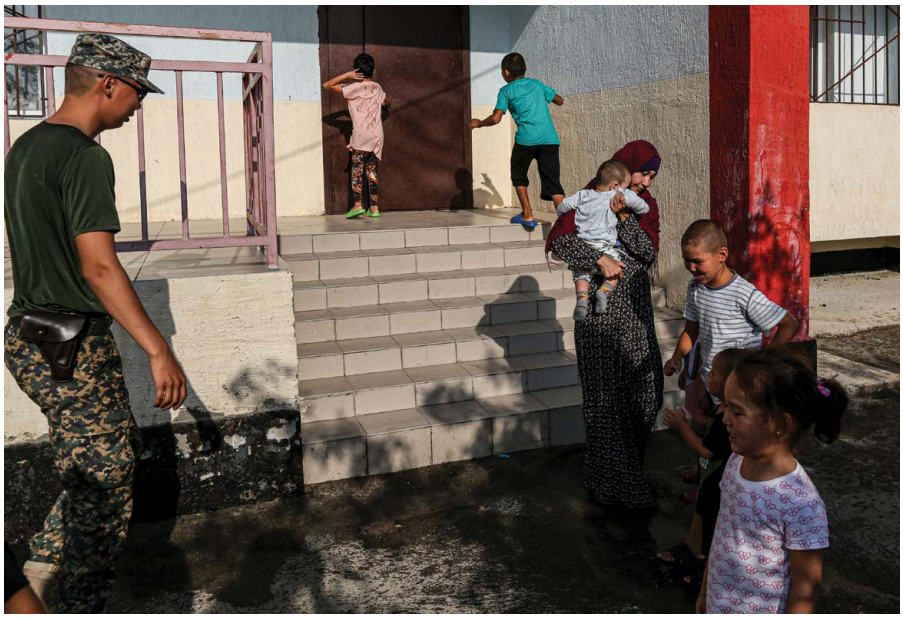
SPECIAL REPORT

NO. 498 | JULY 2021 UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE www.usip.org

Processes of Reintegrating Central Asian Returnees from Syria and Iraq

By William B. Farrell, Rustam Burnashev, Rustam Azizi, and Bakhtiyar Babadjanov



Women and children at a rehabilitation center for women repatriated from the Islamic State, in Aktau, Kazakhstan, on July 22, 2019. (Photo by Tara Todras-Whitehill/New York Times)

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Summary

- The return of foreign fighters and families who traveled to Iraq and Syria to live with the Islamic State is a pressing policy and security matter. Although self-initiated returns have occurred in some countries, state-organized repatriations have been conducted by only a few, led by Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
- These nations differ considerably in their approaches. Kazakhstan emphasizes the deradicalization of returnees, Tajikistan highlights pragmatic state protectionism, and Uzbekistan practices the organic social reabsorption of repatriates.
- The legal and criminal processing of returnees also differ markedly among the three nations, but in each case, the process has allowed the governments to monitor repatriated persons for security purposes.
- After years of state demonization of citizens who went to Syria and Iraq, management of their return has mostly neglected to address resulting social stigmatization. Ameliorating the stigma is particularly critical in receiving communities, which bear much of the burden of reintegration with limited resources.
- The different approaches to repatriation pursued in Central Asia present an important comparative learning opportunity for other countries considering their own reintegration programs.

United States Institute of Peace
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VIOLENT EXTREMISM

ABOUT THE REPORT

This report examines three different state-sponsored reintegration processes for persons repatriated from the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq to Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The different rationales underlying each approach should be instructive for countries considering repatriation and reintegration. The report is based on a research project funded by the United States Institute of Peace and implemented by Swordfish Consulting International, LLC.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

William B. Farrell is principal consultant at Swordfish Consulting International, LLC, and serves on the faculty of the University of Maine. Rustam Burnashev is a professor at the Kazakh-German University in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Rustam Azizi is deputy director of the Center for Islamic Studies under the president of the Republic of Tajikistan. Bakhtiyar Babadjanov is a professor who has served at universities in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, and abroad.

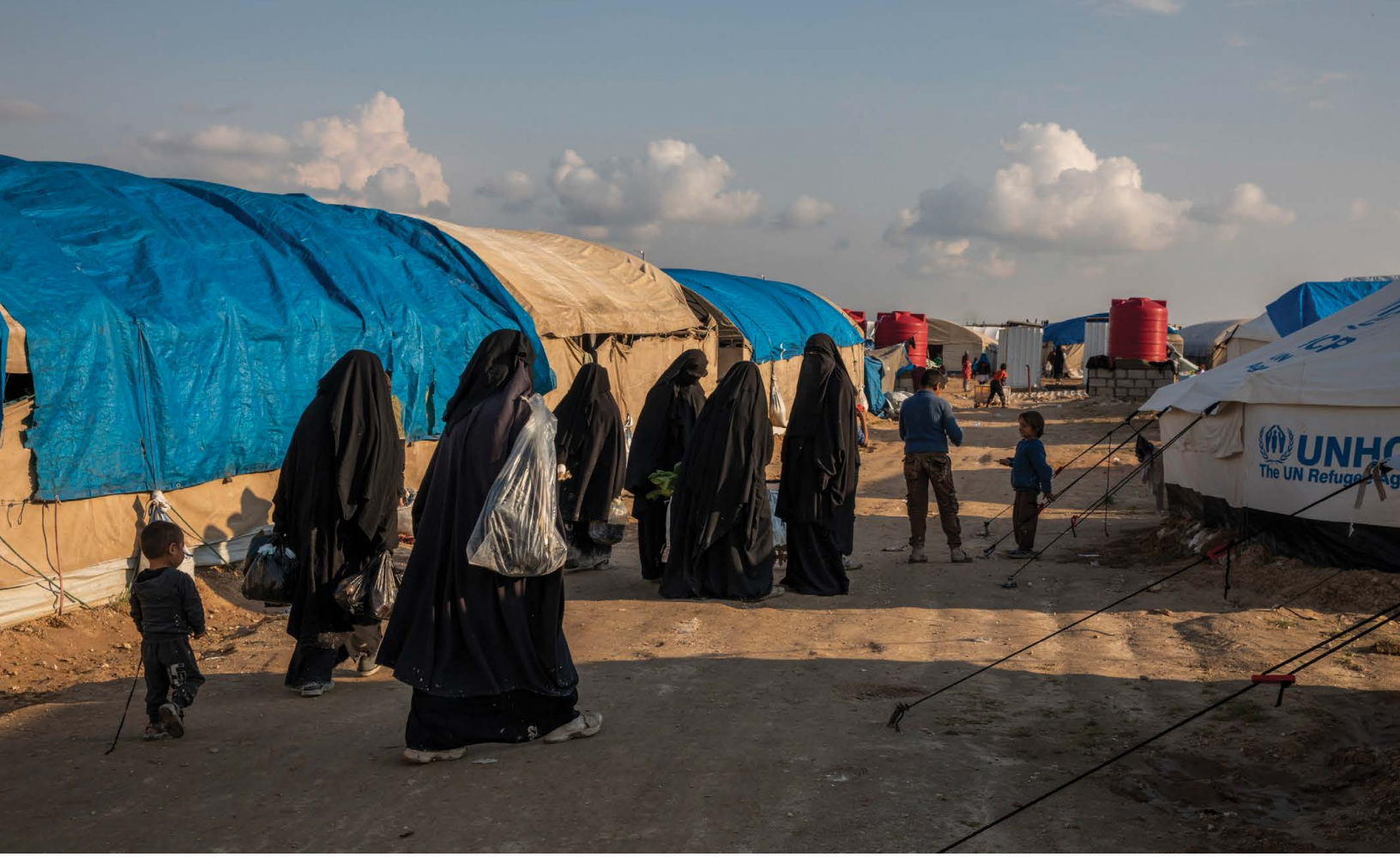
United States Institute of Peace
2301 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20037

Phone: (202) 457-1700
Fax: (202) 429-6063
E-mail: usip_requests@usip.org
Web: www.USIP.org

Special Report No. 498. First published 2021.

