

SECURITY THREATS IN CENTRAL ASIA

Çağla Gül Yesevi

İstanbul Kültür University

Assistant Prof. Dr.

E-Mail: c.yesevi@iku.edu.tr

Abstract

This study will analyze main security threats in Central Asia. It is obvious that since the end of Cold War, there have been many security threats in Central Asia as internal weakness of Central Asian states, terrorism, transnational crime, economic insecurity, environmental issues, drug trafficking, ethnic violence, regional instability. This study will propose that with increasing interdependence, states need each other to solve these global security problems. In that sense, regional and sub-regional cooperation between Central Asian states and with other regional actors has been witnessed. It is clear that the withdrawal of NATO from Afghanistan will destabilize Central Asia. This study will investigate overall security situation in Central Asia and affects and contributions of regional organizations to Eurasian security.

Key Words: *Central Asia, security, regional organizations*

1. INTRODUCTION

Central Asian Republics have been facing with economic hardships. One of the security problems of these republics has been poverty and income inequality. Radical Islam has been the other security problem which would be more important after the withdrawal of the NATO forces from Afghanistan. Authoritarianism and succession problem could affect the stability and security of the region. Moreover, it important to stress that water issue would dominate an important dimension of the regional stability.

2. SECURITY THREATS

Since the end of Cold War, there have been many security threats in Central Asia as internal weakness of Central Asian states, poverty, economic insecurity, terrorism, transnational crime, environmental issues, drug trafficking, ethnic

violence, and regional instability. Mainly, in this study, economic hardships, radical Islamism, authoritarianism and succession problem, border disputes, and water problem will be examined.

2.1 Economic Hardships

When the Soviet Union was about to collapse, Central Asian republics were the poorest Soviet Republics. Their transition to market economies after independence resulted with severe economic hardships for most of the population. Poverty has been the main problem in Central Asia. Most Central Asian countries are poor, as measured by per capita GDP. Kazakhstan's per capita GDP is the highest at US\$10,500, and Turkmenistan's is US\$5,000. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have had higher revenues coming from natural gas and oil. Landlocked Uzbekistan has had significant natural gas. However, it is important to note that their wealth have been unevenly distributed. Uzbekistan is much poorer, at US\$1,500, while both Kyrgyzstan's and Tajikistan's per capita GDP is around US\$1,000. In addition, apart from Kazakhstan, the Central Asian states are predominantly rural, and this means limited opportunities for economic advancement. Unemployment has been main problem in this region. The striking fact is that the worker's remittances they receive from Russia have been regarded as safety valve for Central Asian States. In 2010, Kyrgyzstan received US\$1.037bn and Tajikistan US\$2.065bn in remittances, the equivalent of 15% and 35% of GDP respectively. In that sense, the economic wellbeing of Central Asian states has been heavily reliant on Russia's economy. This positive impact of remittances could be undermined by the anti-immigrant violence in Russia which has been rising. Needless to say, high income inequalities, rapid population increase, and high unemployment and inflation would affect the stability of the region (Kazakhstan and Central Asia Defence & Security Report Q1, 2012).

2.2 Radical Islam and Terrorism

Revival of Islamism has paved way for the revival of militant Islam. Secular leaders of Central Asian republics repressed Islamic groups. Radicalization of Islamic groups have been witnessed since the collapse of the Soviet Union. This movement has been accelerated after the Afghanistan war. Afghanistan has been seen as a safe haven for the radical Islamic groups. As Türker (2011:55) stated radical Islam came to the center stage of policy-makers in the post-9/11 era.

