

The Phenomenon of Jihad: Historical Transformation and Modern Interpretation

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Abstract

The article seeks to differentiate the religious concept of jihad from its modern politicized interpretation to reduce Islamophobia. A historical review of modern Islamic values and principles is carried out. To confirm the hypothesis put forward, the author uses reliable information from the Holy Quran and hadith. The classical views of the Muslim scholars Ibn Qasir and Abu Jafar al-Tabari, who defended the religion of Islam from various misconceptions, are also presented as sources. The author conducted an etymological and hermeneutic analysis of the theory of “armed jihad” and religious concepts distorted for various political reasons. The features of the impact of the microenvironment and individual factors affecting the radicalization of a person are determined. At the same time, the author widely informs about the comprehensive work and measures taken to prevent religious extremism and terrorism in Kazakhstan. The reasons for the spread of radical religious ideology in Kazakhstan are presented in three stages, taking into account Kazakhstan’s experience in combating them.

Keywords: Jihad, Islam, radicalism, terrorism, Operation “Zhusan”

Introduction

In the global era, the phenomenon of “international terrorism” threatens the security of each individual State. In this regard, interstate relations in various areas are also changing due to the influence of international terrorism. In the Western media, such phrases as “terrorism,” “jihad,” and “violence” are attached to the word “Islam” and are spread in society in the literal and literal sense.¹ As a result, we have widespread Islamophobia and xenophobia in the world. This is described in detail in the study “The Nature of Islamophobia: A Test of a Tripartite View in Five Countries.”²

First, we will describe the concept of terrorism. Terrorism is a vicious phenomenon associated with political and social reasons that lead to the violation of any rules and cause fear in society.³ Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said: “The worst form of terrorism is violence against innocent civilians. At the same time, we must make every effort to protect human rights.”⁴ This is because terrorist actions seriously undermine the freedom and security of citizens, enshrined in resolution 217 A (III) UN (United Nations).

One of the factors of the conversion of terrorism into a religious form is fanatics propagandists of terrorist ideology, who understand and analyze sacred religious texts from the point of view of literalism. Hizb ut-Tahrir alone propagandizes its ideology in 40 countries of the world.⁵ In addition, it is important to keep in mind that the situation is also seriously affected by internal and external political factors.⁶

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¹ S. Papale (2023), “The Realpolitik of Jihad: An Anatomy of Transnational Islamist Terrorism in East Africa,” *Security Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 3, pp. 459-471.

² F. Uenal et al. (2021), “The Nature of Islamophobia: A Test of a Tripartite View in Five Countries,” *Personality and Social*, Vol. 47, No. 2, pp. 275-292.

³ T. Borko and A. Vilks (2023), “Consequences and Threats of International Terrorism for Ukraine,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 33, No. 3, pp. 43-50.

⁴ M. M. Yamamoto (2015), “Terrorism Against Democracy,” CISSM Working Paper, School of Public Policy, University of Maryland.

⁵ I. R. Mikheev (2020), *Terrorism: Concept, Responsibility, Prevention*, Vladivostok: Vladivostok Center for Organized Crime Research at the Law Institute of the Far Eastern State University.

⁶ Papale (2023), “The Realpolitik of Jihad,” pp. 459-471.

In the modern scientific world, there are about 200 definitions of this term. At the same time, there is no consensus among scientists on the issue of the criminal-legal definition of the concept of terrorism.⁷ In today's global space, Islam has suffered greatly from terrorism. There are the following political reasons for this: first, according to Western demographic statistics, the number of Muslims is increasing day by day. Among the prisoners of local prisons, the number of converts to Islam is growing.⁸ According to a study conducted in 2009, the number of Muslims in 2050 will be 20% of the population in 27 countries of the European Union.⁹

Secondly, Islam is spreading well in the West. At this rate, Islam will become the dominant religion in the future. According to a report by the Gatestone Institute, which studies the problems of the Western way of life, in its research report entitled "The Rapid Development of Islam in the West," noted that the construction of mosques in Paris, London, and Rome is increasing and competing with local churches.¹⁰ Recently, the Holy Quran of Muslims has become the best-selling book in the United States and Europe. Thirdly, with the spread of Islam in the West, the general social situation of the local culture, worldview, civilization, customs, and traditions may lose its radical Western character. Fifthly, the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1948-1982 caused a new wave of significant negative sentiment against Muslims. As a result, an unprecedented trend of radical Islamism has formed in the Middle East.¹¹

After that, many political scientists, researchers, and strategic analysts noted that after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Islamic world became the main goal of the new ideology of Western liberalism. Since then, Western countries have conducted a comprehensive study of Islam and identified its weaknesses. In this context, the concept of holy jihad in Islam was used to incite Muslims against each other. After that, mass dissemination of information messages began that all violent actions, attacks and uprisings, terrorist acts, and extremist actions committed by Muslims were committed under the motto of armed jihad.¹² Media resources and mass media subordinate to Western countries played an important role here.¹³ The religious ideology of Wahhabism (Salafism), formed in the XVIII century, also became an indispensable weapon. The ideas of jihad were distorted and propagandized about the armed conflict at the international level, as well as at the public domestic level, and the issues of Fiqh (legal) norms were changed.¹⁴

