

Aspects of militarization in the countries of Central Asia: priorities and conflict of interests

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From the moment of gaining independence, Tajikistan, along with other states of post-Soviet Central Asian countries, became an important geostrategic object for the mainpower centers and individual states. Evidently, despite the commonality of goals that main players have on some issues there are also conflicts of interests that have a geopolitical nature.

The countries of the Central Asian region have different understanding of the tasks on developing the "Shanghai Six". Behind the economic cooperation and joint military exercises much more global goals are rooted. But these goals can be achieved only if the countries come to a common denominator. Obviously, the functioning of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has long gone beyond the originally stated goals, since from a modest association with limited tasks of cooperation in Central Asia in general and in Tajikistan, in particular, the Shanghai "business club" quickly evolved into a regional security bloc. This is evidenced by the creation of a strong military-political bloc, which includes the countries of the Central Asian region.

Russia, unlike the United States, has no goal of promoting democracy in this region. The essence of the position of the political leadership of the Russian Federation lies in the fact that such actions can lead to destabilization of domestic political processes in the Central Asian countries, which certainly can negatively affect, first of all, Russia as the nearest neighbor. Therefore, by conducting the Russian-Chinese military exercises, these countries confirm the political will of the regional leaders of Russia and China to ensure stability and become the calling card for a new powerful Eastern bloc. As a result, the SCO has become today not only an important geopolitical factor, but also a reason for restoring priorities and guidelines in the foreign policy world. At the same time, there is serious divergence between positions of Russia and China, on the priorities of the SCO activities. China within the boundaries of the "Shanghai" space carries out serious economic projects. Obviously, this strengthens the position of Beijing in this geopolitical region. Unfortunately, such financial maneuvers of the strategic partner contradict Russian national interests. Moscow believes that if the countries of Central Asia realize that China is really solving their problems, they lose interest in integration with Moscow. In this regard, Russia is trying to draw the attention of member countries of the organization to the fight against terrorism and extremism,

insisting on compliance with its rules of the game inside the club, and considers economic integration in the SCO zone as a more distant goal¹.

In recent years, the SCO, at the initiative of China, has focused on joint energy projects, including the development of the oil and gas sector, exploration of hydrocarbon reserves and the joint use of water resources, and the establishment of an inter-bank SCO to finance similar projects². Russia is concerned that China will establish economic hegemony in post-Soviet Asia, and does everything possible to block Beijing's integration proposals. Russia prefers to negotiate the free flow of goods, services, capitals, labor only with CIS countries that are equal or lagging behind in economic development. China, which offers cheap goods and labor, obviously does not apply to such conditions. Chinese goods can displace Russian products in the market, and Chinese workers can dramatically change the social and demographic situation in the Far East. In addition, Moscow fears that expansion of trade with China will strengthen the unfavorable trend for Russia: currently 95% of Russian exports to China are commodities, while the Chinese export to Russia mainly consist of highly processed products.

Although the SCO member countries insist that the organization is not a militaristic bloc, the main activities under its auspices are still of a military nature. The first joint "antiterrorist" SCO exercises were held in 2003 in the territory of Kazakhstan and the Chinese region of Xinjiang, populated by Muslims (they seek independence, and Beijing considers them potential terrorists). In 2007, large military antiterrorist exercises "Peace Mission 2007" were held in Chebarkul, Chelyabinsk region. The following exercises in 2010 were conducted in the south of Kazakhstan. Thus, the SCO member states are preparing to jointly use military force against new challenges and threats³.

As a result, they have already achieved some degree of compatibility and coherence of their armed forces, and it is likely to increase. Maneuvers are held on the east coast of China and in the surrounding waters, in Central Russia and Central Asia. In 2015, the Russian Navy and the Navy of the People's Liberation

¹ See: What the Ministers of Defense of the CIS countries agreed on // <https://news.tj/news/tajikistan/security/20171012/o-chyom-dogovorilis-ministri-oboroni-stran-sng>; Source in the government: Russia will supply Tajikistan only new weapons // <https://news.tj/news/tajikistan/security/20161202/istochnik-v-pravitelstve-rossiya-postavit-tadzhikistanu-tolko-novoe-vooruzhenie>

² See: 15 years of the SCO: history and development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization // <http://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/3355240>

³ See: Today, the ceremony of handing over Russian armament to Tajikistan will take place // <https://news.tj/en/news/tajikistan/security/20171219/segodnya-sostoitsya-tseremoniya-peredachi-rossiiskogo-vooruzheniya-tadzhikistanu>

Army of China held joint exercises in the Mediterranean. This change in geography speaks of the readiness of both countries to demonstrate to the whole world the strength of their military partnership, as well as strategic unity in one of the most important and troubled regions of Eurasia.

