happened to disagree with their interpretation of Islamic law, and (3) claimed the right to kill “infidels” including traditional Muslims who had failed to side with them. This will be the definition of Islamic extremism adopted here, since it subsumes all varieties of Sunni extremism, whether referred to as Salafi or Wahhabi.

The basic traditions referred to by the Council of Muftis as rejected by extremists were those of Sufism and popular traditions of Islam in Central Asia. Interestingly, one could make a case for the extremists here since they reject such aspects of Islam as did not form part of the religion at the time of the Prophet Muhammad. On the other hand, in particular the Sufi-inspired traditions and practices of “folk Islam” do play a central role in the religious life of many Central Asian Muslims, who thus were alienated by the extremists.

The movement came to be led by two young men: the college drop-out and local mullah Tohir Yo’ldosh and the former conscript soldier Jumabay Hojiyev (later known as Juma Namangani or, at times, Tojiboy). Both were young, and neither is likely to have had a history of involvement in Central Asian Sufism or folk Islam. Indeed, Yo’ldosh had been inspired by the radical preaching of those imams who in turn had found their inspiration in Salafism and/or Wahhabism.

Tohir (or Tohirjon) Abdulhaliqovich Yo’ldosh (also known in Russian as Tahir Yuldashev and in Arabic as Muhammad Tahir Farooq (Farukh in Russian), was born in 1967 in Namangan. His father died when he was five, and he was brought up by his mother, Karomat Asparova. An early member of the Uzbekistani branch of the All-Union Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), founded in Astrakhan in June 1990, he had grown disillusioned with this party’s refusal to demand an Islamic state. Together with other like-minded young Uzbeks, Yo’ldosh formed Adolat as a platform for his demand for an Islamic revolution.

Jumabay Ahmadjonovich Hojiyev, an ethnic Uzbek born in 1967 in Namangan, graduated from agricultural vocational school before he was drafted into the Soviet army in 1987. He reportedly served as an airborne soldier in Afghanistan during the last phase of the Soviet war there, eventually being promoted to sergeant, unless the elite airborne episode too is part of the myth that soon grew around his person. He is said to have become interested in Islam during his term in Afghanistan.

In January 1990, Yo’ldosh renamed the movement, which he now controlled, Islam adolat (Islamic justice) and introduced the taking of an oath of allegiance (bayah) by its members, promising to introduce Islamic law first in Namangan, then the rest of Uzbekistan. In the same year, the movement built the first of several mosques and madrasahs. Of the various centers, Yo’ldosh operated out of the Otavalkhon mosque in Namangan. From November 1991 to the spring of 1992, the movement, which primarily consisted of unemployed young men, perhaps as many as five thousand altogether although other reports indicate numbers ranging from three to five hundred active members only, went on to organize protest meetings and occupy government buildings. The movement formed its own vigilante religious police force, the most militant of which became known as yurishtlar (conquerors), which administered summary justice in the streets. Each member was paid a salary from mosque funds as well as taxes imposed on local traders. In April 1991, President Karimov,
arriving to talk to the militants, was shouted down. Tohir Yo‘ldosh even grabbed the microphone from the president’s hands, shouting “No! Now and here, I’m the ruler! You can talk only when I allow you! Now, shut up and listen!” In December 1991, militants occupied the headquarters of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan (CPU) in Namangan. Among other things, they demanded that the government immediately proclaim the establishment of an Islamic state, use Islamic law as the only legal system, cease to orient the country toward Turkey, and introduce separate schools for boys and girls. They also began to refer to themselves as mujahidlar (mujahidin). Yo‘ldosh assumed the title bosh amir (commander-in-chief). Branches of Adolat rose across the Ferghana Valley, in Andijan, Margelan, Kuva, Farghona, and Osh (in Kyrgyzstan).8

Little reliable information is available today on what the preachers who inspired these demands for an Islamic state actually said to their followers. As far as can be ascertained, the religious content was primarily inspired by Saudi Wahhabism but were not identical to the forms taken by Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia. As for the young leaders of Adolat at the time, their demands were no doubt motivated by personal religious convictions but they simultaneously used the religion as a political tool to achieve personal power. Many of them rejected their own teachers in Islamic theology and wished to take their places in mosques and elsewhere.9

Adolat was banned in March 1992, and the Uzbekistani government restored order, dissolving the movement. Several Adolat leaders, including Yo‘ldosh and Hojiyev, who now took the name Juma Namanganli after his hometown, fled to Tajikistan in 1992, where they joined the Tajikistani branch of the IRP, which by then was preparing to launch a violent civil war in Tajikistan.10

There the two young men embarked upon very different careers, although aiming for the same broad goals. Yo‘ldosh began what can only be called a political career, while Namanganli became a guerrilla leader. Their militant activities took them first to Tajikistan, then Afghanistan, where they formed the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in 1998 and on August 25, 1999, issued their only substantially argued declaration of jihad. This was a document written in Arabic and signed by Zubayr ibn Abdul Raheem, a somewhat mysterious individual who appears to have been a Saudi Wahhabi of Uzbek origin. The group subsequently claimed that he was a descendant of the Mangit family, which once ruled Bukhara in today’s Uzbekistan. Zubayr ibn Abdul Raheem had been appointed head of the IMU religious leadership and also appeared to be the chairman of the group’s supreme council, while Namanganli was military commander and Yo‘ldosh, despite his previous claims to have been a mullah, fulfilled no religious role but that of amir (general commander) and chief political leader. Yet, while the declaration of jihad was signed by Zubayr ibn Abdul Raheem, it stated that the jihad was declared by Yo‘ldosh, in his capacity as amir of the movement, and the decision had been taken following agreement by the religious leadership of the IMU. The declaration concluded that there was “clear evidence” on the obligation of jihad against the infidels as well as on the obligation to liberate the lands and the people of the Muslim community. Even so, the declaration of jihad never properly explained why this was so, or what the “clear evidence” was. The declaration included a total of four citations from the Quran, but of these, only three were referenced. In the final analysis, only one Quran quote, the first of the four and the one that headed the entire declaration, sheds some light upon the motivation
for the jihad: “And fight them until there is no more fitnah (strife; diversity of belief) and the religion is all for Allah” (Al Anfaal 39). While the word “jihad” had been used already in Namangan in 1991, when the militants began to refer to themselves as mujahidin, the 1999 declaration of jihad by Yo’ldosh and his associates does not support a conclusion that they had substantially added to their previous beliefs.

