

„*Ante Portas – Studia nad Bezpieczeństwem*”

2018, Nr 2(11)

DOI: 10.33674/2201822

Leonid GUSEV¹

Russia

TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS, ASYMMETRIC CONFLICTS AND THE FIGHT AGAINST THEM IN THE POST-SOVIET STATES

Abstract:

For the Caucasus and Central Asia states there is a serious threat of extremism and terrorism. The geopolitical situation in these countries is caused by the influence of zones of political instability and conflicts. These zones are Afghanistan, the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of China, Near and Middle East, including Syria and Iraq. For these countries, the terrorist threat is very high. Counteraction to the terrorist threats due to the cross-border nature, in particular, their focus on other regions of the modern world and intersection with non-traditional security challenges (including poorly controlled migration processes, organized crime and the drug mafia) require strengthening of the interaction of post-Soviet states in the sphere of security. The article tells about the actions against terrorist groups in several countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus, such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Keywords:

the Caucasus and Central Asia, extremism, terrorism, regional security, post-Soviet countries, terrorist threats, religious extremists.

¹ Leonid Gusev is PhD in historical sciences, expert of Institute of International Studies of Moscow State Institute of International Relations of MFA of Russia, Email: lgoussev@yandex.ru

Introduction

Nowadays, there is a serious threat of extremism and terrorism for the states of the Caucasus and Central Asian region. The geopolitical situation in these countries is caused by the zones of political instability and conflicts influence. These zones are the Near and the Middle East, the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of China, and Afghanistan. For these countries, the terrorist threat is quite realistic.

It should be noted that for the Caucasus it is primarily the Middle East. If we talk about Central Asia, most of all its security is threatened by the situation in Afghanistan, where the Taliban provide more organizational and material support to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the radical Tajik opposition and the Uygur separatists². In the past few years, cells of the Islamic State (banned in Russia and other countries) have appeared there.

Counteraction to the terrorist threat due to the trans-boundary nature of threats, in particular, their focus on other regions of the modern world and intersection with non-traditional security challenges (including poorly controlled migration processes, organized crime and the drug mafia) require strengthening of the interaction of post-Soviet states in the sphere of security.

Situation in Kazakhstan

In Kazakhstan, in connection with a number of events (explosions in Aktobe and Astana, armed clashes in Zhanaozen), the problem of increasing of the potential of terrorist activities was also actively discussed and continues to be discussed. In this state, as in Central Asia in general, the main vehicles of the ideas of terror are Islamist currents and organizations. In this regard, in order to minimize their impact on the consciousness of the inhabitants of the republic, Kazakhstan's leadership has taken a number of measures to strengthen the work aimed at increasing religious education, as well as the spiritual development of Kazakhstan's society.

For this purpose, a specialized agency was created in the republic - the Agency for Religious Affairs. For the same purposes, more than 10,000 Internet portals were monitored, as a result of which the court of Astana made decisions on recognizing the products of 51 foreign websites for the propaganda of extremism and terrorism illegal and stopping the distribution on the territory of the country. It should be noted that social networks in Kazakhstan have become very popular, as well as in large cities of Russia.

² *Centrasia*, <<http://www.centrasia.ru/news2.php?st=1296021720>> (30.06.2018).

The measures taken by Kazakhstan to combat these negative manifestations, as well as the policy of tolerant attitude towards all confessions and nationalities conducted by the country's leadership, in general, contribute to the preservation of security in the country³.

Terrorist activity in Kazakhstan has a serious international political dimension. A number of experts, for example, the head of the Kyrgyz analytical centre "Prudent Solutions" E. Usabaliev, pointing to the thrust of unrest in Kazakhstan's Zhanaozen against the Chinese owner, notes the potential possibility of uniting the Kazakh underground with Uyghur separatists. The expert also believes that the creation of terrorist groups and the spread of the ideology of jihad in the oil-bearing regions of the Caspian and northwest of Kazakhstan may threaten the interests of the PRC in the region in the future⁴.

