

Experience of Uzbekistan in the fight against terrorism and international cooperation



The problem of countering terrorism does not lose its relevance during a pandemic. On the contrary, the epidemiological crisis of unprecedented scale that gripped the whole world and affected all spheres of public life and economic activity revealed a number of problems that create fertile ground for the spread of ideas of violent extremism and terrorism.

The growth of poverty and unemployment is observed, the number of migrants and forced migrants is increasing. All these crisis phenomena in the economy and social life can increase inequality, create risks of exacerbation of conflicts of a social, ethnic, religious and other nature.

HISTORICAL RETROSPECTIVE

Independent Uzbekistan has its own history of fighting terrorism, where the spread of radical ideas after gaining independence was associated with a difficult socio-economic situation, the emergence of additional hotbeds of instability in the region, attempts to legitimize and consolidate power through religion.

At the same time, the formation of radical groups in Central Asia was largely facilitated by the mass atheist policy pursued in the USSR, accompanied by repressions against believers and pressure on them.

The subsequent weakening of the ideological positions of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, and the liberalization of socio-political processes contributed to the active penetration of ideology into Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries through foreign emissaries of various international extremist centers. This stimulated the spread of a phenomenon atypical for Uzbekistan - religious extremism aimed at undermining interfaith and interethnic harmony in the country.

Nevertheless, at an early stage of independence, Uzbekistan, being a multinational and multi-confessional

country where more than 130 ethnic groups live and there are 16 confessions, chose the unambiguous path of building a democratic state based on the principles of secularism.

In the face of growing terrorist threats, Uzbekistan has developed its own strategy with a priority on security and stable development. At the first stage of the development of measures, the main stake was made on the formation of a system of administrative and criminal response to various manifestations of terrorism, incl. strengthening the regulatory framework, improving the system of law enforcement agencies, promoting the effective administration of judicial justice in the field of countering terrorism and its financing. The activities of all parties and movements calling for an anti-constitutional change in the state system were terminated. After that, most of these parties and movements went underground.

The country faced acts of international terrorism in 1999, the peak of terrorist activity was in 2004. Thus, on March 28 - April 1, 2004, terrorist acts were carried out in the city of Tashkent, Bukhara and Tashkent regions. On July 30, 2004, repeated terrorist attacks were carried out in Tashkent at the embassies of the United States and Israel, as well as at the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Bystanders and law enforcement officers became their victims.

In addition, several Uzbeks joined terrorist groups in neighboring Afghanistan, which later attempted to invade the territory of Uzbekistan in order to destabilize the situation.

An alarming situation required an immediate response. Uzbekistan put forward the main initiatives of collective regional security and carried out large-scale work to form a system for ensuring stability in society, the state and the region as a whole. In 2000, the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Combating Terrorism" was adopted.

As a result of the active foreign policy of Uzbekistan, a number of bilateral and multilateral treaties and agreements were concluded with states interested in the joint fight against terrorism and other destructive activities. In particular, in 2000, an agreement was signed in Tashkent between Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan "On joint actions to combat terrorism, political and religious extremism, and transnational organized crime."

Uzbekistan, facing the "ugly face" of terrorism with its own eyes, strongly condemned the terrorist acts committed on September 11, 2001 in the United States. Tashkent was one of the first to accept Washington's proposal for a joint fight against terrorism and supported their counter-terrorism actions, providing states and international organizations wishing to provide humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan with the opportunity to use their land, air and waterways.

CONCEPTUAL REVISION OF APPROACHES

The transformation of international terrorism into a complex socio-political phenomenon requires a constant search for ways to develop effective response measures.

Despite the fact that not a single terrorist act has been carried out in Uzbekistan over the past 10 years, the participation of citizens of the country in hostilities in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the involvement of immigrants from Uzbekistan in committing terrorist acts in the United States, Sweden, and Turkey necessitated a revision of the approach to the problem of deradicalization of the population and increasing the effectiveness of preventive measures.

In this regard, in the renewed Uzbekistan, the emphasis has shifted in favor of identifying and eliminating conditions and causes conducive to the spread of terrorism. These measures are clearly reflected in the Action Strategy for the five priority areas of the country's development in 2017-2021, approved by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on February 7, 2017.

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev outlined the creation of a belt of stability and good-neighborliness around Uzbekistan, the protection of human rights and freedoms, the strengthening of religious tolerance and

interethnic harmony as priority areas for ensuring the country's security. The initiatives being implemented in these areas are based on the principles of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

The conceptual revision of approaches to preventing and countering extremism and terrorism includes the following key points.

First, the adoption of such important documents as the Defense Doctrine, the laws "On Countering Extremism", "On Internal Affairs Bodies", "On the State Security Service", "On the National Guard", made it possible to strengthen the legal basis for prevention in the fight against terrorism.

Second, respect for human rights and the rule of law are integral components of the fight against terrorism in Uzbekistan. The government's counter-terrorism measures are consistent with both national law and the State's obligations under international law.

