Uzbekistan: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

On October 31, 2017, Sayfullo Saipov, 29, an Uzbek national and U.S. legal permanent resident, drove a rented flatbed truck onto a pedestrian thoroughfare in lower Manhattan, killing eight people and injuring 11 others. He exited the truck holding knives and yelling "Allahu Akbar" (Allah is the greatest) before he was shot and injured by a New York City policeman. It was the fourth terrorist attack by an Uzbek man in 2017, the others occurring in Istanbul, Turkey; St. Petersburg, Russia; and Stockholm, Sweden. (Sources: Fox News, CBS News, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Reuters)

Overview

Muslim-majority Uzbekistan gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 and shares borders with Turkmenistan and Afghanistan to the south and with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to the east. Uzbekistan has been described by the media as "resource-rich, desperately poor, and wildly corrupt." For decades, Uzbekistan was ruled by an iron fist and vast, intrusive security apparatus. Until his death in 2016, Islam Karimov was the only president Uzbekistan had known since gaining independence. (Sources: CBS News, Daily Beast)

During Uzbekistan's transition to independence, Islamic values were increasingly viewed as an attractive alternative to chaos, corruption, and ethnic violence. This was especially true in the Ferghana Valley––a valley spanning parts of eastern Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, where many charismatic Islamic religious figures emerged. The Valley has become a center for the formation, development, and dissemination of radical Islam in Central Asia. In an attempt to subvert the rise of extremist interpretations of Islam, however, the government of former President Islam Karimov cultivated government-approved religious practices, symbols, and ideologies and suppressed charismatic religious figures, branding them as foreign and dangerous security threats. (Sources: U.S. Agency for International Development, International Institute for Counterterrorism)

Consequently, the current level of extremist activity in Uzbekistan is very low. Groups that engaged in extremist violence in the early 2000s, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), were debilitated as a result of the international fight against terrorists in Afghanistan, and few extremists still maintain an operational capability in Uzbekistan or along its border. However, Uzbekistan remains concerned about the possible spillover of terrorist activity from neighboring Afghanistan. (Sources: U.S. Agency for International Development, International Institute for Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State)

Research commissioned by the U.S. Agency for International Development has shown that Uzbeks are most likely to radicalize while working as migrants abroad, where they more easily become targets of online or in-person recruitment. Despite government efforts to suppress extremism, Uzbekistan has become a primary source of foreign jihadist fighters from Central Asia in the Syrian Civil War. In recent years, Uzbeks have also participated in a number of significant terror plots and attacks worldwide, including the October 31, 2017, truck attack in New York City, and deadly attacks in Istanbul, St. Petersburg, and Stockholm. (Sources: U.S. Agency for International Development, International Institute for Counterterrorism, CBS News)

Elected in December 2016, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has expressed a desire for security reform and greater collaboration with Uzbekistan's neighbors. (Sources: Stratfor, U.S. Department of State)

Radicalization and Foreign Fighters

Radicalization

Uzbekistan is a secular state where the government controls religious expression and mosque attendance is discouraged. The "Law on Religion," passed in the late 1990s, set forth acceptable forms of religious expression in the country. Religion cannot be discussed in informal groups or at home; possessing unauthorized religious literature is a crime; beards and hijabs are disallowed; and proselytizing by foreigners in banned. Government restrictions on religious freedoms are intended to prevent extremism from taking root. For example, Friday sermons are written in advance by clergy and submitted to the government for approval. Imams are prohibited from answering questions after their sermons, and attendees are prohibited from lingering afterwards to discuss anything with one another. Minors may not attend mosques.

The authoritarian nature of the Uzbek government has stifled the emergence of extremist forces within the country, and as a result, the current level of extremist activity in Uzbekistan is very low. (Sources: Daily Beast, Pew Research Center, U.S. Agency for International Development)

In 2013, only 39 percent of Uzbek Muslims polled said they were "very free" to practice their religion, the lowest percentage of any Muslim country surveyed. Uzbek state surveillance––especially of persons who attend mosque––reportedly limits mobilization. According to John Heathershaw, a Central Asia expert at the University of Exeter, it is "when [Uzbeks] leave Central Asia that they are then connected to global networks" and more susceptible to recruitment by extremists. A lack of official religious instruction in Uzbekistan makes Uzbek men "vulnerable to ISIS propaganda," says Steve Swerdlow of Human Rights Watch, "as they have little context into which to place it." Research commissioned by the U.S. Agency for International Development concluded that Uzbeks are most likely to become radicalized while working as migrants abroad, where they more easily become targets of online or in-person recruitment. According to at least one analyst, Uzbeks who have committed violent attacks in the West became radicalized in the West. (Sources: Pew Research Center, Daily Beast, U.S. Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development)

