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Security of Central Asian region after 2014 and the Military Doctrine of Kazakhstan

This study assesses the security interests and concerns for each of the Central States in response to the progressive withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops through 2014, as well as their associated political wills and capacities to implement them individually or collectively. As it evolves throughout its security, political, and economic transitions, the stability of the region is also directly affected by the success or failure of their initiatives. The Central Asian countries and other northern neighbors are concerned that Afghanistan's security forces will not be ready to carry the responsibility of autonomously maintaining stability in the country, in order to foster the political and economic developments required to protect and implement their bi-lateral or multi-lateral initiatives for Afghanistan's future.

Key words: Security, Central Asia states, Afghanistan, NATO troops, security forces, military violence, terrorism

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Бұл зерттеу Орталық Азия мемлекеттерінің әрқайсысының АҚШ пен НАТО әскерлерінің 2014 жылға дейін шығарылуына жауап ретіндегі қауіпсіздік мүдделері мен мәселелерін, сонымен қатар оларды жеке және ұжымдық жүзеге асырумен байланысты саяси еріктерімен мүмкіндіктерін бағалайды.

Аймақтың тұрақтылығы мемлекеттердің қауіпсіздік, саяси және экономикалық өзгерулерімен бірге олардың бастамаларының сәттілігі және сәтсіздігімен тікелей байланысты. Орталық Азия мемлекеттерімен олардың солтүстіктегі көршілері Ауғанстанның болашағына арналған екі жақты және көп жақты бастамаларын қорғауға қажетті саяси және экономикалық дамуына ықпал ететін мемлекеттің ішіндегі тұрақтылықты сақтау жауапкершілігін Ауғанстанның қауіпсіздік күштері жеке дара атқара алмайтындығына алаңдаулы.

Түйін сөздер: Қауіпсіздік, Орталық Азия мемлекеттері, Ауғанстан, НАТО, қауіпсіздік күші, әскери қысым, терроризм

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Безопасность Центральноазиатского региона после 2014 года и Военная доктрина Казахстана

В связи с постепенным выводом войск НАТО и США из Афганистана в 2014 г. рассматривается проблема новых вызовов безопасности в Центральной Азии. Показаны интересы, степень готовности и политической воли каждой из стран ЦА по обеспечению безопасности на индивидуальном и на коллективном уровне. В целом состояние безопасности зависит от политических и экономических преобразований в странах региона, немалое значение имеют выдвигаемые инициативы и успешность их реализации.

Республики Центральной Азии и все северные соседи Афганистана выражают обеспокоенность тем, что автономных усилий по поддержанию стабильности недостаточно, а мера ответственности не определена международным правом, чтобы реализовывать двусторонние или многосторонние инициативы, и чтобы оказать содействие политическим и экономическим преобразованиям Афганистана.

Ключевые слова: безопасность, государства Центральной Азии, Афганистан, НАТО, силы безопасности, военное насилие, терроризм.

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, NATO and allied forces intervened to Afghanistan, to dismantle the al-Qaeda terrorist

organization and to remove from power the Taliban government, which at the time controlled 90% of Afghanistan and hosted al-Qaeda leadership. U.S.

President George W. Bush demanded that the Taliban hand over Osama bin Laden and expel the al-Qaeda network which was supporting the Taliban in its war with the Afghan Northern Alliance. As a result, on 2 May 2011, U.S. Navy SEALs killed Osama bin Laden in Abbotabad, Pakistan. About three weeks later, NATO leaders endorsed an exit strategy for removing their soldiers from Afghanistan.

Therefore, on June 2011 Barack Obama declared that all US combat troops are scheduled to leave the country by the end of 2014 [1]. After this declaration many experts wrote about threats which probably may occur after withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. Of course fear came from neighboring countries, especially Central Asian states. As the year 2014 approaches, the Central Asian states and other northern neighbors are concerned that Afghanistan's security forces will not be ready to carry the responsibility of autonomously maintaining stability in the country, in order to foster the political and economic developments required to protect and implement their bilateral or multilateral initiatives for Afghanistan's future. It also assesses the potential of the region to collaborate in concert with regional initiatives and organizations also concerned with the transition of security responsibility in Afghanistan (Timothy A. Krambs) [2].

