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THE RADICAL ISLAMIC MILITANTS OF CENTRAL ASIA

Józef Lang

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CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES

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Glossary of abbreviations

- IRPT - Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan
- TIP - Turkestan Islamic Party
- IMU - Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
- ISAF - International Security Assistance Force
- ISI - Inter-Services Intelligence
- IJU - Islamic Jihad Union
- CSTO - Collective Security Treaty Organisation
- SCO - Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
- TTP - Tehrik-e Taliban-e Pakistan - Taliban Movement of Pakistan
- UTO - United Tajik Opposition

KEY POINTS

- Radical Islamic militants from Central Asia have ceased to be a local phenomenon. The organisations created by those groups (such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Jihad Union) are now affiliated not only with Central Asian Islamists, but also those from other countries, such as Russia, Pakistan, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, China, Turkey and even Myanmar.
- The activities of radical Islamic militants from Central Asia are being conducted on a global scale. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Jihad Union, which are currently based in Pakistan's Northern Waziristan, engage in propaganda, recruitment, fundraising and terrorist operations in states distant from their traditional area of interest, such as European Union countries, South Asia and the United States. The IMU and IJU have shown an ability to disperse geographically and quickly set up operations on new territory.
- The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Islamic Jihad Union have acquired high combat versatility. These organisations are capable of utilising a wide spectrum of methods ranging from terrorist activity, through guerrilla warfare, to regular combat operations.
- As a result of the universalisation of Islamic terrorism, these organisations have been intensifying contacts with other international Islamic terrorist organisations based in Waziristan (mainly al-Qaida, Taliban and the Haqqani Network). A specific system of mutual cooperation has developed between them, involving the specialisation of various terrorist organisations in particular aspects of terrorist activity. The IMU and IJU specialise in the recruitment and training of Islamic radicals from around the world, becoming a kind of 'jihad academy'.
- The IMU and IJU's operations in Afghanistan threaten the further destabilisation of the country. These organisations have *de facto* become an Uzbek wing of the Taliban, engaging in recruitment and combat activities in hitherto tranquil northern parts of the country. This is noteworthy in the light of the withdrawal of ISAF forces from Afghanistan planned for 2014.
- Due to a combination of a wide array of internal problems in the Central Asian states (the growing Islamisation of their societies, social frustration,

tensions in the elites, unresolved issues of the succession of power), as well as the weakness and inefficiency of state structures, it is possible that the IMU and IJU will exploit the internal crises and tensions to accomplish their goals. This can be seen in these organisations' efforts to engage in local Islamic terrorism in Kazakhstan after 2011. The IMU's and IJU's destructive potential for the region is heightened by their presence in northern Afghanistan, as well as the expected drop in stability in Central Asia after the withdrawal of the ISAF forces in 2014 and the intensification of internal problems in the countries of the region.

- Even a threat that the IMU and IJU might return to Central Asia has far-reaching political consequences, since it fits into the fears of the elites of the region's countries regarding the stability of the region after 2014 and the security vacuum that will occur then. On an internal level it contributes to the state tightening its control over society and the fight against growing Islamisation, as well as both the real and perceived occurrences of Islamic radicalism. On a wider geopolitical scale, this threat is being currently exploited by Russia to secure its interests, as well as by China to strengthen its presence in the region in the security dimension. In the long-term perspective, it could contribute to the growth of tensions inside the region, the militarisation of Central Asia and an intensification of the rivalry between the major powers.

INTRODUCTION

Radical Islamic militants from Central Asia have undergone a long evolution, from groups operating on a local scale in the region during the 1990s to international terrorist organisations conducting operations on a global scale in cooperation with other Islamic terrorist groups. Their current activities and forms are multidimensional and complicated, characterised by combat versatility, structural amorphism, operational mobility and operations in different fields and theatres simultaneously. It is necessary to examine the evolution of these organisations to understand these phenomena.

In Central Asia there are several radical Islamic groups and milieus, such as the Salafists, Jamiat-e Tabliq and Hizb ut-Tahrir. However, due to their largely peaceful character (i.e. not undertaking armed struggle) or marginal importance, they are not the subject of this report, which is focused on the activities of the organised radical Islamic militants from Central Asia, currently grouped around two international terrorist organisations – the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Jihad Union.

The report is based on previous studies and research, official documents and government statements, media sources and information originating from the organisations themselves. These include the organisations' statements, propaganda materials and declarations by members and leaders of the IMU and IJU found on jihadi internet forums. Due to their character, these materials often do not have a permanent address, and are circulated online, mostly on jihadi forums, some of which require prior registration.

I. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF RADICAL ISLAMIC MILITANCY IN CENTRAL ASIA

The activity of radical Islamic militants from Central Asia can be divided into two stages: the first, which includes the beginnings of Islamic radicalism and the efforts of radicals to exploit the weakness of the region's states in the first decade after the fall of the USSR; and the second, which includes the period after the 9/11 attacks and the fall of the Taliban in 2001, when radicals from Central Asia were forced to escape and found themselves in a new environment, while their influence on the situation in Central Asia was diminished.

1. The beginnings of radical militancy in the region

The beginnings of Islamic radicalism in Central Asia (and the Soviet Union as a whole) go back to the 1980s, when on one hand the crisis of communism and Soviet society was perceivable, and on the other, due to *perestroika* and *glasnost*, as well as the war in Afghanistan (in which soldiers from the Central Asian republics participated), an atmosphere of laxity and an openness to new ideas developed. With these changes, religious life started to emerge from the underground, and in the Fergana Valley and Tajikistan the first illegal radical organisations started to form. Their underground activities were aimed at propagating a kind of Islam new to the region and increasing the role of religion in the functioning of society. Postulating a revival of the religious life, these organisations *de facto* went against both the traditional 'folk' Islam, and the official Muslim structures which were fully controlled by the Soviet authorities. They were inspired by the fundamentalist trends which developed in Pakistan (the Deobandi movement), and to a lesser extent by the Arab jihadists in war-torn Afghanistan and the Iranian fundamentalists. This search was a part of a broader and increasingly tempestuous discussion amongst the other Soviet Muslims (Tatars, Muslims from the Caucasus), which resulted in the creation of a state-wide Islamic Renaissance Party and its local branches. The radicals' ambitions evolved from small self-study groups, through demands for the re-Islamisation of society, to calls to transform the region – with Muslim identity and *sharia* as the main points of reference and basis for legislations.

In the early 1990s, with the fall of the Soviet Union, the breakdown of the socio-political system in the region, the decline of the state and economic collapse, the role of radical Islam increased, as did the radicals' freedom of action. On the eve of the civil war in Tajikistan (1992-1997), Islamists became one of the

forces of the emerging opposition, and in Uzbekistan's Fergana Valley, radical organisations began establishing local councils and volunteer militias.

During this time, the biggest role was played by the radicals in Tajikistan, where after achieving independence, a deep political, social and economic crisis, as well as disruption of the balance between rival clans (informal structures of local elites) led to a civil war¹. Despite often being depicted as an ideological conflict – with the post-communist government on one side, and the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), comprised of democratic forces and Islamists on the other – it was a *de facto* war between clans. The role of ideology, including radical Islam, was only a secondary derivative of the politically, socially and economically based tensions between the clans. Efforts to increase the role of ideology, by the participation of foreign radicals among others, were unsuccessful². During the course of the war the opposition was unable to gain power, and after the alteration of the geopolitical situation³, both sides signed a peace agreement in Moscow, under which the UTO was to be integrated into state structures, receiving 30% of the state posts, and begin to function as a legal political entity, known as the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan.

The situation was different in Uzbekistan's Fergana Valley, where the erosion of the state, social crisis and ethnic tensions (at times involving violence)⁴ led in 1991 to a power vacuum being formed on a local level; this was filled in by Islamist organisations, the largest being Adolat (Justice), operating in Namangan. The Islamists established local councils, and volunteer Muslim militias began patrolling the streets and attempting to implement the observance of *sharia*. In contrast to the Tajik Islamists, who at the time were less radical and based their authority on clan position, the leaders of Adolat (Tohir Yuldashev and Juma Namangani⁵) were young, and their actions their mainly driven by

¹ The civil war in Tajikistan lasted from 1992 to 1997, resulted in up to 100,000 deaths, and the creation of about 1.2 million refugees and internally displaced persons.

² One example of that is the unsuccessful attempts of the Saudi terrorist Khattab, who together with his small unit briefly fought in Tajikistan on the side of the UTO.

³ The rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan (after seizing Kabul in 1996) caused all external actors who influenced the situation in Tajikistan to become interested in stabilising the situation in the country. During the civil war Russia and Uzbekistan supported the government forces, while Iran and the Tajik forces in Afghanistan (mainly Ahmad Shah Massoud) supported the UTO.

⁴ For example the massacre of the Meskhetian Turks in 1988 and the ethnic conflict between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in 1990, both of which took place in the Kyrgyz part of the Fergana Valley.

⁵ Real name Jumaboy Khojayeov, a former Soviet soldier and a veteran of the intervention in Afghanistan, who after return to the USSR became a Muslim; he is better known under his *nom de guerre* Juma Namangani.

their own, often shallow, interpretation of Islam⁶. After unsuccessful attempts to widen their operations and join the structures of the newly formed state⁷, the Islamist organisations, due to the consolidation of power by Islam Karimov, were suppressed by the Uzbek authorities in early 1992, with their members being either arrested or forced to flee to Tajikistan, where the civil war was already raging. Some of the escapees took part in the civil war on the UTO's side, such as the Namangan Battalion⁸ under the command of Namangani, but their role was limited and was only important on a tactical level.

2. The failure of radical Islamic militancy

The end of the civil war in Tajikistan caused a divide within the Islamists – some of the opposition warlords accepted the terms of the peace treaty and joined the state structures, while others decided to continue the fight and control remote areas in the country or continue marauding⁹. After strengthening itself, the central government undertook several initiatives against the remnants of the warlords, who were either liquidated or forced to seek refuge in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. The Uzbek radicals who settled in Tajikistan became the only authentic force of radical Islamic militancy at that time, yet at first they too withdrew from armed struggle. However, by 1998 Yuldashev and Namangani had established the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), with the goal of toppling the Karimov regime and establishing an Islamic state in the Fergana Valley. The Uzbeks' presence in Tajikistan was tolerated by Dushanbe at the time, due to the support they were enjoying from their former comrades in arms (who now were part of the government), and their role as a counterbalance to Uzbekistan's policies aimed against

⁶ Even Yuldashev admitted to having limited knowledge at the time of what Islam and *sharia* were. Based on Yuldashev's statements in *Obrashcheniya 1*, available at http://www.jundurrahmon.com/jundulloh_filmlar/rus_tili/obraschenie_1.avi

⁷ In April of 1991 Yuldashev invited Islam Karimov, the leader of then still communist Uzbekistan, to Namangan. In December of the same year, after Uzbekistan had already declared its independence, Yuldashev and Karimov met in Namangan. During the meeting Yuldashev presented Adolat's successes in establishing order and proper social conduct, and proposed that the group extend its operations to the rest of the Fergana Valley, and potentially the whole country, under the auspices of the state. The idea was rejected by Karimov, and the encounter contributed to Karimov's ferocity in combating Islam in Uzbekistan.

⁸ Whole families fled to Tajikistan, which caused the later division of the movement into combat and 'civilian' elements.

⁹ For example the warlords Mullah Abdullah and Ali Bedaki, who did not accept the peace treaty and continued the fight, yet their Islamism did not influence their actions in a substantial manner.

Tajikistan (for example Tashkent's support for the coup by Colonel Khudayberdiyev in 1998¹⁰).

