COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE EXPERIENCE OF SAUDI ARABIA AND UZBEKISTAN IN THE FIGHT AGAINST EXTREMISM AND RADICALIZATION

Ulugbek Mirzokhidov

International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan, Student of the major International Relations,
4th course student

Annotation: This article covers the Sakina deradicalization program in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as well as Uzbekistan's deradicalization efforts. At the same time, the focus will be on aspects of the Sakina program, which can be introduced Uzbekistan to control the radicalization observed in our country. As a result, the possible measures to implement in our country in eliminating the danger of radicalization could be found.

Keywords**:** ekstremism, terrorism, radicalisation, "Sakina" program, deradicalization, radical ideas

INTRODUCTION

The large-scale reforms initiated in Uzbekistan in recent years have not bypassed the religious and educational sphere either. However, the strengthening of religious freedom in our society is paving the way for the promotion of radical ideas to increase as well. In addition, the rapid development of Information Technology, which provides the opportunity not only to receive information, but also to disseminate information of any type, makes it possible for extremist groups to carry out activities in the virtual space. In particular, the law enforcement agencies of Uzbekistan have put an end to the illegal activities of several banned terrorist organizations in the first five months of 2023, according to the Ministry of foreign affairs of Uzbekistan earlier this month. According to the Ministry of Internal affairs of Uzbekistan [1], the activities of the four groups associated with the Islamic State (IS) and the Tawhid and Jihad Katiba (TJK) were brought to an end. They also exposed the activities of more than 10 online extremist groups and arrested 250 people suspected of engaging in the recruitment of "lone wolves" over the internet.

The above figures indicate that the propaganda of extremist and fundamentalist ideas is growing. In preventing this, the study of foreign advanced experience as well as the introduction into practice can be of great importance in reducing the number of cases above. In this regard, this article discusses the program "Sakina", which is being used in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, describing its distinctive features.

DISCUSSION

International experience in the fight against religious extremism and terrorism shows that this problem cannot be fully solved only by the use of military force. The risk of their repeated exacerbation is maintained. Media is of a great importance in the current spread of religious extremism and terrorism. Moreover, in recent years, the increased demand for religious content has created the impression that the production rates of information in video, audio formats that meet this demand are somewhat lagging. This led to the penetration of information produced abroad and saturated with foreign ideas into the Uzbek infosphere. Therefore, together with the correct organization of propaganda work in the

information and ideological struggle corresponding to scientifically based, technologically regulated, socio-political processes taking place in the world, the implementation of programs tested in the advanced experience of foreign countries is important in preventing the spread of the ideology of religious extremism.

At the same time, this article provides suggestions on the activities, effectiveness of the Sakina project in Saudi Arabia and the prospects for the development of a national prototype of this program in our country. Comparative as well as chronological methods were used efficiently during the studies.

In Saudi Arabia, the Hanbali jurisprudence of Islam has been dominant and Wahhabism has been the dominant ideology in the region since the foundation of the Saud dynasty. This particular allied relationship helped the Saud dynasty establish their power in large areas of the Arabian Peninsula. But, by the end of the 20th century, conservative Ulama's establishment of cooperation with various radical groups, as well as the implementation of the 9/11 events by two Saudi citizens, increased pressure on the country both externally and internally. As a result, representatives of the authorities increased their efforts to reduce the level of radicalism in the Kingdom as well as to promote moderate Islam. One of these actions is the Sakina project.

Program essence, directions and expansion

➢ "Sakina" is in Arabic means "peace", "quiet", and it aims to prevent virtual radicalization in society. "The project was started in 2003 by a group of Saudi religious scribes and activists concerned about the spread of extremist ideology and violence after the September 11 attacks and the Riyadh terrorist attacks. The following features distinguish this project from the usual propaganda and repressive practices" [3]. Including:

➢ "Islamic ulama operate within the framework of the program. They monitor the internet and communicate with users who are interested in signs of radicalization or extremist ideology;

➢ Ulama try to interpret Islam more modestly, using religious arguments and arguments;

➢ They also offer psychological and social assistance to users and, if necessary, send them to other programs or governmental agencies.

These measures are called online measures [4].

Within the framework of this program, research and analysis will be carried out on the causes, trends and laws of online radicalization and extremism. It also monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of online activities and other activities. On the basis of special conclusions, reports and recommendations are published. These measures are called research and evaluation.

Seminars, conferences and trainings will be organized within the project for religious scholars, teachers, media workers, security personnel and various stakeholders such as civil society organizations. The project aims to raise awareness and build the necessary skills to prevent and combat online radicalization and extremism. The project also partners with other local and international organizations. These measures are called capacity building and networking.

