

Terrorism without a God:

*Reconsidering
Radicalization
and Counter-
Radicalization
Models in Central
Asia*



by Noah Tucker

CAP papers, no. 225, September 2019



CENTRAL ASIA
PROGRAM

Institute for
European, Russian,
and Eurasian Studies

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Cover photo. Feruza was taken to join the IMU from Southern Kyrgyzstan to Afghanistan by her mother and stepfather when she was only 7 years old. She grew up in the IMU camps in Pakistan and was forced to marry one of the group's leaders when she was 13. She said early marriage "ruined my life." After several years, her new husband—a cleric who was a spiritual leader in the group—grew disillusioned with the group and its tactics and decided to defect. He helped her and their small children escape to Karachi, but he was caught helping them defect and was brutally executed by the same group to which he had devoted his life to giving spiritual guidance. Photo taken by the author in Istanbul, 2019.

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Terrorism without a God: Reconsidering Radicalization and Counter-Radicalization Models in Central Asia

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Foreign religious beliefs and practices are consistently cited by regional governments and “common sense” public discourse as the primary causal driver for Central Asian participation in violent extremist groups. Drawing upon three related sets of fieldwork and interview data—conducted between August 2016 and September 2018 in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan—this paper argues that mobilization of Central Asians to the conflict in Syria was rarely linked by respondents or available evidence to foreign missionary activity or external religious groups, and, more importantly, was not evenly distributed in terms of geography. Instead, mobilization in these three countries was significantly concentrated in identifiable zones wherein residents cited unresolved grievances that they framed in terms of “justice/injustice” and lacked alternative mechanisms to resolve or negotiate. This paper outlines an approach to conflict mobilization and socialization from the literature on ethnic conflict and non-Islamist terrorism, which focuses on personal social networks and perceived grievances as key factors that better explain the full spectrum of successful recruiting as well as its geographic concentration. As French scholar Olivier Roy found in patterns of recruiting to Syria in Europe, this paper argues that recent data support the conclusion that, in Central Asia, we should not be discussing the “radicalization of Islam,” but, rather, the “Islamization of radicalism.”

Introduction: Two Daughters Who Disappeared¹

During fieldwork in October 2017 in preparation for a new project, I came to Osh, Kyrgyzstan and in the space of a single day sat in the homes of two Uzbek families whose daughters and grandchildren are missing. Mohidilhon opa lives in the shadow of Mt Suleiman in Osh, a symbol of peace and spirituality for centuries and the site of ethnic conflict where dozens of homes around her burned to the ground in 2010. Mohidilhon's family escaped the conflict outside their door, but not the one hundred of miles away in Syria.

Mohidilhon wept as she showed us pictures of her daughter in law (*kelin*), a “modern” girl who played trumpet in her school's youth orchestra and later worked as a nurse, and her two beautiful grandchildren, Firdavs and Feruza. Her son and his wife, like so many of their neighbors, left to seek a better life in Russia after the conflict badly damaged the economy of the city. One day her daughter-in-law came home to visit with Firdavs and Feruza. Everything seemed as it should be: except when the *kelin* packed a few bags saying she was going to visit her own parents for a few days, she instead left her husband and family and took her children to Syria. For three years, Mohidilhon has watched in horror as ancient cities in Syria are destroyed in slow motion on her television, wondering if her grandchildren or the *kelin* she loved like her own daughter are still alive.

Later that day we went a few kilometers north of the city to the village of Nariman, where residents escaped the conflict in 2010 by working together to build improvised barricades to keep the fighting from spreading to the few streets that enter the village from the airport highway. They didn't not escape the aftermath, however: the tiny village was the site of one of the first post-conflict “mop-up operations” by police, who raided house after house, taking away young men and property on accusations of participating in the conflict in spite of their families' protests that they had been barricaded in their village. That day we first visited and several more after, in a small house on the edge of the village bordered by the cotton fields her family works, we met Ravshonhon opa, who wept, too, as she told the story of her daughter and grandchildren who are still alive somewhere in Syria or Iraq—trapped in a prison camp, unsure of who their captors are or what government they represent.

Ravshonhon describes with regret and self-accusation how because her husband was seriously ill she hadn't been able to look far and wide for a husband for her daughter and had accepted a marriage proposal from a neighboring family they had known their whole lives. The groom seemed like a nice enough boy, following Uzbek tradition and her understanding of Islamic faith, she gave her daughter to a family she knew and trusted. The couple had two children, and then in the winter of 2014-15 he announced that he had found work in Kazakhstan in a barber shop. They would go away for two months and be back in time to help with spring planting.

But instead of going to Kazakhstan, they disappeared. When Ravshonhon finally managed to call through to her daughter after days of trying, through her tears she explained that her husband had said they would fly via Istanbul because it would be “easier for her” with their small children. Once they arrived, instead of boarding the connecting flight some strange men met them at the airport and took them far away in a car.

Now she wasn't allowed to leave the house, couldn't read any of the signs in Arabic to know where she was, and only knew that "there is a war here." Ravshonhon's husband died after a prolonged illness, she wept as she described the way he had spent his last days looking out the window from his bed hoping to see his daughter walk back through the gate of their courtyard. Ravshonhon has gone to the police and the KNB, begging them to at least trace her daughter's weekly phone calls and tell her where she is, but gets no response. Now, she has a third grandchild she has only seen in pictures, born in a stateless space in Syria or Iraq in the middle of a foreign war.

From a research perspective, these are representative anecdotes. From a human perspective, they are tragedies that are strikingly difficult to explain or find meaning in.² One thing they are not, however, is unique to the area in which these families live: in each neighborhood or village where we began to ask neighbors for help finding directions to the home of someone who had lost a family member in Syria, the response was "which one?" These stories and the reoccurring pattern of geographic clustering they illustrate introduce two of the more difficult to explain aspects of violent mobilization or what we often call violent extremism in Central Asia, especially using the most common models applied by regional states, the public and the media.

Standard Explanatory Models for Radicalization and Some Shortcomings

The first aspect of these stories that may jump out at readers familiar with the most common explanation for what we usually call "radicalization" in Central Asia is that religion plays little or no role in the narratives of trajectories that led these two families with their children to a foreign war in Syria.

Neither Mohidilhon nor Ravshonhon mention atypical practices or some sudden increase in religiosity in their family members before their abrupt disappearance. Membership a new religious group or exposure foreign missionaries on the part of their loved ones didn't help explain their tragedy.

When we set up focus groups for the project I will discuss below in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, however, and did pre-research and interviews, it became clear that most people interviewed and every regional government believes that religion (foreign religion of some kind brought by foreign missionaries or locals exposed to foreign religious institutions) is the key factor predicting—and, they often argue—*causing* recruiting to violent extremism.

Yet, a large number of the cases as well as research from other contexts show that long-term religious practice—or past religious affiliation—is a poor or even negative predictor for extremist recruiting at the individual level. On the regional level, foreign missionary or recruiter activity is often entirely absent. Even in cases we examined in which specific self-identified religious groupings had adopted aggressive and separatist positions in relation to their government or society around them, well-informed local interlocutors were unable to identify any foreign source for the group or outside missionaries who had initiated the change in social behavior. Mohidilhon describes the daughter-in-law who took her grandchildren to Syria with the Uzbek word "*o'ruscha*"—a legacy term from the Soviet and colonial era that describes European or "modern" lifestyle and dress as "in the Russian way." No mysterious bearded Salafis or women in long black *chador* appear anywhere in these stories.

In light of the most common narratives used by both government officials and the general public about radicalization or recruiting to Syria, this lacuna stands out in sharp contrast. As researchers noted in the UNDP's recent literature review surveying strategies for countering violent extremism in Central Asia, states in the region uniformly headquarter their efforts for countering or preventing social violence in their Committees for Religious Affairs and their Islamic administrations.³

There has long been an institutional presumption that because twentieth and twenty-first century armed insurgent groups in the region — beginning with the IMU in the late 1990s and extending to ISIS in the present— mobilized around religious identity and claimed to speak in the name of Islam, theological convictions or religious beliefs are the primary *causal factor* in these mobilizations. But cases in which religious beliefs are either absent or unremarkable compared to unmobilized neighbors suggest a different framework is necessary to better explain the full spectrum of cases.

What if religious beliefs or identity are only secondary drivers, or tools used to create group identity for the purpose of *political* mobilization around grievances shared and articulated by non-religious political groups as well? In the terminology long used in development strategies to counter violent extremism or insurgency, focus is almost exclusively on ideology and identity as “push” factors that interact with the psychology of specific individuals. But what if in some areas, particularly where there are intractable political grievances that other groups fail to solve or negotiate, marginalized parts of the population are *pulled* into an insurgency that mobilizes around Islamic identity because they perceive this as the only effective (or even available) political mechanism to resolve their grievances?⁴

Following this line of argument, this paper will offer an alternative model for what we call radicalization in the Central Asian context—that is to say, the process by which individuals join groups that seek to radically change the political order within their society, country, or the world, and are willing to use violence to achieve those ends. If these groups seek to radically alter the political order, are they not political groups? Is it possible that, by overlooking their politics and focusing on religious beliefs or identities, we are missing an important part of the equation?

