

UNSTABLE AFGHANISTAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS AFTER 2014

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Abstract:

The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union have increased the dynamics of the situation in the Central Asia region. Within geopolitics and geoeconomics the postsoviet republics of Central Asia and Afghanistan were the primary objects of interest. The 9/11 events have just emphasized this trend. Regarding this context, the relations among the players of the region have not always been sufficiently analyzed. Thus, this article offers a view on several selected problems relating to the relations among postsoviet republics of Central Asia and Afghanistan. It also aims to present the complexity of promoting regional approach when dealing with problems in the greater scope of Central Asia, which is not possible without the postsoviet republics and Afghanistan.

Key words: Central Asia, Afghan question, security of the region, drug phenomenon, clan factor, regional cooperation.

INTRODUCTION

When examining this topic, in the wider area of Central Asia the year 2014 is definitely considered a milestone, although the departure of all coalition troops of Western states is not yet quite sure. However, Central Asia, considering their neighbourhood with Afghanistan, will probably have to deal with several problems of regional and local character. Within the whole region it is especially the weak defence of state borders and consequent possibility of spreading the conflict from Afghanistan to neighbouring countries. On the local level of individual states the transfer of military machinery of the coalition armed forces and the further fate of foreign military force in the region will be in the centre of attention.

In general we can say that a wide range of issues relating to future relations among Central Asian Republics and Afghanistan dwells inside these states. This standpoint has its genesis, which is analyzed in the first part of this article.

The second part aims to show the possibilities and limits of this relation after the year 2014, while the main focus is on the security dimension. It examines the unsatisfactory situation of the Afghan national army and the consequences that this situation might cause and the further fragmentation of the country and its instability.

The third and last part of this article offers a view of the specifications of afghan – central asian affairs, noticing the latent threats and risks especially within the Central Asian Republics of the former Soviet Union. It emphasizes the fact that all involved countries of the region as well as external actors want Central Asia to be stable. As the Czech specialist for Central Asia S. Horák has stated, no one will deal with Afghan internal problems, while there is effort to preserve stability in Central Asia. (Horák, 2013).

1 The Afghan question reflexion within Central Asian Republics

Central Asia² is at present undergoing a significant transition stage, which will largely designate its future course. The Central Asian region is becoming the key element of the geopolitics of Eurasian

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² Central Asia usually relates to the area of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan (i.e. former Soviet Union Republics). From the geographical point of view the term Central Asia is much broader and besides the area of five

area.(Brzezinski, 2001; Horák, 2008; Hodač – Strejček, 2008; Falkowski, 2006). Afghanistan, as part of the broader Central Asia, is an integral part of this process. Especially since in the turbulent history of this region the old geopolitics rule was valid – who rules Afghanistan, rules Central Asia, too.

Furthermore, there is the much disputed security question concerning the Central Asian area in relation to the departure of coalition troops in 2014. All five Central Asia Republics consider their own national security directly connected to the situation in Afghanistan. Most worried countries are the direct neighbours of Afghanistan (Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan). It is difficult to say clearly that each of this states supports the international coalition with no objections. There is a shift in this issue. Anyway, the bigger national interests determine the level and type of national participation, which was offered to the newly created republics after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.(Hartog(ed.), 2010).

Political leaders of all five countries have realized the risks as well as possible advantages connected to the participation in coalition activities in Afghanistan. Basically, they were willing to cooperate even if there was still some kind of „brake” of the possible impact of cooperation on the relations between these postsoviet republics and Russia. This was reflected in the fact that coalition forces rented the airports in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have played an important role in transportation of non-lethal cargo through Northern Distribution Network. Turkmenistan, which has chosen the foreign policy route based on „positive neutrality”, has not offered direct support to the military operations of ISAF, but they have allowed the transportation of humanitarian cargo and they guarantee limited overflights and emergency landing of coalition aircrafts.

