

Making Sense of Kazak Shootings

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IWPR reporting on violence in Kazakhstan adds facts and nuances to local coverage.

When violent incidents were attributed to Islamic extremists in the west of Kazakhstan this summer, it was sometimes hard to distinguish fact from conjecture in the various accounts of what was going on.

Leading Central Asia-watchers say a series of IWPR reports assessing the role of radical Islam and the Kazak government's response provided a clear steer on developments on an under-reported part of Kazakhstan.

In **Kazak Police Eliminate "Islamic" Cop-Killers**, IWPR reporters pieced together the sequence of events leading from the murder of two police officers to a massive operation that ended in the deaths of nine suspects.

The report also contained interviews with experts who argued that since local resentment of the police is already so high, the authorities need to calibrate their responses to security threats so as to avoid making things worse.

Subsequent pieces were commissioned to tease out other aspects of a complex set of problems. A newspaper editor in Atyrau provided background on the various Islamic groupings now active in the country, and evaluated the extent to which they posed a security threat. (See **West Kazakhstan Under Growing Islamic Influence**.) In **Kazakhstan's Islamists: Radicals or Scapegoats?**, Amnesty International researcher Maisy Weicherding added a human rights perspective, arguing that persecuting faith groups simply for operating outside the state's control is liable to drive members to join more extreme movements operating underground.

Vitaly Ponomarev, who heads the Central Asia programme of the Moscow-based Memorial group, said since information from official sources is often distorted and local media coverage less than ideal, IWPR's articles on events in west Kazakhstan "enable the reader to form a relatively objective picture... which is particularly important given the lack of serious expert research on the Islamic groups operating in Kazakhstan".

Dmitry Orlov, an analyst with the East-West Strategy think-tanks said it was important for people in Kazakhstan to be informed about developments in their country. "For this purpose, I think IWPR's reports are the most professionally done, not least because they present the readers with a range of points of view on a particular issue. Unfortunately, not all media can claim to take this approach to reporting."

As a result, he said, few people were able to distinguish between different kinds of Islamist group.

Orlov said the measure of an article's quality was that if a reader felt impelled to tell others about it, the journalists' job was done.

"IWPR has a lot of reports like that," he added.

Another political analyst in Kazakhstan, Dmitry Tian, said IWPR's reporting was "an objective reflection of what's really going on in western Kazakhstan".

"I would point out its in-depth analysis of the relationship between government and religious groups. This facilitates a better understanding of the problem from the inside, and from various standpoints based on the range of views and opinions cited," he added.

Almaz Rysaliev is IWPR editor in Kazakhstan.

Location: [Kazakhstan](#)

Topic: [Conflict](#)

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