



Research Article

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Prevention of Religious Extremism in Kazakhstan

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Abstract

The purpose of the article is to analyze the prevention of religious extremism in the Republic of Kazakhstan in its practical and theoretical aspects. The paper uses a systematic approach and textual and comparative analysis. Kazakhstan deals with the issue of religious extremism thoroughly. Kazakh philosophy and science conduct the study of religious extremism and its prevention at a fairly high level. Nevertheless, there are different points of view on these issues. The authors propose to distinguish between strategy and tactics in the prevention of religious extremism. The research results can be applied in the further theoretical study of religious extremism and its prevention, as well as in the field of teaching several socio-humanitarian disciplines. A systematic analysis of the interpretations of the prevention of religious extremism in Kazakhstan is carried out.

Keywords: religious extremism, Republic of Kazakhstan, Kazakhstan, prevention of religious extremism, strategy of prevention of religious extremism, tactics of prevention of religious extremism, tolerance

1. Introduction

Extremism and terrorism (especially the former) as practical problems, and not purely theoretical, arose in Kazakhstan almost immediately after it gained its independence. This was also related to the

rehabilitation of religious rights. The main ethnic groups inhabiting Kazakhstan since its separation from Russia are Kazakhs and Russians. The number of believers in the Soviet Union was insignificant. Since the separation, their number has grown significantly. The main confessions are Orthodox Christianity and Sunni Islam (more specifically, the Hanafi school). The construction of mosques and churches began in full swing, and religious educational institutions appeared. However, their qualified religious servants, especially Muslim, were sorely lacking. The situation with teachers in Muslim educational institutions was dire. At first, the state had to invite them from abroad.

However, along with traditional Islam, the so-called radical Islam and various extremist Islamic organizations, of which there are many abroad, began to be introduced into Kazakhstan. Their members brought extremist ideology with them and sought to infect ordinary believers with it, especially young people. They spread it through sermons in mosques, from the pulpits of religious institutions, and through the mass media, which are currently diverse. The state soon realized the threats posed by the activities of Islamic radicals and extremists and began to take measures to protect the population from their activities. First, the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Religious Activities and Religious Associations" was issued. This law regulated the functioning of various confessions in the secular state of Kazakhstan. Then Lists of Extremist Materials Banned on the Territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Lists of Religious Organizations Banned by Court Decision throughout the Territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan were approved. This gave guidance not only to special services designed to counter Islamist extremism but also to ordinary believers when they came across propaganda materials serving to involve them in extremist organizations.

The first President of the Republic of Kazakhstan N. A. Nazarbayev paid much attention to religious radicalism and extremism. In his Message to the People of Kazakhstan, he said that "We must improve our legislation to neutralize manifestations of religious radicalism and extremism. We must also improve anti-terrorism legislation. The state must stop extremism and radicalism, no matter where they come from. We must form new reliable mechanisms for overcoming social and ethnic tensions and conflicts. It is necessary to strictly suppress the activities of non-traditional sects and dubious pseudo-religious movements. We need to strengthen the prevention of religious extremism in society, especially among young people" (Strategy "Kazakhstan 2050", 2012). He also warned that "The fight against extremism should not turn into a witch hunt and grow into a fight against religion. In matters of religion, a thoughtful approach and extreme caution are necessary. The state should not interfere in the internal affairs of religious communities. We must sacredly adhere to the principle of freedom of conscience and traditions of religious tolerance" (Strategy "Kazakhstan 2050", 2012).

This circumstance obliged law enforcement agencies and special services to carry out their anti-extremist activities carefully and attentively, so as not to violate religious freedom. In addition, the State Program on Countering Religious Extremism and Terrorism in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2013-2017 was developed.

The task of combating religious extremism (as with any other extremism) cannot be considered the responsibility of special services alone. It is the responsibility of the entire population of the Republic and especially representatives of the science and education system (Malika et al., 2022). Socio-humanitarian scholars are entrusted with a special mission – to study the phenomenon of religious extremism more deeply and comprehensively to develop adequate and effective measures for its prevention and confrontation with its manifestations (Ganjvar, 2023). In this regard, the study of religious, especially Islamist, extremism is relevant today.

2. Literature Review

Religious extremism is only one form of extremism. There have been studies devoted to the essence of extremism by T. V. Klimova, D. B. Bashanova, G. Niyatbekov, and others engaged in clarifying the concept of extremism and approaches to its definition. B. A. Abibulaev analyzes the problem of classification and typologization of extremism. A. R. Almukhametov, A. Z. Niyakhov, and A. A.