Security of all five Central Asian Republics is weakened by the drug trade emerging from the opium production in Afghanistan. This fact has supported the organized crime in the whole region as well as the dynamic growth of drug addiction problem and the increase of the number of HIV/AIDS infections. In case of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan the drug trade rate has seriously weakened the state and has created alternative power structures – especially in the southern parts of Kyrgyzstan. Drug trade has provided financial support to local muslim extremist groups.

The three countries bordering Afghanistan (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) interpret the situation in Afghanistan from different points of view.

Turkmenistan has always been least concerned about the events in Afghanistan and towards the end of the 90s of the last century the Saparmurad Nijazov government has even at short notice acknowledged the Taliban regime. Nijazov wanted to be able to export gas via Afghanistan and he believed that Taliban regime would provide stability that would allow this export. Due to a long and porous border between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan the country tried to maintain good relations with tribal chiefs in the Western Afghanistan (where Ismail Chan dominated even during Taliban regime) and maintain the drug trade somehow under the Turkmen state monitoring.

Uzbek border is shorter and the government is trying to keep it under control. However, they are concerned about the border between Afghanistan and Tajikistan, which is porous and thus threatens Uzbekistan. They believe this is partially caused by the attitude of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan since terrorist groups (interconnected with local criminal clans) come to their territory from both of these countries.

Tajik security estimates are influenced by the fact that Tajiks are the second largest ethnic community in Afghanistan. In both countries Tajiks have established connections during the soviet occupation and these connections still operate. During the Tajik and Afghan civil war opposition groups from both countries sought for a safe harbor behind the international border on the Panj river. Tajik interests in Afghanistan remain relatively neutral. The country is not interested in helping destabilize Hamid Karzai government, but if Afghanistan splits into openly rivaling ethno-religious and ethno-political groupings, Tajikistan would try to take advantage of Tajik minority in Afghanistan.

All Central Asian Republics considered ISAF operations positive and at least at the beginning they believed that their countries would benefit from better security and economic advantages. Leaders in

postsoviet republics includes also the area of Xinjiang in China, Mongolia, parts of Iran and Afghanistan (i.e. demarcation similar to UNESCO). For the needs of this study we consider the broader variant. For more info see:: JUZA, P. (2004): *Geopolitika islamu, demograficko – civilizačné tendencie v Uzbekistane a Strednej Ázii*, p. 16.

Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan were convinced that destruction of al-Qaida camps (which they considered a realistic aim of ISAF) would improve the security situation in the region.

Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan offered the United States access to their military bases. Uzbeks were willing to risk and irritate Moscow with the improving relations between Tashkent and Washington, while the former Kyrgyz president Askar Akajev was convinced that national security of his country would be weakened if Uzbekistan became the only regional ally of the United States.

Kazakhstan and Tajikistan felt too restricted due to their relations with Russia to make similar offer, but in 2014 president Rahmon, whose country had already had Russian military base, but no border with Russia, offered NATO limited rights for their airports. At that time Uzbek-American relation started to cool, when the military NATO help was significantly smaller than what Uzbeks had expected and the more and more worsening reputation of Tashkent regarding human rights has become the target of criticism in the United States and European Union. (Emerson – Boonstra, 2010). The United States base in Kyrgyzstan got twice nearly closed. The first time after the president Akajev's removal from office and the second time when in 2009 the United States had to accept a significant annual price increase for rent and the reduction of the status of base to transit centre (which meant that United States troops were responsible to Kyrgyz laws).

Since Kazakhstan took over Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Chair, they increased their support for ISAF in comparison with the past. Kazakhstan chaired the Summit on Afghanistan in 2010 and is the only Central Asian state providing financial support for Afghanistan. Kazakhs have participated in missions in Iraq, but nor Kazakhstan nor any other Central Asian state provided troops to join ISAF. Deploying engineers to ISAF in June 2011 failed to be enforced in the Kazakhs legislation³

Partial reason for the absence of Central Asian troops in ISAF was the fact that their armed forces are „successor“ of Soviet forces that had been fighting there in the 80s and also the fact that the fight against ethnic groups members significantly increases the risk of drawing Taliban's attention to Central Asian countries. The reports about deployment of Uzbek troops to Afghanistan in exchange for American military help and security guarantees have proved to be wrong. General Ahmed Rashid Dostum, who had been fighting the Soviets and maintained close contacts with Taskent, could however lead to a certain form of greater Uzbek engagement.