In exchange for their support, China will insist on Russia to transfer advanced military technologies in such areas as anti-aircraft and anti-missile defense, aviation and navy. While Moscow is cautious in supplying Beijing with the latest technical innovations, remembering the periods of deterioration of bilateral relations in the past and not wanting to provoke discontent among other Asian powers, in particular, India and even Japan. But in the current situation, when Moscow more than ever needs the support of Beijing, Russia may have to loosen the restrictions of defense technology exports to China.

The annual joint military exercises of the "Shanghaiers" under the guise of fighting international terrorism make NATO headquarters and the Pentagon nervous. Increasing number of analytical publications and comments in western media in recent years directly affirm that Russia and China can form an eastern version of NATO. The geopolitical parameters of the emerging new power pole force the EU and the US to think about a possible threat to their interests, especially given that India and Pakistan have become full members of the SCO, and Iran has repeatedly expressed its intention to change the status of observer to the mandate of a member of the Shanghai Club⁴.

At first, Russia did not take the SCO seriously. Russia closely followed the activity of China and from time to time cooled China's ambitions in expanding the scope of the organization, for example, by turning it into a free trade area. Everything was changed by two factors: the deployment of US troops in the region after September 11, 2001, and the acquisition by China of oil fields in Kazakhstan. Since 2003, Russia has become more serious about the SCO and has begun working with China to expand the organization's area of competencies. Russia initiated an increase in the number of members, inviting Iran and India in 2005 as observers. In response, China demanded the invitation of Pakistan. However, the both sides agreed that the strange application for membership of America, submitted in 2005, should be rejected.

A certain potential for tensions and even conflict between Russia and China exists in Central Asia - a region stuck between the two powers. China has established itself as the main trade and investment partner of the countries of this region, and Russia, in turn, seeks to integrate these former Soviet republics

⁴ See: Martin Larysh. Interests of the EU in Central Asia // www.cbap.cz/archiv/1418

economically, politically and militarily into bodies such as the EEA and the Collective Security Treaty Organization⁵.

But even here China is tactful enough not to offend the Russians. In the SCO, along with China, Russia plays the role of an unofficial co-chairman. Beijing also does not cross the prohibition line established by Moscow, as to establish political alliances and military bases in the post-Soviet space. This position contrasts sharply with the Western policy of expanding NATO and the EU in the former Soviet borderland on the territory of Eastern Europe.

Russia-India strategic alliance could substantially strengthen Russia's position at the international level. But we are not talking about coordination of efforts within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, where India has its own contradictions with other members, like China. The bilateral anti-terrorist, anti-radical-Islamist alliance would have greater prospects and could seriously change the international alignment of forces. In the event of the implementation of the project of the Russian-Indian alliance, radical Islam would have an enemy who is ready for sacrifice, tough and unpopular political decisions understanding the realities of the Islamic East much better.

Acknowledging its own relative weakness compared to China, Russia will continue to look for counterbalance to China, developing relations with other major states of Asia, but this has become more difficult than before. Russia can try to increase the importance of RIC, an informal consultative association with China and India, which is mostly ceremonial in nature. Theoretically, after India's accession to the SCO in 2015, a triumvirate of the great Asian powers may emerge within the framework of this organization. In practice, however, Moscow will rather continue to develop relations with these two countries in parallel. Russia will have to act cautiously. Russia wants to maintain the position of the main supplier of arms and military equipment to the armed forces of India, which views China as the main threat. At the same time, Moscow may have to transfer to Beijing more advanced military technology, which is unlikely to please New Delhi.

The deepest impact of the deepening of Russian-Chinese integration will be felt in the interior regions of Asia - Afghanistan, Mongolia and the five Central Asian republics of the former USSR. The EAEC will have to work closely with China in its projects to develop the Economic belt of the Silk Road. Most likely, it will come to the emergence of a single trade and investment zone, covering the entire central, northern and eastern Eurasia, the economic driver of which will be

⁵ See: the Air Force of Tajikistan will receive the first combat aircraft from the Russian Federation in 2017 // https://tvzvezda.ru/news/vstrane_i_mire/content/201611301321-5oce.htm

China. This zone can be called "Great Asia" - from Shanghai, its business center, to St. Petersburg, its outpost at the gates of Europe.

