



Jihadi Activity in Kazakhstan?

Over the past six months, terror-related incidents have been on the rise in Kazakhstan, raising concerns of Islamist activity in this hitherto relatively peaceful and stable Central Asia republic.

- On 17 May 2011, three people were wounded when a suicide bomber attacked a security services office in Aktobe. The motives were unclear, and opinions were divided whether this was terrorism or criminal case. Authorities blamed militant Islamists for the attack but called it an isolated incident.¹
- In September and October 2011, the militant group Jund al-Khilafah released two videos of a rocket attack that they claimed to have conducted against an American military base in Khost, Afghanistan on 11 July 2011.
- On 29 August 2011 Kazakh security services arrested 18 people in Atyrau and charged them with plotting terrorist activities.²
- On 31 October 2011, two bombs exploded in Atyrau, Kazakhstan targeting government buildings. An 18 month old baby was hurt by glass from broken windows caused by the explosion.³ The bomber was killed and was later identified as Baurzhan Kanatovich. Upon searching his apartment, police discovered a homemade bomb, bomb-making materials and instructions. The Kazhak Prosecutor-General's office said three suspects had been arrested and confessed to involvement in both attacks, which were classified as terrorist acts by government officials. Jund al-Khilafah claimed responsibility for the attack, but said that the bomb exploded prematurely as the attacker was carrying it and that he was not a suicide attacker.⁴
- On 12 November 2011, seven people were killed when an ethnic Khazak man, identified as M. K. Kariyev, carried out an armed assault specifically targeting police in Taraz. The militant group Jund al-Khilafah claimed responsibility for the attack and threatened further attacks if the government of Kazakhstan does not repeal a recently passed religious law.⁵

¹ Central Asia Security Newswire, "Kazakhstan's first-ever suicide bomber attacks security forces", 17 May 2011;

² Telegraph, "Kazakh President wants to monitor Muslims more closely after 18 arrested for terrorism", 1 September 2011;

³ Reuters, "Islamist group says responsible for Kazakh blasts", 1 November 2011;

⁴ Jamestown Foundation, "Is Kazakhstan Threatened By Islamic Terrorists?", 11 November 2011;

⁵ New York Times, "Fatal Rampage by a Gunman in Kazakhstan", 12 November 2011;



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It is still unclear whether the recent events were all related to Islamic extremism, organized crime, or both. Local media reported that several Kazakh citizens had joined radical groups operating in Russia's North Caucasus region and other republics of Central Asia. Some of these militants were reportedly returning to Kazakhstan after of years fighting in Afghanistan and Pakistan. A small, previously unknown, militant group called Jund al-Khilafah (Soldiers of the Caliphate) claimed responsibility for some of the attacks. Kazakh authorities however have attempted to minimize the significance and severity of the threat posed from this group. In October 2011, the government of Kazakhstan passed a new law to ban prayer rooms in state buildings and to require all missionaries to register with authorities annually. President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who has ruled Kazakhstan as a secular republic since independence from the Soviet Union, supported the law, claiming that it was the best method to rid the country of Islamic religious extremism. Jund al-Khilafah--Soldiers of the Caliphate have threatened further attacks unless the law is reversed.⁶

Background: Jund al-Khilafah (Soldiers of the Caliphate)

The Jund al-Khilafah seek to restore the Islamic caliphate under Sharia, or Islamic law.⁷

Authorities believe the group was established in the summer of 2011 by three Kazakh citizens.⁸ A senior US intelligence official suggested that the group has links to the Haqqani network, based on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Authorities have also noted that the techniques used by the group are similar to those used by Islamist militants in Dagestan, who target police force and government organizations.⁹



⁶Jamestown Foundation, Ibid

⁷New York Times, Ibid;

⁸Jamestown Foundation, Ibid;

⁹New York Times, Ibid;



History

The Jund al-Khilafah terrorist group was unknown prior to the summer of 2011.¹⁰ In September and October 2011 the group released two videos of a rocket attack which they claimed to have carried out against an American military base in Khost, Afghanistan on 11 July 2011. Following that incident, on 31 October 2011, Jund al-Khilafah claimed responsibility for a double bombing in Atyrau, but said that the bomb exploded prematurely as the attacker was carrying it and that he was not a suicide attacker. On 12 November 2011, the group claimed responsibility for an armed assault in Taraz and threatened further attacks if a new religious law is not reversed.¹¹

Organizational Structure and Leadership

Kazakh authorities believe the group was founded by Rinat Khabidolda, Orynbasar Munatov, and Damir Znaliey, and that the leaders are located in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region. The group maintains a level of secrecy and any information on its leadership is based on the interrogation of three detained members of a four man cell responsible for the 31 October 2011 bombing attack in Atyrau. The group is believed to be composed of several battalions. Authorities believe that Rawil Kusaynov is the leader of al-Zahir Baibars Battalion, which is a subordinate group of the Jund al-Khilafah.¹² The cell was inspired by Aleksandr Tikhomirov alias Said Buryatsky, a jihadi ideologue who was killed by Russian security forces in Ingushetia in March 2010.¹³

Primary Modus Operandi

- Shootings
- Suicide bombings / bombings.

¹⁰ Jamestown Foundation, *Ibid*;

¹¹ *Ibid*

¹² Jamestown Foundation, "Militants Escalate Terrorist Attacks In Kazakhstan", 15 November 2011;

¹⁴ RFE, "Kazakh officials say terrorist group involved in Atyrau bombings", 9 November 2011.



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Related Articles:

1. Jamestown Foundation, “Is Kazakhstan Threatened By Islamic Terrorists?”, 11 November 2011;
2. Jamestown Foundation, “Militants Escalate Terrorist Attacks In Kazakhstan”, 15 November 2011;
3. Telegraph, “Kazakhstan prepares for growing Islamic militant threat”, 13 November 2011;
4. Washington Post, “New terror attacks threaten Kazakhstan’s security”, 18 November 2011.