

Socio-psychological aspects of countering the propaganda of terrorism and religious extremism among young people in Uzbekistan

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Abstract: *The article analyzes Uzbekistan's experience in countering terrorism, religious extremism and its propaganda, especially among young people; reveals the essence of the new policy of the government of Uzbekistan in this direction, gives concrete recommendations on improving the counter-terrorism and counter-propaganda activities carried out, taking into account the threats and circumstances changing in the globalizing world.*

Key words: *modern terrorism, religious extremism, socio-psychological preconditions, propaganda, counteraction to threats, anti-propaganda, youth policy, religious education, media literacy.*

Spread out the youth, and you will conquer any nation.

Z. Brzezinski.

Among the many global problems of our time, terrorism and

religious extremism occupy a special place, because they pose an increasing threat not only to the security of individual countries but also to the entire world community. The events of the last third of the XX and beginning of the XXI centuries urgently require explanations for the emergence and spread in public life of these phenomena with huge antisocial consequences. At the same time, the success of the fight against modern terrorism and religious extremism largely depends not only on knowledge of the causes, conditions, prerequisites for their emergence and activation, but also effective counteraction to their propaganda.

To date, there are about 200 definitions of the concept of terrorism, but none of them has yet received universal recognition. The UN-led process of defining the

definition has been going on for over 30 years. Nevertheless, in numerous modern studies of the phenomenon of terrorism, it has already been proved that the characteristic features of the essence of terrorism as a social phenomenon are: intimidation (the desire to create a social and psychological atmosphere of intimidation); publicity of the act; the tendency of growth in the transitional stages of society, during periods of economic and spiritual and moral crises; a reference to antisocial norms and rules, which in a number of cases are borrowed from the ideological guidelines of religious fundamentalism, etc.¹

According to the published results of studies on the research of terrorism and antiterrorist activity²,

today only 38 countries of the world do not experience the influence of terrorism on their social and economic life. This is Uzbekistan, Japan, Mongolia, Romania, Slovakia, South Korea, North Korea, Finland, Oman, Vietnam, Poland, Latvia, Cuba, Panama, Uruguay, Singapore, Turkmenistan, Papua New Guinea, etc. Meanwhile, only for one 2016 year in many countries of the world, 1787 terrorist acts of various sizes were committed. The bloodiest of them were explosions in Baghdad, Istanbul, Orlando, Gaziantep (Turkey), Brussels. The biggest victims of terrorism are in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Yemen, Libya and Pakistan.³

It is very gratifying that Uzbekistan has risen to such a level of security in the fight against the threats of this terrible antisocial phenomenon. But it was not always so. Since February 1999, Uzbekistan has repeatedly faced acts of

¹ See, for example, M.Asanbekov. International terrorism in Central Asian countries // Sociological research, 2005. №9; Jackeebaev US On the socio-psychological aspects of criminal behavior. - Alma-Ata, 1971, etc.

²central.asia-news.com/ru/articles/cnmi_ca/features/2018/02/01/feature-02

³www.gtmarket.ru –global-terrorism-index

international terrorism. The first President of the Republic of Uzbekistan I. A. Karimov, in his speeches from the stands of international organizations - the UN, the OSCE, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the EAPC, etc., has repeatedly stressed the need to strengthen cooperation in countering this phenomenon on a global scale. Since then, as a participant in all the existing UN conventions and protocols in this field, Uzbekistan for many years has been actively involved in organizing the struggle against international terrorism, religious and political extremism, conducted by the world community, and has put forward constructive proposals in this direction. To ensure its own national security in December 2000, the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Combating Terrorism" was adopted, according to which a number of preventive measures were carried out with terrorism and religious

extremism. In the fight against them and confrontation with their threats, all state bodies, departments, the public, civil institutions were involved.

The efforts of the Government of Uzbekistan to prevent extremism and eradicate terrorism have brought and continue to bear their positive results. Thus, the residents of the country say they feel relatively safe as the terrorist threat decreases. In the annual report of the Institute of Economics and Peace "Global Index of Terrorism-2017" with the participation of 163 countries, the level of the terrorist threat in Uzbekistan from the maximum 10 points was estimated at 0.077 points, as a result, the republic took 125th place (the first places in the ranking are occupied by countries, most at risk of terrorism, and the latter - countries that do not have any influence of terrorism). For a year, Uzbekistan has moved from the category of states with the "lowest

influence of terrorism” to the number of countries in which terrorism “has no influence” at all. Comparative analysis showed a decrease in anxiety of citizens about religious extremism to 64.1% in 2017.⁴