ISBN: 978-1-60127-858-6

UNITED STATES
INSTITUTE OF PEACE PRESS

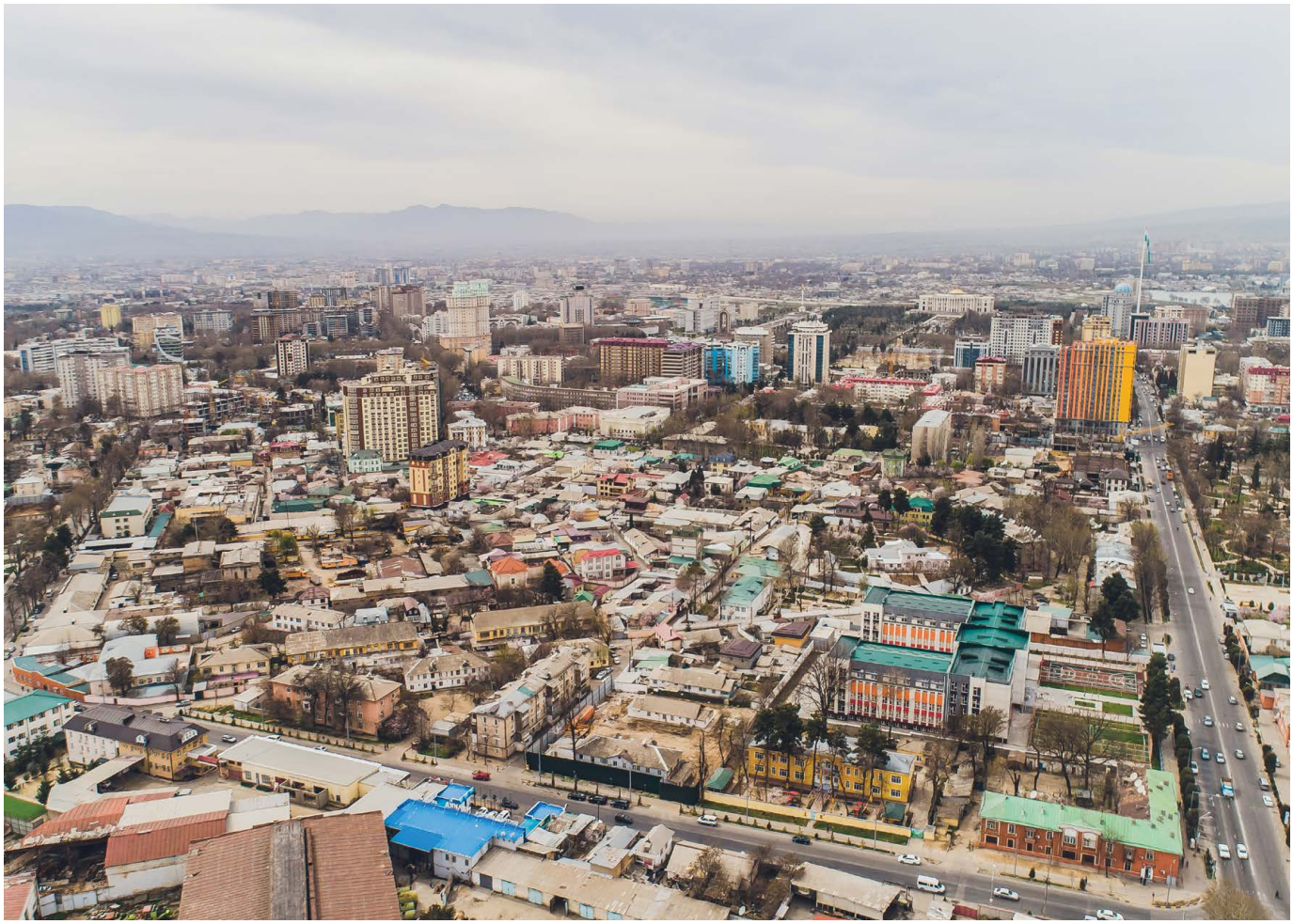


Women and children walk between tents at the al-Hol detention camp in Kurdish-controlled northern Syria on March 28, 2019. (Photo by Ivor Prickett/New York Times)

Introduction

In the wake of the loss of the Islamic State's territorial holdings, the issue of returning foreign fighters and their families to their home countries is among the top international policy concerns. The magnitude of the problem becomes clear in the observation that foreigners who traveled to territory controlled by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) hailed from 80 to 110 different countries.[1] Some of the concern over reintegration is driven by the specter of emerging domestic manifestations of violent extremism in the wake of surreptitious self-initiated returns. Simultaneously, discussions have emerged across countries of origin on ensuring appropriate paths to justice for those who have committed crimes abroad, and the potential consideration of leniency for those who did not participate in violence but were nonetheless present in the conflict regions, often as family members of combatants. Preventing domestic outbreaks of extremism and ensuring paths to justice are but two aspects of the overarching and complex problem of repatriating and reintegrating into society people returning from conflict zones. Though civil society organizations (CSOs) can do much to help support receiving communities, and the media have a potential role to play in humanizing returnees and offsetting stigma, the formal processes of repatriation and reintegration start at the government level.

The responsibility of governments toward both their citizens present in foreign countries and those who remained at home, especially in the communities expected to receive repatriates, is a thorny and somewhat opaque issue. In 2014, UN Security Council Resolution 2178 called for "developing and implementing prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies for



Dushanbe, the capital city of Tajikistan, pictured on June 12, 2018. Since gaining independence with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Central Asia republics have been challenged by the threat of violent extremism. (Photo by Vershinin89/Shutterstock)

returning foreign terrorist fighters," a point underscored by the EU's Counter Terrorism Centre.[2] Yet Resolution 2178 leaves the means and the timeline of repatriation up to individual countries, which differ widely in their approach. Despite repeated calls by the UN for countries to take back their citizens who traveled to or are being held in Syria and Iraq, only a small number of countries have actively taken steps to organize returns. Indeed, some countries have revoked citizenship, potentially in violation of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, further limiting the possibility of return and hindering the ability to provide justice.[3]

Globally, most state-organized repatriations have been conducted by a handful of countries, led by Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan. Central Asia's prominence on this list is notable. Between two thousand and five thousand Central Asian citizens are believed to have traveled to Iraq and Syria between 2011 and 2018, comparable to the numbers from Western Europe.[4] Yet the government-organized returns of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and most recently Kyrgyzstan eclipse the returns of European countries.[5] Through five rounds of Operation Zhusan and several other repatriation actions in Kazakhstan (which saw the return of 654 people), five rounds of Operation Mehr in Uzbekistan (512 people), one round of the humanitarian operation in Tajikistan (84 people), and one round of repatriation of

children to Kyrgyzstan in March 2021 (79 people), these countries have repatriated 1,329 people in total, with the possibility that more repatriations may take place.[6]

While the state-sponsored repatriation and reintegration operations of these three countries have occurred within the same time frame, and while all three emphasize the humanitarian nature of their decision to retrieve citizens and children born of citizens while abroad, there are important differences in their approaches: Kazakhstan emphasizes deradicalization of returnees; Tajikistan highlights pragmatic state protectionism, working to prevent the next generation of extremists through its structured return of children, and Uzbekistan demonstrates an organic social reabsorption of repatriates within their communities of origin in a less formalized process of reintegration. These different approaches present a unique comparative learning opportunity that can be instructive for other countries considering repatriation and reintegration.

This report is based on a review of relevant national legal and policy documents pertaining to the reintegration of repatriated citizens; consultations with national government personnel familiar with the reintegration approach used in their country; discussions with knowledgeable local government personnel, law enforcement, and leadership in receiving communities; and the authors' own expert knowledge and research.

Kazakhstan's Aspirational Deradicalization

Kazakhstan's aspirational deradicalization approach relies on theological, psychological, and social interventions to transform harmful, ideologically driven behavior and to support reintegration into communities.[7] Because of the state's focus on returnees rather than on the communities into which they are to be integrated, and in the absence of measures to gauge the success of rehabilitation and reintegration programs, the outcome of such programs remains an open question.

Since 2013, when citizens of Kazakhstan first traveled to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq and the Kazakh Zhamagat (Kazakh Muslim Community) formed, Kazakh authorities have been concerned that those citizens would someday return to Kazakhstan to commit terrorist acts and spread their ideology—a concern that was further aggravated by the Islamic State's use of Kazakhstani youth in propaganda videos.[8] Accordingly, the main task of Kazakh security services at the time (in the early years of ISIS recruitment of foreign fighters) focused on preventing such people from reentering the country on their own. When the terrorist organizations in Syria and Iraq began losing control of territory in 2017, Kazakhstan chose to adapt its policies to face the new challenge of repatriating its citizens from the conflict zones.

