

TAJIKISTAN'S NATIONAL SECURITY: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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After 9/11, national security in our republic has become a task of global proportions. The fact that Tajikistan and other Central Asian states assisted the U.S. antiterrorist campaign in Afghanistan was conducive to moving the region from the periphery of international life to the center of world attention. Tajikistan has been transformed into a buffer country for opposing the spread of international terrorism, religious extremism, and drug trafficking in the world.

The further normalization of sociopolitical life in Afghanistan, the formation of long-term fundamentals for ensuring security in Central Asia, as well as the growing attention of the international community, particularly of the world's top nations, are creating unique prerequisites for the comprehensive development of both the region and its individual countries. But here there are still several threats and challenges to security which require the closest cooperation between Tajikistan and other Central Asian republics in order to combat.

Drug Trafficking

The difficult economic and sociopolitical situation in neighboring Afghanistan and the fact that its population does not have any legal sources of existence are the main reasons for the development of the drug business in this country. Despite the fact that the Khamid Karzai government has forbidden the growing of opium poppy, the area on which this drug is cultivated is not shrinking. The local peasants, who for

over twenty years have relied on their own efforts to survive, place all their hopes on opium poppy, each hectare of which yields ten-fold more revenue than one hectare of wheat.

When the antiterrorist coalition troops appeared in the country, the attitude of the indigenous population toward this poison did not change, on the contrary, it continued to be harvested at the level espoused by the Taliban. The weakness of the central authorities only added fuel to the fire. According to the estimates of the U.N. International Drug Control Agency, in 2002, the opium poppy harvest was close to the 2000-level and amounted to 1,900-2,700 tons. What is more, according to the reports of the foreign press, during the antiterrorist campaign in the country, the mini heroin-producing factories remained unscathed.

These days, the Afghani drug emirs increasingly prefer to transport drugs via the Central Asian route, which takes the poison to Russia and then on to Europe. This has turned Tajikistan and other countries of the region into a major junction for drug transit to the West. This is inevitably leading to an increase in drug use in the Central Asian republics as well.

The Drug Control Agency under the U.N. aegis operating under the Tajikistan president is making an immense contribution to the fight against drug trafficking. And our country occupies a prominent place in the world and first place in the CIS in terms of drug confiscation. But the employees of this agency have still not managed to arrest a single major drug emir. And the republic will not be able to erect a sturdy barrier to contain this growing surge on its own. The main reason for this is the huge number of poor people in the country, who are willing for a mere pittance to fill the ranks of drug couriers. What is more, the states of the region are striving to reinforce their own borders in order to prevent the poison from coming into their territory. However, they are not concentrating the necessary attention on Central Asia's outer frontiers, that is, efforts must be exerted to intercept the problem at its source and stop drugs from moving beyond Afghanistan's borders. Sometimes this even causes regional cooperation difficulties in other areas. In addition to reinforcing their borders, which in some cases are quite a distance from Afghanistan, these countries must pay more attention to developing cooperation in drug trafficking prevention. Success in this area will ultimately help to strengthen ties between the Central Asian republics in other areas too.

The Threat of Regional Extremism

Along with drugs, a serious threat to the security of individual countries and the entire region is posed by the activity of religious extremist organizations like Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Under the cover of Islamic slogans, they are attempting to overthrow the constitutional structure in the Central Asian states and prevent their further secular development.

There is no doubt that the decisiveness and consistency of the world community's fight against terrorism and extremism, particularly in Afghanistan, have weakened the armed wing of the extremist forces in the region. But they still threaten its stability and, with financial and material support from the outside, could step up their ideological and other activity, of which the penetrating raids by IMU militants are evidence. For example, in 1999 and 2000, they left Afghanistan and passed through the rough inaccessible mountainous terrain of Tajikistan into Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, seriously aggravating bilateral relations between the states of the region. And Uzbekistan even set up mines on its border, stating that it would not remove them until final delimitation and demarcation of its state borders had been carried out. Although, after the antiterrorist campaign, the IMU moved its bases to the border regions of Pakistan and lost several of its ringleaders, it still retained the backbone of the organization and under favorable conditions and with support from regional and world terrorist centers could return to Central Asia, bringing destabilization in its wake.

As for Hizb ut-Tahrir, this party is in favor of building a united technocratic state (Islamic caliphate) not only in an individual Muslim country, but throughout the entire Islamic space, thus posing a threat to

the sovereign development of all Muslim countries. In this respect, particular attention should be paid to the Ferghana Valley, certain parts of which have been divvied up among three states, which gives them a special responsibility for ensuring national and regional security.

But here we see a different approach to political Islam. Uzbekistan is accused of having an overly tough reaction to it. Official Tashkent not only imprisons members and supporters of Hizb ut-Tahrir and the IMU, but also zealous Muslims. Uzbekistan in turn is accusing Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan of a liberal attitude toward Islam, especially Dushanbe, where the republic's Islamic Revival Party is legally participating in sociopolitical life. Spread of the ideas of Hizb ut-Tahrir from the Ferghana Valley to the Sogd Region and on to the south is arousing serious concern among the political leadership of Tajikistan, which is paying increasing attention to this radical organization and is beginning to exert efforts to eliminate it.

