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REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN AGAINST TERRORISM: APPROACHES, EXPERIENCE, PROSPECTS

The tragical events of the last years in the different parts of the world do not leave any doubts that in immediate prospects such a phenomenon as international terrorism will still keep mankind in suspense for a long time. Today practically nobody in the world is insured from actions of any kind of terrorism. Obviously, the Central Asian region is not an exception in this respect.

How strong is the threat of terrorism in Central Asia? In fact, the reply to this question will determine the level of adequate measures taking by the leaders and communities of the countries of the region facing this global challenge to security.

The Republic of Uzbekistan – Target of International Terrorism

From the first days of state independence (early nineties of 20th century) the leadership of Uzbekistan never had any illusions about the real threats to national and regional security. Constant clashes between military parties in Afghanistan and the civil war in neighbouring Tajikistan, contradictions between interests of the different ethnic and regional groups and growing religious extremism could be detonators of a big regional conflict in Central Asia.

Conflicts in the neighbouring countries had a negative influence on some categories of the population of Uzbekistan. The spread of slogans about returning to Islamic values and about establishing Islamic statehood in the region created preconditions for the appearance of persons like G. Namangani and T. Yuldashev who with the support of foreign Islamists

organised the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and became its leaders.

But the first and subsequent actions of the IMU demonstrated that its members will use only terror as the main method to achieve their political goals. It took some years and several large-scale terrorist actions organized by the IMU for the world community to recognise it as an international terrorist organisation.

The Uzbek government's assessment of reality, starting from the mid-nineties of the last century, recognised terrorism as the threat number one to national, regional and global security. There was the understanding in Tashkent that every new fact about terrorism and the threat of terrorism in different corners of the world are sections of the network and connected parts of the new global challenge to mankind.

The fears of the Uzbek leadership were not without cause. At the turn of the century, the young republics several times became the target of terrorist actions with destroying consequences and human victims (explosions in Tashkent in February 1999, attacks on Uzbekistan's border provinces by terrorist bands in 2000-2001, terrorist actions in Tashkent in March and July 2004.

Why did Uzbekistan become the Constant Target of Terrorists?

After the declaration of national independence, the leadership of Uzbekistan made clear its strategic orientation towards the creation of secular democratic statehood. In a state with an absolute majority of the Muslim population, all political organisations with religious extremist maintenance were banned at the legal level. In consequence, the political leadership and power structure of the Republic became the main targets of the Islamic extremists' terrorist threats.

While the internal conflicts continue in neighbouring Afghanistan and Tajikistan, Uzbekistan plays the decisive role of the stabilizing centre in the region. The leaders of terrorist organisations and their foreign sponsors understood that the strong and stable state in Uzbekistan is

becoming the main obstacle to the establishment of their own control in whole Central Asia.

Today, Uzbekistan commended itself as a trustworthy partner of the USA, Russia and other participants of the international antiterrorist alliance. Such position of the Uzbek leadership and society is also a serious disturbing factor for the international terrorists and their assistances at national level.

The general conclusion can be drawn that the Central Asian region, and Uzbekistan in particular, is the very important point where not only the future of an unique element of the Muslim world is being formed, but where also leading tendencies of world development appear which are not acceptable to the famous leaders of international terrorism.

Uzbekistan: Counteracting Terrorism

The Uzbek leadership, adequately assessing the real threat to national security, never neglected its attention to the problem of counter-action against terrorism and other potential distracting actions. But effective resistance to the threats to security first of all demands a new conceptual understanding of the role and place of Uzbekistan in a changing world.

Fundamental conclusions were drawn by the Uzbek leadership about the shape of the new world order, the new system of international relations, and about the nature of existing and potential conflicts. It served as a basis for the adoption of several key legislative documents, like the National Security Concept (1997), the Defence Doctrine (2000), the new redaction of the Law “About Defence” (2001), and some others.

The Uzbek leadership stimulated major changes in the military construction and changed the order of priorities in the activity of the Army, the Special Services and other state security forces. Today, military reforms in Uzbekistan are passing the third stage with the objective of strengthening the defensive and preventive orientation of the structures of the armed forces. At the same time, the role of analytical

structures where civilian experts have significant participation and which include National Security Council is increasing.

At the same time, there is understanding in the Uzbek Government that counter-action against terrorism demands constant attention to internal social and economic problems and measures to minimize the negative consequences of the transition period. It was very important to actively make propaganda among the population and especially among the young people (age up to 20) who represent more than 50% of the whole Uzbek population.