Drawing from Ethnic Conflict and Non-Islamist Terrorism—an Alternative Approach

Inspired by Rogers Brubaker's work on the origins of ethnic conflict and violent mobilization along ethnic lines in *Ethnicity Without Groups*, this paper will propose that we consider an analysis of the problem of violent Islamist extremism “without Islam.”⁵ I will not attempt to argue that religious symbols, rhetoric and belief are not part of the phenomenon of violent extremism in Central Asia. Rather, I argue that in many cases Central Asians are radicalized by social, political or personal circumstances, causing them to be open to or even seek out a group that offers radical solutions to these circumstances in a common cause around a salient identity they share or adopt. In some cases, this salient group identity is Islam.

The argument set forth here (and I am not the first to make it) is that the common analyses of terrorism in Central Asia, both on the official and the public level, *vastly overestimate* the causal role religious belief and specifically the Islamic faith play in violent extremist mobilization. This study will take an alternative approach, examining the phenomenon of radicalization (defined here as

recruitment to or support for terrorist organizations or insurrection) in Central Asia through the lens of revolutionary or insurgent movements that attempt to change political outcomes through violence.

In addition to using a comparative approach from studies of ethnic conflict, this paper draws on the body of research from sociology, political science, and social psychology on non-religious and non-Islamist insurgency or revolutionary groups that socialize recruits into adopting terrorist tactics similar to ISIS or al Qaida (in other words, radicalize them) without referring to Islamic identity or theology.

Building on evidence from recent regional fieldwork conducted in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan—as well as the existing literature and past work analyzing recruiting techniques aimed at Central Asians—this paper will proceed to argue that *grievance* and *personal networks* are stronger predictors of radicalization in Central Asia than religion or religiosity.⁶

While grievances vary widely in individual cases (as will be discussed below), the evidence from fieldwork and from other contexts suggests that *injustice* and *inequality* on the local and national level—as well as in the international order—are grievances that have been most successfully articulated by Islamic State messaging in particular. Their success in finding supporters and recruits within specific geographic areas in Central Asia reflects both their success in promising to address these grievances as well as a stark lack of other trusted mechanisms for citizens to seek resolutions outside the dominant administrative hierarchy and political economy.

1. Lessons from Mobilization in Ethnic and Non-Islamist Conflict

Ethnic conflicts of twentieth century—in particular, the Balkan war of the 1990s, which became the defining ethnic conflict for several generations of Western publics—were commonly understood to be driven by ethnic belonging as an essential and pre-existing factor in the “ancient hatreds” model usually employed to explain them on a public level and sometimes even by their participants.

This model holds that tensions or antipathy caused by physical proximity to other ethnicities—as well as competition for resources between groups with automatically oppositional identities from birth—were “long-simmering” and eventually “boil[ed] over”. In this model, the resulting conflict is a process that has its own essential logic, just as a kettle of water on a stove will inevitably boil when enough heat is applied.

The “ancient hatreds” explanatory model for ethnic conflict has long been criticized, however, because it fails to explain why these supposedly “essential enmities” in fact very rarely result in conflict. Likewise, it fails to explain why the vast majority of members within these purportedly essential groups—which as Brubaker notes not only the public, but also much scholarly analysis simply accepts as a given “thing-in-the-world” that acts as a natural unit—fail to participate in conflicts, even when they erupt in discrete locations.⁷ Further analysis of the conflicts shows that even in areas where violence is intense, most often only a tiny minority of members of either group takes part in it. Ethnic conflicts are popularly portrayed as if ordinary citizens are one day suddenly overwhelmed by hatred or old grudges and pick up an axe, hoe or hunting rifle to attack their neighbors from the rival group. A great deal of newer research has shown that this scenario is extraordinarily rare.

More often, those who engage in violence under the cover of ethnic conflict are members of society who had previously engaged in other forms of violence in the past or were socialized into violent organizations. Frequently the first on the attack are petty thugs, people with a criminal history, or

with connections to gangs. At the other end of the violent entrepreneurs spectrum are what might seem like their exact opposite: police and current/former members of the security services or armed forces with specific training that socialized (and prepared) them to use violent tactics.⁸ The conflict in Osh follows this same model. During previous fieldwork on the conflict and its aftermath, residents related story after story of neighbors of “other” ethnicity who helped or sheltered them, even at their own risk. In weeks of fieldwork over the summers of 2011 and 2012, not a single resident told me of a story in which a neighbor or someone they knew attacked them, nor did they say they knew of such stories. In other words, even though the small number of people who participated in the conflict claimed to be acting as part of and on behalf of “their” ethnic group, membership in any given ethnic group was a very weak predictor of how any individual person might act once the conflict began.

Brubaker’s work lays out a different model for explaining ethnic conflict, one far better supported by evidence: ethnic belonging or participating in groups or rituals that construct ethnic identity is *not a cause* for the conflict, but a tool used by violent entrepreneurs to mobilize individuals to act as a group. This group is rallied on behalf of a cause—usually related to a real or perceived grievance—identified by the mobilizers to achieve political or material goals that they attempt to identify with the whole group. We should not as analysts take these mobilizers at their word that they represent the group or that such a unit of collective action even previously existed. As Brubaker argues:

Participants, of course, regularly do represent ethnic, racial and national conflict in such groupist, even primordialist terms. They often cast ethnic groups, races or nations as the protagonists—the heroes and martyrs—of such struggles. But there is no warrant for analysts to do so . . . we should remember that participants’ accounts—especially those of specialists in ethnicity such as ethnopolitical entrepreneurs, who, unlike non-specialists may live “of” as well as “for” ethnicity—often have what Pierre Bourdieu has called a performative character. By invoking groups, they seek to evoke them, summon them, call them into being. Their categories for doing—designed to stir, summon justify, mobilize, kindle and energize.⁹

This model’s focus upon *mobilization* that *creates* a group and “stirs, summons, justifies” it—while also focusing on the useful role a resonant and readily-available potential group identity such as ethnicity can play in convincing individuals to overcome the significant barriers to a collective action that presents great personal risk—has proved to be far better at explaining why ethnic conflict happens *where* it does and *when* it does (and by whom). Unlike the ancient hatreds approach, a focus on mobilization around real and perceived grievances provides a basis to understand why conflict happens in a specific moment but failed to occur during all the other moments two ethnicities lived in proximity to one another, or why when it occurs in once place conflict failed to stir in all the other locations in which the groups peacefully co-exist outside these discrete zones and moments of conflict.

In the context of Central Asia, perhaps it is easier to see that we do not usually associate the performance or reinforcement of ethnic identity as something inherently dangerous. Revival of national cultures in the late Soviet period and especially following independence is celebrated in each new republic and widely seen as both a priority and a social good. In spite of the myriad conflicts fought by people who claim to represent their ethnic group against “others”, it is easier for us on this level to understand that “ethnicization” is not an inherently dangerous process in the way that “Islamization” is often perceived. And while it is just as easy to see that radical militant groups claiming to represent their ethnicity are a serious threat to security and social cohesion, no one proposes linking an increase in, for instance, Norwegian cultural fairs to the horrific acts of someone like Anders Breivik.

This is perhaps in part because we more readily see radical far-right (ethnonationalist) groups for what they are: *political* groups with specific political goals that most people who happen to be of the same ethnicity the groups claim to represent do not share. There is nothing essential or automatic about being an ethnic Norwegian that caused Brevik's actions, just as there was not something essential about being Irish that would explain the emergence of the IRA and its dozens of high-fatality terrorist attacks in Northern Ireland during the second half of the twentieth century while the much larger population of the Republic of Ireland participated in no such violence.

Both parts of the island are predominantly ethnic Irish and predominately Catholic by population, and the IRA explicitly identified as Catholic. Yet no one seriously proposes that "radical Catholicism" or "radical priests" explain the difference between peace in one half of a relatively small island and a bloody insurgency on the other. Instead, we understand that the difference between the two populations is a political grievance that lacked an adequate mechanism for resolution from either side. The end of the conflict was in part accomplished by the development and implementation of exactly such a mechanism in the peace process that concluded in 1998. Irish Catholic churches were not "deradicalized" as part of the process because no one assumed there was something about their *faith* that had driven some citizens to support or join the IRA.

In the United States, far-right militant organizations frequently cite Christianity as a motivating or justifying factor for their attacks. In 2018, prison guards in a small city in the state of Tennessee intercepted correspondence from an inmate addressed to a US-based white supremacist organization he hoped to join. The letter stated:

My brothers in Jesus Christ our savior and Lord... My name is John Carothers and I believe the Bible is about white people and for white people. I am in the Rutherford County Jail for burning a black man. I set him on fire with lighter fluid poured on his head.

Carothers was telling the truth about his actions: in March of that year, he murdered an African American man by burning him to death in exactly the way he described.¹⁰ While not all white nationalist and white supremacist organizations are explicitly Christian, Carothers clearly understood that his religious identity—supported by scriptural shibboleths—was as important a part of the *bona fides* he wished to establish with this militant organization as his willingness to kill.

The Ku Klux Klan, first founded in 1865 after the US Civil War and subsequently revived in two different iterations, can be considered one of the longest existing terrorist organizations in the Western world. It uses a passage from St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans in the Bible as its foundational text and has always identified as an explicitly Protestant Christian organization. But following a Klan rally or a white supremacist terrorist act—such as the one in Tennessee in 2018 described above—local police do not raid churches or "unregistered" home bible studies, nor do they visit them to "conduct explanatory work." NGOs do not focus on training workshops for pastors or teachers in private Christian schools within communities that have white supremacist groups. For one reason or another, it is much easier for us to understand these groups as the embodiment of specific politics (white supremacy) and that their recruiting depends on mobilizing a group identity around a set of (real or imaginary) grievances rather than being inherently or even meaningfully connected to the larger body of Protestant religion, texts, or institutions these groups insist they represent.