Despite pervasive human rights abuses and religious persecution in the country, violent extremist groups have not surfaced as forces for social mobilization in Uzbekistan. There are no enduring charismatic leaders or mature, functioning organizations supporting extremism that might attract disaffected Uzbek youth. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) are established, capable extremist organizations within Uzbekistan, but neither has launched a significant attack inside the country since 2004. Neither group is currently based in Uzbekistan and both have allied themselves more with the Salafi jihadist movement writ large and, as a result, have suffered setbacks due to U.S. and allied military action against terrorists in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Uzbekistan's highly consolidated authoritarian regime and the pervasive influence of its security services reportedly have made it difficult for extremists to emerge domestically, much less organize and commit acts of violence. The IMU and IJU both maintain websites and conduct media outreach in the Uzbek language, but neither focus their media content on Uzbek nationals, who would have difficulty accessing such content anyhow due to government censorship of the Internet. Those drawn into the IMU and the IJU have generally been pulled into other conflicts where these groups operate––namely, conflicts in Afghanistan and Pakistan. (Source: U.S. Agency for International Development)

At the same time, the repressive nature of Uzbek security forces could prove counterproductive to any future attempts by the Uzbek government to thwart an outbreak of extremism. For example, government-sponsored religious institutions may be perceived as illegitimate and could ultimately be ineffective at countering radicalization. A 2013 report commissioned by the U.S. Agency for International Development identified five factors that, if they materialize, could further increase the likelihood of extremism in Uzbekistan. These include: (1) conflict among elites that creates opportunities for extremist groups, (2) the emergence of ethnic conflict in neighboring countries, (3) "self-radicalization" among labor migrants and refugees, and (4) the return of the IMU or IJU to operational capacity in Central Asia. (Source: U.S. Agency for International Development)

There have been a few opportunities for extremism to take root in Uzbekistan. The Ferghana Valley, the western part of which is located in Uzbekistan, reportedly has become a center for the formation, development, and dissemination of radical Islam in Central Asia. Additionally, despite pervasive security and state controls over religion, efforts to recruit Uzbeks into jihad have been successful. A combination of Russian social media––specifically, the Odnoklassniki social network––and the numerous propaganda efforts of Uzbek fighters in Syria reportedly have aided jihadist recruitment in Uzbekistan. (Source: International Institute for Counterterrorism)

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)

Currently based in Pakistan's tribal areas of North and South Waziristan, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan aims to establish an Islamic caliphate in Uzbekistan. The IMU has allied itself with al-Qaeda and the Taliban and, on August 6, 2015, pledged allegiance to ISIS. The IMU's strength is estimated at several hundred to a few thousand men. The IMU reportedly is responsible for numerous suicide attacks and the deaths of hundreds of tribal elders in Pakistan. The IMU has since expanded its targets to include NATO and Afghan forces in northern parts of Afghanistan. (Sources: BBC News, CBS News, International Institute for Counterterrorism, International Institute for Counterterrorism, U.S. Agency for International Development)

Tahir Yuldashev co-founded the IMU with Jumabai Ahmadzhanovich Kholiyev (a.k.a. Juma Namangani), a former Soviet paratrooper with experience in the Afghan war. In December 1991, both men reportedly led an assault on the Communist Party headquarters in the city of Namangan, in eastern Uzbekistan, after the mayor refused to give them land upon which to build a mosque. The following year, the two men briefly joined the newly established Islamic Renaissance Party of Uzbekistan but left once they determined it was not committed to building an Islamic state in Uzbekistan. They subsequently created their own organization called Adolat (justice) and openly called for the overthrow of the Uzbek regime. However, the Uzbek government detained nearly the entire membership, leading to its disintegration. Escaping repression in Uzbekistan, Yuldashev and Namangani settled in Tajikistan and joined the Tajik Islamic Renaissance Party. While Namangani fought in the Tajik civil war from 1992 to 1997 on the side of the Islamists, Yuldashev traveled to Afghanistan, where he established connections to Islamist movements throughout the region, including the Taliban. The two militants founded the IMU in Afghanistan in August 1998. (Sources: Jamestown Foundation, BBC News, International Institute for Counterterrorism)