Indeed, unlike certain other groups such as the Hizb ut-Tahrir, there was apparently little Islamic theological reflection on jihad among the IMU and its successor, the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU—see later). In fact, what strikes the reader of the documents available from these groups is the lack of theological reflection in them. The reader finds references to the Quran among the political statements and manuals on how to build bombs but despite these isolated sentences, the documents contain only little theological content. Perhaps this is not surprising. Many of the followers of the IMU indeed have but little formal theological training and would themselves be hard pressed to explain their position from a theological point of view. They simply know that they are right because this is what they have been told by their religious leaders. Yet, these are personal religious beliefs held strongly enough to fight and die for, so the simplicity of these beliefs does not warrant a conclusion that they are unimportant.

The history of the IMU in Afghanistan, the death of Namangan in battle against the American-led invasion in late 2001, and the flight of the IMU survivors into Pakistan have been dealt with elsewhere and will not be repeated here.12

The Surviving IMU Networks in Central Asia

To the surprise of many, it soon turned out that the IMU had survived in Central Asia as well as in Pakistan. Details are sketchy, but a few facts can be ascertained. In Uzbekistan, militants believed to have been members of the IMU by mid-2003 still remained in the south, in the Surkhondaryo (Surkhandarya) province, where the IMU had been known to have sleeper cells as late as in 2001.13

The IMU had also survived in Kyrgyzstan. Several alleged IMU bombings took place in Kyrgyzstan during 2002 and 2003. In the United States, the State Department issued several warnings, possibly based on American intelligence information, that the IMU might attack American citizens in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.14

Other alleged IMU incidents took place in Tajikistan. In January and June 2005, explosions occurred near the Ministry of Emergency Situations in Dushanbe, and Tajikistan accused the IMU of involvement. On January 25, 2006, a small group of militants managed to free a prison inmate, who was accused of links with the IMU, from Gharyroghum district of Soghd province in northern Tajikistan, killing the prison director in the process. The group then disappeared by car toward the nearby border with Kyrgyzstan, where they presumably went into hiding. However, there remains some doubt whether the militants in fact belonged to the IMU. Suspicions have also been directed toward another organization, Bayat (oath of allegiance), which had been accused of the murder of a Baptist missionary on January 12, 2004, and of several subsequent arson attacks on the homes and shops of sellers of alcohol as well as local mosques in Chorkuh, Isfara district. A number of Bayat members were reported once to have been members of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan.15

There may also have been a connection between the IMU and the Andijan affair on May 13, 2005.6 Although there is no evidence that the IMU was directly involved
in the events on that day, the Uzbekistani prosecutor-general’s office on September
16 of the same year noted that a certain Ilhom Hojiyev in April 2005 had smuggled up
to $200,000 into Uzbekistan in support of the group involved in the affair.17 Whether
this Ilhom Hojiyev was the relative of the late Namangan who previously had joined
Yo’ldosh in Pakistan is unknown, but the Uzbekistani investigators may have thought
so, since they also requested Kyrgyzstan to return a certain Dilshod Hojiyev, who had
sought asylum there after the Andijan affair. A criminal case was opened against
him in Uzbekistan, while several human rights organizations expressed their rage
that the Kyrgyzstanis considered handing him and three other named Uzbekistani
citizens over to Uzbekistan for criminal charges. Again, it is unknown whether this
Dilshod Hojiyev was the same man who was the son-in-law and second-in-command
of Yo’ldosh, and also the one in charge of IMU finances, or merely an unfortunate
bystander who happened to have the same name.18 Yet, the fact that his name was on
the list of four named suspects requested by Uzbekistan certainly indicates that the
Uzbekistani investigators thought he belonged to the IMU.
On May 12, 2006, militants from Tajikistan reputedly associated with the IMU
attacked a Tajikistani border post and a Kyrgyzstani customs office, presumably
to acquire weapons. Four militants were killed and one captured. Tajikistani law
enforcement noted that their captive was a member of the IMU and was on the
wanted list. In early 2008, one of the remaining wanted gunmen, alleged IMU
activist Abdulhati Yuldashev, was arrested in southern Kyrgyzstan. Three other
gunmen remained wanted, two of them Tajikistani citizens and one a Kyrgyzstani.19
It is difficult to assess whether these and several other acts of violence attributed
to the IMU in the Central Asian republics were planned acts of terrorism or merely the
side effects of continued drug smuggling activities.
In 2006, Yo’ldosh issued statements to the Muslims of Central Asia on three
occasions, speaking in Uzbek. Interestingly, he devoted considerable time toward
a refutation of the ideology of the Hizb ut-Tahrir. Yet, while the statements were
couched in religious terms, they contained no real religious content. Yo’ldosh seemed
content to conclude that he was right and those others were wrong. He also denounced
the perpetrators of the March and April 2004 suicide bombings in Taashkent and
Bukhara, that is, the IJU, severely. He may have felt that he was losing support in his
Central Asian core territories due to his long absence and the comparable success of
other Islamic groups there. Indeed, in August 2005, dozens of people who claimed
to be former IMU members rallied at the Dutch embassy in Tehran to demand
refugee status.20 Yet more Uzbek Muslims contacted other European countries for
the same purpose.21 However, Yo’ldosh also denounced the presidents of Uzbekistan,
Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, and vowed vengeance for the Muslims killed in Andijan
in 2005,22 a statement that may support the supposition that the IMU had provided
funding there in anticipation of the affair.