Lastly, research from other contexts—particularly in social psychology, which examines human behavior as part of a group and group socialization—suggests that in developing policies designed to prevent the emergence of violent extremist groups or public support of terrorist tactics it is important to distinguish both analytically and in practice between groups that espouse or engage in

violence from those that do not. We often assume that common ideology writ-large means that a non-violent group is essentially the same as a violent group adhering to a similar broad ideology – it has simply not yet had time to “evolve” into the violent version, like a patient who has contracted an illness without yet becoming fully acute. This is likely because ideology or identity are *assumed* to be the dependent variable in the equation without testing for other factors.

If we approach them instead as *competing political groups* mobilized by similarly competing political entrepreneurs, it seems the choice to adopt violent tactics may have a great deal more to do with how the group evaluates its chances of achieving political or social change using other means versus its ability achieve the same goals using radical (violent) methods. Similarly, public support for a group that embraces violence works much the same way—that is, while scant because it is rarely tested, available evidence shows that *even agreeing with their basic ideology or sharing the same group identity* is less likely to predict public support for a terrorist group than it does agreeing with their critical assessment of the political situation – that is, a shared community faces a critical conflict and violent means are justified to solve it because either no other means exist or non-violent means have no realistic chance of success.¹¹

Although similar studies are rare and have not often been repeated, Tessler and Roberts (2007)¹² found exactly these results in Algeria and Jordan when testing for public support for groups that use terrorist tactics against the United States. As Winnifred Lewis excellently summarizes in her own overview of the contributions of social psychology to the field, Tessler and Roberts found that, controlling for other variables, support for terror was “not related to religious orientation, views of Western culture, personal economic circumstances, or even support for political Islam.”

The proximal predictors of support [for terrorist tactics] were negative judgements about their own country’s corrupt political structure and about US foreign policy. The authors interpret these findings as showing that neither poverty, nor religion, nor even political aims motivate terrorism: rather, people support terrorism when they perceive that internal and international politics are corrupt and responsible for injustice and inequality.¹³

To summarize, it is relatively easy for us to understand that being born with pale skin is not the primary causal driver for joining a white supremacist group like the Ku Klux Klan in the United States or supporting its tactics and goals, or that growing up in a Norwegian family that embraces a Norwegian cultural identity does not explain the acts of a terrorist like Anders Breivik. Government control or regulation of Catholicism was never considered as an approach for ending IRA terrorism because it was never seen as a causal or even *proximal* driver. If there is indeed a threat of violent mobilization in Central Asia—or a sufficient level of attitudinal and behavioral support for violent groups in some areas for dozens of residents to be successfully recruited—perhaps it is time to consider an approach that looks beyond religion for an explanation, one that focuses on how extremist groups create a sense of group identity *around specific relevant grievances* and what insight this approach might offer into why they are much more successful at mobilization in some areas than others.

2. “Hot Spots” and Unresolvable Conflict: Central Asian Violent Extremism from a Political Perspective

Following these examples in other contexts, how would an alternative approach look—without presuming that Islam or certain types of Islamic groups are “self-mobilizing” or essentially

conflictual—and how might a mobilization-based-on-grievance approach explain the “who”, “why”, and “where” of violent extremism in the region?

Disengaging religion or the Islamic revival taking place across much of Central Asia from the explanatory model may make the problem seem less overwhelming. That is, in this model, the growing frequency of public religious practices such as beards, hijab, or religious education are understood to be unrelated to violent extremism. Indeed, there is little to no evidence (at least, I have neither seen nor heard of any) that schoolgirls who wear hijab are somehow more likely to engage in violence or support others who do. Yet a link that is assumed to exist between these two outcomes is frequently used to debate national policy and inform legislation in the region.

This does not mean, however, that Central Asia does not face a serious problem with terrorism and violent extremism—in fact, it may be about to get worse. Except for a few small incidents in recent years, recruiting and mobilization of Central Asians for violent groups like ISIS has been primarily to support external goals. We see this not only through the surprisingly large outflow of Central Asian citizens to join a foreign civil war in Syria and Iraq as recruits for these externally-based organizations—with over 4,200 estimated to have left the region to join the war—but more strikingly in the limited data that we have about the much larger number of people who *attempted* to join the factions fighting in the Syrian conflict but were prevented from crossing the Turkish border.¹⁴

In the only country case we have available, Turkish authorities cite some 2000 Kazakhstani citizens detained trying to cross, in contrast to current estimates that show only around 800 succeeded in joining. As Richard Barret suggests in the recent Soufan Center analysis that first published these numbers (*Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees*), this may represent a much more alarming problem. First of all, on the assumption that this trend is reasonably similar in other states for which we have no specific data, it means that the frequently-cited state estimates of people *successfully recruited* by violent extremist groups are likely higher than what we previously believed — by as much as 300–400% in some cases. As the report notes, in other contexts would-be militants who attempted to join ISIS in Syria only to be thwarted have proved to be prime candidates for carrying out attacks at home or in a third country. In Central Asia itself, this is illustrated by the largely failed 2016 Aktobe attack in Kazakhstan and the 2017 Stockholm truck attack – each of which reportedly involved frustrated recruits to the Syrian conflict who chose a softer target close to home when they failed reach Syria.

For the region as a whole, this would mean 12,000–16,000 total recruits over roughly the past seven years. Even if all of the estimated 4,200 who reached Syria are presumed killed or captured, this leaves between 8,000 and 12,000 recruits—people who at one point physically attempted to join the group in the Middle East from either their home country or a third country from which they could freely travel, as Stockholm attacker and Uzbekistan native Rahmat Aqilov did. Much effort has already been spent attempting to understand and predict the threat from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in the 1990s and early 2000s. Regional governments passed rafts of legislation to combat the perceived threat from Islamist insurgency, resulting in crackdowns that were frequently violent and resulted in tens of thousands of arrests and prosecutions against groups and individuals who later were found to have had no real connection to terrorism. Yet the movement of citizens to join or attempt to join the conflict in Syria dwarfs the peak period for the IMU, which before it was driven from Afghanistan by coalition forces in 2001–2002 had only an estimated 2,000 people (including women and children).¹⁵

Based on support for past militant groups, the outflow to Syria far exceeds what we might have expected. It is very possible (or even likely) that this partly reflects differences in the conflict citizens

left to join: the Syrian rebellion against Bashar al-Assad's brutal regime attracted global support from many non-Islamist actors, governments, and politicians as well.

Recent field interviews Sirojiddin Tolibov and I conducted together with Central Asians who have voluntarily de-mobilized from the conflict and are now living in Turkey show that many who went to fight were not specifically attracted by the ideology of any particular group. Instead, they sought adventure, to do something noble, to defend the innocent, or to start a new life in a frontier state/experimental utopia with with a poor idea of what they would truly find once they arrived. Many Uzbeks and Tajiks, who make up the largest share of migrant laborers from Central Asia, were recruited while separated from their families and working in Russia under difficult or adverse conditions, and may have (mistakenly) viewed joining the cause in Syria as "the least bad option" they could pursue.¹⁶

There is a troubling difference, however, between a significant number of Central Asian recruits and their counterparts from Europe as well as the Middle East. While exact numbers are very difficult to estimate based on data shared by states, a shockingly high proportion of those who left directly from their home countries to join ISIS in particular were not just men going to join a hyper-masculine cause or find adventure, but in a significant minority we find entire families (including their children) who sold their homes and possessions in order to leave everything behind and become part of *a radically different political system*.¹⁷ Similar to Mohidilhon's daughter-in-law and Ravshonhon's son-in-law from the introduction, it is difficult to imagine why anyone would bring their children to a war zone if they were seeking a purely economic gain or, for that matter, primarily to participate in a war in the first place. We see something in cases like these that indicates a wholesale rejection of their home country and the future that might await not only these individuals, but their children as well.

When we include the factor that cases such as these do not appear to be randomly distributed geographically inside each country—but rather are concentrated in specific areas—this suggests a different way of looking at the problem. What if the attraction of "the Islamic State" for some Central Asians is not itself a problem that will disappear once recruiting to Syria ends (as perhaps it already has)? What if the outflow of hundreds of people—often with their entire families—was a symptom and not the disease? Even if ISIS were to disappear today, are there serious structural and political problems that might have to be remedied in order to prevent violence closer to home?

Pre-Research Analysis and Fieldwork Structure

To begin attempting to answer these questions with data, this paper draws on three separate research projects conducted between 2016–2018. The first of these is a series of focus groups conducted over two years with residents of Aravan, Kyrgyzstan, and were initiated during this period with support from a Luce Foundation grant via the Central Asia Program at George Washington University (the results of which have been previously published on their own).¹⁸ The second is pre-research and coordination conducted for a series of broader focus groups in collaboration with Serik Beysembayev (Strategy) in Kazakhstan, Asel Murzakulova (University of Central Asia)¹⁹ in Kyrgyzstan, and Lola Olimova (IWPR) in Tajikistan.

Together we gathered and analyzed available data on mobilization to identify field sites in each country with the highest per-capita level of mobilization to the Syrian conflict. The third stage involved multiple field interviews in all three countries with families—such as Ravshonhon and Mohidilhon—who had lost members in Syria as well as other key informants from their communities. This was followed by a series of ten focus groups that were filmed for the *Not in Our Name* project

sponsored by RFE/RL with a grant from the US Broadcasting Board of Governors. These focus groups were distilled into nine 22-minute episodes and a final 52-minute episode—all are publicly available—but this paper reflects transcripts of the full focus group sessions, which on average lasted 2–2.5 hours.