Uzbekistan's pressure on Tajikistan (accusing the IMU of conducting a series of bomb attacks in Tashkent in February 1999, probably orchestrated by the Uzbek authorities), as well as IMU's connections with the Taliban, caused the authorities in Dushanbe to change their position on the IMU, and to start putting pressure on the movement to leave the country. The IMU's form of escape forward was an attempt to destabilise the region by conducting a raid on the Batken district in the southern Kyrgyzstan, on the outskirts of the Fergana Valley in the summer of 1999. The goal of the raid was to reach the Uzbek part of the Fergana Valley and initiate an Islamic revolution against Karimov. However, the outnumbered IMU fighters were unable to overcome the Kyrgyz forces, and after several weeks of negotiations an informal settlement was reached, under which the IMU withdrew and partially moved into Taliban-controlled northern Afghanistan¹¹. In 2000, the IMU repeated the attempt, deploying larger forces, and also operating in Uzbekistan, yet the raid ended in failure again¹². The result of this was the movement's complete withdrawal from Tajikistan to Afghanistan, with political and logistical support from Dushanbe and Moscow (for example vehicles of the Russian 201st Division stationed in Tajikistan were used to transport the IMU militants and their families)¹³.

After the transfer to Afghanistan, the IMU acquired a permanent infrastructure (for example training camps) and became an organisation with not merely Uzbeks as members, but also Islamic radicals from all the states of Central Asia. It intensified its contacts not only with the Taliban, who gave them great freedom of action in the north of the country in return for their support in the civil war against the Northern Alliance, but also with the international terrorist organisations, such as al-Qaida and other radicals enjoying the Taliban's hospitality, such as Uyghur and Pakistani Islamists. In 2001 during the American-led Enduring Freedom operation, aimed against al-Qaida and Taliban, the IMU became a vanguard of the Taliban forces in the north of the country, with Namangani becoming the commander-in-chief of all Taliban forces in the

¹⁰ A coup attempt in the north of the country (Khojent) in November of 1998, undertaken by a former Tajik army colonel Mahmud Khudayberdiyev, supported by Uzbekistan.

¹¹ The IMU forces taking part in the raid were about 300 men strong.

¹² The IMU forces were about 600 men strong, and combat also took place on the territory of Uzbekistan, in the Surkhandariya district and in the region of Yangyabad, near Tashkent.

¹³ Rashid, Jihad. The rise of militant Islam in Central Asia, Yale University Press 2002, page 164.

north. During the course of the fighting, the movement suffered heavy losses¹⁴ and was forced to flee to the Tribal Territories in Pakistan.

The failure of the Batken raids in 1999 and 2000, and later the failure of the Taliban and IMU forces during the operation Enduring Freedom in 2001, ended the first stage of radical Islamic militancy in Central Asia. This phase was characterised by the attempts made by radicals to take over power via revolution or military actions, exploiting the weakness of the newly formed state structures of the region's countries. However, neither the public support which the Islamists had hoped for, nor the forces of the radicals, were sufficient to topple the local regimes.

3. Occurrences of Islamic radicalism in Central Asia after 2001

After the 9/11 attacks, the level of activity of the Islamic radicals in Central Asia dropped drastically, and its character altered significantly. The most active circles (mainly the IMU) were forced to resettle to areas remote from the region, and except for a few isolated attempts to continue the armed struggle in Central Asia (IJU attacks in 2004¹⁵), limited their activities to propaganda and recruitment. In contrast, there were numerous instances of the local authorities reporting the involvement of radical Islamists in several incidents that took place in the region during that time. In some cases such incidents occurred as a result of growing social problems, or ethnic tensions; attributing their causality to radical organisations was used instrumentally to combat opposition, tighten the state's control over the society and legitimise the above actions on the international arena. In other cases (such as the clashes in Karategin in Tajikistan in 2009), the confrontational actions of the authorities led to clashes with the local informal groups (which often had claimed to be Islamic), yet first of all these incidents should be viewed as attempts by the central authorities to subordinate these groups, and not as actions initiated by organised radical Islamic militants.

¹⁴ Reaching about 50% of the strength of the combat units, including Juma Namangani, one of the movement's leaders and founders.

¹⁵ In March and April 2004, the IJU perpetrated attacks on government targets in Tashkent and Bukhara, which was met by decisive responses from the authorities. As a result of these clashes, most of the casualties were suffered by the terrorists themselves (33 out of 47 deaths), In July of the same year the organisation also conducted suicide attacks on the embassies of the USA and Israel in Tashkent (4 fatalities, including 2 perpetrators). Based on Ronald Sandree, Islamic Jihad Union, NEFA Foundation 2008. Available at <http://www.nefafoundation.org/file/FeaturedDocs/nefaijuocto8.pdf>

One case in which a rebellion against the authorities was partially caused by Islamic factors was the unsuccessful uprising in the Uzbek city of Andijan¹⁶. However, despite the Islamic background to this case, the main reasons for the protests were the repressive policies of the authorities and social tensions, while the driving force came from adherents of branches of Islam traditional to the region, and not the radical Islamic militants, who are mostly Salafists. In May 2005 leaders of the local popular informal group Akromiya¹⁷ were arrested in Andijan, which led directly to the protests; these turned into an assault on the prison where the detainees were being held, and ended up with the crowd taking control over the city. After several days, on 13 May, the authorities deployed internal troops to the city; they opened fire on the protesters, killing from 800 to as many as 1500 people, depending on the sources. After the massacre in Andijan, Karimov was blamed for provoking the incident. Irrespective of whether this is true or not, the event allowed the government in Tashkent to put down the social unrest and show the public of Uzbekistan that attempts to change the regime, or even exert influence over it, would be met with a strong response from the authorities (these events took place shortly after the successful revolution in Kyrgyzstan, which at that time was unprecedented in the region).

One instance of actual activity by radical Islamic militants in Central Asia was the incidents in Kazakhstan which began in the second half of 2011, and the attempts by Islamist terrorist organisations to influence the situation. Kazakhstan at the time had witnessed an unprecedented series of terrorist attacks (mainly in Western Kazakhstan), committed by local Salafists. The acts were, amongst other factors, caused by the authorities' repression of the Salafists (who acted in an *ad hoc* and uncoordinated manner), and did not present a case of broader struggle for the Islamisation of the country. The established radical organisations did undertake several attempts to influence the course of action, however apart from a few instances, it is impossible to claim that they were really behind the occurrences. Despite the limited scale and effects of the incidents, the fact that the radical Islamic militants took interest in Kazakhstan, makes a new and disturbing quality¹⁸.

¹⁶ Also in adjacent locations on a smaller scale.

¹⁷ It was an informal religious business group, with a strong Sufi background.

¹⁸ See more in section IV.3, Central Asia and Russia.

4. Radical Islamic militants from Central Asia in Pakistan

Despite a drop in their activity in Central Asia after 2001, the radical Islamic militants from Central Asia (who at that time were mainly concentrated in the IMU) did not cease to exist. After the overthrow of the Taliban, who had provided them with hospitality, the IMU members fled to the Pakistani tribal territories (mainly Waziristan). The IMU was in a difficult situation at that period: during the fighting it suffered heavy losses, and as a result of the escape, found itself far away from its traditional areas of operation, uprooted and lacking the means to function as an organisation. Despite such a difficult situation, radical Islamic militants from Central Asia managed to adapt to the new reality, and after some time – despite difficulties (such as a split within the IMU) – they even started to achieve some successes. This was partially because they did not have any other options for survival, either as a movement or as individual members, other than continuing the armed struggle on a new territory¹⁹.

Yuldashev, the only IMU leader alive, at first concentrated mainly on rebuilding the movement's capabilities in Southern Waziristan; the command structures were recreated, new sources of income were searched (initially the revenues from agriculture carried out by movement's members)²⁰, and recruitment of volunteers from Central Asia was restarted. Another area of activity was securing the favour of influential Pashtun clans through various means, for example by arranged marriages, or sermons delivered by Yuldashev (who learned Pashto) in the local mosques²¹.

This strategy enabled the survival of the movement and the restoration of its capabilities, yet also led to its permanent placement in the complicated and dynamic scene of the Pakistani Tribal Territories, with their ethnic and clan diversity, and the power plays of the Pakistani army and intelligence; as well as the presence of other influential actors such as criminal groups (for example smuggling mafias) or terrorist organisations (such as the predominantly Arab al-Qaida). This had a crucial influence over the IMU's subsequent activi-

¹⁹ Members of the IMU could not simply relocate elsewhere, or return to their homeland. Although after the amnesty declared by Karimov in 2002, a small number of IMU militants did return to Uzbekistan, they were often persecuted; <http://www.fergananews.com/article.php?id=4348>

²⁰ The IMU, both then and now, is not composed only of militants, but also their families. See more in Chapter III, Characteristics of the activity of Islamic radicals from Central Asia.

²¹ David Witter, Uzbek militancy in Pakistan's tribal region, Institute for the Study of War 2011. Available at http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/BackgrounderIMU_28Jan.pdf

ties – when Pakistan, pressured by the USA, began attempts to clear South Waziristan of foreign fighters and Pashtun elements hostile towards Islamabad²², the IMU together with the Pashtun forces allied with it started to be attacked with full force²³. Yuldashev saw himself as having been betrayed by Islamabad²⁴, and as an imperative of survival chose the strategy of fighting the Pakistani forces, which led to IMU's further involvement in the intra-Pashtun political setup. The Pakistani government forces were never able to overpower the IMU directly, although the movement suffered heavy losses in combat, and was forced to change its location and patron several times as a result of Islamabad's skilful playing out of the local animosities²⁵. The situation was subject to change only after Yuldashev's death in 2009²⁶, when a new generation of leaders rose to power in the IMU²⁷, and the movement's activities gained their current shape (see further in Chapter II. Current profile of the radical Islamic militants).

From the beginning of the IMU's stay in Pakistan, not all the members of the movement agreed with Yuldashev's anti-Pakistani strategy, the cost of which was the lack of armed struggle in Central Asia. Some of the militants, associated mainly with Namangani, decided that the fight in Central Asia should continue, and in 2004 (or even as early as in 2002, according to other sourc-

²² This was caused by the strategy chosen after 9/11 by Pakistan's president Pervez Musharraf – covert support for the Taliban, while simultaneously combating the insubordinate and often hostile local Pashtun commanders. This allowed him to balance between the undertakings given to the USA, and the pressure from Pakistani army and intelligence (ISI) to support their former allies, the Taliban. Based on Zahid Hussain, *Frontline Pakistan. The path to catastrophe and killing of Benazir Bhutto*, Penguin Books 2008 pages 36, 43 and 46.

²³ The first minor skirmishes with IMU took place in 2002, although at the time the movement's militants declined combat and hid from the Pakistani forces. The first real battles took place in 2004. Witter, *op. cit.*

²⁴ Yuldashev stayed in Pakistan from 1995 to 1998, probably having contact with the ISI; also, some of the IMU's militants and leaders were flown out of the city of Kunduz (which was besieged by the Northern Alliance), by the Pakistani air force (the so-called 'airlift of evil'). Based on Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad. The rise...*, page 140; and Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos. How the war against Islamic extremism is being lost in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia*, Penguin Books 2008, page 92.

²⁵ At first the IMU was supported by the clans of the Waziri tribe, but in 2004 they split; some clans continued to support the movement, while others were hostile towards it. The culmination of the standoff was the so-called 'Uzbek War' in 2007, as a consequence of which the IMU was forced to resettle and change their patron to the Tehrik-e Taliban-e Pakistan.

²⁶ Yuldashev died on 27 August 2009 as a result of an American drone attack, conducted at the request of the Chief of Staff of the Pakistan Army, General Kayani. Based on a leaked American cable available at <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/02/09ISLAMABAD365.html#>

²⁷ Usman Odil and his deputy Abbas Mansour, an ethnic Kyrgyz.

es²⁸), Najimin Jalolov and Suhail Buranov, together with their followers, left the IMU and established a new, much smaller organisation, called the Islamic Jihad Union²⁹. The IJU aligned itself with the ISI-supported Haqqani Network (in return for their patronage, the IJU joined the fight against NATO forces in Afghanistan), and in 2004 conducted a series of attacks in Uzbekistan. The attacks were not as effective as the IJU expected, and were complicated and expensive to plan and execute due to the high level of supervision and control over society in Uzbekistan. Because of this, the IJU gave up the idea of waging jihad in Central Asia, and concentrated on fighting in Afghanistan alongside of the Taliban, and on intensifying cooperation with other international terrorist organisations (mainly al-Qaida) in the recruitment and training of radicals from Western Europe, in which the organisation noted several successes (for example the IJU's recruitment of about 80 German citizens)³⁰.