All Central Asian states have participated in Paris Pact Initiative⁴, which by means of UN and the so-called Rainbow strategy fought Afghan opiates trafficking.⁵ For example, Turkmenistan played the leading role in the „Caspian Sea Initiative (violet paper)“, which included dealing with the issue of Turkmen-Afghan and Iranian-Afghan borders. Kazakhs have created space for the recently organized „Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre“, which included all five Central Asian countries as well as Russia and Azerbaijan. The Yellow Paper Securing Central Asia's Borders has emphasized the enforcement of local laws and restriction of the drug flow to Russia. (World Drug Report, 2010; Illicit Drug Trends in the Russian Federation, 2008);

All these states actively participate in strategies for economical restoration of Afghanistan. Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were disappointed that the main projects that could bring many benefits, were not realized. Plans for transport of Turkmen gas to Pakistan and India through the new Trans-Afghan Pipeline still lacks sponsors (and most of this gas will now head to Chinese and Southasian markets). World bank institutions have shown interest in building an integral market for electricity for

³ The upper house of Parliament of Kazakhstan (Senate) declined the proposal to deploy troops to Afghanistan to help the coalition led by NATO. The decision of Senate reversed the May voting of the lower house, which supported deployment of Central Asian Republic troops to Afghanistan to help ISAF troops. Analysts attribute this mismatch between the houses of parliament to Taliban threats. Taliban has indicated retaliation if Kazakhstan participated in operations in Afghanistan. Committee on foreign affairs, defence and security rejected the proposal completely and recommended to send it back for further negotiations to Majilis (lower house of parliament).

⁴ Under the auspices of UNODC, in 2003 the so-called Paris Pact Initiative aimed at combating Afghan opiates trafficking was formed.

⁵ Experts have lately drawn attention to the unpopularity of rainbow symbol in Afghanistan, since people have found out, that rainbow is a symbol of homosexuals in the West. Thus, it is disputable, if in such serious context as combating drug trafficking it is suitable to use this symbolism. (author's note).

Central and South Asia. For this purpose, huge hydropower stations in Tajikistan (Rogun) and Kyrgyzstan (Kambarata) were planned as early as during Soviet era. No international financial institution for these projects have been assigned (the first of them has been gradually financed by Tajiks themselves and Russians suggest a contract for the construction of the other one). (Juza, 2008).

Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have hoped that ISAF countries would provide for their troops in Afghanistan through supplies bought in Central Asian region. None of this was realized especially due to the fact that the American government was not interested in any change in the process for procurement of goods and services. An exception was the use of the so-called Northern distribution network, by means of which the purchase of fresh food and fuel from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan was performed.

The energy sector belongs to the longterm, regional and economical developmental strategies, in which the Central Asian Republics see scope for cooperation with Afghanistan. Furthermore, Uzbekistan is interested in the main railway project for the interconnection of Northern Afghanistan with the international railway system.

All Central Asian Republics have been counterbalancing the international coalition with their offers and interests within relations with Russia. (Kňazev, 2011). It is questionable if all risks connected to it were rewarded, but every state has set firm limits to their level of participation. For example, Kazakhstan has not even considered offering the facilities of their military bases to the coalition, since this step would require to do the same for Russia, which would be unacceptable for Kazakhstan. Turkmenistan has officially declared „positive neutrality“ as their reason for refusing to join the Northern distribution network. In fact, there were some concerns that joining would open the door for Russia to run the trade and transport via their borders. Uzbekistan has tried to balance their foreign policy and thus they wanted the United States as their main security partner, limiting Russia (that has no border with Uzbekistan) in the position of gas sector. For Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan economical security was crucial and in both cases these countries tried to follow the thin line between opposing Russia and hazarding with financial assistance offered by international financial institutions.