The IMU in Waziristan

The IMU also suffered an uneasy existence in Waziristan. Already in June 2002,
Pakistani security forces killed six alleged IMU members in South Waziristan
and Kohat after they had killed a policeman and an intelligence officer.23 Further
conflicts soon followed. The fighting with Pakistani security forces around Wana in
South Waziristan became particularly severe in March 2004, and a general Pakistani offensive followed from late 2003 onward. In Afghanistan, the IMU had been protected by the Taliban. In Pakistan, the IMU henceforth fell under the protection of the Mehsuds, a powerful local tribe that dominated South Waziristan. In particular, the IMU became associated with the important Taliban-supporter Baitullah Mehsud, who led large numbers of Pakistani Taliban and soon came into conflict with the Pakistan Army. The IMU henceforth became as closely allied to the Pakistani Taliban as it had been to the Afghan Taliban. Yo’ldosh was reportedly present as a witness to the 2006 peace agreement between the Pakistan Army and the Taliban in South Waziristan. In December 2007, Baitullah Mehsud formed the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which he then led from its formation until his death in a CIA drone attack in September 2009. The IMU supported the TTP in its various activities, for instance, by sending fighters to Swat when the Mehsud ally Maulana Fazlullah began his militant activities there. The IMU also retained its international networks. So did, for instance, several Uighurs train with the IMU in South Waziristan, before they reportedly returned to China to attack targets in Xinjiang.

However, problems soon arose in the relationship between the IMU and local Pashtuns in Waziristan. The exact cause for this largely remains unknown, although it seems likely that the IMU was caught up in internecine rivalry within the local Ahmadzai Wazirs, many of whom were hostile to the Mehsuds. In March 2007, Uzbek extremists and local Pashtun militants clashed in the town of Azam Varsak in South Waziristan, close to the Afghan border. At least 15 people died as a result of the fight, and the IMU was forced to leave its bases in and around Wana, at least for the time being.

In January 2008, Yo’ldosh confirmed his support for Baitullah Mehsud, calling for intensified jihad against the Pakistani security forces. Following Baitullah Mehsud’s death in September 2009, Yo’ldosh reiterated his support for the new TTP leader, Hakimullah Mehsud. However, on September 26, 2009, Yo’ldosh was himself mortally wounded in a CIA drone attack in South Waziristan. He reportedly died on October 1 and was replaced as head of the IMU by Usman Jan, the group’s deputy leader till that time. Usman Jan was in his turn targeted by a CIA drone in January 2010, but he may have survived the attack. On August 17, 2010, the IMU finally confirmed the death of Yo’ldosh, and announced that he had been replaced as amir by one Usmon Odil (Usman Adil), presumably the Usman Jan already mentioned.

The IMU Networks in Europe

Despite the IMU’s operations in Waziristan and apparent activities in the Central Asian republics, the organization had not neglected the war in Afghanistan, which it continued to fight, either in rivalry or in cooperation with another Uzbek group, the IJU (see later, including the section on the continued activities of the IMU and IJU in Afghanistan). The IMU also did not neglect its supporters elsewhere.

It soon became clear that the IMU had at its disposal networks of supporters and activists in Turkey and Europe as well as in Central Asia. In May 2008, French, German, and Dutch security agencies reported that they had detained ten individuals, most of them of Turkish background, on suspicion of running a network to send.
money to the IMU. The network had been led by İrфан Demirtaş, of Turkish and Dutch origin. Although this particular network was broken up, it seems likely that the IMU still enjoys the assistance of support networks in Turkey and Western Europe.

In September 2008, for instance, the IMU posted a German-language propaganda video on the Internet in support of the Afghan Taliban. The IMU asked Muslim men and women to come to join the jihad. This may have been a deliberate attempt to copy the success of the IJU in attracting German-speaking recruits. It may also have been a sign of increased cooperation between the two groups.

The Islamic Jihad Union—The Younger Generation of Uzbek Extremists Comes of Age

Following the Taliban defeat in Afghanistan and their 2001/2002 rout into Pakistan, the surviving Uzbek extremist leaders within the IMU could not agree on how best to continue the holy war. Some IMU leaders stayed with Yo’ldosh, who hid in South Waziristan and henceforth appeared to concentrate on the war in Afghanistan and local rivalries in Pakistan. Others, led by Najmiddin Jalolov and Suhail Buranov, presumably in early 2002, withdrew to North Waziristan. There, most likely in March 2002, they founded a new group, which somewhat later came to be called the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU; Islamiy jihad Ittihadi, or Ittihad al-jihad al-Islami, perhaps more correctly translated as the Alliance of Islamic Jihad; its original name was Jamaat al-jihad al-Islami, Society of Islamic Jihad, or simply Jamoat in Uzbek). Unlike Yo’ldosh, Jalolov and Buranov seem to have been more interested in a global jihad of the type waged by Al-Qaeda.36

Najmiddin Kamoltidinovich Jalolov (born in 1972 in Andijan; alias Abu Yahya Muhammad Fatih, Muhammad Fatih Bukhoriy, and Abdurakhmon; Fatih or Foteh signifies “conqueror”) appears to have been a member of the IMU since at least the late 1990s and perhaps from the outset. He was known to have been trained at Al-Qaida camps, presumably in Afghanistan. Jalolov was sentenced to death by an Uzbekistani court in 2000 for his role in the 1999 Tashkent bombings but was never apprehended. Jalolov now appointed another Uzbek named Suhail Fatilloyevich Buranov (born in 1983 in Tashkent; alias Sohail Mansur, alias Abu Huzaifa) his deputy. Buranov was known to have been trained at an Al-Qaida camp in Khost province, Afghanistan. Criminal charges had been filed against him in 2000, which would seem to confirm that he too then belonged to the IMU.37 However, considering his young age at the time, he is unlikely to have been a founding member.

