

Evaluating Islam's role in Central Asia

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Abstract: Since the fall of Communism the countries of Central Asia, once Soviet Republics, have remerged independent. No longer bound by the constraints of Soviet Ideology, Islam, which has been traditionally considered the region's dominant religion, has seen a comeback since the breakup of the USSR. Owing to the region's unique history of being a crossroads of cultures along the famed Silk Road, Islam's contributions and history in this area have long been overlooked, scholars focusing instead on the region of its origins; the Middle East. The decades-long imposition of secular ideology has created an indigenous form of the faith in which tolerance has been mostly prevalent, however exposure to more radical Islam in the region has and will continue to effect change in Central Asian Islam. This shift is exemplified in the policies of governments in the region such as Uzbekistan, whose particularly repressive policies have made governments in the region uneasy about future stability. Nevertheless, the transnational jihadist narrative has still yet to make solid inroads in this region in a way that threatens its immediate stability with the local peoples of the respective countries being more concerned with corruption and stability; however it is up to the governments and, to a degree, the international community to ensure that it stays that way.

Overview of Central Asia: Central Asia extends from the Caspian Sea in the west to the borders of western China in the east, and from the borders of Russia in the north to those of Afghanistan, Iran, and China in the south. The region consists of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan,

Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, which are all former Soviet Republics.¹ The five major ethnic groups are Uzbek, Kazakh, Tajik, Turkmen, and Kyrgyz, respectively. Additionally, as a result of the historical occupation from Russia, a sizeable number of Ukrainians and Russians have lived in the area, thus painting a multi ethnic tapestry.² Islam has been the dominant religion in the region for centuries, but has developed indigenously because of its geographic location in Central Asia along the Silk Road in which many cultures met one another. Combined with the fact that Communism is secular, the region's form of Islam has developed in a way found nowhere else in the world.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, Central Asia which was isolated for decades was reintegrated into the greater Muslim Community. It allowed Muslims in the region to reconnect with their brethren and led to become exposed to other forms of their faith, including more radical interpretations. Political mobilization fueled by radical interpretations of Islam is limited in Central Asia and has not seen the scale like it has in the Middle East; most often it is even more of a response to political repression rather than a self started movement. Nevertheless, governments in the region have used this as an excuse to crack down on subversive activities, in spite of their own efforts to co opt Islam as a source of their legitimacy. Also authoritarianism and corruption have continued to persist over the years, increasing the amount of discontentment and fostering radicalization. This has given governments in the region more excuses to crack down on human rights.

The attacks of September 11th on US soil proved to be a blessing in this regard for Central Asian governments, and particularly Uzbekistan which is considered to be among the most repressive among the governments in the region. This is because it provided Uzbekistan the opportunity to

piggyback off of the US led War on Terror by offering to host bases in support of operations in Afghanistan and further increase its own repressive practices. Consequently it would be in the interest of the United States to address the legacy of its presence in Central Asia and maintain the region's tradition of secularism and unique form of Islam, which has been known for its tolerance and innovation. Much of it could one day serve as a model for the Middle East. The issue of radicalization in Central Asia is pressing more than ever, the Islamic State has managed to draw recruits worldwide and it could only be a matter of time before the group makes inroads in the region. A failure to address it could result in another part of the world engulfed with religious violence and instability. There are differing perspectives of the extent of the threat of radicalization in Central Asia. This paper will examine both arguments though it tends lean toward the side of caution which others may differ, but also emphasize that such may not be the case depending on actions taken to curb it and future trends.

Objective

The purpose of this paper is twofold: First it will examine the arguments regarding the extent of radicalization in the region. Secondly it will look at Islam's history in Central Asia and understand its unique role as well as look at the conditions today presently posing a risk to the stability of the region, while Central Asia is not a hotspot for jihadist activity now with the rise of the Islamic State whose intentions to build a global caliphate this may not necessarily be the case forever.

Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical framework I have adopted for this paper is Constructivism because of its focus on identity formation and history, which is an integral part of the Islam narrative in Central Asia. Indeed by understanding how Central Asia's geographic position made it a crossroads for a number of people and cultures, which as a result produced some of the greatest Islamic thinkers and enabled tolerance and moderation as religious values. In addition, the decades of occupation of the Soviet Union in the region have also played a tremendous part in contributing to a secular mindset, as well as prevented Central Asians from thinking of themselves as part of a nation.