Meanwhile, other factors contributing to the strengthening of radical Islam have been repressive political atmosphere and authoritarian policies of the Central Asian Republics. It is known that under Soviet rule, mosques were closed and destroyed. Beyond any doubt, Soviet totalitarianism repressed Islamic rituals. Moreover, communication with the major centers of Islamic civilization was prevented. Indeed, after the independence of the Soviet Republics, the Central Asian states were back in the main current of Islam. It should be pointed out that both the people and leaders of Central Asian republics were poorly informed about Islam. Identity has been the most complex question in the minds of people. Especially, the political regimes in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have been governing religiously active and young populations. Islamic symbolism has been significant cultural factor. Matveeva (2009:1103) states that the state is a product of the Soviet lineage in which it firmly controls religion. It is important to note that religion has been viewed as a security problem by the ruling elite.

The repressive policies of the totalitarian regimes could not accomplish to remove Islam. Islam was regarded as the most important part of identity. Moreover, after the withdrawal of Soviet man, the people of Central Asian republics tried to fill the identity vacuum with Islam. Moreover, radicalization of Islam was also served as a reaction to the growing influence of Western and non-Islamic cultures (Türker, 2011:56)

Ted Gurr (1970) maintained that the revival of Islamism or radical Islam had represented modern reactions to rapid urbanization , unemployment, poverty, uneven income distribution and corrupt elites (Türker, 2011: 55). Secular leaders of Central Asian states have regarded radical Islam as a main threat to the stability of the region. In that sense, they have been trying to repress radical Islam. It is obvious that extremist groups have emerged in opposition to authoritarian rule. Moreover, it is possible that they will be able to gain strength during the withdrawal of the US army.

2.3 Authoritarianism and Succession Problem

The leaders of Central Asian states personify the new states. Meanwhile, public cultivation of the leaderships forms an important part of legitimization. Importation of Western values and internalization of them have been rejected. There has been widespread belief that democratization could bring chaos and

instability. In that sense, the status-quo has been advertised as a better alternative. It is clear if state exercised strong control, people in those states could have better and more secure life. The five states of Central Asia have been witnessing different types of authoritarianism. Soft authoritarianism has been applied in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Hard authoritarianism has been applied in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan (Matveeva, 2009:1102). It is known that autocratic leaders are thought to enjoy considerable flexibility when crafting foreign policy. These authoritarian leaders, Nazarbaev and Karimov have been continuing to enjoy large, pro-presidential parties. There has been no clear succession mechanism in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (McGlinchey, 2012:266)

Central Asian states are threatened by internal forces and weak legitimacy. State-building and nation-building processes have been continuing. Leaders of Central Asian states' main concern has been internal security and continuation in power. They have been using clientelist, authoritarian and rent-seeking policies. Unlike the Western states, security concepts in Central Asia have been strongly influenced by concerns for regime survival. In this context, they have been strengthening their intelligence organizations and police forces. As a result of this, internal police forces have been enjoying greater state resources than regular armies in all Central Asian states (Blank, 2012).

2.4. Border Disputes

Border issue has had potential to cause important tensions in the region. Uzbekistan has had border problems with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Moreover, Kyrgyzstan has had border disputes with Kazakhstan, Tajikistan. Kazakhstan has had problems with Turkmenistan. Furthermore, some Central Asian states have been facing border problems with external power as Afghanistan, China and Russia. In the near future, Ferghana Valley could pose problems because of growing Islamic militancy and border disputes among Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (Kazakhstan and Central Asia Defence & Security Report Q1,2012:51).

2.4 Water Issue

During the Soviet Union, there had been hydrological boundaries and collective usage of rivers, namely, SyrDarya, Talas, Zerafshan and parts of the Amu Darya. In that time, on three of these four rivers transboundary agreements were

concluded. Five former Central Asian Republics agreed to maintain the basic principles of Central Asian water allocation that had prevailed under the Soviet Union in 1992. In this context, the Interstate Coordinating Water Commission was established to manage water allocation. Although there has been such a commission, water conflicts have been continuing (Wegerich, 2011).

The striking fact is that water is crucial issue for Central Asia because of high degree of agricultural activity and rising population. Key problem has been seen between upstream states Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which want to develop hydropower for electricity generation, and downstream countries Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, which are more populous and need water. Kyrgyztan and Tajikistan have had plans to build dams (Kazakhstan and Central Asia Defence & Security Report Q1, 2012:51).