Despite being one of the world's youngest and rapidly growing religions, Islam's association with violence and terrorism has led to widespread phobia and misunderstanding. The intertwining of religious beliefs with the geopolitical narratives, especially post-Cold War, has led to a misuse of jihad, significantly influencing the global perception of Islam. This politicization of jihad not only damages interfaith relations but also affects the cohesion of Islamic societies themselves. The problem is exacerbated by the failure to address the root causes of religious extremism, with most efforts focused on reactive measures rather than proactive prevention. The article grapples with the misconceptions and politicization of the concept of jihad within Islamic teachings and its impacts on global security, socio-political dynamics, and the resulting rise in Islamophobia. In exploring the complex relationship between Islam, jihad, and modern-day terrorism, the article raises several key inquiries. It investigates how historical interpretations of jihad have evolved to be associated with violence and terrorism and the extent to which political agendas have shaped these perceptions, especially in Western contexts. Additionally, the article questions the impact of media and ideological movements like Wahhabism on public understanding of jihad and Islam, and the consequent rise in Islamophobia globally.

Methodology

During the research of the topic, empirical, analytical, historical-comparative, and hermeneutic methods are used, which are widely used in the humanities and theological sciences, and about sacred texts. This article defines the main philosophical meaning of jihad based on the hermeneutic analysis of sacred

⁷ S. Lane-Poole (1996), *The Story of the Moors in Spain*, Baltimore: Black Classic Press.

⁸ N. Janowitz (2022), "Framing the Intentions of Suicide Bombers," *Religions*, Vol. 13, No. 9, p. 864.

⁹ Z. Baran (2004), *Hizb-ut-Tahrir: Islam's Political Insurgency*, Washington: The Nixon Center.

¹⁰ Meirison Meirison et al. (2021), "Muslim Occupation in France According to Arabic Literature and Western Historical Evidences," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 17-26.

¹¹ A. Mougou (2023), *What is Jihad? Toward a Theory of Jihad in Political Discourse*, Bern: Peter Lang Publishing Group.

¹² M. D. Koning (2023), "New Horizons in the Study of Jihad," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 29, No. 2, pp. 459-461.

¹³ Z. Abylgazova et al. (2023), "Problems of Developing Media and Information Competence of Future Journalists on the Basis of Case Technologies," *Asian Journal of University Education*, Vol. 19, No. 2, pp. 436-446.

¹⁴ S. P. Huntington (2014), *The Clash of Civilizations*, Moscow: AST Publishers.

religious texts in the initial historical period of the development of Islam. At the same time, the article provides proposals based on an overview of Kazakhstan's work on deradicalization in the fight against extremism and terrorism.

Today in the Muslim world there are two different points of view, and incompatible worldviews about jihad. The first are people who adhere to the path formed by classical scientists in religion. The second are those who seek to eliminate all innovations by "reforming" religion. Their religious literacy leaves much to be desired. They cannot explain the Quran with the help of innovative academic theories. The concept of jihad is associated only with war and violence.¹⁵ They do not understand the universality of the concept based on humanism.¹⁶

First of all, it is necessary to identify the positive universal aspects that the concept of jihad includes. "Jihad" in the dictionary and language content is translated directly from Arabic as "action," "effort," "strong motivation," and "inspiration." And in the Quran and the Sunnah, this concept is used in the sense of fighting internal passions (desires) in the way of the Lord, that is, while observing religious canons. VII-VIII centuries. Muslims were the first to spread Islam among the local population on the Arabian Peninsula. Despite the pressure and restrictions from other non-Muslim people, the Muslim believers were patient and tried to show religion only from the good side.¹⁷ Since it was an order of the Creator. Therefore, it was said in the Holy Quran: "The righteous servants of Allah are those who walk the earth humbly (without arrogance) and when they are addressed with the speech of the ignorant (wanting to cause them suffering), they say (answering them): "Peace!" (25:63).¹⁸

In addition, the Almighty added the following: "Call (people) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good admonition, and argue with them (with those who disagree) gently and kindly" (16: 125). At the same time, the following verse was revealed at that time, defining the main and specific goal of jihad: "So do not obey the disbelievers, and strive against them with the Qur'an a great striving." (25: 52). As for the words "jihad," "struggle" in this verse, the famous classical commentator of the Quran, Imam Abu Jafar al-Tabari, wrote in his book: "At that time it was argued that Muslims should not fight (fight) against those who suppress the spread of Islam, but should follow the principle of wisdom and a beautiful message of religion. Therefore, such a patient struggle and diligence (with the Quran) on the path of religion, according to the last verse, is considered "The Greatest jihad."¹⁹

Results and Discussion

Jihad in Historical Context

One day, the Muslims in Mecca, tired of the constant persecution of the Quraysh tribesmen, went to the Prophet Muhammad to complain and ask for permission to resist. In response, the Prophet Muhammad said to them: "Be patient, truly I was not sent for war"²⁰. Then the following verse was sent down from the Creator, which stated that Muslims should listen to the words of the Prophet: "Allah protects those who believe. Indeed, Allah does not love any ungrateful traitors" (22: 38). As can be seen in the above, that initially, the main goal for the Muslims of Mecca was to show patience and a good disposition. The Muslims obeyed religious instructions and did not cause any conflicts in Mecca. There, the peaceful spread of religion was considered the greatest jihad. Therefore, this is a great jihad from the Creator – it is the popularization of Islam among representatives of other religions without fear and coercion.

