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CERTAIN ASPECTS OF REGIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES AND THREATS IN CENTRAL ASIA

This article aims to discuss the three levels of security threats in Central Asia - domestic, regional and extra regional threats and their importance. The author argues that domestic security threats comprise ethnocratic pattern of states and regional division of political elites in countries of this region, inefficiency of institutions, social and ulterior economic problems.

Through assessing all levels of security threats in Central Asia article argues that Central Asian countries should intensify regional cooperation in order to deal with the existing challenges and threats.

***Keywords:** Central Asia, security threats, domestic threats, regional threats, extra regional threats, regional cooperation.*

Introduction

The object of this study is challenges and threats to security in Central Asia.

Literature review. The problems of national and regional security became object of study for Kazakh, Russian and foreign scientific thought.

Among recent works of Kazakhstani authors studying the problems of national and regional security, the works of the following authors should be highlighted: E.T.Karina [1], S.M.Akimbekova [2], S.K.Kushkumbayeva [3], M.T.Laumulina [4], K.L.Syroezhkina [5]. These papers primarily address specific challenges and security threats (terrorism, drug trafficking, Afghan problem), interrelations among great powers in Central Asia, Chinese factor of regional security, activities of SCO, CSTO and NATO. These works share a common concept of geopolitical situation in the region.

It is necessary to highlight analytical report of KazISS (Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of Kazakhstan) «New challenges and threats in Central Asia in the context of geopolitical situation in the neighboring regions' [6], where the authors clearly link the concept of «regional security with a particular region - Central Asia.

Among the Russian authors we distinguish works of V.E.Petrovskiy[7], A.D.Bogaturov [8], A.D.Voskresenskiy [9] and A.I.Smirnov [10]. In these works it is noted that projects of Russia, USA and China focused their attention on the formation of security system in Central Asia. Security issues are central to such organizations operating in the former Soviet Union, such as the CIS, CSTO and SCO. It seems that the division of «areas of responsibility» between the CSTO, CIS and SCO promotes more effective solution to security issues in Central Asia. [11]

The researchers conclude that in CIS there are three safety protection projects for Central Asia: a unified air defense system, peacekeeping activities and anti-terrorist center of CIS.

While writing the work, the significant importance was given to a collaborative collection of Russian and Central Asian scholars - «Security Challenges in Central Asia» [12], which addressed the global, regional, national, political, economic and military factors and aspects of security situation in Central Asia, where particular attention was paid to the role of key players in the region.

These works have common research methodology selected by authors: a systematic approach that allows creating a comprehensive view of the current geopolitical situation in the region, as well as historical and comparative analysis for comparison of interests involved in regional policy, where the author of this work also relied on this type of analysis.

The articles and monographs of foreign researchers consider diverse aspects. Among the analytical works on the

security of the region, the work of foreign experts, such as S. Akiner [13] R. Dannroyter [14] M.B.Olkotg [15] should be highlighted.

The problems of thesis. All studied literature is of great importance for understanding the designated topic. But we shall admit that the majority of these works is devoted to research of one of the players, or bilateral relations, and studies of the functioning and development of an international or regional organization. This narrows down the comprehensive vision of the system of regional security in the CAR (Central Asian Republics) and provides an integrated view of the problem of security challenges and threats in Central Asia. The author will attempt to do the following:

The aim of this work is to consider challenges and security threats in Central Asia at various levels in a comprehensive approach.

To address this the following research objectives were set:

- to examine the internal (national) level of regional security;
- to analyze the regional level security threats
- to investigate the extra-regional security threats;
- to assess their relative level of importance
- to make some recommendations based on an analysis of challenges and threats to security in Central Asia.

Hypotheses. The author suggests that internal security threats depend on the specificity of ethnocratic states, the regional division of political elites in the region, ineffectiveness of political institutions, as well as latent economic and social problems.

The author believes that the problem of the legal status of the Caspian Sea, existence of potential conflicts, frozen conflict zones, existence of ethnic enclaves, water «wars» and drug trafficking are the main regional security threats.

Presumably, the main threats to regional security in Central Asia are the withdrawal of US troops from

Afghanistan, intensification of China's activities in the region, as well as Uighur separatism.