The core of the IJU accordingly consisted of former IMU members who had broken away from Yo’ldosh to work more closely with Al-Qaida against its global rather than regional enemies.38 For them, unlike the first generation of Uzbek extremists in Afghanistan and the Afghan Taliban movement, the territory of Afghanistan was only one front, and not the most important one, in the global jihad as envisaged by Al-Qaida and its supporters. Besides, the loss of bases in Afghanistan, which had followed the Taliban defeat, made them yet more interested in following a global agenda, in particular as a new base could then be found among Al-Qaida sympathizers in Pakistan. The IJU had its headquarters and ran training camps in North Waziristan (in Mir Ali), unlike those of the IMU, which were located
in South Waziristan (around Wana). While the IMU turned toward the Mehsuds for protection, the IJU instead became the junior partner in an alliance with the Haqqani network (a fundamentally autonomous wing of the Afghan Taliban movement based in Miram Shah, the administrative center of North Waziristan, and named after its leader, Jalaluddin Haqqani) and Al-Qaida. In time, the relationship with Al-Qaida became increasingly public. In late January 2008, Abu Laith al-Libi, the Libyan liaison officer between the Al-Qaida leadership and the IJU, was killed in a CIA drone attack in Pakistan. The IJU confirmed his death, referring to him as “our Shaikh.” The IJU again acknowledged its relationship with Al-Qaida in a video communiqué on June 5, 2009, showing several IJU commanders with another Libyan Al-Qaida member, Abu Yahya al-Libi.

Even so, it was soon shown that the IJU, first known to outsiders simply as the Islamic Jihad Group, was even more involved in the Central Asian republics than the IMU. Indeed, the IJU, as it became known in 2005 in the American and British lists of banned terrorist organizations, first rose to fame only for a series of plots to use suicide bombers in Uzbekistan. The IJU is generally believed to have been behind the suicide bombings in Tashkent and Bukhara in March and April 2004, in which both male and female suicide bombers were used, and almost certainly conducted the coordinated suicide bombing attacks in Tashkent on July 30, 2004, against the American and Israeli embassies and the office of the Uzbekistani prosecutor-general, all of which the IJU claimed responsibility for in a statement. The beginning of this statement mirrored the 1999 declaration of jihad by the IMU in that it repeated the quote from the Quran, “And fight them until there is no more fitnah (strife; diversity of belief) and the religion is all for Allah” (Al Anfal 39).

In the trials that followed the events and arrests of 2004, the evidence presented indicated that a radical Jamiyat group led by one Farkhad Kazakhbayev had been operating in Tashkent, Bukhara, and Samarkand since 2000. The trial proceedings also indicated that others, including overall leader Jalolov based in Waziristan, may have played a role linking this Jamiyat with a network that facilitated the movement of small amounts of weapons and men to training camps in Pakistan. There was also an IJU cell in Kazakhstan, headed by Akhmed Bilmurzayev (Ahmad Bekmizayev) and Zhaksybek Bilmurzayev. The former had died in one of the attacks in Uzbekistan. The latter had apparently received training in Afghanistan, and had played a significant role in the IMU incursions into the Batken region in 1999 and 2000, which if correct would have made him yet another early IMU member who had changed his allegiance to the IJU, presumably along with Jalolov and Buranov. Several Kazakh members of the cell had been trained in Shymkent in southern Kazakhstan.

On the eve of the Andijan affair on May 13, 2005, the IJU rapidly posted a communiqué on the Internet, in which it expressed its support for any uprising against the Uzbekistani government, declared war on the Karimov government, and called on all Muslims to join in the attack. The statement, which was written in vague terms and signified no particular knowledge of the events in Andijan, was signed by the amir of the IJU, Muhammad Poch Bukhori, that is, Jalolov. As with previous statements, the text was couched in religious terms but contained no real religious content.

The US and Israeli embassies in Tashkent took the threat from the IJU very seriously. In response to a “specific terrorist threat,” the two embassies in early June 2005 withdrew nonessential staff from the country.
The IJU Networks in Europe

The IJU then turned its attention toward Europe. On September 4, 2007, a plot to attack possibly Frankfurt airport and an American air base in Germany was foiled with the arrest of three men, two of them German converts to Islam (Fritz Gelowicz and Daniel Schneider) and the third a Turk (Adem Yilmaz). The group, which became known in the media as the “Sauerland cell,” had trained in Pakistan and had links with the IJU. Later on, a German Turk, Atilla Seleki, was arrested as well.49

On September 11, 2007, the IJU posted a communiqué on a Turkish website, which stated that the three men arrested in Germany had planned attacks on the Ramstein air base and the US and Uzbekistani consulates in Germany.50 The IJU had by then come to rely on several Turkish-language websites.51 In them, the IJU used a Turkish name, İslami Cihad ittehadi (IC, translated by the group into English as Ittihad Islamic Jihad).

It soon became clear that the “Sauerland cell” formed part of a larger group, consisting of about 30 extremists, mostly ethnic Turks living in Germany but also several converts. Between 10 and 20 of them had participated in terrorist training in IJU camps in Pakistan. This was unprecedented, since ethnic Turks in Europe had not earlier been seen to turn to extremism. Now several had been to IJU camps in North Wazistan.52 Previously, IJU recruits had been sent to commit terrorist acts in Central Asia or to participate in guerrilla warfare in Afghanistan; now the IJU had trained European recruits and dispatched them back to Europe to engage in terrorism there.

The IJU networks in Europe were not confined to Germany. In April 2009, Turkish security forces arrested over 30 militant extremists, most of them allegedly IJU members, including the IJU leader in Turkey, Mahmut Kaplan (alias Abu Muhammad).53 IJU networks may have existed in other countries too, since in May 2008, a noted, French, German, and Dutch security agencies detained several people, most of them of Turkish origin, for suspicion of supporting the IMU.54 It does not seem too far-fetched to argue that in communities where one Uzbek group would have supporters, another one would most likely find a few of its own.