If Islam had been a religion of war and oppression, it would have quickly disappeared, unable to hold on for 14 centuries, and the Quran would not have become a holy book for believers and the heritage of mankind. Unfortunately, some religious scholars now explain that the main reason why Meccan Muslims did not participate in armed jihad was their small number. However, this is not mentioned in any classical religious texts and documents. It should be noted that this is an illogical conclusion. After

¹⁵ M.-J. Jeong et al. (2022), "A Righteous War: Comparing Milton's External Revolution and Bunyan's Internal Struggle," *Astra Salvensis*, Vol. 2022, No. 1, pp. 217-228.

¹⁶ M. Baucum et al. (2021), "Modeling Affective and Cognitive Responses to Soft-Target Terrorism Over Time," *Environment Systems and Decisions*, Vol. 41, No. 2, pp. 227-235.

¹⁷ J. Bennett (2023), "Globalization, Global Jihad, and Civil Society," in F. Baqir (ed.) *Civil Society and Pakistan's Economy: Robber Barons and Meritocracy*, London: Taylor and Francis, pp. 183-201.

¹⁸ Ibn Kathir (2010), *al-Bidaiya ua nihaiya*, Beirut: Dar Ibn Kathir.

¹⁹ O. al-Obaidy (2007), *The Problematic Position of the West on the Islamic Nation*, Iraq: The Faculty of Theology of University of Mosul.

²⁰ Baucum et al. (2021), "Modeling Affective and Cognitive Responses," pp. 227-235.

the Muslims moved to Medina, their political, social and economic situation changed dramatically. For their new life, the following issues: 1-management systems (authorities), 2-constitutions (rights), 3) territories (lands), 4-religion (free religion) have become more relevant than ever.²¹

The Meccan Muslim Muhajirs (settlers) joined the local residents (Ansars) and became a greater political force led by the Prophet Muhammad. The Muslims created a new system of government that streamlined political relations with local Christians and Jews. The Constitution regulating State affairs was adopted. It is known in history as the Medina Constitution.²² Territories belonging to Muslims appeared. Now the main goal of the formation of the Islamic religion has become its free dissemination among the population without any pressure or oppression. As a result, an Islamic State was created. In the new state-community, people of different religions lived in peace. Trade flourished, the number of caravanserais and merchants grew. In addition to the prophetic mission, Muhammad was now entrusted with additional duties, such as ruling the state, commanding the army, judging and political and diplomatic functions. In this case, the first task was to protect the young state from external enemies who did not abandon attempts to eradicate Muslims.

Since, in the west, the Roman System operated, and in the east. The Persian Empire. Moreover, the Quraysh Arabs, along with other tribes, sought to exterminate the Muslims. Despite the constant military threats, the Muslims of Medina adhered to such ideas of jihad, which were based on coexistence, patience, dialogue and the peaceful spread of their religion. This was facilitated by the Madinah verse: “And do not argue (O believers) with the People of the Book (with Jews and Christians), except in the best (way) of good temper and good speech” (29:46).²³ One day, Muslims came to the Prophet Muhammad and asked him: “What is the best jihad?” The Prophet replied: “The best jihad is to tell the truth to a cruel king.” In addition, the Prophet said, “Religion is instruction.” Then the Companions asked: “O Messenger of Allah, for whom is the instruction?” He replied: “To all mankind.” Thus, we see that the basic moral and conceptual idea of jihad was the same both in Mecca and in Medina.²⁴

As Abdullah ibn Omar reports: “One day, when the Muslims were going to battle, a young man approached the Prophet and asked for permission to participate in the battle to receive a reward from God. To which the Prophet said to him: “If your parents are alive – they are your jihad and service to them!”²⁵. The Prophet directed him to what was more obligatory in his case. This is a return to the parents and accompanying them through life in the best possible way. After all, this refers to the struggle (jihad) with one’s own soul: because you need to serve your parents, make them happy and obey them. Previously, Muslims had been fighting for the preservation of religion in Mecca for 10 years, now in new circumstances they could freely conduct a dialogue with other cultures and spread their religion. First of all, this was because an Islamic state was created in Medina and the issue of the security of Muslims was raised for the first time. The presence of religious freedom in the new place played a key role in this issue. After some time, Muslims began to pay more attention to the social and political situation. To protect the territory from external and internal enemies, it was necessary to combine all forces and resources. Muslims sign joint agreements with local tribes and religious leaders, such as Bani Auf, Banu Nazir, Banu Qurayza, etc.

This was the first political agreement in the history of the Islamic State. This agreement, in turn, was intended to establish a peaceful life with other non-Muslim tribes and peoples. The adopted agreement took into account the common interests of all residents, regardless of religion, language and race. According to the Medina Constitution in 622, Muslims emphasized the need to protect certain territories for peaceful life and introduced these norms into laws. From now on, when Muslims and the Islamic religion were threatened with pressure or reprisals, it was allowed to fight them, including waging armed jihad to prevent this evil. On this occasion, the following verse was revealed from the Surah “Hajj”: “Permission [to fight] is given to those against whom fighting is launched, because they have been wronged” (22:39). The famous interpreter of the Quran, Ibn Abbas, said: “This verse was the first

²¹ H. Rane (2023), “Higher Objectives (Maqāsid) of Covenants in Islam: A Content Analysis of ‘Ahd and Mithāq in the Qur’ān,” *Religions*, Vol. 14, No. 4, p. 514.