The measures of the Uzbek Government made possible (1) an effective and productive reaction against terrorist attacks, (2) the minimisation of the negative consequences of terrorist activity, (3) the limitation of the internal social base of terrorists.

But the main result of this work consists in fact that the overwhelming majority of the population did not support terrorist actions while its leaders tried to speculate on the problems and difficulties of the transition period.

At least Uzbekistan demonstrated its ability to resist terrorism, but the leadership of the state had deep understanding that decisive success in the struggle against terrorism is impossible without joint efforts of the world community. Official Tashkent recognises that participants of terrorist actions in the country mainly consist of citizens of Uzbekistan. But it is obvious that their activity was only possible due to the support of famous international terrorist organisations including al-Qaeda and others. Domestic terrorists in Uzbekistan used their style and methods including so the so-called “shackhids”, which have never been specific to the history and mentality of ethnic Uzbeks.

There were principal prognoses in Uzbekistan of increasing terrorist tendencies at all levels. It should be remembered that the political leadership of the country declared many times its fears in connection to the threat of terrorism in Central Asia. But for some years, the attention of the key world players has been focused on conflict resolution in the

Middle East, the Balkan crisis and the situation in the European part of the former Soviet Union.

The tragic events of September 11, 2001 became a decisive argument for the necessity of pooling all counterterrorist efforts and special attention to all regions where international terrorism is active most.

Based on this, the Uzbek leadership is using any possibility of international cooperation in the struggle against terrorism. Such pragmatical approaches clarify many steps taken by official Tashkent.

Particularly, Uzbekistan stopped its membership in the Collective Security Treaty (CST in the framework of the CIS) because this organisation was very ineffective during the counter-action against terror and the organisation itself was under strong influence of political priorities, which made some actions of the CST counterproductive.

At the same time Uzbekistan actively supported antiterrorist initiatives in other regional and sub-regional organisations. For instance, Uzbekistan is famous for its active position in the Shanghai Organisation of Cooperation (ShOC). During chairmanship of Uzbekistan in the ShOC (2003-2004) Tashkent prepared all necessary conditions for the processing of the Regional Antiterrorist Structure (RATS), whose Executive Committee was opened during the ShOC summit in Tashkent (June 2004).

New perspectives for regional security were opened in the framework of the Organisation of Central Asian Cooperation (OCAC). Russia's membership in the OCAC (October 2004) can give strong stimulus to the struggle against terrorism and other threats to regional security. This is recognised by all members of the OCAC and has adequate reaction in Uzbekistan, on whose initiative Russia joined the OCAC.

Besides, Uzbekistan traditionally uses possibilities of bilateral cooperation for providing security and on this basis has successful relations with the USA, Russia, some European and other countries.

Lessons of the Struggle against Terrorism for Uzbekistan and Central Asia

The active measures taken by the international antiterrorist alliance in different parts of the world including Central Asia produced some results. The world became more secure but the threat of terrorism did not disappear. This conclusion also reflects the situation in the Central Asian region. The most important indicator of the level of national security in Uzbekistan is the development of the situation in neighbouring Afghanistan.

The first results of the antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan allowed many experts to come to the conclusion that the level of threat of terrorism had slightly decreased in the region. The failure of the Taliban regime and the destruction of al-Qaeda's basic military infrastructure visibly weakened the resources of the terrorist organisation IMU and made it and other extremists act deeply underground.

But the weakened position of radical extremist groups does not mean their disappearance and even less – their refusal to use terror as a method to reach political goals. In such conditions it is necessary not only to save responsibility but also to diversify methods of the struggle against terrorism and its causes.

The significance of this task is too important for Central Asia and Uzbekistan because today the situation in Afghanistan is still far from being stable and secure. The decisive military blow against terrorist organisations in this country has not yet been followed by enough political, social and economic measures. The reason is the lack of administrative management in the country and good conditions for restoring terrorist tendencies.

While assessing the importance of foreign threats, the Republic of Uzbekistan must also pay attention to the existing internal factors which are able to exert negative influence on the development of the situation as a whole. Although each country in the region has a different form and

speed of reforms, all of them are facing similar problems specific to the transition period.

Up to the present, each country of the region is still far from comprehensive political democracy and marked economy. Economic and social problems of a significant part of the population can be the reason for their dissatisfaction just as the case of possible mistakes in the personnel and ethnic policy of local administrations can give reason to an extremist form of protest.