But, despite the fact that the last terrorist attack in Uzbekistan was organized 14 years ago, in 2004, the citizens of Uzbekistan are still concerned about the problems of terrorism and religious extremism. According to a poll published by the Uzbek Center for the Study of Public Opinion “IzhtimoiFikr” (“Public Opinion”), the majority of Uzbeks consider terrorism and religious extremism to be the most serious threats to the security of Central Asia. The study involved 1,100 residents of Uzbekistan from all regions of the country. According to its results, published on February

19, extremism was named the most serious threat by 70% of respondents. 31% of respondents consider the websites with religious information spread by extremists as the most dangerous threat for young people.⁵ And this is not accidental, even against the background of the reduced threat of terrorism. The Internet remains the most accessible platform for intimidation, spreading its own, false ideology and replenishing the ranks of terrorists. Thus, in one of the religious sites, an unknown Uzbek militant in Syria promises to “liberate” Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan from secular governments in the propaganda video of extremists.⁶ And this is far from an isolated case. Only in the past year, according to the British Ministry of Internal Affairs, the cases of propaganda of IGIL have

⁴central.asia-news.com/ru/articles/cnmi_ca/features/2018/02/01/feature-02

⁵ The same

⁶central.asia-news.com/ru/articles/cnmi_ca/features/2018/02/01/feature-02

been revealed in more than 400 Internet resources.⁷

In the text of the global counter-terrorism strategy proposed by the UN on May 3, 2006, this is indicated: “The Internet is a clear example of how terrorists can act truly on a transnational basis; in response, States need to think and act on an equally transnational basis. Those who want to use cyberspace for terrorist purposes can do this from virtually anywhere in the world. Terrorists take advantage of differences in the national response - if they are not allowed to act in one state, they can simply move to another. Thus, the Internet can become a virtual refuge, allowing to ignore the national borders”.⁸

Unfortunately, strengthening the propaganda of radicalism, extremism and terrorism, especially in the youth environment, is one of

the threats generated by objective reality in the current conditions of an interconnected and interdependent, globalizing world, which actualizes the problem of counteracting it. According to the definition of the Dictionary of Basic Terms and Concepts in the Sphere of Combating International Terrorism and Other Extremism, propaganda of terrorism is the dissemination of ideas, views, theories, concepts justifying terrorism and the need to carry out terrorist activities in written, verbal and demonstrative form, as well as calls for its implementation; as well as the production and storage for this purpose of the relevant materials.⁹

Since today propaganda and agitation are carried out mainly in electronic form, the issue of the need to improve information literacy and media literacy of the population, especially young people, is at the

⁷<https://islam-today.ru/.../v-velikobritanii-pridumali-kak-udalit-94-onlajn-propagandy->

⁸<https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/ru/un-global-counter-terrorism-strategy>

⁹<http://determiner.ru/termin/propaganda-terrorizma.html>

forefront. And it's not just about practical mastery of modern media space by the personality, but about factors of perception, understanding, interpretation of media texts / information messages, and the formation and development of critical attitudes towards them, that is, analytical and critical thinking. The latter is not only a critical perception of information, but first of all its multilateral analysis, which can take as any initial factors, but the result of the process should be an understanding of the overall concept of media text, the direction of communication.¹⁰ In this situation, media education as an ideology of the pedagogical activity of educational institutions is a guarantee of the effectiveness of the formation of not only general skills and use of information, but also the

enhancement of the information culture of young people. And this activity should have a systematic character and be conducted at all levels of education.

Using social networks, websites, terrorists and extremists, often posing as “freedom fighters”, use ideological guidelines, religious guidelines for manipulating the minds of people, especially young people, and distracting the public from the true goals of the organizers of terrorist acts. This is an effective tool for selecting the radical youth of the society and directing its energy to false goals. Declaring “sublime motives”, young people, due to “youthful maximalism”, mental and moral immaturity, are easily susceptible to radical and religious ideas. At the same time, as is known, the social and psychological ground of such manipulation strengthens unemployment, lack of education, or poorly educated youth; social isolation and alienation, a sense of

¹⁰ See this: Divina Frau-Maygs, Velez I., Flores Michel J. “Public Policy in Media Education and Information Literacy in Europe: Intercountry Comparisons”, London: Public Policies in Media and Information Literacy in 2017 Europe: Cross-Country Comparisons, Londres: Routledge, 2017).

