



## Forensic psychology approaches to terrorism risk assessment in Central and South Asia

**Aybek Adilov\***

Academy of the Ministry of the Interior Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic  
720040, 1A Chui Ave., Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5081-6305>

**Serimzhan Dosumov**

Solva Group Ltd  
050000, 502 Seifullin Ave., Almaty, Kazakhstan  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8131-2705>

**Anvar Kasymov**

Academy of the Ministry of the Interior Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic  
720040, 1A Chui Ave., Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan  
<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-2462-8826>

**Abstract.** This study aimed to develop adapted forensic-psychological approaches for terrorism risk assessment in Central and South Asia, considering the region's specificities and threat dynamics. The methodology was based on a theoretical analysis of secondary data, including global terrorism reports and official legislative documents from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan. The primary methods were trend observation, activity product analysis, and comparative legal method. The results indicated that the region's terrorist landscape is transforming from hierarchical structures to decentralised networks and individual actors, posing significant challenges. It was established that South Asia, particularly Pakistan, continues to demonstrate a high level of terrorist activity, whereas Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan face growing, albeit still low, risks. It was recorded that in 2024, Pakistan experienced a more than twofold increase in the number of terrorist attacks, from 517 to 1,099 incidents, and the number of fatalities increased by 45%, from 748 to 1,081. Significant gaps were also identified in understanding the psychological criminogenic factors of radicalisation and recidivism, and existing Western risk assessment models require adaptation to the local socio-cultural context. In this regard, adapted forensic-psychological approaches were developed, accounting for cultural sensitivity, religious specificity, behavioural indicators, psychosocial factors, language barriers, legislative context, and the integration of artificial intelligence for accurate risk assessment in Central and South Asia. The practical value of the study lies in the potential for its results to be used by law enforcement agencies, security services, and judicial institutions to enhance terrorism risk assessment methodologies. The developed approaches can serve as a basis for creating training programmes for psychologist practitioners working in the field of counter-terrorism, as well as for developing national strategies for countering radicalisation and reintegration programmes for former combatants

**Keywords:** fradicalisation; extremism; threats; profiling; counter-terrorism

### Introduction

The persistent and evolving threat of terrorism necessitates the continuous refinement of counter-terrorism strategies, particularly in understanding its complex psychological underpinnings. Contemporary terrorist acts are characterised

by their transnational nature and pronounced physical and psychological aggression, often demonstrating a complex character. The research by V. Jitariuc (2023) indicated that, despite changes over time, the methods of committing

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\*Corresponding author



terrorist acts and the psychology of the perpetrators remain largely unchanged. He emphasised that law enforcement agencies often collect incomplete information and draw unfounded conclusions, leading to errors in the investigative process. This underscores the critical need for proper investigation of the forensic nature of the crime of terrorism and its *modus operandi*. Given these challenges, effective risk assessment becomes an imperative.

The study of terrorism within criminology is one of the fastest-growing subfields. G. LaFree & A. Schwarzenbach (2021) noted that this growth resembles the early years of criminology itself, characterised by energy, imagination, and creativity, but simultaneously struggling with the collection and analysis of reliable data, the application of appropriate research methods, and the development of comprehensive theoretical frameworks. Although criminology holds significant potential for applying theories of crime to terrorism, D. Fisher & E.M. Kearns (2024), in their analysis of leading criminological journals, found that many criminological theories that could help understand terrorism receive scant attention. They emphasise the need for more qualitative, theoretical, and mixed-methods research, and also point out that few studies concern the development of terrorism laws. This indicates a significant gap in understanding psychological criminogenic factors. Specifically, Z.A. Sukabdi (2021), in his study of psychological risk factors of terrorist offenders in Indonesia, found that the psychological criminogenic factors for identifying terrorist offenders with a risk of recidivism in Indonesia remain unclear. Consequently, the adequate assessment of individuals involved in terrorism and the measurement of the effectiveness of terrorist rehabilitation are called into question. This demonstrates an urgent need for the development of robust tools for risk assessment and management, particularly concerning the residual risk of terrorist acts or violent extremism posed by offenders after their release from prison, as noted by B. Ripperger (2021) in his analysis of the use of terrorism risk assessment tools in Australia. He pointed out that existing tools are time- and resource-intensive, and courts afford them limited weight.

The development and implementation of terrorism risk assessment tools are central to addressing these challenges. C. Logan *et al.* (2023) stressed that risk and threat assessment practices are crucial for identifying extremists, prioritising resources, and developing individualised management plans. In the United Kingdom, as noted by A. Silke (2025), the Extremism Risk Guidance (ERG 22+) has been the primary risk assessment framework used for terrorists and violent extremist offenders in England and Wales since 2011. However, its effectiveness requires constant revision. A study, which is the first rapid evidence assessment of ERG22+ factors, showed that most ERG factors were the focus of significant research activity between 2012 and 2020, while six factors received very little research attention. Ten research themes were also identified that could potentially shape new factors or play a significant role in updating or revising some existing factors. This

underscores the dynamic nature of terrorist risk and the constant need for refining assessment methodologies.