This creates favourable conditions for the appearance of a recruiting environment for the leaders of terrorist groups. In the case of Uzbekistan with a dominating Muslim population such actions could be realized mainly by using Islamic slogans.

Thus terrorism as the key threat to Uzbekistan's security remains very actual and demands constant attention in order to localise its external and internal roots.

The leadership of Uzbekistan understands that the deep political and economic reasons form the basis for extremism and its most dangerous form – international terrorism. Religious slogans are only a cover in a region of a dominating Muslim population.

Experience of the last years showed that the Central Asian states must elaborate a **comprehensive strategic conception about the mid- and long-term aims of the system and its tasks regarding regional security and peace**. Common regional interests must give the general direction for the interaction between Central Asia and other states and international organisations.

By the way, in the region there is still a geopolitical pluralism which can play both a destructive and a contractive role. It is known that Central Asia's importance depends on various interests and is reflected in four geopolitical status: (1) buffer, (2) sanitarian cordon, (3) platts arm or the (4) centre of power.

But this diversity of approaches to the Central Asian role gives the opportunity to create a new security system that to all countries of the region offers the opportunity to participate in different coalitions on the basis of their own national interests. This system would not make existing contradictions more complicated as there would be no necessity to make only one geopolitical choice. Such system must guarantee strong attention to Central Asia not only from Russia or China, but also of the USA, the EU and international institutions even if their main attention is concentrated on other regions.

One of the important lessons for Central Asia after September 11 is that the region could and can avoid geopolitical rivalry between Russia and the USA and other western states and that a cooperation for mutual interests and benefit could be established in the region.

Another lesson for the Central Asian region is that participation in the international antiterrorist alliance will continue for a long time.

In this connection it must be considered that for some foreign forces, especially theocratic states, Islam was and will remain one of the main methods of ideological and foreign policy counter-action. Ten thousands of religious schools – madressa in the Muslim world - are occupied by radical Islamists and in fact play the role of “Jihad schools”, financially supported by different sources in Saudi Arabia and other countries in the Persian Gulf.

According to the opinion of different experts, during the last 20 years more than 4 million young people were educated in such madressa and more than 500.000 are presently visiting them. There are different figures about terrorists educated by al-Qaeda (from 20.000 to 100.000 persons). But any figure gives reason for fear and the necessity to take preventive antiterrorist measures.

Permeability of the borders between the Central Asian states allows terrorists to cross the border, to travel in the region and to use the territory of one country for terrorist actions in another country without any obstacles. Such situation always negatively influences mutual trust

between the states and interrupts the development of regional interactions.

This is the reason why cooperation on the basis of common threats must be the main priority for the Central Asian countries in a medium-term (3-5 years) perspective. Prior direction could be towards interaction between special services of the Central Asian states and other states and organizations involved in the war on terror. This would not only allow to draw the “general and unique picture” of international terrorism but it could also be very helpful for strengthening trust in bilateral and multilateral relations between different states.

An important lesson of the last years was the understanding that only a similar approach to the reasons of threats and challenges to security will make effective counter-actions against terrorism possible. But today, there is no general position among international experts and politicians about the nature and sources of international terrorism.

In fact, today’s world community deals only with the consequences of terrorism, but much less with its reasons and ideological sources. For instance, there are opinions that terrorism (1) is a product of the Third world, (2) the consequences of radical Islam, (3) an example of the clash of civilizations, (4) an element of psychological illness of some people, (5) a specific form of the struggle for freedom, etc.

A fundamental assessment of the phenomenon of terrorism is necessary because without such an approach there will be only some half measures, mainly military actions, but the expected order will be instable.

There is the point of view that the key reason for the spread of religious extremist ideas is the low level of education, poverty and social dissatisfaction of the population in some countries. It is possible to agree with such position but only partly. Indeed, it is impossible to exclude that in the Central Asian countries hard social position of some categories of the population is an assisting factor for participating in

religious extremist organisations and the involvement of local people in terrorist activities.

But in the Central Asian countries, the level of education of the population and the level of social protection are much higher than in many Muslim countries in the Middle East and many Asian states. Nevertheless, extremist ideology and attempts to start a terrorist war also take place in Central Asia. Even more, leaders and activists of extremist and terrorist organisations very often have good education including western education.

The conclusion to be drawn is that during a global struggle against international terrorism, security and stability can only be provided on the basis of a consensus on the nature and self-maintenance of terrorism and also on the methods of reaction to this threat.