Though the rationale for Kazakhstan's pivot toward repatriating its citizens has not been clearly defined, a set of factors can be identified from statements made by officials. One significant factor is the country's national and international legal obligations. Kazakhstan is a signatory to several international agreements, such as UN Security Council Resolution 2396, signed in December 2017, on extradition and support for women and children who are associated with foreign terrorist fighters and who may be victims of terrorism.[9] Moreover, according to Kazakhstan's

Repatriation is seen as Kazakhstan's contribution to international efforts to eliminate the risk of militants escaping responsibility and reinvolving themselves in terrorist activities. It is believed that repatriates can be deradicalized.

constitution, citizens of Kazakhstan have the right to return to their home country, though this right may be restricted "in order to protect the constitutional order, public order, human rights and freedoms, health and morals."[10]

Another factor has to do with national and international security. Repatriation is seen as Kazakhstan's contribution to international efforts to eliminate the risk of militants escaping responsibility and reinvolving themselves in terrorist activities. It is believed that repatriates can be deradicalized. As President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev noted in May 2019, "The women who returned . . . have given up on the radical past, joined jobs, and reestablished ties with relatives."[11]

A third major factor in Kazakhstan's multifaceted decision to repatriate citizens is humanitarian. For example, in January 2019, then president Nursultan Nazarbayev noted that the citizens being returned were victims who had been "fraudulently taken to this crisis-stricken country, where they were held hostage by terrorists."[12] The narrative that repatriates were manipulated into entering conflict zones in Syria and Iraq is quite common in Kazakhstan. This, combined with the sentiment that "none of our people will be left behind," especially women and children, has been key in legitimizing repatriation and reintegration activities.[13] The humanitarian posture likely also shows the influence of international organizations and partner states, primarily the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which have encouraged repatriation of families and children, and the United States, which has engaged in mediation on behalf of returnees to Kazakhstan.[14]

HOW REPATRIATION TO KAZAKHSTAN WORKS

In keeping with the country's initial limitations on returnees and its support for women and children leaving conflict zones, the first information on the state-sponsored return of Kazakhstanis from conflict zones in Syria and Iraq concerned children: in December 2017, Kazakhstan's National Security Committee reported that "authorities have managed to return 63 children to their homeland, and are awaiting the arrival of another 50."[15] Later, in 2018, a special working group was established to return Kazakh citizens, including fighters for ISIS, from Syria and Iraq.[16] This work resulted in the Zhusan (Sagebrush) operation, which was described as a humanitarian operation, with a name that evokes images of the homeland and its ubiquitous plant. The first of the three stages of the operation included identifying and documenting Kazakh citizens. The second stage consisted of negotiations and the creation of conditions for the evacuation of Kazakh citizens. The third stage was repatriation itself, which covered the period from early 2019 to early 2021. A total of 654 people were returned from Syria to Kazakhstan as part of the Zhusan operation.[17] At the end of November 2019, the Rusafa operation was implemented to return fourteen children from Iraq.[18] In addition, according to unofficial sources, in the autumn and winter of 2019, seven women and twenty-six children were taken to Kazakhstan from Turkey and Syria with state support. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, all returnees were invited to voluntarily sign an agreement allowing the state to return them to Kazakhstan. No incentives, such as amnesty guarantees or material support, were offered to encourage people to return to Kazakhstan.

Official data on the ministries and agencies involved in all stages of the Zhusan and Rusafa operations have not been published. However, public reports indicate that the National Security Committee, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Ministry of Defense of Kazakhstan were involved in the operation. The National Security Committee seems to have played the role of coordinator: it established contacts and interacted with foreign security agencies, ensured the security of the operations at all stages, carried out work to identify repatriates, and verified their involvement in violent extremist activities. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs represented the country in relations with foreign states and international organizations and conducted identification and documentation of repatriates. The Ministry of Internal Affairs similarly provided identification and documentation of the repatriates, and verified their involvement in criminal activities. The Ministry of Defense ensured the security of operations and managed transport functions. The president's office was directly involved, since the operations were conducted "at the personal order of the Head of State."[19]

The Zhusan operation was supported by a robust public relations campaign intended in part to humanize the repatriates for the people back home. Each phase of the operation was accompanied by a statement of the president of Kazakhstan, briefings by the National Security Committee and the Foreign Ministry, and informational videos.[20] Externally produced documentary films were also released, such as *Zhusan: A Long Way Home* and the USIP-sponsored *Aroma of Sagebrush*, conveying the connotation of the "green grass of home."[21]

ADAPTATION, REHABILITATION, AND REINTEGRATION STAGES

Children and adults who were in conflict zones but did not participate in hostilities passed through three phases upon return: (1) adaptation, (2) rehabilitation, and (3) reintegration.[22] Different state bodies were involved in each phase, with the National Security Committee monitoring and analyzing the process of deradicalization that occurred throughout these phases.

Adaptation

Initially, repatriates were brought to a special adaptation center in Mangistau Province for one month. There, returnees underwent medical treatment and criminal investigation before receiving new or reissued documentation. Criminal prosecution was pursued through special processes and closed trials by the national government against repatriates who were determined to have participated in hostilities or who had been active participants in the propaganda operations of terrorist organizations. Thus, in Kazakhstan, criminal proceedings have been initiated against fifty-seven adult returnees, with thirty-one men and twelve women having been convicted and fourteen others under investigation.[23] The details of these criminal procedures, however, are obscured by their designation by Kazakh security services as secret intelligence and operational information. Those convicted are serving their sentences under the jurisdiction of the Criminal Enforcement System Committee of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the National Security Committee, most of them in a facility in Kustanai Region. While in confinement, these individuals undergo psychological and theological interventions for deradicalization and are largely kept separate from the general prison population.[24]

Rehabilitation

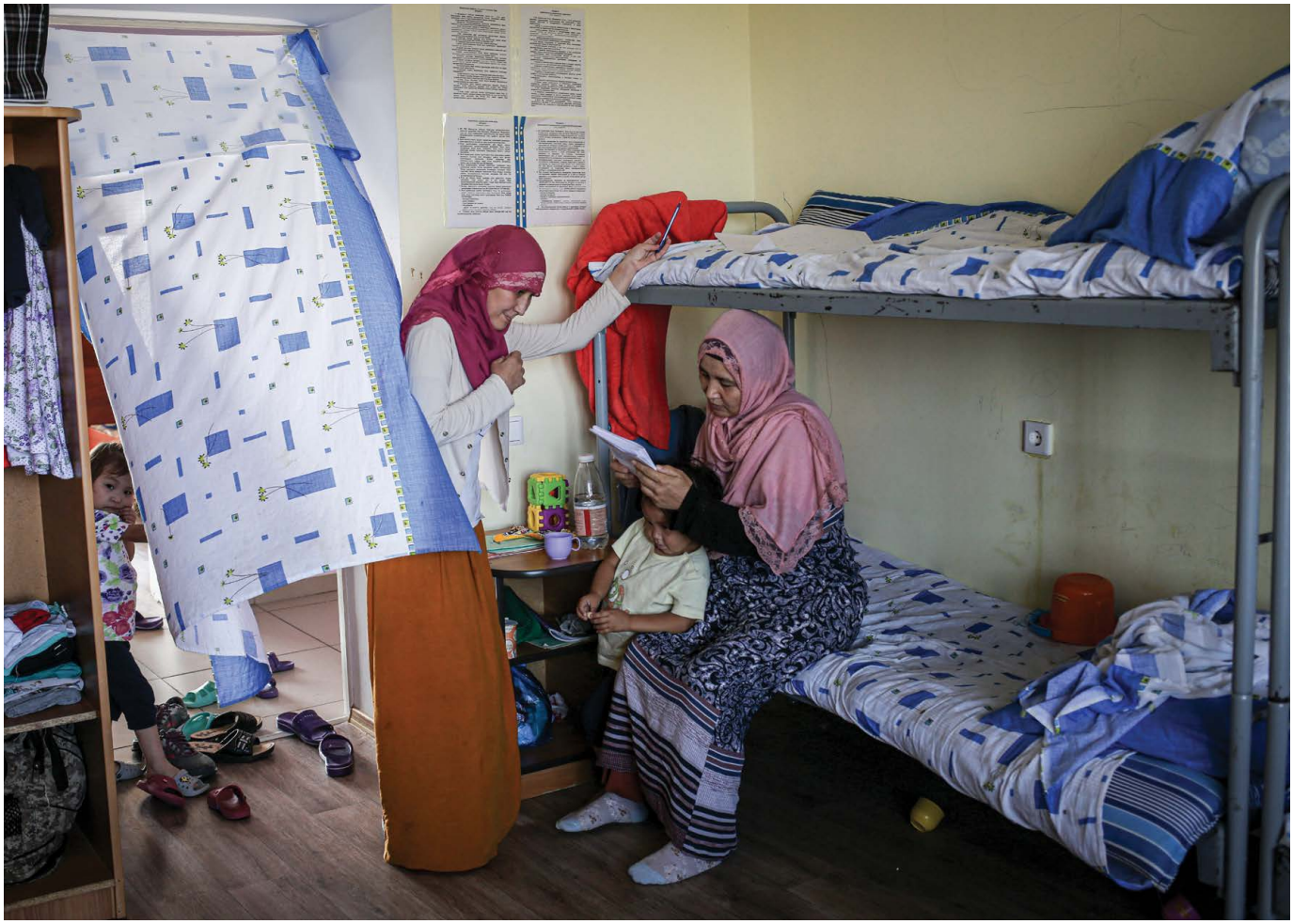
As the remainder of repatriates were considered victims, they were allowed to return to their former places of residence, typically with their families. During the rehabilitation phase, the Ministry of Education and Science was the agency responsible for working with minors. Rehabilitation was carried out at the Chance Social and Legal Support Centers under the supervision of the public foundation Pravo.[25] Pravo is a government- and privately funded nongovernmental organization that operates in almost all regions of the country. Though the main task of these centers is the rehabilitation of children, they also provide legal, psychological, social, and material assistance to adult repatriates, in addition to assisting with medical examinations and treatment and preparing children to enter schools.