However, mental health professionals working with individuals whose potential for harm may be ideologically motivated face unique challenges. C. Logan & R. Sellers (2021), in their introduction to a special issue on violent extremism and mental health, highlighted three key issues: the complexity of ensuring proper practice in risk assessment and management; the challenge of establishing and understanding the role of extremist ideology; and how practitioners and their services respond to the risks. These challenges are fundamental in light of the ongoing debates regarding the link between radicalisation, terrorism, and mental disorders. A systematic review conducted by M. Trimbur *et al.* (2021), which analysed 25 articles, showed that they failed to identify a significant link between radicalisation, terrorism, and mental disorders overall, although they noted that some studies indicate a high level of mental disorders in subgroups of radicalised individuals and lone-actor terrorists. They emphasised the need for further research using standardised psychiatric assessment methods. Similarly, research by G. Thijssen *et al.* (2023), which retrospectively analysed data from 82 convicts in Dutch terrorist units, showed that violent extremists are a heterogeneous group in terms of socio-demographic characteristics, with approximately 60% of the population having prior convictions for ordinary crimes, and one-third suffering from a mental disorder. This study concluded that additional research into motivational and other risk factors is necessary. The latter is a necessary step for improving the identification, risk assessment, and effective treatment of violent extremists. Furthermore, information gathering from witnesses in counter-terrorism operations has been evolving. T. Ashkenazi & R.P. Fisher (2022) conducted an empirical study in which they trained experienced Israeli investigators to use the Cognitive Interview (CI) technique to improve witness reports in real-world terrorist attack investigations. Their results showed that the CI yielded more information, as well as more new information that was not present in the first interview. This indicates a broader application of psychological methods, extending beyond direct assessment alone to the gathering of intelligence data.

Given the multifaceted nature of terrorism and the identified gaps in understanding and assessing psychological risk factors, this study aimed to develop tailored forensic psychological approaches to terrorism risk assessment in Central (CA) and South Asia (SA). The research problem of this study was as follows: how can forensic psychological approaches be effectively adapted and integrated into counter-terrorism framework programmes in Central and South Asia to enhance the effectiveness of risk assessment, prevention, and rehabilitation, considering the specific socio-cultural dynamics of the region and evolving terrorist threats.

## Materials and Methods

The study focused on a country sample comprising Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan. These countries were

selected as key representatives of Central and South Asia, facing diverse yet interconnected aspects of terrorist threats. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are strategically important Central Asian states demonstrating a low level of risk. Pakistan was included to study adaptation and response mechanisms to significant and evolving threats within a context of high and continually increasing levels of terrorist activity.

The analysis period covers the timeframe from 2015 to 2025, aiming to trace contemporary trends and the evolution of threats. The source selection procedure was based on defined inclusion and exclusion criteria: the inclusion criteria were official reports from international organisations (UN, Europol), annual GTI indices (Global Terrorism Index, 2025), peer-reviewed scientific literature, and current legislative acts of the studied countries directly pertaining to terrorism, risk assessment, and legal psychology. The exclusion criteria were unverified media reports and sources without a clear methodology. Methodologically, the study was based on specific scientific methods of legal psychology and legal research. Observation of terrorist activity trends was conducted through monitoring and analysis of statistical data presented in the European Union terrorism situation and trend report (2025), and Country Reports on Terrorism (2023). The application of this method was aimed at tracking the dynamics and geographical distribution of terrorist incidents. Key metrics and indicators were systematically extracted and aggregated from the selected sources: the number of terrorist incidents, the number of fatalities and casualties, the type of terrorist actor (organisation, individual), the geographical distribution of attacks, and the primary modus operandi.

Activity product analysis was applied to study a significant corpus of textual materials. This included official documents from international organisations (Regional Expert Group..., 2025) and the United Nations Mission (UN) in Central Asia (UNRCCA (Central Asia), 2025). Reports from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (Victims of terrorism, 2020; Model Legislative Provisions, 2022; Kazakhstan and UNODC reinforce cooperation..., 2025) were also analysed. National legal acts of Kazakhstan were examined: Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 191-IV (2009), Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 178-IV (2009), Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 266-IV (2010). Strategic documents (Astana jubilee declaration..., 2010; The Global Initiative..., 2025) were also included in the analysis. The application of this method aimed to identify patterns, risk factors, as well as existing risk assessment tools. Qualitative variables were extracted from legislative acts and official documents: existing legal counter-terrorism mechanisms, procedural safeguards during investigations, definitions of key terms (“terrorism”, “extremism”), and existing risk assessment tools applied at the national level.

The biographical method was applied to study the evolution of terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State (ISIS), and their ideological foundations, based on historical information and analysis of their activities. The formal-legal

method was applied for a detailed study of the structure and content of normative-legal acts, including Resolution of the Security Council Committee of the United Nations No. 1267 (1999) and Resolution of the Security Council Committee of the United Nations No. 1540 (2004), as well as legislative acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The historical-legal method was used to trace the development of legislation and counter-terrorism strategies, as well as the evolution of terrorist threats in the regions of Central and South Asia (The fight against..., 2019). The comparative-legal method was applied to juxtapose Western approaches to forensic psychological risk assessment with the needs and context of Central and South Asian countries, aiming to identify discrepancies and opportunities for adaptation (European Union terrorism..., 2025; Kazakhstan Security Radar, 2025). The statistical method was applied to interpret quantitative data on terrorist incidents and their consequences (GTI, 2025), to identify patterns and trends. Based on the analysis of existing models and a comparative juxtaposition of their characteristics, a synthesis of key aspects for adapting forensic psychological approaches to terrorism risk assessment in Central and South Asia was conducted. This study is based exclusively on the analysis of open, publicly available sources. The work did not involve the use of personal data, closed operational information, or conducting experiments involving human subjects.