3. SOLUTIONS TO SECURITY THREATS

It is apparent that today post-Soviet region has been facing challenges as foreign rivalry, neo-imperial policies, security problems, ethnic conflicts, regime instabilities, terrorism, separatism, border disputes, human and drug trafficking, water and energy tensions. The new regionalism of Eurasia will be examined with the Collective Security Treaty Organization, Eurasian Economic Community and Shangai Cooperation Organization.

3.1. Collective Security Treaty Organization

Presidents of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan signed a charter in Tashkent founding the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Uzbekistan became a full participant in the CSTO in 2006, she suspended her membership in 2012. The CSTO has been a military alliance basing on collective defense. The Collective Rapid Deployment Force was established in 2009. The working areas of the CSTO are military aggression, anti-terrorist operations, transnational crime, drug trafficking and natural disasters.

The Collective Security Treaty Organization held its annual summit in Sochi, Russia, on 26th September 2013. The member states discussed the Syrian issue and strengthening of the Afghanistan-Tajikistan border. In that sense, they decided to provide additional collective assistance to Tajikistan to reinforce its national border with Afghanistan. As Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon stated the aid would include constructing new buildings of frontier posts, restoring warning and

signaling systems and providing border troops with means of air patrol and surveillance as well as radar (Kucera, 2013).

According to the official CSTO statement, "On the basis of a request from Tajikistan the member states of the CSTO will, according to their abilities, within three months render military-technical assistance to the border forces of the State Committee for National Security of the Republic of Tajikistan." Interestingly, the aid package appears not to include Russian troops, which no doubt the Russian side was pushing for. Russia has been pushing the CSTO as its primary tool for preventing the spread of instability from Afghanistan after U.S. and NATO forces leave the country starting next year. Said Putin:

The CSTO has been taking on new responsibilities and new priorities as cyber security, quashing color revolutions, creating unified foreign policy, even drone manufacture (Kucera, 2012a). Moreover, the CSTO called its first-ever peacekeeping exercise, in Kazakhstan. As Kucera (2012b) states this exercise would strengthen Kazakhstan's ability to send peacekeeping forces abroad.

Russia has been giving an aid package over a billion dollars to militaries of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. It has been alleged that helping Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan modernize their army, Moscow would strengthen the potential of the CSTO in the light of the forthcoming American withdrawal from Afghanistan. In that sense, Moscow would prevent the US from strengthening their positions in Central Asia (Kucera, 2012c). In sum, the CSTO has been the most important tool of Eurasian re-integration policy of Russian Federation. A final point that needs to be underlined Russia has been pushing the CSTO as its primary tool for preventing the spread of instability from Afghanistan after the NATO's withdrawal.

3.2. Eurasian Economic Community

The treaty on the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Community was signed on 10 October 2000 and came into force on 30 May 2001, after the ratification by all the member states. Five states have been members of the Eurasian Economic Community from its formation as Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan have established the Eurasian Economic Commission, a supranational body for integration management, with the aim of

ensuring the function and development of the Customs Union and Common Economic Space (President of Russia Official Site, 2013a)

Eurasian Economic Community is an international economic organization. Its functions include the formation of common external customs borders for its member countries and the development of common foreign economic, tariff and price policies and other elements required for the functioning of a common market. The treaty establishing the EurAsEC was signed on October 10, 2000 in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan (President of Russia Official Site, 2013b).

Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan have been members of this organization. Uzbekistan became a member of EurAsEC in January 2006 but it suspended its membership at the end of 2008. Although, Moldova and Ukraine tried to be rather close to European Union, they were granted observer status in May 2002. Armenia joined the EurAsEC as an observer in 2003 (President of Russia Official Site, 2013b).

