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Author-Critic forum: 'Radical Islam in Central Asia'

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Author–Critic forum: ‘Radical Islam in Central Asia’

Radical Islam in Central Asia: Between Pen and Rifle

Vitaly Naumkin, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005. xviii + 283 pages, glossary, chronology and index, pb. ISBN: 0-7425-2930-4

Editorial Introduction—Radical Islam in Central Asia?

As part of the recent editorial changes at *Central Asian Survey*, I am delighted and honoured to have been asked to be the new book review editor of a journal that has remained a favourite of mine since it became my first scholarly introduction to the region as an undergraduate. This is a fortuitous moment to take on this role, as we are witnessing an unprecedented output of books on the region. I hope to build on the work of my predecessor, Stephen Blank, and ensure that the journal becomes the primary forum for timely reviews of books published not only in Europe and North America, but also in Central Asia itself, as well as other parts of the world.

To further this end, we are introducing a range of new formats alongside the standard book review. One of these is the ‘author-critic forum’. A number of scholars from a variety of backgrounds will be invited to critically appraise a single text that is deemed important to the field and which raises pressing scholarly questions. The author will then be invited to write a response to these appraisals. Its purpose is to provide a lively forum that will acquaint the reader with the range of arguments, debates and issues within a particular field prompted by the publication of the book, and to make a judgement about its importance.

We are launching this format in this issue with an author–critic forum on Vitaly Naumkin’s important and controversial recent book, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Between Pen and Rifle*. Vitaly Naumkin holds a doctorate of historical sciences from Moscow’s Institute of Eastern Languages and has researched the intersections of politics and Islam in the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia. He is currently President of the International Centre for Strategic and Political Studies at Moscow State University. His latest book is important because it engages a question of concern to Central Asianists across many disciplines: what is the relationship between Islam and the multiple political, social, economic, intellectual and geographical changes engendered by the end of Communist rule in Central Asia? It is controversial because some thinkers consider that the very notion of ‘radical Islam’ is at best empirically and conceptually flawed, and at worst perpetuates political repression in the region and informs the misguided foreign policies of external powers.

Naumkin’s study is based on a range of sources, including the writings of founders and teachers of Islamic movements, official and unpublished documents, and

interviews with clerics, politicians and what he calls ‘top and rank-and-file radical Islamists’ over the past two decades. Following an introduction, chapter 1 defines terms, sketches an outline of the history of Islam in Central Asia and provides an overview of different theoretical approaches to the subject. In order to understand the nature of what the author terms ‘radical Islam in Central Asia’, the substantive chapters of his book each consider one of three very different manifestations of it. Chapter 2 considers the rise and fall of the armed Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, chapter 3 the grassroots transnational political activism of the Hizb at-Tahrir al-Islami party and chapter 4 the fortunes of Tajikistan’s Islamic Revival Party. In his conclusion, the author draws these studies together and asks what can be learnt from them about the nature and extent of Islamic radicalism (or what he prefers to term *Salafism*). Rather than privileging a single explanation, he identifies factors such as poverty, social inequality, authoritarianism and corruption as being necessary backgrounds that make the appeal of radical Islam attractive. However, to these he adds particular proximate causes such as its relationship to organised (narcotics) crime, the increased ability under conditions of globalisation of international Islamist networks to channel aid from Saudi Arabian Salafi centres, and the backgrounds of many key leaders in ‘cultures of violence’ such as wrestling, boxing and special forces. He asserts that active supporters of political Islam in the region remain a minority of the population. He concludes that it is counterproductive to seek to repress such movements, but nonetheless the transplanting of Western-style democracies is not possible at the moment and cannot be advocated as a panacea.

Four scholars, from very different backgrounds, have been invited to write comments on Naumkin’s book. Najam Abbas is based at London’s Institute of Ismaili Studies and is conducting ongoing research into the creation of social capital and civil society in Central Asia. Stephen Blank works at the Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College, and studies foreign (particularly US and Russian) strategic interests in Central Asia. Alisher Khamidov is a PhD candidate at the School of Advanced International Studies of Johns Hopkins University, USA, working on Islam and socio-political change in Central Asia, particularly the Ferghana Valley. Maria Louw is an anthropologist at Aarhus University, Denmark, from where she studies everyday practices and understandings of Islam in Central Asia. Thus, this author–critic forum is a debate between people from backgrounds in Islamic, development, and security studies, as well as political science and anthropology.