At the same time, the SCO can give the Greater Asia a mechanism for consultation and coordination of policy, joint economic development, financial support and cooperation in the field of security. Russia will continue to play an important role in the SCO, but most likely will take the second place among its member states along with India, but the one who set the tone and provide most of the resources of this organization will be China.

The geopolitical shift in Eurasia will affect strategic stability and change the global strategic balance of power. Russia and China will not create a military alliance, but for each of these countries the US will be a potential enemy. The growth of China's nuclear potential will bring it closer to the level of the United States and Russia. In the 2020s, the strategic arms control process will only make sense if all three of these powers are included, but Beijing's consent to participate in it is only possible if it considers that this will enhance its security and prestige. In any case, Moscow will cease to be the only counterpart of Washington in discussions on issues of strategic stability.

It should be noted that Tajikistan is located in the southern boundary of the CSTO's common area of responsibility, and the complex situation in Afghanistan dictates the need to constantly improve the defense of the southern borders of Tajikistan. Therefore, military and military-technical cooperation are priority areas of Russian-Tajik cooperation. A significant stabilizing role is played by the 201st Russian military base (RVB) located in Tajikistan, the largest Russian military base outside the Russian Federation. Since the beginning of the 1990s, during the years of civil confrontation in Tajikistan, it has carried out a peacekeeping mission and contributed to the normalization of the situation on the Tajik-Afghan border. The personnel of the 201st RVB are constantly on the alert, taking part in joint Russian-Tajik exercises, as well as in exercises conducted by the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

Junior commanders of military men of the Armed Forces of Tajikistan are trained at the training fields of Russian military base. Only for the period 2014-2015 about 2 thousand experts - sappers, scouts, mechanics-drivers of tanks and infantry fighting vehicles, artillerymen were trained for the Ministry of Defense of Tajikistan. In addition, Russian officers and soldiers carry out an important humanitarian mission. So, the personnel of the military base traditionally provide humanitarian assistance to orphans, disabled people and veterans in Dushanbe, Tursunzade and Khatlon region. During emergency situations, units of the 201st

RVB were involved in providing assistance to the population of the areas affected by the disaster⁶.

Russia's leading positions in matters of military and military-technical cooperation with Tajikistan are largely due to traditional ties, the overwhelming predominance of Russian (Soviet) produced arms and equipment in the Tajik army, the staffing of the main units of the command staff of the Armed Forces of the Republic with personnel trained in the military educational institutions of the Russian Federation. Supply of the Armed Forces of Tajikistan with military products of Russian (Soviet) production is carried out within the framework of the agreed plans for the modernization of Russia by the Tajik Armed Forces⁷.

Annually, about 500 Tajik servicemen are trained in Russia on a free basis. The command of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Tajikistan considers the graduates of the Russian military educational institutions to be the most trained in the professional plan officers of the Tajik army. The armed forces of the two countries actively cooperate in the development of measures to prevent any possible aggression. In March 2017 in Tajikistan, major joint exercises of the Central Military District of the RF Armed Forces and the Tajik Armed Forces took place. The purpose of this kind of exercise is to discourage any potential aggressor from invasion into the territory of Tajikistan.

Russian military facility which conducts optical observation of space objects called "Window" located in the city of Nurek plays an important role in strengthening of the security of the Russian Federation. This facility is designed to promptly obtain information about the space environment, cataloging of artificial objects, determining their class, purpose and current status.

Apparently, close contacts between the special services of Russia and Tajikistan in the fight against terrorism and extremism facilitate effective interaction and achievement of concrete results. Given the constantly improving tactics of the actions of terrorists and extremists, we recognize that it is advisable to further expand Russian-Tajik cooperation, both in bilateral format, and within the CIS, the SCO and the CSTO⁸. "

⁶ See: Shoigu said that Russia prepared five tactical groups for Tajikistan // <https://news.tj/news/tajikistan/security/20171012/rossiya-godu-podgotovila-dlya-tadzhikistana-pyat-takticheskikh-grupp>

⁷ See: In 2017, Russia will supply military aircraft to Tajikistan and resume training of Uzbek officers in Russian universities // <http://www.fergananews.com/news/25682>

⁸ See: Khakimov Sh.K. Religiously motivated extremism and problems of its prevention in Tajikistan // Collected materials of the Almaty international scientific and practical conference "Prevention of religious motivated extremism in the modern metropolis" (Almaty, November 24, 2016). Pp. 61-68;

The Russian Federation continues to provide Tajikistan with all kinds of assistance related to the protection of the state border. This function is performed by the Federal Security Service Border Cooperation Group, located here. Along with servicemen of the 201st RVB, border group officers provide operational support to their Tajik partners and help train personnel. Aviation of the Russian Federal Security Service on a regular basis ensures the delivery of Tajik border guards and cargo to hard-to-reach areas of the country.