In 1999, the IMU was reportedly authorized by the Taliban to set up several military training facilities for jihadi fighters in northern Afghanistan. In August 1999, Namangani led about 800 Islamic extremists––mostly Uzbeks––in a cross-border raid into Kyrgyzstan from bases in Tajikistan, seizing several villages near the Uzbek border and taking seven hostages, including four Japanese geologists. The extremists reportedly were attempting to establish a base in Kyrgyzstan from which to launch attacks into Uzbekistan. The group reportedly launched additional incursions into southern Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in 1999 and 2000. (Sources: BBC News, Jamestown Foundation, Congressional Research Service)

In October 2000, the U.S. Department of State designated the IMU a Foreign Terrorist Organization. However, by the mid-2000s, the IMU reportedly had weakened significantly due to successes of the multinational force against Islamic extremists in Afghanistan, the failure of Uzbeks to rally in support of the IMU, and the broader success of the global war on terrorism at breaking down al-Qaeda-linked networks. The IMU has failed to establish for itself a permanent presence in Central Asia. After September 11, 2001, U.S. forces pushed the IMU from Afghanistan into the tribal areas of Waziristan, Pakistan, where they remain as of 2017. (Sources: Federation of American Scientists, Jamestown Foundation, U.S. Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development)

After a series of suicide bombings struck Tashkent and Bukhara in late March 2004, Uzbek authorities blamed the IMU and announced that "some of the detained individuals involved have testified that they were trained in terrorist camps by Arab instructors who had previously trained Al-Qaeda militants." Government critics, however, alleged that by claiming a link to international terrorism, the Uzbek government was attempting to divert attention from its own record of repression, human rights abuses, and poor political and economic reform. (Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty)

Two IMU leaders––Tahir Yuldashev and Usmon Adil––were killed in drone strikes, though sources differ on the exact dates of those strikes––in the case of Yuldashev, either 2008 or 2009. IMU subsequently was led by Usman Ghazi (a.k.a. Abu Usman), who was allegedly killed by the Taliban in late 2015 in fighting that claimed the lives of hundreds of IMU extremists. In August 2015, the IMU pledged its allegiance to ISIS. Although the IMU was previously allied with the Taliban, the Taliban established a special unit to combat all pro-ISIS groups in the region in an effort to rid the region of all ISIS influence. By December 2015, the Taliban had killed hundreds of IMU fighters, including Usman. (Sources: BBC News, CBS News, International Institute for Counterterrorism, U.S. Agency for International Development)

IMU jihadists reportedly have traveled to Iraq to fight multinational forces there, and a small number of Uzbeks are among prisoners held at the U.S. detention center in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. However, research commissioned by the U.S. Agency for International Development in 2013 determined that IMU's membership and operational capacity have significantly diminished in light of U.S. and international military activity in Afghanistan. The group has lost most, if not all, of its original leadership and membership and has less of a connection remaining to Uzbekistan; its current spiritual leader is a Bangladeshi imam. (Sources: Jamestown Foundation, International Institute for Counterterrorism, U.S. Agency for International Development)

Islamic Jihad Union

The Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) is an umbrella term that refers to a network of extremists in Central Asia comprised of Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and Kazakh radicals who are linked to, but not formally associated with, the IMU. Members of the network reportedly share an interest in jihad, sources of funding, a desire to use violence targeting anti-Islamic Central Asian

authorities, links to criminal networks, and a broad goal of establishing an Islamic caliphate. The IJU grew out of internal splits in the IMU after the group's relocation to the South Waziristan region of Pakistan. In March 2004, the IJU claimed responsibility for a series of deadly bomb attacks targeting police in Uzbekistan's capital, Tashkent. (Sources: Jamestown Foundation, U.S. Agency for International Development)

The U.S. intelligence community assesses that the IJU is allied with al-Qaeda and maintains a small presence in Pakistan, from where it participates in fighting against U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan. U.S. federal prosecutors have linked the IJU to several "self-radicalized" ethnic Uzbek refugees arrested inside the U.S. who had yet to actually receive any material support from the IJU. (Source: U.S. Agency for International Development)