In 2008, Sakina became an independent, non-governmental organization officially recognized and supported by the Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs. "A new information security law was passed that year. It imposed severe penalties for anyone involved in the dissemination of extremist or radical material on the Internet" [5].

In 2011, however, the Sakina program expanded its activities to include offline activities such as visiting schools, mosques and prisons to raise awareness of the dangers of extremism and the importance of moderation. Seminars, trainings and conferences were also organized to help volunteers

and scientists fight radical currents, and to provide psychological and social support for those prone to radicalization.

"In 2014, Sakina developed a website that provides information and resources on various Islamic-related topics such as theology, Islamic jurisprudence, history, and ethics. The website also contains testimonies from former extremists who renounced violence and supported peaceful coexistence. The website aims to reach a wider audience and offer a platform for constructive dialogue and discussion" [6].

The project also employs volunteers who have renounced their former extremist beliefs. Most of these individuals were not extremists, but people who had questions about what is permissible in Islam and wanted to get answers to their questions from industry experts.

After initial communication is established on the network, the "Sakina" employee usually offers them to move to a private chat room. These online conversations take place both in real time and in the form of posts. In the second case, usually the participant asks a question, and then the employee of "Sakina" answers. These conversations can take several hours. But some users resort to this service continuously for several months. The dialogue transcript is then posted online for others to read. This increases the coverage capacity of the program.

RESULTS

According to a report by the International Center for the study of radicalization and political violence, "the Sakina project conducted more than 3,000 online dialogues with individuals who expressed sympathy for extremist views or similar ideas, and successfully dissuaded 1,500 of them from joining the ranks of terrorists" [5].

Soon after its implementation, the program began to give promising results. Saudi officials claim the success rate was between 80 and 90 percent. In addition, in November 2007, Prince Mohammed bin Nayif noted that "only 35 cases of repeated crimes were recorded - a figure of less than two percent. It should be noted that, given that changing the opinion of citizens who are influenced by foreign ideas and preventing repeated crimes is a complex task, the above result testifies to the success of the program". [6]

Sessions in Virtual chat rooms seek to show lies by engaging people in discussions about their beliefs, and to help internet users abandon "misconceptions" about Islam. The popularity of the internet, as well as its central role in spreading extremist ideologies, aroused international interest in Saudi Arabia's Sakina project. One of the greatest achievements of the program is that virtual services within the framework of this project are also used by citizens of other countries of the region. It is known that more and more Sakina employees communicate with citizens of states.

For this reason, the Government of Saudi Arabia has been approached by several other countries for practical assistance in creating similar programs to combat radicalization. In particular, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, in cooperation with Saudi Arabia, began their efforts to create national versions of "Sakina".

The Sakina project stimulated interest in virtual deradicalization platforms in a number of other countries, including Algeria, the United Kingdom and the United States [6]. The importance of the internet will only increase in the future, and there is no doubt that the number of programs such as "Sakina" will also increase in this way.

Strategy for combating extremism in Uzbekistan

At this point, Uzbekistan is also undergoing a process of systematizing efforts in the fight against radicalism and extremism. In particular, Article 8 of the law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "on the fight against Extremism" adopted in 2018 strengthened the following:

The exaltation of the legal consciousness and legal culture of the population, the formation of an uncompromising attitude towards extremism in society is carried out in the following ways:

➢ "conducting explanatory work;

➢ Organization and improvement of legal education;

➢ development of educational and methodological and scientific literature on issues of combating extremism;

➢ strengthening cultural traditions, spiritual, moral and patriotic education;

➢ organization and conduct of scientific and practical events;

➢ improvement of educational programs taking into account the main directions of state policy in the field of combating extremism;

➢ The elevation of the legal consciousness and legal culture of the population, the formation of an uncompromising attitude towards extremism in society can also be carried out in other ways in accordance with legislation". [7]

At the same time, it is appropriate to look at the national strategy of the Republic of Uzbekistan for the fight against extremism and terrorism for 2021-2026. This strategy is carried out in accordance with the road-map approved by the decree of the president of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Strategy by extremism and counter-terrorism entities:

A. in the formation and execution of budgets of all levels, including at the expense of international donor funds and other sources not prohibited by legislative acts;

B. by resolving personnel issues;

C. implementation of the right to legislative initiative and the adoption of regulatory legal acts of the Republic of Uzbekistan;

D. by ensuring the inevitability of criminal and administrative responsibility for committing crimes of extremist and terrorist orientation;

E. with media support in broad and objective coverage of the situation in the field of extremism and counterterrorism;

F. through close cooperation with civil society institutions, mechnisms for the implementation of this strategy are being developed.

