



THE GLOBAL TERRORISM INDEX AND CENTRAL ASIA

Terrorism nowadays remains one of the major global threats representing a security risk to every single country. Since 2000, the Institute for Economics and Peace has been publishing the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) report, which analyzes the data from 1970 to the present to assess the impact of terrorism and to provide a comprehensive summary of its key global trends. According to the latest report published in November 2019, the number of deaths caused by terrorism declined by almost 52% as compared with 2014. However, the number of countries that are effected by terrorism still remains high. Therefore, it would be interesting to look at the global trends in terrorism, while focusing on the case of the Central Asian states.

According to the GTI report, at least one death caused by terrorism was recorded in 71 countries in 2018, which is the second highest number since 2002 in terms of the number of countries that are affected by terrorism. As for the reduction in the number of deaths caused by terrorism, there are several reasons that are indicated in the report. These are mainly related to the reduction in conflicts in the Middle East and the decline of terrorist activities of the so called Islamic State (Daesh). The analysis of the number of deaths in the report indicates that four terrorist groups are responsible for 57.8% of total terrorism related deaths in 2018, namely the Taliban, Daesh, the Daesh Khorasan Chapter, and Boko Haram. Besides these terrorist groups, there is also an increasing number of far-right terrorist groups. While they are responsible for the small part of deaths caused by terrorism, their death toll is on the rise in recent years – from 11 in 2017 to 77 by the end of September 2019. Alongside these figures, the report also provides the ranking of countries by the impact of terrorism, with the most affected at the top of the list and the least affected at the bottom. Since 2003, Iraq had been leading the index until Afghanistan surpassed it due to an increase of 59% in the number of deaths from terrorism in 2018 as compared with 2017. Afghanistan and Iraq are followed by Nigeria, Syria, Pakistan, Somalia, India, Yemen, Philippines, and Congo.

The Central Asian states in the report are included in the Russia and Eurasia region, which comprise twelve post-Soviet states. Of these states, Turkmenistan and Belarus maintained their score of “no impact of terrorism”, whereas Kazakhstan stood out without any incidents for the past two years improving its position from the 79th

to the 85th. The positions of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, which are ranked 87th and 135th, respectively, remain relatively stable for years. Within the Central Asian states, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are considered as the least affected by terrorism, with the former holding to its position for almost 10 years and the latter mostly staying at the bottom of the list. Overall, out of the twelve post-Soviet states, nine improved their positions in the GTI index in 2019. Yet, Tajikistan is an outlier case in an otherwise stable Central Asia due to the recent terrorism related incidents in the country and was, as a result, downgraded in the index. Undoubtedly, the main factor causing many security issues for Tajikistan is its proximity to Afghanistan, where numerous cells of terrorist groups operate.

Even though there is a decline in terrorist activities of Daesh for the second successive year both in the number of death and attacks by 69% and 63%, respectively, compared with its peak period in 2016, Tajikistan with its ill-protected borders continues to suffer from terrorist attacks reportedly organized by Daesh. For instance, the most recent terrorist attack took place at around 3:00 a.m. on November 6, 2019, on the eve of the celebration of Tajikistan's Constitution Day, when 20 masked militants attacked the border post No. 4 “Ishkobod” in the Rudaki district, located 60 km from Dushanbe at the Tajik-Uzbek border. As a result, 15 attackers were killed and five were captured, while two Tajik personnel were killed, according to the Tajik State Committee for National Security. Two days after, the Daesh militants released a video, where they claimed responsibility for the attack. Andrei Serenko, expert of the Russian Center for the Study of Modern Afghanistan, suggested two explanations for the attack: it could be linked to the change of the leader of the caliphate and the Daesh's attempt to demonstrate its new capabilities, or the attack was a provocation to demonstrate the reality of the Daesh threat in the Central Asian states. Yet, there are a lot of doubts about the involvement of Daesh in the attack due to the lack of detailed information from the Tajik government. Particularly, the questions were raised concerning the validity of the statement that the militants illegally crossed the border from the Qalai Zoli district of Afghanistan to the Qabodiyon district of Tajikistan. It remains unexplained how the militants traveled for two days without being detected. In addition, the Ministry of Defense of Afghanistan stated that there was