Besides that, it is expected that the Central Asian countries should strengthen their regional cooperation in order to face current challenges and threats.

The variables used in the analysis of security in Central Asia include conflict zones, demilitarized border, level of development of economy, development of state institutions, economic and social problems, and others.

Applied methods. While writing the work, the author relied on the theory of political realism the representatives of which are N. Machiavelli [16] K. von Clausewitz [17] G. Morgenthau [18] R. Aron [19] and others, who considered security as the primary interest of any state as well as the causes of their violent confrontation on the world arena. The famous theorists in world of international relations and the followers of liberal paradigm, namely, Hugo Grotius [20] K. Deutsch [21] D. Mitrani [22] and etc., built their own system of safety studies on the recognition of the interdependence of global actors and their attempt to develop comprehensive cooperation.

Moreover, this work designates special attention the work of recognized expert in the field of international security, B. Buzan [23], who considers security in terms of different levels of its formation (personal, national and international), and stresses the need for a comprehensive study of safety issues according to the sectors: politics, economy, ecology, etc.

The main methods, the use of which helped to solve the tasks, were general scientific methods, such as analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, factor analysis; special methods of analyzing information, included historical method, comparative method, retrospective method; as well as the methods of the theory of international relations, namely, the method of scenarios construction, modeling, SWOT-analysis and others.

Domestic Level of Regional Security

To investigate defined problem, the author decided to implement the most developed and efficient methodology for the analysis of the regional dimension of international politics - theory of regional security complexes (TRSC), set out by Englishman, Barry Buzan, and Dane, Ole Waever, in their book «Regions and Powers: structure of international security» [24].

I like the idea of TRSC, which claims that, despite globalization, the majority of security threats in international relations still have a territorial nature, and their extent depend directly on the geographical distance. Buzan and Waever emphasize that «TRSC is a theory, in which the geographical factors take central place.» Most states are anxious, mainly, due to the power potential and intentions of their neighbors. In view of this, the relationship of security interdependence is usually concentrated in regional clusters or «security complexes».

In the analysis of threats and challenges to security in Central Asia the thesis Buzan and Waever is applicable, which says that «a set of actors, processes, securitization de-securitization are so interconnected that the problems of safety of these actors cannot be analyzed or separated from each other.»

When working with the source it was helpful that TRSC widely uses constructivist as well as realist approaches. The constructivist component of TRSC is that it relies on the theory of securitization that is on the analysis of the socio-political processes by which given problems receive the status of safety issues. The intense geopolitical component, emphasis on territoriality of major international actors (states) and the polarity of the distribution of power between them bring it together with realism.

However, unlike the most influential trend of contemporary realist paradigm - neorealism, which focuses on the level of global system, TRSC stresses the regional dimension of international politics.

Relying on the ideas outlined above, the author by solving the tasks, came to some conclusions. At first, since getting independence in 1990s Central Asian states practiced different approaches to nation- and state-building, however, by mid-2000s all countries (except for Kyrgyzstan) consolidated into authoritarian regimes with various degrees of political openness and maturity of market economy. Still, some countries proved to be more stable, while others failed to develop efficient institutions. This is typical for small countries like Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Although the reasons for institutions failure in these two countries vary, the weakness of the state authorities in these republics negatively affects the regional security in Central Asia.

Second, the parallel processes of nation building and state-building led to the ethnocratic character of states. All Central Asian republics represent the countries where population originates from various ethnic groups and their peaceful interaction inside the countries is a key to both state and regional security. Although officially states guarantee access to power to all ethnic groups, in reality the government is dominated by leading ethnos. Obviously, this process varies across states; however even Kazakhstan, which attempts to develop civic identity over ethno-national one, faces the conflict of interests with conflict potential. This issue became evident during 2010 events in Osh when power conflict was transformed into violence between Kyrgyz and Uzbek population of the region.

The third domestic factor contributing to regional security is disunity of elites and regionalism/tribalism. The political power in Central Asian republics largely relies on clan relations and ties, rather than political values and identity. The presence of different clans in politics of all Central Asian countries and their constant rivalry for power affects the domestic stability of the states, and thus challenges regional security. The issue of successor adds up

another point of concern to the continuing rivalry between elites in Central Asia.