Throughout the year 2009 while negotiating with Kyrgyzstan Russians indicated their willingness to invest into the Kambarata hydro power. This was probably a stimulus for Kyrgyzstan to support the departure of the United States troops from the country (obviously on the order of Moscow). It seems that the primary goal of Moscow was rather to show Washington their position of „doorman“ than the complete departure of NATO from Kyrgyzstan.

All Central Asian Republics except Turkmenistan are members of Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Due to the complicated heritage of Central Asian Republics this organization has not managed to elaborate any effective positions for the situation in Afghanistan. (Čech, 2011).

Russia would probably be pleased if the international coalition guaranteed them a more important role in the region of Central Asia, with the possibility to take advantage of the lead role of Moscow within the Collective Security Treaty Organization.⁶ However, nothing suggests that any Central Asian country, maybe except for Kyrgyzstan (whose present-day leaders would be willing to trade with key aspects of sovereignty in Exchange for 100% security guarantees), would voluntarily agree with suchlike politics. Those days, when the United States (or NATO) and Russia could close an agreement, are past. Kazakhstan has become a recognized international player, Uzbekistan lags behind a little and Turkmenistan and Tajikistan also have multi-vector foreign strategies.

In most republics the planned departure of coalition troops is considered a more serious threat to the stability and security than Taliban. These opinions result from the fact, that Afghan government does not the country. Only few of the leaders of Central Asian states believes that the United States will keep their troops in Afghanistan for those 10 years that are believed to be important for the military defeat of internal opposition of Karzai's regime. They also do not believe that the international community will provide enough money for the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

⁶ Where Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are active members (Uzbekistan has frozen its membership).

There is a reasonable concern that the departure will happen earlier than the Afghan government gains enough credibility to sustain and enhance control over the whole country. This fragmentation can have various forms. For example, throughout the 90s when the factions within Afghanistan supported opposition groups in countries of Central Asia (main destinations of this „aid“ were Uzbekistan and Tajikistan). (Horák, 2005). If the withdrawal of coalition troops leads to extreme fragmentation of Afghanistan, especially political leaders in Tashkent worry, that this will lead to extreme fragmentation of Tajikistan. Furthermore, since during the last months there has been some information on revival of Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (Kňazev, 2011) and its activities in Afghan provinces of Takhar, Kunduz, Badakhshan, Samanga, Batgiz and Faryab.

The previous events are causing that the Central Asian Republic legitimately use the unstable Afghanistan as the source of security threat.⁷ Civil war conditions attracted al-Qaida to Afghanistan. Religious ideologies of al-Qaida and Taliban overlap, however, these two groups do not share a common interest in creating a global Islamic state. Al-Qaida got a guardian from Taliban because they financed his actions. For the most supporters of Afghan Taliban Afghanistan without foreigners is a reward for their engagement in conflict. Yet the movement includes also radicals, for whom the domestic victory is a stepping stone to get to neighbouring states. Except for the terrorist threat Taliban is inextricably linked with drug trafficking. Be it governmental structures of Taliban itself, in fact everybody surrendered to this Afghan phenomenon to some extent.

2 What can be expected from the relationship between Central Asian countries and Afghanistan after 2014

The departure of coalition troops will probably launch another wave of fragmentation of Afghanistan, which could seriously disturb its territorial integrity. To prevent this scenario, government administration in Kabul in cooperation with coalition partners of Western countries devoted considerable resources to build a functional Afghan army (ANA) and other security forces. (Majerník, 2014).