no evidence that the attackers entered Tajikistan from the Afghan territory. Besides, there are doubts about whether they came from the neighboring Taliban-dominated north of Afghanistan or from the Daesh-influenced east of the country. Nevertheless, the Tajik authorities refrain from commenting on the details of the attack. Either way, after the attack, the Council of Commanders of the Border Troops of the CIS member states declared a readiness to provide support in strengthening the Tajik-Afghan border, while the anti-terror units of the 201st Russian military base in Tajikistan held exercises to test the defense of the Dushanbe garrison. It is worth mentioning that since last year, Tajikistan confronted a number of terrorist incidents related to Daesh. In February 2018, the State Committee for National Security detained 12 Daesh members who had been preparing a terrorist attack in the country. In July 2018, Daesh claimed responsibility for the killing of four foreign tourists during their bicycling tour of the country. The Daesh-affiliated inmates also organized prison riots in maximum-security penal colonies in Khujand (November 2018) and Vahdat (May 2019), with around 30 people killed during those riots. Unsurprisingly, as a consequence, Tajikistan was downgraded in the GTI report from the 74th position in 2018 to the 50th in 2019. In relation to the recent attack on Tajikistan's border post and other incidents, it is worth mentioning the report made public by the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs in early 2019 about the mass transfer of Daesh militants from Pakistan to the borders of Tajikistan. Thus, it could be considered that Russia's report sounded like an early warning for Tajikistan to take necessary measures and be ready for a potential terrorist attack. Nevertheless, the recent terrorist incidents in Tajikistan have alarmed other states in the Central Asian region, as well as major regional players, reminding them of the importance of preventive security measures, both at the state and interstate levels. Therefore, it is no coincidence that counterterrorism issues are discussed thoroughly by officials of the post-Soviet countries, including in the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Although the impact of terrorism has reduced globally and the number of terrorist attacks is also in decrease, the threat of terrorism has not disappeared and continues to evolve. Thus, the Central Asian countries have to work together to prevent terrorist incidents and maintain stability and security in the region.

Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- The 14th meeting of foreign ministers of the countries participating in the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) was held in Madrid. The ASEM is a forum for dialogue and cooperation between the two continents established in 1996. During the event themed “Asia and Europe: Together for Effective Multilateralism”, the parties exchanged views on strengthening Asia-Europe relations in a wide range of areas (ASEM InfoBoard, 15-16.12.2019).
- The 9th plenary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic Speaking Countries (TurkPA) themed “Parliamentary Diplomacy in the Turkic World: Strengthening Regional Cooperation for Peace and Security” was held in Baku. The participants discussed reports and recommendations of the assembly’s standing committees, adopted some model laws and passed the Baku Declaration, while the TurkPA presidency was transferred from Turkey to Azerbaijan (TurkPA, 18.12.2019).
- During his official visit to Japan, President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev held talks with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The parties discussed the expansion of the Uzbek-Japanese multifaceted partnership, including political dialogue, inter-parliamentary relations, mutual trade and economic cooperation, and interaction on humanitarian issues. Particular attention was paid to the implementation of joint projects in energy, mining, agriculture and other priority sectors (President.uz, 19.12.2019).
- During the meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council held in St. Petersburg, the leaders of the EEU member states discussed current issues of the union, outlined future tasks and signed a package of documents. After summing up the work of the Eurasian Economic Commission for the past four-year period, the parties appointed representative of Belarus Mikhaïl Myasnikovich as the new commission chairman (Eurasian Economic Commission, 20.12.2019).
- During the informal CIS summit held in St. Petersburg, presidents of Russia and Tajikistan Vladimir Putin and Emomali Rahmon discussed the strengthening of security at the Tajik-Afghan border. The two leaders discussed the need to equip the Tajik army with modern equipment in connection with the “alarming situation in Afghanistan” (CIS Executive Committee, 21.12.2019).
- During the second meeting of the National Council of Public Trust held in Nur-Sultan, President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev announced a package of political reforms, including on sensitive topics like public assembly. The president also supported the idea of including civil society representatives in executive boards of socially significant enterprises in the quasi-public sector (Astana Times, 21.12.2019).
- The OSCE Program Office in Dushanbe and Tajikistan’s Institute for Public Administration organized a training for representatives of Tajik state judiciary and public institutions dealing with corruption issues. Participants were familiarized with the newly developed anti-corruption curriculum for civil servants. In addition, they discussed international standards in combating corruption and best methods for the development of strategic anti-corruption documents (OSCE, 20.12.2019).