It should be noted the emergence of a tendency to criminalize the activities of radical Islamists, or, conversely, the Islamic radicalization of ordinary bandits. It is especially obvious on the example of Western Kazakhstan. The focus of the spread of Islamic extremism (as in Kyrgyzstan, and in a number of regions of Russia) have become places of deprivation of liberty (jails). In Kazakhstan, now 100% of places of deprivation of liberty become "green zones", that is, areas that are informally controlled by Islamic extremists (as opposed to "black", controlled by traditional criminals, and "red", controlled by administrations).

The authorities tighten the fight against terrorists. In 2016-2017 years in the country there were numerous arrests of extremists, including those connected with criminal circles and schemes (in particular, with the theft of oil in Western Kazakhstan).

In 2018, the National Security Committee of Kazakhstan has developed a state program to counter religious extremism and terrorism in Kazakhstan for 2018-2022.

The program notes the need to ensure border control, identify and suppress channels (routes) and methods of infiltration of religious extremists and terrorists into the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan, or import prohibited materials into the country, including through the use of illegal migration channels and forged documents. It is also planned to train law enforcement officials and

³ S. Gorkovenko, *Terrorizm i religioznyy ekstremizm: Stranytsentral'noy Azii b'yt trevogu*, cisnews.org, 16.09.2011, <<http://www.cisnews.org/expert-opinion/2866-terrorizm-i-religioznyy-ekstremizm-strany-centralnoy-azii-byut-trevogu.html>> (30.06.2018).

⁴ <<http://polit.uz/archives/7745>> (30.06.2018).

improve the material and technical equipment and infrastructure of the divisional police inspectors⁵.

Struggle with terrorism in Kyrgyzstan

For the southern part of Kyrgyzstan, the traditional threat is the transfer of extremist groups from neighbouring Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. One of the reasons for this is the weakness of law enforcement agencies in this country. In general, we are talking about the life of the Uzbek Diaspora, the Kyrgyz themselves are involved in this activity relatively poorly, due to the low level of Islamization.

In October of 2012, a member of the international terrorist organization "Islamic Movement of Turkestan" Habibullo Suleimenov, a native of the Fergana region, wanted by Uzbek special services was detained in Kyrgyzstan⁶.

However, the activities of pseudo-educational groups, such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir (which formally do not set the task of armed struggle, but included in the lists of terrorist organizations approved by special services of key countries in the world), gradually began to embrace the Kirghiz people.

In recent years, a new trend has emerged. Jihadist groups of Kazakhstan, driven out of this country, also have an impact on Salafi jamaats in Kyrgyzstan. In particular, the appearance in Kyrgyzstan of the group "Jaysh ul Mahdi" in 2009-2010 and the aggravation of the situation in Kazakhstan in the religious sphere approximately in the same period can be regarded as links in one chain⁷.

In addition, the alarm of the Kyrgyz authorities is prompted by a quick focus on the specific environment and flexibility in the actions of radical religious groups, to which the terrorist organization Zhaishul Mahdi banned in the country by the Supreme Court decision, based on the principles of jihad against non-believers, is closely adjoined. In Kyrgyzstan, there are cases when members of these organizations imprisoned, for a short time managed to turn inmates in their ardent supporters. Against this background, the toothlessness and friability of traditional Islam and its institutions, coupled with perpetual upheavals within

⁵ *V Kazakhstan zapretyatv"yezd terroristam iz sanktsionnykh spiskov SB OON*, pavlodarnews.kz, 30.01.2018, <<http://www.pavlodarnews.kz/index.php?id=6647>> (30.06.2018).

⁶ <<http://www.24kg.org/investigation/139737-v-kyrgyzstane-zaderzhan-chlen-mezhdunarodnoj.html>> (30.06.2018).

⁷ <<http://polit.uz/archives/7745>> (30.06.2018).

the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan, only aggravates the problem⁸.

One of the latest manifestations of terrorism in the country was an explosion at the gates of the Chinese embassy in Bishkek on the morning of the 30 of August of 2016. It was committed by a suicide bomber who, with a Mitsubishi Delica car, rammed the gates of a diplomatic mission and exploded. As a result, the suicide bomber died, three embassy employees were wounded and hospitalized. All victims are citizens of Kyrgyzstan⁹.

