



THREAT FROM AFGHANISTAN IN THE CENTRAL ASIAN SECURITY

AGENDA

Over the past several years, the Central Asian republics have expressed their concern regarding the security issues ascending from the rising destabilization in Afghanistan. For many years, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has represented the most substantial security challenge for the Central Asian landscape. Therefore, the withdrawal of the military contingent of the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) led by the Western military alliance North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) from Afghanistan in 2014 had a significant impact on security implications in Central Asia and directly affected the international security aspects. Therefore, the threat of spreading of extremist ideas in the region caused by the activity of illegal armed groups on the territory of Afghanistan, namely, Taliban and ISIL/DAISH, can be called the main dispute arising after the end of the Operation Enduring Freedom-Afghanistan (OEF) carried out by the United States' military forces in the period of 2001-2014.

In a decade since the beginning of the military operation, NATO has peaked nearly 140,000 troops to Afghanistan. At the end of the OEF in December 2014 after the military withdrawal about 13,000 residual militaries were left for training and counter-terrorism processes, including 9,800 U.S. troops. Despite the intensified activities on stabilizing Afghanistan, the ultimate goal of totally eliminating the threat coming from terrorist organizations within the country has not been achieved. Despite the fact that coalition forces of the U.S. and the Western countries have significantly weakened the Taliban movement and provided presidential elections in Afghanistan in 2014, the socio-political and socio-economic disputes within Afghanistan have remained unresolved.

For instance, the cross border drug trafficking has increased significantly during the years of the ISAF activity in the country causing direct threat to the Central Asian security. As the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has stated in the report named "Opiate Flows Through Northern Afghanistan and Central Asia: A Threat Assessment" conducted in 2012, about 90 tons of drug substances,

such as heroin and opium are being produced on the territory of Afghanistan annually. Taking under consideration the fact that over 25% of the Afghan produced heroin passes through the Central Asian region, toward Tajikistan and onward to the European Peninsula, the problem of cross border drug trafficking is becoming more common.

Moreover, illegal border crossing in the Central Asian states provide an example of clear danger coming from the armed Afghan groups in terms of extremist fighters infiltrating the region. During the last years, members of Afghan terrorist organizations have attempted to cross Afghan-Tajik and Afghan-Turkmen borders number of times. In the beginning of March 2016, one of the armed Afghans was killed during a military operation and others were arrested at the Afghan-Tajik border by the Tajik border authorities. Sharing the longest border (1200 km) among the Central Asian states with the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Tajikistan can be identified as the most vulnerable republic of the region to the double threat coming from Taliban and ISIL/DAISH terrorist organizations. During 2014, Tajik Military documented more than 100 violations of the Tajik-Afghan border on behalf of the Afghan extremist groups and drug traffickers. Such incidents demonstrate the need for an extensive settlement of the Afghan problem among the Central Asian states as it represents threat to Central Asia as a whole.

It should be noted that the Central Asian states have contributed to both the peace making process and the NATO-led ISAF military operations in Afghanistan. For instance, the U.S. and NATO forces have used the Manas airbase, later transformed into the Manas International Transit Center, in Kyrgyzstan, until its closure in 2014. While Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan have provided overflight rights for delivering military cargos to Afghanistan.

Moreover, leaders of the Central Asian republics have advanced number of initiatives in order to focus regional players' attention on addressing the problem of peaceful settlement of the Afghan conflict. For instance, during the 2008 NATO's Euro-Atlantic Partnership

Council meeting in Bucharest, Romania, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, has made a proposal on establishing "6+3" Initiative aimed at diplomatic resolution of the Afghan conflict with the membership of six neighboring states plus the U.S., Russia and NATO, excluding the representatives from Afghanistan. The Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan, Abdulaziz Kamilov, reiterated the aforementioned initiative during the 67th session of the UN General Assembly in 2012. Another proposal has come along the 2009 Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in Yekaterinburg, Russia, on behalf of the Tajik President, Imomali Rakhmon. He projected the provision of the Dushanbe Four, the meeting to be held in Dushanbe in order to discuss security and economy projects with the reference to the Afghan conflict. Moreover, in 2012 the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Yerzhan Kazykhanov, projected the construction of United Nations hub for Afghanistan that was to be located in Almaty. However, due to the lack of international support, no substantial results in formation of the Central Asian dialog platform on the issue of peaceful settlement of the Afghan conflict have been reached.

Therefore, when it comes to cooperation among the Central Asian countries in terms of security challenges coming from Afghanistan, united security framework has not been formed yet. The lack of collaboration among the Republics is the major obstacle.

To conclude, today all Central Asian Republics are disturbed by the rising security challenges coming from Afghanistan after the withdrawal of ISAF forces in 2014. The rise of extremism and an increase in terrorist attacks can negatively affect and destabilize the whole region of Central Asia. In order to make a step towards stabilization of Afghanistan, the Central Asian region should come up with a single policy framework and intensify their support to the southern neighbor in the framework of various economic projects positively contributing to economic and political stabilization within the disruptive state.