Methodology

This paper will use a multi faceted approach and will follow a chronological view of the history of the region from Islam's arrival, through the end of the Soviet Union, and up to the present day. More recent events such as the Tajik civil war and Uzbekistan's political repression will also be considered. In addition, it will be reviewing the arguments regarding the extent of the radicalization of the region. By taking a comprehensive view in this manner we can understand how Central Asia's history has given rise to distinct factors and nuances which are not found elsewhere along with its unique challenges and advantages it faces when it comes to Islam today.

Reviewing the Arguments For and Against Radicalization of the Region:

Central Asia is not an area that receives a lot of attention compared to Africa, the Middle East or the Far East, because it has traditionally been of much less strategic and economic interests to the United States in comparison. In fact, it is an area that the US could not exert any influence over until recently, given that it was part of the Soviet Union up until two decades ago. However, with the newfound independence of Central Asia, the geopolitical realities of the region's richness in

natural resources--such as oil in the case of Kazakhstan³ --, and recent efforts from both Russia and China to court the respective governments, it is doubtful that the United States will remain out of the picture. A presence in Central Asia could even help keep control over neighboring Afghanistan whose stability remains an important security guarantee.

In examining the debate about the extent of radicalization in Central Asia, I will be relying mainly off of *The Myth of Post-Muslim Radicalization in the Central Asian Republics*, written by John Heathershaw and David W Montgomery, and published by the Royal Institute's of International Affairs, which provides a comprehensive argument against the claims that radicalization in Central Asia should be of concern In contrast, in order to review the arguments supporting that radicalization is a serious issue, I will be using the International Crisis Group's reports, which in fact provide a counter argument against Montgomery and Heathershaw's thesis. In summary, Heathershaw and Montgomery's rebuttal of the notion that Central Asia is experiencing an Islamic extremism problem is based on the claim that there is little evidence to support this fact. They identify six misconceptions that analysts make when talking about Islamic radicalism: 1) There is a post-Soviet Islamic Revival 2) To Islamize is to Radicalize 3) Authoritarianism and poverty cause radicalization 4) Underground Muslim groups are radical 5) Radical Muslim groups are globally networked; and 6) Political Islam opposes a secular state.⁴

The first claim is that post Soviet Central Asia is experiencing an Islamic revival. Since the collapse of the USSR Islam has made a return to the region as indicated by the creation of new

Islamic parties, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and conflicts in Chechnya which have sprung up in a vacuum along with the number of mosques that have spread across the region and the open display of Islamic culture both in private and open walks of life. .

Heathershaw and Montgomery acknowledge that their research has shown that observable expressions of faith such as building new mosques, Islamic parties and dress have risen. They cite in a survey they conducted that 43% of respondents claimed to pray more than they did prior to independence. Despite this Heathershaw and Montgomery argue that Islam never went away and continued to be a social force even in the Soviet era. While the USSR imposed restrictions on religious practice and modified certain forms of religious learning's, thus pushing toward a privatized version of Islam, the Russians followed the same practice that local rulers had been doing for centuries in co opting the religion rather than suppressing it; although this briefly occurred in the 1920s and 1930s. Overall, this sort of national secularism is something that has emerged in multiple Islamic countries including Turkey and Indonesia⁵

The second claim stems from the first that a post Islamic revival will lead towards greater radicalization owing to a more observant Muslim population than to a secular one. The authors cite a quote from one of ICG's reports *Kyrgyzstan: Widening Ethnic Divisions in the South* (2012), a local Uzbek claiming his brethren "had turned on themselves and Allah"⁶ Another report talks about Tajikistan showing increased outward signs of visible observant Islam and refuse to listen to un-Islamic music. In this use of anecdotal Heathershaw and Montgomery accuse the IGC of making broad sweeping generalizations that to Islamize automatically equates to radicalize. They further support this accusation by citing a briefing in 2009 "The term Islamist in this report is used to refer to political activists with an agenda of applying Islamic

law, through peaceful democratic means, through missionary work, through nonviolent advocacy or through violent jihad.”⁷ Heathershaw and Montgomery point out that this causative association between Islamization and radicalization despite the lack of evidence is something governments in the region do all the time and have used as an excuse to crack down on any political groups under the fear that increasing public display of Islam will automatically lead the population to radicalize citing Uzbekistan as a prime example of this. The tendency to put an antagonistic relationship between Islam and the state shows ignorance of how Islam has functioned in Central Asia in the past. Once again citing surveys the authors themselves conducted, it was found that only 6% reported an increase of prayer during times of political crisis, and of those who claimed that religion influences behavior “a lot”, only 30% pray only on special occasions or during times of crises. As such, Heathershaw and Montgomery maintain that there is little evidence to support this viewpoint.⁸