The authority responsible for the rehabilitation of adult repatriates is the Committee on Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Information and Public Development. The committee engaged the Akniet Information and Rehabilitation Centre, with offices in all regions of Kazakhstan, to carry out rehabilitation work. The foundation conducts theological and psychological rehabilitation of repatriates, including those in detention facilities. Despite the existence of standard methods developed by the Akniet Centre in cooperation with the Ministry of Information and Social Development, specialists commonly make unilateral changes and adjustments. The Muslim Spiritual Directorate of Kazakhstan also takes an active part in the religious rehabilitation program, and regional NGOs and rehabilitation centers have been involved in the rehabilitation and resocialization process. All centers operate with financial support from both state and charitable funds.

Reintegration

Most repatriates have entered the reintegration phase since 2020. From that time on, responsibility for and substantive work with the repatriates transferred to the local executive authorities, while the Ministry of Information and Public Development and the Ministry of Education and Science retain coordination functions. During the reintegration phase, theological, psychological, and social interventions are administered, based on individual plans developed for each repatriate. These plans consider age, gender, health conditions, and the need for material support, as well as the social environment in their respective communities. The condition and welfare of returnees depend to a large extent on the capacities of municipal authorities and NGOs involved in the reintegration process in each region, resulting in uneven access to support and services. Since some repatriates have contact with each other through social networks, the comparisons of their differing situations have, at times, engendered frustration.

The provincial religious affairs departments, in cooperation with NGOs, take the lead in reintegrating adult repatriates into local communities, emphasizing training and employment so that repatriates can achieve some financial independence. Work with children is carried out at schools by the education bodies of the local executive authorities in cooperation with NGOs. Children were distributed among schools based on geographic considerations and the availability of appropriate teachers and psychologists. The work consists of preparing children for learning through special education provided to those who have not previously attended school and are therefore not at comparable learning levels as other children their age. Additionally, the work focuses on building critical thinking skills and active socialization through structured



Women who formerly lived under the Islamic State at a rehabilitation center in Aktau, Kazakhstan, in July 2019. (Photo by Tara Todras-Whitehill/New York Times)

leisure time activities, such as visits to museums and exhibitions, and familiarization with the history and culture of Kazakhstan.

The participation of the local community, with the exception of relatives, in reintegration is very limited. As a rule, the population distances itself from adult returnees, in part because the repatriates are constantly monitored by security services, a situation that generates distrust and fear. Further, local communities in Kazakhstan are generally underresourced and capacity constrained, with little expectation on the part of the government for community support for the returnees.

CHALLENGES TO REINTEGRATION

The fundamental problems of reintegrating returnees in Kazakhstan stem from Kazakhstan being a weak state with a weak society.[26] The government is alienated from society, and society has no real cohesive identity and no ability to influence the government. There is no dialogue among the government, society, and repatriated persons. This gives rise to a number of practical difficulties, foremost among which is the lack of a clear explanation to the local communities as to why people from the conflict zones in Iraq and Syria were returned and why funds from the country's budget should be spent on their rehabilitation and reintegration.

Even though deradicalization is most commonly understood as "removing the object . . . from radical ideology/views," [Kazakh] authorities primarily control repatriates' public behavior rather than their values or ideological attitudes.

The main challenge of the reintegration program is that the preliminary stage of repatriation has not been sufficiently developed—needed are a risk-benefit analysis, scenario planning, and the necessary legislative framework for rehabilitation and reintegration. The provisions for the social rehabilitation of children affected by terrorist activities, for example, were introduced into Kazakh legislation only in May 2020. The program appears to have been launched without serious discussion with specialists and without preparing either a plan for primary adaptation or a plan for subsequent in-depth rehabilitation and reintegration. There also has been a shortage of specialists, and there is no system in place to train them. Critically, there is no defined state program with responsibility for the entire process, from repatriation through reintegration; it would be more correct to speak of a loose set of activities that are carried out in support of returnees.

Further, Kazakhstan's efforts in preventive deradicalization seem focused on outward expressions and manifestations of so-called radical behavior rather than on the underlying beliefs. Even though deradicalization is most commonly understood as "removing the object . . . from radical ideology/views," the authorities primarily control repatriates' public behavior rather than their values or ideological attitudes.[27] The same can be said about methods of working with repatriates. While the details of these methods are unavailable for analysis because of security restrictions, off-the-record expert assessments by those familiar with the methods suggest that they lack sufficient clinical validity. The development of these methods appears to have occurred synchronously with the repatriation itself, calling into question the preparation and preplanning needed for success.

This lack of preparation was the result of no state body having an overall picture of the reintegration process and plan, and further no identified measures or efforts to gauge what successful reintegration might look like. Some specialists involved in the reintegration of returnees have criticized this lack of preparation, coordination, and metrics of success as symptomatic of Kazakhstan's primary focus on aspects that have an obvious public relations component and are aimed at improving the image of the country and its leadership. Thus, those stages of implementation that are important but outside the public's view have fallen victim to a lack of state interest. In the long term, the issue of ongoing funding for reintegration remains an open question. And as implementing NGOs rely on state funds and regular retendering of grants, there is uncertainty as to funding stability and continuity of the work with returnees.

AREAS NEEDING ADDITIONAL ATTENTION

Rehabilitation and reintegration programs in Kazakhstan focus on repatriates, while the communities in which they are to be integrated remain out of focus, engendering two key questions: To what extent are the repatriates ready and able to identify with and accept the new local communities into which they are integrating? And to what extent are the local communities ready and able to accept the repatriates? At the local level, both returnees and their relatives bear a social stigma. And there is lingering concern that repatriated persons may once again enter the social environment in which they were initially radicalized.

A key issue in the reintegration of returnees is that they are not a monolithic group. Each repatriate has his or her own identity, goals, and values. Accordingly, the development of any reintegration mechanism will encounter the problem of individualization.

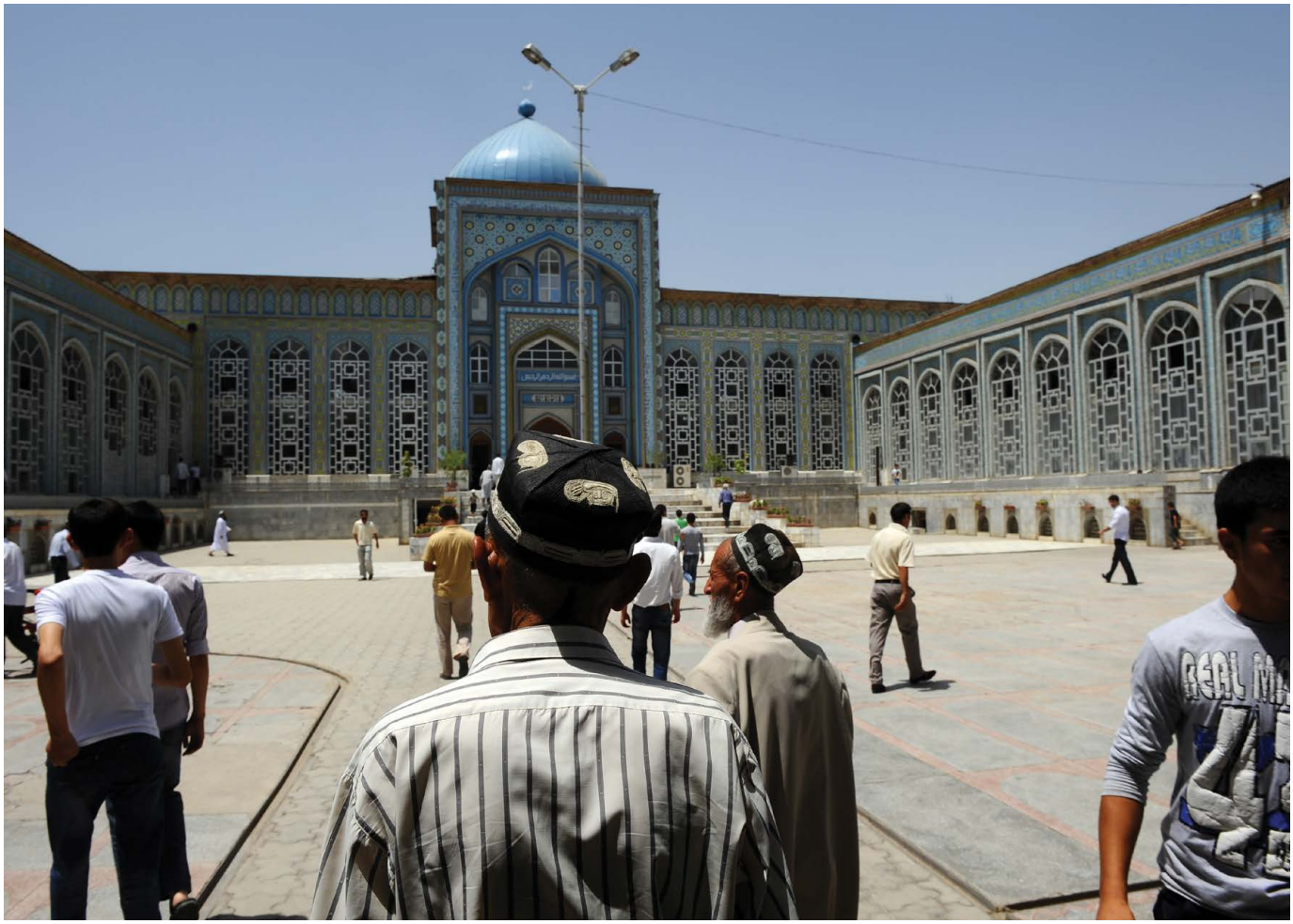
The issue of parity and equity of state assistance to individuals is also a serious topic in local communities that are still not fully onboard with repatriation. Because the poverty rate in Kazakhstan is quite high, many people think it is wrong to provide special assistance to repatriates over the needs of other people. Further, there are strong fears in local communities about the threats posed by repatriates, connected with the belief that a significant portion of this cohort has not repented and remains committed to the ideals of religious extremism, potentially forming secret extremist cells in Kazakhstan. The official narrative that they are "deceived people in need of help" is not a view widely shared by the population. Nonetheless, communication and interaction between repatriates and community members through work and school can be a valuable step toward involvement of the local community in the process of rehabilitation and reintegration, serving to minimize either stigmatization or glorification of repatriates.