Besides, the situation in Afghanistan continues to be key threats to the stability of Central Asia since the country's leaders still face major challenges to resolve fundamental socio-economic, political and military problems. Afghanistan also remains the epicenter of drug traffic expansion into Central Asia, from where there is an ever-increasing volume of illegal drugs into Russia and the East European markets along the so-called 'north route' through Central Asia, which is used as a transit corridor. A serious threat to security throughout the region is posed by the complex military-political situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where terrorism and religious extremism have concentrated their main ideological and combatant forces and the special training camps of al-Qaeda, the Taliban, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, the Jihad Group or Islamic Jihad Union and others. In the contemporary context, especially following the 2014 US and NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan, this will create real conditions for emissaries and militants of these organizations to move in and fuel terrorist and

extremist manifestations in Central Asia, including Kyrgyzstan.

Each country in Central Asia has its own view of Afghanistan and its own goals post-U.S. withdrawal. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are largely failed states. Their governments are extremely volatile, and Moscow weighs in heavily on their actions. The Manas Air Base, located in Kyrgyzstan, has been a point of contention in the region since it opened its doors in late 2001. Manas has served as a base of support for ongoing U.S. military operations in Afghanistan and is the only base of its kind that U.S. forces have in Central Asia. In 2009, Kyrgyz officials threatened to shut down the base due to pressure from Moscow. The message was clear: a permanent U.S. military presence in the region is not welcome. The issue was resolved when the Pentagon agreed to pay higher rents for the base's use, which now amount to \$60 million annually.

More recently, a top Kyrgyz defense official made clear the U.S. military should have «no military mission» at Manas after 2014. The U.S. lease expires in July 2014, after which Kyrgyzstan's government will seek to close it down for military use. Some Kyrgyzstani officials do seem to understand the dangers that a complete U.S. military withdrawal will have for their government. In April 2012, Kyrgyzstan asked the United States to leave its drones after the NATO withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. Washington appears ready to consider this request in the event of future cooperation from Kyrgyzstan following U.S. withdrawal [3].

Kyrgyzstan's former interim president, Roza Otunbayeva, is not only concerned about Afghanistan, but considers Central Asia as one of the world's most dangerous zones. At a recent interview in Brussels she pointed out Tajikistan may become as unstable as Afghanistan, the repression in Uzbekistan is so severe that popular anger is likely to explode in revolt. Kyrgyzstan's anemic economic conditions have fostered a food crisis and are threatening the onset of a civil war. Regarding insurgency threats, she stressed that "The region is becoming increasingly insecure because of the activities of the international force in Afghanistan. Military violence is coming increasingly close to our borders. Right now, jihadist groups are active everywhere. They are waiting for their opportunity. I am concerned about the 39 very porous borders between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and that between Tajikistan and Afghanistan". She believed

that reinstating a rule-of-law that works is vitally important to her, as this deficiency is “perhaps the most important cause of destabilization in Kyrgyzstan.” Shortly after President Obama announced plans to withdraw 30,000 troops from Afghanistan, several Kyrgyzstan officials feared that all of Afghanistan’s neighbors will be in danger if the U.S. fails to stabilize the situation there [3]. However, the political elite in Kyrgyzstan have not actively expressed intent for direct support in Afghanistan in response to the NATO/ISAF troop withdrawal. During his presidential inauguration speech in December 2011, the former Kyrgyz Prime Minister Almazbek Atambayev swore to develop and protect the interests of Kyrgyzstan in establishing a foreign policy that builds relationships with neighboring countries.

With the perspective that he is from the country’s Russian leaning north, he recognized that Kyrgyzstan and Russia “have a common history and future,” and announced his intention to join the Russian-led customs union. However, nothing was mentioned of cooperation towards a regional solution for stability in Afghanistan. At the end of 2011, upon being elected as the new President of Kyrgyzstan, Atambayev was even more passive about the situation in Afghanistan. Although he publically announced Kyrgyzstan’s recent accomplishments including territorial integrity, economic growth of up to 8.5% GDP, and improved international relations, nothing was mentioned about accomplishments or goals towards improved relations with Afghanistan. Instead he focused on domestic affairs. Noting that Kyrgyzstan was still recovering from ethnic turmoil from 2010, he affirmed that further inter-ethnic turmoil would not be tolerated. Additionally, issues involving security, terrorism and drug trafficking remain “acute problems.” Political scientist, Aida Alymbayeva, mentioned that all of Kyrgyzstan’s recent efforts have focused on preserving political and ethnic stability in its own country by “establishing relationships between the political elites” [4, p. 38-40].