The third claim—that authoritarianism and poverty cause radicalization—is accepted to apply worldwide and rarely questioned. Citing IGC’s report in 2011 *Central Asia: Decay and Decline*, in which it is stated that Central Asian governments would do well if able to address the failure of services, including basic necessities, bad living conditions, lack of economic opportunity, and corruption of public officials⁹. Heathershaw and Montgomery dismiss this narrative as typical western discourse among policy analysts and is a view often held by leaders of the Central Asian governments themselves as well as western ones, and that there is no evidence to otherwise support this claim. While they acknowledge some support for extremist groups in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan; one is the region’s wealthiest and the other is the poorest and also the most democratic by respected indexes, but points out Turkmenistan is the most authoritarian yet has

not seen any major acts of extremism. Uzbekistan, which also has a highly authoritarian regime, has managed to eject with success the most extremist groups from the country. In the case of Tajikistan, during the civil war, Heathershaw and Montgomery argue that the most violent organizations were minor players in the overall conflict. Overall, Heathershaw and Montgomery believe the argument that authoritarianism and poverty cause radicalization to be overstated.¹⁰

The fourth claim which Heathershaw and Montgomery dispute is that all underground Muslim groups are radical. Many Muslim groups are outlawed, and while western analysts may make the distinction between those who employ violence versus those who don't, most Muslims groups have been labeled less than one single term--radical--, even when there is no evidence to support radicalization. They rebut the claim from IGC's 2009 report *Women and radicalization in Kyrgyzstan*, in which it is noted that repressive security measures by the government have inflamed tensions with radical Islamists such as HT (Hiz ut Tahrir)¹¹ In Heathershaw and Montgomery's opinion, there is little evidence to support this accusation and that groups like Hiz ut Tahrir remain localized and isolated, unable to mobilize people to a critical mass.¹²

The fifth and final claim is that radical Muslim groups are globally networked, playing to the narrative of the global war on terror. The most common statistic cited to support this is 32 people from the former Soviet Union were among the 800 captured by US forces during the first four years of the global war on terror. This is the most compelling argument made that Muslim groups have been integrated into the global jihadist networks. Furthermore, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), one of the forces allied with the Taliban, is used as a prominent example to back the claim that Central Asian groups are globally networked. However,

Heathershaw and Montgomery point out there is a lack of direct evidence to support this idea and that much of it comes from websites whose information is hard to verify. Regardless, this is taken as a given by a wide range of people including security analysts, liberal academics, and the central Asian governments themselves. Heathershaw and Montgomery argue for a more complex viewpoint pointing out that none of the IMU's members were captured in their country of origin, but rather in Pakistan or Afghanistan, and that the group is Central Asian only in name. In addition, it has not had an active presence in the region since the beginning of the War on Terror in 2001.¹³

In the case of Hiz ut Tahrir, which is a transnational network, research indicates Central Asian governments are aware of how far the organization spans with their cause having a more local focus rather than globally. Heathershaw and Montgomery note that, while Central Asian fighters have gone to join ISIS, the region as a whole is still skeptical to global ideologies and networks. Many of the known names associated with radical Islam, including Osama Bin Laden, Said Qutb, Ayman Zawahiri etc. are not widely recognized in the region, with only 2 percent recognizing Qutb's name in Heathershaw's and Montgomery's survey. The most recognized names were Muhammad al-Bukhari and Ibn Sina, who are not known for their theological work in the Islamic tradition, but rather their place in the region's history, which further supports the idea that Central Asians view Islam in the context of their history rather than as a global movement.¹⁴

