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## РЕГИОНАЛЬНЫЕ ВЫЗОВЫ БЕЗОПАСНОСТИ ДЛЯ ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ

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Рассматриваются региональные вызовы безопасности для Центральной Азии, связанные с дестабилизацией Ближнего Востока и ростом нестабильности в Афганистане.

*Ключевые слова:* Центральная Азия; Афганистан; Ближний Восток.

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## REGIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES FOR CENTRAL ASIA

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The article analyses regional security challenges for Central Asia, focusing on those of them originating from destabilizing of the Middle East and increasingly insecure Afghanistan.

*Key words:* Central Asia; Afghanistan; Middle East.

Over the last twenty five years terrorism, extremism and Afghan drug trafficking have emerged as eminent security challenges for newly independent states of Central Asia. All five post-Soviet states, namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan faced this kind of challenges. Confirmations of “new threats” to the population of Central Asia, directly infringing their security are the acts of terrorism which have become habitual and the growing number of supporters of extremist ideologies [1]. Baken events of the summer and autumn of 1999–2000 in southern Kyrgyzstan, when a group of international terrorists had come into a direct military confrontation with the secular regimes in the region, clearly confirmed the reality of the threat. Hiding behind the slogan of “the Islamic Renaissance”, their masterminds directed their actions to destabilize the situation in the region and “trigger” chaos mechanism that they had been able to succeed partially for a short period of time.

Events in the Middle East torn apart by long-drawn-out conflicts, sectarian violence, “smoldering” conflicts in Afghanistan have common causes and similar mechanisms of opposition to official authorities. The regional extremists of all stripe steam up into alliances and have common promoters [2]. According to various estimates about 30 thousand fighters from different countries are fighting under the banner of the so called “Islamic State”, tenth of which are of Central Asian origin. In our opinion it is probable that in the case of the effective outcome of the operation, conducted by the Russian military pilots from the base in Latakia, and correspondingly, a successful sweep by government forces of Bashar Assad territory con-

trolled by the ISIS militants and the actions of the international anti-ISIS coalition a certain part of the ISIS militants will be moving into Afghanistan, where ISIS is actively cooperating with the radically minded Taliban militants [3]. Thus, the problem of the ISIS will gradually get closer to the borders of Central Asia.

It should be pointed out that the Central Asian countries have taken a proactive approach in the processes of global development and in combating international terrorism and religious extremism at the present stage, indentifying most of the known regional terrorist and extremist organizations as illegal. Thus in 2015 the Supreme Court of the Kyrgyz Republic declared “Islamic State”, “Al-Nusra” and a number of other organizations as terrorist and extremist organizations and banned their activities in Kyrgyzstan. The law providing for the responsibility for mercenarism and the participation of citizens in armed conflicts or military actions on the territory of a foreign state was signed in July 2015.

Similar legal measures have been taken in neighboring countries. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan conduct a restrictive policy in the domain religion. We need to point out that this is accompanied by the growth of a latent protest potential among Muslims [4]. Against that back drop the influences of extremist organizations are growing, whose representatives often throw an open challenge to the official authorities and public figures. There is an optimistic spirit in Uzbekistan that the country is ready to confront a possible invasion from Afghanistan effectively, yet at the same time they are aware that this state is not a member of the CSTO, and therefore cannot expect proper military support.

In the case of negative developments in Afghanistan, associated with the activation of the ISIS and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the flash-point there can reach levels comparable to the conflict in Syria. In recent months, militants ISIS go into clashes with government troops very actively. According to various estimates, from three to five thousand fighters were spotted in the north of Afghanistan, across the river Panj, near the border with Tajikistan.

At the same time there are preconditions for a negative scenario in Central Asia. Counter-modernistic trends directly reflected in the growth of religious and ethnic intolerance, strengthening of international terrorism and the whole complex of negative phenomena arising from that are presenting the region. They in turn pose a big doubt to all the achievements of the Central Asian countries in the past twenty-five years of independence, at the same time requiring the diversion of huge funds from the scope of development into the sphere of combating international terrorism and organized crime.

As we've already mentioned, we can not claim that Central Asian countries are not trying to solve the problem of international terrorism and other threats to stability in the region associated with it. The development of the situation in Afghanistan and its border regions in the last fifteen years has proven that sooner or later the Central Asian countries will have close encounter with the problem. The issue was narrowed down to when and where it will happen only. Most likely, that the extremists penetration will go through Tajikistan, and probably Turkmenistan.

The Batken events in 1999 and 2000, the terrorist attacks in other countries of Central Asia have already determined the urgency of forging a consolidated response to threats of international terrorism, fueled by Islamic radicals. Since the collapse of the USSR, when the countries of Central Asia gained independence, almost all of them have been actively cooperating with international organizations, including the security field.

For a quarter century problems of counteraction to terrorism and extremism, has always been on the agenda of the CIS. Many experts doubt its effectiveness, but still a number of multilateral agreements were signed within CIS. For example, Anti-Terrorist Centre was created with the regional office in Bishkek. In order to address security problems some post-Soviet countries signed in 1992 the Collective Security Treaty (CSTO), known as the Tashkent Treaty. Great hopes in the region are put on the CSTO. It is expected to tackle threats of extremist nature and to protect members of big-scale attacks by terrorists. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Central Asia is considered as another tool to deal with security threats. Executive Committee of the SCO Regional Antiterrorist Structure is carrying out operative coordination, legal international and

informational-analytical activities. SCO member states consider the fight against terrorism, separatism and extremism within the SCO framework as an important foreign policy task. However SCO members also seek wider international cooperation in the security field to make SCO activities more effective.

Experts point out that challenges of extremism, terrorism and separatism have some specific roots the Central Asian region, which includes, but is not limited to: unresolved territorial-administrative borders between the new states of Central Asia; "smoldering" military conflict in Afghanistan) and consequences of civil war in Tajikistan; insufficient protection of the external borders of the region, which leads to insufficient effectiveness of the collective defense; continuing social and economic difficulties. The security in Central Asia is also undermined by the existence of "fault lines", which are fueled by intersecting and sometimes mutually exclusive influences from the outside. This leads to emergence of complex political clashes between the countries of Central Asia. Terrorists and extremists look for ways to exploit all this.

We do not share the pessimism that internal regional problems and outside influences doom Central Asia to become object of terrorist activities. While threats are present, the regional countries also have capability to respond to them effectively. The more the regional countries cooperate on the security issues, the more efficient their counter-terrorist policies will be.

Not only the consequences of terrorist attacks should be tackled, but also their socio-economic roots, which includes poverty and high level of unemployment. The international community, should avoid confrontation between peoples, cultures, religions and civilizations any circumstances. It is necessary to eliminate the causes and conditions of extremism and terrorism. All actors in the world that are ready to fight terrorism should maintain global dialogue and regionally cooperate.

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