²² Ibn Kathir (2010), *al-Bidāiyya wa nihāiyya*.

²³ al-Obaidy (2007), *The Problematic Position of the West on the Islamic Nation*.

²⁴ S. Sertkaya (2023), “What Changed in Medina: The Place of Peace and War in the Life of Prophet Muhammad. *Religions*,” Vol. 14, No. 2, p. 193.

²⁵ al-Obaidy (2007), *The Problematic Position of the West on the Islamic Nation*.

phenomenon associated with war.” This was followed by two conditions that allowed Muslims to fight: 1) to repel the attacking enemies; 2) To be the first in the offensive, to destroy the insidious plans of the enemy against the Muslims. According to paragraph 1, an example is the Battle of Badr in 624, Uhud in 625 and the Battle of the Trench in 627²⁶ to protect themselves from attacks by the Quraysh. In the second example, it is known that local Jews began to grieve about the growing number of Muslims in Medina and a Jewish religious leader named Finchas, ridiculing the Quran, spoke out against Muslims in their already difficult situation.²⁷ Over time, relations between Muslims and Jews deteriorated. However, for Muslims not to quarrel with representatives of other religions, the Almighty revealed the following verse: “You shall most certainly be tried in your possessions and in your persons; and indeed you shall hear many hurtful things from those to whom revelation was granted before your time, as well as from those who have come to ascribe divinity to other beings beside God. But if you remain patient in adversity and conscious of Him - this, behold, is something to set one’s heart upon” (3: 186).

After a while, the Jews violated the treaty with the Muslims. Now they openly opposed the spread of Islam.²⁸ The local Jews were supported by the Jews living in Khaybar, and they agitated them against the Muslims. As a result, the Jews of Medina, together with the Ghatafan, Banu Nadir, and Quraysh tribes, intended to exterminate the Muslims. After learning about such plans, the Prophet Muhammad consulted with his companions, and they developed their own plans to stop the illegal actions of the enemies. In 629, the Muslims in the number of 1.500 soldiers moved to Khaybar to destroy the plan of internal and external enemies, besieged the area for more than one month and won a victory.²⁹ With this, the second condition of the jihad was fulfilled. One such example was also the Battle of Tabuk.

In 630, the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius I did not want Muslims to spread quickly in the Arabian Peninsula. As a result, he planned to gather more than 100 thousand soldiers and fight with the Muslims. Information about the plan of the Roman ruler quickly spread among the inhabitants of Sham (Syria) and reached the Muslims through caravans from Mecca and Medina. In a short time, the Prophet Muhammad gathered 30.000 soldiers and went to the area of Tabuk to thwart the plan of Heraclius. However, the Byzantines did not come to the battle. As a result, the residents of Tabuk adopted Islam and increased the number of Muslims. This, in turn, was a campaign to prevent danger. Therefore, an Arabic proverb appeared, which says: “If you do not attack Rome first, they will attack first.”³⁰

During the Arab conquests, Muslims entered Syria, Egypt, Kufa and Andalusia under similar conditions. 803-806 The Abbasid Caliph Harun Rashid learned about the plan of the Byzantine emperor Nikephoros I, nicknamed “Genik,” and was the first to attack the enemy, thus forcing him to change his original plans to kill the ruler of the Muslims.³¹ In addition, the local Christian leader of Andalusia, Julian, protesting against the system of slavery and injustice in the country and seeking to establish peace and equality between people, quarreled with the then King Roderick (688-711). He asked for help from the North African Muslim commander Musa ibn Nusayr (640-716) and promised to provide ships and guides to cross the Mediterranean Sea if necessary.³² As a result, Muslims appeared in Andalusia and made an invaluable contribution to society by opening libraries, conservatories and other institutions for the development of such sciences as literature, philosophy, medicine and architecture.³³ Although the Muslims came to these lands with a military mission, their goal was not to occupy the territories and convert the entire local population to Islam. On the contrary, the goal was to maintain justice and liberate the people from tyrannical rulers. In the lands under the control of such rulers, Islam eventually spread peacefully in Europe without coercion, since Muslims adhered to the principle of the Quran: “There is no compulsion in religion” (2: 256).

During each such campaign, the Muslims did not touch women, children and the elderly. This is because there is a verse in the Quran that prohibits this: “right in the way of Allah those who fight you but do

²⁶ B. Savinkov (2009), *Memoirs of a Terrorist*, Moscow: Astrel.

²⁷ A. Sagikyzy et al. (2015), “Synthesis of traditional and Islamic values in Kazakhstan,” *European Journal of Science and Theology*, Vol. 11, No. 5, pp. 217-229.

²⁸ Sagikyzy et al. (2015), “Synthesis of traditional and Islamic values in Kazakhstan,” pp. 217-229.

²⁹ D. McKeever (2021), “Revisiting Security Council Action on Terrorism: New Threats; (a Lot of) New Law; Same Old Problems?” *Leiden Journal of International Law*, Vol. 34, No. 2, pp. 441-470.

³⁰ F. al-Hueini (2000), *Faraid al-Haraid fi al-Amsal*, Jordan: Dar an-Nafais.