A common approach of the regional states to eliminating the threats of religious extremism will make it easier to fight it, but a set of military-political, financial, diplomatic, political-legal, and other measures must be drawn up in this area, as well as efforts exerted by the region's public organizations.

Integration and Disintegration Processes in the Region

Threats to regional security as a whole and the national security of each Central Asian country individually may be posed by a deterioration in relations both among each other, and with neighboring countries or with world nations.

The borders of Central Asia are quite extensive, open, and relatively poorly defended, and its republics are building their armed forces on the basis of their own defense strategy. But their aggregate power in terms of numerical strength and force is nowhere close to that of the armies of Russia, China, or NATO, which (in addition to everything else) also possess nuclear weapons. So it is clear that the region's countries will be able to defend their sovereignty and territorial integrity only in a collective security system. Their more than ten years of independent development show that they are ensuring their security primarily on the basis of good-neighborly relations, and not with the help of armed forces.

In order to further develop trade at the international level, these landlocked countries must procure access to the world oceans, that is, free transit of cargo through neighboring states and regions. In turn, Central Asia can become a convenient crossroads between the Far and Middle East, and between North Eurasia and South Asia. So all the countries of the region are exerting efforts to restore the Great Silk Road. A clear example of these efforts is the Silk Railroad (Trans-Eurasian Railroad Beijing-Almaty-Istanbul and on to Europe). What is more, international airports have been reconstructed in Kazakhstan (Almaty), Uzbekistan (Tashkent), and other countries located half way between Beijing, Tokyo, and Singapore (in the Asia Pacific Region). Stabilization of political life in Afghanistan, which is geographically located in Central Asia, is leading to activation of the southern route, which provides access to one of the nearest world ports, Karachi, and this means to the Indian Ocean.

Keeping in mind the region's geopolitical status, as well as the unique ethnodemographic composition of its population, and vast mineral supplies, primarily energy resources, the only possible foreign policy strategy the Central Asian states can conduct, according to experts, is friendly relations with all the states of the world, primarily within the region and with neighboring countries.

Geopolitical Rivalry of the Leading World Nations for Domination in Central Asia

The dynamic military and political changes that began in the region after 9/11 have put an end to Russia's monopoly position here. In the new situation, Moscow has been forced to correlate its status and

strategy, since it has to take into consideration the interests of the “new players,” mainly the U.S., PRC, Turkey, Iran, Japan, India, Pakistan, and the European Union.

Within the framework of the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization), it was able not only to keep its 201st division and significant border contingents in Tajikistan, but also create a new air base in Kant (Kyrgyzstan).

A discussion is gaining momentum in Tajik society about Russia’s military presence in the republic. Giving Moscow’s efforts in the peacekeeping processes and its contribution to the achievement of national consent in our republic their due, many domestic experts are nevertheless displeased with the clear imbalance in bilateral relations, with preference going to the military sphere to the detriment of trade and economic ties. Even the labor migration of many Tajiks (more than 10% of the country’s population) to Russia, the monetary injections into the republic from which are many times higher than the annual budget of our republic, does nothing to appease most of these critics. However, in our opinion, Russia’s military presence is strengthening national security in post-conflict Tajikistan. But Dushanbe must still look for new mutually advantageous spheres of cooperation, which would meet the national interests of both sovereign states.

Recently, due to the destructive appeals and demarches of some of Russia’s political forces regarding nation-building in the Central Asian countries and the formation of contemporary nations in the region’s republics, the West, in particular the U.S., took over the initiative from Moscow in supporting this process.

Washington’s official representatives are trying to explain their interests in the region, including in Tajikistan, by making statements in the mass media that the main objective of their efforts in this area is to create democratic political institutions here, carry out market reforms aimed at accelerating economic development, establish stronger regional cooperation, as well as integration of the Central Asian republics into the world community, conduct effective security policy, including combating terrorism, and intercepting drug trafficking.

There is no doubt that young sovereign Tajikistan must develop ties with the West, particularly with the U.S., in order to carry out structural reform of its economy and ensure infrastructure development in other areas too. But we must keep in mind that further augmentation of the West’s military presence will arouse not only Russia’s displeasure, but also that of Tajikistan’s other partners, China and Iran, which will upset the balance of interests.

In conclusion it should be stressed that in the new geopolitical situation, sovereign Tajikistan will inevitably encounter numerous challenges and obstacles. Some of them the republic is resolving within the CSTO, SCO, and other organizations, in which it is an equal partner. Economic problems are helping to step up cooperation with other players as well, primarily with Western states and with China, whereby special attention must be focused on increasing trade turnover with Beijing. Active cooperation with the West is also necessary for building a civil society and affecting its democratization, and the threats to national security from international terrorism and the drug mafia are causing a further intensification of ties with Russia and the countries of the antiterrorist coalition.

Keeping in mind this complex set of interrelations with foreign partners, which are in direct or indirect competition with each other, a balance must be observed and an obvious list toward one pole of force or the other avoided, while always keeping an eye on the most important thing, the country’s national interests.