The illicit traffic of heroin from Afghanistan poses a serious threat to the national security of the Russian Federation and other CSTO member states. Tajikistan, which has a long border with Afghanistan, can not cope alone with this drug outbreak. Therefore, the competent authorities of the Russian Federation provide assistance to the Agency for Drug Control (ACC) under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan. First of all the renewal of its material and technical base, its structural expansion through the creation of territorial units, the training and retraining of personnel, and material support. AKN Tajikistan was provided with modern special technical equipment, vehicles, premises for operational and search activities, buildings reconstruction were carried out⁹.

With the help of the Russian Federation, three new units have been set up on the most intensive routes of drug trafficking. Besides, thanks to the support of Russia, the outflow of qualified personnel of the Academy of Justice of the Republic of Tajikistan has been suspended, the discipline of officials has been improved, positive tendencies in the organization of the work of investigative and operational units is noticeable. It is necessary to emphasize that, despite the reorganization in Russia, all agreements on rendering assistance to the DCA of the Republic of Tajikistan remain in place. Combating Afghan heroin aggression is also carried out in a multilateral format: under the auspices of the CSTO in Tajikistan, joint anti-drug operations "Channel-South Trap" and "Thunder-2015" were conducted.

Besides solely military and security assistance, Russia has been providing experts and equipment for demining, as well as liquidation of unexploded ordnance. This type of aid, labelled as „demining“, can be seen as humanitarian in the sense that it is both life-saving and a form of post-conflict assistance (whereas

<https://www.news.tj/en/news/tajikistan/security/20171101/tadzhikistan-i-rossiya-gotovi-ukrepit-vzaimodeistvie-po-protivodeistviyu-terrorizmu>

⁹ See: Overview of the drug situation in the Republic of Tajikistan for 2015. // The review was published with the financial support of UNODC: "Regional Program for Afghanistan and Neighboring Countries" and the Project "Monitoring Trade in Afghan Opiates".

civilian efforts to build a lasting peace and avoid another armed conflict would be deemed development aid). Demining has been part of Russian aid providing activities since 1996, when the first operation in a foreign country, Tajikistan, was undertaken. In 2000 a specialized organization, EMERCOM-Demining – Center of Humanitarian De-mining and Special Blasting Operations, was set up to „provide rapid and effective solutions to international humanitarian operations¹⁰”.

Speaking about Russian humanitarian assistance in the region it is worth to mention that in the recent years Russia has made a number of international aid commitments, marking its re-emergence as an international donor since the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Yet the country’s involvement in aid also has clear limitations – crucially, it has still not signed up to the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) Principles and lacks a single international development agency, with the Ministry of Civil Defense and Emergencies (EMERCOM) currently playing a dominant role in the area of humanitarian aid provision.

Humanitarian activity of Russian Federation still remains below the levels achieved by most „traditional“ donors. Another notable characteristic is that Russian humanitarian aid is primarily in-kind, consisting predominantly of processed foods, transport, shelter, and so on. The majority of this aid is directed towards the former Soviet republics, highlighting Russia’s traditional regional focus in terms of aid giving. Russian aid tends to be implemented through multilateral organizations rather than bilaterally, and the country is also reluctant to work with non-governmental organizations.

Humanitarian food aid is currently the largest component of Russia’s humanitarian aid. In-kind food aid falls into two main categories: processed foods, particularly canned foods with a long shelf life; and wheat and wheat flour, whose prominence is unsurprising given that Russia is the world’s top wheat producer (and the largest in terms of production per capita¹¹). These two types of aid are sent to a wide variety of recipient countries, as well.

The countries that have most frequently received the highest proportion of Russian humanitarian aid are located within Russia’s sphere of influence, and in particular the former Soviet Union. The Caucasus and Central Asia region are the top recipient of Russian humanitarian aid. To be more specific, the bulk of this assistance went to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

¹⁰ EMERCOM, Center of Humanitarian Demining and Special Blasting Operations, [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.emercom-d.com/en_about.htm (Accessed: August 2012)