The State Committee for National Security (SCNS) of Kyrgyzstan announced in a few days that a terrorist act in the Chinese embassy in Kyrgyzstan was committed by a member of the Islamic Movement of East Turkistan under the order of Uygur terrorist groups operating in Syria linked to the Jab hat a Nusra group (a terrorist organization banned in Russia). Even his name was mentioned. This Uighur, who had a passport of a Tajik citizen of the series "M 626881" in the name of Zoir Khalilov, 15.01.1983 b¹⁰.

However, it should be noted that in general, the Kyrgyz authorities have recently intensified their struggle against religious extremism and the influence of various kinds of Salafi groups.

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kyrgyzstan, in January-April 2018 alone, 4,470 people were brought to criminal liability for crimes of an extremist nature in the republic¹¹. This is a fairly positive trend.

Terrorist organizations and fight with them in Azerbaijan

The level of terrorist threat in Azerbaijan as a whole is lower than in the North Caucasus or in the countries of Central Asia. The historical specifics of this country (with the exception of the northern regions where representatives of the North Caucasian nationalities, in particular, the Lezgins, also live) are the traditional spread of Shiism (at least from the time of Azerbaijan's entry into the Sefevid state). In practice, over time, the difference between Sunnism and Shi-

⁸ S. Cheriko, *Kyrgyzstan - poligonterroristicheskogo internatsionala?*, centrassia.ru, 28.09.2012, <<http://centrassia.ru/kirgistan/17-kyrgyzstan-poligon-terroristicheskogo-internatsionala.html>> (30.06.2018).

⁹ *V Bishkeke avtomobil' protaranil vorota posol'stva Kitaya i vzorvalsya:terrorist pogib, troye raneny*, newsru.com, 30.08.2016, <<http://www.newsru.com/world/30aug2016/kirg.html>> (30.06.2018).

¹⁰ *V Kirgizii nazvalivovnika terakta u posol'stva KNR v Bishkeke*, interfax.ru, 06.09.2016, <<https://www.interfax.ru/world/526964>> (30.06.2018).

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

ism in Azerbaijan has worn off (especially in the Soviet period). However, Sunni terrorist groups did not always find support among the Azerbaijani population. On the other hand, in Azerbaijan, special services fought, including, with radical Shia groups, which have ties with Iran.

As in many other post-Soviet countries, active discussions are held in Azerbaijan about the definition of certain movements as radical and, especially, terrorist ones. According to a number of independent experts, the authorities exaggerate the existing problems with extremism with a view to restricting of the freedoms of the population¹².

Radical groups are most prevalent in the northern regions of the country (the impact of religious extremist groups from the North Caucasus, as well as the polyethnicity of the population) and in Sumgait¹³. Al-Qaeda units operated in Azerbaijan in the 1990s and early 2000s, and now the Islamic State (forbidden in Russia and other states)¹⁴.

According to official figures, more than 100 people left for the war in the Middle East, over 200 people left for the unofficial ones. 49 people returned¹⁵. In independent sources, one can also find more alarmist estimates: from 300 to 700 people fighting in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan are from Azerbaijan¹⁶.

Among the extremist and terrorist structures operating in Azerbaijan, it is possible to single out "Jayshullah" (the Arab. Army of Allah). Representatives of the Azerbaijani unit of this structure committed the murder of the famous psychic Etibar Erkin and his two underage sons, committed an armed attack on the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development office in Baku, planned terrorist attacks against the embassies of Western states¹⁷. Jayshullah was defeated in the 1990s. Also in Azerbaijan, the Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami unit was defeated (the Arab. Party of Islamic Liberation).

The most important element of the terrorist threat is the activity of the "Forest Brothers" based in the south of the country. The "Forest Brothers" group led by Ilgar Mollachiev (Malachiyev) in August of 2008 attacked the

¹² *Baku toughened methods of combating terrorism and opposition*, Kavkaz-uzel.eu, 07.02.2017, <<http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/297227/>> (30.06.2018).