²⁸ Sandree, *op. cit.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ See more in chapter IV.4, Europe and global activities.

II. CURRENT PROFILE OF THE RADICAL ISLAMIC MILITANTS FROM CENTRAL ASIA

Currently, radical Islamic militants from Central Asia are concentrated around two distinct, yet similar and cooperating organisations: the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Jihad Union. These organisations, despite their Central Asian origin and character, are part of a network of international terrorism, based in Pakistan and concentrated around al-Qaida³¹. These organisations' members are Islamic radicals not only from Central Asia, but also from other countries of the former Soviet Union, Afghanistan, South Asia, Turkey and even Western Europe. The range of the IMU's and IJU's activities, including the strictly terrorist ones, has also evolved beyond the traditional region of interest, now reaching a global scale.

1. Strength and ethnic composition

Most probably the strength of the IMU is about 10,000 people, including about 3000 militants³², with the IJU being much smaller, probably around several hundred to a thousand militants strong³³. There are a number of problems with calculating the exact strength of the IMU and IJU – the vast inflow and outflow of volunteers to the training camps, the groups' structural amorphism and often the lack of formal membership in the organisations³⁴, as well as fact that they are in fact composed of two elements – combat (active militants) and 'civilian', comprised of their families, women, the elderly and children. The ethnic composition of the IMU and IJU is diverse, and alongside the militants from Central Asia³⁵, there are Afghans (mainly Uzbeks, but also Turkmens and Tajiks), Russian citizens³⁶, Uyghurs, Turks, volunteers from Western Europe (both migrants from the Muslim countries as well as

³¹ The so-called 'core' of al-Qaida is a small terrorist organisation with predominantly Arab Muslim radicals as members; it is based in Pakistan, but serves as a patron to a number of organisations worldwide. This is the so-called 'al-Qaida franchise', such as 'al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula' or 'al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb'. The main strength of al-Qaida in Pakistan is its ability to acquire funds.

³² http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/06/special_operations_f_4.php

³³ Sandree, *op. cit.*

³⁴ This is especially apparent in the case of IMU militants in Afghanistan. See further in chapter III.2, Structural amorphism and operational mobility.

³⁵ Mainly from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, but also from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Based on materials published by the IMU, available at <http://www.furqon.com/>.

³⁶ Predominantly Tatars, but also volunteers from the Caucasus (despite speculations, there are no Chechens amongst them) and even ethnic Russians who have converted to Islam. *Ibid.*

ethnic Germans – who have converted to Islam), small numbers of Pashtuns from Pakistan, and also even Americans, Burmese and Indonesians in their ranks. Based on the available information³⁷, we can tell that the core of the movement is made up of the militants from Central Asia and Afghanistan, and amongst the other groups most visible are German (perhaps as many as 200 people in the IMU and IJU)³⁸ and Russian citizens (around several dozen people).

2. Leaders

Despite the presence of many ethnic groups in the IMU and IJU, the crucial role is still being played by the Uzbeks, who shape the vector of the organisations' activities, become their *amirs* (leaders) and rule the organisations in an authoritarian fashion. After the death of Yuldashev in 2009, his deputy and son-in-law Usman Odil became the *amir*³⁹ and gave the organisation its current shape. After Odil's death in 2012 the leadership was taken by Usman Gazi⁴⁰ (previously known as Abdulfatah Ahmadi), who originates from Uzbekistan, was previously one of Yuldashev's deputies⁴¹, and continues the undertakings of his predecessor. The current leader of the IJU is Abdullah Fatih, also from Uzbekistan, who took power in 2009 after the death of Najimin Jalolov (who had previously been associated with one of the IMU's founders, Namangani)⁴².

3. Manifesto

In the manifesto of the radical Islamic militants from Central Asia, emphasis is laid on political issues, with Islam playing a secondary yet important role.

³⁷ A list of the movement's martyrs in 2011, published by the IMU, included 87 names, of which 64 people originated from Afghanistan, and only 20 from Central Asia. However, due to the character of the IMU's operations in 2011, it is not possible to extrapolate these proportions to the scale of the whole organisation; <http://furqon.com/2011-09-16-11-34-50.html>

³⁸ <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/disillusioned-german-islamists-returning-home-to-germany-a-844799.html>

³⁹ http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=39900&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=36ef48745coc3eedb9b79c033675b084

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Based on the IMU film Tema Mojaheda, available at http://www.jundurrahmon.com/jundulloh_filmlar/rus_tili/tema-mujahida-1.avi

⁴² IJU statement available at: <http://www.ansar1.info/showthread.php?t=13863> and Sandree, *op. cit.*

As their ultimate goal the IMU and IJU list the creation of an Islamic state in Central Asia⁴³. During the last several years, issues of the fight against the broadly understood West have also appeared in the IMU and IJU's ideology, which is a result of the influence of international terrorist organisations⁴⁴. Matters relating strictly to religion, such as theological questions, are not widely discussed, in contrast to other Islamic terrorist organisations, and the movement itself has members from different branches of Sunni Islam⁴⁵ (see further in chapter III.3, The universalisation and globalisation of Islamic terrorism). Both organisations view terrorist actions, including those aimed at civilian targets, as justified and legitimate means of struggle, equal to combat against armed forces⁴⁶.

4. Vectors of activity

The IMU and IJU's activities are characterised by a great diversity of means and a far-reaching operational mobility. These organisations can employ a wide spectrum of methods to act, ranging from terrorist activity, through guerrilla warfare, to regular combat operations. Their activities are also geographically dispersed: the IMU and IJU are based in Pakistan, and conduct both combat in Afghanistan and terrorist activities on a global scale.

The IMU and IJU maintain all of their organisational infrastructure (leadership, training camps, the families of militants etc.) in Northern Waziristan in Pakistan, the IMU in the Miram Shah region and the IJU in Mir Ali⁴⁷. This is possible thanks to the patronage of the Haqqani Network, and allows for relatively safe operations at the organisations' rear. At the same time, the strategic direction of IMU's and IJU's activity is the fight in northern Afghanistan,

⁴³ The IMU's film *Znamya Jihada*, available at http://www.jundurrahmon.com/jundulloh_filmlar/rus_tili/znamyajihada.avi

⁴⁴ Visible in the propaganda of IMU and IJU, for example: http://www.jhuf.net/showthread.php?17737-JundAllah-Studio-Der_Konig_Lowe-Abu-Ibraheem-Al-Alman

⁴⁵ Officially the IMU is a Sunni organisation adherent to the Hanafi *madhhab* (school of Islamic jurisprudence) common in Central Asia, and in the theological dimension (*akida*) following the teachings of imam Ata Hawi (*sic*); however, both the statements of the leaders of the movement and the actions of the organisation show that it is open for all Sunni radicals. Source: Tema Mujaheda 1.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ David Witter, *Uzbek militancy in Pakistan's tribal region*, Institute for the Study of War, Washington 2011, available at http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/BackgroundunderIMU_web.pdf

where the IMU has become a *de facto* Uzbek wing of the Taliban⁴⁸ and poses a serious threat to the Afghan and ISAF forces⁴⁹.

At the same time, the IMU and IJU conduct terrorist activity outside of their traditional area of interest (Central Asia, Afghanistan, Waziristan); principally these organisations specialise in propaganda, recruitment and training of Islamic radicals from Western Europe (especially from Germany). This is performed both independently (aimed at acquiring volunteers or funds) and as a subcontracting service for other terrorist organisations (mainly in the field of training). There have also been cases of these groups pursuing such activities in Russia and South Asia, and even attempts at terrorist acts in the USA⁵⁰ (see further in chapter IV. Areas of operation of the radical Islamic militants from Central Asia).

5. Acquisition of funds

The radical militants from Central Asia acquire funds from various sources, which can be divided into three basic categories. The first is the business activity of the organisations and their members, performed in the Pakistani Tribal Territories. It is primarily agriculture, but also trade and construction services⁵¹. These organisations are also engaged in the trade and trafficking of illegal drugs from Afghanistan⁵². The second category is the financial aid from other terrorist organisations, mainly al-Qaida, granted in return for the IMU's and IJU's participation in joint projects⁵³. The third category involves funds coming from the members and sympathisers of these organisations, both those migrating to Waziristan and those living abroad and transferring money to Pakistan. The last is especially true of the Islamic radicals living in Europe (amongst others there have been cases of such activity in

⁴⁸ Understood as forces fighting in Afghanistan against the ISAF and Afghan forces; subordinate to the so-called Quetta Shura, under the leadership of Mullah Omar, the leader and founder of the movement.

⁴⁹ Andrew Feitt, Countering the IMU in Afghanistan, *Small Wars Journal*, available at <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/386-feitt.pdf>

⁵⁰ http://www.rferl.org/content/uzbekistan_united_states_obama_islamic_movement/-24480474.html

⁵¹ Based on statements regarding the business activity of IMU members in the organisation's film Qaboilda nima gap? 6, available at http://www.jundurrahmon.com/jundulloh_filmlar/qaboilda6.avi

⁵² <http://www.rus-obr.ru/ru-web/2965>

⁵³ Predominantly the training of militants, but also joint terrorist actions.

Germany⁵⁴, France⁵⁵ and the Netherlands⁵⁶), but also in Russia⁵⁷, or even the United States⁵⁸.

6. Cooperation with other terrorist organisations

The Islamic radicals from Central Asia cooperate actively with other terrorist organisations, the most important of which are al-Qaida, the Haqqani Network⁵⁹ and the Afghan Taliban. North Waziristan is a place where different terrorist circles and organisations meet with each other, and is a destination point for Islamic radicals from all over the world. This proximity, as well as the congruence of their goals, leads to advanced cooperation between them – on one hand, the exchange of information and experience, the transfer of people between organisations or financial support; and on the other, the specialisation of particular organisations in individual aspects of terrorist activity. One has to bear in mind that in this region, the particular alliances and connections are subject to constant change, and that the activity of these organisations shows that within a short period of time, they can cooperate intensively and then turn on each other. Their relationship with Pakistan is similar – while radical Islamist circles inside the ISI⁶⁰ support them, the civil authorities, or

⁵⁴ <http://tribune.com.pk/story/345977/trial-opens-in-germany-of-suspected-militant-brothers/>

⁵⁵ <http://www.rferl.org/content/france-trial-10-alleged-imu-supporters/24788580.html>

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ <http://www.rus-obr.ru/ru-web/2965>

⁵⁸ http://www.rferl.org/content/uzbekistan_united_states_obama_islamic_movement/-24480474.html

⁵⁹ The Haqqani Network is a terrorist business organisation created during the fight against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan by Jalaluddin Haqqani. Currently run by his son Sirajuddin Haqqani, it conducts a wide range of armed terrorist activity in Eastern Afghanistan and runs a number of prosperous businesses. Its actions are controlled by the Pakistani intelligence agency ISI, which utilises it to accomplish its interests in Afghanistan. Based on Jeffrey Dressler, *The Haqqani Network – a strategic threat*, Institute for Study of War, Washington 2012, available at http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Haqqani_StrategicThreatweb_29MAR_o.pdf and the hearing before the US Congress of the US Chief of Joint Staffs of Admiral Mike Mullen, available at <http://armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/2011/09%20September/Mullen%2009-22-11.pdf>

⁶⁰ Inter-Services Intelligence, the most influential intelligence agency in Pakistan, theoretically subordinate to the General Staff, although in reality having its own goals and strategy, as well as conducting its own policies, independent of the army and civilian authorities. Its main areas of activity are Afghanistan and Kashmir, where it maintains a number of subordinate terrorist organisations. The ISI is not monolithic; there are several groups within it, including a radical Islamic wing, which supports the Islamic terrorist organisations. Most probably these circles were responsible for harbouring Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad; see http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/TM_009_Issue47.pdf

even the army, can combat them, and the terrorist organisations can conduct actions against them.