¹¹ FAOstat, <http://faostat.fao.org/>

The geographical distribution of Russia's aid must be viewed in the context of its long-term strategic ambitions. Russia regards former Soviet republics as its sphere of influence, and its willingness to maintain close ties with them explains why they receive such a large proportion of its aid. The regional focus of Russian aid efforts has caused many experts to conclude that its motivation for becoming a donor once more is primarily geopolitical. This observation is compatible with the vision expressed in the recent Russia's Foreign Policy Concept, which states that „Russia's foreign policy is transparent, predictable and pragmatic”¹². In this view, geostrategic leverage and positioning in the world economy are what drive the country's actions as a donor in the post-Soviet world¹³. Russia's focus on the CIS/FSU countries is consequently often interpreted as a way of maintaining a degree of influence over these countries, and several scholars highlight the correlation between regimes that are friendly towards the Russian government and the amount of aid these states receive from Russia. The cases of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and sometimes Armenia are cited in particular. It is important to note, however, that the blurring of boundaries between humanitarian aims and economic or foreign policy objectives is recognized as a growing problem in donor action globally. If perceived self-interest shapes aid policy, assistance may not be allocated within and between countries according to human need. Moreover, in conflict situations people and institutions implementing aid programs on the ground may be viewed by parties to the conflict as partial or politically motivated, and so may face greater security risks, as may the beneficiaries¹⁴.

There is a similarity between Russia and China's approach to the humanitarian assistance and development cooperation in the region. In the new millennium China has substantially increased its assistance abroad in the form of both soft loans and grants. This trend accompanied expanding trade relations and the intensification of China's global search for natural resources. Therefore, the

¹² Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (2013) Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, 12 February 2013. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcbb3/76389fec168189ed44257b2e0039b16d!OpenDocument (Accessed: May 2013)

¹³ See works such as A. Binder et al. 'Humanitarian Assistance: Truly Universal?', Global Public Policy Institute [Online]. Available at: <http://www.gppi.net> (Accessed: July 2012)

¹⁴ https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/dp-russia-humanitarian-donor-15071-en_0.pdf

main recipients of Chinese assistance have been Asian neighbors-including the Central Asian states-and resource-rich African countries¹⁵.

Chinese development assistance proved highly competitive. This is due to a number of factors. Firstly, its lack of conditionality: a characteristic of Western donors, who demand reforms in return for aid. Therefore, regimes of the recipient states feel more comfortable with the assistance. Secondly, China can deliver results quickly and effectively thanks to its cheap and efficient labor force¹⁶.

Governments of recipient states are highly appreciative of Chinese development assistance. At the same time, at the level of political and economic elites and the public, concerns are expressed about the negative impact of this assistance and the general increase of China's presence that accompanies it. Local industries are endangered because they are unable to compete with their Chinese equivalents. Chinese companies bring labor with them, therefore few jobs are created and no technology transfers take place. In Central Asia, there are also fears of Chinese migration and the demographic and cultural challenge that it presents.

Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are the poorest countries in Central Asia and therefore most in need of foreign investment and assistance; that makes them more vulnerable to external pressures; the actors who gain more influence in these two states could ultimately influence the destiny of the region as a whole.

There are a number of features that mark Chinese development assistance from that of traditional donors. Firstly, it lacks clarity and transparency. Unlike the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) countries, the Chinese government does not have an official definition of what constitutes development aid. Chinese prefer the terms "strategic partnership" (featuring "political equality and mutual trust, economic win-win cooperation and cultural exchanges")¹⁷. The second important, the Chinese government does not have a dedicated body in charge of development assistance and does not publish reports providing consolidated information on foreign aid. The second important feature is lack of conditionality. Chinese politicians and experts emphasize that their country's foreign policy is guided by the principles of noninterference in internal affairs and treatment of other countries as equals.

¹⁵ See G.T. Chin and B.M. Frolic, "Emerging Donors in International Development Assistance: The China Case; Partnership and Business Development Division, IDRC CRDI, December 2007

¹⁶ Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, "China's Independent Foreign Policy of Peace," 18 August 2003, <www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdUwjzclt24881.htm>.

¹⁷ The Declaration of the Beijing Summit of the FOCAC, 5 November 2006.

Large portions of Chinese development assistance are channeled into apolitical infrastructure projects, while capacity building is much less emphasized than is in the case of Western donors. China offers its own example of development but does not impose blueprints and models to follow. Assistance is tightly linked with the promotion of Chinese business interests. The key condition of soft loan provision is the participation of Chinese companies.