being on the roadside of society and loss of life prospects; lack of social prospects or unpreparedness for modern types of work; wrong organization of her leisure; painful aggravation of religious and national feelings due to their incorrect, distorted perception and awareness; the intensity of despair and hatred, provoked by the experiences of a large degree of social injustice with a tendency to project on society the causes of their failures; a strong need to join the group, i.e. in group identification or membership; state of frustration; insufficient personal identity; low or inadequate self-esteem, due to improper upbringing in the family, school; psychological trauma received in early childhood or adolescence due to cruel treatment by parents, peers or outsiders, etc.¹¹ Perhaps, due to such

circumstances, people from Uzbekistan, who were fighting on the side of IGIL, were recruited, information about which appears in the media and Internet sites. Not finding the right way of life, these people rushed to a foreign country to fulfill their "Islamic duty", not suspecting that, in fact, they voluntarily surrendered themselves to slavery and became a tool for religious fans and Islamic militants.

President of the country Sh.Mirziyoyev, envisaging in the admitted shortcomings the lack of organization at the proper level of the ongoing work to solve the most pressing issues in the life of the youth, especially to create decent conditions for finding a place in life for the unorganized youth, to provide it with all possible support, to provide vocational guidance and employment, to stimulate its

¹¹ See this: Olshansky D.V. Psychology of terrorism. - St. Petersburg, 2002. 282 p.; Pukhovskiy NN Psychotraumatic consequences of emergency situations. - M., 2000; Psychologists on terrorism ("round table") // Psychological journal. - T. 16. - 1995. Ho 4;

Jackebaev US On the socio-psychological aspects of criminal behavior. - Alma-Ata, 1971.

initiatives, and also for the purpose of consistent and effective implementation of youth policy, a radical reform of the system of protection of its rights and legitimate interests, raise it to a qualitatively new stage, I have issued a decree “On measures to improve the efficiency of the state youth policy and support activities of the Union of Youth of Uzbekistan”, according to which on the basis of Public Youth Movement of Uzbekistan “Kamolot” organized by the Union of Youth of Uzbekistan.

Thus, the government of Uzbekistan is acutely aware of the need to prevent radicalization in a country with a high birth rate and a large number of young people. According to the government, more than 17 million Uzbeks, or 64% of the population, are under the age of 30. It is no coincidence that the youth policy is aimed at people aged 14 to 30 and provides for the education of young people in a spirit

of tolerance, protection from the ideas of terrorism and religious extremism and takes concrete measures to achieve this goal.¹²

Thus, one of the 12 main priorities of the Union of Youth of Uzbekistan is “the formation of lasting immunity against young people against various ideological threats, in particular, religious extremism, terrorism”, mass culture “and other ideas alien to us by further enhancing its interest in reading scientific and fiction, including e-books, raising its legal, ecological, medical culture and the culture of using information and communication technologies”. It is also indicated that in order to publicize the scientific and creative achievements of young people, their interest in science and literature, as well as important news about youth

¹² See: Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On measures to improve the effectiveness of state youth policy and support the activities of the Youth League of Uzbekistan” // lex.uz/pages/getpage.aspx?actForm=1&lact_

policy, the Youth Publishing House, specializing in the production of Turkiston, Youth of Uzbekistan, YoshKuch and other youth publications of the Youth Union of Uzbekistan; together with the Republican Committee of Women, to establish the magazine “Kizlarzhon” (“Girls”). The decree provides for the organization of centers for socio-psychological assistance to young people under the Central Council of the Union of Youth of Uzbekistan, the Institute for the Study of Youth Problems and the Training of Prospective Personnel at the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Moreover, speaking at the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly, Sh. Mirziyoyev proposed the development of the UN International Convention on the Rights of Youth, a unified international legal instrument aimed at the formation and implementation

of youth policy in the context of globalization and the rapid development of information and communication technologies. The signatory states must make firm commitments to raise this sphere to the level of one of the main, vital priorities of their social policy - Sh. Mirziyoyev emphasized.

And perhaps most importantly, while maintaining vigilance against the background of the diminished influence of terrorism and extremism in the country, but still changing the current security threats in the global world, the government is actively working on a law aimed at preventing, countering and eliminating the threats of extremism, The Law on Counteracting Extremism, which will be developed by August 30 this year. This is one of the points of the State Program of Action for 2018, approved by President Sh. Mirziyoyev on January 24 this year, a whole section of it is

devoted to priority areas in the sphere of ensuring security, interethnic accord and religious tolerance. The law provides for definition of the concept of extremism, mechanisms for counteracting it, identifying responsible bodies and forms of international cooperation in this direction.