In 2010, Jamshid Muhtorov, an Uzbek who received political asylum in the United States, was arrested while attempting to depart Chicago, allegedly destined for an IJU training camp after initiating contact with the group and offering material support. (Source: U.S. Agency for International Development)

ISIS

ISIS has successfully won adherents among some young Uzbek men. On October 31, 2017, permanent U.S. resident and Uzbek national Sayfullo Saipov plowed a rented flatbed truck into pedestrians and bicyclists in New York City, killing eight and wounding 12. Saipov, 29, later claimed that he carried out the attack "in the name of" ISIS. In August 2015, Abdurasul Juraboev, an Uzbek national living in Brooklyn, New York, pled guilty in U.S. court to conspiring to provide material support to ISIS. He had come to law enforcement's attention after making a post on an Uzbek-language website supporting ISIS. In January 2017, Turkish security authorities conducted raids across Istanbul targeting Uzbek ISIS cells following a January 1 attack at night club in Istanbul. (Sources: *Los Angeles Times*, Reuters, Reuters)

An Uzbek man who plowed a truck into pedestrians in Stockholm in April 2017 lived at the same Stockholm address as another Uzbek man who had been under police investigation for running a company that was suspected of funneling money to ISIS. Three men were convicted as a result of that investigation. (Source: International Institute for Counterterrorism)

Propaganda videos from ISIS in Syria and Iraq regularly feature jihadists from Uzbekistan or of Uzbek descent. As of July 2016, some 1,000 Uzbeks and Tajiks were fighting for ISIS in Syria. Many Uzbeks fighting in Syria traveled there from their countries of exile, including Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, and possess extensive war-fighting experience from time spent in Afghanistan and Pakistan. (Sources: CBS News, International Institute for Counterterrorism)

Foreign Fighters

Uzbekistan has become a primary source of foreign fighters in all of Central Asia. Uzbekistan has faced threats of radical Islam, both homegrown and from neighboring countries Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Central Asian jihadism and extremism remains a regional issue, impacting local governments and neighboring countries, but more recently has consumed the attention of security services worldwide as Central Asian jihadists have increasingly flocked to the Syrian battlefield and become involved in terror plots worldwide. (Source: International Institute for Counterterrorism)

The Uzbek government is concerned about the threat of foreign fighters spilling over from Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, as well as about terrorist organizations operating in Afghanistan and Pakistan––namely, the IMU and IJU. Uzbek extremists have received training in Afghanistan, and have participated in fighting in Afghanistan and Syria. An Uzbek national who committed a shooting at an Istanbul night club on January 1, 2017, was trained in Afghanistan and Pakistan, according to Turkish authorities. Uzbekistan utilizes frequent document checks and house-to-house "resident-list" checks to identify potential foreign fighters transiting or active in Uzbekistan. The U.S. Department of State believes such techniques, along with detentions of suspects without strong evidence, could contribute to anti-government sentiment more than to effective counterterrorism. In the first half of 2016, Uzbekistan law enforcement detained approximately 550 persons on suspicion of involvement in extremist or terrorist activity. (Source: U.S. Department of State, Reuters)

Uzbek nationals and ethnic Uzbeks constituted the largest single group of Central Asian jihadists to join ISIS in Syria in 2014. In 2015, their numbers were estimated to be between 500 and 2,500. Additionally, hundreds of Uzbeks may have joined Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, an extremist group operating in Syria that pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda. (Sources: CBS News, International Institute for Counterterrorism)

As of August 2017, Russian security agencies had arrested or killed an unspecified number of Central Asian migrants––possibly as many as 16––who had formed a gang in and around Moscow for the purpose of training fighters to leave for Syria. The gang was organized by Ibaydullo Subkhanov, reportedly an ethnic Uzbek from Osh, Kyrgyzstan, who had gained military experience while fighting with ISIS in Syria. Members of the gang called themselves jama'at, which suggested jihadi motivations, but their activities were solely criminal. En route to court in August 2017, five of the gang members attacked their security guards, attempted to possess their weapons, and exchanged gunfire with a policeman in a courthouse, leading to the death of three of the gang members. (Source: International Institute for Counterterrorism)