Afghan people know what life with gun in their hands means and this aspect has affected several generations. The image of their traditional and historically evoked pugnacity is over and above spread by all world media. According to this image the possession of firearm and fight the main purpose of life of common Afghan men. The desire to live and work in peace is indeed not unknown to Afghan people, but on the other hand hundreds of years of tradition have had impact. Boys learn to shoot since their early childhood and leadership skills in battles are part of the upbringing. Many young men today do not know anything but weapon handling and fighting.

Above stated facts allow us to see that regarding these conditions it is not a problem to build a regular and functional army. Unfortunately, the opposite is true and the current army of almost 200 000 strength faces significant problems with recruitment. (RUSI Journal, December 2009). They have managed to increase soldiers' salaries lately – from the previous 80 USD to the present-day 210 USD (including the combat deployment allowance) – which is more than Taliban offer.⁸ In spite of this ANA displays 50% desertion.

There is the ethnic and clan aspect – in the south Pashtun soldiers who refuse to fight their own people cannot be deployed. They are trying to protect their own families (threat of vendetta). Most of the recruited men lately have been semi-literate villagers from Tajik areas, who do not speak Pashtu language of the southern provinces. ANA without air support of international forces and without backup from alliance allies in case of combat deployments does not seem very convincing.

⁷ The annual review by the organization Fund for Peace – by means of The Failed States Index – places Afghanistan in 2013 on the 7th place in the ranking (out of 178 evaluated states) regarding the riskiness and the possible unstable course of progress.

⁸ According to the American general W. Caldwell, who was in charge of increasing the numbers of Afghan police and army in the recent years, due to the higher pay there are 7 000 men applying to join, but Pashtun recruits from the South make just about 2 – 3 % of the total number. Available at: <<http://www.ceskenoviny.cz/svet/zpravy/nato-si-nevi-rady-s-dezerci-afghanskych-rekrutu/443751>> [04.03.2010].

Nine out of ten Afghan recruits cannot read. They have problems with studying weapon manuals or obtaining driver's licence etc. One quarter of Afghan military recruits deserted after the first "leave". The estimate is alarming: 25% of members is heroin and opium addicted. (Čech, 2012). ANA is losing many members due to leaves, kidnappings or killings. Three out of ten soldiers leave the army this way and the monthly loss is 5000 soldiers. (Šulc, 2013).

In spite of this the process of building ANA is presented as the greatest success of coalition forces in Afghanistan (especially when compared to the attempts to reform police force but also in the field of economy and politics). (Sibyla, 2010). The real situation is that the preparedness of Afghan army and security of the country is questionable. (Giustozzi, 2009, p. 36-42).

The state's poor ability to provide security in the country strengthens the authority of local commanders. When added to the inability of the centre to send money to the commanders in exchange for their loyalty, we can expect a certain division of competence and redistribution of territory at the local level. Of course, in this moment it is very difficult to forecast how deeply the Afghan society will be affected by this disintegration or fragmentation after the elections in 2014.

In relation to the prediction of internal instability of Afghanistan and with the reduced responsibility of broader international community in the Afghan question the external solution of possible Afghan problems will be shifted to neighbouring states and engaged Asian or Eurasian powers (mainly China, Russia, Iran and India). Today it is necessary to prepare several scenarios, including those more complicated ones. (Tellis – Mukharji (eds.), 2010).

When talking about bilateral Afghan – Central Asian relations, since 2001 there has been some increase in the frontier trade and mutual humanitarian exchange, for all Central Asian countries trade with Afghanistan is relatively negligible. The question of potential refugees is also not very topical, because Central Asian regimes are for Afghan Turkems, Uzbeks and Tajiks not much more attractive.

The biggest problem of future relations is the concern of Central Asian regimes that after the departure of coalition forces there will be a civil war in Afghanistan, which might eventually spread to Central Asia. However, it is more likely that any Afghan power would in this case focus on inner Afghan problems rather than on expansion beyond borders. The main threat could be presented by various radical groups with their bases in Central Asia.