During the Interstate Council meeting on August 16, 2006 in Sochi, heads of state Alexander Lukashenko, Nursultan Nazarbayev, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, Vladimir Putin, Emomali Rakhmon and Islam Karimov made a decision to establish a customs union within the EurAsEC framework, with the Republic of Belarus, the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation as initial members. They have also approved that other EurAsEC member states will join the customs union when their economies are ready to take this step. In this context, they agreed that the establishment of the EurAsEC customs union and common economic space would enable the Community to become in the near future a rapidly developing organization for regional integration. They remarked that the EurAsEC would be able to ensure effective use of existing economic potential to raise the living standard of their people (EurAsEC, 2013a).

The EurAsEC's main governing bodies include the Interstate Council, the Integration Committee, the Inter-parliamentary Assembly, and the Community's Court of Justice. The EurAsEC has observer status in the UN General Assembly (President of Russia Official Site, 2013b). The EurAsEC Interstate Council is the supreme body of the Eurasian Economic Community. This council is composed of heads of state and heads of government.

The Customs Union between Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan was established on December 19, 2009, in Almaty, Kazakhstan. In that meeting, the leaders of the three states, signed the Joint Statement on its founding. The first phase of the Customs Union's functioning began on January 1, 2010, with the introduction of a uniform customs tariff. The leaders of these three states, approved the uniform customs tariffs. The Customs Union has based on a common customs territory. The members of this Union have concurred that there would be no customs duties or economic restrictions within common customs territory. They have decided to abolish protective, anti-dumping and compensatory measures. Moreover, it was decided that a uniform customs tariff and other uniform measures regulating the commodity trade with third nations will be applied within this Customs Union (President of Russia Official Site, 2013a).

The Interstate Council of the of the Republic of Belarus, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Tajikistan has agreed on the establishment of an international economic organization on the basis of the customs union. Normatively, the functions of the Organization are to be connected with joining the World Trade Organization, forming external customs borders, common external economic policy, tariffs and prices, as well as other aspects of a common market (EurAsEC Official Site, 2009a).

It should be highlighted that the member-states main aim was stated as the protection of their markets against the foreign economic powers. Although, customs union agreement came in to force between Russian Federation, Belarus and Kazakhstan in 2010, it should be indicated that the preparations and idea behind this structure dated back to 1990s. Collapse of the SU and the nation building processes of the ex-Soviet Republics were considered as flourishing of new open markets in that area. However, the establishment of this organization could present us there have been also reverse dimensions and contradictory demands within new republics.

It has been stated that the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) created to effectively realize goals and objectives defined in the Agreement on a Customs Union. It is important to note that the Eurasian Economic Community based on three important agreements. One of them is the Agreement on a Customs Union, dated 20 January 1995. The other agreement is the Treaty on the Deepening of

Integration in the Economic and Humanitarian Fields signed on March 29, 1996. Last one is the Treaty on a Customs Union and a Single Economic Space, dated February 26, 1999 (EurAsEC, 2009b).

One of the important goals of the Eurasian Economic Community, is the establishment of a common market in transport services and of a unified transport system. It is important to note that through that Common Transport Space, free movement of passengers, baggage, cargo and conveyances and ensuring both technical and technological compatibility of transport processes, a harmonized transport-related legislation and common competition rules will be realized. In this context, the Common Transport Space embraces the activity of all types of transport and applies to the suppliers of transport and auxiliary services related to traffic organization, independently of their type of ownership and country of establishment. It should be pointed out that EurAsEC by establishing the Common Transport Space aimed the creation of a common market of transport services, creation of a common transport system, realization of the EurAsEC Member States' transit potential, and development of a system of the Community's logistics centers (EurAsEC, 2009b).