Tajikistan's Pragmatic State Protectionism

In contrast to Kazakhstan's aspirational approach to repatriation and reintegration, Tajikistan's pragmatic approach seeks to protect the country from a future wave of violent extremists through amnesty and oversight.[28] By relying more on traditional local reintegration capacities than on the sort of formal processes Kazakhstan has implemented, Tajikistan has yet to create the type of programming that would grant a substantial role for CSOs or the international community in helping to reintegrate returnees. Nonetheless, Tajikistan early committed to repatriation, focusing first on women and children and on those who renounced extremist views.

MOVING BEYOND PREVENTION AND COUNTERACTION

Since gaining independence with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Tajikistan has been challenged by the threat of extremism and terrorism. During the 2000s this threat intensified and transformed, with official statistics showing an increase in extremist activity in the country.[29] While data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs indicate that only one Supreme Court–recognized terrorist organization was noted in the republic in 2010, there were forty-three by 2014.[30] These threats assumed new significance as the Islamic State's propaganda and recruitment efforts moved into the digital space and began to focus on labor migrants abroad. (Tajikistan has one of the highest rates of labor migrants per capita in the world.) Tajikistan thus developed and adopted the National Strategy on Countering Extremism and Terrorism of the Republic of Tajikistan for 2016–2020, similar to strategies and action plans adopted by other Central Asian countries.[31] These strategies mainly target two key tasks, prevention and counteraction. As a result, Tajikistan was not adequately prepared to work with repatriates on reintegration upon their return.



The central mosque in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, on July 1, 2011. As many as two thousand Tajik citizens traveled to Iraq and Syria to live and fight with ISIS. (Photo by James Hill/New York Times)

Though there was no specific returnee scenario planned from the onset of the conflict in Syria and Iraq, the leadership of Tajikistan early expressed political will regarding the return and amnesty of those willing to renounce their past actions. Unlike Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, Tajikistan decided to count those who returned on their own among the legitimate repatriates, rather than limiting the definition only to persons who returned under the auspices of the state. Since 2015, Tajikistan has made available an automatic amnesty option for individuals who voluntarily return and report to authorities. In accordance with this amnesty law, 111 people were amnestied in April 2018, and in September 2019 their number exceeded 200. Of these, only two have returned to the war zone to date, with the remainder continuing to live and work peacefully at home or in migration, ostensible evidence of their successful rehabilitation. However, unlike the returned children, there have been no established rehabilitation and support programs for returned and amnestied adults or for convicted violent extremists released from prison.

Once the decision was made to repatriate citizens, an interdepartmental working group was created under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that was responsible for the repatriation process. To coordinate the rehabilitation and integration of returnees, an interdepartmental working group of twelve ministries and agencies was established under the Executive Office of the President

of the Republic of Tajikistan. The effective joint participation of these stakeholders has been a key success factor in the implementation of the initiative.

SAFEGUARDING THE HOME FRONT BY REPATRIATING CHILDREN

The Tajik government's intense interest in forestalling future domestic extremism has led it to center repatriation efforts on children who have been in ISIS-controlled territory. On April 30, 2019, a special flight from Baghdad to Dushanbe was organized by the government of Tajikistan in collaboration with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Iraq and Kuwait, the internal affairs bodies of Iraq and Tajikistan, UNICEF, and other international organizations. In total, eighty-four children and teenagers were brought to their homeland. More remained in Iraqi prisons and camps because their mothers did not allow them to be repatriated.[32]

Tajikistan's unique experience in the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century in repatriating citizens who had been displaced by the civil war stood the country in good stead when it turned to repatriations from ISIS combat zones. Based on this earlier experience, authorities were able to arrange the necessary financial, logistical, institutional, public relations, and integration mechanisms, making it possible to quickly carry out the return of Tajik children from Iraq. However, while the post–Tajik Civil War repatriation and rehabilitation experience may have informed the repatriation and reintegration processes, adults who have arranged their own return to Tajikistan or who may be included in future state-sponsored repatriations from the conflict zones are different from those who returned after fleeing the civil war. Those returning from Syria and Iraq are people who chose to leave Tajikistan not in flight from war but rather in flight *to* war, to live in areas controlled by the Islamic State.

Work continues on the return of citizens remaining in Iraq and is also under way to return 575 women and children still based in Syrian refugee camps. After speaking with representatives of the Bashar al-Assad government in October 2019, Zubaidullo Zubaidzoda, the Tajik ambassador to Kuwait and Iraq, conveyed that "their return should commence in the near future."[33] Unfortunately, those plans had to be deferred as a result of Turkish military operations in northern Syria and the COVID-19 pandemic.

CHILDREN'S PATH FROM TRAUMA TO REINTEGRATION

The eighty-four returned children belong to a total of forty-seven families. The mothers of most of the children, however, had been sentenced to extended prison sentences in Baghdad. The government of Tajikistan therefore worked with the government of Iraq and UNICEF to secure permission from these mothers for their children to return to Tajikistan. For returning children who were born in Tajikistan, the challenge was the question of legal guardianship and the parental rights of their imprisoned or otherwise unavailable parents. For some children who were born in Syria or Iraq and who thus had no birth certificate, the challenge was to verify their parentage. After a two-month process, the Ministry of Justice had successfully restored or issued new documents to all returnees.

On their return, the children were initially housed at Sanatorium Kharangon in the Varzob area near Dushanbe. Foremost, the repatriates received counseling with psychiatrists and psychotherapists to overcome the traumas they had experienced; as one Tajik psychologist working with returnees stressed, the needs of every returned person must be considered individually. Many of the

repatriates were also in need of medical care for physical injuries, infections, and diseases acquired as a result of living in war conditions without access to proper medical treatment. Some children did not know the Tajik language, requiring interpreters of Arabic and Uzbek. After a week of working with these children, psychologists concluded that, despite their time on the battlefield, these children would likely be able to acclimate to living in Tajikistan. Subsequently, a working group for the adaptation of children was created under Tajikistan's Ministry of Education. There was an urgent need to put the children in school, since many either had not been to school or had missed significant amounts. By July 2020, according to the Ministry of Education, seventy-nine of the eighty-four returned children had been placed in seventeen orphanages and specialized boarding schools throughout the country. Specialists believed that it would be easier for children to forget the horrors of war if they did not have contact with other children who had similar experiences. At the same time, guided by the principle of preserving families, siblings were not separated and were sent to the same institution.

Importantly, there are currently no discussions or instances of actual transfers of children to close relatives, despite petitions from some to take the children. Only short visits have been allowed. One official stated, "It is too early to return them to their relatives. Most of these children, having lived in the horrors of war, received psychological trauma that cannot be healed in a short time. They still need constant monitoring by teachers and psychologists. Of course, over time, after complete rehabilitation, all children will return to their loved ones."[34] No exact date has been set for this to happen, however. The Ombudsman for the Rights of the Child says that not all children will be handed over to their loved ones even after rehabilitation, stating that families need to be examined first: "The best environment for raising children is a family, and no one argues with that. I understand that there are relatives who are ready to take these children into upbringing. But what is the environment in this family?" According to Deputy Health Minister Shodikhon Jamshed, the return of these children to their homeland has attracted the attention of childless families. The fact that the children's parents have not yet been officially deprived of their parental rights makes the adoption process legally impossible at the moment.