Thus, it is necessary to mention that the situation has changed and the groups that are considered most dangerous now have their own priorities somewhere else or they operate illegally in Central Asia. In the first case this is the Islamic Movement Uzbekistan, whose current leaders do now come from Central Asia anymore and they focus especially on Southern Asia, or the global Jihad. In the second case it is the Islamic groups Hizb ut – Tahrir or other ones. These groups operate quite successfully in the more liberal Kyrgyzstan, which is often a thorn in the neighbouring states' side. The biggest danger for individual states in the region then might be especially the infiltration of smaller, well-equipped groups under the command of one or more commanders with authorities over concrete places. These groups can then perform mainly terrorist activities or some minor activities discrediting local authority of local armies and regimes. This fact relates especially to weaker regimes in Kyrgyzstan and foremostly in Tajikistan. Authoritarian character of local regimes together with weak experience of national armed forces might lead to the inability to face these asymmetric threats. So let us ask the question if similar terrorist activities are able to destabilize local Central Asian regimes.

Regarding the military preparedness of Central Asian states, none of these states and not even all states together could engage in case of military conflict with Afghanistan. The only country able to deal with destabilization of Central Asia is Russia (in cooperation with local governments). Along with bilateral relations Russia emphasizes also multilateral cooperation within The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). (Saliev, 2011). Although this organization disposes of collective powers of special purpose also to support Russia, on the other hand they have been dealing with other threats. Collective threats are not clearly defined and participation of other soldiers (except for Russia and partially also Kazakhstan) is not certain. Besides it, CSTO in the Central Asia includes also air base in Kant, Kyrgyzstan, which has restricted operational limits of functioning. Russia is expected to cover the most of the expenses

of this group, to arm local armies and follow the signed pacts on military cooperation and military machinery supplies. Although Russia follows their particular goals this way (economical and military unity of Central Asian territory under the leadership of Russia), they have to count on the risk that they can be easily dragged into the conflict among Central Asian states. CSTO still does not include the neutral Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (membership frozen in 2011).

Central Asian states as well as Russia or China thus will not be able nor willing to solve the situation in Afghanistan. Their effort will focus on protection of Afghan borders (where it is possible) and maintaining stability inside the Central Asian territory. The problem with protection of the borders is especially their relative openness – geographical, economical and military.

From this point of view the Tajik-Afghan and Tajik-Kyrgyz borders are less protected. Frontier organs of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are not able to effectively prevent illegal migration through the borders from Afghanistan. The discussed return of Russian or other foreign border troops could enhance the situation just partially and regarding the political elite of Tajikistan it is not very welcome. Finally, when Russian border troops were present at the river Panj (until the year 2005), for some groups it was not a problem to cross the border anyway, be it illegally or due to corruption.

Although Kyrgyzstan is not an immediate neighbour of Afghanistan, its long border with Tajikistan is not sufficiently monitored and it is used for illegal crossing of people and goods.

On the other hand, the Uzbek border is better protected. On the Afghan side there is the Amudarja river, which has been well-protected since the Soviet times. The only border crossing on the Friendship Bridge near the South Uzbek Termez can easily be closed and the border can be protected. Since the end of 90s Uzbekistan has taken several steps to secure the borders with Kyrgyzstan and especially Tajikistan. In some places they even mined the territory and it has not been completely demined so far.

Turkmenistan is a specific problem. Their border with Afghanistan has several leaks, since there is no natural river border (unlike previous states). Furthermore, the desert terrain is not very suitable for guarding. Turkmen leadership can only rely on the fact that there had not been any threats from any radical elements coming from Afghanistan. Anyway, they have to count on another alternative and in case of confrontation they cannot expect that Turkmenistan would be prepared for an asymmetrical fight against any guerilla or illegal group.

One of the most significant problems of Central Asian – Afghan relations in future will be the issue of opium – production of heroin, transit via the region and its distribution. Drug trade involves radical opposition groups using drugs to finance their activities (also against local governments). Drug trade includes also people close and loyal to existing regimes. Any changes in this context could in fact arise instability in the region, which is not what the powers would appreciate (Russia or China).