Here a person cannot fail to mention another important link in Uzbekistan's new policy on countering threats-the rehabilitation of former extremists. The very idea of rehabilitation belongs to Sh. Mirziyoyev: "If we do not show magnanimity to such people ... we will not give them a helping hand; they will remain pariahs of society". According to official data, their total number in 2017 was 18 thousand people. The authorities are making every effort to return them to a peaceful life, so that they do not remain angry and isolated from society. For them, new opportunities

are created, financial support is provided, some of the former extremists are given loans for business development, measures are being taken to solve their life problems. The work was done by 9,500 rehabilitated people. More than 10 thousand Uzbek children, whose parents were previously included in the blacklist, are involved in arts, science and sports.¹³ Rehabilitation is of great importance not only for former extremists, but for society as a whole, experts believe. And to work with these people will have a long and patient.

According to the State Program, one of the effective ways of countering the propaganda of terrorism and extremism is to increase the religious literacy of modern youth through education and propaganda. February 14 this year,

¹³news.uz/policy/uzbekistan-reabilitiruuet-16-tysyach-byvshikh-ekstremistov/

the President of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev signed a decree that introduces a new system of fighting crime in Uzbekistan. Among the priorities in it is the early elimination of the causes of extremism on the principle of “Education against ignorance”, which envisages the development and dissemination of the traditional Islamic culture of Uzbekistan as opposed to the lies of extremists. In the same speech at the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly, he called for bringing to the world community the “truly humanistic essence of Islam”. Along with other factors, ignorance and intolerance lie at the basis of international terrorism and extremism, the president noted and asked the UN member states to adopt a special resolution of the General Assembly “Education and Religious Tolerance”, which was called upon to promote tolerance and mutual respect, ensure religious freedom, protect the rights of

believers, and prevent their discrimination. In the same place, a decision was made to organize an International Research Center named after Imam Bukhari and the Center for Islamic Civilization in Tashkent in Samarkand. They are called upon to serve scientific research in the field of religion, as well as the promotion of Islamic values, the protection of young people from various destructive ideas.

In this context, the problem of training literate, professionally trained specialists, propagandizing these values and leading religious enlightenment work among the young people acquires even greater urgency. It is very important that young people deeply and critically understand those false conjectures and “postulates” of religion, which are intentionally taken by terrorists and extremists as the basis for their destructive activities in order to achieve their goals. It must

comprehend the true purpose of Islam - philanthropy, attitudes toward a worthy, spiritual life, to understand the depth of the true relationship of religion to the problems of coercion, violence, murder.¹⁴ Everyone who conducts such serious educational work should be ready to answer the most complicated and unexpected questions of young people (for example, why, if Islam is so perfect, we cannot live according to the laws of the Shariah? - which has already happened in practice).

First, from the point of view of psychology, the correct interpretation of religious phenomena by attracting the sources of the cultural heritage of the people, gently handed down from generation to generation, and their adequate perception and understanding by the

person in adolescence, certainly generates deep respect for such an interesting object of study, and the emergence of such a question in the minds of young people, even if it is not voiced or will be camouflaged in other words and expressions, is a completely logical phenomenon. Secondly, the likelihood of its appearance in large numbers among young people in the process of religious enlightenment work is also great. Therefore, the readiness of a competent specialist is correct, satisfactory from the point of view of the curiosity of young people to answer such a question - a difficult task, but very important. This determines the formation of young people's correct life position, orientation in values, ideological and religious beliefs, etc. Such issues have a direct bearing not only on the legal, political literacy, the history of statehood and the nation, which should be possessed by a specialist working in this direction, but also to

¹⁴ See this: Saidkasymov S. Islam does not accept violence // *Khukuk-Pravo-Law*, 2004, №4 (28), P.68-78; It's the same. Islamrejectsterror // *Huquq-Law-Law*, 2005, No.2 (30). pp. 9-22.

one of the most urgent psychological problems of the individual - identity.

It is known that identity is a mental construction that dynamically develops on the basis of a multitude of cultural, political, economic and other prerequisites. By carefully preserving and developing our language, our national, cultural heritage, we are at the same time part of the vast geographic, political, economic and other communities. We cannot deny the historical fact of the revival of the countries of the East as a result of “Europeanization” in the second half of the twentieth century, i.e. the assimilation of the advantages of Western civilization - technical means, culture, languages. As a result of centuries-old interrelations, joint life activity of different peoples, ethnicities, nationalities, many common features of economic and cultural life, as well as mentality, were formed. The cultural, economic interaction,

integration processes that have taken place (and are taking place now) in the Central Asian space, formed the unity of several subcultures (Turkic, Slavic, Iranian), which in turn led to the formation of a single Eurasian identity. Since Uzbekistan is a democratic, rule-of-law state, it is very important, in a globalizing world, to maintain this identity and eliminate any dangers to it.