The Fight against International Terrorism as a Contribution to the New World Order

The activity of the international antiterrorist alliance could be analysed in the context of shaping of the new world order. With respect to the different points of view about prospects of the new system of international relations, one must consider that Central Asia's and Uzbekistan's active participation in counterterrorist activity gives them the particular opportunity for their strong integration into the world community and therefore could be recognised as a contribution to the new world order which has already mainly determined its framework and key players.

During the last years the war has created several bilateral and multilateral mechanisms of interaction to strengthen security and stability in the Central Asian region. The current experience allows to follow the prospects of such cooperation in both frameworks: multilateral with international organisations and bilateral on an interstate level.

Today, the United Nations carry out some programmes in Central Asian countries to assist them in establishing democratic institutions and in carrying out reforms. There is also cooperation for the provision humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. But at the same time, the UN involvements in Ex-Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Iraq are strong arguments for the necessity to modernise some points of the international law and the decision-making process in this organisation dealing with peace-keeping operations.

The OCSE is trying to find for itself an adequate and effective role in connection to the creation of new structures for maintaining security. In this context, recognising the increased strategic importance of the region for European and international security as a whole, the OSCE considers the Central Asian states as one of its priorities in its new strategy. But even today the activity of the OCSE has no definite and clear understanding of the long-term role in the modern regional processes.

The present NATO is practically a unified international structure that has the necessary political, economical, military, scientific and other resources to provide security and stability on a regional level. NATO's engagements and its new links with Russia pushed the Alliance to new zones of NATO responsibility outside of the European borders. The global war on terror will raise NATO's role in the process of providing international and regional security including in Central Asia. The NATO mission in Afghanistan is obviously following this aim and this is the reason why the mission is supported by all countries of the region.

Geopolitical Interests of the World's Leading States

The Central Asian countries understand that the biggest states in the world like the USA, the EU, Russia, and China have both similar and contradictory positions in Central Asia. In an analysis of regional security in Central Asia based on the traditional position of the so-called "Big Game" with the corresponding principle "Or America, or Russia", the situation of the Central Asian countries would look very difficult because they would have to choose between two alternative orientations.

But today such approach is absolutely not correct even in the framework of the “Balance of Powers”. In fact, today it is impossible and very counterproductive to bring out either America or Russia from the geopolitical field of Central Asia because in any case competition between them will not be finished.

This means that the Central Asian countries must be interested in strategic partners who are ready to combine their potential in the long term in order to provide the region with security and sustainable development.

On the one hand, active cooperation in security issues both on bilateral basis with the leading powers (USA, Russia, EU, China, Japan) and in the framework of international organisations (UN, NATO, OSCE, ShOC) helps to balance out the outside players’ interests in the region, but on the other hand, it can have a negative bearing on the efficiency of the joint efforts of counter-action against threats to regional security.

It is difficult to make an analysis of Central Asian security without considering the interests of Russia as Russian interest can not be provided without considering interests of the Central Asian countries as well. But Russia should adopt a balance between its interests in the West and those in Central Asia like in the whole ex-soviet area. The USA and the EU can be helpful in this process but today the perspectives of the relations between Russia and West are not completely clear. This uncertainty influences the logic of the policy of the CIS countries.

In the context of the struggle against terrorism in Central Asia, Russia is acting in several directions: stimulation of the CIS integration, development of TCS, involvement in the protection of the Tajik-Afghan border, coordination of antiterrorist activities with the states of the region.

The inclusion of Central Asia in the global strategy of the USA became the key factor that determines the new geopolitical situation in the region. Washington is already closely cooperating with the Central Asian countries in the different programmes of security and military

cooperation. The USA is also strengthening its assistance to the region's countries by stimulating democratic and economic reforms which are recognised by Washington as the basic element of stability and security in the region.

The interests of the EU, and first of all of Germany, the UK and France, in Central Asia are determined by the growing recognition of the strategic importance of the region to the whole European security system. The EU is realizing the principle of a unified Eurasian continent and demonstrates its interest in the political and economic independence of the Central Asian states being neighbours to Europe and also in such hot spots as Afghanistan.

Leaders of the countries in the region several time declared their adherence to regional integration, but this process is obviously in need of new stimulus.

The basic document for the development of a cooperation on security issue between Central Asian countries is the Tashkent treaty (April 2000) named "About joint actions in the struggle against terrorism, political and religious extremism, transnational organized crime". This treaty, signed by Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, is one of the most important elements in shaping the regional security system.

