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## **The implication of Central Asian jihadists in the terrorist attacks in Russia and Turkey: from a regional to a global threat?**

The implication of a Kyrgyz citizen in the recent terrorist attacks at the St. Petersburg metro, where 11 citizens died, as well as the involvement of some Central Asians fighters - affiliated with the Islamic State and al-Nusra Front - in the airport attack (June 2016) and in the attack of the Reina nightclub, both in Istanbul (December 2016), have highlighted the threat represented by Central Asia jihadists.

The explosion of the civil war in Syria in 2011 has enhanced the involvement of Central Asian militants in the international jihadist framework, even if this threat was mainly feared in a regional perspective, considering the potential destabilizing impact on the post soviet secular autocracies provoked by the return of these foreign fighters in their homelands. Instead, the terrorist attacks in Russia and Turkey organized by Central Asian fighters have showed the global dimension of the Central Asia radicalism which affects international security.

According to the recent study of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, nearly 3,000 Central Asians militants have been trained to fight in Syria and Iraq, as affiliated of the Islamic State (mainly Tajik and Kazakh fighters) or joining al-Nusra Front (mainly Uzbek and Kyrgyz fighters). Tajiks are the majority of Central Asian militants (1,100 fighters), followed by Kyrgyz (600 fighters), Uzbeks (200-500 fighters), Kazaks (400 fighters) and Turkmen (360 fighters).

It is relevant to observe that a growing number of Central Asian militants have been recruited in Russia, from the wide community of migrant workers which is frequently discriminated for both ethnic and economic reasons.

However, the feared penetration of IS-foreign fighters in Central Asia has been confined to the remote mountainous region between Afghanistan and Pakistan, weakening the project to establish the Khurasan velayat - which should ideally include Central Asia, Af/Pak region and Iran - under the IS banner: in 2016 only the terrorist attack to the Chinese embassy in Kyrgyz capital Bishkek and the armed attack in the city of Aktobe (Kazakhstan) were undertaken by Central Asian jihadists linked to IS and Al Nusra.

Nevertheless, Central Asian republics have not still solved several domestic problems which can fuel religious radicalism and extremism, such as political authoritarianism, poverty, corruption, a rigid state control over society and religious expressions. Moreover, al Qaeda and Taliban are regaining their traditional influence in Central Asia after the progressive military encirclement of the Islamic State in the "Siraq" region.

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