³¹ S. Dannawi (2001), *Mawsuat Harun Rashid*, Beirut: Dar Sadir.

³² Lane-Poole (1996), *The Story of the Moors in Spain*.

³³ V. Boiko and S. Kuleshov (2023), “Movable Monuments of History and Culture in the State Register of National Cultural Heritage: A Comparative Analysis,” *Society. Document. Communication*, Vol. 19, pp. 60-80.

not transgress (the boundaries that Allah has established – do not disfigure the bodies of the dead, do not hide trophies, do not kill those who are forbidden to kill, and these are women, children, old men, monks in cells, do not burn trees, and do not kill animals without benefit), – Indeed. Allah does not like transgressors” (2:190). On this occasion, the classical commentator of the Quran, Fakhriddin ar-Razi, said: “Only those who are on the battlefield should resist, and women, children and the elderly should not be killed. This is a crime.”³⁴ In addition, the Arabic adjective “الذين” – “those who” in this verse indicates that one should fight only with those who oppose. The same conditions were strictly observed by the Prophet Muhammad and the Muslims after his death.

The arrival of Muslims in the Bilad al-Sham was greeted with great joy by the local population, especially representatives of other religions. Because they were under the yoke of the Roman Empire for a long time. The evidence of this is the historical renaming by the ruler of Muslims, Caliph Omar ibn al-Khattab, during his visit to the so-called “Garbage Church” – “The Garbage Dump” (كنيسة القمامة) in Jerusalem to the “Church of the Resurrection” – “كنيسة القيامة” (The Church of the Holy Sepulchre). The ruler personally cleaned this holy place of garbage, and the Muslims followed his example.³⁵ The local population, seeing such an attitude of the ruler of the faithful to the non-orthodox church, was imbued with even greater respect for them, although earlier they were intimidated, talking about the cruelty of Muslims and their “anti-cultural barbarism.”

If the purpose of the Muslim invasion had been different, then Christian historical sites, such as the ancient House of Saint Ananias in Damascus and the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, would not have been preserved as places of worship. Therefore, the Islamic religion, with its highest moral qualities, has always been able to settle in a new environment, in a new society. The principle of “Muslims are brothers to each other” aroused great interest among people of other faiths. Muslims have never considered themselves superior to others. From the very beginning, Islam strictly forbade Muslims to divide society. This is clearly stated in the 103 ayat of Surah “ali-Imran,” 159 ayat of Surah “al-An’am” and 46 ayat of Surah “al-Anfal.”

In addition, the Holy Quran contains more than 50 verses about peace, tranquility, and tolerance and only 6 verses are directly related to military operations and defense. The next three righteous generations of Muslims after the prophet also avoided social upheavals and professed the same religious principles regarding peace and war in society. The Medina concept of jihad had a direct impact on the formation of the highest humanistic principles among Muslims. Therefore, it is necessary to specifically define that the principles of jihad contain a universal philosophy based on morality and humanity, which does not allow any undesirable actions towards people – profanity, deception, beating, not to mention terrorist acts. This is the main difference between Islam and other religions and movements. However, over time, the ideas of jihad acquired a political color and were interpreted unilaterally, only applicable to military actions. As a result, various radical religious Muslim groups and movements have emerged since the XVIII century.

Countering Religious Extremism in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Salafist ideology spread to the republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus. As a result, this religious and political doctrine has become the main cause of various religious and armed conflicts in Tajikistan, Chechnya, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Adherents of this ideology also disturb the peace in society by introducing new religious attributes that were previously different and have not yet been practiced in these countries. In Kazakhstan, for example, in recent years, such issues as wearing a niqab/burqa, ugly beard growth, and wearing non-traditional clothing for this area have become a serious controversy at the state and public level. Muslims are divided into several camps on these issues. For three decades, the prerequisites for such a negative phenomenon have been formed:

1) 1990-2000 – due to the absence of various religious factors that threaten the national security of Kazakhstan in the state, there were no specialized programs to combat terrorism and extremism. Kazakhstan was the only place where Muslims who violated the law in their countries escaped from responsibility by temporarily living there.

³⁴ A. Temirgaliyeva (2019), “EP commends evacuation of 47 Kazakhstani nationals from Syria,” *Kazinform*, https://www.inform.kz/en/ep-commends-evacuation-of-47-kazakhstani-nationals-from-syria_a3486705.

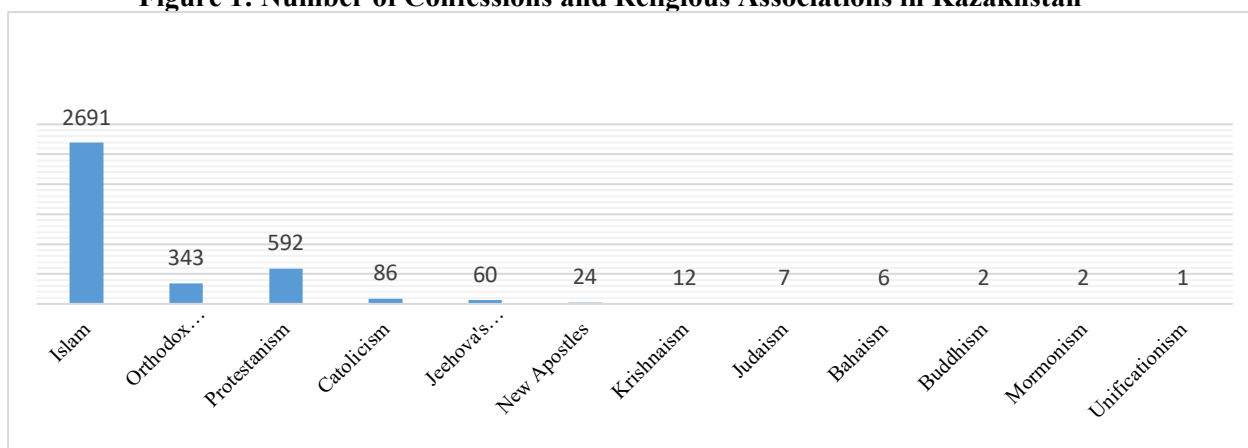
³⁵ Ibn Kathir (2010), *al-Bidaiya ua nihaiya*.