The IJU Media Wings

The IJU maintained a rather professional media wing, known as Badr at-Tawhid (Full moon of monotheism). The group also published in German and Turkish with another media outfit named Elif Medya.55 Both seem to have understood what kind of media strategy goes down well in the West. The media campaign focused on fighting crusaders, which appealed to an extremist Muslim audience, and to fight dictatorships such as those of Central Asia, which appealed to the Western media. The IJU in October 2009 even claimed not to be connected to Al-Qaida, in order to present itself in better light to a Western audience.56

Badr at-Tawhid by early 2010 seemed to have some relationship to yet another jihadiist web site, tawba.info, allegedly produced by the Jamaat Bulgar group of Russian-speaking Islamic extremists.57 This was not surprising, since already in 2007 Andrey Batalov, a Russian convert to Islam, had been arrested in Afghanistan,
disguised in a burqa, in a truck loaded with explosives. He admitted to having received some kind of training presumably in an IJU camp in North Waziristan, although he denied that he had ever intended to take part in fighting.58 Indeed, the IJU made considerable efforts to maintain contacts and recruits in many different countries and among many different ethnic backgrounds. In May 2007, Jalolov in an interview confirmed that the IJU had been in contact and worked on common targets with jihadis from the Caucasus.59

The IJU and Pakistan

Despite its apparent focus on Europe and Turkey, the IJU, true to its allegiance to Waziristani militants, remained engaged in hostilities with Pakistani security forces. In October 2006, three Pakistanis trained and supported by the IJU and its leader Jalolov went so far as to attempt improvised explosive devices (IED) attacks on government targets in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad.60

In October 2007, the Pakistan Army launched an offensive against Uzbek fighters in Mir Ali in North Waziristan. The IJU was also active elsewhere in Pakistan. The group claimed to have attacked Pakistani military targets in Swat in late 2007.61 Jalolov was killed on September 14, 2009, in North Waziristan in a CIA drone attack. He was replaced as amir by Abdullah Fatih.62

The IJU (and IMU?) in the Central Asian Republics

From 2009, Uzbek terrorism appeared to have returned to its place of origin. On May 25–26, 2009, several attacks took place in Uzbekistan. A police checkpoint was attacked in Khonobod on the border with Kyrgyzstan and bombings occurred in nearby Andijan. The IJU claimed responsibility for the attacks a few days later.63 In July, the IJU again voiced its support for jihad against Uzbekistan.64

On June 23, 2009, Kyrgyzstan claimed to have killed five IMU terrorists in a special operation.65 On August 29, 2009, a series of shootings took place in Tashkent, in which one alleged IMU member was killed.66 In early June 2010, Tajikistan too claimed to have killed two IMU members in a special operation.67

It is hard to assess the level of involvement, if any, of the IJU or IMU in these events. Both organizations have expressed their participation in and support for jihad against the governments of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Both organizations certainly appear to have networks in place in these countries. Since the IJU split from the IMU, there exists the possibility that individuals cooperate with each other, even if they have given their allegiance to separate groups. There is also the possibility that security organs may mistake members of one organization for that of the other. On the other hand, there is some doubt whether all these incidents were properly attributed by the law enforcement organs of the countries involved. The temptation to label regular violent crime as terrorism may be strong. It may even be that individual IMU and IJU members have turned to regular crime to fund their activities, or even to support themselves. As described elsewhere,68 the IMU once played a substantial role in narcotics trafficking out of Central Asia. The two groups may still be involved in such activities.69
The IJU’s Recruitment in Turkey and Europe and the Concept of Jihad Tourism

Arguably, the main impact of the IJU has been as a promoter of international jihad and facilitator for extremist recruits from Turkey and Europe who wish to fight in Afghanistan.

The memoirs of the German convert and IJU recruit Eric Breininger (who died in action on April 28, 2010) give a vivid description of how new recruits from Turkey and Europe from the mid-2000s onward reached the IJU training camps in Waziristan. Recruits to Waziristan first traveled by air to Iran (for which they needed a visa, something that caused difficulties for Breininger and his friend, the German-Lebanese Hussayn al-Mallah, although they eventually got seven-day transit visas upon landing in Tehran). Then they would board a domestic flight or bus from Tehran to Bam, from where they continued to Zahedan. There the recruits typically changed their names or adopted noms de guerre, apparently due to the fact that from there the clandestine part of their journey began. Having arrived in Zahedan, they would take a taxi to a certain mosque (possibly the large Makkai Mosque, reportedly an important center for IJU logistics), where a contact would be waiting. This contact brought them to a safe house inhabited by facilitators (ansar), where they would wait a few days until a small group of recruits had shown up. The group would travel together along the apparently usual route, by bus across the Iranian-Pakistani border. Foreign-looking recruits such as Germans would instead travel in a private car to the Iranian-Pakistani border, disguised in burqas while crossing, since women were usually not searched. From the border, they would then take one of the waiting Pakistani taxis to a certain hotel, while a native facilitator bought bus tickets and then put them on a bus, presumably to Quetta. Foreign-looking recruits would remain in burqas during the ride. Upon arrival, other facilitators would meet them and take them to a safe house, where they finally could get out of their burqas. From there on, the final leg of the journey was by car along a mountain road to a house belonging to yet other facilitators, this time of the IJU. Judging from Breininger’s memoirs, it is quite possible that all other facilitators met during the journey were freelancers rather than IJU members, presumably as part of regular smuggling networks that moved recruits for money (although the IJU may well have been the ultimate broker and financier of the journey). At the IJU safe house, the new recruits would wait other recruits, from countries as far apart as Turkey and Tajikistan, after which they went as a group to the training camp.