Economy, Finance, and Energy

- According to the National Bank of Kazakhstan, starting January 1, 2020, the country’s second-tier banks will be banned from providing loans to citizens with incomes below the subsistence level and from accruing fees for all unsecured consumer loans of individuals after 90 days of delay. In addition, stricter requirements concerning banks’ own capital will be introduced, which will reduce economic incentives for banks to issue unsecured loans (Kazinform, 17.12.2019).
- Uranium production in Kazakhstan in 2019 is expected to reach 22,742 tons, which is 5% higher compared to 2018. Despite unfavorable pricing conditions that persist on the global uranium market, Kazakhstan continues to maintain its leading position accounting for nearly 40% of world production and plans to produce higher-end uranium products (Kazinform, 19.12.2019).
- Turkmen gas began commercial extraction of natural gas at the Tajibay field located in the Lebap region near the Malay gas field in northeastern Turkmenistan. The daily production capacity of the gas well is more than 450,000 cubic meters. In the coming years, it is expected that natural gas production at the field will increase significantly due to the commissioning of new wells (Business Turkmenistan, 21.12.2019).
- According to the agreement signed between the National Agency for Project Management under the President of Uzbekistan and the Ministry of Public Administration and Security of South Korea, a joint center for cooperation on e-government and digital economy will be established in Tashkent. The South Korean side will allocate a \$2 million grant for the creation of the center that will provide expert support (NAPM, 18.12.2019).
- The Council of the European Union prolonged the economic sanctions targeting Russia’s financial, energy and defense sectors, as well as the area of dual-use goods, until July 31, 2020. This decision was taken following an update by French President Macron and German Chancellor Merkel on the incomplete implementation of the Minsk agreements by Russia (Council of the EU and European Council, 19.12.2019).
- Russia and Ukraine settled their long-running dispute over transit fees and signed a new contract that allows to continue transportation of the Russian gas to Europe via Ukraine for the next five years. According to the deal, Russia will pay higher gas transmission tariffs, as well as \$2.9 billion to settle an arbitration claim between Russia’s Gazprom and Ukraine’s Naftogaz (Deutsche Welle, 21.12.2019).
- Azerbaijani and Ukrainian officials attended the opening ceremony of Ukraine’s trading house held in Baku. The trading house is expected to render consulting services and play the role of a logistics, trade and economic center, which will facilitate expanding business ties between the two countries and increasing bilateral trade turnover (Trend, 18.12.2019).

Society and Culture

- A ceremony of the opening of the first Kazakh-Uzbek cultural and educational center in Uzbekistan dedicated to the Independence Day of Kazakhstan took place at the Fergana State University. The main goal of the center is to contribute to cooperation between scientific and educational communities of the two countries, as well as to promote the Kazakh language and culture in Uzbekistan (Kazinform, 16.12.2019).
- Kyrgyzstan maintains its leading position among the Central Asian states in the World Press Freedom Index 2019 ranking the 83rd among 180 countries. While Kyrgyzstan was marked as a country that has noticeable problems with press freedom, the situation in Kazakhstan (158th), Uzbekistan (160th) and Tajikistan (161st) was described as difficult. Turkmenistan (180th) was found to be the country with the worst level of press freedom in the world (Kun.uz, 17.12.2019).
- The Days of Kazakhstan medicine in Tajikistan were organized in Dushanbe by Kazakhstan’s Ministry of Health with the purpose to strengthen cooperation and exchange experience between health organizations and educational institutions of the two countries. More than 30 leading medical and pharmaceutical organizations, medical universities and colleges from Kazakhstan took part in the event (South Kazakhstan Medical Academy, 20.12.2019).
- The regional conference titled “Innovative approaches and solutions in the system of sustainable water resources management and opportunities for their use in Central Asia” was held in Almaty. During the event that brought together more than 150 experts, scientists, relevant officials of the Central Asian countries and representatives of international organizations, the UN Special Program for the Aral Sea Basin was presented (MFA of Turkmenistan, 20.12.2019).
- According to a survey by HSBC Bank’s Expat Explorer Report, Turkey is the seventh best country in the world to live and work for expatriates after Switzerland, Singapore, Canada, Spain, New Zealand, and Australia. More than 18,000 expats living in 163 countries were surveyed, and 62% of expats in Turkey said that the quality of life in Turkey is much better than in their home countries (Anadolu Agency, 19.12.2019).
- The Forbes business magazine named the Georgian Black Sea resort of Batumi among the “best European cities to invest in for 2020”. The assessment of cities that show signs of real estate growth but yet to surpass the threshold of profit was made by LeadingRE, a global consortium of 565 real estate brokerages across 70 countries (Agenda.ge, 22.12.2019).
- According to the Belarusian authorities, administrative offenses in the country will be graded into several types depending on their severity, similar to criminal offenses. In the updated Code of Administrative Offences, all sanctions will be reviewed to mitigate liability, and inappropriate penalties will be ruled out (Belarus24, 18.12.2019).