This strategy is planned to be implemented in three stages. The first stage (2021) provides the implementation of the following activities:

A. to create favorable conditions for the implementation of the strategy, to ensure the Coordination of the activities of state bodies, to attract the general public and international organizations to jointly solve this problem;

B. setting the prospects for the development of the legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the field of extremism and counterterrorism;

C. improving the organizational support and harmony of the activities of state authorities and self-governing bodies in combating extremist and terrorist activities;

D. the organization of comprehensive programs for monitoring and analyzing the situation, as well as the development of proposals to clearly identify problems and eliminate them.

The second stage (2022-2025) provides for the implementation of the following activities:

A. improving the current laws and other regulatory legal acts of the Republic of Uzbekistan and adopting new ones aimed at solving tasks in the field of extremism and counterterrorism;

B. the creation of a system aimed at additional protection of the National information space from the penetration of extremist and terrorist ideology;

C. monitoring the results achieved in the implementation of the strategy;

D. develop forecasts for the development prospects of the situation and measures to reduce and eliminate identified risks, threats and risks arising from extremism, terrorism and their financing, as well as complex analysis of interethnic and interdenominational relations in the country.

At the third stage (2026), it is envisaged to summarize the results of the implementation of this strategy and prepare proposals aimed at developing new documents on strategic planning in this area, as well as to ensure the adoption of measures of an organizational nature at the interdepartmental level. [8]

It should be noted that the areas of activity of the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan, which operates in our country, has expanded and become a leading scientific institution in the religious and educational sphere. In particular, under the Academy there are structures for conducting scientific research in the religious and educational sphere, such as the ISESCO Department for the study of Islamic civilization, the UNESCO Department for the study of the history of religions, the Ziyo media Center, the Imam Moturidi International Research Center. In addition, the teaching and pedagogical staff of the Academy of Islamic Studies and religious studies analyze the dangers of various religious fanatic currents, while teaching professors in the direction of international relations produce regular audio-visual content in order to highlight the original political-ideological motives of the above-mentioned fanatic groups. In particular, the internet column called "refusals" gives scientifically based answers and refusals to various extremist and radical propaganda in the internet space, and in doing so is a great contribution to preventing young people from falling under the influence of various radical ideologies.

Relying on the above legal sources, we can say that in our Republic, in the fight against extremism and radicalization above, active intervention in the information space and methods of protection are selected, and the implementation of such projects as "Sakina" in our country is in line with the strategy entrenched in our legislation.

CONCLUSION

We are all equally concerned that part of the arguments in the debates in religious context that is going on these days in our society are based on radical ideology. After all, the withdrawal from fundamental concepts such as "there is no coercion in religion" and "Islam is the religion of relief" in pure Islam leads to a rift in society between believers and secularists.

In order to avoid this risk, is the existing information infrastructure, able to meet the demand? It is important that we look for an answer to that question.

In particular, in the implementation of the above-mentioned Program "Sakina", it is possible to experimentally establish the program "Sakina" using the technical and scientific potential of the specialists of the fatwa jury of the Muslim Office of Uzbekistan and the Ziyo studio under the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan.

With this, we need to treat those affected by extremist ideas not as criminals, but as victims. Given this, it becomes clear that the above-mentioned Project Sakina has the potential to serve as a program that effectively prevents the spread of radical ideas in our society.

REFERENCES:

1. Abdullah bin Khaled al-saud. (2017). The tranquility campaign: A beacon of light in the dark world wide web. Perspectives on terrorism volume 11 issue 2 ISSN 2334-3745

2. Andreas Casptack. (2015). Deradicalization Programs in Saudi Arabia: A Case Study.Middle east institute. link: https://www.mei.edu/publications/deradicalization-programs-saudi-arabia-case-study

3. C.Boucek "Saudi Arabia's "soft" counterterrorism strategy" Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Publications Department Middle East Program Number 97 September 2008 (page 21)

4. Christopher Bouchek (2008). The «Sakina» Campaign and internet counter-radicalisation in Saudi Arabia. Combating terrorism center Sentinel. August 2008, volume 1 issue 9 p:1

5. Centralasianews.com a link from the article on the website "increased terrorist activity in Uzbekistan assumes a comprehensive approach": https://central.asia-news.com/uz-Cyrl/articles/cnmi_ca/features/2022/06/28/feature-01

6. Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "About the measures of combatting the terrorism". https://lex.uz/docs/-29526

7. National strategy of the Republic of Uzbekistan for combating extremism and terrorism for 2021-2026. https://lex.uz/docs/-29526

8. Nazirov, M. (2021). G'arb va musulmon olami dialektikasidagi zamonaviy tendensiyalar. *Academic research in educational sciences*, *2*(12), 328-334.

9. Sumanto al-Qurtubiy va Shafi Aldamer. (2020). Terrorism and Counterterrorism in Saudi Arabia. Sage journals volume 8, issue 1 link: https://doi.org/10.1177/2347798920976286