In Central Asia, as was mentioned above China was instrumental in the creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001. Since then, China has used it to promote economic cooperation with Central Asian states based on trade and development assistance. China's development aid is delivered in three ways--grant aid, interest-free loans, and concessional loans. Grants tend to be disbursed in kind, through various projects, as requested by the recipient country. Preferential or concessional loans are extended by the Government and provided by the China Export-Import Bank (Eximbank). Chinese development assistance projects are mostly of a turnkey nature. Chinese companies who win a tender bring their own specialists, labor and equipment. The policy of importing labor leads to an apparent paradox. While Tajik workers migrate to Russia in great numbers and on a regular basis, jobs on construction projects in Tajikistan are filled with Chinese workers. Tajiks engaged in the projects are few and they are mostly drivers or occasional manual labor workers. Chinese companies prefer to use Chinese labor because the latter are disciplined, hardworking and cheap. Tajik labor cannot compete with Chinese workers. The biggest chunk of Chinese development assistance is allocated to infrastructure projects. The benefits of good roads, power lines and hydropower plants are incontestable. The construction of transport infrastructure helps Central Asian states break from the isolation resulting from their landlocked geographic situation, and therefore increases their potential for development. China plays a key role in this respect: it has the finances, experienced companies, cheap and disciplined labor force, and a streamlined and effective process of negotiating and delivering projects. China builds roads connecting China to Central Asia, but also ones that interconnect Central Asian states, thus contributing to regional integration. However, China, similar to Russia in this way, is interested in the promotion of regional integration with China's active participation. The new transport infrastructure will increase trade between China and Central Asian states. On the one hand, cheap Chinese products help the impoverished people of Central Asia to maintain a certain standard of living. On the other hand, it creates very tough competition for local industries¹⁸.

¹⁸ <https://www.ifri.org/.../ifrichinacentralasiakassenovaengjanua...>

Both China and Russia are interested in security and good governance in the region (stressing the rule of law, rather than democratization), necessary to improve regional security. China is more interested in improving the business environment for its economic plans and trade whereas Russia puts more emphasis on security and military integration with Central Asian states promoting joint military training activity and supply weapons and other military equipment to the armies of these states.

The events in Yemen, Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Libya and other world's hot spots, as well as world economic and geopolitical transformations, fuel a variety of militaristic and alarmist sentiments and contribute to the explosive growth in demand for a wide variety of weapons systems. In this respect, the Central Asian countries are no exception. The trend towards the growth of the military budgets of the Central Asian states can already be called fairly stable. Their spending on security is increasing both in very limited in funds Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, as well as richer Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. This is a trend that is common for the region.

Steady growth in spending on the army, police and special services has been observed at least since the mid-2000s and continues to grow. According to the data, Kazakhstan's defense spending in 2017 amounted to about 2.5 billion US dollars, although in 2011 it was 1.3 billion US dollars, while Uzbekistan's defense spending in 2018 will be more than 1.4 billion dollars. The defense costs of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are estimated at about 150-200 million US dollars and also show annual growth. In general, since 2006, the military expenditures of the Central Asian countries have increased by an average of 25% -30% annually¹⁹. It should be specially noted that all available data on the military potential and military expenditures of the Central Asian countries are very approximate: the secrecy regime in most Central Asian countries differs little from the Soviet one, and determine with sufficient accuracy military expenditures and arms statistics is quite difficult task. Nevertheless, all experts and observers agree that there is a clear trend in the military spending growth and it suggests that, for at least the next decade, the states of the region will spend more and more on the army. Thus, it can be stated that the standard regional arms race has quite developed in Central Asia, just like in the Asia-Pacific region and the Persian Gulf²⁰.

¹⁹ Military Strength Ranking <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.asp>

²⁰ Arms race in Central Asia. Andrei Valentinovich Grozin, Head of Central Asia and Kazakhstan department of Institute of CIS <http://materik.ru/country/detail.php?ID=14518&print=Y>

The statistics of military expenditures rises questions about the reasons that cause the growth in absolute figures of military expenditures in the countries of Central Asia. Of course, there is a natural objective need to modernize armament and military equipment. If first, while exercising their sovereign rights to the share of the USSR's military property, the leaders of the new states sought to obtain as many weapons as possible, then in a couple of years it became clear that the costs of protecting and maintaining the huge arsenals in normal condition lay beyond their control burden on budgets, and some of this property has become a direct threat to the population of nearby areas. Later on, when the Soviet era made arms become outdated both morally and physically, the problem of repairing and modernizing this equipment, as well as buying more modern weapons become more pressing. Almost all countries of the region continue to carry out military reforms because the military equipment, infrastructure and command system that the Central Asian states inherited from the USSR do not correspond to the new realities anymore²¹.

However, a simple desire to update the Armed Forces cannot become a main reason and there are more compelling reasons for such a sharp turn towards increasing military spending. It is clear that there is growing concern in Central Asia about the situation in Afghanistan. This concern is present in all capitals without exception, since the operation conducted by the USA in Afghanistan is clearly stalling. The Taliban, and even more recently, “Islamic State” have very serious positions almost throughout the country.