It is important to note that the state policy of Uzbekistan in the field of combating terrorism and protecting human rights is aimed at creating conditions under which these areas do not conflict with each other, but, on the contrary, would complement and reinforce each other. This entails the need to develop principles, norms and obligations defining the boundaries of permissible legal actions of the authorities aimed at combating terrorism.

The National Strategy on Human Rights, adopted for the first time in the history of Uzbekistan in 2020, also reflected the government's policy towards persons guilty of committing terrorist crimes, including issues of their rehabilitation. These measures are based on the principles of humanism, justice, independence of the judiciary, competitiveness of the judicial process, expansion of the Habeas Corpus institution, and strengthening of judicial supervision over the investigation. Public confidence in justice is achieved through the implementation of these principles.

The results of the implementation of the Strategy are also manifested in more humane decisions of the courts when imposing punishments on persons who have fallen under the influence of radical ideas. If until 2016 in criminal cases related to the participation of terrorist activities, judges appointed long terms of imprisonment (from 5 to 15 years), today the courts are limited to either suspended sentences or imprisonment of up to 5 years. Also, the defendants in criminal cases who participated in illegal religious-extremist organizations are released from the courtroom under the guarantee of citizens' self-government bodies ("mahalla"), the Youth Union and other public organizations.

At the same time, the authorities are taking measures to ensure transparency in the process of investigating criminal cases with an "extremist connotation". The press services of law enforcement agencies work closely with the media and bloggers. At the same time, special attention is paid to excluding from the lists of accused and suspects those persons in respect of whom compromising materials are limited only by the applicant base without the necessary evidence.

Thirdly, systematic work is underway for social rehabilitation, the return to normal life of those who fell under the influence of extremist ideas and realized their mistakes.

Measures are being taken to decriminalize and de-radicalize people accused of crimes related to violent extremism and terrorism. So, in June 2017, at the initiative of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the so-called "black lists" were revised in order to exclude from them persons who were firmly on the path of correction. Since 2017, more than 20 thousand people have been excluded from such lists.

A special commission is operating in Uzbekistan to investigate the cases of citizens who have visited the war zones in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Under the new order, individuals who did not commit serious crimes and did not participate in hostilities can be exempted from prosecution.

These measures made it possible to implement the Mehr humanitarian action to repatriate the citizens of Uzbekistan from the zones of armed conflicts in the Middle East and Afghanistan. Since 2017, more than

500 citizens of Uzbekistan, mainly women and children, have returned to the country. All conditions have been created for their integration into society: access to educational, medical and social programs has been provided, including through the provision of housing and employment.

Another important step in the rehabilitation of persons involved in religious extremist movements was the practice of applying acts of pardon. Since 2017, this measure has been applied to over 4 thousand persons serving sentences for crimes of an extremist nature. The act of pardon acts as an important incentive for the correction of persons who have violated the law, giving them a chance to return to society, family and become active participants in the reforms being carried out in the country.

Fourth, measures are being taken to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism. For example, in recent years, youth and gender policies have been strengthened, and initiatives in education, sustainable development, social justice, including poverty reduction and social inclusion, have been implemented to reduce vulnerability to violent extremism and terrorist recruitment.

In September 2019, the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On guarantees of equal rights and opportunities for women and men" (On gender equality) was adopted. At the same time, within the framework of the law, new mechanisms are being formed aimed at strengthening the social status of women in society and protecting their rights and interests.

Taking into account the fact that 60% of the population of Uzbekistan is young people, considered as a "strategic resource of the state", in 2016 the Law "On State Youth Policy" was adopted. In accordance with the law, conditions are created for the self-realization of young people, for them to receive a quality education and to protect their rights. The Agency for Youth Affairs is actively operating in Uzbekistan, which, in cooperation with other public organizations, is systematically working to provide support to children whose parents have come under the influence of religious extremist movements. In 2017 alone, about 10 thousand young people from such families were employed.

As a result of the implementation of the youth policy, the number of registered terrorist crimes in Uzbekistan among persons under the age of 30 has significantly decreased in 2020 compared to 2017, more than 2 times decreased.

Fifth, taking into account the revision of the paradigm of the fight against terrorism, the mechanisms for training specialized personnel are being improved. All law enforcement agencies involved in the fight against terrorism have specialized academies and institutions.

At the same time, special attention is paid not only to the training of law enforcement officers, but also theologians and theologians. For this purpose, the International Islamic Academy, the international research centers of Imam Bukhari, Imam Termiziy, Imam Matrudi, and the Center for Islamic Civilization have been established.

In addition, the scientific schools "Fikh", "Kalom", "Hadith", "Akida" and "Tasawwuf" have started their activity in the regions of Uzbekistan, where they train specialists in some sections of Islamic studies. These scientific and educational institutions serve as the basis for the training of highly educated theologians and experts in Islamic studies.