I will not rehearse the arguments presented, but will make one observation on the exchange pertinent to the burgeoning field of the study of Islam in Central Asia. This observation is also informed by Rasanayagam’s insightful critique of Abee Khalid’s new book *Islam After Communism*, reviewed in this issue, as well as other recent publications. That is the unfortunate difficulty that many scholars of some aspect of Islam in Central Asia experience in relating their particular findings to those of other experts. Many working in ‘big picture’ disciplines—such as history, political science and security studies—are often too ready to generalise and thus reject the conclusions of others about the nature of Islam in Central Asia.

Likewise, researchers more attuned to the specificities of particular places—such as anthropologists and those in development studies—can often be too hasty to dismiss the conclusions of ‘big picture’ scholars on the basis of their detailed knowledge about a limited range of material. We must be cautious not to confuse the little slice of reality that we think we have grasped with reality as a whole. Science is by its nature a collaborative project. As it is a relatively small field still in its infancy, the detailed study of Islam in Central Asia has potential to evolve as a genuinely multi-disciplinary and collaborative project. It is hoped that this author–critic forum might highlight the necessity of such an intellectual trajectory.

Nick Megoran
Newcastle University, UK

Comment: *Najam Abbas, Central Asian Studies, Institute of Ismaili Studies, UK*

In his recently published book about perceptions of terrorist threats, *Overblown*, John Mueller argues that, while the threat exists and is ‘real’, it has been systematically and very substantially exaggerated. He highlights how some politicians tend to be fixated with a narrative of an imminent danger from Islam. Seeking to profit from such a tendency, terror industry intellectuals provide a constant supply of superficial reports that inflate the significance of security threats.

Certain passages of Vitaly Naumkin’s latest book are reminiscent of that approach. Naumkin’s central conceptual framework is what he identifies as two paths to power commonly pursued by Muslims in Central Asia—intellectual and martial. Naumkin contends that the union or opposition of these two elements have ‘permeated the entire history of the Islamic world, and our times bear witness to the continuing existence of this conflicting dyad’. The book then moves on to prove this in the context of political Islam in present-day Central Asia. Here, there is a striking imbalance. The author is able to come up with a number of examples of men of the sword but does not furnish enough information on who are the present day intellectuals providing leadership, guidance and direction, and whether there exist any measurable followings for such individuals.

Naumkin’s discussion of the statements and activities of Islamist groups often fails to critically appraise their meanings and capabilities. Readers would be well advised not to read too much in the rhetoric of some of the zealous individuals whom Naumkin discusses, without considering their groups’ actual capabilities on the ground. So, in discussing Hezbut Tahrir Islami’s (HTI) goal—the creation of an Islamic state encompassing Central Asia and eventually the entire Islamic world—the author forgoes questioning if they actually possess the means to achieve this. Based on field research, including interviews with HTI members on the ground, a 2003 report by the International Crisis Group concluded that, ‘the evidence suggests that HTI is far from presenting a present-day threat to the

stability of the Central Asian states in any direct senses. There is no evidence that it has any military capabilities.’ Failure to bear this in mind exaggerates the threat posed by this group.

Many quotes used by the author convey specific, often loaded meanings portraying a picture of difference and divisions at all levels of the religious groupings studied. Interestingly, they also suggest how local authorities were exploiting ideological or theological differences to create political divisions among the groups to prevent any chances of them allying and thus posing a threat to the government. Hence the book tends to accord more attention to journalistic, sensationalist, often opinionated and sometimes motive driven sources rather than adequately entertaining serious academic perspectives demonstrated in the works of Suha Taji-Farouki, Jean-Francois Mayer, Brian Glyn Williams or Anke von Kuegelgen. Instead of simplistically speculating and second guessing, the author could have engaged in a more sophisticated analysis of a range of possible meanings and visions of what Islam means for different people in Central Asia.