The authorities of the Central Asian countries closely monitor the situation in Afghanistan and recognize that it is becoming less and less predictable. This, of course, makes them rely more on their own armed forces as the best guarantee of security. Moreover, the pressure exerted on the leaders of the Central Asian countries by numerous new challenges should have helped to bring them closer together, but until recently this has not happened. Almost all states of the region have tensions between each other, sometimes quite serious and capable of developing into direct confrontation under unfavorable circumstances. Among the problems complicating the relationship between official Astana, Tashkent, Dushanbe, Ashgabat and Bishkek, one can name territorial disagreements, incompleteness of the process of delimitation of borders; distribution of transboundary water resources; issues of energy supplies; multidirectional orientations of the states of the region in the foreign policy, etc.

²¹ Central Asia: Military Balance: <https://www.caravan.kz/articles/centralnaya-aziya-voennyjj-balans-375511/>

Small local clashes between the servicemen of these states have already occurred on the border between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, as well as between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, including unilateral mining of the border area by Uzbekistan. The current president of Uzbekistan, Sh. Mirziyayev, has proclaimed a friendly policy towards neighbors, but given the long history of strained relations and sometimes outright animosity, it is too early to talk about real friendship and good-neighborliness²².

Each state of the region also view their armed forces as a guarantor of internal stability. Recent “color revolutions” in different parts of the world, including the “Arab spring” have made a strong impression on all the Central Asian countries without exception. No one in Ashgabat, Tashkent or Astana want such a conflict in their countries. Therefore, they view their own well-paid Army, Low enforcement and security agencies as the main guarantor against such events.

The security bodies of these countries, in addition to a generous financial injection, are also endowed with greater powers, and frequently unlimited, which naturally negatively affects the civil rights and freedoms of citizens of these states. The sad examples of Syria, Libya, Ukraine and other countries where popular protests turned into armed confrontation make it easier for the governments of these states to achieve popular support for strengthening the role and authority of the security forces and increasing military spending.

International human rights organizations have long regarded the Central Asian states as authoritarian regimes with limited rights and freedoms for their citizens. With increasing militaristic and alarmist sentiments these restrictions of rights and freedoms will become even more severe and significant concentration of power in the hands of the ruling regimes will be the obvious consequence. Negative influence of militarization on the social and economic situation in the countries of the region cannot be ignored either. As countries of the region spend larger amounts of money on the military, other domestic programs like education and infrastructure development will receive less.

For countries with a developed military-industrial complex and a large export of military products, the increase in military spending is not so painful, and often useful in terms of expanding production, scientific potential and the growth of professional jobs. Kazakhstan and part of Uzbekistan still have some production of military products, but most of the equipment and ammunition is purchased from abroad anyway. However, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are forced to import almost all types of weapons right up to the last bullet. The growth of military expenditures is badly hitting the budgets of these countries and negatively impact the socio-

²² Central Asia is being armed <http://www.easttime.ru/reganalitic/1/248.html>

economic situation. Defense and security expenditures takes bigger share of these state's budget. It should also be emphasized that military spending is, known to be not disclosed and rather nontransparent way of spending serious budget resources, which is financed by different budget items and, therefore, the exact figure of expenses is often much higher than stated. In view of the secrecy and specific nature of the costs of defense and security, the lack of democratic control over expenditures, there is the problem of proper transparency of expenditures and, correspondingly, the growth of corruption in the law enforcement agencies.

The countries of Central Asia have been experiencing difficulties with economic growth for several years. There is a decline in business activity, cash inflows from migrants working in Russia, which constitute a significant part of the income of countries such as Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Accordingly, these countries face difficulties with the contributions to their state budgets. And in this situation, in order to increase military spending, the authorities will inevitably resort, as in past years, to tightening tax regime which is already one of the toughest in world. This, in turn, will further reduce business activity, employment of the population even more and increase the flow of migrants from these countries.

It becomes obvious that excessive militarization in the countries of Central Asia harms these states both in their socio-economic life and in observing the rights and freedoms of citizens of these countries. However, on the other hand, the question arises as to how to achieve maximum security in the region, without resorting to excessive militarization? According to most experts, the most acceptable solution to the problem is the initiating steps towards common security in the region and launching institutions of war prevention and preventive diplomacy.