The contracting parties are also working out some bilateral treaties about friendship and cooperation and some interstate and inter-organisational agreements in the specific area of interaction including between military forces and special services.

The official membership of Russia in the OCAC creates conditions for further regional integration in the field of antiterrorist activity. Uzbekistan and other countries of the region not only recognised Russian interest in the region but also perceive Russia as the big power who had resolved many problems in this part of the world.

In this way, the struggle against terrorism was raised to a new level and the first serious step must be the adoption of a list of terrorist organisations whose activities should be banned on the territory of all member states of the OCAC. This question is not only of practical, but also of conceptual importance. For example, there is a common understanding between Uzbekistan and Russia that organisations such as “Khezbut Tachrir” must be included in this list. This extremist Islamic party has its divisions in the Central Asian countries.

It is a fact that the foreign leaders of the party themselves insist on the ultimate goal of their propaganda which is the establishment of a new Islamic caliphate. But it is not only an ideological threat to the constitutional base of the countries in the region. The latest terrorist attacks in Tashkent showed that some people took part in these actions under the influence of the “Khezbut Tachrir”. In general, this question is connected with the absence of a visible barrier between Islamic radicalism and terrorism.

Today, regional integration in the fight against terrorism mainly depends on the level of the military cooperation. A new example for this is the decision in October (2004) to organise the Council of the heads of the national security services in the framework of the OCAC.

But the problem of regional security can not be solved separately from the questions of close economic cooperation. There is no doubt that long-term success in the struggle against religious extremism and terrorism will depend on the liquidation of Central Asia’s deep social and economic problems too.

What are the Objective Obstacles to Regional Integration?

First, the absence of resources for integration in the hands of any country in the region. Each country has to pay prior attention to domestic problems and uses for this its own limited internal resources. At this stage practically nobody is ready to offer a significant part of the national resources for the provision of regional integration programmes.

Second, differences in the conceptual approaches to the perspectives of regional integration. It is obvious that first of all common economic problems of mutual interest (use of hydro energetic resources, adoption of common trade conditions, etc) must be resolved. Nevertheless, the problem of political integration is still within the realm of a distant perspective.

Third, differences in the Central Asian countries' foreign orientations in their political and economic relations with foreign partners. While the Central Asian region feels competition between big foreign powers, there is an unhealthy rivalry between the regional countries themselves.

What are the Stimuli to Regional Integration?

First of all, political will and effective assistance from developed countries and their organisations. But today, such activity is mainly focused on political and military issues.

Today economic interest of the West and East in the Central Asian states is just limited to raw materials and energetic resources. Foreign investments are offered to the oil and gas industry making Central Asia heavily dependent on world prices. At the same time potential foreign investors prefer to deal with Central Asia as common market.

The list of foreign partners of the Central Asian region being able to play the role of "locomotive" for regional integration is very limited.

But at the same time:

- The strategic aim of Russia is restoring its own dominating influence in the Central Asian region;
- The USA did not elaborate a comprehensive strategy for the region and uses separately the different opportunities of the region's countries to assure very concrete national interests;
- The EU today is not ready to play the role of "locomotive" for Central Asian integration because it will be busy with the problems of the European enlargement in the near future;

- China while having global ambitions has not enough experience and traditions to work in the Central Asian region;
- Japan while having experience in stimulating integration in other regions and demonstrating its readiness to participate in the Central Asian processes is still passing the stage of elaborating its own concept of “Central Asia plus Japan”.

Nevertheless, there are no alternatives to comprehensive regional integration as a highly effective strategic direction of counter-action against terrorism and extremism. Efficiency and results of this direction on a decisive level will depend on the activity and mutual understanding between present and future political elites of the states involved in the Central Asian region.

General Conclusions

1. For a long time, international terrorism will remain a parameter of regional development in Central Asia, and Uzbekistan demonstrates adequate assessment of the level of its threat;
2. The Republic of Uzbekistan while mobilising internal resources against terrorism is ready for any form of cooperation with every member of the international antiterrorist alliance and is demonstrating this in practice;
3. The fight against terrorism demands an objective and unified assessment of the nature and reasons of international terrorism by the world community;
4. Joint fight against international terrorism could and must be way to the creation of a new and much more valid world order;
5. Integration in the Central Asian region as an important factor of regional security needs foreign support because meaning and importance of stability and security of this region go far beyond the Central Asian borders.

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