In many places, the conclusions drawn in the book outpace the empirical evidence adduced to support them. For example, in his discussion of ‘the roots and causes of Islamic radicalism’, the author points out that rather than using the fundamentalist label, attempts should be made to make clear distinction between the revivalists of core traditions (*usooli*) and the puritans (*salafis*), those calling to revert to the pure state of early Islam. Naumkin claims that it was only the establishment of the World Muslim League in the 1960s that gave Salafis ‘a powerful tool for deep penetration into the Islamic world’ (p 2). In fact, funding construction of mosques or publication of religious literature could provide no more than an opportunity to get a foothold, some visibility and a little influence among religious elites. This is one of many examples of the book’s rather peculiar use of adjectives.

The author emphasises that for a successful analysis of this topic it is necessary not to confine it to a narrow regional scope, but to put it into the context of broader Islamic intellectual–religious strands of thought and to examine how they were transmitted and absorbed in the specific conditions of Central Asia. Naumkin pays particular attention to the role of individual actors in the local power play and the jostling for influence among groups using religion as a factor. At places, one wishes that the author would cut down some of the lengthy and detailed quotations that he uses, for example extracts from Mulla Hindustani, and would instead expand further on the analytical part. When analysing the roots of Islamic radicalism, Naumkin refers to ‘a multiplicity of approaches and explanations for this phenomenon’ (p 21) and provides an overview of these. The author notes that a conservative or protective trend incorporates those Salafi schools that are trying as much as possible to ‘fence’ Islam ‘in’ from contemporary life, particularly from the influence of non-Islamic societies. This section that could have ideally served as the substantive part which begs for elaboration especially about relevance of the factors at work in the Central Asian context.

In a recent article, Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart¹ argue that the importance of religiosity persists most strongly among vulnerable populations, especially those living in poorer nations. They contend that it is not just a shortage of economic resources, but particularly their maldistribution, that matters for the development of the senses of societal vulnerability, insecurity and risk that drive people to religiosity. Naumkin's book makes no clear references to a range of factors such as these that potentially cause people to seek refuge in religion.

The evidential basis of certain claims in the book is weak. Among other things the book claims that the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan is losing influence while the HTI is gaining in popularity (p xii). Here and on many similar points, input from sociologists measuring religious tendencies would have served as an additional means to crosscheck such trends. Instead, this publication serves as yet another example of how the appeal of radical Islam is highly overrated and socio-economic grievances are downplayed, while the issues of human rights, free expression and religious accommodation almost overlooked. Subscribing to an alarmist approach towards Central Asia's traditionalist elements comes with a high price. It implicitly condones a heavy-handed approach by the region's incumbent authorities, and puts under greater risks the limited options for liberties, free expression and association that Central Asia's populations have been longing for since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Notes and references

1. Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, 'Sellers or buyers in religious markets? The supply and demand of religion', *The Hedgehog Review, Critical Reflections on Contemporary Culture*, Spring/Summer 2006, pp 69–92.

Comment: *Stephen Blank, US Army War College, Pennsylvania, USA*

To my knowledge nothing like this book exists in English, the publication of which could not be more timely. Indeed, it may possibly be the first truly scholarly effort to clarify and analyse the real nature of radical Islam in Central Asia, specifically the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Islamic Revival Party in Tajikistan. Such an effort is not merely long overdue, but is rather urgently needed. Inasmuch as so much is written about radical Islam in general and on its manifestations in Central Asia in particular while in fact so little is actually known, this is a most important book. Despite the plethora of writings on the subject, accurate, verifiable and unbiased information is extremely hard to come by. Nevertheless Naumkin is uniquely situated to have brought all this information and analysis to foreign readers. He has the scholarly knowledge of the region acquired through years of research, the first-hand contacts to actually make contact with some of the actors and the ability to make sense of it. For these reasons alone we should be very grateful that he has brought forth these sources and analyses that no specialist in Central Asia can afford to miss.