In this context we can thus not expect more significant changes in comparison with the current situation. In Afghanistan it was not possible to get rid of this profitable element of economy even with help of various aid programmes, so it will be even more difficult in times when the inner development of Afghanistan will be more or less left to their own devices.

Part of the Central Asian elites is not and will not be interested in reducing the incredible incomes from this trade. Especially Russia and China are interested in reducing the drug transit from Central Asia. (Kalačev, 2011).

3 Specific problems of Central Asian - Afghan relations

In addition to the expectation of the course of situation in Afghanistan after 2014 the Central Asian countries will have to deal with a number of problems, which will determine not just their own course, but also the relations of these countries with Afghanistan.

Tajikistan belongs to the most troubled states in the region. Their current president Emomali Rahmon confirmed his mandate in the elections in November 2013, which allowed him to eventually settle with the opposition or other inconvenient groups. His armed forces would probably not be able to deal with potential bigger and better coordinated activities of anti-regime groups. What is more, in Afghanistan, Tajikistan and

other countries several commanders of civil war live and they still have not squared their accounts with the president.

One of the most dangerous one is the Ansarollah group, whose core is formed by former opposition commanders and combatants. In addition to that, the mountainous terrain of the country offers the illegal groups relative security for their bases, that is why Dushanbe does not need to monitor the whole country. This could be seen especially in 2010, when the government forces eliminated the armed attacks of the former commander Mullah Abdull with great difficulties. For Tajik elites (both pro-regime and opposition) the mentioned situation of participating in drug trade is typical. It involves even people from the closest circles of president Rahmon.

The Afghan factor and internal contradictions probably caused also the last year's ratification of the agreement on maintaining Russian military base in the country until 2043. Russian troops in the country would probably not stop the potential invasion from Afghanistan or the portion of elimination of armed groups operating in Tajikistan. The Russian presence itself, however, is by all actors viewed as a stabilizing element. The rising investments in the country also have their purpose. For China Tajikistan is interesting especially due to the natural resources and building Tajik economical ties with China will be interesting for any Tajik regime. These ties are important for Tajikistan due to overcoming the infrastructural isolation. Most of the transport constructions connecting the country with the outside worlds leads via Uzbekistan and the relations between the two presidents are very bad, also because of their irreconcilable positions within the hydroenergy projects. Thus the Tajik leaders support alternative infrastructural projects – especially the questioned construction of road network and railway from Kashgar through Southern Kyrgyzstan (Pamir-Alaya region), Tajikistan and Afghanistan to Turkmenistan or Iran. For the energetic security of Tajikistan the key factors are pipelines from Turkmenistan, hydro powers projects and interconnection of electricity networks of Afghanistan and Pakistan (CASA project). In addition to the key issue of financing these constructions Tajikistan will also have to deal with the primary purpose of stability in the area north of Hindu Kush mountains.

Kyrgyzstan does not have a direct border with Afghanistan, but their weak economy, troubled government in Bishket that in facts does not control parts of Southern Kyrgyzstan near the borders with Tajikistan and mafia circles or state structures involved in the Afghan drug trade do not make the country a strong ally when preventing threats from Afghanistan. For Afghan policy of Kyrgyzstan the 2014 so-called Transit centre of American troops at the Manas airport by Bishket will be important. Closing it Kyrgyzstan will lose 3 – 5 % of state budget income, but for solving problems coming from the south this base is not so important for the country. The stability of Kyrgyzstan will also not be secured by another military base in the country run by Russia under the auspices of CSTO.