2) 2000-2010 – In 2003, by the decree of the first President N. Nazarbayev, it was decided to consolidate the work of the relevant state structures within the framework of the anti-terrorist center of the National Security Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan³⁶. These measures were taken as a certain part of Kazakh Muslims became more radical, and they began to preach non-traditional religious postulates, as well as destructive religious and political ideologies. In addition, they have secretly joined terrorist groups in countries near and far abroad, such as Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan. This is confirmed by the arrest in 2004 of the so-called “Jamaat of Central Asian Mujahideen” in Uzbekistan, where there were also citizens of Kazakhstan. After such circumstances, Kazakhstan became more active in the fight against religious terrorism, and as a result, religious groups such as Al-Qaeda, the Muslim Brotherhood, Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Front for Al-Nusra and others were officially banned by courts in the Republic of Kazakhstan, and their religious propaganda materials were seized and blocked on the territory of the country.

3) 2010-2020 – The number of criminal cases on terrorism and extremism has sharply increased in Kazakhstan.³⁷ Previously, the threat of terrorism was amorphous, but now it has become a reality. In 2010, the Chairman of the National Security Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan N. Abykayev noted: “We record the aspirations to the Central Asian region, including Kazakhstan, on the part of certain international terrorist groups and organizations. Our approach to this problem is to unequivocally condemn terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, regardless of their political, religious or other motives.”³⁸

As a result, several terrorist attacks occurred in Kazakhstan. For example, in 2011, a man named Rakhymzhan Makatov blew himself up near the department of the National Security Committee in Aktobe. For the first time in the history of our country, this was recognized as a crime of a special nature. Shortly after that, on November 12 of the same year, a man named Maksat Kariev attacked law enforcement officers in the city of Taraz, he killed seven people. Also, on June 5, 2016, 25 people were killed as a result of a criminal attack in Aktobe, and on July 18, 4 people were killed as a result of an attack in Almaty. As a result of these terrorist attacks, the dynamics of fear of terrorism among the population has increased. This is noted in the report of the Public Fund “Strategy” for 2008-2013, where the indicators increased from 44% to 57%.³⁹ In addition, in 2011, a number of laws were amended to curb negative religious ideology. For example, the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Religious Activities and Religious Associations” was adopted, which reformatted the religious sphere, legalized real religious organizations in Kazakhstan and formed a process of monitoring the activities of destructive and radical religious movements. Today, there are officially 18 confessions and 3.826 religious associations in the country (Figure 1):

Figure 1: Number of Confessions and Religious Associations in Kazakhstan



³⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Kazakhstan (2020), “Operation Jusan: Kazakhstan’s experience in rehabilitation and reintegration of citizens from war zones,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Kazakhstan*, <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/mfa/press/news/details/136719?lang=en>.

³⁷ D. Sharipova and S. Beissembayev (2023), “Causes of Violent Extremism in Central Asia: The Case of Kazakhstan,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 46, No. 9, pp. 1702-1724.

³⁸ Z. Liu et al. (2021), “Damage Effect of Terrorist Attack Explosion-Induced Shock Wave in a Double-Deck Island Platform Metro Station,” *Periodica Polytechnica Civil Engineering*, Vol. 65, No. 1, pp. 215-228.

³⁹ G. T. Ileuova (2013), *Perception of the threat of terrorism by the population of Kazakhstan*, Almaty: Center for Social and Political Research Strategy.

Religious parties are banned in the country. In addition, several additional articles have been introduced into the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan. However, in Kazakhstan, citizens convicted of destructive religious ideology are sentenced to imprisonment for a term of 3 to 15 years. That is, the punishment is not too severe. For example, in the United States, only for suspicion of complicity in the terrorist attack in Boston, a citizen of Kazakhstan, Dias Kadyrbayev, was initially threatened with up to life imprisonment.⁴⁰

In 2013, at the initiative of the Prosecutor General's Office of Kazakhstan, the "State Program for Countering religious extremism and terrorism in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2013-2017" was developed, then in 2017 the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Civil Society of the Republic of Kazakhstan developed the "Concept of State Policy in the religious sphere of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2017-2020," the relevant state bodies in the field of religion worked based on of these documents. To continue ensuring the security of people, society and the state from violent manifestations of religious extremism and threats of terrorism in the country, the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan adopted a new "State program for countering religious extremism and terrorism in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2018-2022."⁴¹