Kalieva consider the issue of defining religious extremism. R. K. Turyszhanova and M. K. Tashbulatova study the problem of the essence, features, and manifestations of religious extremism. T. T. Aimukhambetov, A.D. Shagirbayev, K. K. Begalinova, A.D. Kurmanalieva, E. E. Burova, N. S. Kaldybekov, A.M. Sergaliev, N. A. Mukanova, Sh. M. Zhandosova, A.D. Shagirbai, and others consider the technology of extremism of religious consciousness. Some researchers study countering extremism as such, based on general principles (S. Y. Kolchigin and S. S. Rysbekova).

The issues of prevention and counteraction to religious extremism are analyzed by V. D. Kurganskaya, M. Nurgalieva, R. S. Irzhanov, N. Z. Mailybayeva, R. S. Mukhitdinov, E. B. Amire, and K. Shamshadin. Some opportunities for prevention and confrontation are seen in religion itself by V. Y. Dunaev, A. G. Kosichenko, and G. G. Solovyova.

Special studies are devoted to the prevention of religious extremism, scientific conferences are held, and dissertations are written and defended. In 2005, based on the results of a sociological study, the report "Extremism in Central Asia: Trend Assessments (Based on the Example of Kazakhstan)" was compiled. In 2015, the Institute of Philosophy, Political Science, and Religious Studies of the Science Committee of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan published a collective monograph "Values and Ideals of Independent Kazakhstan", in the sixth chapter of which the third paragraph is entitled "Attitude to Religious Extremism and Means of its Prevention" (Shaukenova, 2015). E. E. Burova, D. M. Zhanabayeva, Sh. M. Zhandosova, A. G. Kosichenko, B. M. Satershinov, N. L. Seitakhmetova, D. A. Sikhimbaeva, and G. G. Solovyova took part in writing the chapter and paragraph. In May 2017, an International Scientific and Practical Conference "Prevention of the Spread of Ideas of Non-Traditional Religious Movements in Central Asia" was held in Almaty (Materials of the Almaty International Scientific and Practical Conference "Prevention of the Spread of Ideas of Non-Traditional Religious Movements in Central Asia", 2017).

It can be seen from the analyzed works that religious extremism and especially the issue of its prevention in Kazakh literature has not yet received enough attention. This circumstance makes the topic of this work relevant.

3. Methods

Several methodological tools were used in the work, which allowed us to consider the topic in a meaningful way. The systematic approach allowed us to bring various points of view in Kazakh philosophy and science into a certain integrity for further analysis. Textual analysis was applied to publications on the prevention of religious extremism. The comparative method allowed us to consider different points of view and draw appropriate conclusions.

4. Results and Discussion

The main results can be formulated as follows:

1. The analysis of state documents devoted to religious (especially Islamist) extremism and its prevention has shown that they are sufficiently substantiated and can correctly direct practical actions.
2. Kazakh philosophy and science, partly relying on state documents and partly their principles, thoroughly explore the phenomenon of religious (especially Islamist) extremism and discuss the issues of countering and preventing it. However, there is still a lot to be done today.
3. There are still disagreements among researchers of religious extremism on methods of its prevention. The development of a single view on the subject is a matter of the near future.
4. We propose to distinguish between 1) the level of strategy and 2) the level of practice in the prevention of religious extremism.

Practical work on the prevention of religious (especially Islamist) extremism and countering it in practice has been carried out primarily by government agencies, law enforcement agencies, and

special services. This work is based on the documents adopted by the state and especially on the State Program on Countering Religious Extremism and Terrorism in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2013-2017. This program states that "despite the measures taken, extremist and terrorist activities are becoming more organized every year and new individuals are being involved in the ranks of such groups under the influence of external forces".

In particular, international extremist and terrorist organizations, hiding behind religious rhetoric, are trying to form radical views and beliefs in Kazakh society. Their purposeful influence on the consciousness of individuals leads to "the loss of their sense of patriotism and national identity and cultural, moral, and family values" (Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated September 24, 2013 No. 648, 2013). Regarding the reasons for the emergence and strengthening of extremist religious organizations and religiously motivated terrorist organizations in sovereign Kazakhstan, the State Program on Countering Religious Extremism and Terrorism in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2013-2017 states the following: "The internal factors contributing to the involvement of new adherents in radical religious structures include the existing socio-economic problems, the low level of religious literacy of the population, the shortcomings of moral and patriotic education of the younger generation".