The Eurasian Economic Community covers a territory of 20,374 km² with about 180m. inhabitants. EurAsEC has vast resources of minerals and raw materials. Most importantly, It has been stated according to 2010 datas, member-states possessed 9 % of the prospected oil resources worldwide, 25% of gas and 23 % of coal. EurAsEC countries are major exporters of mineral resources and metals to the global market. The main point that needs to be underlined that these member-states have been playing a leading role among exporting countries with regard to oil and gas, chrome, manganese resources, aluminum, nickel, copper, platinoids and raw diamonds (EurAsEC, 2011, p.4)

The Heads of state of Belarus, Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, announced a joint declaration on 5 July 2010, in Astana. They approved that they had created an organization built on new principles of trust and mutual cooperation. The Eurasian Economic Community has been declared as an alliance of independent states with equal rights whose activities are aimed at implementing the national interests of each Community member state. They mentioned that further advancement towards enhanced integration between these countries aimed at the establishment of a Common Economic Space. Moreover,

they decided that in future, they would have a union currency. It is important to note that they mentioned that the Common Economic space and a union currency would provide an additional impulse for developing the Community and promoting the growth of the Organization's international authority (EurAsEC, 2011, pp.16-17).

Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan joined the meeting of Interstate Council of the Eurasian Economic Community on 12 May 2011. Putin stated that an agreement should be signed on the creation of a Eurasian Economic Union by 1 January 2013. Late in 2011, as Prime Minister Putin announced his plans to return to the Presidency, he called for a stronger "Eurasian Union" to include Belarus and Kazakhstan immediately, and Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan later (Spechler & Spechler, 2013).

Taking into consideration the treaty on cooperation in protection of external borders of the member states of the Eurasian Economic Community on 21 February 2003, it needs to be underlined that the Eurasian Economic Community members had decided to cooperate on security issues. In this context, EurAsEc has been a political platform for economic integration. It could be regarded as the tool of Russian hegemony for further re-integration in post-Soviet territory.

3.3 Shangai Cooperation Organization

Shangai Cooperation Organization has been a political, military and economic organization which was founded in 2001. Members of the SCO are Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. This organization deals with security. It tries to prevent the member states from terrorism, separatism and extremism. Russia and China are important actors of the Shangai Cooperation Organization. In that sense, the SCO could serve to regulate Sino-Russian competition. Moreover, it could prevent these countries domination in the region. As Blank (2012) stated main purpose of the SCO is to organize and articulate regional support for the ouster of American bases from Central Asia and to prevent the formation of any kind of American-led security organization there. Secondly, the SCO is to provide a forum for its members' virtually unanimous opinion that the USA should not interfere in their domestic arrangements. Thirdly, members of the organization support the continuation of the status quo and they

are all sensitive to reject calls for externally interested parties like the USA on behalf of democratic norms.

Last summit of the SCO was held in Bishkek, in September 2013. The leaders of the member states have focused on fostering economic development and regional security cooperation. The main issue in this SCO summit was the situation in Afghanistan. Both leaders of Tajikistan and Afghanistan maintained that Afghanistan needed the SCO's assistance. However, this demand was not supported by Russian. In the economic sphere, the SCO leaders have been discussing the need for a regional development bank for years (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2013) In conclusion, because of the rivalry between China and Russia, the SCO could not serve as security provider in the region.

4. CONCLUSION

The Central Asian Republics have been facing many problems as poverty, economic insecurity, terrorism, transnational crime, environmental issues, drug trafficking, ethnic violence, and regional instability. In this study, economic hardships, radical Islamism, authoritarianism and succession problem, border disputes, and water problem were examined. We have been witnessing new regionalisms in today's world. Regionalism and globalism have been evident in the processes of development of regional organizations. In this study, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEc) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) were examined whether they could be solutions to security problems of the Central Asian Republics. Dealing with the CSTO, peacekeeping missions, arms deals, military exercises of this organization are important. It could serve as a security provider in the region. Russian dominance is apparent in the CSTO and EurAsEc. The EurAsEc will help strengthen economic cooperation and economic integration. Due to rivalry between China and Russia, we could hardly state that SCO could be a security provider in the region. The striking fact is that the Central Asian States are conspicuous in formulating regional agendas or structures for security cooperation. Strengthening of regime security has priority over regional cooperation in the whole region.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Blank, Stephen (2012), "Whither the new Great Game in Central Asia", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, No.3, 147-160.