To hide foreign jihadists in burqas was by then standard operating procedure for both the IJU and IMU. In addition to the already mentioned Breininger and the Russian Batalov, who both hid in burqas, the IMU in a 2008 interview pointed out that a dark-skinned Sudanese too had been successfully smuggled into Pakistan by the same means. The same method was again used in June 2010, when another suspected IJU recruit from Germany was detained in Bannu district, northwestern Pakistan, traveling from Mir Ali to Peshawar with a fake Pakistani passport and a burqa to hide his foreign appearance.

In fact, so many German and German-speaking recruits reached the IJU that Breininger and friends founded the “Deutsche Taliban Mujahideen” (German Taliban Mujahidin), comprising six men, with a certain Abu Ishaq al-Muhajir elected as
amir. This was not all, however. Breininger wanted unmarried Muslim girls to travel to their camp, so they all could get married. The girls would also learn to use weapons, "just like the mujahidin." Then the newlyweds, he argued, would raise a new generation of mujahidin who would know Arabic, Turkish, English, Pashto, Urdu, and the mother tongue of the parents, in his case German. The children would learn Islam and temper their bodies through sports and martial arts, and early on learn the use of weapons and military tactics. This would, he planned, produce a new "generation of terrorists" whose names did not exist in any security service database. Indeed, from the mid- to late 2000s a growing number of Islamic extremists from Germany, including converts but many of Turkish or North African descent, traveled to Waziristan. Swedish extremists too joined them, as did several of apparently Kurdish extraction, although their choice of names alone does not reveal whether they were Kurds from Europe, Turkey, Iraq, or Iran. Some commentators even referred to the establishment of a jihadist village of European fighters. The white-faced European recruits had a reputation as dedicated fighters, since for them, unless they had less obviously foreign faces, it took some perseverance to reach Waziristan. Indeed, in July 2008 complaints were voiced in an IJU communiqué that too many new recruits, in particular among Turks, were useless as jihadist fighters, since "they grew up in a democratic society" and therefore were prone to discuss commands rather than accepting and obeying them without questions. Furthermore, many had come to the IJU only to prove to their friends back home that they were more religious than them, or had come to escape social or other secular problems. Many were indeed no more than jihad tourists, who had come to Afghanistan only so that they could tell stirring tales of their exploits when they returned home to friends and family.

The issue of how individuals in Europe and Turkey are being radicalized and recruited, in many cases by voluntarily searching out groups such as the IJU, would warrant an essay of its own. Still, in particular the phenomenon of "jihad tourists" from Europe and Turkey is a fascinating one. While these individuals typically express very strong personal religious beliefs, they often lack the theological skills needed to define which tradition of Islam they support. In this, interestingly, they are quite similar to most Central Asian recruits to the IMU and IJU. They are certainly not religious scholars, and usually have had no real contact with such theologians.

The IMU and IJU in Afghanistan

The fact that both the IMU and IJU continued to maintain networks for recruitment and presumably smuggling in the Central Asian republics and in Europe did not mean that they neglected the war in Afghanistan. Both groups continued to support jihadist activities against Afghan security forces and foreign troops there.

On January 3, 2008, the IJU claimed to have attacked British troops in Paktika province, Afghanistan. On March 3, the IJU announced on a Turkish website that a second-generation Turk living in Germany had carried out a suicide attack on American and Afghan troops in the same province. In April, this was followed by a video call for jihad by Eric Breininger, the German convert then in an IJU camp in Waziristan. Then the IJU claimed responsibility for two other suicide attacks (on May 31 and June 4) in Jalalabad city and Khost province, respectively, the first
on an American convoy and the second on a military post.\textsuperscript{81} In the same year, the IJU also claimed responsibility for several additional attacks in Pakhta and Paktia provinces.\textsuperscript{82} There was then no longer any question of whether the IJU had begun to participate in the war in Afghanistan, at least in the named provinces, which formed part of the region traditionally dominated by the group's protector in Waziristan, the Haqqani network.\textsuperscript{83} However, from 2009, if not before, the IJU was also active in Kunduz province, further to the north. On May 12, 2009, two IJU operatives were arrested there.\textsuperscript{84}

This was a new development, since the IJU had not previously been known to fight in northern Afghanistan. However, later in the year, it seems that the IMU too had moved combat teams there. By October and November 2009, several reports mentioned that IMU fighters (usually only referred to as "Uzbeks and Chechens") had been killed in Kunduz, fighting German and Afghan troops.\textsuperscript{85} Whether or not the attribution by the security forces of these "Uzbeks and Chechens" to the IMU was correct remains unknown and should not be taken for granted, even though the IMU had a long history of fighting in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{86} Be that as it may, in December 2009 further details from the north followed. The Afghan National Security Directorate's press service stated that four IMU fighters led by Hafiz Nurillah, a resident of Faryab province, had been arrested.\textsuperscript{87} If correct, this would indicate that the IMU by then had acquired local roots in northern Afghanistan. In January 2010, reports suggested that armed groups comprising Chechens, Uzbeks, and Tajiks had moved into positions in Ghovr-Teppa, Kunduz province. Whether they belonged to the IMU or IJU was unknown; yet, the participation of Tajiks, and their identification as such by Afghan security forces, again suggested that networks that included local militants as well and not only foreign fighters may have been formed.\textsuperscript{88} By February 2010, IMU fighters were reported in Jowzjan province too.\textsuperscript{89} By April 2010, IMU fighters were noted in Baghlan province as well as in Kunduz province.\textsuperscript{90} In Baghlan province, the government forces had in May 2010 not yet gained control over the Ahmadzai area of Dahan-e Ghovri District, where Pakistanis, Chechen, Uzbek, and other foreign fighters were reported as being part of the resistance.\textsuperscript{91} By June 2010, IMU fighters were reported even in the hitherto fairly calm Balkh province.\textsuperscript{92}

Concluding Remarks

This brief history of the IMU and IJU shows that the two groups changed considerably in character on several occasions during the two decades in which their members have engaged in violence. Yet, many of their goals, tactics, and means of finance remained the same. The IMU and IJU accordingly remain a source of violence and instability in their many and varied areas of operations. Although the eyes of the world are focused on Afghanistan and Pakistan, it will not be enough to ensure stability there (in itself a difficult task). Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and to some extent Uzbekistan remain fragile states with militant networks closely connected to those south of their borders.