For each of these projects, analysis of available data in the pre-fieldwork phase first attempted to identify target communities for interviews and focus groups—that is, which communities had direct experience with the problem of recruiting to Syria. This revealed a pattern that became perhaps in itself one of the most significant findings of the three projects.

Patterns of successful mobilization to Syria from Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan are neither random nor evenly distributed in any of the three countries. Geographically, each country has one or several “hot zones” that, when portrayed on a map, look almost similar to the way epidemiology charts visualize the initial outbreak of a biological disease. But instead of eventually spreading into the broader population and geography as time went on, successful mobilization remained primarily contained within these zones, even when they are not demographically (or religiously) unique.

In each country, exact numbers are difficult to find and even when offered—particularly by state authorities—are frequently disputed. The trend of geographic concentration does appear to hold, however, even when comparing sometimes competing or contradictory sources of data. As in any case of attempting to analyze and explain the behavior of large groups of people, exceptions will always be abundant and neither the description of trends nor explanatory models suggested here will be able to make sense of all cases. In fact, on an individual level, both pre-research and fieldwork results from these projects and more recent study of de-mobilized recruits offer additional confirmation that it is almost impossible to find patterns or make predictions for individuals: for every “typical recruit” profile we might develop, we will immediately encounter three exceptions in actual events.

There is a strong general belief (and one we frequently encountered among focus group participants) that the typical ISIS recruit from Central Asia is, say, a relatively poor 20 year-old male without a university education who has spent a great deal of time and energy going to mosque and getting a basic religious education only to eventually “convert” to an aggressive form of Salafism. But for each case that might seem to match that description, we find two other young men who have never entered a mosque, another from a wealthy family with a university education, two women who followed their husbands to Syria, and yet another woman who left her husband behind because he refused to go. The marked absence of a discernable pattern on the individual level makes finding relatively clear ones on the community or sub-national level even more important, because particularly when combined with geographic clustering, it strongly suggests that there may be structural factors in that specific area that offer more insight into how a group was formed and mobilized than trying to build a model off of an almost infinitely different list of individual trajectories or personal decisions.

Site Selection/“hot zones”

In Kyrgyzstan, as described in detail elsewhere, a single small community—the Aravan district—that makes up less than 2% of the country’s population supplied up to a third of all Kyrgyzstani residents mobilized to Syria in a distribution that included significant numbers of women and children. When expanded to include surrounding communities in the Osh oblast, the “hot zone” becomes even more acute, making up the majority of reported successful recruits. Individual recruits from Southern Kyrgyzstan joined other militant groups affiliated with Jabhat al-Nusra, al Qaida or the Taliban, and

even assumed leadership roles in these organizations, but anecdotally those who left with their whole families appear to have most often joined the Islamic State.

Similarly, in Kazakhstan up to a third or more of all recruits come from the isolated copper mining region of Zhezkazgan. Local authorities sharply dispute public accounts of the numbers, but non-government activists as well as families who lost members in Syria and have created unofficial support networks state that they estimate around 300 total residents traveled to Syria in order to join ISIS, primarily from the cities of Zhezkazgan and Satpayev as well as the small village of Kengir. The Kazakh government now acknowledges that around 800 of its citizens left in total.

In Tajikistan, numbers are equally disputed and difficult to acquire, but officials acknowledged even early on that a disproportionate number of recruits they identified came from the Khatlon province, including a number of high-profile cases from the Kulob region. According to official numbers, citizens from Khatlon form the plurality of all identified recruits when divided by region (albeit with another significant concentration in the far north—that is, from Isfara and its surrounding cities in Sughd province, which form a second hot zone).²⁰ While the overwhelming majority of citizens in Tajikistan are recruited while working abroad (primarily in Russia) according to available data from all sources, the government also acknowledges that at least 150 families went to Syria, and that a large proportion of its citizens that are still missing include women and children.²¹

Once these “hot zones” were identified, the immediate goals of further research were to attempt to understand what made these communities different, and what were the pathways residents followed as they left their communities and eventually traveled to the Middle East — particularly when they chose to bring their children with them. Multiple research trips to each country as well as to these specific locations gave us the opportunity to collect interviews with families who had lost members—often multiple members—to recruiting for the Syrian conflict, many of whom agreed to have their interviews recorded. We also met with activists, NGO employees, and local community members who had worked in these affected communities from the time recruiting had begun, as well as security officials and government employees whose narratives and interpretations of the issues often varied widely from the families and communities who had experienced it directly.

Finally, in each country we conducted focus group sessions in which we showed excerpts of the video interviews with families who had lost members in Syria to mixed gender groups of young people. The groups in each country were organized in four stages, beginning with a wider pool of participants and narrowing for the final two stages, grouping participants as follows:

- 1) The community we identified as most directly affected (Aravan, Kyrgyzstan; Zhezkazgan, Kazakhstan; and a group from several cities in Khatlon Province, Tajikistan);
- 2) Regions or communities that were the least—or much less affected—by recruiting (Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan; Almaty, Kazakhstan; Dushanbe, Tajikistan);
- 3) Half of each group from stages 1 and 2 joined one another for a mixed session (Aravan + Bishkek, etc.) and, lastly,
- 4) A final regional session combined several participants from all six locations.

In the family interviews like those conducted with Ravshonhon and Mohidilhon (from the introduction), only around one-third of respondents cited observing new or unusual religious beliefs, practices, or networks related to their loved one or the person in their family who initiated the move to Syria. In some cases, this may reflect that their son or daughter’s new network was acquired while in a third country—such as working as a labor migrant in Russia—and were beyond their immediate observation.

Of course, this sample was too small to be statistically significant, but it still stands in sharp contrast to the high number of focus group participants who stated they believed “being led onto the wrong path,” in terms of religion and theology was the most important explanation for someone going to Syria. That sentiment was closely followed by economic motivation and lack of education, which they often saw as a secondary factor that explained the primary one (that is, that people go to Syria because they adopt heterodox religious ideas, and they adopt these ideas because they are poor or uneducated).

However, as a parallel to the findings from RUSI’s recent study of migrant laborers in Russia,²² only one of the interviewed families and very few of the focus group participants who directly knew someone who went to Syria cited economic motivations. When challenged by moderators or other participants to explain why someone would bring their small children to a highly dangerous area if they were primarily motivated by the potential to earn money (which they could have sent home to their families like most migrant laborers instead of bringing them along), participants agreed it was impossible to explain the decision to go to Syria with economic motivations in these cases.

Particularly in those groups that had more direct contact with people who had made the decision join ISIS or other militant groups, a different dynamic emerged. Frequently, they cited relatives or people close to them who had left very shortly after a “conversion” experience—many participants and families stated their friends or relatives had abruptly “started praying” around a month before disappearing.²³ A second stark difference between those who had been directly acquainted with recruits or directly exposed to the recruiting process was the quiet reoccurrence of a new motivational factor described in oppositional terms for the concepts *justice/injustice* that appeared in variations in all five languages in which the focus groups and interviews were conducted.²⁴ These terms were used to describe both distribution of resources and opportunities in society (in a way we might refer to in English as *equality/inequality* and *corrupt/fair* but in Central Asia, falls under the rubric of justice) and to describe the specific actions of judges, government officials, police, and other law-enforcement agents that participants described as corrupt and/or discriminatory.

One interviewee from Satpayev — who watched in distress as dozens of neighbors he had known from childhood were recruited from the city and has communicated with many of them over the years they were in Syria in an attempt to convince them to return — described what he felt like was a central message in the ISIS narrative so many from his city responded to in this way:

They say everything will really be just like it was in the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Everything will be distributed justly. The courts will be fair when there is no corruption, and everything will be decided according to real justice.

A proposed grievance structure: reintroducing politics and political economy to the analysis of radicalization in Central Asia

What is it, then, about these three geographic locations that might make them into “hot zones”, and what makes successful mobilization—particularly in the cases of whole families going to Syria to join the self-proclaimed Islamic State—cluster in these areas and not in others?

First, a significant part of the answer may be found in the analysis of personal networks. As has been described in past work on Central Asian recruiting by this author and Edward Lemon

independently,²⁵ available evidence shows that personal connections are an important key in the recruiting process.

While we often speak about a “pathway to radicalization”, one of the findings in all three sets of research used for this study is that many people appear to end up in Syria without ever having been “radicalized” at all. What happens to them once they reach the territory controlled by a militant group and are socialized into the Islamic State in particular is something different.

Numbers are (as always) unclear, but all available data indicates that a significant proportion of the total number of Central Asians who went to Syria are family members who often had no idea where another member was leading them or to what end. Many cases credibly suggest that others were deceived (as in the case of Ravshonhon’s daughter), many more were too young to understand what they were doing, or were wives following their husbands in order to keep their families intact and avoid what many respondents describe as devastating social stigma from their communities against single mothers and women who had been previously married. These cases may in fact make up the majority of total numbers from some countries: in Kazakhstan, for example, according to official data more than half of all citizens in Syria were children.²⁶

In many other instances, although the presence of foreign missionaries or recruiters is often assumed in public discussion, none can be found or identified. However, former local residents who traveled to Syria in the early period of the conflict and then contacted people back home—friends, family, classmates, and so on—played a direct role in recruiting according to many respondents.

