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"The Events in Afghanistan 2021: Impact on Security in Central Asia"

Introduction

The international arena is facing numerous changes every day and the last several months are not the exception. One of the noticeable changes indeed was the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan. "Taliban fighters take control of the Afghan presidential palace in Kabul, Afghanistan, on August 15, 2021" (Hollingsworth, 2021). Since all countries live in one world and events happening in one country affect other countries, this news did not leave anyone indifferent. Sometimes some global issues are bigger than any particular country or even continent, such as worryings about environmental problems, pandemics, wars, and terrorism. Effective international relations are needed for countries to interact efficiently in order to meet these challenges together and find potential solutions to them. Hence, for countries of Central Asia that are located close to Afghanistan, the topic of Taliban takeover is serious because of potential security threats and regional instability.

It is important to clarify the concept of security to understand how the events in Afghanistan impact security in Central Asia. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, security is "the state of being protected or safe from harm" (Merriam-Webster, 2018). If to apply this to international relations, it will be the condition of states being protected from external interference or abuse. One of the main scholars in the field of security studies Barry Buzan believed that security cannot be limited only to the military force and thus, created a framework in which "argued that the security of human collectivities (not just states) was affected by factors in five major sectors, each of which had its own focal point" (Williams, 2018). These five sectors are societal, political, military, economic, and environmental. Therefore, I will use Barry Buzan's framework to identify how the Central Asian region's security is affected by the Taliban takeover by discussing each sector in more detail.

Main Body

The first sector of security is societal. According to Barry Buzan, **societal security** is "centred on the sustainability and evolution of traditional patterns of language, culture, and religious and national identity and custom" (Williams, 2018). The ongoing issue of Taliban and coming refugees from Afghanistan to the countries of Central Asia raised caution from the citizens of the region. People started refusing to accept refugees because of the belief that it affects the security of their countries. From the constructionist perspective, identity is socially constructed and can be formed through various means. In other words, we can take people of Central Asia as one social/ethnic group because ethnicity is flexible, and changes with interethnic interaction to resist social changes for specific goals. Hence, people of Central Asia as a group with strong and permanent cultural identities (common ancestry, language, beliefs, etc) take action together against Afghanistani refugees because they feel

like they have much to lose. It means that when group members think that "other's" identity frightens or rejects their own identity, conflicts with a violent character can appear. In other words, nationalism usually occurs in such circumstances. According to Cambridge Dictionary, "Nationalist sentiment is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of the principle, or the feeling of satisfaction aroused by its fulfillment..." (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). Central Asia is divided into two social groups: one is citizens of Central Asia with nationalistic sentiments and the other group is refugees from Afghanistan who were abused for coming to the country. It guides to the point that the events happening in Afghanistan, more precisely refugees who are coming to Central Asian countries, *raise the collective identity and nationalistic sentiments* that usually lead to conflicts among the people of the region.

Another social process that is currently bothering Central Asian countries is the spread of different radical ideologies among civilians. When people move from one country to another, they do not only take their things with them but also their beliefs, traditions, languages, ideologies, etc. Thus, there is a risk that Afghanistani refugees will spread radical or extremist ideologies in the public to threaten international and regional stability. Chinara Esengul who is a senior advisor to the United Nation's global development network (UNDP) of the Kyrgyz Republic on Conflict Prevention states that she worries about "the Taliban's extremist ideology spreading in the region. The public and government should adopt measures to fight the spread of radicalism" (Imamova, 2021). If a lot of Central Asian people be affected by radicalism, the common identity will be ruined, and intergroup hatred, ethnocentrism, or different biases can emerge. That is how social conflicts, battles, or even terroristic attacks arise because of intergroup competitions or struggles under different ideologies. Moreover, President of Russia Vladimir Putin showed his concern about refugees in Central Asia by saying "We don't want militants coming in pretending to be refugees, or to see a repeat of the 1990s and 2000s" (Imamova, 2021). It explains that not only Central Asian people can be affected by radicalism but also terrorists pretending to be refugees can commit different crimes. The possible *rise of nationalistic sentiments, the spread of extremist ideologies, and social struggles between different groups* indeed mean that the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan impacts the societal security of the Central Asian region.