## Results and Discussion

### The evolution of terrorist threats and the conceptualisation of risk in the regional context of Central and South Asia

The analysis of the contemporary terrorist threat landscape in Central and South Asia has revealed a fundamental shift from hierarchically organised groups characterised by a clear structure and centralised command, towards more diffuse, amorphous, and ideologically motivated networks, as well as a growing role of individual actors who may operate either independently or in small, situational groups. This transformation creates unprecedented challenges for traditional risk assessment methods, which historically relied on security and law enforcement approaches focused on identifying known organisations and their operational plans. The GTI (2025) provides clear evidence of this dynamic, confirming that, despite a global 22% decrease in terrorism-related deaths compared to the peak of 33,346 deaths in 2014, South Asia consistently remains the region with the highest average GTI score, holding this position throughout 2015-2025. This underscores the deeply entrenched and persistent nature of terrorist threats in this subregion. Pakistan, in particular, demonstrates an exceptionally high and increasing level of terrorism impact, ranking 2<sup>nd</sup> in the global ranking with a score of 8.374 out of 10.000 (GTI, 2025). This indicates deeply rooted, persistent, and multifaceted extremist networks that continue to operate despite counter-terrorism efforts. The situation in Pakistan is the primary reason for the deterioration of the region's indicators as a whole.

In 2024, Pakistan experienced a sharp increase in the number of terrorist attacks, more than doubling from 517 incidents to 1,099, while the number of terrorism-related deaths increased by 45%, from 748 to 1,081 (GTI, 2025). This surge makes Pakistan one of the countries with the highest absolute number of casualties and a deteriorating trend. One of the deadliest incidents in Pakistan in 2024 was the November 9<sup>th</sup> explosion in Balochistan, which resulted in 25 fatalities, for which the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) claimed responsibility (GTI, 2025). The main terrorist actors in Pakistan remain Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and regional affiliates of the Islamic State – Khorasan Province (ISK), which is a branch of the ISIS terrorist organisation, carrying out attacks on security forces, civilian populations, and infrastructure, highlighting their capacity for destabilisation. Meanwhile, in Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the nature of the primary threat is somewhat different. These countries, while not ranking within the top twenty countries for terrorism impact according to the GTI (2025) (Kazakhstan ranks 100<sup>th</sup> with a score of 0.000, indicating the absence of terrorist acts over the past five years, and Uzbekistan ranks 90<sup>th</sup> with a score of 0.233), face other challenges. Uzbekistan's score, although low, nevertheless shows an increase of 0.19 points in 2024, indicating a potential deterioration of the situation or an increase in risks.

The obtained data on the rise of terrorist activity in Pakistan and potential risks in Uzbekistan are consistent with research highlighting the complexity and multifactorial nature of terrorism in the region. F.E. Bilal *et al.* (2022) in their critical analysis of terrorism in Pakistan noted that no single cause has a direct link to terrorism; rather, its roots lie in the interplay of poverty, illiteracy, social grievances, inequality, human rights violations, and state suppression. The increase in attacks in Pakistan confirms their conclusions that the country remains a “serious victim of terrorism”. The research by S.A. Abbas & S.H. Syed (2021) further elucidates the role of external factors in sectarian terrorism in Pakistan, finding that economic cooperation with India, credit from Saudi Arabia, and trade relations with Iran can paradoxically activate extremist groups. This underscores that the dynamics of terrorism in South Asia are not merely internal but are deeply interwoven into a complex geopolitical fabric, complicating the development of simple solutions.

Data on the growing activity of ISK and its alliances with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) point to the further evolution of threats, which is consistent with the analysis of N. Shukuralieva & A. Lipiński (2021), who studied the process of the “securitisation” of Islam in Central Asia. They argued that Islamic radicalism is often portrayed as a threat to military, political, and societal security, influencing legislation and the reproduction of authoritarianism. In the case of Uzbekistan, as noted by T. Chutia (2021), the official discourse often exaggerates the threat of terrorism to justify authoritarian counter-terrorism policies, whereas human rights organisations point to the opposite picture. The conclusions regarding the low but

increasing GTI score for Uzbekistan confirm that, despite official statements, the risks may be more latent and linked to the repatriation of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs), making the focus on forensic psychological assessment highly relevant. This shift from “organisational” to “individual” terrorism necessitates new approaches, as “stochastic terrorism”, described by M. Amman & J.R. Meloy (2021) and characterised by the inspiration of violence through diffuse public rhetoric, becomes increasingly relevant in the modern digital environment. Data on the rise of online radicalisation and ISK's use of a multilingual media strategy to engage youth corroborate the conclusions of J.F. Binder & J. Kenyon (2022) that, while the current threat of online radicalisation is not exceptionally high, it is “unlikely to remain so in the future” given the overall growth and acceleration of online activity by terrorist actors. This indicates a need for psychological tools that can detect signs of radicalisation before it escalates into violent action.