The final and sixth claim is the easiest one which is that political Islam opposes the secular state, thus falling on the common assumption that political Islam and secularism are inherently in

conflict with one another. Heathershaw and Montgomery point to an IGC report in 2009 that stated “radicalization would make keeping Kyrgyzstan a secular state more challenging”¹⁵ to make their argument. This debate, according to Heathershaw and Montgomery, is constructed often times by Central Asian governments themselves, rather than hinging on the reality; the people of these nations in fact often adhere to secular principles while at the same time privatizing their faith. Their survey indicates that 62% of those who believe religion influences them a lot also believe that religion should only be considered spiritual. Nonetheless, it was also found that 51% believe that state law should reflect religious law, which at first seems contradictory. But Heathershaw and Montgomery argue this demonstrates that recognizing secular and Islamic values are not mutually exclusive. Rather they show that religion should be used as a moral basis of authority shaping secularism. Heathershaw and Montgomery point out that this is not unique to Central Asian countries or even Islamic ones, and point to the United Kingdom as such an example.¹⁶

In conclusion of the literature review, Heathershaw and Montgomery conclude that there is little evidence to support discontent with secularism in Central Asia; they further claim that there is a failure both within and outside of Central Asia in respect to the governments’ activities , which are yet essential to understand the complexities in which Islam and secularism blend with one another. The myth of post Islamic revival, they believe, isn’t so much attributed to Islamphobia but simply that modern political discourse fails to recognize the particular nuances of this region. Furthermore, 0.1 percent of all global terrorist attacks took place in Central Asia. Additionally, out of the State Department’s Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations, only two have any relation to the post soviet republics; the IMU and its splinter Islamic Jihad Union.¹⁷

However, these organizations have largely been inactive in the region and are best understood according to Heathershaw and Montgomery, and largely products of politics of Pakistan and Afghanistan, even though their membership has people from Central Asia in its ranks. It is important to note that Heathershaw and Montgomery draw a difference between Central Asia and the North Caucasus where Islamic groups pose as a real regional problem. The myth of post Islamic revival they believe supports the regimes in many Central Asian countries as an excuse to strengthen their own domestic apparatuses and use foreign governments as a way of supporting them.¹⁸

Arrival of Islam in Central Asia

Islam has been a part of Central Asia's history since the 7th Century AD, when Arab invaders under the Umayyad Caliphate first entered the region from the Middle East with the conquering of Khorasan.¹⁹ Gradually, after consolidating their position, they moved outwards under Qutayba Ibn Muslim, the governor of Khorasan, who began an aggressive military campaign to subject the rest of the region all the way to the far borders of China.. Qutayba also began to undertake efforts to convert the local populations to Islam. Initially, it was a quite brutal process which included destruction of religious monuments, especially that of Zoroastrianism, but the conversion to Islam eventually gave way to more moderate methods.²⁰ The integration of new lands under the same command helped increase commercial and cultural ties across different communities, but also spurred more and more spreading of the faith.. By the beginning of the 9th century, due to the successful efforts of bringing the region under the control of the Caliphate, Merv became the capital from AD 813 to 817.²¹ Toward the end of the century, the first independent Muslim

Dynasty of Central Asia, after almost 100 years in power, would be overthrown by a Turkic rival dynasty, whom had already converted to Islam previously.²²

The result from the Arab invasions and from the local converts of the faith themselves, ensured that Islam was firmly established in the region by the mid 9th century. The majority of followers belonged to a Sunni school known as the Hanafi School.²³ This led to a number of scholars contributing to jurisprudence and Islamic philosophy, as well as the sciences, and whose names include al-Bukhari (compiler of one of the fundamental collections of the Traditions other Prophet, still revered and consulted today), at-Tirmizi, al-Farghani and al-Khwarezmi of the ninth century, and al-Farabi, al-Biruni and Ibn Sina (Avicenna) of the tenth century.²⁴

Sufism also made its way into Central Asia shortly after the Arab conquests, with the first major figure being Yusuf Hamadani.²⁵ Spending the first parts of his life in the Middle East, he later found his way to Central Asia and established a monastery in Merv that was known as the Kaba of Khorasan. Two orders of thought were derived from his teachings: one from Ahmad Yasavi, and one from Baha-ad-Din-Naqshbandi. These orders would grow beyond the borders of Central Asia; the first would find adherents in the Turkic world, and the second would gain influence in India and China, and as of recent times in Western Europe. Two important distinctions between the Yasavi and Naqshbandi orders was that one practiced a hidden set of devotions while the other was the opposite. The Yasavi tended to have more of an appeal among the Turkic speaking regions of Central Asia, in particular among the nomad populations, whereas the Naqshbandi tended to have a much greater effect on the sedentary Iranian speaking population.²⁶ This among many others was an example of the rich Islamic tradition which developed in Central Asia.