One of the reasons for the emergence of a destructive attitude and distrust of the authorities, mainly among the youth, is corruption and bureaucracy on the part of individual government officials. "Certain conditions for the spread of religious extremist ideology are created by the widespread distribution of religious literature and other information materials of dubious content" (Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated September 24, 2013 No. 648, 2013). According to the Program, the improvement of measures for the prevention of religious extremism and terrorism will be achieved by:

1. conducting scientific, analytical, and sociological research to study the causes and conditions of the spread of religious extremism and terrorism in society and the social portrait of a potential extremist and terrorist and assessing and identifying vulnerable aspects in the state policy in this area;
2. developing and implementing effective forms and methods of religious extremism and terrorism prevention;
3. qualitatively improving the efficiency of information and explanatory work;
4. organizing and carrying out preventive work among target groups (persons inclined or subject to radical ideology) on a religious basis about the alienness and unacceptability of radical religious ideology;
5. ensuring the coverage of students of secondary, vocational, and higher education institutions with the necessary amount of knowledge about religion for a conscious attitude to the surrounding reality and critical perception of radical religious ideology;
6. further developing the national system of theological education by increasing the level of its competitiveness and accessibility for the population;
7. introducing the practice of demonstrating thematic videos (films) to senior students in secondary schools and first-year students in vocational and higher education institutions, aimed at forming a persistent rejection of destructive ideology;
8. implementing a social project for the prevention of religious extremism and terrorism, aimed at the formation of consciousness among young people corresponding to the traditions and cultural heritage of the people of Kazakhstan;
9. organizing and holding events aimed at educating young people in the spirit of Kazakh patriotism based on fundamental moral and cultural values;
10. organizing children's and youth patriotic movements in educational institutions to preserve and promote the historical and cultural heritage of the people of Kazakhstan;
11. creating conditions in all rural settlements up to the level of a rural district for proper cultural, moral, spiritual, patriotic, and physical development and upbringing of children and youth;

12. organizing constant monitoring of print and electronic media, including Internet resources, to identify materials promoting the ideas of religious extremism and terrorism, including through the introduction of modern programs to identify illegal content;
13. conducting seminars, round tables, and other public events with the involvement of experts, scientists, and representatives of state bodies on the prevention of religious extremism and terrorism and the popularization of the model of interethnic and interfaith harmony;
14. releasing and forming an array of domestic religious literature and a series of cultural and entertainment products promoting traditional spiritual and moral values;
15. actively disseminating through the media materials aimed at revealing the negative essence of radical ideology, including those based on a deliberate distortion of true religious canons;
16. disseminating information exposing the methods of involving Kazakh citizens in extremist and terrorist activities;
17. developing effective measures to protect Kazakh citizens during their stay abroad from the propaganda activities of adherents of radical views;
18. effective functioning of a special rehabilitation center for persons affected by the ideology of religious extremism and terrorism or those who have fallen under the influence of this radical ideology (Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated September 24, 2013 No. 648, 2013). This Program is correct in that the main addressee of its activities is young people, as well as teenagers and even children. Adolescent and youth consciousness, due to its characteristics, is the least resistant to alien influences.

Now let us turn to researchers. Socio-humanitarian scholars are also working on preventing and countering religious extremism. A lot of recommendations have been accumulated, just the analysis of which would require increasing the volume of the article several times. We will only note that there are many useful recommendations among them, which, undoubtedly, are subject to generalization. Scholars, as a rule, proceed from their specialty with their ideas on the prevention and countering of religious extremism. Lawyers propose measures correlating them with legislation, sociologists propose measures accessible to a sociological approach, psychologists proceed from their subject, etc. Social philosophers, political scientists, and religious scholars offer what fits within the boundaries of their subject areas. However, there is more in common between these three groups of specialists than between each of them and the rest of the specialists.

