

An Analysis of the Relationship between Economic Indicators and Tendency toward Radical Islam in Central Asia

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Abstract

Following the collapse of the former Soviet Union, the reunion of millions of Central Asian Muslims with the rest of the Islamic World drew considerable attention from analysts. The collapse not only triggered the independence of five Central Asian republics, but also turned Islam from being the faith of the minority (since it was not fully demonstrating itself during the Soviet era) to the official religion of the majority. The fact that religion like nationalism could be a strong element of political identity began to be considered as a defining feature of foreign policy in Central Asian contemporary International Relations. In other words, return of the five republics was to a level that their new Islamic face started to be a distinctive feature of national identity for them. In such a context, central Asian states by enacting new regulations, besides putting limitations on Islamic activities, scrutinized religious organizations. Government pressures multiplied via continued economic crisis, overarching administrative corruption, local official corruption, insufficient infrastructures and other issues resulted in strengthening radical tendencies amongst large groups of Central Asian inhabitants specially the youths who were marginalized due to an unfavorable situation in their societies. The aforementioned reasons as well as ISIS' strategic propaganda and its special approaches (such as the promise of a better life and position in comparison with Russia, providing incentives and promoting social standing) in the region has helped the group successfully implement its media warfare. Therefore, different reasons can be raised when considering Muslims orientation toward radical fundamentalist Islam. The paper tries to investigate the relationship between economic factors and tendency toward radical Islam in the five

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commonwealth Central Asian republics. It can be said that economic factors in general and economic poverty in particular have influenced in two distinctive ways the tendency toward radical Islam in Central Asia: first, it has presented an incompetent picture of the governments, hastening the radical-fundamentalist movements; second of all, it has forced the Central Asian governments, already facing severe economic conditions, to seek the exploitation of ethnic identities and nationalism. But considering their severe economic problems, nationalism has not turned into a national movement and has many Islamic features, resulting in presenting the idea of Islamic socialism by some hardliners in the region.

Main question: is there any relationship between economic factors and tendency toward radical Islam in the five commonwealth Central Asian republics? (case study: ISIS). Hypothesis: in answering the research question, two main hypotheses are raised. Hypothesis 1: there is a significant relationship between economic development indicators of commonwealth countries and how ISIS used to absorb new members among them. Hypothesis 2: there is a significant relationship between economic development indicators in the commonwealth countries and tendency toward ISIS.

Research method: the present study based on research nature is considered to be a descriptive study of correlation type. Quantitative methods are used to collect research data especially secondary analysis method based on statistics of economic development from Polish Institute of International Affairs (2015). Research conclusion: findings of the study based on analytical-descriptive method show that as of the five studies Central Asian republics, Kyrgyzstan with 7.1 %; Tajikistan with 13.6 %; Kazakhstan with 17/9 %; Turkmenistan with 25.7 %, and Uzbekistan with 35.7 % have the lowest to highest fighters in ISIS respectively. The present study shows: (1) there is a statistical significant difference at 0.01 in economic indicators including employment rate, percent of population under poverty rate line, business activities indicator, per capita GDP, and business freedom indicator among the studied countries; (2) there is a statistical significant difference at 0.01 in economic indicators including employment rate, percent of population under poverty rate line, business activities indicator, per capita GDP, and business freedom indicators and tendency toward ISIS, among the studied countries. The level of economic development (as the general indicator) with -0.57 scales shows the significant correlation of the indicator with tendency toward ISIS. Regarding the analytical and experimental analysis of the present study, it can be said that following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, under which the Central Asian communities enjoyed a certain level of organization, communities in the region were deprived of the strengthening organization. In this context, the Islamic ideology that does not categorize humans based on ethnic origins, and acts as a unifying power, was faced with increasing

acceptance and a role of balancer. In this way, the Islamic movements of Central Asia gradually lost their nationalistic identity and became increasingly Islamic. Deteriorating economic situation all over the region, officials' inability to decrease the difficulties of ordinary people and severe crackdown has resulted in an increasing trend toward Islamism. Radical groups absorb marginalized poor inhabitants of Central Asia via multilayered propaganda which focuses on their severe economic difficulties, deep-rooted poverty, and inflation. These groups, in their propaganda depict themselves as leaders of redemption, provide an idealist worldview to the youth and promise to remove economic difficulties. As a result, Central Asia has become a safe zone for radical Islamic groups.

Keywords: Central Asia, Economic Indicators, ISIS, Radical Islam, Unemployment Rate.