Russian Conquest and its long lasting Impact

The Russian conquest of Central Asia and rule under the Soviet Union would have an impact on the region which can still be felt today. While the secularizing force of Communism inhibited Islam, it never crushed the religion; most attempts from Soviet authorities occurred under Stalin, and became less severe shortly after World War 2. Russia's relationship with Central Asia began when Russians were still under Mongolian rule. During their course of conquest, Mongols gradually converted to Islam. The Russians then drew a relationship between Islam and the Mongols, referred to as Tatars, and concluded that in order to keep the rest of Europe from suffering the humiliation they experienced, it was necessary to go on the offensive .²⁷

Under Tsar Ivan IV, Russians began expanding into the region, starting with the conquest of a Tatar stronghold of Kazan, and then further into southern Siberia and the Caucasus. The most northern steppes they hold at the time became Kazakhstan in the 18th century, though much of the rest of Central Asia at this time was still untouched. With the Crimean War putting a halt in the Balkans to Russian expansion, they began to move south. Their military campaign was quite successful and met little resistance. Major cities fell into Russian hands, including: Chimkent, Tashkent, Bukhara, Khiva, Kokand, and Mary.²⁸ Some cities such as Bukhara and Khiva were granted limited autonomy in return to ceding some of their lands. However, not all were as fortunate. The Khanate of Kokand for instance was put under direct control of Russian authorities.²⁹

The Tsarist regimes approach to Islam was divided into two categories; those in the northern steppe's region who tended to be nomadic and those of the sedentary population in the area known as Transoxiana.³⁰ The nomads of the northern steps, who are known today mainly as Kazakh and Kyrgyz's, had been Islamic for a long time before the Russian invasion and due to

their syncretic approach, the Tsarist regime thought it prudent to publicly show support for the faith in order to win the loyalty of the people there. To help consolidate the faith among the various tribes, Tatar missionaries, who had been previously conquered since the mid 16th century and belonged to Hanafi School like the Kazakh's, were brought to introduce a more orthodox version of Islam to the area.³¹ Despite sharing the same school, this did not go over well initially with Kazakhs being accustomed to a less dogmatic way of life; but with the support of the Tsarist government who funded the construction of several mosques, which ultimately led to a gradual change in the workings of religious authority, Kazakhs adapted. However, in the mid 19th century, the policy changed and Russian authorities--who were taken back by the level of fervor of the Tartarian missionaries--decided to try to convert the Kazakh population to Christianity. This ultimately met little success if not for placing restrictions on religious practice and approving only certain precepts of the faith, a tradition which has been continued by Central Asian governments to this day.³²

In Transoxiana, due to the successive victories by Tsarist troops, the region came under control relatively quickly, in part due to infighting among the local powers which led to a more positive relationship between the native peoples and the Russians. As a result, Governor General Chernayev issued a proclamation prepared in Turkic that inhabitants of Tashkent should act in accordance with the teachings of Muhammad, and that the faith should be openly observed and taught. Governor General Chernayev even went as far to honor the warriors who had acted with bravery against the Russian forces. Because a more cohesive set of Islamic institutions was already in place, the restructuring of power by Russian authorities was relatively easy and practice was largely left as it was. Sharia Law and its courts, for instance, were given a fair amount of autonomy, with the exception of some of the more serious crimes.³³

Soviet rule came to Central Asia starting in Tashkent in September 1917, after the collapse of the Tsarist Empire. The region had previously been experiencing a period of instability due to alienation of the populations as a result of the heavy hardships the war effort had imposed on them, and a major insurrection was launched but brutally suppressed. What had become Tsarist-controlled Turkestan became an administrative unit in 1918 known as “The Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Republic”. However, this was disrupted by a civil war and it would take another effort by Soviet forces to regain control. In 1920, Bukhara and Khiva’s leaders were removed and renamed People’s Republics, respectively, and by 1924 all of Central Asia was divided into five political administrative regions who became the states we know today as Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan.³⁴ From Lenin, onward through Stalin, the CCP made a concerted effort to replace Islam through Communism and Russianization; however, repression was lifted after World War Two in response to Stalin’s death, and a trend of cooperation and reconciliation followed. The Soviet took a more accommodating attitude toward Islam by allowing a state sanctioned version of it, while at the same time controlling what elements they deemed subversive.^{35 36}