This does not mean that every one of Naumkin's findings or assertions is ground truth. For example, he tends to subscribe to the tendency to see Hizb ut-Tahrir as essentially a movement preaching non-violence. To this reviewer such an assertion is a non sequitur. Even if one discounts the numerous reports and charges made by Central Asian governments about this organisation's proclivity for violence and numerous acts thereof, it is impossible to take Hizb ut-Tahrir's assertion that it preaches non-violence seriously. An organisation whose propaganda, identity and rhetoric are permeated through and through by vicious anti-Semitism cannot justifiably call itself non-violent. The nature of it as being a clandestine organisation, as well as its calls for a Caliphate, the central objective it now propounds, are, of course, further reasons for being sceptical about its professions of non-violence. Another caveat that should be borne in mind when approaching this material is that in part thanks to Naumkin's pioneering work, others will build on his analysis to criticise and modify it. After all, since it is the first such effort, in English at any rate, there is no doubt that others will start to investigate the claims made by Naumkin and his analyses of the three radical groups in question.

As Naumkin notes in his conclusion, defining the nature of the Islamic radical groups currently in action in Central Asia is an essential scholarly and political question, indeed an urgent one. Until now one common method followed by local regimes in dealing with the phenomenon of radical Islam has been repression and the extension of state controls over religious life. While this hardly squares with Western thinking on issues of religious freedom and other civil rights, it is very much in consonance with local tradition. While Naumkin wants to shy away from coming out in favour of such repression, he does make a credible argument for external and local observers and regimes to exercise great caution in defining a political space where radical Islam could act freely within local governments. The experience outlined in this book and more broadly suggests the need for such caution given the difficulties in integrating radical Islamic parties into local regimes. While he believes that integration and globalisation will ultimately bring about the deradicalisation of these movements and maybe of Central Asian Islam in general, he also foresees that state failure to answer pressing socio-political issues ensures that the vocabulary and language of radical Islam will continue to play a prominent role in Central Asia for a long time to come. These arguments, like this very important book in general, must be grappled with by every specialist or even non-specialist who wants or needs to come to understand the nature of contemporary Central Asia.

Comment: *Alisher Khamidov, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Washington D.C., USA*

Vitaly Naumkin's accessible and well-written book makes a significant contribution to the debate about militant Islam in Central Asia. At the same time, its shortcomings highlight the difficulties in obtaining the substantive evidence necessary to properly assay the influence and extent of what the author terms 'radical Islam'.

One of Naumkin's goals is to view Islamic activism more holistically by putting Islamic activism in the region into the context of broader Islamic intellectual–religious strands of thought and examining how they were transmitted and absorbed in the specific conditions of Central Asia. This is a timely goal that should set an example to many students of Islam in Central Asia and elsewhere.

The author's choice of various written and oral sources is noteworthy. Naumkin relies on data collected in the course of his long fieldwork in the region, in particular, interviews with local actors—Islamic scholars, clerics, political leaders, government officials, academics and both high-level and rank-and-file Islamic activists. In addition to these sources, the book also benefited from Naumkin's previous works on the history of Arab nationalism and Arab national/liberation movements in the Middle East.

A particular strength of the book is its detailed discussion of the origins and usage of such politically loaded and confusing concepts and terms as 'wahhabism', 'fundamentalism', and 'jihadism'. Naumkin amply demonstrates that scholars, state officials and journalists have employed these terms indiscriminately in an effort to understand a new pattern of Islamic activism in the region, which deviates from the traditional forms of Islam in the region. Naumkin's discussion is a fresh reminder that terms and concepts may have adverse political consequences on various communities if they are not thoroughly scrutinised before being used by scholars and journalists.

The author enriches his study by bringing his extensive historical knowledge to bear. His detailed account of the history of Islam in the region, the Soviet efforts to eradicate it, the rise of reformist Islamic groups in the late Soviet period, the efforts by Islamists to establish Islamic rule in the Ferghana Valley, is intriguing and rich with factual data. Naumkin's personal relationships with prominent Islamic clerics such as Ishaq qari, Imam Ismail qari, and others adds to the authenticity of the data presented.

Naumkin's claim about the centrality of violent subcultures in explaining the origins of Islamic militancy is especially illuminating. As he notes, an approach emphasising the study of such cultures of violence 'has received little attention in the literature on Islamic militancy', despite the fact that it has particular explanatory power (p 29). Naumkin demonstrates that many members of radical Islamic movements in the Soviet successor states have been former wrestlers, boxers and special forces officers. In other words, they all were 'specialists in violence'. Naumkin goes on to suggest that 'specialists in violence are of great importance in reproducing the general culture of violence' (pp 29–30).