In the larger set of focus groups from Aravan, participants identified direct communication over WhatsApp (which as a direct messaging service with no directory or search function like Facebook or VKontakte requires a personal connection) with former classmates or neighbors who were already in Syria as keys to recruitment. In Zhezkazgan, one interviewee recalled going to a birthday party at the house of an acquaintance in 2013 or 2014, and being surprised when all the males attending were gathered into a room around laptop to hear a personal recruiting pitch over Skype from one of the first local residents to join ISIS in Syria. Just outside of Zhezkazgan, in the tiny village of Kengir, every young man (or nearly every young man) who left the village in clusters of small groups was a member of the same boxing club that met to train in an empty garage in the center of the village near the school and the only store. Mosques or religious schools are often mistakenly assumed by outsiders to be “ground zero” for recruiting, but, upon closer examination, other social ties—classmates, family members, boxing and martial arts clubs, and even birthday parties—play a more important role in facilitating recruiting. Outsiders, foreigners, or “radical imams” play little to no role at all in the narratives of family and friends who directly experienced the losses. The axiom coined by counter-insurgency scholar David Kilcullen (and adopted from the earlier work of political scientist Ralph Peterson) bears continued repetition: “People don’t get pushed into rebellion by their ideology. They get pulled in by their social networks.”²⁷

It follows that while impossible to precisely quantify with currently available data, to a certain extent an argument can be made that recruitment is concentrated in hot zones simply because a few residents from that area successfully traveled to the conflict early on, lived long enough and were persuasive enough to pull others from their network with them. At least part of the answer to “Why Kulob?” or “Why Aravan?” seems to be directly related to the issue of networks. But when people are being recruited by their neighbors (or former neighbors), is there something important about the community they live in that motivated both “patient zero” to leave as well as all those who followed behind? Why in Kyrgyzstan, for example, is it Aravan, Osh, and Nookat, but almost never Bishkek? And in Kazakhstan: Zhezkazgan, Satpaev, Aktobe, and Aktau, yet almost never Almaty or Astana?

Most surprising, perhaps, is why Khatlon and specifically Kulob, the home region of President Emomali Rahmon as well as his base for victory in Tajikistan's crippling civil war from 1992–1997, and home to many of the countries' elites in Rahmon's government and extended family?

From the available data, we can only suggest hypotheses and interpretations. Proving them requires a larger sample set and better comparative data, but building on findings from other fields describe in section one—that is, from ethnic conflict and non-Muslim terrorist movements—we can construct an alternative model that identifies specific political grievances in these communities that fit with focus group data and other research.

Fieldwork and focus groups reveal that each of these hot zones have serious political grievances—particularly related to *political economy*, which is to say the nexus between power and resources as well as disagreements about how those resources are controlled and shared—and lacks political mechanisms to resolve these grievances or conflicts.

The conflicts or grievances are different in each country, but have two factors in common. First, they are viewed by local residents in terms of “justice/injustice”, and, secondly, the communities in which they arise lack (or have lost) mechanisms to negotiate these grievances with central authorities.

Kazakhstan

In Kazakhstan, while local government officials engage in a sort of competition with one another to convince the public that the problem of ISIS recruiting is “much worse in X city than here,” the list of cities that rotate in and out of first place depending on which figures one relies on or who is speaking (Zhezkazgan, Aktobe, Aktau, Atyrau, and Zhanaozen) each have something crucial in common identified by sociologist Serik Beysembayev: all of them are Soviet-era “*monogorody*” (which we might translate as “single-purpose cities”). *Monogorody* are cities governed by special administrative zones that were founded or developed around a single industry and dominated during the independence period by a single semi-private corporation. Like the “company towns” that existed in the US, Canada, or Britain—but with the added crucial advantage of having been built by a fully centralized economy that could utilize forced (gulag) labor in the Soviet period—these cities would not exist in their current form without access to natural resource deposits.

In most cases, since independence these cities have struggled to develop their economy in other sectors despite their relatively large size – each is in a remote and isolated location with severe climates. In no small part because of the success of resource extraction from these areas, Kazakhstan has become by far the wealthiest state in the region—with a GDP nearly double all the other regional states, combined—and created a gleaming new capital in Astana as well as a powerful modern financial hub in Almaty. The contrast between the *monogorody* and wealthier parts of the country could hardly be starker, however. Many homes in Kengir just outside Zhezkazgan do not have running potable water, so families must carry buckets of water from a storage tank in the village back to their homes or apartments. Likewise, the central heating utility created in the Soviet era was long ago abandoned to disrepair by local authorities, forcing residents to cut their own wood or buy coal to heat their homes or apartments in extreme winter temperatures that can fall below -50 Celsius.

More important than the economic circumstances, however, appears to be the lack of other opportunities inside these cities beyond the single industry (and single corporation) that dominates them. The severe curtailment of resident and even employees' ability to negotiate with these corporations since the violence in Zhanaozen in 2011—which left many protestors dead—led to measures that international observers argue crippled existing labor unions as well as the right of

workers to organize in Kazakhstan.²⁸ Fieldwork in and around Zhezkazgan showed that young people in those communities had a very clear understanding that the set of opportunities available for them were significantly different than those available for people born in other parts of the country, even if those opportunities were created by wealth extracted from their region by their own labor or that of their neighbors.

While the other cities in the list have economies built on hydrocarbon extraction, Zhezkazgan was created to exploit deposits of copper and other metals—once among the richest on the planet—that have been steadily depleted by massive industrial extraction. Now functioning in the 21st century market economy—similar to other global manufacturing cities like Detroit in the United States that relied heavily on a 20th-century industry that experienced a sharp decrease in demand or that has become significantly less profitable over the last century—the mining company can no longer afford to offer the same types of benefits, community resources, or level of employment that it did in the community’s golden age during the last century.

One entire community outside Zhezkazgan called Rudnik (which typical of other functionally-named Soviet towns literally translates as “Deposit”), once a model Soviet town that attracted skilled internal migrants from all over the USSR, is being systematically demolished on the authority of the national mining company *Kazakhmys*. As the deep nearby mines, the town’s residents worked in for three generations have become fully depleted, the company has been forced to convert to pit mining operations to maintain profitability. And as those pits continue to steadily expand, in the current economy the resources available just underneath Rudnik’s soil are now deemed more valuable than the once idyllic city itself.

Residents have little choice but to accept the terms they are offered by the mining company and move into cheaply constructed apartment blocks in the neighboring city of Satpaev. Many continue to hold out and refuse to abandon their homes even as the city collapses around them. At the same time, they have no leverage with which to negotiate with a corporation that has no competitors and owns the resources under their feet. Just as in other cities like Detroit whose economies collapsed under the effects of globalization, marginalized youth in Kazakhstani citizens like Zhezkazgan have formed criminal gangs and less organized networks that make money off the “gray” economy. Serik Beysembayev’s work has shown links between these groups and extremism as well as successful recruitment into (or in support of) violent groups such as ISIS.²⁹

A second concrete grievance that was offered specifically in relation to successful recruiting to Syria was religious discrimination. Although persecution or curtailing the rights and freedoms of people expressing their religious beliefs has long been warned to be potentially counter-productive in Central Asia and is frequently used by recruiters to ISIS and other groups, Zhezkazgan was the first time in my own research that I encountered cases where there appeared to be direct and demonstrable ties between specific instances of discrimination and the decision to join a militant group. One example given by interview subjects was an explosives specialist who worked in mining operations in Satpaev for *Kazakhmys*. Following a “conversion” experience, he began to let his beard grow and he changed the way he dressed. The company claimed the expert technician was violating dress code regulations and fired him on the supposed grounds that his failure to comply with these rules created a safety hazard. He felt sure, though, that he had been denied the primary opportunity for gainful employment in his town not because he violated a dress code, but because his style of dress expressed that religious beliefs that both his employers and the local government disliked. With little left to lose, the explosives specialist soon disappeared and later re-appeared in Syria, having found a new employer interested in his skills.

Kyrgyzstan

In Aravan and southern Kyrgyzstan, the economic and governance structure has few similarities to the situation in Kazakhstan. But in repeated fieldwork trips and focus group discussions since 2016, a common repeated theme of *justice/injustice* similarly emerged—in this case, around ethnic belonging and the continuing consequences of three generations of ethnic conflict in Southern Kyrgyzstan.³⁰ While at least several dozen ethnic Kyrgyz residents of both north and south also have been mobilized to Syria, in private conversations, both security officials with direct access to data and NGO or international organization employees who work on the problem will admit that the overwhelming majority of recruits to Syria are ethnic Uzbeks from the south. The Aravan district is perhaps the most acute “hot zone” in all of the region. While this can no doubt be partially explained by social networks and, to a certain extent, random events, the large number of recruits from similar nearby communities indicates a structural issue in the same way heavy recruitment does from *monogorody* in Kazakhstan.