On January 16, 2017, Turkish authorities arrested Uzbek national Abdulkadir Masharipov in Istanbul. Masharipov, who is originally from a small town in Kyrgyzstan with a large Uzbek population, is the perpetrator of the New Year's Day 2017 nightclub shooting in Istanbul. Masharipov reportedly graduated from Uzbekistan's Fergana State University with a degree in physics and a minor in computer science. According to information provided to Interpol by Uzbekistan, Masharipov was a known jihadist and the subject of a national arrest warrant who had told investigators that he received training from al-Qaeda in Afghanistan after traveling there in 2010. Later, while in Pakistan, he pledged allegiance to ISIS and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. A year before the nightclub attack, Masharipov was given orders by ISIS to establish himself, and his wife and two children, in Konya, Turkey, and await further orders. Then, on December 25, 2016, Masharipov claims he was directed by ISIS via the messaging app Telegram to launch a New Year's Eve attack with weapons supplied to him by an ISIS affiliate whose name he never learned. An ISIS cell of Uzbeks operating in Konya allegedly provided Masharipov with support. (Sources: International Institute for Counterterrorism, Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point)

In March 2017, Turkish authorities in Istanbul detained two ISIS suspects who held Uzbek citizenship and were believed to be planning an attack like the New Year's Eve 2017 nightclub shooting. From their apartment, police seized weapons, ammunition, and electronic and printed documents containing information about ISIS. (Sources: International Institute for Counterterrorism, Al Arabiya)

In November 2016, Russia's Federal Security Service arrested 10 Central Asian nationals, including an unspecified number from Uzbekistan, said to be planning shooting and bombings in places of mass gatherings in Moscow and St. Petersburg. The arrests reportedly were made possible after security services in Tajikistan detained accomplices of the suspects and passed relevant information to their Russian counterparts. (Source: Russia Beyond)

On May 11, 2016, Azizjon Rakhmatov, 28, was arrested and charged in federal court in Brooklyn for conspiring to attempt to provide material support to ISIS and conspiring to use a firearm. Rakhmatov, who allegedly belonged to network of individuals seeking to join ISIS, donated his money and worked to raise funds to help others travel to Syria to join and fight for the group. (Sources: International Institute for Counterterrorism, Reuters)

In July 2010, Norway announced the arrest of three men, including an Uzbek national named David Jakobsen, accused of plotting terror attacks in Europe. A European intelligence official said the three men were members of the Turkistan Islamic Party. (Source: International Institute for Counterterrorism)

Uzbeks in Syria

Of 11 military training camps reported to exist in Syria, four belong to Uzbek groups, reaffirming the important role Uzbek fighters play among jihadists from Central Asia. One of the largest Central Asian extremist groups operating in Syria––Katibat Imam al-Bukhari (the Imam Bukhari)––is comprised mainly of Uzbeks. Established in 2013, the group, which had 500 fighters as of 2015, operates in Syria's Aleppo Province as well as in Afghanistan. It is allied with the Nusra Front, although an undisclosed number of the group's members pledged allegiance to ISIS in November 2014. Its founder and leader, Akmal Jurabaev (a.k.a. Salahuddin al-Uzbeki), was born and raised in the Fergana Valley region of Uzbekistan and possessed considerable military experience from time spent in Afghanistan. Jurabaev was assassinated by a fellow Uzbek group member in April 2017, reflecting tensions within the group, and was replaced by Abu Yusuf, a Tajik national. In December 2015, the group released a video of Uzbek children receiving military training in Syria. (Source: International Institute for Counterterrorism)

Katibat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (KTJ) is another primarily Uzbek group operating in Syria, consisting predominantly of Uzbeks and Kyrgyz nationals, as well as a small number of Syrians. Established in 2013, KTJ cooperates with the Nusra Front and coordinates and shares propaganda material with Katibat Imam al-Bukhari. Like Katibat Imam al-Bukhari, KTJ operates in

Syria's Aleppo province. (Source: International Institute for Counterterrorism)

In November 2015, a group of Uzbek citizens arrested in Tashkent were allegedly planning to travel to Syria to join Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad. On Facebook and YouTube, the group posted video footage of Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad members fighting in Syria, as well as speeches by the jihadist group's leader, Abu Saloh. (Source: International Institute for Counterterrorism)