In addition to many strengths, the book exhibits a number of shortcomings connected with the inconsistency and inaccurate usage of some arguments and data. He questions the validity of socio-economic explanations of the growth of Islamic extremism, contending that poverty and unemployment alone 'cannot explain why Islamic radicalism appears in societies that are relatively developed socioeconomically' (p 22). He uses comparative statistics to argue that 'a low standard of living has no direct or significant effect on the rise of Islamic extremism'. For example, he contends that these statistics show that 'Uzbekistan has become a

hotbed for the most ferocious Islamic movements in Central Asia, despite the fact that its decline in living standards has been less than that of some other Central Asian countries in the post-Soviet period' (p 22). However, in his discussion of Hizb-ut-Tahrir, on p 194, Naumkin argues, 'the party was able not only to maintain, but also in part to build up its power. This is explained, first of all, by extremely serious socioeconomic problems, including poverty and unemployment, the lack of real prospects of the situation improving'. This appears to be a direct contradiction to his earlier argument about invalidity of the socioeconomic approach.

In his section on the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, on p 246, Naumkin argues that the Tajik authorities in 2002–2003 'took into account the fact that the IRPT even now remains the most active and efficient opposition party and that its main efforts are aimed at the strengthening and expansion of structural subdivisions at regional and district levels . . .'. Yet the empirical evidence shows that in 2002 and 2003, the political influence of the IRPT had been declining. In 2003, the party suffered some serious blows to its reputation. The Tajik authorities imprisoned two of its high ranking members on criminal charges facing little opposition from the party. The position of Said Abdullo Nuri, the party leader, was also tenuous as he fought allegations that he ordered the murder of Sobirjon Begajanov, the chairman of the Jabor Rasul District in the Sugd province. Moreover, the IRPT was unable to seriously challenge the efforts by the Tajik authorities to flood the national parliament with pro-government forces in the 2004 parliamentary elections.

Naumkin's use of evidence is also questionable in several other sections of the book. For example, on p 59, the author describes a 1990 meeting between religious activists and Abdurahim Polat, a leader of the opposition party 'Birlik' in the city of Namangan. During this meeting, Polat allegedly urged the Islamists to take control of the army. When Islamists said that the Russians controlled the Army, Polat called on Islamists to convert the Russians and win them over to the side of the Islamists. This episode is based on an account provided to Naumkin by an identified Tashkent scholar. While the account's validity is yet to be proven, it supports the view of the Uzbek secret service about the link between secular opposition and the religious 'extremists' in Uzbekistan. Quite interesting, in a personal communication to the reviewer, Polat himself vehemently denied the allegation about this account.

In another instance, on p 187, Naumkin describes picketing organised on three occasions in Samarqand in early 2003, of a tobacco factory owned by an Uzbek–British–American tobacco company. During the picket, according to Naumkin, 'the picketers, the greater part of whom were women and children, threw stones at the building and tried to set fire to it'. Naumkin notes that the formal grounds for picketing were concerns about ecological problems: the factory's influence on the environment and health of local residents. But then Naumkin refers to a leader of a local ecological foundation in arguing that the riots at the factory had been organised by Hizb-ut-Tahrir because its activists were spreading leaflets at the picket. This does not necessarily mean that they organised the protest, but Naumkin relies on this episode to support two further arguments. These are that

the party is using concern over environmental problems to increase its support base and may be succeeding at using interclan rivalry to its advantage (p 187). These are major claims but, in the absence of firm evidence, are little more than speculation.

Such flaws in both reasoning and the uncritical reliance on often unsubstantiated evidence necessarily undermine the book's authority. However, in spite of this, Naumkin's text will be of considerable value to students of Central Asia, in particular owing to its historical depth and the author's use of extensive personal connections with Islamic clerics and state officials. Naumkin's conclusion that repressive policies of the authorities have been counterproductive remains convincing. His book serves as a reminder that the best way to counter Islamic militancy is principled support for the rule of law and democratic freedoms.