In the expectation of U.S. withdrawal, Tajikistan is strengthening its ties with Pakistan. In March 2012, Pakistan’s President Asif Ali Zardari imparted that he thought it was important for Pakistan to develop closer defense, security, and intelligence ties. He floated a proposal that

the two countries’ interior ministers should meet more often for that purpose, and the proposal was readily accepted by Tajikistan’s President Emomali Rahmon at a meeting between the two leaders.

In his address to parliament in April 2012, Rahmon spoke of the dangers of leaving Afghanistan in a situation where the progress made is not irreversible. He emphasized the regional instability that a premature NATO withdrawal is likely to bring to the region and the increased responsibility that Tajikistan will have in the region as a result. Tajikistan has a 1,300-kilometer-long border with Afghanistan that Rahmon called a «buffer zone» in the path of illegal drug traffickers from Afghanistan. Rahmon’s biggest worry is that Taliban rule in Afghanistan will increase in instability due to a further Islamization and an increased drug trade in the region, leading to his own illegitimate government’s downfall.

Uzbekistan’s authoritarian President Islam Karimov is in his mid-70s and not getting any younger. Large changes in Uzbekistan’s government are likely to occur in the future. Karimov’s regime is frequently cited as one of the most repressive in the world. It is one of only nine countries that received the lowest score possible in Freedom House’s [5]. Karimov’s regime is yet another Central Asian government that has much to fear from increased instability in the region, as it is impossible to gauge its support by the military and security services.

Uzbekistan recently gained strategic importance to the United States as a key hub of the NDN during U.S. withdrawal. The relationship is mutually beneficial, and the Uzbek government is earning considerable sums from NATO passage through its territory. Karimov attempted to use this position to gain a one-to-one meeting with President Barack Obama at the May 2012 NATO summit in Chicago, Illinois, but was refused by the administration. After the U.S. withdrawal, Uzbekistan will have to take far more responsibility for its own security [6].

Nowadays the debate over the size and scale of any remaining American involvement in the country has come to the forefront of Washington’s policymaking circuit. From the Department of Defense and the State Department, to USAID and the White House, discussions are being held over not only how many U.S. troops should remain in the country after the withdrawal deadline of the end of 2014, but also on the potential abilities and

effects that a force would have especially regarding the potential of the U.S. retaining no troops in the country, the so called “Zero Option.” Afghanistan, Pakistan, the U.S., and to a lesser degree India and China, are all involved or carefully watching the debates, as vital national interests would be altered, depending on the U.S. commitment after 2014. But the one country that is watching the debates as closely as Afghanistan and Pakistan is Russia; not only because of its own history of intervention in the country, but because of the potential for instability to spill over into the Central Asian republics.

Russia watched first-hand as Afghanistan descended into chaos and anarchy following its withdrawal in February 1989, enacting its own “Zero Option.” The slow decay of Afghanistan’s institutions and ruling mechanisms led to not only the eventual takeover of the country by the Taliban, but the growth in drug production and the spread of radical Islamist ideologies to Central Asia—particularly Tajikistan, which waged a civil war throughout most of the 1990s.

To prevent the spread of instability, Russia had to support not only the economies and political structures of many of the Central Asian states, but contribute significant military support as well. Tajikistan, one of the poorest countries in the region, whose own military numbers some paltry 16,300 troops, has relied on Russia’s 201st Motor Rifle Division to help maintain security, especially in securing its 1,344-kilometer border with Afghanistan, since the fall of the Soviet Union. And due to the fear of a spillover of violence following the pullout of foreign troops, Putin and Tajik President Emomali Rahmon recently announced that they had reached an agreement extending the presence of the 201st through 2042, and a \$200 million support package for the diminutive Tajik military. Russia is also helping to build up Kyrgyzstan, another desperately poor country, which is set to receive a \$1 billion support package to help modernize its military.