In recent years, the Government has expressed concern about the spread of Salafist ideology among convicts in the country. Despite this, the demand for the Islamic religion in society, especially among young people, is growing day by day. This is because of many centuries Islamic values have been firmly intertwined with the Kazakh spiritual worldview and worldview. It should be noted that today, independent Kazakhstan, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which for a long time promoted atheism, is undergoing a process of returning the Kazakh people to previously weakened traditional Islamic values. However, at the same time, the issue of preventing the growth of radical ideology is also relevant. This has become one of the most difficult issues for the state policy in the field of religious regulation in the country.⁴²

In this regard, in order to increase the religious literacy of the population, a special optional subject "Fundamentals of Religious Studies" was introduced in general secondary schools of the country, today it is called "Secularism and fundamentals of religious Studies." Within the framework of this subject, special attention is paid to the spiritual and moral education of the youth of Kazakhstan. In addition, special state grants are allocated and Kazakh universities located in large cities prepare bachelor, master and doctoral students in the field of "religious studies," "theology" and "Islamic studies." Also in 2001, the Nur-Mubarak Egyptian University of Islamic Culture was established, where foreign teachers from Egypt, Turkey and other countries are attracted to train qualified personnel in the religious sphere.

In 2018, to promote the national spiritual ideology and combat foreign influences, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan proposed a project to create a "National School of Religious Education." In religious and legal matters (Sharia), they will adhere to the madhhab (school) of Abu Hanifa, and in the Aqidah (in the belief) of Imam al-Maturudi.

The project aims to form a traditional Kazakh Muslim community on the Kazakh land by reviving the national religious idea. This initiative was put forward in connection with the growing number of radical groups in the country. Today, within the framework of this project, the Abu Hanifa Research Center operates and it is planned to open the "Academy of Islam" in Astana.

Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Returnees from Extremist Areas

Over the past ten years, following blind faith, some religious Kazakhs have moved to countries such as Syria and Iraq in search of an "earthly paradise" and a "just state." According to the official representative of the National Security Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan Sergey Shveykin, in 2008-2018, about 800 Kazakh citizens committed a "religious hijra," i.e. they moved to "their" close-minded communities in the territory controlled by extremists (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant).⁴³

⁴⁰ K. B. Aubaevich et al. (2021), "Problems and Prospect of Countering Religious Extremism in the Kazakhstan Republic Including Problems of Bioterrorism in Religious Extremism," *Journal of Legal, Ethical and Regulatory Issues*, Vol. 24, No. 4, pp. 1-9.

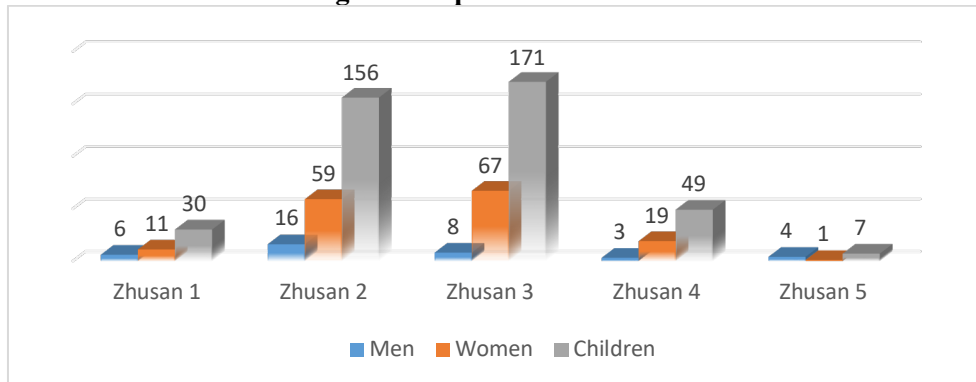
⁴¹ U. Tungatova et al. (2023), "Prevention of Religious Extremism in Kazakhstan," *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 82-89.

⁴² Sagikyzy et al. (2015), "Synthesis of Traditional and Islamic Values in Kazakhstan," pp. 217-229.

⁴³ A. M. Kalguzhinova et al. (2021), "Criminal Counterfeiting the Spread of Religious Extremism among Youth in Kazakhstan," *Journal of Legal, Ethical and Regulatory Issues*, Vol. 24, Special Issue 1, pp. 1-11.

On January 9, 2019, a special humanitarian operation “Zhusan” was organized with the help of the competent authorities of the country to save their families. According to the official data of the National Security Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the operation was carried out in 5 stages, the total number of returnees was 607 Kazakhstanis, most of whom were children of Salafists who died in hot spots⁴⁴ (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Operation “Zhusan”



Today, all “repatriates” are undergoing rehabilitation by theologians, psychologists and sociologists. It should be noted that the repatriates were members of the “Islamic State,” “Al-Nursa Front” and other groups for 5-7 years. They have adapted to a radical lifestyle and adopted a destructive ideology. Of course, it is difficult to quickly get rid of negative religious ideology, since the citizens who returned to the country were convinced that they were on the right path. Therefore, in order to completely eradicate the Salafi religious ideology from consciousness and connect them with society, it is necessary to work systematically with each citizen for several years, mainly theologically and psychologically. In this direction, the National Security Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and other interested state bodies of Kazakhstan attract qualified specialists and carry out appropriate rehabilitation work with returned women. According to the director of the “Center for the Study of Problems of Religions Astana,” Karasholakov Zhanbota. As part of the implementation of the “State Program for Countering Religious Extremism and Terrorism in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2018-2022,” since 2019, the Center has been working with citizens who have returned from Syria and local religious communities under “the Sapsan project.” The Center attracts the necessary number of qualified theologians, psychologists and other specialists for this work.⁴⁵