In the case of the IMU and IJU, this kind of cooperation means participation in joint actions with other terrorist organisations⁶¹, conducting activities in Western Europe, and giving Islamic radicals from around the world combat training, partially on the behalf of the rather compact al-Qaida⁶²; as well as running combat operations in northern Afghanistan, on behalf of the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani Network (which is part of the so-called Quetta Shura⁶³). In the past the IMU has also intensively cooperated with the *Tehrik-e Taliban-e Pakistan*, the so-called ‘Pakistani Taliban’, and currently signs of renewed cooperation between them are visible⁶⁴.

⁶¹ For example, the attack on the Bagram Airbase, the largest American base in Afghanistan, in July 2010. Described in the IMU film *Fidali Ali*, available at http://www.jundurrahmon.com/jundulloh_filmlar/ali_mergan_russian.avi

⁶² Witter, *op. cit.*

⁶³ Quetta Shura – the council of the most important Taliban leaders, established after the defeat in Afghanistan, by the movement’s leader Mullah Omar in the Pakistani city of Quetta.

⁶⁴ <http://www.ansari.info/showthread.php?t=44576>

III. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ACTIVITY OF ISLAMIC RADICALS FROM CENTRAL ASIA

The activity of the radical Islamic militants from Central Asia concentrated in the IMU and IJU is multidimensional, and shows not only the highly developed adaptation skills of these organisations, but also the general dynamic of the far-reaching changes in the functioning of Islamic terrorist organisations. The first category primarily includes combat versatility (i.e. the wide range of means these organisations employ); structural amorphism (for example, the transfer of people between different circles and terrorist organisations); and operational mobility, i.e. the ability to conduct operations at many different, remote theatres of action. The second category includes intensified cooperation between organisations, which leads to their far-reaching specialisation; as well as the globalisation and digitalisation of Islamic terrorism, which facilitates both the contacts between different groups and the radicalisation and recruitment of the Islamists worldwide.

1. Combat versatility

The essence of the IMU's and IJU's activities are their combat actions. These organisations have proven their ability to conduct diverse combat actions, showing both their skills at adaptation, as well as the scale of the threats associated with them. The IMU and IJU are capable of conducting regular military operations (such as the clashes in South Waziristan in 2007⁶⁵), guerrilla warfare (the raids in Kyrgyzstan in 1999 and 2000, operations in Afghanistan), as well as a whole spectrum of strictly terrorist actions. The latter include attacks utilising improvised explosive devices (IEDs, used mainly in Pakistan⁶⁶), attacks utilising IEDs placed on vehicles (VBIEDs, used in Pakistan and Afghanistan; the IMU and IJU have shown great innovativeness in this field)⁶⁷, suicide attacks (usually aimed against representatives of authorities⁶⁸, albeit not only: for ex-

⁶⁵ Clashes between the local Pashtun units supported by the Pakistani army and the IMU forces and the Pashtun clans allied with it; dubbed the 'Uzbek War' in Pakistan; http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2007/04/the_talibans_interne.php

⁶⁶ Apparent in the materials published by the IMU, such as *Vesti iz Pakistana 2*, available at http://furqon.com/images/stories/videos/fbp2_russian.avi

⁶⁷ The wide combat experience of the IMU and IJU, as well as their members with an appropriate technical education (for example electricians), allow them to construct complicated devices of this type. *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/2106-kunduz-police-chief-killed-in-suicide-attack>

ample the attack on the American Provincial Reconstruction Team in Panjshir in 2011⁶⁹) conducted also by women⁷⁰, and suicide raids similar to the one executed by *Lashkar-e Taiba* in Mumbai in 2008 (the so-called Mumbai-style attacks⁷¹) conducted by the IMU and IJU, for example in Afghanistan against the Bagram Airbase in 2010, but also planned in several places in Europe⁷².

The IMU and IJU possess a wide arsenal of weapons and equipment. Apart from firearms and explosive materials (as well as the means to produce them), these organisations have mortars, large-calibre machine guns, recoilless rifles, BM-1 rocket rounds and home-made copies of the latter⁷³. IMU and IJU militants also utilise modern military equipment, such as night-vision, bulletproof vests, Kevlar helmets and advanced communication sets, which is uncommon amongst terrorist organisations⁷⁴.

A distinct trait of the IMU's and IJU's militant activity is the high level of their militants' training and their use of complex combat tactics. The IMU was established by people who were veterans of the war in Afghanistan, or who had at least gone through compulsory military service in the USSR, where they were given appropriate training. In the later stages of the movement, the combat training of the new members remained comparable to that employed in the regular armed forces⁷⁵. Similarly the combat tactics (including reconnaissance

⁶⁹ <http://tribune.com.pk/story/274646/suicide-attack-on-afghanistan-us-facility-kills-two/> as well as the IMU's statement: <http://furqon.com/2011-09-08-02-30-52/2011-11-20-17-32-45/184-2011-11-25-07-03-24.html>

⁷⁰ The IMU and IJU actively engage women in their actions. Based on IMU materials: the film *Nastavleniye sestyor*, available at <http://furqon.com/images/stories/videos/nastavleniyas.avi>, an IMU statement about a suicide attack conducted by a woman in 2012, available at <http://www.jhuf.net/showthread.php?7955>; and http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/11/pro-taliban_pakistan.php

⁷¹ Attacks in which in order to maximise casualties, the militants first utilise firearms and only then explosive suicide vests. This kind of operation was conducted on a large scale for the first time in Mumbai in 2008. http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/11/analysis_mumbai_atta.php

⁷² <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/sep/29/terror-attack-plot-europe-foiled>

⁷³ Based on the materials published by the IMU and IJU, such as *Vesti iz Pakistana 2*, *Qaboilda nima gap? 2* (available at http://www.jundurrahmon.com/jundulloh_filmlar/qaboilda2.avi), *Qaboilda nima gap? 3* (available at http://www.jundurrahmon.com/jundulloh_filmlar/qaboilda3.avi).

⁷⁴ Feitt, *op. cit.*

⁷⁵ Such as military drilling, physical exercises, training in the use of firearms, explosive materials, navigation, communication and group tactical coordination. Based on the IMU materials *Tema Mojaheda 1*, *Znamyia Jihada*, and *Qaboilda nima gap? 8* (available at: http://www.jundurrahmon.com/jundulloh_filmlar/qaboilda8.avi).

and planning) were taken from those used by the regular armies, and are being constantly improved by the IMU and IJU. They also train the children of the organisations' members, with IMU even having its own *madrassa* in which children are subjected to indoctrination and military training⁷⁶.

The above factors mean that the radical Islamic militants from Central Asia have, on a tactical level, become a serious adversary to the coalition forces in Afghanistan⁷⁷, and an attractive subcontractor (mainly in the field of training) for other Islamic terrorist organisations (mainly al-Qaida; see further in chapter III.3, The universalisation and globalisation of Islamic terrorism).

2. Structural amorphism and operational mobility

An important trait of the IMU's and IJU's activity is their far-going structural amorphism and operational mobility – the capability to alter the organisation's operation and establish its activities in new areas. Several factors contribute to this phenomena, such as the lack of a permanent and unified command structure on the scale of the whole organisation; the lack of a unified model of membership in the organisation, and the ease of transferring people between various terrorist organisations. This gives the radical Islamic militants from Central Asia the ability to conduct actions on a wider than regional scale, and to influence a growing number of circles and environments, while keeping the organisation steerable and maintaining its Central Asian character.

The IMU and IJU do not have an unified organisational structure – this refers not only to the changes in structure associated with the evolution of these organisations, but above all to their internal structural diversity and mobility. Everything is based mainly on personal connections, which facilitates the task-based management of people and units according to the organisation's current needs – without the need to formalise its structure into unified form, but with the ability to easily implement rapid changes in case of necessity. This also makes it easier to conduct effective actions in remote operational theatres and set up new ones quickly⁷⁸.

⁷⁶ The Abdullah ibn Zybaair *madrassa*. Based on Quaboilda nima gap? 8.

⁷⁷ Feitt, *op. cit.*

⁷⁸ Based on the analysis of biographies of members and descriptions of the situation inside the movement found in materials published by the IMU, such as statements, lists and audio-visual materials, published on internet jihadi forums, amongst other sites.

The IMU and IJU do not have a unified model of membership. The organisations include both members who are fully committed to the cause – “full-time militants” – as well as those who only help the organisations in its operations. Some of the people assisting, or even fighting in the ranks of the IMU and IJU, are possibly not even aware of being a part of the organisation, which is primarily the case with the Uzbeks fighting under the IMU’s command in northern Afghanistan⁷⁹. The transfer of personnel between individual terrorist organisations active in Waziristan additionally strengthens the IMU and IJU’s structural amorphism. This phenomena occurs when a terrorist organisation transfers its members to another organisation in order to achieve common goals. In the case of the IMU and IJU these are mainly al-Qaida members who enter the ranks of these organisations in order to gain more opportunities while working on joint projects⁸⁰.

The above factors mean that the IMU and IJU are very internally diverse organisations. Currently they consist of overt units and an infrastructure, subordinated directly to the *amir* (the IMU and IJU in Waziristan)⁸¹; units functioning in the same area independently from each other, but coordinated by the *amir* in Waziristan (such as the IMU in northern Afghanistan)⁸²; as well as covert cells directed at only one kind of activity (for example, recruitment or acquisition of funds), which maintain contact with the headquarters of the organisation, but enjoy large degrees of autonomy (such as the cells in Central Asia, Russia and Germany)⁸³. In addition to that, there are also individuals acting on the behalf of IMU and IJU, who often have only limited contact with these organisations (Europe, USA, South-Eastern Asia)⁸⁴. Such a model of functioning allows the

⁷⁹ The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan is known under relatively neutral names, such as Uzbek Jamyati/Uzbek Harikati (Uzbek Group/Movement) or Islomi Harikati (Islamic Movement).

The Islamic Jihad Union is also known as Jamyat Islomi (Islamic Group) and Jihad Jamyati (Jihad Group).

⁸⁰ For example, cooperation in planning the failed attacks in Europe in 2010 (see further in IV.4, Europe and global activities), or the transfer of Moezeddin Garsallaoui from al-Qaida to the IJU (see further in IV.3, Central Asia and Russia); http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/10/jund_al_khilafah_emi.php

⁸¹ Qaboilda nima gap? 2.

⁸² Giustozzi Antonio, Reuter Christoph, The Northern Front. The Afghan insurgency spreading beyond the Pashtuns, Afghanistan Analysts Network 2010. Available at <http://aan-afghanistan.com/uploads/20100629AGCR-TheNorthernFront1.pdf>

⁸³ Based on a description of the captured cells. For example: <http://www.fergananews.com/news/20667>

⁸⁴ One example is the case of Ulugbek Kodirov in the United States. See http://www.rferl.org/content/uzbekistan_united_states_obama_islamic_movement/24480474.html

IMU and IJU to utilise their available resources efficiently; makes it difficult to combat them; and at the same time does not prevent them from being steered.

3. The universalisation and globalisation of Islamic terrorism

The universalisation and globalisation of Islamic terrorism are processes which occur in almost all such organisations, and the IMU and IJU are no exceptions to this. These processes consist of intensifying the interdependencies between Islamic terrorist organisations, widening their social support and social recruitment base (as well as the ability to reach out to it); and the diverse methods (including ones not directly involving violence) that these organisations can use in their operations (for example thanks to their opening on digital technologies). This has been made possible due to the redefinition of their goals (to operate on a global scale) and ceasing the use of centralised structures in favour of the network-based structures – elastic, open to cooperation with external partners, and much more efficient. This is especially visible in the case of the IMU and IJU, who in the ecosystem of global jihad are playing the role of a ‘jihad academy’ – recruiting and training Islamic radicals from countries far beyond their traditional region of interest.

