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Country Reports on Terrorism 2023: Uzbekistan

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Uzbekistan

Overview: While there were no reported terrorist incidents in Uzbekistan in 2023, the Government of Uzbekistan (GOU) continued to be concerned about the spillover of terrorist activity from Afghanistan, particularly from ISIS-K. Other terrorist groups with Uzbek members included Katibat al Tawhid wal Jihad (KTJ), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Islamic Jihad Union, and Jamaat Ansarullah. Many Uzbek citizens who join terrorist groups are radicalized to terrorism overseas, particularly as migrant laborers. Yet Uzbekistan's courts convicted several individuals in 2023 who apparently were "radicalized" online. The GOU did not repatriate any Uzbek FTFs or their associated family members from northeast Syria.

2023 Terrorist Incidents: There were no reported terrorist incidents in Uzbekistan in 2023.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: Uzbekistan adopted no significant CT-related legislative changes in 2023. The GOU estimated that "hundreds" of Uzbekistani citizen FTFs and their associated family members remained in Syria, though confirming the identity of suspected Uzbekistanis has been complicated by missing travel documents and the practice of many FTFs changing their names. Additionally, government contacts have claimed that some Uzbekistani FTFs and their family members who remain in Syria "want to stay there." UNICEF estimates that at least 200 Uzbekistani women and children remain in Syria. In cooperation with UNICEF, the government continued to monitor returnees from its five previous repatriation flights, the latest of which was in 2021. More than 500 Uzbekistani have been returned in total, according to government officials.

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In September, Tashkent's criminal court sentenced a Namangan resident to nine years in prison for joining a terrorist organization in Syria. In December the Kashkadarya district court sentenced a 21-year-old man to seven years in prison for promoting "extremist" ideas through Telegram Messenger channels. Uzbekistan's State Security Service (DXX) reportedly prevented his attempt to travel to Syria.

The government repatriated several Uzbekistani citizens who were arrested for terrorist activities or affiliations in other countries. According to the DXX press service, an Uzbekistani citizen was detained in December "while crossing from Syria to a neighboring country for medical treatment." The 24-year-old man, who allegedly was injured while fighting for KTJ in Syria, was later returned to Uzbekistan. Uzbekistanis with suspected terrorist ties were also extradited to Uzbekistan from Moldova and Egypt. Local press also reported widely on the arrest of four Uzbekistanis suspected of belonging to KTJ in Indonesia. Three of the four suspects attempted to escape imprisonment, leading to the deaths of one of the suspects and an Indonesian immigration officer.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Uzbekistan is a member of the Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism. Its Financial Intelligence Unit, the Department on Struggle Against Tax Currency Crimes and Legalization of Criminal Incomes at the GPO, is a member of the Egmont Group. In April the Central Bank and the Prosecutor General's Office issued a "joint decree" that effectively amended legislation on countering the financing of terrorism and the proliferation of WMD. The amendments sought to "strengthen internal controls" in overseeing online and bank card transactions.

Countering Violent Extremism: The government continued to use countermessaging campaigns, training, and rehabilitation programs to prevent radicalization to violence of at-risk citizens and labor migrants. Law enforcement agencies shut down channels for spreading violent extremist propaganda and promoting terrorism on social media, particularly on the popular Telegram Messenger application. The government continued to restrict certain forms of political and religious expression in the name of countering broadly defined "extremism." Observers in Uzbekistan have expressed concern that heavy-handed government regulation of religious expression, including several reports of men being forced to shave religiously prescribed beards, could lead to resentment of these limitations and to greater radicalization to terrorism. Law enforcement reported providing rehabilitation and reintegration (R&R) assistance to pardoned citizens, partly to mitigate vulnerability to radicalization to violence. The GOU continued its active role in the C5+1 regional CVE and FTF framework through online

youth resilience building, community leader and R&R care provider trainings, and virtual and hybrid CVE, repatriation, and R&R meetings and workshops.

International and Regional Cooperation: Uzbekistan maintains active CT engagement with a variety of international, multilateral, and regional organizations, including these:

The UN Counterterrorism Center

UNICEF

UNOCT

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime

The EU

NATO

The GOU continued to participate in regional CT activities with the Regional Antiterrorism Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

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