Comment: *Maria Louw, Department of Anthropology, University of Aarhus, Denmark*

No phenomenon in post-Soviet Central Asia has quite captured the attention of observers as that of the radical Islamic groups that have appeared in the region since the late 1980s. These groups have challenged the social, political and moral order of society in various ways, including the secular nature of the Central Asian states. Much has been written addressing the question why these radical groups have been able to garner support among people who largely regard themselves as moderate Muslims and whether there is a risk that they might gain a stronger foothold among them.

Unfortunately most of what has been written has been speculative and not supported by in-depth knowledge about groups whose clandestine nature necessarily makes them notoriously difficult to investigate. Stereotypes and rumours have often stood in for informed research. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Hizb ut-Tahrir have been surrounded with mystery and an omnipresent amorphous category of 'Wahhabism' has acted as a shorthand for the general concept of Islamic menace. In Uzbekistan, in particular, any Muslim who challenges the *status quo* in religious or political matters risks being labelled, and discredited, as a 'Wahhabi'.

Vitaly Naumkin's book is also concerned with the question of why radical Islamic groups have been able to garner support in Central Asia. Drawing on a range of sources to provide detailed accounts of the history, organisation, activities and ideologies of the movements and the biographies of key actors, he goes a long way to untangle the myths and stereotypes that have surrounded the phenomenon of radical Islam in the region. A great strength of the book is the insight that it provides into the agentive complexity involved in shaping movements which have often been presented in more two dimensional simplistic terms. By contextualising them historically and globally, it traces the seeds of radical Islam in the region to Soviet-period underground teachers in the Ferghana Valley and explores its links with transnational Islamist groups.

In the introduction, Naumkin provides a sketch of the main contending explanations of the roots of Islamic radicalism in Central Asia—from economical to cultural and psychological—and dismisses them all as inadequate. He prefers to be inductive, ‘... to leave theory aside until we regard the empirical case of Central Asian Islamic groups and consider what light their history throws on theoretical discourse’ (p 29). This refusal to outline an analytical framework or explain how he has chosen to present his material, at times makes his book a bit difficult to follow: the reader feels at a loss as to how to navigate the complexity of the material presented.

In his introduction he does, however, argue that an approach stressing ‘cultures of violence’ might have particular explanatory power, given the fact that many members of radical Islamic movements have been ‘specialists in violence’—wrestlers, boxers, special force officers—and the fact that they have engaged in conspicuous violent acts, often with a ritual character, such as demonstrative decapitation, bomb explosions and hostage taking. This is a very interesting analytical perspective, but it remains sketched rather than pursued throughout the book. How should we understand this ‘violence as *culture*’? Does the concept of culture imply that the conspicuous violent acts committed by radical Islamist groups are symptomatic of a culture of violence that permeates Central Asian society as such? This is not clear from Naumkin’s text.

More generally, from an anthropological perspective one might have wished for a more thorough contextualisation of the radical Islamic groups into the wider social, political and economical dimensions of Central Asian society. Naumkin indeed grants importance to the wider context for understanding the appeal of radical Islam: poverty, relative deprivation and unemployment; the social inequality; the omnipresence of corruption; populations increasing disillusionment with their governments’ abilities to improve the situation and, in the case of Uzbekistan in particular, authoritarianism, lack of political alternatives and the hard-line persecution of Islamist activists. All of this, he argues, has helped increase the popularity and social support of Hizb ut-Tahrir, which claims to offer solutions to such malaises. However, throughout the book we hear very little about the wider social, economical and political realities of Central Asian society, which provides fertile soil for radical Islam in the region. At least for those readers who are not well acquainted with the region a better contextualisation would have been useful.