The rise of cooperation among international Islamic terrorist organisations has led to the creation of a system of interdependency, the basic trait of which is the specialisation of particular organisations. In the case of those groups active on the Afghanistan/Pakistan border, the system is as follows: local organisations provide hospitality to the international terrorist organisations (for whom the lack of their own territory is a substantial problem), and in return receive either financial contributions (from al-Qaida) or assistance in combat actions (from the IMU and IJU). Simultaneously, there is analogous cooperation between the international terrorist organisations. Al-Qaida – small in strength, but possessing considerable funds, which mainly come from donors in the Persian Gulf – financially supports the IMU and IJU’s actions. In return, these organisations make concrete efforts to achieve common goals, such as propaganda, recruitment and training of Islamic radicals mainly (but not only) from Europe⁸⁵ (see further in chapter IV.3, Europe and global activities). For the Islamic radicals from Central Asia it is also a way to improve their position (as the operations are being carried out under their banner, not al-Qaida’s), as well as the prestige and attractiveness of these organisations (which facilitates the further recruitment of volunteers).

⁸⁵ Witter, *op. cit.*

An important element of the universalisation of Islamic terrorism, also in the case of IMU and IJU, is its digitalisation and broadening distribution. These phenomena are coupled with each other: on one hand, due to the rise of importance of radical Islam worldwide, the social base for operations of the Islamic terrorist organisations is increasing; and on the other, due to the wide usage of digital tools by these organisations, they are able not only to reach out to and recruit radicals, but also to contribute to the intensification of the radicalisation process itself. Use of the internet also allows Islamic terrorist organisations, geographically remote from each other, to exchange ideas and experiences, and for Islamic radicals worldwide to establish contact with them easily.

The IMU and IJU are very active in this field, utilising a wide array of means and conducting actions calculated on effecting several locations simultaneously. These organisations have their own websites⁸⁶, are active on the internet jihadi forums⁸⁷ and online social networking services⁸⁸, and also produce and publish audiovisual propaganda materials in a number of languages⁸⁹. The scale of the phenomena can be illustrated by the numbers: up to date, the IMU has created about 170 propaganda films (in at least 10 languages), of which about 20 are in English, 20 in Russian, and over 30 in German. These films are also being translated to other languages, such as French, Indonesian, Burmese, Urdu and Arabic⁹⁰. The IMU and IJU's activity in this field is aimed not only at the recruitment of Islamic radicals from European countries (predominantly Germany), South Asia and even the United States⁹¹, but also at the radicalisation (and possibly later recruitment) of the Muslim population in Central Asia⁹². In this case, the IMU and IJU have succeeded in developing a mechanism for

⁸⁶ The IMU's website is at <http://www.furqon.com/>, <http://www.jundurrahmon.com>, the IJU's -at <http://www.sehadetzamani.com>, <http://sodiqdar.info> These websites serve as platforms to distribute the organisations' materials, although they are subject to frequent blockades and hacker attacks, and so the IMU and IJU now more frequently use internet forums.

⁸⁷ Such as Ansar al Muajahideen, the largest jihadi forum in English (<http://www.ansar1.info>) or the Jamia Hafsa Forum (<http://www.jhuf.net/forum.php>).

⁸⁸ For example, activity on the Facebook website <https://www.facebook.com/mujohid>, or <https://www.facebook.com/IMU313>, as well as high activity on YouTube, for example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2GT1OD8Nmo>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JYne9sPQhX4>

⁸⁹ The IMU and IJU have their own propaganda film studios, the Jundullah Studio (IMU) and Badr al-Tawheed (IJU), which create and distribute propaganda materials, mainly films, but also audio podcasts.

⁹⁰ Based on list of films available at the IMU's website (<http://furqon.com/2011-09-08-02-37-00.html>) and those published on the jihadi forums.

⁹¹ Radicalising the Uzbek community in USA via the internet.

⁹² The presence of a large number of propaganda materials in Uzbek or Tajik, but also Russian.

distributing the propaganda materials, bypassing the internet blockades and monitoring present in many countries of the region⁹³.

The process of universalisation has also met with favourable conditions inside the IMU and IJU. These organisations do not have a precise ideological and theological framework within militant radical Sunni Islam⁹⁴. This allows them to reach out to radicals from different environments and circles, and to incorporate multiple ideological narratives without the need to concentrate or declare in favour of a particular one⁹⁵. In IMU and IJU propaganda, fighting the Karimov regime⁹⁶, the corruption of Western civilisation⁹⁷, betrayal of Islam by the Pakistani civilian authorities⁹⁸, combating the ISAF forces in Afghanistan⁹⁹ or even the persecution of the Muslim Rohingya people by the military junta in Burma¹⁰⁰ are interwoven. It is largely this approach that has made the operational mobility of IMU and IJU described earlier possible. However, it also encompasses certain limitations for these organisations; they cannot permit themselves any direct engagement in problems, such as ethnic tensions which involve animosities between the groups whose representatives represented in the IMU and IJU¹⁰¹.

⁹³ Which consists of publishing films online in Russian, Uzbek and Tajik in the 3gp format dedicated for the mobile phones. Such a film is then downloaded in a country without internet blockade, smuggled into Central Asia on mobile devices, and later distributed through the Bluetooth protocol.

⁹⁴ Based on the statements made by IMU leaders in Obrashcheniya 1.

⁹⁵ The IMU and IJU's ranks also include Islamists who adhere to non-radical branches of Sunni Islam (such as Hanafis), as well as those who support other Islamic theological doctrines, including radical ones such as Salafism or Deobandism. Similarly the social background of the organisations' members is diverse; despite the specific unity of their goals, a German Salafist, a Central Asian Islamist and a Burmese imam have different opinions and world-views.

⁹⁶ Obrashcheniya 1.

⁹⁷ IMU propaganda film *Der Muster Muslim*, available at http://furqon.com/images/stories/videos/der_muster_muslim.avi

⁹⁸ <http://www.ansari.info/showthread.php?t=44576>

⁹⁹ <http://ahyaislam.com/showthread.php?t=634>

¹⁰⁰ [http://www.jhuf.net/showthread.php?16775-IMU-Jundullah-Studio-presents-A-Lost-People-\(about-the-Tragedies-of-Burma\)-Al-Mufti-Abu-Dharr-Azzaam-\(Hafidhahullaah\)](http://www.jhuf.net/showthread.php?16775-IMU-Jundullah-Studio-presents-A-Lost-People-(about-the-Tragedies-of-Burma)-Al-Mufti-Abu-Dharr-Azzaam-(Hafidhahullaah))

¹⁰¹ An example of this is the IMU and IJU's inability to exploit the chaos that occurred in southern Kyrgyzstan during the ethnic conflict between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in 2010. Despite speculation of the IMU's potential involvement in the conflict on the Uzbek side, the organisation, due to its internal logic of operation and the presence of Kyrgyz in its ranks (at even the highest levels – at the time the commander of IMU's military units was an ethnic Kyrgyz, Abbas Mansur; *Vesti iz Pakistana* 2) – limited its reaction to releasing a lukewarm statement condemning the violence between Muslims.

IV. AREAS OF OPERATION OF THE RADICAL ISLAMIC MILITANTS FROM CENTRAL ASIA

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Jihad Union conduct their operations on several, distinct and distant areas simultaneously, which is a sign of their operational mobility. In each of these areas, the operations of the radical Islamic militants from Central Asia are influenced by different factors, are conducted in diverse manners, and bring forth varied reactions from the other actors. The most important areas of operations for the IMU and IJU are Afghanistan, Central Asia (together with Russia) and Western Europe (but also other countries, for example the USA).

1. Afghanistan

Afghanistan is the basic and strategic area of operation for the IMU and IJU. Their activity there is focused on recruitment and combat in the north of the country, where they have become a *de facto* Uzbek wing of the Taliban. The IMU and IJU's presence in northern Afghanistan poses a threat to ISAF and the authorities in Kabul, and is problematic for the Central Asian states, as well as for China and Russia.

Due to its size, the IMU is leading in the actions in Afghanistan, where it has succeeded in spreading the insurgency against the authorities in Kabul and ISAF forces to the territories inhabited by the ethnic minorities. The Taliban were unable to accomplish this due to the strong Pashtun affiliation of the movement, while the predominantly Uzbek IMU was capable of conducting radicalisation and recruitment among the local Uzbeks (and also Turkmens and Tajiks, to a lesser extent) and use them for militancy¹⁰². The IJU at first fought only alongside the Taliban in the south of the country, but is currently also cooperating with the IMU in the north of the country¹⁰³.

So far the IMU has mainly participated in fighting in the provinces of Kunduz, Takhar, Balkh, Baghlan, Samangan, Jowzjan, Faryab, Badakhshan and Badghis, which border Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan¹⁰⁴. The IMU's *mo-*

¹⁰² Giustozzi, Reuter, *op. cit.*

¹⁰³ Based on materials published by the IJU showing the combat of its militants in Afghanistan.

¹⁰⁴ Based on the ISAF statements (available at <http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/isaf-releases/index.php>) and materials published by the IMU and IJU, for example at <http://www.ansar1.info/showthread.php?t=14438>

dus operandi in Afghanistan is to recruit members of the local ethnic minorities for combat, which is directed by IMU veterans from Central Asia; the IMU headquarters in Waziristan also deploys to Afghanistan experts in such fields as communications, explosives etc.¹⁰⁵ The IMU's combat operations in Afghanistan include regular combat and occupation of captured terrain¹⁰⁶, guerrilla warfare and insurgency, such as attempts to seize the water reservoirs in the province of Faryab¹⁰⁷, or extensive use of improvised explosive devices against the Afghan and ISAF forces; together with terrorist actions, such as the numerous suicide attacks¹⁰⁸. In the north of Afghanistan, as in other parts of the country affected by the insurgency, there is a local shadow administration¹⁰⁹. Its leaders often originate from the IMU, although they are not fully independent and operate within a wider 'shadow government' structure, managed directly by the Taliban¹¹⁰. The IMU has shown its ability to perpetrate attacks in provinces traditionally hostile towards the Taliban and forces allied with them, an example of which are the two attacks conducted by the IMU in Panjshir¹¹¹ (the IMU is the only organisation which has perpetrated attacks in this province).

Combating the IMU in the previously peaceful parts of Afghanistan, due to the socio-political situation, is a serious challenge for the ISAF forces and Afghan authorities. The current elite of the Uzbek and Tajik communities in Afghanistan is divided and lacks a single, undisputed and charismatic leader amongst these minorities. This has enabled the IMU to channel the frustration of some of the Afghan Uzbeks and even Tajiks, who during the 1996-2001 struggle against the Taliban were in the vanguard of the anti-Taliban forces. This creates a danger not only for the local authorities, but also the government in Kabul and the ISAF forces, since in all the calculations, it was the north of the

¹⁰⁵ Feitt, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁶ For example the skirmishes in the Badakhshan province in May 2013, <http://www.fergananews.com/news/20639>

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.fergananews.com/news/20639>

¹⁰⁸ Usually aimed against representatives of the local authorities or security forces, such as the attack on the chief of police in Kunduz province in March 2011; <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/2106-kunduz-police-chief-killed-in-suicide-attack>.

¹⁰⁹ Alternative state structures of the Taliban, which include their own governors, judicial and tax systems and police.