Uzbek extremists have played major roles in civil conflicts, such as in Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, and in transnational narcotics smuggling. In civil conflicts, they have indeed played the role of a foreign legion.
Uzbek extremists have also encouraged further radicalization as far away as in Turkey, Russia, and Europe. The existence of IMU and IMU bases in Waziristan has encouraged jihad tourism from Europe and Turkey to Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The IMU and JIU have been rivals for funds and recruits; however, now all original leaders are dead. It is likely that the causes of rivalry between the IMU and JIU will have died with them. The survivors will probably cooperate or even merge, since their networks already seem to overlap in many places and some of their members very possibly already collaborate on an individual basis. Any increased level of cooperation will probably be seen first in Afghanistan.

The IMU and JIU have been a catalyst for terror and instability. Their propensity for violence should not be ignored, nor their effect in pushing state structures into excessive repression in the name of combating terrorism. Indeed, the activities of Uzbek extremists have been central to the retention, and even strengthening, of authoritarianism within the Central Asian state structures, thereby directly preventing these states from acquiring any increased level of democracy and popular legitimacy. This was attained by the extremists through the role of catalyst rather than through direct participation in government. As in many other countries, including outside the region, the state confronted with terrorism responded with the tools at its disposal, including increased powers to the security services and harsher legislation. Although neither the IMU nor JIU ever stood a chance of assuming power in Central Asia, their negative impact on state development there, and elsewhere, has been considerable.

Yet, there is but little religious content in the statements issued by these groups. They employ Islamic vocabulary but display little or no theological reflection. Despite this lack of religious reflection, these groups have not encountered any difficulties in attracting new recruits to their cause. Mere faith in the righteousness of their cause and statements sprinkled with Islamic vocabulary but with little religious content have proven sufficient to inspire willing recruits from several, widely different cultural backgrounds. Group dynamics have enabled potential recruits first to radicalize, then to prepare themselves psychologically for battle and death for each other and the cause. The armed struggle has seemingly become a goal in itself and may no longer be regarded as a means to build an Islamic society. Religious reflection and motivation has been exchanged for faith in the righteousness of one’s comrades, the group, and its cause. Participation in armed jihad has become not one among several religious activities, but the one religious act that is believed to lead to salvation.

Notes


11. Fredholm, *Islamic Extremism as a Political Force*, pp. 21–23, which also reprints the declaration of jihad in the original Arabic and in translation.


16. On the events in Andijan, see Shirin Akiner, *Violence in Andijan*, 13 May 2005 (London, June 7, 2005). Her report was subsequently published as Shirin Akiner, *Violence in Andijan, 13 May 2005: An Independent Assessment* (Washington, DC, & Uppsala: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, July 2005). The media’s somewhat one-sided focus on repression in the Central Asian states, in particular in Uzbekistan, has influenced the international community in several ways. First, any information received from Central Asian law enforcement organs will routinely be treated as unsubstantiated, regardless of content. While it has to be said that such information at times is biased and
incorrect, it would appear unwise to disregard all information derived from these sources simply because they have received a bad press. Second, the way the situation in Uzbekistan in particular has been framed in the Western media means that Western governments can refuse asylum to Uzbekistani citizens only with great difficulty, or not at all, even if they are known or suspected terrorists, since there are difficulties in separating bona fide refugees escaping from persecution by authoritarian government from terrorists and extremists fleeing from bona fide Central Asian counterterrorism efforts.

19. Kommersant, May 13, 2006; IWPR’s Reporting Central Asia 448, June 19, 2006; Sanobar Shermatova, “IMU May Return into Politics Only If and When the Existing Geopolitical Parity in Central Asia Is Ruined,” Ferghana.ru, February 8, 2008. The captive was identified as 30-year-old Abdulrahim Khojeyev from the Syrdarya region of Uzbekistan. His name is a common one, but it is possible that the Kyrgyzstanis, perhaps wrongly, connected him with the already mentioned IMU leader Ilhoom Hojiyev, alias Commander Abduhakim, the relative of the late Namangan.
21. In Sweden, e.g., no less than 530 people born in Uzbekistan received asylum in 2005. In comparison, in the period 1994–2001 this number varied between 16 and 32 per year, rising to between 57 and 120 annually in the period 2002–2004. SCB national statistics.
26. See, e.g., Guido Steinberg, A Turkish al-Qaeda: The Islamic Jihad Union and the Internationalization of Uzbek Jihadism (Center for Contemporary Conflict, n.d. (July 2008)).
28. See, e.g., Steinberg, A Turkish al-Qaeda.
29. Yo’ldosh was, for instance, shown with Hakimullah Mehsud in a video released by the IMU’s media wing, Studio Jundullah. NEFA Foundation website, www.nefafoundation.org.
31. Hindustan Times, October 3, 2009. There have been conflicting reports on both the date of the drone attack and on whether Yo’ldosh survived or not. However, the appointment of a new head would seem to confirm his death before this date.
37. Jalolov was born on April 1, 1972, Buranov on October 11, 1983. Details on the various names, aliases, and addresses of the IJU leaders, and criminal charges against them, were published in, among others, United Nations Security Council Al-Qaeda and Taliban Sanctions Committee, SC/109396, April 23, 2008; United States Department of the Treasury, press release hp-1035; June 18, 2008; Office of Foreign Assets Control, Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons, Financial Institution Letter III, 60–2008 (Washington, DC: Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation [FDIC], June 26, 2008).