A group of sociologists in the scientific and analytical report "Extremism in Central Asia: Trend Assessments" came to the following conclusion regarding the causes of extremism: "If we summarize the respondents' answers about the causes and factors of the possible spread of religious extremism in the Republic of Kazakhstan and distribute these factors in accordance with the main spheres of society, the following picture emerges:

1. The socio-economic sphere: violation of social justice, corruption, low living standards of a large part of the population, stark social differentiation, and lack of confidence in the future.
2. The moral and ideological sphere: the decline of public morality, imaginary religiosity due to various circumstances, and the absence of an articulated and shared by the majority of the population ideology of state-building.
3. The political and legal sphere: the use of religion for political purposes, the lack of elaboration of legal aspects of the settlement of interreligious conflicts in the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the absence of a state body capable of conducting religious expertise and giving an objective assessment of the activities of a religious association.
4. The foreign policy sphere: the intervention of foreign states, the activities of foreign missionaries" (Extremism in Central Asia: Trend Assessments (Based on the Example of Kazakhstan), 2015, p. 46).

The authors of the collective monograph "Values and Ideals of Independent Kazakhstan" set the task to describe the attitude of Kazakh citizens toward religious extremism and the means of its prevention. The respondents were asked the question: "What needs to be done to eradicate extremist ideas? (Rate according to the degree of importance)" (Shaukenova, Ed., 2015, p. 169).

The results of the survey showed that respondents prioritized violent methods in the fight against extremism; the second place was given to the quality of education and the third place – to the need to improve the living conditions of the poor. Regarding violent methods, S. Y. Kolchigin wrote the following: "This method of countering extremism, although it represents the most popular measure in the eyes of the majority of the population and politicians, should be rejected as inadequate. The neutralization of one external force by another will never lead to a true and final victory of one side over the other. The force in this case simply will not be neutralized: it will only be replaced by another, greater force, and even then only for a while until the defeated side accumulates new forces for radical aggressive actions" (Kolchigin, 2004, p. 263). To this reasoning, we can respond in the following way. By and large, Kolchigin is right. However, his rightness extends only to such forms of religious extremism that are either still in the process of becoming or have not yet taken aggressive actions. If extremism has moved from ideas to actions, then forceful methods become inevitable. Even here the use of force must correspond to the degree of threat.

Kazakh researchers do not lag behind foreign scholars in the prevention of religious extremism. E. E. Burova, a well-known philosopher and specialist in the field of religious studies, presented a solid list of measures to prevent and counter religious extremism (Burova, 2014, pp. 176-177). We will not reproduce it. Let us note only the opinion of those who believe that religion itself can greatly contribute to the prevention and counteraction of religious extremism. This point of view is expressed by Kazakh scientists G. Solovyova (2011, p. 67-74) and A. Kosichenko (2011). Kosichenko writes: "Religions can act both directly and indirectly in this direction. Directly by influencing the consciousness, mind, and conscience of believers and all people in general. Indirectly by reminding the authorities of their duty to take care of citizens, maintain a certain level of justice in society, implement social programs, and provide people with opportunities for material and spiritual development" (Kosichenko, 2011, p. 39). The author concretizes religion's opportunities (Kosichenko, 2011, p. 39-40), as well as the opportunities of non-traditional religious associations in Kazakhstan (Kosichenko, 2011, p. 40).

Concerning developing a strategy and specific measures to counter religious extremism in Kazakhstan, V. Yu. Dunaev notes that "the task of attracting the potential of non-confessional types of worldviews to counter Islamic forms of religious terrorism and extremism becomes especially urgent" (Dunaev, 2012, p. 94). Dunaev makes "a general conclusion that to increase the effectiveness of the prevention of religious extremism, it is necessary to shift the emphasis from 1) contrasting the values of so-called traditional religions and fundamentalist religious movements and from 2) developing a culture of tolerance (religious tolerance) to 1) explaining the values of free thinking and 2) fostering a culture of critical-reflective thinking. In particular, school and university religious studies programs should be revised from this point of view" (Dunaev, 2012, p. 95).

We agree with Dunaev, as well as with many of those who think that it is necessary to educate the population in a culture of thinking and not just to provide them with knowledge about religious extremism and its harmfulness. The culture of thinking consists, first of all, in its criticality. To develop it, in our opinion, the current education system needs several reforms, about which there is no opportunity to speak here.