BARRIERS TO REINTEGRATION

Though the goal of Tajikistan's repatriation efforts is deradicalization and reintegration into a social community, several factors stand in the way of successful reintegration at the local level. Among these, stigmatization of returnees is prominent, sometimes hindering opportunities for adults to find work or study. When the media are silent in the face of the stigmatization, receiving communities—already hesitant to accept the role thrust on them—find no encouragement to review their disposition toward returnees. Though CSOs and potentially NGOs might be able to provide assistance in resettlement and housing of returnees, Tajikistan's reliance on traditional, local facilities means there is no formal role for such organizations. The difficulties resulting from these compounded challenges affect both returning fighters and noncombatants.

Since 2014, the Tajik government has given amnesty to individuals who voluntarily return to the country and repent of their actions. Amnestied adult self-returnees are often viewed with suspicion, seen as criminals or fanatics. Although they are able to go out and about, their movement is limited by required weekly check-ins with their police inspector. Most of them survive with the help of relatives or work in low-paying jobs because they cannot receive loans or social benefits for unemployment.

Some relatives do not want to accept returned children, arguing that the returnees could negatively influence their own children; nor do they want to attract the constant attention of law enforcement agencies and social services.

In one illustrative example, a returnee from Syria tried unsuccessfully for four years to resume his medical studies. Another amnestied citizen said that because he had returned from Syria, the family of his brother's fiancée broke off the engagement, fearing the potential negative influence of this returnee or increased attention from the security services.

The children returned under the auspices of the state also suffer stigmatization. An essential element of reintegration is to ultimately rejoin families, relatives, and local communities. Statements in the media that all relatives welcome and accept the repatriated women and children are not fully grounded in fact. One social worker at the Ministry of Education said that relatives of only fifteen out of the forty-seven families applied to receive their repatriated young relatives. Some relatives do not want to accept returned children, arguing that the returnees could negatively influence their own children; nor do they want to attract the constant attention of law enforcement agencies and social services. The financial side of the issue raises additional concerns among potential guardians and foster families. The social worker at the Ministry of Education also noted that, according to their surveys, most parents do not want their children to go to school with repatriated children.

To date, Tajik media have done a poor job of reporting on the reintegration process. After several articles appeared on the return of Tajik children from Iraq, this topic has barely been touched on by either the state-owned or independent media. For several years, people encountered horror stories in the media about the radicalization and violent extremism of their compatriots who left for conflict zones. But since repatriation efforts started, the population has not heard humanizing, positive stories of those same compatriots returning and abjuring their earlier deeds and beliefs. Though journalists do face hurdles in accessing repatriates to learn their stories because of surveillance by the security services, that does not fully account for the absence of a narrative of uplift.

Limited possibilities for CSO and NGO engagement

Because Tajikistan has used a less formal approach to rehabilitating and reintegrating its citizens than Kazakhstan and has relied more on traditional local capacities, the participation of CSOs and international organizations has been minimal. Not a single NGO has received permission to conduct activities with returnees. The only possible form of civil society participation has been the provision of material assistance to repatriated children. Ideally, civil society involvement could help facilitate effective rehabilitation and reintegration, with a clearer division of labor to articulate civil society's role. For example, one aspect of reintegration that is important to address is the repatriates' need for housing and employment so that they can lead a normal, independent life.

Another hurdle in the Tajikistan rehabilitation and reintegration process has been the shortage of trained specialists to work with the repatriates, including psychological counsellors, psychiatrists, and social workers, which perhaps suggests an additional role for CSOs. More broadly, there is a need for experience sharing and advice on different approaches to rehabilitation work at the regional and international levels. Not least important is the need for financial support from international partners. The costly and complex processes of rehabilitation are beyond the ability of local governments and other stakeholders, including potentially CSOs, to fully fund.

Uzbekistan's Organic Social Reabsorption

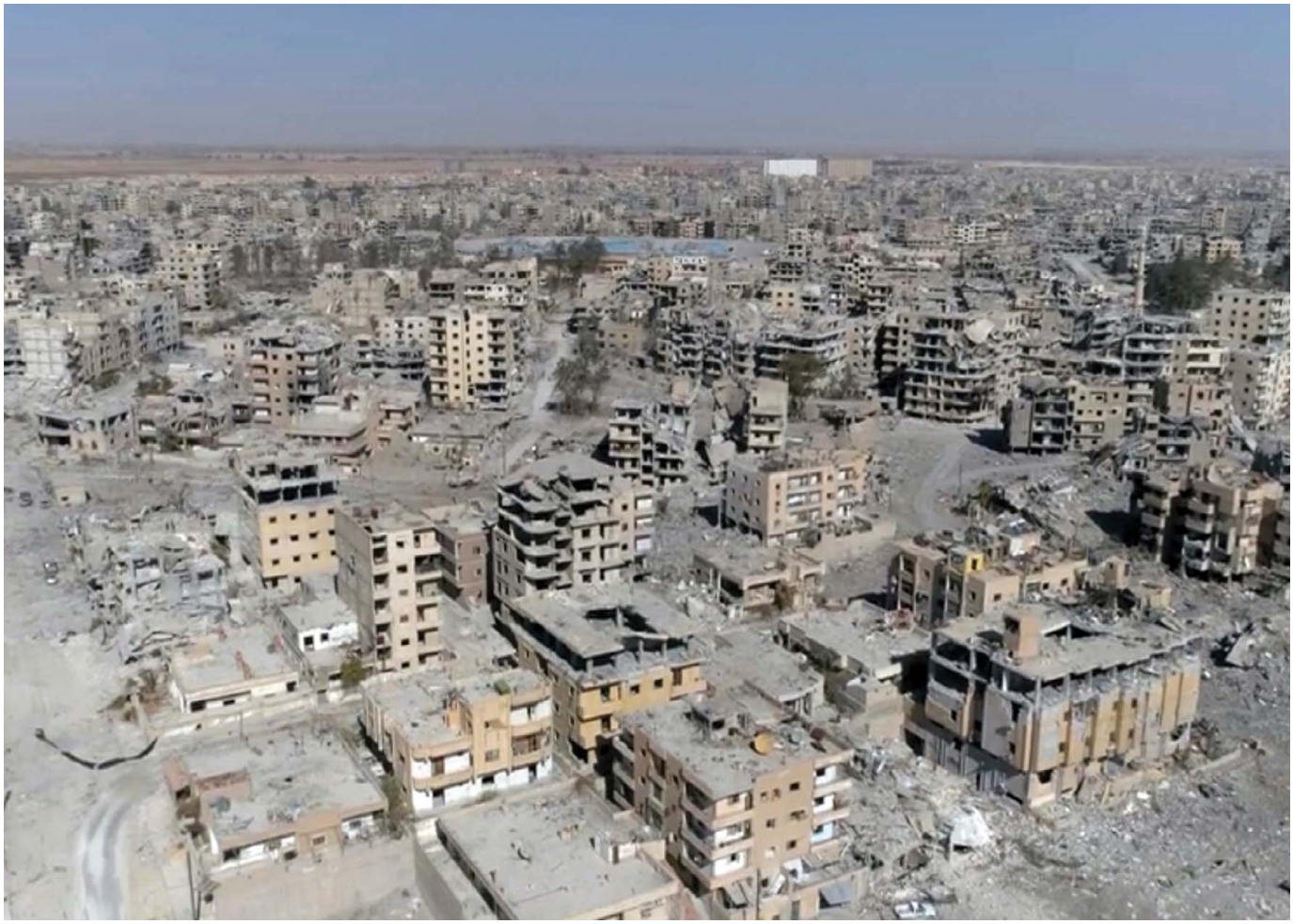
Uzbekistan's approach to reintegration entails socialization in familiar and traditional community settings.[35] To that end, children are not placed in closed orphanages or rehabilitation centers to restart education and rehabilitation as in Tajikistan but are quickly released into the community, with ongoing psychological assistance, while adults—mostly women to date—who abjure ISIS doctrine receive legal leniency and assistance finding jobs and housing to facilitate their reintegration. The staging of the repatriation operations as acts of mercy and the favorable treatment of returnees by the media contributed to a more positive perception of returnees by the receiving communities and has smoothed the reintegration process.

Uzbekistan's recent repatriations of citizens from ISIS-controlled conflict zones occurred in two stages. On May 30, 2019, a special operation known as Mehr-1 (Mercy-1) was carried out on the instructions of the president of Uzbekistan and with the assistance of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and UNICEF. One hundred fifty-five people were repatriated to Uzbekistan from Syria, including 48 women and 107 children. At the time, they were being held in the Mabruk, al-Hol, and Roj camps in the border territories of Iraqi and Syrian Kurdistan. The operation was conducted during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and was portrayed by the national media as an act of mercy. The second stage of the operation, Mehr-2, was completed on October 10, 2019, with sixty-four children repatriated from Iraq, primarily under twelve years of age. Some of the children arrived as orphans; the parents of others remained imprisoned in Iraq and Syria.[36] Three subsequent rounds of Mehr repatriations brought the total number of people returned to Uzbekistan to 512 by May 2021.[37]

The media depicted this approach not only as an act of mercy by the state but also as a symbol of greater tolerance in the country's policies toward religion and religious adherence.[38] Comments on social media and rapid surveys conducted with students, teachers, and taxi drivers suggest that this media portrayal had a positive effect on public sentiment.[39] A majority of the survey respondents approved of repatriation as an act of mercy, with disapproval expressed by a minority. Those disapproving thought that the decision to go to the Middle East had been a personal choice and that repatriation should not have been allowed out of fear the returnees would spread jihadist ideology. While society's attitude toward repatriates was not uniform, the largely positive perceptions suggested that social rehabilitation had a good possibility of success.