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ *Foreign fighters. An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq*, soufangroup.com, 12.2015, <http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate_FINAL.pdf> (30.06.2018).

¹⁶ *Baku uzhestochil metodybor'by s terrorizmom i oppozitsiyey*, <<http://mahachkala.bezformata.ru/listnews/uzhestochil-metodi-borbi-s-terrorizmom/54636677/>> (30.06.2018).

¹⁷ *Baku toughened methods ... op. cit.*

"Abu Bekr" mosque in Baku. In September of 2008, in Dagestan, as a result of cooperation between the special services of Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation, three suspects were killed in the involvement in this attack¹⁸.

In 2007, Azerbaijani security forces destroyed one of the groups of "Forest Brothers" led by Lieutenant of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces Kamran Asadov and Al-Qaeda-related group of Abu-Jafar¹⁹.

In November of 2013, members of a group planning a terrorist attack in the Shia mosque "Mashadi Dadash" in Baku were detained.

In 2013-2017 years Azerbaijani security forces, following the pattern of Russia in the North Caucasus, moved more and more to the tactics of physical liquidation of identified terrorists and extremists.

On the 3 of December of 2016, the State Security Service (SSB) reported about the elimination of the Baku-based Emin Dzhami Azizagh-oglu, who tried to blow up the suicide bomber belt near the Bina shopping centre, and on the 25 of November of 2016 - the liquidation of a local resident Ramig Nazir oglu Ragimov during a special operation in the village of Duztakhirob, who was named the leader of the militants who fought in other states²⁰.

On the 26 of January of 2017 the State Security Service reported about the murder during a special operation of an Azerbaijani resident Ojagov Jeyhun Islam-oglu, whom the security forces called a religious extremist. On the 31 of January of 2017, the State Security Service reported that, while trying to detain groups of residents who joined terrorist organizations operating outside Azerbaijan, four suspects were killed and another was detained.

In 2018, an amendment was introduced to the Code of Administrative Offenses of Azerbaijan, according to which individuals, legal entities and government agencies not participating in the freezing of assets in the framework of combating the financing of terrorism will be brought to administrative responsibility²¹.

In this case, officials will be fined in the amount of from 1,500 to 2,500 – manat, Azerbaijani currency (881-1468 dollars), legal entities - from 15,000 to 25,000 manat (8810-14684 dollars)²².

¹⁸ *Ibidem.*

¹⁹ *Ibidem.*

²⁰ *Ibidem.*

²¹ *V Azerbaydzhanegosstruktury i organizatsii, ne uchastvuyushchiye v bor'be s finansirovaniyemterrorizma, bud, kavkaznews.az, 07.02.2018, <<http://kavkaznews.az/2018/02/v-azerbaydzhane-gosstruktury-organizatsii-ne-uchastvuyushhie-v-bor-s-finansirovaniem-terrorizma-budut-shtrafovot-sya/>> (30.06.2018).*

²² *Ibidem.*

Georgia in a way of fighting against terrorism and extremism

In the South Caucasus, the terrorist threat from Islamic extremists other than Azerbaijan is characteristic for Georgia to a certain extent.

In Georgia, in general, with the exception of the Pankisi Gorge, the situation with the threat of terrorism is quite good. Pankisi Gorge is a territory where Chechens-Kistins live compactly. According to the Global Terrorism Index of 2016 study, Georgia was included in the list of countries with a very low impact of terrorism (1,257 points, 87 out of 163 countries)²³.

Terrorist groups in the territory of Georgia began to actively use social networks for their propaganda²⁴. At the same time, the very nature of propaganda has changed. In particular, in a video message distributed in social networks in November of 2015, Georgian citizens fighting in Syria called on Georgian Muslims to attack "infidels" in their homeland. Before, there were only calls to join terrorists in their war in Syria and Iraq, or to attacks in Russia²⁵.