38. In June 2008, an IJU video claimed that one Uzbek IJU member had taken part already in IMU’s 1999 attack in Kyrgyzstan, and later had fought in Afghanistan against the Northern Alliance and then against Coalition forces. Nichols, Central Asia’s Security, p. 9.

39. See, e.g., Steinberg, A Turkish al-Qaeda.

40. He was probably killed on January 29, 2008, in North Waziristan, according to the Pakistani military. See, e.g., CNN, January 31, 2008; Steinberg, A Turkish al-Qaeda.


42. See, e.g., the presentation to the British Parliament by Home Office Minister Hazel Blears, October 13, 2005.


44. AP, July 27, 2004; Cerwyn Moore, “Uzbek Terror Networks: Germany, Jarnat and the IJU,” Terrorism Monitor 5:21 (November 2007). Yet another member was mentioned as being called Abu Muhammad.


46. See, e.g., Steinberg, A Turkish al-Qaeda.

47. The communiqué was as before conveyed by Hazratqul Khudoyberdi through the website www.centrasia.ru, May 13, 2005.


49. See, e.g., Economist, September 8, 2007; Der Spiegel, September 12, 2007, October 9, 2007 (www.spiegel.de). The group was reportedly first identified by the NSA. The operation was later handled by a joint CIA and German task force set up in Berlin. See also Moore, “Uzbek Terror Networks”; Logvinov, “Islamische Dschihad-Union.”


51. The September 11, 2007, communiqué was posted on www.shadetvakti.com (“Time for Martyrdom”), now defunct. The IJU has also posted information on www.shadetvakti.com (in Turkish) and the more general jihadist websites www.sodiqlar.com (in Uzbek) and www.chaderi.net (in Turkish). The first communiqué posted on Turkish websites seems to be dated April 2007. Logvinov, “Islamische Dschihad-Union.”

52. See, e.g., Steinberg, A Turkish al-Qaeda.
55. See, e.g., the movement’s various websites.
   zaman.com, October 23, 2009.
   military reports covering the war in Afghanistan that in July 2010 were exposed by the
   According to this initial report, Batalov was unknowingly going to be used as a suicide
   bomber.
59. NEFA Foundation website, www.nefafoundation.org; NEFA release date, September 23,
   2009, original date: May 21, 2007.
   Turkish al-Qaeda: Ronald Sandee, The Islamic Jihad Union (IJU)* (NEFA Foundation,
   October 14, 2008), p. 15.
62. GEO TV Pakistan (www.geotv.tv), September 17, 2009; Bill Roggio, “Two al Qaeda Leaders
   org), September 16, 2009; Badr at-Tawheed communiciqué, September 27, 2009 (www.
   sehadetvakati.com).
63. RIA Novosti, May 26, 2009; Deirdre Tynan, “Uzbekistan: Kyrgyz Officials Deny Islamic
   org); Der Spiegel (www.spiegel.de), June 5, 2009. See also Nichols, *Central Asia Security*,
   p. 6.
64. In a communiciqué dated July 3, 2009, Logvinov, “Islamische Dschihad-Union.”
65. Roman Muzalevsky, “Kyrgyz Operation Against IMU Reveals Growing Terrorist Threat,”
   *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, July 1, 2009.
66. Deirdre Tynan, “Uzbekistan: Authorities Link Tashkent Shootout in August to Islamic
67. Interfax, June 4, 2010. The same news report indicated that some 15 suspected members
   of the IMU were convicted in Tajikistan each year.
68. Fredholm, *Islamic Extremism as a Political Force*.
69. For a list of terrorist attacks in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan in the period
   2004–2009, not all of which can be attributed to the IMU or JII, see Sanderson, Kimmage,
70. Abdul Ghaffar El Almani [Eric Breininger], *Mein Weg nach Jannah* (ElfiMedya, posted
   online on May 5, 2010), p. 106.
71. Sandee, *Islamic Jihad Union*, p. 11. Sandee does not provide a source for this statement,
   and Breininger never identifies the mosque in his memoirs.
72. Abdul Ghaffar El Almani [Eric Breininger], *Mein Weg*, pp. 82–85.
73. NEFA Foundation website, www.nefafoundation.org; NEFA release date January 29, 2009,
   original date: September 2008.
75. Abdul Ghaffar El Almani [Eric Breininger], *Mein Weg*, p. 102.
76. Ibid., pp. 103–104. The implication of this, and his choice of languages, is that he also
   foresaw attacks in Germany itself.
82. Sandez, Islamic Jihad Union, pp. 16–17; based on IJU communiqués.
84. Kunduz Executive Summary, September 15, 2009 (Program for Culture & Conflict Studies).
85. See, e.g., Afghan Islamic Press news agency (Peshawar), October 11, 2009; Reuters, October 20, 2009; Pajhwok Afghan News (Kabul), November 5, 2009.
86. Doubts on whether the Afghan security forces in fact could correctly identify if they customarily referred to as “Uzbeks and Chechens” were also expressed by foreign intelligence officers in Afghanistan, for instance, among the secret US military reports exposed by the Wikileaks website. See Report Key EDD3627E-B5D4-417E-B086-CBEDA384FB08, document AFG20071009m1041. According to this report, “PRT CO spoke with ANP 6 today regarding his comments in an open source report on the 5 OCT air strike in Sarobi. In the source, ANP 6 stated that 16 Uzbek fighters were killed and one was captured; however, this conflicted with TF Eagles own assessment of the fighters and the BDA. ANP 6 received his intelligence from the Sarobi Chief of Police, and it seems likely that the COP and the locals assumed the fighters were Uzbeks only because they did not speak Pashto. TF Eagle identified the fighters as Turkish based off of SIGINT and the 1 captured EWIA.”
88. Avesta (Dushanbe), January 22, 2010, citing the governor of Kunduz province. The Tajiks may of course have come from Tajikistan.
89. Shamshad TV (Kabul), February 10, 2010, citing the governor of Jowzjan province.