On April 7, 2017, Rakhmat Akilov, a 39-year-old Uzbek man, commandeered a truck and plowed it into pedestrians near a shopping mall in Stockholm, Sweden, killing five and wounding 15. Akilov, who confessed to the crime as soon as he was arrested, had posted ISIS propaganda to social media. Turkish authorities reportedly arrested Akilov in 2015 when he tried to travel to Syria to join ISIS. Given his refugee status, he was deported back to Sweden. Uzbekistan added Akilov to a wanted list in February 2015 after a criminal case based on alleged religious extremism was opened on him. (Source: International Institute for Counterterrorism)

Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

Attacks by Uzbeks Abroad

In recent history, few significant acts of violence have occurred inside Uzbekistan, owing to ruthless security measures enforced under the regime of former President Islam Karimov. However, there have been a number of deadly terror attacks involving Uzbeks that have occurred outside Uzbekistan. Since 2016, there have been five major attacks carried out by ethnic Uzbeks or Uzbek nationals abroad. Two have taken place in Istanbul: an ethnic Uzbek was one of three men to carry out a suicide bombing at Istanbul's airport in June 2016, and an Uzbek national carried out a shooting attack at an Istanbul nightclub on New Year's Day 2017. Both attacks were reportedly carried out on behalf of ISIS. In April 2017, a Kyrgyz-born ethnic Uzbek carried out a suicide bombing on a subway car in St. Petersburg. Days later, an Uzbek national with ISIS sympathies drove a truck into a crowd in Stockholm, Sweden. On October 31, 2017, Uzbek national Sayfullo Saipov drove a rental truck onto a bike path in New York City's worst terror attack since 9/11, reportedly inspired by ISIS. (Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point, CNN, Reuters, CBS News, CNN, *Los Angeles Times*)

Due to the Uzbek government's strict security measures and strict stance on religion, Uzbeks are generally more susceptible to radicalization abroad. When abroad, Uzbeks can more easily access global networks and extremist propaganda that are inaccessible within Uzbekistan. Furthermore, according to Steve Swerdlow of Human Rights Watch, Uzbeks are especially vulnerable to the messages in extremist propaganda because a lack of official religious instruction in Uzbekistan gives them little context in which to place it. This appeared to be the case for Sayfullo Saipov, who immigrated to the United States in 2010. According to Mirrakhmat Muminov, an Uzbek community activist from Ohio and former acquaintance of Saipov, he began studying religion in the United States and "couldn't get enough" of the religious freedoms allowed in the country. (Sources: Daily Beast, U.S. Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development, Reuters)

Additionally, many immigrants experience feelings of disenfranchisement that make them susceptible to extremist recruitment. According to Erica Marat, a Central Asia Security expert at the National Defense University, when Uzbek immigrants "are looking for ways to belong" in the society where they live, extremist narratives often provide a sense of meaning and appear especially attractive. (Source: Vox)

- **October 31, 2017:**Permanent U.S. resident and Uzbek national Sayfullo Saipov, 29, plows a rented flatbed truck into pedestrians and bicyclists in New York City, killing eight and wounding 20 others.
  Shot and wounded by law enforcement, Saipov tells authorities he conducted the attack on behalf of ISIS. Authorities say Saipov became radicalized in the United States after watching ISIS videos on his cell phone, on which 90 videos and 3,800 images related to ISIS were found. Source: *Los Angeles Times*
- **April 7, 2017:**Uzbek national Rakhmat Akilov, 39, commandeers a truck and plows it into pedestrians in Stockholm, Sweden, killing five people and wounding 15 others.
  Sources: CBS News, International Institute for Counterterrorism
- **April 3, 2017:**Akbarjon Jalilov, 22, a Kyrgyz-born ethnic Uzbek man with Russian citizenship, conducts a suicide bombing on a subway car in St. Petersburg that kills 15 people and injures 45 others.