These calls find some support. In August of 2016, the State Security Service of Georgia reported the disclosure of the case about the preparation of the terrorist act and the detention of seven people. The detainees were going to blow up the natural gas pipeline, which receives natural gas from Russia to Armenia²⁶.

Georgia is making active efforts to combat terrorism. In June of 2015, the activities of foreign terrorists were criminalized, and criminal responsibility for inciting terrorism was introduced. These measures followed the amendments of 2014, which imply the imposition of criminal liability for participation in international terrorism and the recruitment of persons with a view to their entry into a terrorist organization²⁷. Among the measures of the Georgian leadership is also noted the strengthening of border security and the fight against the financing of terrorism²⁸.

²³ *Vliyaniye terrorizma na Gruzijuminimal'no*, sputnik-georgia.ru, 20.11.2016, <<https://sputnik-georgia.ru/politics/20161120/233874864/Vlijanie-terrorizma-na-Gruzijuminimalno.html>> (30.06.2018).

²⁴ *Georgia remains a reliable partner of the US in the fight against international terrorism*, golos-ameriki.ru, 03.06.2016, <<http://www.golos-ameriki.ru/a/state-department-terrorism-report/3360629.html>> (30.06.2018).

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ *Vliyaniye terrorizma na Gruzijuminimal'no*, *op. cit.*

²⁷ *Georgia remains a reliable... op. cit.*

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

The Georgian leadership is making efforts to involve the youth of the Pankisi Gorge in educational and sports programs²⁹. It should be noted that recent measures do not bring special results.

In Georgia, recruitment to international terrorist structures is mainly subjected to two groups that have a traditional Islamic identity. These are ethnic Chechen-Kistins living in the Pankisi Gorge, and, to a much lesser extent, the inhabitants of Adjara (ethnic Georgians, professing Islam). A total of 50 international terrorist militants are from Georgia³⁰. According to other sources, only 50 to 100 Georgian citizens are fighting in Syria and Iraq³¹.

The arrest in June of 2015 of the 37-year-old Imam Ayuf Borchashvili and three other citizens of Georgia for connection with the IS became evidence of active recruitment in the Pankisi Gorge. On the 7 of March of 2016 Tbilisi City Court sentenced Ayuf Borchashvili to 14 years in prison³². As for the rest of the detainees, all three were found guilty, because having been influenced by A. Borchashvili, intended to travel through Turkey to Syria to participate in the terrorist actions of jihadists.

In August of 2018, the State Security Service reported that Malkhaz Tokhosashvili, a native of the Pankisi Gorge, was detained on charges of association with a foreign terrorist organization, as well as of illegal purchase and possession of firearms³³.

According to the State Security Service for 2017, 30 citizens of Georgia are fighting in Syria and Iraq in the ranks of various terrorist organizations, among them both ethnic Georgians and ethnic Chechen-Kistins, who come from the Pankisi Gorge³⁴.

Conclusion

So according above written, we see that terrorist organizations have recently been active, both in Central Asia and the Caucasus. To combat them, it is necessary to unite efforts, both organizations operating in the post-Soviet space, and international organizations.

²⁹ *Ibidem.*

³⁰ *Foreign fighters. An... op. cit.*

³¹ *Georgia remains a reliable... op. cit.*

³² *Ibidem.*

³³ *Areshidze: terrorism - ugroza dlya vsego Kavkaza*, sputnik-georgia.ru, 06.08.2018, <<https://sputnik-georgia.ru/politics/20180806/241625981/Areshidze-terrorizm-ugroza-dlja-vsego-Kavkaza.html>> (30.06.2018).

³⁴ *Ibidem.*

It is desirable to improve the organizational structure of such an entity as the Collective Security Treaty Organization to counter the threats of terrorism.

It is possible to form regional CSTO coalitions with other international structures, such as the SCO, as well as the EU and NATO, to combat the terrorist threat in Central Asia and the Caucasus region.

Incidentally, the same is written in the "military doctrine" of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which speaks of "expanding cooperation in the military and military-technical fields" with the United States and the European Union.

