

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
(Also known as: IMU, Islamic party of Turkestan, Islamic Movement of Turkestan)

The following background information is based on publicly available details about the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The IMU has been listed in the United Nations 1267 Committee's consolidated list and as a proscribed terrorist organisation by the governments of the UK, US, and Canada.

Current Status of the IMU

The origins of the IMU date from the early 1990s, when Juma Namangani, a former Soviet soldier who fought in Afghanistan, and Tahir Yuldosh (variant of name, spelled Yuldashev in most reporting), an unofficial mullah and head of the Adolat (Justice) Party, joined forces to implement sharia law in the city of Namangan in Uzbekistan's part of the Ferghana Valley. Alarmed by Adolat's demands to transform Uzbekistan into an Islamic state, the government banned Adolat in March 1992. A period of repression followed, forcing many Islamic militants to flee the Ferghana Valley.

Namangani fled to Tajikistan, where he participated in the Tajik Civil War and established a base for his fighters in that country. Yuldashev escaped to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, where he established links to other Islamic militants. He also made clandestine trips to Uzbekistan, maintaining contact with his supporters and setting up underground cells. By the late 1990s, the IMU was officially formed. Its stated goal, as posted on the internet in August 1999, was the "establishment of an Islamic state with the application of the Shariah" in Uzbekistan.

The IMU's reach into Central Asia peaked from 1999 to 2001, when it conducted a series of attacks in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and made incursions into Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, from bases in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

The IMU's goal of an Islamic state was expanded in 2001 to encompass an area stretching from the Caucasus to China's western province of Xinjiang, under the new banners of the Islamic Party of Turkestan in April 2001 and the Islamic Movement of Turkestan in May 2001. However, the group has always been and continues to be known as the IMU, and that is the name under which it is listed by the US Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism as a foreign terrorist organisation.

By the end of the 1990s, the IMU had relocated to Afghanistan, due to the lack of support for the movement in Uzbekistan and the measures taken against it by the government. The IMU suffered heavy losses in the fighting that followed the US invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001, including the death of Namangani. The remnants of the IMU fled to the tribal areas of neighbouring Pakistan, where their behaviour in some areas brought them into conflict with the local tribesmen and the Pakistani military. However, many IMU fighters have successfully integrated into the local community, where they have enjoyed the hospitality and sanctuary provided by the tribes.

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The IMU continues to recruit fighters, and IMU members fight alongside the Taliban and al-Qa'ida against coalition and Pakistani forces in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Ferghana Valley, where the Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Tajik borders converge, is a fertile recruiting ground for the IMU, which has successfully exploited the widespread poverty in the region in its recruitment strategy.

IMU members have received training in camps in Afghanistan, some controlled by al-Qa'ida or the Taliban. The IMU also trains in camps in Pakistan and maintains bases there. Typical IMU tactics have included hostage-taking, raids on government security force outposts, and bombings.

The IMU has close ties with al-Qa'ida and the Taliban. Senior IMU leaders have held positions in the al-Qa'ida hierarchy. Sources of funding for the IMU have included criminal activities such as drug trafficking, as well as donations from sympathisers and al-Qa'ida.

On 11 September 2006, the IMU leadership renewed its commitment to attack the governments of Central Asia and issued personal threats against the Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Tajik Presidents. This statement reinforced the IMU leadership's commitment to al-Qa'ida's ideology of global jihad and continued anti-Western and anti-Israeli rhetoric.

The IMU's losses in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as the defection of fighters to a splinter group, the Islamic Jihad Union, have not diminished the group's capability and intent to conduct terrorist attacks.

Objectives

The IMU's initial objective was to overthrow the Uzbek regime and replace it with an Islamic state. Uzbekistan is part of what its Russian conquerors called Turkestan, a collective name for the old Central Asian feudal states. The IMU's stated goal now is to establish an Islamic caliphate in Turkestan, stretching from the Caspian Sea to China's Xinjiang Province and encompassing the current Central Asian nations.

Leadership and membership

Tahir Yuldashev is the leader of the IMU. His co-founder, Juma Namamgani, was killed in Afghanistan following the US invasion.

The IMU has attracted support from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, principally Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Chechens, and Uighurs from western China. The strength of the IMU is approximately 500, with members located in South Asia, Central Asia, and Iran. Among the IMU's supporters in the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia are a large Uzbek diaspora and several Islamic extremist groups.

Terrorist activities

Terrorist attacks and activities inside Central Asia for which the IMU has claimed responsibility or for which responsibility has been reliably attributed include:

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- 16 February 1999: five car bombings in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, that killed at least 16 people and wounded over 130, in an apparent attempt to assassinate President Karimov;
- 21 August 1999: taking hostage four Japanese geologists, their interpreter, and the head of the Kyrgyz Ministry of Interior troops;
- 12 August 2000: taking hostage four US mountain climbers;
- 27 December 2002: a bombing in a market in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, that killed six people and wounded 40;
- 8 May 2003: a bombing in a currency exchange office in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, that killed one person;
- 31 January and 13 June 2005: bombings outside the Ministry of Emergency Situations in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, that killed one person and wounded at least 12;
- 25 January 2006: an armed attack on a pre-trial detention centre in Kairakum, Tajikistan, that killed the centre's chief;
- 12 May 2006: armed attacks on border and customs posts in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

The IMU is now fighting in support of the Taliban and other Islamic groups against the Afghan government and international military forces in Afghanistan.

- In mid-2007, seven heavily armed militants connected to the IMU were arrested while planting a mine on a road used by International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) patrols in northern Afghanistan. The group admitted to carrying out rocket attacks, suicide missions and recruitment activities.
- In May 2008, two IMU members in possession of explosives and hand grenades were arrested in Afghanistan. The two admitted to planting mines on a road and providing a base for militant activities.

IMU leader Tahir Yuldashev has also stated his support for the Pakistani Taliban in its conflict with the Pakistani security forces, and Pakistan claims to have killed at least 150 Uzbek militants in 2007.

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