¹¹⁰ <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/04/20134910314648770.html>

¹¹¹ Attacks in October 2011 and May 2013: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/274646/suicide-attack-on-afghanistan-us-facility-kills-two/> and <http://www.jhuf.net/showthread.php?18108-Islamic-Movement-of-Uzbekistan-Notification-of-Martyrdom-Operation-in-the-center-of-Panjshir-Afghanistan>

country which was expected to be neutral, or even support the government in Kabul. The need to combat the IMU not only draws the forces away from fighting the Taliban in the south and east of the country, but also potentially creates a possibility of wider involvement of ethnic minorities in the insurgency against the authorities in Kabul (see further in chapter V, Perspectives). The scale of the efforts which the US and ISAF forces have invested in combating the IMU in the north of Afghanistan can be seen by the intensification of the raids against the IMU's regional commanders and specialists; during the first five months of 2013 there were 26 such raids (compared to less than 20 last year), which are a crucial element of combating the IMU in Afghanistan¹¹². Another important element of this strategy is the enduring American campaign against the IMU and IJU targets (leaders and infrastructure) in Waziristan, utilising unmanned aerial vehicles (drones)¹¹³.

2. The regional consequences of IMU's activity in Afghanistan

The IMU's presence in the north of Afghanistan is very problematic for the Central Asian states bordering Afghanistan, but also for China, and indirectly Russia also. Most of all the Central Asian states fear the repetition of attempts at incursion into the region by radical Islamic militants from the IMU (especially after the withdrawal of ISAF forces planned for 2014), but also the destructive influence of this organisation on their increasingly Islamised societies¹¹⁴. So far the IMU has shown no interest in initiating direct armed struggle in Central Asia (although that does not mean this will continue to be the case in the future); despite this, the regimes in these states have blamed the IMU for several incidents on their territories¹¹⁵, and have actively utilised the spectre of a return of the IMU to fight Islam in their countries and to receive aid

¹¹² Based on ISAF statements, available at <http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/isaf-releases/index.php>

¹¹³ IMU leaders such as Yuldashev, Usman Odil and Abbas Mansur, as well as other important members of the organisation (including some from Europe), have been killed by American drone attacks.

¹¹⁴ The Islamisation of the societies of Central Asia is taking place in all the countries of the region, and is viewed as a threat by the authorities, who are trying to combat this process, as can be seen for example in Uzbekistan (for example the actions of the governor of the Andijan district <http://www.centrasia.ru/person2.php?st=1160886886>) and Tajikistan (for example, the ban on minors entering religious facilities <http://tribune.com.pk/story/224080/tajikistan-bans-muslim-youths-from-praying-in-mosques/>).

¹¹⁵ For example, attributing responsibility for the clashes in Karategin in 2009 to the IMU: http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/09/suicide_bomber_strik_5php

(including military aid) from the United States, Western countries, Russia and China¹¹⁶.

The IMU's activities in Afghanistan have also deepened China's concerns for the stability of Xinjiang and Central Asia. Above all, China is afraid of a rise in Islamic radicalism and Uyghur separatism in its western province of Xinjiang, as well as intensification of operations by the East Turkestan Islamic Movement¹¹⁷, which currently is based in Waziristan and has a long history of close contacts with the IMU and IJU¹¹⁸. The spill over of potential conflict in Central Asia onto Chinese territory is also a threat to China. In order to eliminate the dangerous impact of the situation in Afghanistan (including the actions of the IMU and IJU), China has undertaken a number of steps to intensify military cooperation with the countries of the region, also within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation¹¹⁹.

For Russia, which treats Central Asia as its sphere of influence, the IMU's activity in Afghanistan simultaneously presents an opportunity and a challenge. In the short term, Moscow has been exploiting the threat of the IMU's return instrumentally in order to secure its interests in the region. In the long term, the IMU's operations in Afghanistan are dangerous for Russia, due to the risk of destabilisation of Central Asia associated with them. Most vulnerable are the weakest countries of the region, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, with which Russia is allied through the CSTO, and in which it has a military presence. The potential armed presence of the IMU in these states might force Russia to engage in armed conflict, which is not desirable for Moscow¹²⁰.

The policy of Iran towards the IMU's combat in Afghanistan, while marginal, is of relevance. In 2001, Iran granted temporary asylum to IMU members¹²¹,

¹¹⁶ <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/reports/us-military-aid-central-asia-1999-2009-security-priorities-trump-human-rights-and-diplomacy>

¹¹⁷ The East Turkestan Islamic Movement, the Turkestan Islamic Party – an Islamic terrorist organisation established in 1997, with predominantly Uighur membership. Its goal is the creation of an Islamic state on Uighur territories in China. Currently based in Waziristan, it has close ties to the IMU and IJU, and participates both in combat in Afghanistan (on a limited scale) as well as terrorist activity in China.

¹¹⁸ Obrashchenya 1 and <http://www.cfr.org/china/east-turkestan-islamic-movement-etim/p9179>

¹¹⁹ http://www.ojkum.ru/arc/lib/2010_04_15.pdf

¹²⁰ This was shown by the ethnic conflict in south Kyrgyzstan in 2010, when the Kyrgyz government asked for Russian troops to intervene under the auspices of the CSTO, yet the Russian government chose not to risk engaging its own forces in the pacification process. <http://lenta.ru/news/2010/06/12/refuse/>

¹²¹ <http://www.fergananews.com/article.php?id=4348>

and there is evidence that Iran currently supports (on a limited scale) the movement's militant activities in Afghanistan¹²². However, this is only one element of a larger change in Iranian strategy towards the Taliban and their allies, whom Iran previously combated but now partially supports, in order to harm US attempts to realise its strategy in Afghanistan¹²³.

3. Central Asia and Russia

The IMU and IJU's operations in Central Asia, and also in Russia, are mainly aimed at the radicalisation and recruitment of new members. Despite numerous media reports and declarations by the states of the region, these organisations are not directly engaged in militancy in these countries. A disturbing exception was the IJU's attempts to engage in terrorism in Kazakhstan after 2011, setting up means which would have enabled the IJU to channel it and take control over the local atomised Islamic radicals.

At present, Central Asia is above all a source of new recruits for the IMU and IJU. The growing Islamisation of the societies of Central Asia favours such actions, although the authoritarian or even totalitarian character of the region's regimes and their continuous persecution of Islam pose serious problems for these organisations. The IMU and IJU have a network of cells in the Central Asian countries, whose actions are directed at the radicalisation of Muslims and their subsequent recruitment¹²⁴. Most such operations are conducted in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (where the weakness of state structures combines with the rising number of people practising Islam), and the least in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, where the level of surveillance over society and the locked-in character of these states substantially limits (but does not eliminate¹²⁵) the IMU's and IJU's capabilities.

Russia is also an area of operations for the IMU and IJU. This is connected with the presence of several million Central Asian labour migrants in Russia (predominantly from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and to a lesser extent from Kyr-

¹²² http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/09/senior_islamic_movem_2.php

¹²³ Based on the US Department of State report on states supporting terrorism, available at: <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2010/170260.htm>

¹²⁴ The existence of such cells is admitted by the radicals themselves (based on Fidali Ali), but also proven by the arrests of its members of such cells by the authorities (for example in Tajikistan in January of 2013 - <http://www.rferl.org/content/tajikistan-imu/24825405.html>).

¹²⁵ The IMU and IJU still have volunteers from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Based on Qaboilda nima gap 3.

gyzstan), amongst whom these organisations actively conduct recruitment operations¹²⁶. This in turn is facilitated by the Islamisation of the emigrants in Russia, which is a result of their social situation, attacks from Russian nationalist circles and the influence of Islamists from the Muslim republics of the Northern Caucasus. The IMU and IJU also conduct recruitment operations on a limited scale amongst Russian Islamic radicals (mainly Tatars, but also representatives of other ethnic groups (such as Bashkirs), and even ethnic Russian converts to Islam)¹²⁷, which is supported by a wider process of the radicalisation of Russia's Muslims¹²⁸. It is also possible that the IMU and IJU are conducting recruitment operations amongst the Crimean Tatars (especially bearing their rising Islamisation and relations with Central Asia in mind), although currently there is no evidence to prove this.

The radicalisation and recruitment process is lengthy and consists of several stages. The first stage is the radicalisation of the future recruit, without the recruiter revealing any association with a terrorist organisation¹²⁹. The second stage consists of convincing such an individual of the necessity of migrating (*hijra*) to a territory where *sharia* is the basic law, and the need to wage *jihād*; only afterwards is the association with the particular organisation revealed¹³⁰. The last stage is the operation to deploy the volunteer together with his family (as well as their financial savings) to Waziristan, where before becoming a full-fledged member of the organisation, he is subject to a counterintelligence screening¹³¹ and undergoes thorough training. The journey to Pakistan itself is also divided into several stages, and is usually done *via* Turkey and Iran (also rarely through the Persian Gulf countries), but never directly¹³².

A new and dangerous quality are the attempts made by terrorist organisations to exploit the tensions and disturbances caused by the endogenic grassroots Islamic radicals. One example of this is the actions of the Islamic Jihad Union (and indirectly also al-Qaida) during the terrorist incidents in Kazakhstan af-

¹²⁶ Based on <http://www.fergananews.com/news.php?id=17739>, and an account given by a member of the IMU recruited in Russia, published by the IMU (in Fidali Ali).

¹²⁷ <http://www.fergananews.com/news/20667>

¹²⁸ <http://www.golos-ameriki.ru/content/russia-siberia-islam/1611001.html>

¹²⁹ Based on IMU member's description of his own recruitment. Fidali Ali.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Accounts from the former members of the organisation. Sandree, *op. cit.*

¹³² Based on the account of a journey to Waziristan by volunteers from Kazakhstan, described by the wife of a former IJU member in the 2013 documentary films on the Chabar television, *Zapadnya and Terrorizm v Kazakhstanye – slepaya vera*.

ter 2011, which were conducted by domestic Islamic radicals. At the same time, the lack of engagement by the IMU and IJU in the bloody ethnic conflict between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2010, shows the limitations of these organisations in exploiting the ethnic conflicts present in the region for their own benefit.

At that time in Kazakhstan, which up to then had been the only state in Central Asia free of occurrences of Islamic terrorism, several violent and terrorist incidents took place (shooting attacks, bombings and suicide attacks, skirmishes with the law enforcement forces), as a result of which 32 people were killed¹³³. These attacks were concentrated in the western part of the country (but also took place on the outskirts of Almaty) and were directed against the law enforcement forces (mainly the National Security Committee (KNC) and police)¹³⁴. One of their causes was the authorities' brutal putdown of the growing Islamisation and radicalisation of this part of the country¹³⁵. Kazakhstan's local Salafists (the majority of whom are against waging jihad in Kazakhstan¹³⁶) are primarily connected with Salafists in Russia and Caucasus, which is also true of the Kazakh Islamic radicals, who are atomised and lack organisational structures¹³⁷.

International terrorist organisations saw the potential of the Kazakh Islamic radicals, who had hitherto only sporadically been recruited for militancy in Pakistan and Afghanistan. At the time the Islamic Jihad Union established a new organisation, Jund ul-Khalifah (Soldiers of the Caliphate)¹³⁸, which was headed by Abu Moez (Moezeddine Garsallaoui), a Swiss citizen of Switzerland

¹³³ Based on information about the casualties of particular attacks, available at: <http://tengrinews.kz/tag/%D0%A2%D0%B5%D1%80%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%BC>

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ http://rus.azattyq.org/content/terakt_fokina_babitski_taraz_kizatova_demos_kazakhstan_aktobe/24406772.html as well as based on the notorious tales of persecution of the Salafists by the police and KNC found in the posts of Kazakh Salafists on the internet forums of Islamists in the Caucasus.

¹³⁶ For example, the Kazakh religious leader Rinat Abu Muhammad, who is very popular amongst the post-Soviet Salafists opposed to armed struggle. More at <http://salaf.kz/?p=870>

¹³⁷ For example, the extensive presence of Kazakh Salafists on the internet forums for the Islamic radicals in the Caucasus. Also it was Hunafa, an Islamist website from Caucasus, which published a fatwa by Sheikh Abu Munzir Ash-Shinkriti, which allows Muslims in Kazakhstan to engage in militancy in defence of the religion. <http://hunafa.com/2010/09/fatwa-o-dzhixade-protiv-kazaxstanskoj-policii/> and <http://hunafa.com/2011/03/vopros-ozakonnosti-voennyx-dejstv-v-kazaxstane/>

¹³⁸ Based on http://www.sehadetzamani.com/haber_detay.php?haber_id=2498

of Tunisian descent who had previously been associated with al-Qaida¹³⁹. The goal of Jund ul-Khalifah was to radicalise the Salafist community in Kazakhstan, channel the violence and benefit from it. The organisation itself has no independence, and is only a cell within the IJU. The main signs of Jund ul-Khalifah's activity were its statements and threats to the authorities and President Nazarbayev¹⁴⁰, while its influence on the events in Kazakhstan was small (it recruited the perpetrators of one attack online)¹⁴¹. Despite that, the newly formed organisation conducted a broad propaganda campaign and established itself in the narrative about Islamic terrorism in the region¹⁴².