Undoubtedly, the development of military-political cooperation is of strategic importance for countering modern challenges and threats, but at the same time an urgent problem for the countries of the Central Asian region and especially for Tajikistan remains the observance of human rights, the formation of civil society, support of constructive initiatives of citizens and their public the formation of a multiparty system as conditions for the development of political and ideological diversity, as well as the creation of favorable conditions for Freedom of economic activity. Therefore, it would be advisable that the country's budget policy conforms

to the military doctrines of the countries of the Central Asian region and does not contradict the strategy of sustainable development. In this respect, taking into account the practice of the leading modern successful states, it is necessary to

discuss the draft military budgets with the involvement of representatives of civil society institutions in order to ensure their transparency and effectiveness in their implementation. This is the only way to ensure that militarization adequately affects the welfare of the people living in the Central Asian region and create conditions for socio-political transformations and economic reforms.

So, our analysis leads us to the conclusion that the SCO member countries have their own interests. So,

Russia is interested in forming a military-political bloc that acts as a guarantor of security and stability in the Asian region.

China has its own interests and, first of all, it is the markets and raw materials of Central Asia and Russia.

India is interested in guarantees of oil supply from Russia and Central Asia via pipelines through China or through Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Pakistan hopes to intensify the participation of the SCO member countries in the energy project - the construction of the trans-Afghan gas pipeline system from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and India, and to strengthen political influence in the Central Asian region.

Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan are interested in the fact that the SCO should help them avoid the hegemony of China. In Central Asia, they hope that Russia will restrain expansion of Beijing. Countries are also interested in obtaining economic bonuses from the transit of raw materials and goods.

Iran has political considerations, first of all, they are interested in opposing the US and to use strong friends or at least their sympathizers.

Mongolia intends to use the position of the geographical buffer between China and Russia to obtain economic benefits.

Further militarization of the Central Asian region in general, and of Tajikistan in particular, should not hinder the process of sustainable development and improvement of the well-being of the population, as well as real socio-economic reforms and socio-political transformations. In order to ensure transparency and increase the effectiveness of militarization policy, it is necessary to create public consultative councils within law enforcement and security agencies. In addition, it is useful to regulate international cooperation related to militarization with human rights obligations, and in this respect it is very important that the participation of citizens and their public associations be included in the discussions. In fact, today the transformation process of Central Asia, combined with the post-conflict period as well as the further development of the region largely depends on activity of the population in building and strengthening civil society with their active involvement in solving urgent problems of the modern

Central Asian society. Radical transformations taking place in the life of modern society and addressing many of its problems are inextricably linked to the formation of civil society in the region. Today it has become an indisputable fact that the social activity of individual or civil society initiative is the most important and the most significant factor in formation of a democratic, legal state and truly free tolerant civil society. In a certain sense, emergence of NGOs in Central Asian countries was not only the answer to the new challenges of democratization of the region (a civil society as the most important task of democratization), they also helped the reviving new statehood in all spheres: health protection, restoration of private housing and farm holdings, peace building, culture, education, etc²³.

KARIMOV Sh. T. Aspects of militarization in the countries of Central Asia: priorities and conflicts of interest. This article is devoted to the specifics of the militarization process of the post-Soviet countries of Central Asia after they gained independence in the framework of military-political cooperation to ensure stability in the region.

KEY WORDS: Central Asia, militarization, stability, conflict of interest, sustainable development, civil society.

Ш.Т. КАРИМОВ. Аспекты милитаризации в странах Центральной Азии: приоритеты и конфликт интересов. Данная статья посвящена особенностям процесса милитаризации постсоветских стран Центральной Азии после приобретения ими независимости в рамках военно-политического сотрудничества для обеспечения стабильности в регионе.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА: Центральная Азия, милитаризация, обеспечение стабильности, конфликт интересов, устойчивое развитие, гражданское общество.

Ш.Т.КАРИМОВ. Чанбаҳои низомигарой дар кишварҳои Осиёи марказӣ: афзалиятҳо ва хилофи манфиатҳо. Мақолаи мазкур ба махсусиятҳои раванди низомигароии кишварҳои Осиёи Миёна баъди ба даст овардани

²³ Karimov Sh. The role of NGOs in the formation of civil society in Tajikistan. Abstract for the degree of Doctor of Political Science. Dushanbe, 2016

Истиқлолияти давлатӣ дар доираи ҳамкориҳои ҳарбию сиёсӣ ба хоҳири таъмини амният дар минтақа бахшида шудааст.

МАҲУМҲОИ КАЛИДӢ: Осӣи Марказӣ, низомигарой, таъмини амният, хилофи манфиатҳо, рушди устувор, ҷомеаи шаҳрвандӣ.

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