But, it is advisable to form coalitions of not individual states, but regional organizations on the principle of "network interaction" (that is, mainly, through individual programs), which can increase the flexibility of responding to threats.

It is very important to fight against the financing of extremist and terrorist activities. This is one of the main promising areas of international cooperation. It requires the establishment of broad international cooperation and the rejection of "double standards" in the field of combating terrorism.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- ✓ *Areshidze: terrorism - ugroza dlya vsego Kavkaza*, sputnik-georgia.ru, 06.08.2018, <<https://sputnik-georgia.ru/politics/20180806/24162-5981/Areshidze-terrorizm-ugroza-dlja-vsego-Kavkaza.html>> (30.06.2018)
- ✓ *Baku toughened methods of combating terrorism and opposition*, Kavkaz-uzel.eu, 07.02.2017, <<http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/297227/>> (30.06.2018).
- ✓ *Baku uzhestochil metodybor'by s terrorizmom i oppozitsiyey*, <<http://mahachkala.bezformata.ru/listnews/uzhestochil-metodi-borbi-s-terrorizmom/54636677/>> (30.06.2018)
- ✓ *Centrasia*, <<http://www.centrasia.ru/news2.php?st=1296021720>> (30.06.2018).
- ✓ Cheriko S., *Kyrgyzstan - poligonterroristicheskogo internatsionala?*, centrassia.ru, 28.09.2012, <<http://centrassia.ru/kirgistan/17-kyrgyzstan-poligon-terroristicheskogo-internacionala.html>> (30.06.2018)
- ✓ *Foreign fighters. An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq*, soufangroup.com, 12.2015, <http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate_FINAL.pdf> (30.06.2018).

- ✓ *Georgia remains a reliable partner of the US in the fight against international terrorism*, golos-ameriki.ru, 03.06.2016, <<http://www.golos-ameriki.ru/a/state-department-terrorism-report/3360629.html>> (30.06.2018)
- ✓ Gorkovenko S., *Terrorizm i religioznyy ekstremizm: Stranytsentral'noy Azii b'yut trevogu*, cisnews.org, 16.09.2011, <<http://www.cisnews.org/expert-opinion/2866-terrorizm-i-religioznyy-ekstremizm-strany-centralnoy-azii-byut-trevogu.html>> (30.06.2018)
- ✓ <<http://polit.uz/archives/7745>> (30.06.2018)
- ✓ <<http://www.24kg.org/investigation/139737-v-kyrgyzstane-zaderzhan-chlen-mezhdunarodnoj.html>> (30.06.2018)
- ✓ *V Azerbaydzhanegosstruktury i organizatsii, ne uchastvuyushchiye v bor'be s finansirovaniyemterrorizma, bud*, kavkaznews.az, 07.02.2018, <<http://kavkaznews.az/2018/02/v-azerbajdzhane-gosstruktury-organizatsii-ne-uchastvuyushhie-v-bor-s-finansirovaniem-terrorizma-budut-shtrafovot-sya/>> (30.06.2018)
- ✓ *V Bishkeke avtomobil' protaranil vorota posol'stva Kitaya i vzorvalsya:terrorist pogib, troye raneny*, newsru.com, 30.08.2016, <<http://www.newsru.com/world/30aug2016/kirg.html>> (30.06.2018)
- ✓ *V Kazakhstan zapretyatv"yezd terroristam iz sanktsionnykh spiskov SB OON*, pavlodarnews.kz, 30.01.2018, <<http://www.pavlodarnews.kz/index.php?id=6647>> (30.06.2018)
- ✓ *V Kirgizii nazvalivinovnika terakta u posol'stva KNR v Bishkeke*, interfax.ru, 06.09.2016, <<https://www.interfax.ru/world/526964>> (30.06.2018)
- ✓ *Vliyaniye terrorizma na Gruziyuminimal'no*, sputnik-georgia.ru, 20.11.2016, <<https://sputnik-georgia.ru/politics/20161120/233874864/Vlijanie-terrorizma-na-Gruziju-minimalno.html>> (30.06.2018)