Politics, Foreign Affairs and Security

- The Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Uzbekistan and China held consultations in Tashkent on the issue of legal base of the Uzbek-Chinese relations. The Chinese delegation was headed by the Advisor to the Law and Treaty of MFA, Guo Xiaomei. During the meeting, the sides exchanged views on drafts of bilateral documents to be signed during the upcoming joint meetings.
- During the trilateral meeting in Baku, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, Elmar Mammadyarov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran, Mohammad Javad Zarif, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Sergey Lavrov, discussed in detail such issues as the implementation of the North-South International Transport Corridor and the recent events in Nagorno-Karabakh.
- During the 44th meeting of the Special Working Group for working out the Convention on the legal status of the Caspian Sea held in Baku and chaired by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, Khalaf Khalafov, the parties discussed the provisions of the draft Convention on the legal status of the Caspian Sea, as well as various areas of cooperation between the littoral states.
- During the 4th round of trilateral talks between the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, Elmar Mammadyarov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran, Mohammad Javad Zarif, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Mevlut Cavusoglu, held in Ramsar, the parties signed a Plan for cooperation between the involved countries for the next two years and agreed to set up a Committee responsible for implementation of reached agreements.
- The Ministries of Defense of Azerbaijan and Armenia reported that combat operations in the zone of the Nagorno-Karabakh had been suspended upon the agreement of the parties.
- During the meeting between representatives of the Caspian states' navies held in St. Petersburg, the parties discussed the opportunity of establishment of a special committee of navy commanders of the Caspian states, which would serve as platform for further discussion of issues of organization of joint drills, navigation and hydrographic provision, as well as counteraction to illegal

migration, transportation of arms, drugs and poaching.

- The Chief of the General Staff - First Deputy Commander of the Aerospace Forces of Russia, Lieutenant General Pavel Kurachenko, stated that Russia and Belarus had completed the formation of their joint air defense system in the Eastern European region of collective security. The agreement between Russia and Belarus on the joint protection of the external border of the Union State in the airspace and the creation of the joint regional system was signed and ratified in 2009.
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia announced that temporary restrictions of movement at Salla - Salla and Lotta - Raja - Jooseppi crossing points of the Russian-Finnish state border had become effective. According to the agreement reached between the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, and the President of Finland, Sauli Niinistö, a temporary restrictions will be introduced for 180 days.

Economy, Finance and Energy

- According to the Central Control Administration of the Fuel and Energy Complex, in 2015 Russian oil producers reached a record level of crude output of 534.081 million tons, which was a 1.4% increase compared with the previous year. Russia increased oil export by 20 million tons in 2015 against production growth by 7 million tons only on account of conversion ratio increase.
- The President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has ratified an agreement with Georgia on cooperation in the energy sphere. Georgian State Electro System has started to carry out the functions of a transit corridor from Azerbaijan to Turkey starting from February 2016.
- According to the Ministry of Economy and Development of Turkmenistan, the volume of foreign trade between Turkmenistan and Turkey hit \$5.5 billion in 2015. To date, Turkish companies are implementing 1,580 projects in Turkmenistan in the spheres of transport, fuel and energy, communication, agriculture, construction, trade and management of water resources.
- Following the 25th meeting of the Joint Economic Committee in Konya, Iran and Turkey signed three Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) related to banks and chambers of commerce. MoUs are aimed to increase bilateral trade, which

dropped by 29% in 2015 compared to the previous year. The trade turnover between the two countries reached \$13.71 billion in 2014 and stood at \$9.76 billion in 2015.

- The CEO of the Iran Power and Water Equipment and Services Export Company (SUNIR), Bahman Salehi, announced company's plans to build a wind power plant and two thermal power plants in Kazakhstan in the next 18 months. A relevant contract worth \$600 million was signed with the Kazakh Eurasia Invest Group on the sidelines of the Iran - Kazakhstan Business Council meeting in Tehran.
- Azerbaijan's state-owned company, Azeravtoyol, announced the signing of an agreement with the World Bank for allocation of a \$140 million loan to complete the reconstruction of a highway network, including the Baku - Shamakhi road.
- The Asian Development Bank announced its plans to allocate loans in the amount of \$1 billion to Turkmenistan directed to the projects on development of railway corridors, production and supply of electricity in the period of 2016-2017.
- According to the World Bank's report about the impact of China on Europe and Central Asia, Kazakhstan's GDP growth rate will fall from 1.2% in 2015 to just 0.1% in 2016. Mean-while, the inflation is expected to re-main elevated.

Society and Culture

- Within the framework of memorandum signed in December 2015 between Kazakhstan and China a cross-border group tourist route was officially opened in Alatau Pass of Xinjiang province. The first eight Chinese tourists will spend six days on touring Kazakhstan, tasting local specialties and watching opera and ballet performances.
- During the meeting between delegation of the Central Asia Drug Action Program (CADAP), headed by the project manager, Ernest Robello, and representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan held in Ashgabat, the sides stressed the high level of Turkmenistan - EU cooperation within the CADAP and expressed their commitment to further development of joint activity in fight against tobacco and drugs.
- Kyrgyzstan has marked the six year anniversary of the bloody 2010 revolution that caused death of 87 people and injury of 1,000 more.