The Kazakh government was able to temporarily manage the situation through a campaign of mass arrests (over 500 people were arrested)¹⁴³ and in 2012 Islamic radicals only undertook a few operations¹⁴⁴, although there were two unexplained incidents¹⁴⁵, responsibility for one of which the authorities attributed to an undefined Islamic radical group¹⁴⁶. The situation showed the authorities' weakness towards Islamic terrorism¹⁴⁷, the willingness of the elites to exploit this matter in their internal struggles¹⁴⁸, international terrorist organisations' interest in Kazakhstan, as well as their readiness to exploit the endogenic problems in Central Asia for their benefit. Above all, not only did the causes of the occurrence of terrorism in Kazakhstan (the radicalisation of certain circles and milieus, the pressure of the authorities on the Salafists) not cease, but they actually increased in strength, which poses a threat to the stability of the country, especially in the context of the unresolved issue of the succession of power after President Nazarbayev.

¹³⁹ http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/10/jund_al_khilafah_emi.php

¹⁴⁰ <http://ansar1.info/showthread.php?t=36876>

¹⁴¹ <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2011/11/01/15322.shtml>

¹⁴² For example: http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=-40911&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=b6a10c91e3e0a1fo08278abc9a6097d8

¹⁴³ http://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/v-kazahstane-sotni-chelovek-sidyat-za-ekstremizm-i-terrorizm-229238/

¹⁴⁴ <http://www.inform.kz/rus/article/2496476> and <http://lenta.ru/news/2012/07/12/terrorism/>

¹⁴⁵ Killing of 14 soldiers and destruction of an outpost on the border with China (<http://www.rferl.org/content/more-kazakh-border-guards-found-dead/24600606.html>), and killing of 11 people in the mountains of the Ili-Alatau national park (<http://www.newsru.com/crime/14aug2012/8bodynazparkkaz.html>).

¹⁴⁶ <http://news.gazeta.kz/art.asp?aid=373083>

¹⁴⁷ Principally the appropriate authorities' lack of readiness to face threats and challenges of this kind.

¹⁴⁸ Mainly as an element of a campaign against the powerful head of the National Security Committee Nurtay Abikayev; <http://www.astanadaily.kz/?p=1506>

4. Europe and global activities

Radical Islamic militants from Central Asia are active in Europe (mainly in Germany), where they concentrate on radicalisation and recruitment, but have also attempted to perpetrate terrorist attacks. The IMU and IJU's operations in Europe are conducted in cooperation with al-Qaida, which does not possess the manpower of these organisations. Apart from this, the IMU and IJU have shown interest in engaging in a limited way in activities in other parts of the world, such as the South-East Asia or even United States.

The basic aim of IMU's and IJU's operations in Europe is to radicalise the local Muslims and recruit volunteers. The pioneer of these actions was the IJU, which initiated efforts to recruit new members from Turkey, and gradually shifted its activities to Muslim communities in the countries of Western Europe¹⁴⁹. At first this process was part of the subcontracting services for al-Qaida, but later became an integral part of the IMU and IJU's operations, an element of building up their position amongst other terrorist organisations and increasing their attractiveness in the other theatres of operations (such as Central Asia and Russia).

The recruitment of radicals from Europe is conducted by IMU and IJU for several purposes: first of all, to gain new militants for the armed struggle in Pakistan and Afghanistan (in these cases, the volunteers are transferred to Waziristan and undergo training); secondly to create local cells of these organisations, with the task of supporting the IMU and IJU's actions in acquiring funds or further recruitment; and occasionally to aid in the preparations of terrorist acts¹⁵⁰.

The country most vulnerable to the activity of the IMU and IJU is Germany, from where about 200 militants of these organisations originate¹⁵¹, and where they have attempted to perpetrate several terrorist attacks. The IMU and IJU are also active in other European countries, mainly France, the United Kingdom and Denmark, but also in Spain and potentially in Sweden¹⁵². In all of these

¹⁴⁹ http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=39332

¹⁵⁰ Witter, *op. cit.*

¹⁵¹ <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/disillusioned-german-islamists-returning-home-to-germany-a-844799.html>

¹⁵² Based on information about IMU and IJU members detained in Europe; their citizenship, residence, place of employment, etc.

countries the basis for their activity is the existence of radicalised Muslim communities (such as the Salafists)¹⁵³. With the spread of radical European Islam to other countries of the continent, the area of the IMU's and IJU's operations will probably also increase.

In Europe, except for auxiliary activity (such as recruitment or acquisition of funds, etc.), strictly terrorist actions conducted by radical Islamic militants from Central Asia have also taken place. The IMU and IJU have planned several attacks in Europe, which were thwarted due to the early discovery of preparations. However, another serious threat is posed by attacks perpetrated by European Islamic radicals who act independently, but who were trained by the Central Asian terrorists, or even just inspired by their actions.

The first attack planned by radical Islamic militants from Central Asia was a 2007 attack on the Ramstein American base in Germany with firearms and explosive materials¹⁵⁴. The perpetrators of the attack were to be members of a four-person IJU cell in Sauerland consisting of one Turkish citizen and three Germans¹⁵⁵, who had received training in Waziristan. They were caught before committing the attack, albeit after they had succeeded in planning and carrying out most of the preparations (for example, initiating the production of explosive materials)¹⁵⁶.

In 2010 several intelligence agencies announced that they had discovered a plan to conduct a number of attacks in Germany, France and the United Kingdom, which were supposed to be suicide raids resembling the Lashkar-e Taiba attack in Mumbai in 2008¹⁵⁷. These attacks were ordered directly by Osama bin Laden, and the perpetrators were to have been IMU terrorists¹⁵⁸. In this case, it was possible to discover the plans of terrorists early enough and foil the attacks (the militants who were to have directly participated in the attacks were killed while training in the IMU training camp in Waziristan)¹⁵⁹.

¹⁵³ http://centralasiaonline.com/en_GB/articles/caii/features/main/2012/02/03/feature-01

¹⁵⁴ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/mar/04/islamic-jihad-union-bomb-plot>

¹⁵⁵ These included two ethnic Germans, converts to Islam.

¹⁵⁶ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/apr/22/german-terrorism-trial>

¹⁵⁷ <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/operation-alberich-how-the-cia-helped-germany-foil-terror-plot-a-504837.html>

¹⁵⁸ <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/o,1518,730377,00.html>

¹⁵⁹ Including citizens of Germany and the United Kingdom: http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/10/british_german_jihad.php

More dangerous are the less spectacular terrorist attacks conducted not by the IMU or IJU cells, but by Islamic radicals who either received training from these organisations, or for whom their actions serve as inspiration. Examples of this type of actions are the attacks in Toulouse in 2012 (7 fatalities) perpetrated by Mohammad Merah, who had undergone training at the IJU training camp in Waziristan¹⁶⁰; and the 2011 attack on American soldiers in the Frankfurt airport (2 fatalities), perpetrated by an Albanian Islamic radical, probably inspired by the operations (such as the plans to attack the Rammstein airbase) of the radical Islamic militants from Central Asia¹⁶¹. Attacks of this type are more dangerous, since they are much harder to detect; the perpetrators originate from Europe (or are citizens of European countries), do not maintain frequent contacts with the terrorist organisations, and their plans of attacks are not the subject of communications, the interception of which was the main reason for the failure of the complicated, spectacular actions planned by the IMU and IJU. The role of these organisations in such attacks is limited to propaganda activity, and possibly training, although this does not minimise the dangers stemming from their operations.

The IMU and IJU is also employing a similar model of activity on a global scale, undertaking a number of actions aimed at the radicalisation of Muslim communities, the acquisition of volunteers and funds, as well as potentially influencing lone Islamic radicals to conduct attacks on their own. This is especially true of countries of South-East Asia, where a large social potential exists, and where the IMU's and IJU's activity is directed mainly at the recruitment and acquisition of funds¹⁶². These organisation, however, are also active in such exotic (from their point of view) countries as the USA, and even African states, ac-

¹⁶⁰ http://www.longwarjournal.org/threat-matrix/archives/2012/03/french_fighters_training_in_no.php as well as a statement by Jund ul-Khalifat (a group subordinate to the IJU) regarding the training of Merah: <http://ansari.info/showthread.php?t=39797>

¹⁶¹ <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/fatal-shooting-at-frankfurt-airport-german-investigators-suspect-islamist-motives-behind-attack-a-748769.html>

¹⁶² Mainly Indonesia, Malaysia (because of its language's proximity to Indonesian), Burma and Bangladesh. Based on the analysis of propaganda materials published by IMU and IJU and translated to Indonesian and Burmese (for example <https://www.ansari.info/showthread.php?t=40924>, and <https://194.145.209.131/~jhufnet/showthread.php?15923-Jundullah-Studio-presents-New-video-release-by-burmese-language-quot-Izzatu-rasta-quot-Part-3>), as well as the actions of Mullah Azzam abu Dhar, a Burmese refugee who graduated from a Pakistani *madrasa* (Vesti iz Pakistana 2), and is currently a prominent member of the IMU: [http://www.jhuf.net/showthread.php?16775-IMU-Jundullah-Studio-presents-A-Lost-People-\(about-the-Tragedies-of-Burma\)-Al-Mufti-Abu-Dharr-Azzaam-\(Hafidhahullaah\)](http://www.jhuf.net/showthread.php?16775-IMU-Jundullah-Studio-presents-A-Lost-People-(about-the-Tragedies-of-Burma)-Al-Mufti-Abu-Dharr-Azzaam-(Hafidhahullaah))

ording to some sources¹⁶³. The main reason for the IMU's interest in the United States is the presence there of a large Uzbek diaspora (about 50,000 people¹⁶⁴). Examples of IMU's activity in USA are the 2012 arrest of an Uzbek man who had been supporting the movement financially¹⁶⁵ and logistically, based on an order from the IMU to attack President Obama, as well as the arrest of an IMU member (also an Uzbek) in Idaho in May 2013, who had planned to conduct terrorist attacks on US soil¹⁶⁶. The IJU is also active on the territory of the United States, evidence of which is the arrests of IJU members (recruited online) in Chicago and Philadelphia in 2012¹⁶⁷.

¹⁶³ <http://www.newvision.co.ug/news/637260-police-issue-fresh-terror-alert.html>

¹⁶⁴ <http://www.rosbalt.ru/exussr/2012/01/27/938338.html>

¹⁶⁵ http://www.rferl.org/content/uzbekistan_united_states_obama_islamic_movement/24480474.html

¹⁶⁶ <http://www.idahostatesman.com/2013/05/18/2581161/boise-case-may-be-new-chapter.html>

¹⁶⁷ <http://www.jpost.com/Breaking-News/US-man-arrested-for-supporting-Uzbek-Islamic-militants>

V. PERSPECTIVES

The activity of radical Islamic militants from Central Asia is subject to rapid and dynamic changes. This trend will probably continue in the future, which makes it difficult to forecast their further operations. The possible scenarios include the establishment of a quasi-state in northern Afghanistan, or a possible return of the IMU and IJU to Central Asia. Much will depend on the state of affairs at the time, such as the situation in Afghanistan after the planned withdrawal of the ISAF forces in 2014, as well as the internal stability of the Central Asian states and the rise of already existing tensions.