The primary threat here is associated less with the mass, overt activity of large terrorist organisations within the country, and more with the heightened risks stemming from FTFs and their families returning from conflict zones, as well as with processes of online radicalisation (Regional Expert Group..., 2025). A key role in this context is played by ISK, also known as Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP). This regional branch of ISIS, operating primarily in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and parts of Central Asia. Formed in 2015, ISK pledged allegiance to the central leadership of ISIS and seeks to establish an Islamic caliphate in the historical Khorasan region, which spans parts of modern Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia (GTI, 2025). ISK has become one of the most active jihadist groups internationally in recent years, having carried out numerous attacks beyond its bases in Afghanistan (Gerges, 2021). In 2024, the group was responsible for one of the deadliest terrorist incidents of the year: the January attack in Kerman, Iran, which killed at least 95 people. Since its inception, ISK has been linked to 634 attacks and 3,212 fatalities. In particular, an increase in ISK activity is observed in the Eurasia region, where the number of incidents rose from 11 in 2023 to 18 in 2024, and the number of deaths attributed to the group increased from four to 199 over the same period (GTI, 2025).

These individuals, often with combat experience and deeply ingrained extremist ideology (Gerges, 2021), pose a significant internal threat to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, being potentially capable of inspiring new cells, recruiting new members, or carrying out lone-wolf, yet devastating, terrorist attacks. ISK actively employs a multilingual media strategy, using languages such as Pashto, Dari, Arabic, Urdu, Farsi, Uzbek, Tajik, English, and more recently also Russian and Turkish, to target youth and marginalised groups through platforms like Telegram and Al-Azaim. A key factor contributing to ISK's expanding influence is its maintenance of alliances with groups such as the IMU, which in 2015 pledged allegiance to ISIS (GTI, 2025). The IMU, formed in 1998 predominantly from Uzbeks, historically aimed to overthrow the government of

Uzbekistan and establish an Islamic state governed by Sharia law (Gerges, 2021). This connection is perilous, as ISK continues to attract returning fighters from Syria and Iraq, with recruitment efforts being intensified precisely by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (GTI, 2025). The Country Reports on Terrorism (2023) also emphasise that although Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have demonstrated progress in combating terrorism and repatriating their citizens, the risk remains high due to proximity to Afghanistan and the activity of extremist groups in neighbouring regions where ISK has a strong presence, particularly near the southern border provinces of Tajikistan, including Badakhshan, Kunduz, and Takhar (GTI, 2025; Country Reports on Terrorism, 2023). Since 2021, following the change of power in Afghanistan, the influence of traditional external forces, such as the USA, India, and Pakistan, on Afghanistan has significantly diminished. The only exception is Uzbekistan, which has retained its influence, although its overall impact on Afghanistan remains limited. This shift may weaken the ability of traditional players to counter ISK's activities, while the Taliban's focus on consolidating internal control could increase the potential space for the expansion of influence by other actors, such as ISK. ISK relies on financial networks to support its operations, having had access to approximately 2.5 million US dollars through blockchain transactions in 2023. The group's membership in the region in 2024 was estimated at between one and six thousand individuals. Early strategic alliances of ISK also included ISIS affiliates in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, indicating deep roots and a branched network (GTI, 2025).

Sociological data from Kazakhstan highlight the problem: international terrorism consistently ranks among the top three threats of concern to the population, second only to inflation and wars, with 82% of respondents expressing significant concern about it (Kazakhstan Security Radar, 2025). Such high public anxiety creates significant pressure on state authorities, demanding from them not only effective countermeasures but also the development and implementation of innovative preventive mechanisms. However, traditional methods, focused exclusively on identifying members of specific terrorist organisations or monitoring their physical activity, prove insufficiently effective in countering modern, hybrid threats characterised by rapid adaptation and the use of new technologies. As noted in the Europol report, terrorist propaganda is increasingly disseminated not through traditional media or open forums, but through decentralised online platforms, encrypted gaming services, and closed chats, which extremely complicates the monitoring, identification, and neutralisation of individuals in the process of radicalisation (European Union terrorism..., 2025). This qualitative change in the paradigm of the terrorist threat necessitates a transition from purely reactive measures to a proactive and individualised risk assessment, which is the primary task of applied forensic psychology. The psychology of terrorism, as defined by R. Borum (2004), is an extremely complex psychosocial problem, not merely a matter of military tactics

or criminal behaviour that is easily amenable to standard assessment. It encompasses profound motivational, cognitive, emotional, and social aspects that shape susceptibility to violent extremism. Consequently, any attempt to assess the risk of terrorist behaviour without a deep, multifaceted understanding of psychological factors – motivation for violence, resilience of ideological beliefs, presence of psychopathological traits, the influence of social connections and manipulation, as well as the overall social and economic context conducive to radicalisation – is doomed to ineffectiveness and potential harm. This creates an urgent need for the integration of comprehensive forensic psychological approaches into the activities of law enforcement, intelligence, and even rehabilitation agencies in the region.