Sources: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, CBS News, International Institute for Counterterrorism

- **January 1, 2017:**Abdulgadir Masharipov, an Uzbek national, allegedly kills 39 people in a shooting attack at an Istanbul nightclub.
  ISIS claims responsibility for the attack. According to a media reporting, Masharipov, a married father of two, is a well-educated man who speaks five languages––Russian, Arabic, Chinese, Turkish, and Uzbek. Masharipov's ISIS handlers communicated with him from Syria via the encrypted messaging app Telegram. Sources: Reuters, CBS News, Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point
- **June 28, 2016:**An unidentified ethnic Uzbek is allegedly one of three men to carry out a suicide bombing in a terrorist attack at the Istanbul airport that kills 44 and injures 239.
  Turkish investigators report that senior ISIS leaders helped plan the attack. Sources: *USA Today*, CNN
- **March 2, 2016:**Gyulchekhra Bobokulova, 38, a divorced Uzbek mother of three, admits in a Moscow court to beheading a four-year-old girl in her care and setting fire to the girl's family's apartment, saying "Allah ordered" her to do it.
  Russia's state news agency, citing an unidentified law enforcement source, said that Bobokulova was living with a Tajik man who subjected her to "Islamic extremist ideas." Sources: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, BBC News
- **July 30, 2014:**Three suicide bombings target the U.S. and Israeli embassies in Tashkent and the headquarters of Uzbekistan's chief prosecutor, killing two Uzbek security guards employed at the Israeli embassy.
  Uzbek state television reports that nine individuals are injured in the bombings, while a presidential spokesman claims that five are injured. None of the victims is American or Israeli. It is unclear who is responsible for the bombings, though primary suspects include the IJU, IMU and al-Qaeda-linked groups. Sources: *Washington Post*, BBC News, U.S. Agency for International Development
- **June 8, 2014:**IMU gunmen fighting with the Pakistani Taliban kill 39 people at the international airport in Karachi, Pakistan.
  In a claim of responsibility, the group says the attack was intended to avenge military air strikes in tribal areas of North Waziristan, Pakistan, that allegedly killed women and children. Source: BBC News
- **March 28, 2004 - March 31, 2004:**Extremists launch a series of attacks in Tashkent and Bukhara involving gunmen and female suicide bombers that mainly target police.
  The attack leaves 33 extremists, 10 policemen, and four civilians dead. While the Uzbek government blames the IMU and Hizb-ut-Tahrir, the Islamic Jihad Union claims responsibility, which the U.S. Department of State views as credible. Sources: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, U.S. Agency for International Development
- **August 2000:**The IMU kidnaps four American mountain-climbers, but they escape after six days.
  Sources: U.S. Department of State, Jamestown Foundation, *Guardian*
- **February 16, 1999:**Six car bombs explode in Tashkent, killing 16 and injuring more than 100.
  The attack appears to target government buildings. One of the bombs explodes just prior to the arrival of President Karimov at a government meeting. The Uzbek government blames the IMU. Sources: U.S. Department of State, Congressional Research Service
- **August 1999:**The IMU seizes several villages in neighboring Kyrgyzstan, taking hostage a group of Japanese geologists.
  Sources: U.S. Department of State, Jamestown Foundation, Congressional Research Service

Domestic Counter-Extremism

Acts of terrorism are outlawed under Article 155 of Uzbekistan's criminal code, and procedures governing terrorism-related investigations and prosecutions outlined in the "Law on Combatting Terrorism" passed in 2000. The National Security Service is Uzbekistan's lead counterterrorism agency. In 2016, Uzbekistan amended its criminal code to allow for prison sentences of eight to 10 years for the act of recruiting or training a terrorist. Sentences of up to eight years were also approved for propagating ideas of religious extremism and three to five years for displaying symbols of extremist or terrorist organizations. (Source: U.S. Department of State)

Uzbekistan also periodically blocks social media sites and networking platforms, purportedly to disrupt terrorist communications. The criminal code as amended also prohibited the spread of extremist propaganda via the Internet, though the U.S. State Department asserts that this authority has been abused to suppress criticism and dissent. The U.S. State Department also views Uzbekistan's definition of extremism, which includes any non-state sanctioned religious expression, as inaccurate. In its 2016 Country Reports on Terrorism, the State Department noted that the government of Uzbekistan is not transparent on matters of internal security, complicating efforts "to analyze the extent of the terrorist threat and the effectiveness of Uzbek law enforcement efforts to counter it." (Source: U.S. Department of State)