Last, but not least, the social and economic development of republics varies substantially. Central Asian states fall between a) middle-income economies (Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan) able to provide certain level of living standard and b) economies dependent on remittances and foreign aid (Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan). These economic differences create problems through intensification of labor migration (sometimes illegal) from low-income economies to better doing neighboring countries further deteriorating the possibilities of economic growth at home. Moreover, the permanent economic inefficiency and inability of state to provide better living conditions became a ground for open social unrest as well as extremism. In this regard, continuous revolutions in Kyrgyzstan might serve as good illustration of the argument.

Thus, social unrest in one of the Central Asian republics might sparkle region-wide instability and thus ability of state to prevent such unrest through providing higher living standards becomes crucial for regional security.

Regional Level of Security Threats

The regional level of security threats includes issue of legal status of Caspian Sea, terrorist activities, territorial disputes among states of the region complemented by ethnic controversies, tensions over water and energy resources, problems of drug trafficking and inefficiency of regional organizations.

More than 20 years have passed since the collapse of the USSR, countries bordering Caspian Sea were not able to come to the decision over its legal status and the exact borders. By now Russia, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan agreed on demarcation of the seabed, dividing 64% of the Caspian Sea floor among them. Iran and Turkmenistan do not agree to the schemes offered by other bordering countries; Iran, for instances, can not find a common denominator with

Azerbaijan. Even the past four Summits did not solve all the contentious issues of the Caspian states. Although this issue did not bring open confrontation among bordering countries, its existence affects the usage of Caspian Sea resources, including oil and gas as well as construction of oil and gas pipelines in the region and thus endangers security of states and region as a whole.

The issue of proliferating terrorism and extremism remains to be crucial for Central Asian security. The ongoing ISAF mission in Afghanistan as well as deterioration of domestic economic and social situation in Central Asian republics contribute to increase in number of terrorist and fundamentalist groups in the region. Islamic extremist organizations are active in all five countries; even Kazakhstan, most stable and prosperous country of the region, experienced terrorist attacks recently. Moreover, Fergana valley remains to be a source of potential conflict in a region, where Islamic fundamentalists fuel social and economic problems. The other point of concern is Pamir area of Tajikistan, which is weakly controlled by central government and through shared border with Afghanistan falls under influence of the processes going on in that country.

The third regional source of security threat is the heritage of the Soviet Union. The collapse of the SU led to the painful process of border delimitation and created a zone of ethnic enclaves in the region. The actual state borders in Central Asia do not coincide with the ethnic borders. While that might be true for many countries worldwide, in Central Asia this discrepancy is complemented by nation building process, which is mainly driven by ethnic identity. For instance, more than 600 thousand Uzbeks live in Osh and Jalal Abad areas of Kyrgyzstan and this number is equal to mainly Kyrgyz population inhabiting Talas and Issyk Kul regions of Kyrgyzstan. Similar regions exist in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. This creates potential for conflict, and recent border conflicts between Tajikistan and

Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are illustrative in this regard.

The other source of potential conflict in Central Asia is water and energy resources. The countries of the region are divided into water rich and energy rich republics. During Soviet time water usage and energy systems of the region were united in one complex, providing enough water and energy for those in need. However, the collapse of the SU led to nationalization of the parts of the system and water became a source of conflict. Upper stream countries Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan attempts to use it to get access to the energy resources of neighboring countries as they do not have enough resources at home, while downstream countries Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan attempt to secure their access to water supply for their agriculture. The existing plans of constructing Kambarata (Kyrgyzstan) and Rogun (Tajikistan) hydropower plants fuels fears of downstream countries to loose water supply for agriculture. This is vital for Uzbekistan, which heavily relies on water from Tajikistan in its cotton production; recently Tashkent even threatened to start a war in case Tajikistan continues to build Rogun HPP.

Drug trafficking has become another threat to regional security in Central Asia. The unequipped borders, inexperienced border control personnel, proliferation of criminals in early 1990s and corruption in the region as well as increased drugs production in Afghanistan made Central Asian states a transit route for drugs from Afghanistan to Russia and further to Europe. Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan's borders with Afghanistan have become starting point of this route, which encompasses Kazakhstan. While previously drugs were delivered to Russia and Europe, recently some of the narcotics began to be left in the region to cover domestic demand in drugs. Obviously, drug trafficking leads to criminalization of the countries and might weaken state authorities, thus destabilizing the region.