THE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

International cooperation is at the core of Uzbekistan's counterterrorism strategy. The Republic of Uzbekistan is a party to all 13 existing UN conventions and protocols on combating terrorism. It should be noted that the country was among the first to support the fight against international terrorism, including the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

In 2011, the countries of the region adopted a Joint Action Plan for the Implementation of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Central Asia was the first region where a comprehensive and comprehensive

implementation of this document was launched.

This year marks ten years since the adoption of the Joint Action in the region to implement the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. In this regard, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev, during his speech at the 75th session of the UN General Assembly, announced an initiative to hold an international conference in Tashkent in 2021 dedicated to this significant date.

The holding of this conference will make it possible to sum up the results of the work over the past period, as well as to determine new priorities and areas of interaction, to give a new impetus to regional cooperation in the fight against the threats of extremism and terrorism.

At the same time, a mechanism has been established for the UN Counter-Terrorism Office and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime to conduct step-by-step training courses on combating terrorism, violent extremism, organized crime and the financing of terrorism for law enforcement officials of the country.

Uzbekistan is an active member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which also aims to jointly ensure and maintain peace, security and stability in the region. In this context, it should be noted that the establishment of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) of the SCO with the location of its headquarters in Tashkent became a kind of recognition of the leading role of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the fight against terrorism. Every year, with the assistance and coordinating role of the Executive Committee of the SCO RATS, joint anti-terrorist exercises are held on the territory of the Parties, in which representatives of Uzbekistan take an active part.

Similar work is being carried out by the Anti-Terrorist Center of the Commonwealth of Independent States (ATC CIS). Within the framework of the CIS, the "Program of cooperation of the CIS member states in the fight against terrorism and other violent manifestations of extremism for 2020-2022" was adopted. The success of this practice is demonstrated by the fact that the law enforcement agencies of the Commonwealth countries only in 2020 jointly liquidated 22 cells of international terrorist organizations that were recruiting people for training in the ranks of militants abroad.

In countering terrorism, the Republic of Uzbekistan pays special attention to partnership with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which is supported by two-year programs for joint cooperation in the politico-military dimension. So, within the framework of cooperation for 2021-2022, the key goals are countering terrorism, ensuring information / cyber security and assistance in combating the financing of terrorism.

At the same time, in order to improve the qualifications of law enforcement officials, cooperation has been established with the Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism (EAG), the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering (FATF), and the Egmont Group. With the participation of experts from specialized international organizations, as well as according to their recommendations, a National Assessment of the risks of legalization of proceeds from criminal activity and financing of terrorism in the Republic of Uzbekistan has been developed.

Cooperation is actively developing and strengthening not only through international organizations, but also at the level of the Security Councils of the Central Asian states. All countries of the region are implementing programs of bilateral cooperation in the field of security, which include a set of measures aimed at countering terrorism. Moreover, in order to promptly respond to threats of terrorism with the participation of all states of the region, coordinating working groups have been established through law enforcement agencies.

It should be noted that the principles of such cooperation are as follows:

First, it is possible to effectively counter modern threats only by strengthening the collective mechanisms of international cooperation, by adopting consistent measures that exclude the possibility of applying double standards;

Second, priority should be given to combating the causes of threats, not their consequences. It is important for the international community to step up its contribution to the fight against radical and extremist centers that cultivate the ideology of hatred and create a conveyor belt for the formation of future terrorists;

Third, the response to the growing threat of terrorism must be all-encompassing, and the UN must play the role of a key world coordinator in this direction.

The President of the Republic of Uzbekistan in his speeches from the tribunes of international organizations - UN, SCO, CIS and others - repeatedly stressed the need to strengthen cooperation in the fight against this phenomenon on a global scale.

Only at the end of 2020, initiatives were expressed on:

- organizing an international conference dedicated to 10th anniversary of the implementation of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia;
- implementation of the Cooperation Program in the field of deradicalization within the framework of the CIS Anti-Terrorist Center;
- adaptation of the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure to the solution of fundamentally new tasks to ensure security in the Organization's space.

INSTEAD OF AN AFTERWORD

Taking into account the changes in the forms, objects and goals of terrorism, the Republic of Uzbekistan is adapting its strategy of combating terrorism to modern challenges and threats, relying on the struggle for the minds of people, primarily young people, by increasing legal culture, spiritual and religious enlightenment and protection of rights. person.

The government is based on the principle: it is important to fight the reasons that make citizens susceptible to terrorist ideologies.

With its counterterrorism policy, the state is trying to develop in citizens, on the one hand, immunity against a radical understanding of Islam, foster tolerance, and on the other hand, the instinct of self-preservation against recruitment.

Collective mechanisms of international cooperation are being strengthened, and special attention is being paid to the exchange of experience in the field of terrorism prevention.

And despite the rejection of tough forceful measures, Uzbekistan is among the safest countries in the world. In the new "Global Terrorism Index" for November 2020, among 164 states, Uzbekistan ranked 134th and again entered the category of countries with an insignificant level of terrorist threat.

Timur Akhmedov,

**Head of the Department of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the
President of the Republic of Uzbekistan**

Source