In his discussion of Hizb ut-Tahrir, Naumkin addresses the question of why women have joined the organisation and now constitute around 10 per cent of the membership in Kyrgyzstan. He argues that women are attracted by the organisation’s networks which invoke the language of kinship, in a situation where they have experienced greater social vulnerability as a result of the destruction of the system of customary family values and ties by modernisation. While attention is thus paid to the particularities of women’s involvement in radical Islam, men’s involvement is not explored from a gender perspective, although this might be potentially fruitful. Indeed, while much has been written about how women in Central Asia negotiate gender identities, less attention has been paid to how men do the same. While it might be true that women have been more vulnerable

to post-Soviet social change, it is also important to recognise that, notably, the rising unemployment and the difficulties of providing for one's family have been a hard blow for many men. In a society where masculine identity is very much bound up with the ability to perform successfully in the public sphere, to be the head of one's family, providing for its material and financial needs, the inability to do so can be felt as emasculation. The appeal of an organisation such as Hizb ut-Tahrir for many men might indeed be grounded in the fact that it offers them the prospects to *do* something about their situation, thus not only helping bringing about an ideal order of society, but also reconstituting their masculine identity in a situation where other ways of constituting masculinity have been blocked.

Author Response: *Vitaly Naumkin*

I am grateful to the reviewers for their generous evaluation of my book and for their insightful critical comments and suggestions, which I shall certainly take into account in my further work on the subject.

I found the comments and suggestions of Stephen Blank most inspiring, but will focus my response on those comments and criticisms raised by the other three contributors. For the future investigation of an issue of such magnitude as the nature of the radical Islamic groups in Central Asia, I found the anthropological approach advocated by Maria Louw to be very promising. I agree with her that some of the issues and approaches I touched upon (such as the culture of violence, for example) may have remained only partially developed throughout the book. This was because they were not the main focus of the text. She is, of course, correct that I should have explored the gendered aspects of both men and women's involvement in Islamist networks. There is no doubt that challenges to masculine identities do create favourable conditions for the mobilisation of protest. It is also true that of many contending explanations of the roots of Islamic radicalism in the region I do not favour any specific one, not because I dismiss them all but because I prefer a combination of elements of them.

Likewise, Louw's call for 'a more thorough contextualisation of the radical Islamic groups into the wider social, political and economic context' seems to me a very useful indication of the potential directions of research on Islam in Central Asia. However, it is my conviction that the role of religion is broader than that of providing the inspiration for solidified action in 'hopeless' social and political situations, although it undoubtedly performs such a function. Ensuring the supreme, sacral level of the sanctioning of action, religion serves as an effective instrument of social regulation. Having said this, I do discuss my doubts about many structure-based explanations of Islamic extremism especially when they lean towards pure economic determinism. Instead, I prefer to combine *structural*, *relational*, and *ideational* explanations (as formulated by Edward Walker). In this context I would like to refer also to Mark Juergensmeyer who seeks explanation in the unique contemporary intersection of 'the current forces

of geopolitics and in a strain of violence that may be found at the deepest level of the religious imagination'.¹ Whatever the religion in question, when it is used to sanctify killing and maiming it is dangerous. New sophisticated military and communication technologies magnify the extreme suffering caused by those who, in the name of religion, pursue evil ends.

Turning to some criticisms made by Alisher Khamidov, I would like to say that I do not see any significant contradiction between my disagreement with those who derive Islamic extremism *directly* and most exclusively from poverty, and my observation that extremely serious socio-economic problems along with other factors helped Hizb at-Tahrir al-Islami (HTI) to build up its power. The problem of the roots of extremism is indeed very complex, but for all my respect for Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, I do not subscribe to their alleged claim (as Abbas does) that the religiosity persists largely among poorer nations.² What about wealthy Gulf monarchies like Saudi Arabia and its neighbours? In the Western world, too, the far from poor USA is perhaps the most religious country. Nor do I see any contradiction between my assertion that the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan '*even now [that is, despite of all its setbacks]* remains the most active and efficient opposition party', especially given its penetration into new regions (which occurred just before my manuscript was submitted to the publisher), and Khamidov's accurate statement that the party was unable to seriously challenge the Tajik authorities. I have no doubts about the ability to use many other sources other than those I employed to question the evidence adduced, but I have full liberty to use the evidence of a respected scholar (having no reason to suspect him of any relations with the Uzbek secret services, as Khamidov hints), especially given the fact that I do not treat his evidence as the ultimate truth.