Uzbekistan has the strongest army in the region and also the shortest and best secured border with Afghanistan. Uzbekistan has the strongest army that had been able to face asymmetrical attacks from the Islamic Movement Uzbekistan in 1999 – 2000, also in the territories of neighbouring states. However, Uzbekistan pursues a rather isolationistic policy with no cooperation with other countries or regional groupings, which they consider unable of real activity. The problem of Uzbekistan is their economical weakness, which resulted in migration of 1 – 2.5 million Uzbeks. There will be also presidential elections. The current president will run out of mandate in 2015 and his future presidential career (also regarding his age – he is 75-years old) is not certain. There have been no techniques for handing over power so far and there might also be some rivalry between power groups that are currently loyal to the president. In case of real power clashes within Uzbek elite and the consequent instability in the country Uzbekistan is likely to become a base for a number of groups that are currently residing in Afghanistan or between Afghanistan and Pakistan. For Uzbekistan the agreement with Uzbek diaspora that in Northern Afghanistan that handles most of the trade and investments is important.

Turkmenistan is obviously less interested in engagement in inner Afghan affairs except for the pipeline TAPI (Turkmenistan- Afghanistan – Pakistan – India), which should run through Western Afghanistan. Financing this project as well as its security dimension, however, has been the subject of unsuccessful negotiations since the 90s. Turkmenistan is still (even if to a lesser extent than during the first

president Nijazov era) one if the transit states for drug trade from Afghanistan further to Russia or Kaukazus.

Probably the least threatened country in the region is Kazakhstan. In addition to their relative economical stability they also have better secured border in the south, which can if necessary be closed. In the past the Kazakh – Uzbek border was several times challenged and after the year 2010 also the Kyrgyz – Kazakh parts of border. Activation of some radical groups inside the country that have connection to Afghanistan could present some problem. On the other hand there is just little support so far and significant opponents of the regime do not belong to the supporters of Islam or other radical circles, on the contrary, they are recruited rather from business circles.

Conclusion

Comparing the mutual relations between Central Asian Republics and Afghanistan in the past and the possible factors that can influence their future does not induce any optimism at all, but we cannot consider Afghanistan an immediate Threat to the present order in the region.

Central Asian states will probably not be able to face threats individually especially from the South, maybe except for Uzbekistan and the less involved Kazakhstan. Otherwise the states do not have technical means for the case of potential destabilization. However, mutual cooperation among them is complicated or even impossible, too. A block has formed of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan on one side and Tajikistan on the other side. The other two states of the region have an ambivalent attitude to this division. They are on the side of the stronger state (i.e. Uzbekistan) and on the side which offers advantages.

Outer powers are able to help states in the region just in a limited way, although all involved outer players are enormously interested in stability of the region. Russia does have military and political influence in the region, but their economical attractions slowly fades away because of China's influence. It can be expected that Russia and China will try to keep rather cooperative than competitive position (similarly to previous situations) in the region with significant synergic effects. Russian military and political ambitions may operate in short-term or medium-term, while Chinese expansion and investing into infrastructural projects can bring along greater stability and integration not just in Central Asia, but in Afghanistan itself in the long-term perspective. Furthermore, in case of destabilization of Afghanistan Chinese can withdraw from this country without any considerable losses and support (also regarding defence) more strategic regimes in Central Asia.

Stability is thus also the interest of power centres – Europe and the USA. American side will weaken its position after the departure from the region and European policy, which has here strong roots, will have to deal with potential problems within cooperation with Russia and China, eventually India. In this context it means supporting the defence of borders, supporting infrastructural projects, supporting stability of existing and predominantly non-democratic systems and securing a smooth power transition from one president to another (especially in case of two countries – Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan).

Central Asia (unlike Afghanistan) thus has their strategic purpose for a number of world power centres, but their reasons are different. If efforts to stabilize Afghan situation by inner powers fail (unfortunately this option is quite possible), then external engagement should not be expected. We will more likely witness cementing Afghan borders. In other words, Afghan inner problems will not be solved by anybody, while there still will be strong efforts to maintain stability in Central Asia. If this geopolitical interest is sufficient enough for maintaining stability in the region is questionable. This question remains open and it will develop depending on the nature of individual Central Asian regimes and the situation in Afghanistan.

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