Last, but not least, Central Asia lacks efficient and strong regional organization. In reality, countries of the region were not able to unite under one roof to fight against security threats and ensure prosperity of the region in these years. Instead, region became divided among different organizations, none of them able to fully take responsibility for regional security. Moreover, the idea of Central Asian unity became devaluated, as countries switched for bilateral solutions or changed their priorities.

Thus, the failure to solve the problems by Central Asian states continues to create certain security risks at the regional level.

Extra Regional Security Threats.

Since United States proclaimed their decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan by 2014, scholars and policy-makers started their debate on the consequences of such withdrawal for global and regional security. For Central Asian countries withdrawal of NATO troops from unstable Afghanistan is a nightmare as it is obvious that Central Asian republics are not able to protect themselves from threats originating in that country.

Along with post-2014 challenges in form of growing Islamic fundamentalism and extremism, withdrawal issue has other dimension. US and other NATO members participated in ISAF uses territory of Central Asian republics for transit of its military equipment and weapons through so called Northern Route. It covers railways of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, as well as port Aktau in Kazakhstan. There is serious concern that during transportation, the military equipment might be lost or stolen and slip to the black market. Taking into consideration instability of Central Asian states, high level of corruption, integration of some authority representatives in the Southern Kazakhstan and several areas of Tajikistan with criminal structures will probably lead to the equipment plunder and destruction. Moreover, it could be used for organization and conduction

of diversified activity in the eastern direction of the route, in the close proximity of Xinjiang-Uyghur autonomous area in China, where strong separatists forces exist. The second extra regional security threat is connected to growing Chinese involvement in Central Asia both economically and politically. This growing presence of China revives "New Great Game" in Central Asia, affecting stability and security of the region. States of the region is forced to seek their ways to maneuver among powers engaged in rivalry. The paradox of the situation is that all powers involved in "Great Game" is interested in stability of the region, but they also seek to maximize their own influence, and the competition for influence proportionally affects stability. It is hard to keep fragile equilibrium of powers in the region, however it is needed to keep it stable and secure.

The third most important threat is Uyghur separatism in Xinjiang, China, reinforced by the US and the number of European states. Although China invests a lot into combating separatist movements in Xinjiang, her efforts might be insufficient. Additionally, bordering regions of Central Asian states are inhabited by Uyghur people who might support separatists by providing shelter and assistance in case of need and this will complicate bilateral relations of Central Asian republics with China. Moreover, this separatism might endanger territorial integrity of states; for instance Kazakhstan has large Uyghur diaspora living mainly in Almaty region adjacent to Chinese border and it might attempt to unite with Chinese Uyghur to create independent state.

Thus, we see that Central Asia has a complex of problems associated with non-regional security threats. Moreover, one of the states are not able to cope with these threats and challenges on their own.

Conclusion

Analyzing all the issues related to the threats and security challenges in Central Asia, the author made several

conclusions. Central Asia is a region in which the different levels of security threats interact and intersect with each other, creating a complex network of issues. This paper made an attempt to present the most significant threats to security, which arise at different levels - national, regional and extra-regional, and their impact on security in Central Asia.

The opinion of the author is that, despite the fact that the impact of the various threats to regional security change, all of them remain to be important.

There is no doubt that the Central Asian states are not able to deal with all the security threats alone, especially with those that emerged at the regional and extra-regional level. Thus, countries require regional cooperation, as well as external security guarantees provided by great powers.

Nonetheless, different views on regional security, its threats and challenges, as well as the tools for security provision, both within the region and among participating nations, significantly influence the effectiveness of security regime in Central Asia. In this regard, it is recommended for the Central Asian Republics to fully exploit the potential of regional security organizations such as CSTO and SCO, and, where possible, promote inter-organizational cooperation between them.

Each chapter can further become a separate subject of study and be useful for understanding and solving all issues related to minimization of threats and security challenges in Central Asia.

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