As described elsewhere, one of the most important results from fieldwork in Aravan and communities like it is the severe lack of trust—particularly following the most recent conflict in 2010—between Uzbek majority communities and local authorities, who in most cases are overwhelmingly ethnic Kyrgyz. On the national level, the disparity is even more stark: following constitutional reforms that eliminated single-mandate districts, which had allowed Uzbek-majority districts to elect their own representatives to both parliament as well as local government, the switch to party-list voting at both levels has all but eliminated minority representation because parties generally choose not to include minority candidates—particularly at the national level.³¹ Even when minority candidates are nominated by a party that secures a parliamentary mandate, those candidates owe their position to other members of their own party rather than to a home electoral district to whom they are accountable and expected to represent. While the economic devastation that followed the 2010 conflict affected the whole southern region, the lack of representation in both law-enforcement and government left minority communities without a mechanism by which to negotiate their place in the politics or political economy of the region or the nation.³²

Perceived discrimination—especially at the hands of law enforcement—has led to a deep gap in trust that has a direct effect on recruiting to Syria and handicaps law enforcement efforts to disrupt the networks that pulled many people into the conflict, despite clear community level condemnation of recruiting.³³ In focus groups conducted over a two-year research period, only one participant stated they would be willing to turn-in a friend or loved to the police if they feared that person was preparing to leave for Syria. Many cited the fear that they would themselves become suspects, and that their friend or relative would be better off dying in Syria than finding themselves at the mercy of the authorities on extremism charges.³⁴ While group participants were reluctant to further exacerbate inter-ethnic relations by drawing a direct causal link between perceived discrimination and the success of recruiters in their communities, in private conversation they made clear links between what they described as growing portion of the public that supports an Islamist caliphate as an alternative form of governance for the region and perceptions of a lack of belonging or full citizenship in the current Kyrgyz Republic.

Tajikistan

Inferences from focus groups and interviews are more difficult to draw from Tajikistan because discussion among Tajik participants was much more limited and less open. Many participants explicitly stated that they feared potential recrimination if they were seen to be in any way critical of their government, and often spoke very differently when conversing privately as opposed to

participating in the focus groups. Similar to the other contexts, however, the themes of injustice, inequality of opportunity, severe limitations on opportunity, and corruption that forced many citizens to become labor migrants came up repeatedly in discussion, particularly among those who had direct experience with either labor migration or exposure to ISIS recruiting.

As in Zhezkazgan and Osh, participants identified perceived discrimination as a serious grievance exploited by recruiters. One former migrant worker, Abudullo, described the recruiting process that he was exposed to online:

In 2014 I was in Russia, working as a labor migrant along with two of my brothers. In my free time I used to go on Odnoklassniki. Almost every day, every minute they were trying to recruit me. In those days there were a lot of recruiters on Odnoklassniki, to the point that one out of every ten [Tajik-language] users was an [ISIS] recruiter. They cited specific bans on religious practices in their videos... they sent out messages designed to make us start to feel hatred toward our homeland. When the love you had for your homeland disappears, and it gets replaced by hatred, they are good at using that. And it's at that moment that they try to lure you to Syria.³⁵

In Tajikistan, economic circumstances drive migration from most of the country's regions, and policies that might be experienced as discrimination are often implemented on a national level. This, then, raises a difficult question: why Khatlon province in particular? There may be a variety of factors, but one potential explanation is that general inequality as well as inequality of opportunity is *starker* for some residents of Khatlon than for those of other regions. Khatlon is home to the majority of the families who have benefited most from the post-war economic order in Tajikistan—a system of governance and political economy that Edward Lemon in the Freedom House's *Nations in Transit* 2018 report on Tajikistan called a “virtual nepotocracy.” That is: a state in which effectively the full system of governance is controlled by a single extended family and its close associates. Those without connections to the post-war elites can readily see the stark gap between their own opportunities and those who enjoy them. Despite being on the “winning team”, the set of opportunities that awaits them is not significantly better than regions that either lost the war or did not participate, and as in other identified “hot spot” regions they similarly lack any mechanism for negotiating their status in the existing political economy.

3. Vulnerability and Resilience to Radicalization from a Different Perspective

In sum, each of these hotspots has critical political issues that are not being resolved in their current political systems, leaving key groups or constituencies in these areas (ethnic, economic, religious, or some mix of all three) without representation or other mechanisms for dialogue that are adequate to negotiate and resolve these political conflicts. The existence of outstanding political conflicts does not itself indicate some fatal flaw in the political system of any of these three countries. Every state and society has conflicts, and competing groups will always disagree about their place in the political economy or their share of power. Political conflicts always arise, but not all systems provide mechanisms for parties to resolve their disputes.

There are other aspects to this set of problems that are inherited from the Soviet system and/or are beyond the control of each state. It is not poor decision-making or planning in Astana that has caused the copper deposits in Zhezkazgan to begin to dry up, nor is it realistically possible for a corporation operating in any form of the free market to be able to continue offering the same services and benefits—or even level of employment—that it could in the 1960s with the benefit of a controlled

economy and subsidies from Moscow. Tajikistan lacks access to hydrocarbon resources or precious metal deposits that many of its neighbors enjoy, and is deeply scarred by a five-year civil war. Its economy was likely fated to continue to be among the poorest in the former Soviet space and to be largely dependent on labor migration no matter how successful its reform or development policies could have been under ideal conditions.

The fact that citizens would complain of injustices or that these grievances would be more acute in some regions than in others is not unexpected. These are challenges that far wealthier economies and mature democracies struggle with across the globe. What sets Central Asia apart, and what may help explain why the republics of the former Soviet Union were more responsive to violent extremist recruiting for foreign fighters to the Syrian conflict than any other region of the world, may have much more to do with the lack of mechanisms for negotiating these grievances. As Tessler and Roberts found in Algeria and Jordan, attitudinal and behavioral support for groups promising to bring about a new political order—even if that would require a total rejection of the existing system and its overthrow through violence—in Central Asia likely also depends significantly on assessments of the potential success of non-violent solutions.

Grievances centered on injustice, inequality, discrimination, and corruption are inherently political. While many in the region in particular describes ISIS as a kind of religious cult—which in some ways, for some recruits, it undoubtedly is—it is also fundamentally a political organization with political messages and political goals. The argument laid forth here is that in some particular areas and for some constituencies in each of these Central Asian states, ISIS or related groups became one of only actors articulating these grievances as well as offering solutions. Ersatz radical Islamists—often only recently discovering their identity as Muslims—became one of the only alternative voices on injustice, corruption, or discrimination for those who could not find solutions inside the existing system that in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan is dominated by a single political party. While Kyrgyzstan has a comparatively competitive system, it frequently does not offer meaningful direct representation to minority communities even in local administrations and organs of local governance such as the police force even when they make up the demographic majority in that district.

Islamic State in particular came to be seen by its supporters in some areas of Central Asia as the only political actor offering a meaningful alternative to the current system and its perceived institutionalized discrimination. In stark contrast to the narratives of their home governments, Islamic State messages aimed at Central Asians and produced by their own peers touted a full rejection of ethno-nationalism as a foundation for statehood or a criterion for full belonging and citizenship. ISIS also offered a complete rejection of a neoliberal international order that many felt had caused or contributed to the injustices and trauma they experienced in their lives—from the chaos that accompanied the collapse of the Soviet Union to the liberal western order that promised to bring them democracy and development, both of which never materialized in the eyes of many citizens (or worse, were judged by their “fruits” to be fundamentally unjust no matter how or where they were implemented). Viewed from this perspective, we may come closer to being able to understand why many from these specific communities believed they were making a rational decision when they sold everything they owned or left behind businesses and extended families, bringing their children to a place they seemed to believe offered a brighter future—or at least a greater cause in which they hoped to take part.

One respondent from follow-up focus groups—held in Aravan in September 2018—described the narrative their brother had used to explain his motives for going to Syria:

Everything here is for sale, you have to pay for everything. For school, for the hospital, for government services. Here, most importantly, there is no justice. But there we will find justice!³⁶

That those who left for Syria with these hopes were gravely mistaken or bitterly deceived goes without saying. A significant fraction paid for this mistake with their lives and, in some cases, their children's lives as well. These are the tragedies that make this problem worth our attention and effort, even if they make up only a tiny proportion of the total population.

We also cannot ignore that many went on to commit terrible acts of violence and encouraged others who remained home to do so as well. As in Brubaker's work and that of many others on ethnic conflict, we find that violent entrepreneurs in ISIS consistently framed grievances in dishonest and deceptive ways, relied on dis- or misinformation for large parts of their recruiting efforts, and distorted sacred texts on which they claimed to base their actions.³⁷ Using these tactics, they also often redirected or reimagined perhaps legitimate grievances that their recruits experienced in order to falsify narratives of blame against a third party that the organization itself wanted to target, from tourists in New York to Swedish pedestrians to Turkish nightclub attendees to Yazidis in Iraq or even neighbors who refused to support the group's tactics. Respondents in focus groups and interviews *unanimously* supported their own existing states and security services in their efforts to counter as well as prosecute ISIS and other violent extremist groups, particularly those whose own friends or family members were radicalized.

Aside from larger conceptions of injustice or politics, it is important to note that on an individual level ISIS claimed to offer a kind of *personal* justice by offering meaning or fulfillment to recruits who felt their goals in life were thwarted not only by states or systems, but also by society or even personal failings. In this case, justice is getting "what you think you deserve" but have been somehow cheated of: any woman a young man wants to marry—more than one, in fact—loot or property captured in battle, large homes with swimming pools in occupied cities, adventure, fulfillment, revenge, a future full of limitless prospects as part of a powerful army instead of a marginalized group or a forgotten town.