#### **Forensic psychological risk assessment: Methodology, tools, and regional adaptation**

Forensic psychological risk assessment of terrorism is a scientifically grounded, systematic process aimed not at “predicting” future behaviour, which is impossible, but at formulating a structured, evidence-based clinical and empirical judgement for the effective management of a potential threat posed by a specific individual. In contrast to traditional “profiling”, which is often based on generalised stereotypical assumptions about terrorists and can lead to discrimination and erroneous conclusions, modern risk assessment tools focus on individual analysis. As noted by K. Höffler *et al.* (2022), these tools, such as VERA-2R (Violent Extremism Risk Assessment) or HCR-20 (Hare Psychopathy Checklist – Revised), are based on the analysis of a set of empirically validated risk factors, which can be categorised into static (historical) and dynamic (variable) factors. Static factors, which include criminal history, history of violent behaviour, involvement in extremist groups, or certain socio-demographic characteristics, are immutable but indicate a long-term propensity. In contrast, dynamic factors, such as current ideological beliefs, presence or absence of social support, level of life satisfaction, presence of a life crisis, perception of injustice, propensity for violence, as well as connections with extremist networks, can change over time. Accordingly, it is the dynamic factors that are subject to targeted correction through psychological, social, and rehabilitative interventions. It is the focus on dynamic factors that makes forensic psychological risk assessment a key tool not only for identifying and early detection of threats but also for developing individualised programmes for deradicalisation, reintegration, and long-term monitoring. The UNODC report (Victims of terrorism, 2020) emphasises the importance of such integration of psychological approaches for effective prevention and countering of extremism.

However, the direct, uncritical application of tools developed in a Western socio-cultural and legal context in countries of Central and South Asia is problematic and may be ineffective or even counterproductive. Existing tools often insufficiently account for the unique role of personal contacts, extended family ties and social

networks, as well as religious authorities in the radicalisation process, which is relevant for the collectivist and traditional societies of the region (Höffler *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, risk factors that are significant in Europe or North America may have different meanings, interpretations, or even be irrelevant in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, or Pakistan, where religious, tribal, cultural, and ethnic identities play a significantly greater, and sometimes dominant, role in shaping worldview and motivation. For instance, in Pakistan, where, according to the US State Department report (Country Reports on Terrorism, 2023), a significant number of terrorist groups operate with diverse, often conflicting ideological platforms – ranging from ethnic-separatist to radical-religious and anti-government – the motivational profiles of militants can differ substantially. This necessitates the development of adapted tools that consider such nuances as the significance of “honour”, “tribal loyalty”, or specific interpretations of religious doctrines. In Uzbekistan, where the government maintains strict control over the religious sphere and has a history of suppressing religious dissent, radicalisation often occurs in underground or foreign networks, using encrypted communications and recruitment through personal connections, requiring different methods of detection than in

countries with more open religious freedom. In Kazakhstan, significant attention is paid to countering foreign terrorist fighters and their repatriation (Country Reports on Terrorism, 2023; Kazakhstan Security Radar, 2025). This creates a unique challenge related not only to the initial risk assessment of individuals who already have combat experience and have undergone deep ideological indoctrination but also to the subsequent development of effective programmes for their reintegration and monitoring. Here, forensic psychological assessment must integrate factors of post-traumatic stress, combat experience, and the resilience of extremist views. The UNODC report (Model Legislative Provisions, 2022) also emphasises the need for flexibility and adaptation of the legislative and methodological base in the fight against terrorism, which extends to psychological approaches. Furthermore, reports point to the emergence of new technological factors of radicalisation and attack planning, requiring the inclusion of digital footprint analysis and interaction with artificial intelligence (AI) in psychological assessment (Pfaff, 2025). Table 1 illustrates key aspects that must be considered when adapting psychological tools for assessing the risk of terrorism in the context of Central and South Asia, highlighting their specificities.

**Table 1.** Matrix for adapting western risk assessment tools (VERA-2R, ERG 22+) for the Central Asia (CA) and South Asia (SA) region

| Aspect of adaptation                  | Problem in existing tools   | Proposed modification for CA/SA   |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Cultural sensitivity                  | Items on social isolation do not account for the region’s collectivist values.  | Add assessment of the role of the extended family, clan, and tribe as a potential protective or, conversely, criminogenic factor (pressure, obligations of honour).                 |
| Religious specificity                 | The general item “Ideological Commitment” does not differentiate between traditional religious practices and extremist interpretations. | Include monitoring of informal financial systems (e.g., Hawala), analysis of specific online slang, and abrupt changes in social habits (renunciation of traditional celebrations). |
| Behavioural indicators                | Indicators of attack planning may not account for local methods of communication and financing.   | Include monitoring of informal financial systems (e.g., Hawala), analysis of specific online slang, and abrupt changes in social habits (renunciation of traditional celebrations). |
| Psychosocial factors                  | Items on personal grievances and trauma are overly general.   | Add specific assessment of the impact of historical conflicts, migration experience, and combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder in repatriated foreign fighters.             |
| Linguistic and communication barriers | Interview tools and protocols are primarily designed in English and do not account for local communication norms.                       | Develop and validate versions of tools and protocols in key regional languages (Pashto, Dari, Uzbek, etc.) involving linguists and cultural experts.                                |
| Legislative context                   | Tools are not integrated with national legal frameworks, including lists of proscribed organisations.                                   | Align risk factors with legal definitions of extremism and terrorism in the legislation of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan.  |
| Integration with digital analysis     | Traditional tools poorly cover online radicalisation processes, especially within closed communities.                                   | Add a separate domain for digital footprint analysis, including activity on encrypted messengers and interaction with AI-propagated propaganda.                                     |