Steps such as these are aimed at preventing the spread of chaos that Russia witnessed following its own withdrawal. The fear is that Afghanistan’s institutions, both political and military, will be unable to operate without significant U.S. and ISAF support. Putin has urged the Collective Security Treaty Organization (the CSTO is a collection of post-Soviet states: Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan)

to create “An effective algorithm of practical action to minimize possible risks for our countries «following the departure of foreign troops from Afghanistan [7]. Central Asia has always played a vital role in Western defense planning policy in relation to Afghanistan ever since Operation Enduring Freedom commenced in 2001 in the aftermath of the meta-terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. The Western military deployment into Afghanistan was supported at an early stage by agreeing access to military facilities within Central Asia, notably the US military base at Kharshi-Khanabad (K2) in Uzbekistan and the airbase at Manas near Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The Central Asian states have also stepped up their participation in bilateral security assistance programmes and the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) [8].

However, as the drawdown of military forces from Afghanistan approaches in 2014, western capitals are also considering the potential implications for the wider security of Central Asia. The following study examines the perspectives and planning options in two of the leading states in Central Asia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Among the policy issues explored that are linked to the 2014 drawdown are the extent to which there may be potential to encourage a regional approach to security, or whether the NATO exit from Afghanistan may result in common policy positions or shared interests among the Central Asian states [8].

Furthermore, the level of disagreement among the Central Asian states on the potential security threat stemming from Afghanistan post-2014 is even more pronounced if we compare these documents from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to official views in Astana. Kazakhstan’s 2011 Military Doctrine pays only scant attention to Afghanistan: in fact, of its four Military Doctrines issued since 1993, the 2011 Military Doctrine is the first even to name Afghanistan. Section 3.1 outlines the external and domestic threats to national security as follows:

External military security threats to the Republic of Kazakhstan include:

- socio-political instability in the region and the likelihood of armed provocations;
- military conflict flashpoints close to Kazakhstan’s borders;
- use by foreign nations or organizations of military-political pressure and advanced information-psychological warfare technologies to

interfere in Kazakhstan's internal affairs to further their own interests;

- increasing influence of military-political organizations and unions to the detriment of Kazakhstan's military security;

- the activity of international terrorist and radical organizations and groups, including cyber terrorism and growing religious extremism in neighboring countries;

- production by some countries of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery vehicles, and illegal proliferation of the technologies, equipment and components used to manufacture them, as well as of dual purpose technologies [8].

Domestic military security threats could include:

1. extremist, nationalist and separatist movements, organizations and structures seeking to destabilize the domestic situation and change the constitutional order through armed methods;

2. illegal armed groups;

3. illegal proliferation of weapons, munitions, explosives and other devices that could be used for sabotage, terrorist acts or other illegal actions [9].

Indeed, Kazakhstan's 2011 Military Doctrine places four threats to national security above terrorism:

- socio-political instability within Central Asia and possible conflicts,

- flashpoints on its periphery,

- state actors using information tools to pressure the state,

- the potentially negative influence of political-military organizations.

In the preamble to the same section Afghanistan is mentioned, but only loosely and in a wider context. The uneven distribution of natural resources, the widening gap between developed and developing

countries, different approaches to national socio-political systems, and other negative aspects of globalization could exacerbate antagonisms between nations, with military and other coercive means being used to resolve them. The situation in Central Asia could deteriorate due to the persistent instability in Afghanistan, socio-political tensions in the region, border-territorial and water problems, and economic, religious and other antagonisms that are being resolved through less than ideal mechanisms. Drug trafficking and illegal migration have become transnational problems [10].

The conference 'Stability and Security in Central Asia: Cooperation between Kazakhstan and Afghanistan' was held on December 11 in Astana. At this conference Afghan Parliament's speaker Mohammad Saleh Saldzhuki proposed Central Asian countries to create a joint program on border protection. Mohammad Saleh Saldzhuki said that, Afghanistan hopes the Central Asian Countries will take part in protection of not only joint borders but also Afghanistan's southern borders with Pakistan within this program. Afghanistan's proposal to Central Asia on joint border security program is not the first country's appeal of such kind to the neighbors.

In conclusion, in September 2013 Afghan President Hamid Karzai at the meeting of Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Kyrgyzstan asked the organization member states to assist Afghanistan in its struggle against terrorism. "We understand that the entire world community is concerned by the state of our country after the withdrawal of the international coalition. But we can prevent violence and strengthen national security. Afghanistan will be able to solve this problem together with the SCO countries," the Afghan president said [11].

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