This project is aimed at the rehabilitation, adaptation and socialization of returned women, providing them with work, and including them in society. A sewing workshop has been opened in the Center, women are taking sewing courses and can start their own business in the future. This area of the project is called “Occupational Therapy.” In addition, according to the director of the information and propaganda and rehabilitation center “Akniet” in Shymkent, Dalelhan Ospanov.⁴⁶ First of all, as part of the operation “Zhusan,” they issued documents of women who returned to the country. Today, special cultural events for returnees and their families are organized quarterly under the auspices of the local Department for Religious Affairs.⁴⁷

Within the framework of the program of events, such sacred places of Turkestan as the mausoleum of “Khoja Ahmed Yasawi” and “Arystanbaba,” included in the UNESCO World Heritage List, were visited. It explains the religious and historical significance of the holy places for the Kazakh people. Within the framework of this direction, since the beginning of 2020, the theologians of the “Akniet” Center have been working with many women believers at the national level. Currently, this work is

⁴⁴ G. M. Campedelli, M. Bartulovic and K. M. Carley (2021), “Learning Future Terrorist Targets through Temporal Meta-Graphs,” *Scientific Reports*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 11-28.

⁴⁵ A. Iskakov, T. Akimzhanov and G. Zhunisbayeva (2023), “Changes to the System for Preventing the Spread of Religious Extremism to Improve the Efficiency of the Penitentiary System: Experience of the Kazakhstan,” *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 3, pp. 373-386.

⁴⁶ W. Mehran and A. F. Lemieux (2023), “‘My Journey to Jihad’: Featured Stories in Jihadi Propaganda,” *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, Vol. 15, No. 2, pp. 139-157.

⁴⁷ H. Mohamed, M. Alimi and S. Ben Youssef (2021), “The Role of Renewable Energy in Reducing Terrorism: Evidence from Pakistan,” *Renewable Energy*, Vol. 175, pp. 1088-1100.

being carried out in 3 formats. The first is an online format. Well-known theologians-teachers conduct online lectures on religion 2-3 times a month for all citizens who have returned to the country. The second one is an offline format. Here, each region gathers local women and forms groups where lectures are given on Islamic etiquette, the formation of good morals, human humanism, ritual purity, etc. Thus, after the successful completion of the work in the first two formats, the work is carried out in the third format – this is an individual meeting. This time, an individual conversation will be held with each woman, where the knowledge she received in previous lectures is determined and her personal portrait is corrected. Then, depending on the level of knowledge, in-depth lectures on topical topics will be held. The final stage of this format ends with a deep study of the correct Islamic belief. Such systematic work, in turn, is based on the postulates and methods of the “National School of Religious Education” and is designed for 5 years.⁴⁸

Among them, there are also men convicted of membership and support of international terrorist organizations banned in Kazakhstan. The youngest is 22 years old, and the oldest is more than 50 years old. They are forbidden to communicate with the public. There were also different opinions about the operation “Zhusan” in the Kazakh society. Some supported the operation, while others were worried about the further deterioration of the religious situation in the country. However, time has shown that as a result of rehabilitation work, many of them have changed their minds and adapted to society. MEP Iveta Grigule Peters highly appreciated the results of such a large-scale work: “We highly appreciate the humanitarian operation carried out by the Kazakh law enforcement agencies together with the Foreign Ministry.” Members of the US Congress and the UN Special Rapporteur on the protection of human rights in the fight against terrorism Fionualla Ni Aolain also highly appreciated operation “Zhusan” and called on other countries to follow the experience of Kazakhstan in the fight against terrorism.

Conclusion

The historical trajectory of jihad from a spiritual struggle towards an often politicized tool reflects the critical misinterpretations that have fueled Islamophobia in modern times. The article highlights the urgent need for a nuanced understanding that differentiates the peaceful principles of Islam from the acts of a minority who misuse the term ‘jihad’ for their violent agendas. It advocates for a concerted effort by Muslim scholars to reclaim the narrative of jihad, emphasizing its profound ethical and moral dimensions, and to disseminate this understanding through academic and theological discourse. Furthermore, the article underscores the role of comprehensive education and social initiatives, such as those demonstrated by Kazakhstan’s Operation “Zhusan,” in combating religious extremism. These initiatives should not only focus on reactionary measures but also on proactive engagement with communities to address the root causes of radicalization, such as social and economic disenfranchisement.

In recognizing the complex interplay of factors that contribute to the perversion of jihad, the article calls for a multi-faceted approach that includes rigorous academic study, responsible media reporting, and informed policy-making. It is through such measures that societies can work towards eradicating the scourge of terrorism and extremism while fostering a climate of understanding and respect for the true tenets of one of the world’s youngest and fastest-growing religions.

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⁴⁸ D. Canetti, J. R. Gubler and T. Zeitsoff (2021), “Motives Don’t Matter? Motive Attribution and Counterterrorism Policy,” *Political Psychology*, Vol. 42, No. 3, pp. 483-499.

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