**Source:** developed by the authors based on Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 191-IV (2009), Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 178-IV (2009), The fight against... (2019), Victims of terrorism (2020), K. Höffler *et al.* (2022), Country Reports on Terrorism (2023), C.A. Pfaff (2025), GTI (2025)

The developed approaches to adapting forensic psychological risk assessment tools for terrorism in the CA and SA regions are based on a deep understanding of the unique socio-cultural, religious, and behavioural characteristics of

these countries. Instead of directly copying Western models, a comprehensive strategy is proposed that considers specific regional dynamics. A key aspect is cultural sensitivity, which involves analysing the role of family, community,

and tribal ties, as well as religious authorities in radicalisation processes. This avoids simplified interpretations and the stigmatisation of religious views. Identifying religious specificity is significant, differentiating between traditional and moderate religious practices and extremist interpretations used by terrorist groups. These approaches also include the development of behavioural indicators relevant to local conditions, such as abrupt changes in appearance, social habits, rejection of traditional celebrations, or activity in closed extremist groups and informal financial support. Attention is paid to psychosocial factors, considering the impact of trauma, conflicts, migration experience, discrimination, as well as post-traumatic stress and combat experience among repatriates, which requires assessing their level of social support and resilience. The proposed approaches also involve adapting linguistic and communication barriers through the development of tests and interviews in local languages, considering dialectal and cultural nuances, as well as integrating digital footprint analysis and the use of artificial intelligence to detect patterns of radicalisation in the online environment, which is necessary for identifying latent threats. Thus, effective implementation of forensic psychological methods in the region requires not blind copying of Western models, but their careful adaptation, interdisciplinary validation, and localisation considering the local social, cultural, religious, legal, and political context. This entails conducting one's own empirical research to identify region-specific risk factors, developing relevant indicators for their assessment, and creating regionally sensitive intervention and monitoring protocols.

A systematic review conducted by A. Clesle *et al.* (2024) confirms that, despite the variety of risk assessment tools (VERA-2R, TRAP-18, ERG 22+, etc.), data on their predictive validity remain scarce. This means their ability to accurately predict future violence is limited and requires further study. This is a relevant aspect for Central and South Asia, where the lack of local validation studies makes the application of these tools even more risky. The research by Z.A. Sukabdi (2021) in Indonesia is an example of the necessity for adaptation: the development of the MIKRA tool, based on three domains (motivation, ideology, capability) and 18 individual risk factors, is the result of a deep analysis of the local context and the involvement of Indonesian experts. This approach is the direct opposite of simply “importing” Western methodologies and demonstrates a path that Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan could follow. The work of J. Kenyon *et al.* (2025) on the updated version of ERG-R, which considers the rise of online radicalisation, youth engagement, and the fluidity of ideologies, also underscores the need for constant adaptation of tools to the changing terrorism landscape. The inclusion of a fourth dimension – protective and risk-mitigating factors – is a necessary step, as it allows for a shift from mere risk assessment to the development of individualised intervention plans. This is needed for working with repatriates, where identifying and strengthening protective factors (e.g., family support, employment opportunities) can be key to successful reintegration.

### **Integrative profiling models, behavioural indicators, and interagency synergy in countering terrorism**

The application of forensic-psychological approaches for terrorism risk assessment in Kazakhstan and neighbouring countries necessitates the development of integrative profiling models that harmonise psychometric tools with unique regional behavioural indicators. Unlike static templates, these models must be dynamic and multifactorial, focusing on predicting potential radicalisation and propensity for violence, rather than merely identifying already formed terrorists. This entails the development of standardised, yet culturally-sensitive psychometric instruments that allow for the assessment of not only superficial ideological statements but also deep-seated motivational attitudes, cognitive distortions (e.g., dehumanisation of the enemy, justification of violence), affective regulation (anger control, impulsivity), and social support for extremist views. In the context of Kazakhstan, where an official national list of terrorist and extremist organisations exists, psychological profiling must incorporate an analysis of the narratives used by these groups for recruitment and their impact on the specific psychological characteristics of potential members. For instance, research could focus on how the preaching of the “caliphate” by ISK (GTI, 2025) resonates with certain personality traits or social frustrations. In Kazakhstan, where countering terrorism is a national security priority, this involves adapting psychometric tests that not only assess standard psychopathological traits but also measure perceptions of social injustice, the influence of group pressure, the level of identification with extremist narratives, and vulnerability to recruitment (The fight against..., 2019). A priority is the consideration of behavioural indicators that are specific to the Central Asian context, such as unusual changes in religious practice that deviate from traditional Islam, sudden withdrawal from family and community ties without apparent reasons, or the emergence in speech and digital communication of radical ideologemes characteristic of proscribed organisations, such as “Hizb ut-Tahrir” or “Tablighi Jamaat”, which are included in the national list of terrorist and extremist organisations in Kazakhstan (The fight against..., 2019). Additionally, given the activity of ISK and its multilingual media strategy, the analysis of the digital footprint of individuals who may be under the influence of extremist propaganda becomes a key behavioural indicator requiring enhanced psychological interpretation, not merely technical monitoring. This entails the development of standardised protocols for assessing the psychosocial status of individuals under suspicion and those returning from conflict zones, integrating data from open sources, social networks, and psychological testing adapted to the cultural norms of the region. This will allow not only for more accurate risk identification but also for distinguishing sincere religious beliefs from extremist ideology, avoiding unwarranted stigmatisation. Another critical component is ensuring effective collaboration between law enforcement, intelligence, and forensic-psychological agencies, supported by an appropriate legal framework. Kazakhstan