The Ministry of Security Affairs openly acknowledges that security measures alone are insufficient against Islamic extremism and has worked to identify and encourage potential defectors from extremist ranks. The government primarily works through local organizations to conduct outreach and educate citizens about the dangers of extremist ideologies. Representatives of these groups then monitor their communities and undertake interventions when necessary. The government has engaged in counter-messaging about the dangers of Islamic extremism through public service announcements and state-controlled media reports. These messages also have been posted to social media platforms, including YouTube. Additionally, state-supervised religious figures, such as Uzbekistan's Grand Mufti, have condemned extremist ideology. In public remarks on January 4, 2017, President Mirziyoyev mentioned his concern about extremism and urged parents, teachers, and community leaders to guide young people away from it. The Uzbek government also has an annual amnesty program, in which the president decrees the release of a small number of individuals imprisoned for religious extremism or other minor political crimes. In 2004, 400 formerly extremist individuals reportedly accepted offers of amnesty. As of 2016, there was no known reintegration effort underway for returning fighters, as there was not a significant, reported number of returnees. (Sources: U.S. Embassy in Uzbekistan, Jamestown Foundation, U.S. Department of State, Academy of Arts of Uzbekistan, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe)

International Counter-Extremism

Elected in December 2016, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has expressed a desire to prioritize improving relations with Uzbekistan's neighbors. In the past, Uzbekistan has not collaborated much with its neighbors on security matters. Uzbek authorities have expressed confidence in their ability to control the Uzbekistan-Afghanistan border, but doubt in their neighbors' abilities to do so. Uzbekistan is also concerned about the possibility of extremist infiltration through the country's long borders with Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Uzbekistan has actively participated in the C5+1 regional framework of cooperation between the U.S. and five Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), which includes a program related to countering violent extremism (CVE). Uzbekistan is not a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. (Source: U.S. Department of State)

In October 2017, Alexander Bortnikov, chief of Russia's Federal Security Service, told a meeting of unspecified security leaders in the city of Krasnodar that cooperation with the security services of several foreign countries, including Uzbekistan, had thwarted several attacks in Russia and led to the identification and detention of persons linked to unspecified "international terrorist organizations." He added that those trying to carry out attacks against Russia were ISIS militants who had "set up positions" in Afghanistan. Russian and Uzbek security services have held joint seminars related to combating extremism, and share information about terrorism suspects. (Sources: Ahram Online, U.S. Department of State)

On January 13, 2007, Mushahid Hussain Syed, Chairman of the Pakistani Senate's Foreign Relations Committee announced in a speech at the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies, a think tank run by the Uzbek government, that Pakistan and Uzbekistan would cooperate to fight terrorism and drug trafficking in Afghanistan, including through an annual dialogue on counter-terrorism. (Source: Pakistan News Service)

U.S.-Uzbekistan Cooperation

In October 2001, to aid the fight against the Taliban in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan agreed to allow U.S. troops and warplanes access to its airspace and an Uzbek military base. U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said the U.S. was working with Uzbekistan on border security and anti-terrorism efforts, as there were "threats coming at them from Afghanistan." In 2005, Uzbekistan evicted U.S. troops from the country in response to U.S. criticism of Uzbek government actions related to the deaths of hundreds of protestors in the city of Andijan on May 12-13, 2005. Then-President Islam Karimov reportedly directed senior military officers to fire on protestors who, motivated primarily by economic and civil rights grievances, allegedly occupied government buildings and prisons. (Sources: U.S. Department of State, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, U.S. Agency for International Development)

More recently, Uzbekistan has assisted U.S. counterterrorism efforts in Afghanistan. In November 2010, then-U.S. CENTCOM Commander James Mattis visited Uzbekistan, met with then-Uzbek Minister of Defense General-Major Kabul Berdiyev, and signed an agreement on military training to be held between the two departments. In March 2012, Mattis met with then-President Islam Karimov, and signed an agreement on the air transit of materials and personnel from

Afghanistan. In June 2012, land transit of materials from Afghanistan was agreed to between NATO and Uzbekistan. (Sources: Congressional Research Service, U.S. Department of State)

Public Opinion

In a 2014 poll, 78 percent of Uzbek nationals said that violence against civilians is "never" justified, the most people holding such a position in 10 African and Asian countries polled. About a third of all persons polled refused to rule out attacks on civilians, whereas in Uzbekistan, nearly eight in 10 said such attacks are never acceptable. (Source: Commentary)