EARLIER EXPERIENCE WITH REPATRIATION: LESSONS LEARNED

Uzbekistan's 2019 repatriation operations and its focus on rapid societal reintegration, with state assistance, reflects lessons learned from an earlier major repatriation effort. In 2001–2002, Uzbekistan offered amnesty for those citizens who had emigrated and found themselves in the ranks of terrorist groups in Afghanistan. Twelve families and thirteen teenagers (only women and children) were returned to Uzbekistan from Afghanistan in an operation carried out in strict secrecy. Some were members of the violent extremist organization the Islamic Movement



The war-torn city of Raqqa, Syria, shown on October 19, 2017, two days after Syrian Defense Forces retook the city from ISIS fighters, including many of Central Asia origin. (Photo by Gabriel Chaim/AP)

of Uzbekistan.[40] All returnees were placed in a special camp, passed a medical examination, and received treatment. The psychologists who worked with returnees tried to relieve mental tension in the women and children. Through a process of restored identity, all adult returnees received new identification documents, and children received state birth certificates. The entire rehabilitation process lasted approximately one month.

Adult returnees in the 2001–02 operation were found to have committed several criminal acts under the laws of Uzbekistan, including but not limited to illegal crossing of international borders and participation in criminal groups, which posed a barrier to lawful repatriation. A solution was found that avoided repudiating the law: the general prosecutor's office opened criminal cases against adult returnees on charges of illegal immigration. The defendants admitted their guilt while simultaneously writing a petition of pardon addressed to Uzbekistan's president, Islam Karimov. Immediately following conviction and sentencing, a presidential decree of pardon was read out to the accused. The Supreme Court thus replaced the prison terms with suspended sentences of two to five years.

Social reintegration, however, turned out to be more difficult than legal reconciliation. One of the notable features of Central Asian societies is the great importance placed on social ties and

daily practices. Social ties within neighborhoods (*mahallas*) or villages (*qishlaqs*, *ails*) have substantial weight because they are derived from the collective mores of traditional society.[41] The 2001–2002 returnees made a conscious choice to return out of war fatigue and the realization that they were disconnected from familiar social networks and friendships and were constantly at risk of losing their families. Some became disillusioned with the ideas that the spiritual leaders of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan were trying to instill in them. Therefore, returning to their homeland was the only solution. In other words, psychologically they were ready to return to the social environment they had previously rejected.

It is these social connections and networks that became a natural social rehabilitator. This same social environment, dominated by conformist and nonaggressive forms of Islam, also became an ideological rehabilitator for the repatriates. The repatriates abandoned the more extreme ideology, realizing its futility from their own experience. This example of ideological rehabilitation subsequently informed the approaches used beginning in 2019 with repatriates from Syria and Iraq. However, the experiences from this first wave were not adequately recorded in a manner that would allow that process to serve as a useful model for current repatriation efforts from ISIS-controlled territories.

REPATRIATION AND REINTEGRATION OF RETURNEES FROM SYRIA AND IRAQ

The experience of the women who voluntarily returned to Uzbekistan from ISIS-controlled territory in recent years, arguably a self-selected group, suggests that many had been deceived about what to expect from life in Syria and Iraq and that, having lived in combat zones and having experienced the loss of people close to them, they were mentally and morally ready for repatriation and social reintegration. Given these circumstances, Uzbekistan chose a simplified reintegration process that consisted of three stages: (1) adaptation, which addressed medical diagnosis and treatment, the removal of initial psychological phobias, the restoration of civil status, school placement of children, and periodic financial assistance; (2) the return of repatriates to familiar society, which involved local communities and traditional civic institutions such as the mahallas working with repatriates to overcome social exclusion and psychological discomfort; and (3) engagement with NGO rehabilitation centers, which trained returnees in new professions, improved their legal literacy, and helped them overcome traditional social and economic dependency.

Two months before the return of repatriates began in 2019, a rehabilitation team was organized at the Ministry of Health with six practicing psychotherapists, a psychologist, more than forty doctors from different disciplines, the imam of the city of Chirchiq, three *otin-oyi* (religiously literate women), lawyers, social service workers, a representative of the Committee for the Protection of Human Rights, representatives of women, and representatives of law enforcement agencies. It was planned that on repatriation, the returnees would be placed in a prepared adaptation center in the Tashkent region and would undergo medical and psychological examination and treatment. The first stage, which lasted twenty-five to forty-five days, was financed through the President's Fund and the Social Support Fund under the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan.

The rehabilitation team anticipated few complications related to the ideological adaptation of returnees since those who remained committed to the Islamic State and its ideology had

Psychologists in Uzbekistan take a minimalist view of training or reeducating repatriates, preferring returnees to spend less time in closed rehabilitation centers and more time in social settings to enhance socialization.

already declined to return to Uzbekistan from Kurdistan. Nonetheless, as a safeguard, adult returnees were interviewed by otin oyi, who assessed whether there was a continuing commitment to violent extremist ideologies. Psychologists of the state security service also conducted special psychological tests, the results of which established that three women out of fifty-six remained prone to fundamentalist versions of the interpretation of religion, built on the rejection of traditional forms of Islam seen in Central Asia.[42] Since the return of these three women to their homes, the otin oyi have continued to work with them to increase their acceptance of traditional local forms of Islam.

Upon arrival in Uzbekistan, some of the children remained highly fearful of war-associated sounds from their time in the conflict zone. In the first days, when some young children heard aircraft passing over the adaptation center, they quickly scattered, lay on the ground, or hid behind trees. Child psychotherapists worked with them to remove negative sound associations and phobias. Currently, all repatriated children study at schools and receive regular monitoring by psychologists, with no visible adaptation difficulties readily apparent. Unlike Kazakhstan's approach, psychologists in Uzbekistan take a minimalist view of training or reeducating repatriates, preferring returnees to spend less time in closed rehabilitation centers and more time in social settings to enhance socialization. Psychologists hold that on returning to a familiar society after a long hardship, reinvolvement in traditional networks where local traditional Islam prevails will become a natural driver of reintegration.

As in the case of the 2001–2002 repatriates, all recent returnees had violated several laws. The authorities drew on the earlier experience, using legitimate administrative tools to avoid potential legal crises. After rehabilitation and resettlement, repatriates were formally interrogated, then voluntarily wrote confessions and letters to the president asking for pardon. The court then opened criminal cases and on an expedited basis issued indictments, with prison sentences of three to six years. After sentencing, the presidential pardon was read in the courtroom, and punishment was replaced by a suspended sentence of six to twenty-four months. The administrative flaw in this approach is that it would not have been possible to resolve such legal issues without invoking executive authority. Thus there remains a need to install a legally flawless codified solution for future cases of return, such as amendments to the Code of Criminal Procedure's chapter 63 regarding amnesty for this type of repatriated citizen.

The process of issuing new documentation to the returnees was simplified by the fact that the Illegal Migration Department and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Uzbekistan already had a list of persons who had emigrated to the Middle East. The state made considerable effort to officially welcome and distribute new documentation to returnees through a nationally broadcast congratulatory ceremony. For returnees, this ceremony and the official recognition of their return provided a meaningful stimulus for psychological rehabilitation. Additionally, the formal ceremony signaled that the first stages of reintegration had been fully completed, setting a necessary precondition for lawfully receiving state services—a notable difference from the continuing inaccessibility of state services in Tajikistan for amnestied adult repatriates.

RETURNING TO THE COMMUNITY: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

A potential primary obstacle to the full reintegration of returnees from ISIS-controlled territory was the years of negative portrayal of these immigrants in official propaganda. However, this hurdle has gradually been reduced in the wake of large-scale reforms begun in Uzbekistan in 2016. Critical views have emerged regarding the state's previous policies on religious freedom, relations between religious organizations and state institutions, and how these connect to security and the rule of law; one clear source of contention is the unjustified persecution of religious leaders and believers. It is notable that there have been no cases of mass ostracism of returnees.