Islam in Central Asia Post USSR Breakup

With the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, Central Asia has seen a revival of Islam after almost seventy years of religious and political repression. Even with its best efforts, Russia was unable to root out the deep-seeded Islamic traditions, which had been in place for hundreds of years. However, repression still continues on behalf of certain Central Asian governments such as Uzbekistan, which has made good use of Washington’s war on terror as an excuse to crack

down at dissidents at home. Looking at three of the Central Asian states, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, we can see how each has responded to Islamic revivalism.

Tajikistan gained its independence in 1991 and saw an outbreak of a bloody civil war due to the repression of the opposition by the ruling Communist party. The war came to an end in 1998 due to a negotiated ceasefire. In return for allocating 30% of all state positions to the opposition party, Protestants were to renounce violent actions; Tajikistan thus took the unusual position of incorporating extremist forces in the government. However, the opposition also had its share of liberals and democrats, which in turn balanced out the fundamentalists. The result of the civil war had far reaching consequences beyond Tajikistan, and as a result other Central Asian governments chose to ban Islamic parties.³⁷³⁸ This, however, and despite its more liberal approach to Islam, has not stopped the Tajik authorities from imposing certain restrictions such as ordering all Islamic men to shave, and banning headscarves in classrooms.³⁹⁴⁰

Since its independence Uzbekistan has taken a hard-line stance, dictated by President Islam Karimov, who has moved to crush any opposition to his rule. Frightened by the civil war in neighboring Tajikistan, Karimov feared a strong opposition that could challenge his rule, and when protesters assembled in 1992 at Namangan, his response was to outlaw any opposition with authorities. He then rounded up thousands of Muslims for detention and torture.⁴¹ Ironically, Karimov's policies caused many Uzbeks to flee to Afghanistan and Tajikistan where they helped formed the IMU which is an ally of the Taliban. As of 2003 it is estimated that 6,500 people are in jail in Uzbekistan due to their religious or political beliefs.⁴² President Karimov has also used the Soviet experience of creating an official state sanctioned version of Islam called the Committee of Religious Affairs, which is essentially a replica of the Soviet Islamic Central

Asian Directorate.⁴³ It is unlikely that President Karimov's policies will change anytime soon, especially given the rise of the Islamic State. It is likely that he will use this as further excuse to maintain his oppressive rule.

Kazakhstan has had a different experience than Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Out of the Central Asian nations it is the most secularized. While the country has not been immune to the political and economic issues that the other Central Asian nations have, it has been able to maintain a more level headed approach to this issue by acknowledging its Islamic heritage, and by not trying to restrict religion in the private or personal sphere. It has also taken a more narrow approach to Islamic radicalism, and has sought to isolate radicals versus targeting broad swaths of society. When the Kazakhstan's government attempted to pass a bill in 1999 to tighten control, it caused widespread protests and as a result the government backed down, which is unlike in Uzbekistan where protesters were met with force.⁴⁴ Overall, Kazakhstan has had the least tumultuous time in transitioning from Soviet rule to independence.

Future Trends in Central Asia

The future for Islam in Central Asia is a complicated one; while radicalization still is not a widespread problem nor has that been the case in the region, threats traditionally from outside such as the Islamic State could start making its way deeper into the interior, creating a problem stemming from external influences rather than internal ones. While corruption and lack of economic opportunities will undoubtedly continue to be an issue for Central Asians, this does not mean that progress will not be made in these areas in the future. The West would do well to

continue to push the governments in the region to respect human rights, particularly Uzbekistan, and not base its foreign policy on geopolitical calculations as it did after 9/11. Central Asia's experience with Islam still represents a model of hope for a place like the Middle East where sectarian conflict and radicalism is still very much an issue. Perhaps, in the future, governments and societies there will use the opportunity to learn from the Central Asian Islam narrative.

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