Many researchers suggest educating citizens, especially the younger generation, to be tolerant, including in the field of interfaith relations. What is tolerance? The concept of tolerance, according to Kazakh researcher I. Tsepkova, expresses a predominantly negative assessment. The author distinguishes between the concept of tolerance and the concept of acceptance. Tsepkova writes: "In contrast to tolerance, acceptance is characterized by respect, recognition of the right to freedom of self-determination of the individual, receptivity, open-mindedness to alternatives, and the absence of protest and condemnation of any actions of the object" (Tsepkova, 2008, p. 23). Receptivity and open-mindedness to others are the qualities of a normal person. However, it is impossible to agree with the author concerning protesting and condemning someone's actions or ideas (for example, extremist). It is one thing when an individual does not accept the actions or views of another individual. It is different when they do not accept the actions or views of a certain socially dangerous group (for

example, extremist). In this case, why not condemn these actions or views and not even speak out against them? Tsepikova herself sees the paradoxical nature of the phenomenon of tolerance. She writes: "Tolerance cannot be unlimited" (Tsepikova, 2008, p. 28). This is the thesis. The antithesis says: "Tolerance is limitless" (Tsepikova, 2008, p. 28). However, according to dialectics, thesis and antithesis must be removed in synthesis. Tsepikova does not offer any synthesis and, most likely, does not see its possibility.

It is easier to be tolerant of some problems than others, for example, in the field of science. There are sometimes tough discussions that include the rejection of other people's positions, etc. However, this does not escalate into direct violence (although it is sometimes veiled). In the field of interethnic and interfaith relations, it is not so easy to be tolerant. The Russian philosopher N. A. Berdyaev wrote: "It is easy to be tolerant of any faith to someone who does not believe in anything, who is indifferent to the truth. But how to combine fervent faith and devotion to the one Truth with a tolerant attitude to false faith and denial of Truth? Isn't religious tolerance always a sign of indifferentism?" (Berdyaev, 1994, p. 107).

According to the Russian researcher R. R. Valitova, "tolerance of someone else's point of view does not imply the rejection of its criticism or one's own beliefs. It means recognition of pluralism" (Valitova, 2001, p. 76). However, pluralism cannot be accepted as something exclusively positive. Pluralism is diversity, but not every diversity is pluralism. Diversity within unity is one thing; the diversity of a multitude of self-contained points of view, doctrines, confessions, etc. is a purely external unity. This is pluralism. The famous Russian philosopher G. S. Batishchev writes: "This atmosphere is praised as the realm of acceptance, tolerance. However, pluralistic tolerance is just a forced non-interference in the foreign and alien affairs of others (which remains forced, even if it has been assimilated and has become a habit of politeness), just contractual non-attraction and formal diplomatic restraint, behind which internal rejection is always kept. This tolerance is only regulated and constrained as if frozen intolerance" (Batishchev, 1997, p. 348). In the West, an excessively broad understanding of tolerance is imposed now: acceptance of gay parades, LGBT, pedophilia, etc. is considered tolerant. In accordance with this interpretation, nothing prevents one from being tolerant of extremism and terrorism. Thus, today, tolerance, as the Kazakh philosopher A. A. Khamidov writes, has a dark side (Khamidov, 2008). Such tolerance is unacceptable for Kazakhstan.

In our opinion, it is necessary to distinguish between strategy and tactics in the system of preventing and countering religious extremism. The strategy is set out in the State Program on Countering Religious Extremism and Terrorism in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2013-2017. A tactic is a system of methods for its implementation. It should also be developed primarily at the state level. It is necessary to develop specific methods of prevention and counteraction for each public sphere within its competence and in relation to the way it functions. For example, law enforcement agencies have their competence and methods; the same can be said about the National Security Committee, science, education, etc. In developing these methods, it is necessary to involve researchers, teachers, and representatives of law enforcement agencies and special services, as well as representatives of both leading religions (Islam and Orthodoxy) and other denominations. All this must be stated in a single document and conveyed to each sphere related to it. However, these spheres should not be isolated but interact with each other and exchange experiences. Only then, in our opinion, both the prevention and counteraction of religious extremism will be as effective as possible.

5. Conclusion

The article shows that in Kazakhstan, a serious attitude towards religious extremism and its prevention exists at all levels of the state and society. Practical implementation, including the special development of relevant documents, is carried out by specific state bodies (Ministry of Internal Affairs, National Security Committee, intelligence services, etc.). The theoretical basis, including for the development of these documents, is provided by philosophers and scholars. Thus, the cooperation of science and practice in this matter is at the proper level.

The research results can be applied in further theoretical studies of religious extremism and its prevention, as well as in the field of teaching such academic disciplines as religious studies, philosophy of religion, sociology of religion, and psychology of religion.

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