A significant role in the solution of all these tasks is played, in addition to state bodies and relevant departments, by public organizations and civil institutions. In addition to the Union of Youth of Uzbekistan and its regional branches, there are more than 100 public organizations operating in the country, taking into account branches in the regions, most of which have a fairly large and interesting experience of working with young people. They are: Youth Information and Education Center “Avlodlaristiqboli” (“Future of

Generations”), Center for Women and Youth “Taraqqiyot” (“Development”), “Republican Center for Social Adaptation of Children”, “Center for Children's Creativity”, “Development Strategy” etc. In the context of the new policy, which is even more aimed at the harmonious development of youth, these public organizations should improve their activities, concentrating on the tasks set by the government in this area.

Modern socio-psychological research convincingly shows that individual parameters of groups have an extremely significant, mostly positive, impact on the process of personality formation and its qualitative characteristics. One of these parameters is the status of the mahalla. In Uzbekistan, the mahalla has been considered a powerful center of culture since ancient times, a unique institution of civil society, an effective self-governing body of citizens, the closest structure to the

people. The role and importance of the mahalla are invaluable in the careful preservation of the national and universal values, culture, way of life, thinking and spirituality of the multinational Uzbek people passed from generation to generation.

The experience gained in Uzbekistan in the development and strengthening of this important social institution is also of interest to the international community. So, the comment on this phenomenon was given by the representative of the Municipal Council of the London area of Waltham (Great Britain) Bernadette Mill: “The mahalla is an absolutely unique public institution building its work in the modern new concept, this is the institution of a new formation”.¹⁵

The decree of the President of Uzbekistan “On Measures for Further Improvement of the Mahalla

¹⁵ Cit. on: Soboleva E. Organs of self-government of citizens and their role in strengthening the institution of the family // Uzbekistan today, №49 (328) 06.12.2012.

Institute” on February 3, 2017 marked the beginning of a new stage in the development of the system, the mahalla institute is being successfully improved in accordance with the requirements of the time.

One of the priority areas of the decree is the strengthening of the interaction of citizens' self-government bodies with state and non-governmental organizations in the education of young people with spiritually developed and physically healthy personalities, in the context of which work with young people, including in combating terrorist and extremist threats, value.

Thus, the success of Uzbekistan in the fight against terrorism and its manifestations, as we see, is not accidental. Behind him is a huge, painstaking, harmoniously coordinated work of the government, relevant departments and structures. Effective counteraction to terrorism

and religious extremism depends, as the experience of the republic, on the implementation of the interrelated, interdependent activity of all state bodies, public organizations, civil institutions, which is systemic, permanent, comprehensive, developing and implementing a comprehensive program that includes political, social, economic, legal, ideological, and, of course, psychological aspects, interaction and coordination of all forces of society, is interested in solving this urgent problem.

At the same time, in the context of the need to confront the propaganda of these threats and the improvement of anti-propaganda activities in the republic, it seems expedient:

1. To develop a concept of counterpropaganda of terrorism and religious extremism in the youth environment with a detailed description of the main principles

and specific directions for counteracting the propaganda of these antisocial phenomena.

2. Strengthen the research work of the relevant scientific institutions and educational institutions on the problems of religious education and education, confront religious extremism and fanaticism, while paying closer attention to the study of the socio-psychological characteristics of individuals capable of propaganda; motivational regulators of behavior of people inclined to terrorist and extremist activity; the identification of personal predispositions, which often become motivating motives for individuals to enter the path of terrorism, etc.

3. Regularly publish cycles of scientific and methodological and educational tools for young people with open development based on real examples of propaganda, recruitment with detailed analysis,

conclusions and specific recommendations of a counterpropagandistic nature.

4. To improve the monitoring of websites, media space, as well as the system of information (media) education; regularly replenish popular Internet resources (e.g. Wikipedia) with interesting analytical information of a religious and educational nature.

5. To improve the system of professional training of specialists in matters of religion, religious education and enlightenment, as well as psychological rehabilitation.

6. In order to strengthen the ideological component of the upbringing of the younger generation, to create children's, youthful, youth patriotic movements.

7. To improve the activities of public organizations and civil institutions, especially mahallas, aimed at religious education, youth

education, social and psychological rehabilitation of young people, including former extremists, counteracting the propaganda of terrorism and religious extremism.

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