Following their time in the adaptation center, many families returned to their communities of origin. The remainder, including single mothers with children, received small apartments paid for from the Social Support Fund. Questionnaires and conversations with repatriates reflected that they had reached a stage of readiness to reintegrate into society. They had returned to their familiar native environment and reported having managed to reestablish former ties, navigate conflicts, and overcome their own wariness of others. In some cases this was an indication of disillusionment with the unsuccessful experience of living in the "true Islamic state." Thus it is important to recognize that this feedback from repatriates may be best interpreted as indicating they had arrived at a point of readiness for the ongoing process of reintegration.[43]

All repatriates were provided with jobs, which was sometimes a source of resentment in local communities, where repatriates were seen as being given special treatment or rewards for poor choices and behaviors. Some repatriates, however, refused to work, citing low salaries owing to their lack of education or skilled work experience. Others chose to work at home, sewing clothes, baking bread, or engaging in similar entrepreneurial activities. To purchase the equipment for the home-based work, the repatriates received loans on preferential terms from state banks, made possible by a special order from the head of the Central Bank of Uzbekistan. For women repatriates of retirement age who had been homemakers, an additional challenge arose: since they had not paid anything into the Pension Fund of Uzbekistan during their lifetime, Social Service refused to issue them pensions. This limited their benefits to the payment of approximately $80 in monthly social benefits to which all citizens are entitled. Some returnees noted their feelings of dependency and expectation of constant assistance from the state, atrophying their own self-initiative.

While NGOs are helping to address such problems, there remains no direct coordination or information sharing between NGOs and government on this issue. And while NGOs do receive some funding from the Ministry of Employment and Labor or from parliament, for example, the bulk of their funding comes from international organizations and foreign governments. Perhaps the most successful example is the work of the International Social and Educational Center Barqaror Hayot (Stability), located in the city of Termez. This center has organized courses for returnees on mastering new private business skills and specialties and offers lectures and classes to overcome social problems in reintegration, to increase legal literacy, and in other relevant areas of knowledge. The center's work has seen seventeen returnees able to study professions, overcome psychological barriers in new jobs, and receive certificates that establish eligibility for obtaining loans.

Comparative Observations and Recommendations

These three Central Asian countries' repatriation and reintegration processes exhibit both common characteristics and some notable differences. Comparative observations support the following recommendations for enhancing policies still in development in these countries and for the international community as more nations take up reintegrating returnees from extremist conflict zones.

Develop a specific action plan for the reintegration of repatriates. Years prior to undertaking repatriation, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan had already adopted national strategies on violent extremism. Yet the existing strategies were not explicit with respect to repatriation and reintegration, leaving those plans to be developed as the need arose by special cross-departmental ad hoc working groups and committees established under the auspices of each national government. With hindsight as a guide, there is some indication that the process may have been improved with earlier consideration of reintegration modalities. It is, however, still warranted to develop specific national strategies and action plans in each of the countries for the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees.

Encourage public discussion and debate as part of repatriation planning. Relatedly, public discussion and debate over the merits and risks of repatriation did not emerge in any of the three countries before the official decision was made to move forward. After years of state demonization of Central Asian citizens who had gone to the conflict zones of Syria and Iraq, the welcome home not only was discordant for some, it also neglected to address the stigmatization that had become embedded in society. That will take time and effort to erode.

To reduce stigmatization of returnees and improve their chances of successful reintegration, encourage the media to personalize their stories. The media have an important role to play in reducing the stigma attached to returnees who have been in conflict zones. While the media played a role in announcing the mechanics of repatriation and in promoting public relations messaging in the Central Asian countries under discussion, they could contribute significantly more to minimizing stigmatization and paving the way for society's acceptance of returnees by conveying returnees' personal stories, giving a human face to the issues of rehabilitation and reintegration while still serving a cautionary purpose.

To ensure security and preserve the rule of law, determine prosecution procedures and develop means to track and monitor returnees. The three countries have not been uniform in whom they have welcomed home, which has resulted in different criminal prosecution policies and raised security concerns among receiving populations. Kazakhstan has facilitated repatriation of all genders and ages. Tajikistan arranged the return of children, but also bestowed amnesty on self-returnees who repented, and Uzbekistan has focused on assisting the return of women and children. While Kazakhstan has pursued criminal prosecution and conviction of repatriates who were actively involved with terrorist organizations or other criminal activities, Uzbekistan has used presidential pardons to suspend sentences following conviction, as a means of preserving the rule of law. Tajikistan has avoided the legal process altogether through

its blanket amnesty. But in each of these cases, the process of repatriation, regardless of legal process or outcome, allowed state security services to identify returnees, creating a pathway to actively track and monitor them.

Build capacity at initial processing centers, including medical, psychological, theological, and legal expertise. Each country conducted initial adaptation measures at special in-processing centers, providing medical and psychological evaluation and treatment and helping returnees work through legal issues of citizenship and documentation. There is some indication, at least in the case of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, that increasing the number and expertise of specialists, including psychologists, religious scholars, social workers, teachers, lawyers, and others, would have been useful, in light of the unique challenges of reintegrating this population. Kazakhstan's in-processing period was lengthier than that used in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, focusing to a greater extent on institution-based supervised adaptation and risk assessment as a first step toward the aspired deradicalization. Following in-processing and initial adaptation, the repatriates in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan for the most part returned to their original homes and communities. In Tajikistan, the children were sent to schools for daytime education and nighttime accommodation, pending clarity on whether or when a return to the care of relatives might occur. Tajikistan's adult self-returnees have the freedom to choose their home location, but a weekly check-in requirement with their case officers serves as a de facto restriction on mobility and a further means of ensuring security.

Engage civil society in supporting repatriates and their communities. Civil society involvement in reintegration falls along a spectrum in Central Asia. Kazakhstan's cooperation with the Pravo public foundation through the Chance Social and Legal Support Centers and with the Akniet Information and Rehabilitation Centre not only demonstrates the use of national support networks but also provides examples of public-private partnerships in working toward reintegration. In Uzbekistan, civil society is also playing a role in helping to solve some of the reintegration challenges faced by returnees, including the work of the International Social and Educational Center Barqaror Hayot and others in training returnees for new professions, enhancing legal literacy, and overcoming social and economic dependency. In Tajikistan, CSOs are restricted by law from working with repatriates, leaving a critical gap. This is particularly challenging for the adult self-returning population. In each of these countries, civil society has the potential to play an even greater role in partnering with the government and supporting both repatriates and their communities. For this effort to be most successful, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan need a mandate and mechanism for legitimizing a spectrum of activities by CSOs on rehabilitation and reintegration and for coordination between civil society and government.

Assist local communities with reintegration. The local communities to which repatriates return have borne much of the burden of reintegration, whether of state-sponsored repatriates in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan or of self-organized adult repatriates in Tajikistan. With limited local resources and capacity, as well as hesitation on the part of community members to directly engage returnees, reintegration success becomes situationally dependent. As shown in Uzbekistan, the definition of a successful reintegration also depends on how one defines reintegration. In that country, returning to a community, renouncing radical ideologies, and finding a job or attending school are presented as sufficient markers of reintegration, setting returnees on a trajectory of

normalization. But whereas the process of reintegration is not necessarily linear, the need for ongoing interventions and support is quite likely. In the absence of full transparency on reintegration processes, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which objective success criteria are being used to determine when the process of societal reintegration or deradicalization is truly complete.

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The experiences of these countries have shown that the processes of repatriating and reintegrating citizens are complex. Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan should be acknowledged as leaders in carving a pathway through this opaque landscape. As other countries embark on this journey, their experiences should be taken into consideration. And though it would be comforting to believe that the phenomenon of foreign migration to conflict zones such as in Iraq and Syria is a relic of history, ongoing vigilance shows recognition that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

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34. Anonymous interview, July 2020, Dushanbe, Tajikistan.
35. This section draws on Dr. Bakhtiyar Babadjanov's research on the social reintegration of returnees. For this analysis, eighty-six people in the Tashkent, Andijan, and Namangan regions were interviewed, including returnees, relatives, and specialists who participated in their post-return adaptation.
36. Uzbekistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs received notarized permission from the parents to take the children to Uzbekistan.
37. A small, unknown number of these repatriates returned from Afghanistan.
38. Since the death of President Islam Karimov, the new administration has required authorities to ensure that religious freedoms are fully implemented.
39. Research was conducted by Dr. Bakhtiyar Babadjanov on behalf of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the president of Uzbekistan in 2019 and 2020, with 120 respondents and more than 500 studied comments on social networks.
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41. The types of such social structures in Uzbek society are considered in Johan Rasanayagam, *Islam in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan: The Morality of Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
42. In Uzbekistan, Muslims freely combine Islamic precepts with national customs, which have become part of the cultural and confessional identity of local peoples.
43. Research and interviews were conducted in June, September, and October 2019.

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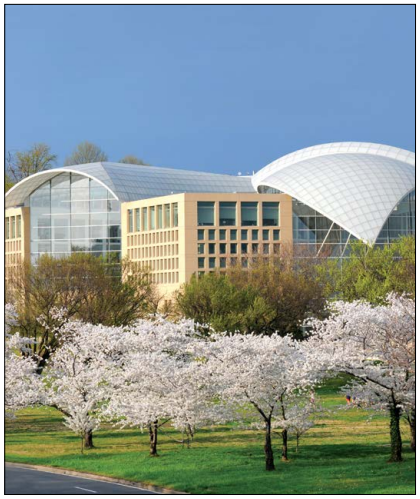

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