In ISIS propaganda, Central Asians sometimes became the poster children for exactly this brand of "personal justice". In February of this year, I sat in a café in Satpaev with the informant quoted above who has tried over the past few years to convince his former neighbors to lay down their arms and return home. I showed him a recent ISIS recruiting video to see if he might recognize anyone and be able to offer insight on each person's individual story. He immediately recognized the "star" of this particular video—Yerbol, a young blind man from Satpaev who used to regularly attend the city mosque. After finishing school, Yerbol wanted to earn a living beyond his meager disability payments, and the mosque congregation wanted to help. They not only came up with a job he could perform without sight—working as a massage therapist—but also collected money to pay for his training.

Yerbol completed his courses and began to work, but he could not build up a client base big enough to support himself in the way he hoped. Like so many others from Satpaev, one day he abruptly disappeared. Although my informant had heard rumors that Yerbol had gone to Syria, that day in the café as we watched the video on my laptop was the first time the informant had seen him.

The recruiting video shows Yerbol the blind massage therapist at work, wearing a camouflage military uniform and administering massages in a hospital for mujahedeen missing parts of their limbs or with burns and jagged scars—wounds they received while trying to expand the borders of the "caliphate". In an interview, Yerbol says that while he was unable to find a wife at home in

Kazakhstan, he now had not one, but *two* wives and every material need for their family is met. The message, though embellished with wooden references from the Koran and memorized Arabic slogans, was unmistakably the old Marxist adage: “From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.” The tragic absurdity of the situation left both of us stunned as we watched it. Between the time the video was filmed and when we watched it together, the town where it took place had been captured by Kurdish forces and the distinct possibility that Yerbol was dead hung over us. Despite those and other losses, his message continued to circulate among his former neighbors on WhatsApp in a cynical attempt to lure them away, too.

Thus, the appeal the Islamic State made to Central Asians was not just about politics or social justice, but also a false promise of a very personal kind of justice for those who felt left behind or left out in their home country: a place, and a future, for everyone who did not see much prospect for either at home.

Conclusions: The Dangers of Fighting Religion Instead of Violent Networks

The research results outlined here, however preliminary, reveal a complex picture of violent extremist mobilization that supports an argument that successful models for preventing radicalization—especially if by this we mean behavioral or attitudinal support for groups that espouse violence—have to go beyond religious interventions or theological approaches. First, this revised approach is necessary because despite ISIS violent entrepreneurs’ own insistence that they represent “true Islam”, we must be wary of taking manipulators at their word to explain their motivations and causes, just as we do not trust ethno-nationalist demagogues when they claim to be acting on behalf of their entire ethnicity or race.

This is particularly important because the Islamization of everyday life is likely to continue in Central Asia as individuals and families find comfort and meaning in religious rituals as well as a sense of belonging in religious identity and community. It is imperative that in both analysis and policy we do not make the mistake of assuming a connection between all practicing Muslims (or a “certain kind” of practicing Muslim) to specific groups mobilized with reference to specific political grievances in specific places and circumstances. Just as we cannot usefully explain or hope to prevent ethnic conflict with the “ancient hatreds” model that assumes ethnicity itself is the core causal factor or predictor, we cannot hope to meaningfully prevent violent mobilization that claims to act on behalf of a religious identity by banning the expression of religious identity. Religious identity (or its expression) is not the problem to be solved. Similarly, “Irishness” or “Catholicness” is not the problem to be solved in Northern Ireland, nor are Protestant worship practices or biological differences in skin pigmentation the problems to be solved in the struggle to prevent or eliminate white supremacist terror attacks in the United States.

Instead, this model suggests that should recognize how a religious group identity is used to mobilize the same basic grievances that in the recent past would likely have been represented by different group identities that are either no longer available, have been discredited, or are less relevant. As the French scholar of Islamist insurgent movements Olivier Roy has now famously argued, we seem to be observing a process not of the “radicalization of Islam, but the Islamization of radicalism.”³⁸ In his earlier work, *Globalized Islam*, Roy has a section titled, “Is Jihad Closer to Marx Than to the Koran?”³⁹, and has argued that, at least in France, many of the recruits to Syria or their supporters are

responding to the same kind of grievances that two generations ago may have put them at the center of Communist-led student protests in Paris in the 1960s. With this approach, the broad suggestion is that we may have had the causal mechanisms exactly backwards—that is, rebels, insurgents, and others who embrace the terrorist tactics of groups like ISIS did not find religion and become radicalized by it, they were already radicalized by social, political, or personal circumstances and found a radical group that claimed to represent a salient identity (religious, in this case) and offered them a place and cause to which they could belong.

If the primary appeal of the Islamic State was that they claimed to offer “justice”, then it follows that the most effective counter-mobilization of both active and passive support is to offer better mechanisms for improving grievances that arise from “justice/injustice” issues.

It also follows that, in this model, the *least effective* means of combatting violent extremist mobilization is to perpetuate or expand these grievances by punishing or discriminating against those who consider themselves part of the broader identity group that the violent entrepreneurs are attempting to mobilize and claim to represent.

If our primary goal is truly to prevent violence, 20 years of global counterinsurgency scholarship—or even community policing models for combatting criminal gangs—has shown that it is imperative for us to expand our allies within the “vulnerable” community as widely as possible while simultaneously narrowing the list of adversaries to those who engage in crime, violence, or active support of such. Doing otherwise feeds recruiting narratives and widens the spectrum of grievance. If we view grievance as the primary factor behind radicalization (defined as supporting political violence rather than a set of religious beliefs), any steps that increase the number of aggrieved yet previously non-radicalized citizens—or that expand support or sympathy for terrorists—are counterproductive. This is particularly crucial when the grievances that the violent networks use to mobilize supporters in the first place arose from perceived injustice at the hands of those same law enforcement and governance agencies.

Is religion still relevant?

Even if we apply a political grievance model for conflict, we do not have to suppose that it is accidental or irrelevant that religious identity is the one chosen for mobilization by violent entrepreneurs.

Religious networks are especially powerful in a system in which there are weakly developed political parties as well as a weak civil society. Failure to develop secular political mechanisms and civil society for resolving conflict is, therefore, arguably something that increases the likelihood that insurgency will evolve around religious lines when religion is a salient identity—that is, just as it was in non-Muslim contexts such as Northern Ireland.

Religion also offers a deeply meaningful eschatology that offers an individual a role in in an eternal and universal plan, a hope for reward in the afterlife, and a powerful sense of justification for some participants in conflict. It is not entirely unique in this way, since teleological promises of Communism (or other secular ideologies) offer similar justifications for heroic individual sacrifices that will serve the greater group and live on in “eternal” memory even without the promise of a heavenly reward.⁴⁰

We likely underestimate at our own peril, however, the extent to which recruits to ISIS or other millenarian militant groups may believe at first that they are genuinely doing something good—building the justice of God’s Kingdom on earth and helping to right a world that they and many others

in their community feel has gone horribly wrong. Here, clerics or trusted religious figures in a person's own community can play an important role in clarifying morals and ethics as they are interpreted through the specific lens of Islam. In the context of trusted personal relationships, they are uniquely placed explain that groups such as ISIS distort the sacred texts—that is, break sacred law they claim to represent—and do not act justly, even as they claim to represent justice.

In order to maximize the effectiveness of religious outreach, it follows that we ought to also maximize the size and breadth of our religious coalition by focusing on behavior (rejection of violence or coercion) and less on theology, identities, or schools. The secular state's primary concern should be whether or not a religious group rejects violence and recognizes the state and the rights of others, even if it wishes to protest or change specific laws or policies. A secular state is, by definition, agnostic when it comes to theological disputes. It does not promote one religious sect over another, or persecute one form of belief and reward another. It does not differentiate among its citizens for how they dress or what they believe, only for the actions that they take. When a state chooses sides in purely religious debates, it ceases to be truly secular and inadvertently expands the spectrum of grievances available to violent entrepreneurs for propaganda and recruiting.

Maximizing the freedom for each person to choose to express (or not express) religious beliefs according to their own conscience, to believe (or not) within the same set of secular laws that govern all citizens regardless of their personal beliefs extends belonging and citizenship to the largest possible proportion of citizens – at least in terms of this one aspect of civic life. When violent extremist groups whisper in the ears young people, they claim to offer justice, empowerment, representation and belonging. Perhaps the surest way to combat those messages is to create a community in which the largest possible number of citizens already feel that they belong and see a future of belonging for their children, too.

¹ I want to express my deep and sincere gratitude to all who made each of the projects this analysis draws from possible – to Susan Jackson, who offered invaluable supervision, guidance and encouragement in the *Not in Our Name* project, to my friends and colleagues Asel Murzakulova, Serik Beysembayev, Ikbol Isakov, Aziz Usmanov and Sirojiddin Tolibov, without whose insight and partnership made any good that came of these efforts possible. And of course to Marlene Laruelle and the staff of the Central Asia Program for their unparalleled support and tireless effort to create and promote new research in Central Asia. All errors, on the other hand, are entirely my own.

² Edited versions of these interviews are available online (in Uzbek with Russian subtitles) as part of the *Not in Our Name* project produced by RFE/RL. <https://pressroom.rferl.org/not-in-our-name>

³ UNDP “Mapping the Violent Extremism in Central Asia Research Field” Regional Dialogue, Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) 12 September 2018.

⁴ “Push” and “pull” factors for violent extremism and insurgency are outlined in *The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency*, USAID Policy. 2011. https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pdacs400.pdf

⁵ Rogers Brubaker, “Ethnicity Without Groups” *Archives of European Sociology* XLIII 2(2002), pp. 163-189 and *Ibid*, *Ethnicity Without Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2004).