EurAsEC Official Site. (2013a). *About EurAsEC*, <http://www.evrazes.com/en/about/>, [05.07.2013]

EurAsEC (2011), *EurAsEC Today*, <http://www.evrazes.com/en/about/>, [05.07.2013]

EurAsEC Official Site. (2009a). Interstate Council Resolution 23 May 2000.

<http://www.evrazes.com/docs/view/92>, [05.07.2013]

EurAsEC Official Site. (2009b), Concept of Establishment of the Common Transport Space of the Eurasian Economic Community, 25 February 2008, <http://www.evrazes.com/docs/view/156>, [06.07.2013]

EurAsEC Official Site. (2009c). On cooperation in protection of external borders on cooperation in protection of external borders of the member states of the Eurasian Economic Community on 21 February 2003, <http://www.evrazes.com/docs/view/137>, [07.07.2013]

EurAsEC Official Site. (2009d). Treaty on the Establishment of the Eurasian Economic Community amended on 25 January 2006 and 6 October 2007, <http://www.evrazes.com/docs/view/95>, [08.07.2013]

Farrell, M. (2005), "The Global Politics of Regionalism: An Introduction" In M. Farrell and B. Hattne (Eds.), *Global Politics of Regionalism: Theory and Practise*. Pp.1-17. Sidmouth: Pluto Press.

Kazakhstan and Central Asia Defence & Security Report Q1: Central Asia Regional Security Review (2012). Business Monitor Int.

Kucera, Joshua (2012a, August, 22), "CSTO keeps adding missions: Now It's emergency management", *Eurasianet*, <http://www.eurasianet.org/taxonomy/term/1738>, [23.08.2012]

Kucera, Joshua (2012b, October 8), "CSTO holds First-ever Peacekeeping Exercises", *Eurasianet*, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66023>, [10.10.2012]

- Kucera, Joshua (2012b, November 7), “Report: Russia Spending \$ 1.3 Billion to Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan”, *Eurasianet*, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66152>, [10.11.2012]
- Kucera, Joshua (2013, September, 24), “CSTO promises support but no Russian troops to Tajikistan’s borders”, *Eurasianet*, <http://www.eurasianet.org/taxonomy/term/1738>, [25.09.2013]
- Matveeva, Anna (2009), “Legitimizing Central Asian Authoritarianism: Political Manipulation and Symbolic Power”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.61, No.7, pp.1095-1121.
- McGlinchey, Eric (2012), “Foreign Policy and Aging Central Asian Autocrats”, *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol.20, No.3, pp.262-267.
- Molchanov, M. A. (2012). “Eurasian Regionalisms and Russian Foreign Policy”, *UACES Convention Exchanging Ideas on Europe 2012, 3-5 September 2012*. Passau, Germany.
- President of Russia Official Site. (2013a). “Glossary: C” http://eng.news.kremlin.ru/terms/C#term_28, [05.07.2013]
- President of Russia Official Site. (2013b), “Glossary: E”, <http://eng.news.kremlin.ru/terms/E>, [05.07.2013]
- President of Russia Official Site. (2013c). “Informal CSTO Meeting”, 29 May 2013, <http://eng.news.kremlin.ru/news/5491>, [30.05.2013]
- Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (2013, September 29), “SCO summit focuses on Afghanistan, Economic Cooperation”, <http://www.rferl.org/content/shanghai-cooperation-organization-summit-bishkek/25104495.html> , [29.09.2013]
- Spechler, M. C. and Spechler, R. D. (2013)., “Russia’s Lost position in Central Eurasia”, *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 4, pp.1-7.
- Türker, Tolga (2011), “Radicalization of Islam in Central Asia: Theory, Trends and Prospects”, *OAKA* Vol. 6, No.11, pp.51-74.
- Wegerich, Kai (2011), “Water resources in Central Asia: regional stability or patchy make-up?”, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol.30, No.2, 275-290.