Three of the four reviewers demonstrate a clear understanding of the issues I studied. Unfortunately, the fourth review by Najam Abbas exhibits the author's inability to comprehend the problems I addressed. In criticising the works of other authors, one should never ascribe to them what they had not asserted or even meant. My paper gives no ground whatsoever to suspect that I am inclined to build 'a narrative of an imminent danger from Islam'. On the contrary, in all my research (see, for instance, the report of the High Level Group of the Alliance of Civilizations, which I took part in authoring), I resolutely reject such a narrative. I completely share Abbas's concern with the damage being caused to the mutual understanding between the West and the Muslim world by studies premised on such notions. The menace stems not from Islam but from organisations which, ascribing to themselves the right to speak on behalf of religion, are calling for the elimination of their opponents—not simply people of different faith, but even co-believers with whom they disagree.

I am not setting myself the task of measuring the extent of the threat represented, for example, by HTI. This is the proper business politicians and other authors. Incidentally, I am not at all sure, as Abbas seems to be, that the conclusions of the International Crisis Group, no matter how profound its report is, must be treated as a catechism for the sole reason that it has conducted a

number of interviews. I am only attempting, on the basis of an analysis of its texts, pronouncements and actions, to make sense of HTI's views and appraise its members' practical actions. This said, it seems natural to me that the governments whose replacement by an Islamic Caliphate this organisation calls for have reasons to feel worried by it. The fact that one of the reviewers (Abbas) criticises me for exaggerating the threat emanating from radical Islamists while another (Blank) takes me to task for underestimating it, only testifies to the complexity of this problem and to the need for its impartial and comprehensive scientific analysis. On the one hand, HTI speaks of its commitment to exclusively peaceful methods of struggle. On the other hand, as I show in my book by analysing passages from one of the books written by its founder, it is possible to argue that at some stage the party may resort to violence. In addition, there are also facts attesting to the involvement of party members in violent actions, although I do treat these facts with caution. Though professions of non-violence are undoubtedly better than appeals for killings, one has to accept that the atmosphere of intolerance that is created by such organisations facilitates, however inadvertently, the spread of jihadism.

Furthermore, I am puzzled by Abbas's desire that I should 'cut down the lengthy and detailed quotations' from Mawla Hindustani. As far as I am aware, it is exactly these passages that are of particular interest to many readers. Almost nothing so far has been written on Hindustani and other Central Asian *ulama* of the Soviet era. Therefore I believe that subsequent studies should pay much more, not less attention to their role. The reader should be acquainted not only with the researcher's analysis but also with the statements personally made by these very significant characters in the history of Islam in the region. It is through the underground efforts of these very people that the tradition of Hanafi Islam that prevailed there for centuries (the Ismaili tradition, as is known, exists only in Gorno-Badakhshan) could survive in Central Asia in the Soviet era. Audio cassettes with recordings of lessons and sermons of these preachers were passed from hand to hand and rerecorded.

Finally, I am surprised by Abbas's claim that I overlooked 'the issues of human rights, free expression and religious accommodation'. This judgment is refuted by both Khamidov and Louw, who deem my conclusion about the counter-productivity of repressive policies convincing. Meanwhile, however rare its incidence, the problem about how to counter religious terrorism remains. Even much more democratic governments than those that we have in Central Asia sometimes resort to force in these cases. It is pertinent to recall that in speaking of a similar problem with respect to the Arab rulers of the Middle East, Fareed Zakaria assumes that they 'are autocratic, corrupt, and heavy-handed. But they are still more liberal, tolerant, and pluralistic than what would likely replace them.'³

By defending my positions I am far from thinking that my book is immune to criticisms. Like any other book this one may contain contradictory statements and judgements that the reader finds unconvincing. As I have indicated in this response, I accept that there is much further work to be done and that some of the approaches advocated by the reviewers could enhance, complement and act

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as a corrective to aspects of my own work. My overriding concern has been to ground my research exclusively on primary sources and first-hand knowledge. The main and modest contribution of my book, as I see it, is simply its ability to give others some facts and ideas for further investigation and to provoke more discussion of this extremely important scholarly and political issue. The lively debate engendered by this forum leads me to hope that it will fulfill that role.

Notes and references

1. Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), p 6.
2. In point of fact, they wrote: 'due for demographic trends in poorer societies, the world as a whole now has more people with traditional religious views than ever before'. The meaning is slightly different here and their discourse has more to do with the problem of global secularisation. Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p 25.
3. Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), p 21.