⁶ This work builds on a similar analysis previously done from a political science perspective by Eric McGlinchey on domestic mobilization of Islamist political groupings in the region before the Syrian conflict. See: Eric McGlinchey, “The Making of Militants: The State and Islam in Central Asia,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 25, no. 3 (2005): 559. McGlinchey, “Islamic Revivalism and State Failure In Kyrgyzstan,” NCEEER, 2009.

⁷ For an overview of work elaborating upon the same constructivist or socialization approach to ethnic conflict and analysis using large data sets, see James D Fearon, David D Laitin, “Violence and the Social Construction of

Ethnic Identity,” *International Organization*, 54:4 (2000), Pp.845–877; James D Fearon, David D Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War” *American Political Science Review* 97:11 Pp. 75–90.

⁸ David D. Laitin, “National Revivals and Violence,” *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 36 (1) 1995, 3–43. For a description of what authors argue is the normative state—that is, how differing ethnic groups manage political disputes and cooperate to avoid conflict, see: James D. Fearon, David D. Laitin, “Explaining Interethnic Cooperation,” *American Political Science Review* 1996/12, 90:4, Pp 715–735.

⁹ Brubaker, op. cit. p. 166.

¹⁰ Brett Barroquere, “Tennessee man charged with murder for burning black man to death, then using Bible to justify act,” Southern Poverty Law Center, August 28, 2018.

<https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/08/28/tennessee-man-charged-murder-burning-black-man-death-then-using-bible-justify-act>

¹¹ W. R. Louis, “If They’re Not Crazy, Then What? The Implications of Social Psychological Approaches to Terrorism for Conflict Management,” in W. G. K. Stritzke, S. Lewandowsky, D. Denemark, J. Clare, & F. Morgan (Eds.), *Terrorism and Torture: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, (New York, NY, US: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 125–153

¹² M. Tessler & MDH Robbins, “What Leads some Ordinary Arab Men and Women to Approve of Terrorist Acts against the United States?” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 51 (2007), pp. 305-328.

¹³ W. R. Louis, op. cit.

¹⁴ Richard Barret, *Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees* (The Soufan Center: October 2017). <http://thesoufancenter.org/research/beyond-caliphate>

¹⁵ N. Tucker, “Central Asian Involvement in the Conflict in Syria and Iraq: Drivers and Responses,” USAID 2015, https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/CVE_CentralAsiansSyriaIraq.pdf; Brian Glyn Williams, “On the Trail of the ‘Lions of Islam’: A History of Foreign Fighters in Afghanistan and Pakistan, 1980–2010,” Foreign Policy Research Institute, September 2010, <https://www.fpri.org/docs/media/lionsofislam.pdf>

¹⁶ Field interviews, Istanbul metro area. May-June 2019.

¹⁷ In my own earlier work (“Central Asian Involvement in the Conflict in Syria and Iraq” op. cit) on development approaches to counter Central Asian recruiting, I found, in 2015, based on evidence that was available at the time, that labor migration was a re-occurring commonality in many of the Uzbeks and Tajiks—in particular, those who eventually went to Syria. It is important to distinguish that labor migration itself was not meant to be presented as a positive causal factor, but, rather, that recruiting efforts specifically targeted labor migrants and may have been more successful than they would have been at home in part because the migrants lacked community mechanisms that may have helped them avoid a bad decision or fatal mistake at home. This work is not meant to negate earlier findings, but, in particular, to reflect other cases (for example, recruits from Kazakhstan almost always came from their home country instead of via labor migration in a third) with new fieldwork.

¹⁸ N. Tucker, “What Happens When Your Town Becomes an ISIS Recruiting Ground? Lessons from Central Asia about Vulnerability, Resistance, and the Danger of Ignoring Perceived Injustice,” CAP Paper 209 (George Washington University Central Asia Program: July 2018). <http://centralasiaprogram.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Tucker-CAP-Paper-July-2018.pdf>

¹⁹ Some of Murzakulova’s previous work importantly adds to the foundation of evidence relating social justice grievances to extremist recruiting in Central Asia. See: Asel Murzakulova, “Searching for social justice: the problem of women joining religious extremist organizations in Kyrgyzstan,” in T. Kruessmann, *Gender in Modern Central Asia*, Lit Verlag, 2015.

²⁰ Sayrahmon Nazriev, “Glava Khatlona Obespoen Bol’shim Kolichestvo Bokhtartsev v Sirii” [Сайрахмон Назриев, “Глава Хатлона обеспокоен большим количеством бохтарцев в Сирии”], *Asia Plus*, January 21, 2017. <https://news.tj/ru/news/tajikistan/security/20170121/glava-hatlona-obespoen-bolshim-kolichestvo-bohtartsev-v-sirii>

²¹ Ibid.

²² Muhammad Elshimi, R. Pantucci, S. Lain, & N. Salman “Understanding the Factors Contributing to Radicalisation Among Central Asian Labour Migrants in Russia,” RUSI Occasional Papers (London: Royal United Services Institute, April 2018). https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201804_op_understanding_radicalisation_in_central_asia.pdf

²³ Across all three countries, “he/she started praying” is how interlocutors describe the “conversion” experience. That is, the person in question may have been a nominal Muslim or considered themselves Muslim their whole lives, but only abruptly began regularly performing religious rituals and attempting to adhere to

specifically religious ethics in their personal lives. As both Wendall Schwab and Helene Thibault have described in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, respectively, this process is not considered a conversion from one religion to another, but rather the point at which a person begins a personal religious experience that is similar to the way Evangelical Christians describe being “born again.”

²⁴ Author note: In Russian, *spravedlivost’/nespravedlivost’*, in Uzbek *adolat/adolatsizlik* or *haq/haqsiz*—variations from the Arabic root “h-q,” simultaneously referring to something that is true in the positivist sense, yet also in its correct place in the order-of-things. Therefore, the same term can be used to describe a person’s rights under a just system—that is, on where things are ordered as they should be and justly function. From these focus groups as well as many other conversations, it seems, to me, that while Western—American, in particular—society might value equality or equality of opportunity as the highest social goods, Central Asians value *justice* and *justice of opportunity*, which are similar yet different things.

²⁵ Noah Tucker op. cit. 2015; E. Lemon, “Daesh and Tajikistan: The Regime’s (In)Security Policy,” *The RUSI Journal* 160, no. 5 (2015): 68–76.

²⁶ “КНБ: 390 казахстанских детей находятся в Сирии,” *Matritca*, <http://www.matritca.kz/news/50245- knb-390-kazahstanskih-detey-nahodyatsya-v-sirii.html>.

²⁷ George Packer, “Knowing the Enemy: Can Social Scientists Redefine the ‘War on Terror’?” *The New Yorker*, December 18, 2006, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/12/18/knowing-the-enemy>.

²⁸ Human Rights Watch, “‘We Are Not the Enemy’: Violations of Workers’ Rights in Kazakhstan,” November 2016. https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/kazakhstan1116_web_0.pdf;

Malika Tukmadiyeva, “Nations in Transit 2018 Country Report,” Freedom House (2018), https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/NiT2018_Kazakhstan.pdf.

²⁹ Serik Beysembaev, “Religious Extremism in Kazakhstan: Between Criminality and Jihad,” [«Религиозный экстремизм в Казахстане: между криминалом и джихадом»], <http://www.ofstrategy.kz/index.php/ru/research/socialresearch/item/485-religioznyj-ekstremizm-v-kazahstane-mezhdu-kriminalom-i-dzhikhadom>

³⁰ In addition to the conflicts in 2010 and 1990, smaller scale—but still significant—conflict occurred in the 1960s in the city of Osh, one of the aspects that makes local interlocutors sure that they are trapped in a cycle of conflict that has not yet ended or been resolved. During repeated fieldwork visits and fieldwork trips in 2011, 2012, 2016, 2017, and 2018, it was, particularly, ethnic Uzbek residents in Osh who repeated variations of the same refrain: another conflict was “not a question of ‘if’—only when.”

³¹ Scott Radnitz, *Weapons of the Wealthy: Predatory Regimes and Elite-Led Protests in Central Asia* (Cornell University Press, 2010)

³² Noah Tucker, 2018.

³³ Human Rights Watch, “Where is the Justice?” Interethnic Violence in Southern Kyrgyzstan and its Aftermath, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2010/08/16/where-justice/interethnic-violence-southern-kyrgyzstan-and-its-aftermath>

³⁴ See Noah Tucker 2018 for a more detailed summary and analysis of fieldwork results.

³⁵ Transcript of focus group with residents of Khatlon in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), December 2017.

³⁶ Transcript of focus group with residents of Aravan, Kyrgyzstan, September 15, 2018.

³⁷ Noah Tucker, “Research Note: Uzbek Online Recruiting to the Syrian Conflict,” Central Eurasia — Religion in International Affairs Brief No. 3, George Washington University Central Asia Program, November 2014. <https://app.box.com/s/2lvkprsdniz6gomzrfjo>

³⁸ Olivier Roy, “Who are the New Jihadis?” *The Guardian*, April 13, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/apr/13/who-are-the-new-jihadis>; Olivier Roy, *Jihad and Death: The Global Appeal of Islamic State*, (C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2017).

³⁹ Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (Columbia University Press: 2002).

⁴⁰ For an extended discussion of terrorism in light of cultural and religious values that prompt humans to view death in service of a cause as a value higher than life, see: Ginges and Atran, “Psychology Out of the Laboratory: The Challenge of Violent Extremism,” *American Psychologist*, Vol. 66, No. 6 (2011).