The future of the IMU and IJU will largely be a function of the situation inside Afghanistan after 2014. The American strategy of increasing the size of its military contingent and intensifying the operations (the so-called surge), which was effective in Iraq, failed to accomplish its goals in Afghanistan. The Taliban were forced out of some of the areas they controlled in the south¹⁶⁸ (such as Helmand), although this was a short-lived success; after shifting the gravity of conflict to other regions, they return to the areas they previously controlled. The international community has not succeeded in creating efficient state apparatus and state institutions in Afghanistan, and the political system does not reflect the real balance of power between the particular groups. Simultaneously, the power of the northern warlords, who were traditionally hostile towards the Taliban, has been substantially weakened¹⁶⁹. This has created a situation where the authorities in Kabul are weak and ineffective¹⁷⁰, while the ethnic minorities in the north lack leadership, are detached from each other and internally divided. At the same time the Taliban, and the forces allied with them, are actually in control of the situation in many provinces, conduct the functions of local administration, and due to the absence of any real political representation for the Pashtuns, enjoy growing support from that part of the population. In the perspective of the 2014 withdrawal of the ISAF and majority of the American forces, a return to the *status quo ante* 2001 is possible. Such

¹⁶⁸ Initially the surge was supposed to also include the east of the country, although due to greater than expected difficulties in the south of the country, the plan was not fully realised.

¹⁶⁹ Limiting their role after 2001 by the authorities in Kabul and the policies of the United States. The Taliban have also assassinated several influential former warlords and political figures from the north of the country (such as Burhanuddin Rabbani, the former president and leader of the Tajiks), with the intention of hindering the unification of the north in the perspective of 2014.

¹⁷⁰ A substantial problem, for example, is the overwhelming corruption present at all levels of power.

a scenario would mean the collapse of the central government, civil war between the Taliban (supported by Pakistan) and forces representing the ethnic minorities from the north (supported by Russia, USA and the Central Asian states); as well as the far-reaching fragmentation of the country.

For the IMU and IJU, such a situation would open up new opportunities, and their operations in northern Afghanistan would significantly increase. They will probably never reach a level which would allow the IMU to take control over the entire north of the country, yet establishing control over part of the territories in the north does not seem improbable. Depending on the course of events, the radical militants from Central Asia would be able to either continue their militancy alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan while maintaining their headquarters in Pakistan, or transfer all their assets to Afghanistan and control a chosen compact area, which would *de facto* become a quasi-state (similar to the fragmentation of the country in the 1990s), closely linked to the Taliban and al-Qaida. This would substantially strengthen the Central Asian Islamic radicals concentrated around the IMU and IJU, while the existence itself of such an entity would pose many threats to the region by reinforcing the fears of the Central Asian states and China, as well as by increasing the existing internal tensions.

The potential return of the IMU and IJU to active militant operations in Central Asia depends not only on the situation in Afghanistan and the role these organisations will play in it, but also the internal situation in Central Asia itself. Regardless of the course of events, a return of the IMU and IJU to the region as a compact force seems highly improbable, and a more likely scenario is that these organisations will exploit the possible escalation of tensions and conflicts in the region.

Regardless of the particular states' current political and economic successes (primarily Kazakhstan), or the effectiveness of their apparatus of repression (primarily Uzbekistan), both they and the region of Central Asia as a whole are highly unstable in their political and social structures, as well as their stabilisation mechanisms being not fully-fledged and vulnerable to shocks. Kazakhstan not only has the problem of the radicalisation of some circles and groups (such as the Salafists in the west of the country), but above all communal tensions with a social background (which could be seen for example in the frequent worker strikes) and the unresolved issue of the succession of power after President Nazarbayev. If these factors superimpose on each other, they could pose a serious threat to the stability of the country, and due to its importance in the region, also to the neighbouring states. Uzbekistan has a similar serious

problem regarding the succession of power after President Karimov (who has ruled the country since 1989), and the expected subsequent struggle within the elite, which could cause the exposure of suppressed social tensions, or even a violent domestic conflict. Kyrgyzstan, apart from the general weakness of the state, suffers from a deep socio-political divide between the north and the south of the country, which has previously been a source of instability. The ethnic conflict in the south of the country is still unresolved, and even a minor incident could transform into open armed clashes on an even larger scale than took place in 2010. The Islamic factor in the south of the country is also rising; the Islamists¹⁷¹ have detached themselves from the ethnic divides¹⁷², and are a distinct force whose importance is on the rise¹⁷³. The role of Islam is also growing in Tajikistan, where the state authorities are fighting against both the Islamisation of the country, the legal Islamic party, as well as both real and perceived radicals; this leads to these groups' growing frustration which, in combination with the other tensions (such as those existing between different regions), the bad socio-economic situation and the erosion of state authority, could be a serious threat to the stability of the country. Apart from these factors, there are also tensions and animosities between the states of the region, as seen in the border incidents in the Fergana Valley (between Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) and tensions between Tashkent and Dushanbe. There also is a possibility of a merger of internal crises in particular countries, for example if Uzbekistan intervenes (as part of the consolidation of the new power after Karimov's death) in the ethnic conflict in southern Kyrgyzstan.

For the IMU and IJU, the above threats to the region's stability offer potential room for re-establishing their presence in the region. The IMU's entry into Central Asia as an organised and compact force is highly unlikely; a more probable scenario seems to be the IMU and IJU becoming involved in a future crisis in one or other of the Central Asian states and subsequent exploitation of the Islamic factor. The most probable areas of such activity seem to be Uzbekistan (if the power struggle leads to an internal conflict) and Kyrgyzstan (if, as a result of the ethnic conflict in the south, chaos breaks out, and the role of local

¹⁷¹ In this case these are not necessarily individuals adhering to the radical branches of Islam, but rather people who practice their faith and adhere to the religious commandments.

¹⁷² They took an active role in preventing and combating violence during the ethnic conflict in 2010.

¹⁷³ Signs of their willingness to take action and further radicalise are apparent, as seen in accounts of Islamists from southern Kyrgyzstan fighting in Syria; <http://www.fergananews.com/news/20677>

Islamists rises). In a practical dimension, these operations would consist of organising and training local Islamists, providing weapons, and the direct participation of only a limited number of IMU and IJU militants, who would serve as commanders and experts¹⁷⁴. The goal of such actions would first of all be the seizure of power, if not in the whole country, than in part of it (for example, the Fergana Valley).

The appearance of radical Islamic militants, even in a limited scope and in one country of the region, would have far-reaching political consequences for all the Central Asian states and neighbouring powers. The regimes of these states fear that the IMU might return to the region and join in the existing tensions. A situation where radical Islamic militants are involved in armed clashes in one of the Central Asian states would cause panic reactions from the other countries of the region, which could include the closing of the borders, limited intervention (for example by Kazakhstan in northern Kyrgyzstan, or by Uzbekistan in Kyrgyzstan) and requests for foreign intervention (first of all by Russia).

If such a situation occurs, Russia's (and potentially also China's) willingness to provide direct military assistance under the auspices of the SCTO or SCO remains an open issue. In the case of an actual conflict in Central Asia with the participation of the IMU and IJU, Russia would be interested in eliminating these organisations' destructive influence to its territory (for example through limiting its spread to the other countries of the region), than in direct armed combat with the Islamic radicals. However, that does not mean that Russia would not take advantage of the threat of the militants' return to realize its goals in the region (for example the issue of the return of Russian troops to the Tajik-Afghan border), or in the case of a crisis in one of the states, to secure its interests in the others (for example by establishing a military presence in Uzbekistan or Kazakhstan). In the face of a threat of further expansion of Islamic radicalism, such a move could be accepted by the local regimes.

In the case of IMU and IJU actions conducted on a global scale (such as those in Europe), we could expect both their intensification and further geographical expansion (for example to the Philippines, the Muslim communities in Australia or the countries of Latin America). The current operations of these organisations show that the main threat does not come from their direct par-

¹⁷⁴ As has already taken place in northern Afghanistan.

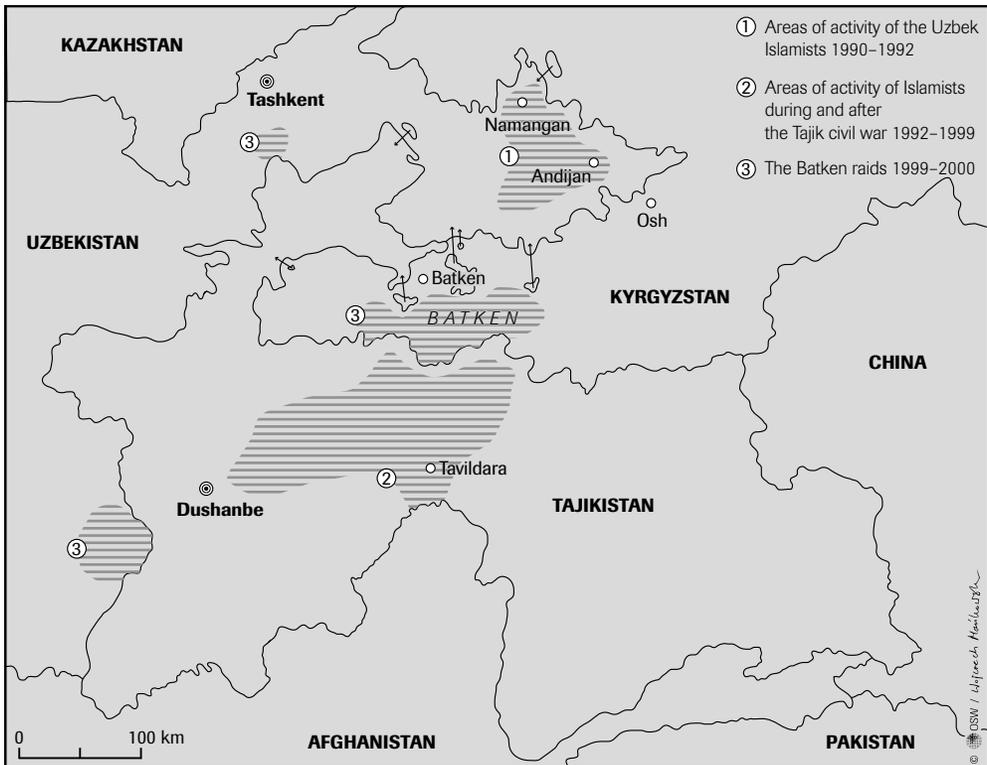
ticipation in terrorist attacks outside of their traditional region of interest, but from an indirect yet no less dangerous threat, through the radicalisation of local Muslim communities (through the influence of IMU and IJU propaganda) or by the inspiration and training of Islamic radicals, independent and isolated in their actions. Another challenge for Europe could be the return of the IMU and IJU militants to their home countries, where with their combat experience and radical Islamic views, they could pose a serious threat to public security.

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Map 1. Central Asia



Map 2. Areas of activity of Islamic radicals 1990–2000



Map 3. Main area of activity of radical Islamic militants of Central Asia in 2013



Map 4. Afghanistan - Pakistan border



Radical Islamic militants from Central Asia have ceased to be a local phenomenon. The organisations created by those groups (the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Jihad Union) engage in propaganda, recruitment, fundraising and terrorist operations in states distant from their traditional area of interest, such as European Union countries, South Asia and the United States. Their ranks contain not only Central Asian Islamists, but also those from other countries, such as Russia, Pakistan, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, China, Turkey and even Myanmar. These organisations' current activities and forms are multidimensional and complicated, characterised by combat versatility, structural amorphism, operational mobility and simultaneous operations in different fields and theatres. As a result of the universalisation of Islamic terrorism, these organisations have been intensifying contacts with other international Islamic terrorist organisations based in Waziristan (mainly al-Qaida, Taliban and the Haqqani Network).

A specific system of mutual cooperation has developed between them, involving the specialisation of various terrorist organisations in particular aspects of terrorist activity. The IMU and IJU specialise in the recruitment and training of Islamic radicals from around the world, and have thus become a kind of 'jihad academy'.