demonstrates significant progress in this direction, having ratified fourteen universal international counter-terrorism instruments and establishing an Anti-Terrorism Centre in 2003 to coordinate the activities of all security structures (The fight against..., 2019). Laws such as Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 191-IV (2009) and Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 178-IV (2009), regulate mechanisms for halting the dissemination of illegal information on the Internet and countering the financing of terrorism. These legislative acts create a foundation for integrating forensic-psychological expertise into operational activities. For example, psychologists can be involved in developing methodologies for identifying individuals involved in financing terrorism through complex digital transactions, as is the case with ISK, which uses blockchain to access \$2.5 million (GTI, 2025).

Cooperation with international organisations, such as the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), serves as

an example. Within the framework of the UNODC Global Programme on Passenger and Cargo Control (PCCP), the capabilities of Kazakhstan's border service were enhanced through the transfer of portable TruNarc analysers for detecting drugs and precursors (Kazakhstan and UNODC reinforce cooperation..., 2025). Although this initiative is aimed at combating drug trafficking, it demonstrates potential for expansion into counter-terrorism, where substance analysis and enhanced border control capabilities (including the modernised infrastructure of Almaty airport) can be integrated with psychological profiling to identify individuals transporting prohibited materials or having terrorist intentions. Table 2 demonstrates the multi-vector and comprehensive nature of Kazakhstan's interagency and international cooperation in countering terrorism, highlighting the potential for integrating forensic-psychological expertise at various levels.

**Table 2.** Key aspects of Kazakhstan's inter-agency and international cooperation in countering terrorism

| Entity/direction of cooperation                       | Description and role in the context of forensic psychological assessment  |
|---|---|
| Anti-terrorist centre of Kazakhstan                   | Coordinates the activities of all security agencies. Integration of psychologists to develop joint protocols for risk identification and assessment.  |
| UN international instruments                          | Ratification of 14 universal instruments. Cooperation with the UNSC CTC (Resolutions 1267, 1540). This creates a global legal basis for data exchange, which can include psychological profiles and assessment methods.                   |
| UNODC   | Global passenger and cargo control programme, transfer of TruNarc analysers. Potential for integrating psychological profiling into border control to identify individuals with terrorist intentions (including returnees).               |
| UNRCCA (Central Asia)                                 | Preventive diplomacy, regional cooperation in counter-terrorism. A platform for sharing best practices in forensic psychological risk assessment and deradicalisation.  |
| Regional organisations (CIS, SCO, CSTO, OSCE)         | Coordination of anti-terrorism measures, joint training, information sharing. Opportunity to develop and implement standardised psychological protocols adapted to the region. Astana OSCE Jubilee Declaration.                           |
| Kazakhstan's legislative base                         | Laws "On Countering the Legalisation...", "On Information and Communication Networks", "On Countering Terrorism". Provide the legal basis for conducting psychological expert examinations and the operational use of psychological data. |
| Global initiative to combat nuclear terrorism (GICNT) | Cooperation in preventing nuclear terrorism. Psychological profiling can assist in identifying individuals prone to involvement in such high-risk crimes.   |

**Note:** commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO); Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO); Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE); United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee (UNSC CTC)

**Source:** developed by the authors based on Resolution of the Security Council Committee of the United Nations No. 1267 (1999), Resolution of the Security Council Committee of the United Nations No. 1540 (2004), Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 191-IV (2009), Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 178-IV (2009), Astana jubilee declaration... (2010), The fight against... (2019), Kazakhstan and UNODC reinforce cooperation... (2025), UNRCCA (Central Asia) (2025), The Global Initiative... (2025)

The significance of cooperation between law enforcement and intelligence agencies in Central Asia is amplified by the transnational nature of the threat and the need for rapid response. Kazakhstan actively participates in regional cooperation, including the activities of the CIS, the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), and the CSTO, which allow for the coordination of anti-terrorism measures and information exchange (On Amendments and..., 2009; UNRCCA (Central Asia), 2025). This cooperation is complemented by international support, such as the UNRCCA mission, which focuses on preventive diplomacy and regional cooperation, including counter-terrorism, water management, and women and youth

security (UNRCCA (Central Asia), 2025). A fundamental aspect is the legal framework underpinning these efforts. Kazakhstan has adopted key documents, such as the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 266-IV (2010), which establishes the principles and model of the state system for countering terrorism (Kazakhstan on Counter-Terrorism..., 2019). These laws provide the legal basis for conducting intelligence operations, using special technical means, and performing forensic psychological examinations. Furthermore, Kazakhstan maintains continuous cooperation with the UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee and its committees for the implementation of Resolution No. 1267 (1999) (sanctions against

“Al-Qaeda”) and Resolution No. 1540 (2004) (nuclear non-proliferation), allowing for the integration of national efforts into the global context of the fight against terrorism (The fight against..., 2019). The emphasis on collective action, as seen at the OSCE Conference on Preventing Terrorism in Astana in 2010, where the Astana Declaration was adopted (Astana jubilee declaration..., 2010), testifies to a deep understanding that countering terrorism requires coordinated national and international efforts, supported by both legislative and psychological instruments (The fight against..., 2019). In particular, cooperation within the GIBATE (The Global Initiative..., 2025), where Kazakhstan is one of the first participants and conducted relevant exercises (“Atom-Antiterror – 2008”), underscores the multi-vector nature and strategic importance of these efforts (The fight against..., 2019). Thus, forensic-psychological expertise, embedded within a robust legislative and interagency system, is key to effectively countering modern terrorist threats in the region. This creates a platform for implementing standardised protocols for forensic-psychological risk assessment, based on best practices but adapted to regional needs, with a particular emphasis on effectiveness in preventing and responding to transnational threats, such as the activities of ISK. These efforts will ensure a comprehensive approach encompassing not only forceful confrontation but also psychological, preventive, and rehabilitative aspects.

The results of this research, emphasising the necessity of integrating psychological methods into legislative and law enforcement practice, find confirmation in the work of G.B. Zhussupova (2025), who, analysing Kazakhstan’s legal policy, concluded that, despite the existence of a solid legislative base, there are gaps in law enforcement, interagency coordination, and the ability to adapt to modern challenges, such as cyber-terrorism. The proposed integrative profiling models and psychometric tools can serve as one way to fill these gaps, providing law enforcement agencies with scientifically-grounded tools for more accurate risk assessment. The research of I. Diamant (2021) on the use of psychological tests for assessing suicide bombers and “lone actors” also confirms the importance of combining different methods. His conclusion about the low validity of self-report questionnaires and the high effectiveness of semi-structured interviews for uncovering deep-seated personal dynamics and traumatic experience aligns with this thesis on the necessity of developing comprehensive, culturally-sensitive assessment protocols. This is of paramount importance, as the meta-analysis by K.M. Sarma *et al.* (2022) did not confirm the widespread belief that terrorists have a higher level of mental disorders than the general population. This means the focus should not be on searching for psychopathologies but on analysing the complex psychosocial factors that lead to radicalisation, which is the central task of forensic-psychological risk assessment. It should also be noted that terrorist threats are not limited to religious extremism. The research of E. Chan (2023) on the “incel” community in Canada and its connection to gender-based violence demonstrates that

existing risk assessment frameworks may fail to account for new forms of extremism. This underscores the need for constant expansion and adaptation of risk assessment tools to detect new ideological threats that may be relevant for Central Asia as well. Thus, the results of this study not only describe the current situation but also propose a path towards building a more flexible, scientifically-grounded, and humane system for countering terrorism, where psychological expertise plays a central role in preventing violence and promoting reintegration.

## Conclusions

The conducted research has identified the key features of the evolution of terrorist threats and the necessity of rethinking traditional methods of counter-terrorism. It was established that the terrorist landscape of the region is characterised by a shift from hierarchical structures to more decentralised networks and individual actors, which creates significant challenges for security systems. The analysis showed that South Asia, particularly Pakistan, continues to be a region with a high level of terrorist activity, as confirmed by the increase in the number of attacks and casualties. At the same time, Central Asian countries, such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, while demonstrating lower indicators, face a potential increase in risks associated with transnational terrorist networks and the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters. This dynamic requires flexible and contextually sensitive approaches to risk assessment.

Existing Western risk assessment models, despite their efficacy, require adaptation, as they do not always fully account for regional specificities, particularly the complex interplay of ideological, social, and personal motivations. In light of this, a number of adapted forensic psychological approaches have been developed, which entail profound cultural sensitivity, distinguishing religious specificity from extremism, identifying regionally relevant behavioural indicators, analysing psychosocial factors, adapting to linguistic and communication barriers, considering the legislative context, and integrating AI into digital analysis. These approaches enable the formation of more accurate and contextually grounded mechanisms for assessing the risk of terrorism in CA and SA. The identified problem underscores the necessity of moving away from universal templates towards a more differentiated and individualised analysis. In particular, the importance of considering local dialects and cultural nuances in communication with suspects and victims is paramount for obtaining reliable information and establishing rapport. The integration of artificial intelligence into big data analysis processes, including digital footprints, will facilitate the detection of hidden patterns and the prediction of potential threats with greater accuracy than traditional methods. This will also enhance the preventive potential of counter-terrorism measures, contributing to more effective prevention of radicalisation and recruitment.

The creation of specialised inter-agency teams, comprising psychologists, sociologists and/or religious studies

scholars, and security experts, is recommended for a comprehensive assessment of radicalisation risks. Focus should be placed on developing rehabilitation programmes that consider the psychological needs and ideological beliefs of individuals involved in terrorism, with an emphasis on recidivism prevention. Furthermore, it is necessary to enhance international and regional cooperation, particularly the exchange of experience and best practices in the field of forensic psychological assessment. The principal avenues for further research involve conducting empirical studies to verify and adapt existing psychological tests and risk assessment methodologies for target groups in Central and South Asia. Subsequent work may include the development of new profiling tools that account for the influence of digital technologies and artificial intelligence on the processes of radicalisation and recruitment.

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A. Adilov developed the research concept and methodology, whilst S. Dosumov and A. Kasimov collected materials and analysed data on the risks of terrorism in Central and South Asia. The authors jointly prepared the manuscript, formulated adapted forensic psychological approaches and approved the final version of the article.

## Conflict of Interest

None.

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