The second sector of security is political. **Political security** is "focused on the organizational stability of states, systems of government and the ideologies that give them their legitimacy" (Williams, 2018). The pattern that can be found in all Central Asian countries is distrust of government. Civilians do not believe in the government, political system, institutions, and policies due to several reasons such as corruption, absence of the dialogue between government and citizens, violation of human rights, etc. For instance, The Anti-Corruption Knowledge Hub created by Transparency International and financed by the European Union states "Corruption is rampant throughout Central Asia. The five countries average 26.6 out of 100 on the 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index, far below the global average of 43" (Transparency International, 2021). Another thing that can show the reasons for distrust by people of the region is "Central Asian states have been subjected to severe

criticism by the international community for the human rights violations in each state" (Afzal, 2004).

After mentioning some common issues of the Central Asia region, it can be clear why people there choose not to believe their governments. Due to the distrust of the government, each step undertaken by the governments of Central Asia especially those about the security of the region meets with public concern and resistance. Nowadays Afghanistan's new government is trying to negotiate with the neighboring countries. For example, they had a meeting with Kyrgyzstan's Deputy Head of the Security Council Taalatbek Masadykov (Podolskaya, 2021). Kazakhstan also had a meeting with Afghanistan during which the issue of providing food and other humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people was discussed (GOV.KZ, 2021). According to Amir Khan Muttaki (Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan), the new Afghan authorities want to establish peaceful relations with all countries, especially neighbors. However, this fact can negatively impact the Central Asian countries because negotiating with Afghanistan which directly violates international law, reduces the level of trust from the public. In other words, if Central Asia negotiates with Afghanistan, the level of public trust which is already small can reduce at all which later will lead to rallies, battles, or political opposition. This shows that the political power of the government and institutions will not be enough to control the public and keep order. In other words, it means that the events happening in Afghanistan and negotiation processes with it will result in *rallies and conflicts among civilians which happening because of the absence of the needed reliability and authority* of the governments will harm the political security of the region.

The third sector of security is the military. **Military security** is "concerned with the interplay between the armed offensive and defensive capabilities of states and states' perceptions of each other's intentions" (Williams, 2018). If events happening in Afghanistan will result in terroristic attacks that cross the borders of its country and reach others, it means that military security will be harmed. Already discussed sectors as societal and political securities are known to impact more on domestic issues of the region, while military security directly touches the topic of national security and becomes an international issue. From the perspective of realism, when one country offends or attacks another country, another country should resist and oppose it to protect itself from external power. In other words, realism "depicts the international system as a realm where "self-help" is the primary motivation; states must provide security for themselves because no other agency or actor can be counted on to do so" (Walt, 2010). It is sometimes called "offense-defense balance." Thus, relying on realism if some military attacks happen by Afghanistan in Central Asia, the region will have to defend itself by using counter-military power. In this case, *the real war can occur with a lot of victims from both sides* which indeed impacts the military security of the Central Asian region.

Even though terrorism is happening since ancient times, the issue became prominent in the International Agenda only after the 9/11 incident. Therefore countries started developing strategies such as "War on Terror" or "preventive wars" to combat terrorism. The ideology of Preventive war is preventing terrorism by any measures even without real evidence of terror in another country. Therefore, preventive wars are inspired more by

speculations than by real coming threats. We live under anarchy and there is no certain president, organization, or other body that rules the world. If we live under anarchy, then it leads to a security dilemma. It means that each state will be not sure about another state's intentions or plans, and thus can undertake something concerning that state because of being afraid. This will lead to foreign interventions, massacres, or even genocides because states/individuals are possible to do anything "in the state of nature." Thomas Hobbes describes this phrase as "everyone is free to do everything" (Hobbes, 1996). In other words, the country that wants to use this strategy can attack another country and its allies without knowing its intentions. This strategy sometimes can fail and harm the country. For instance, once when the US decided to invade Iraq because accused it of producing unconventional weapons for Al Qaeda (The New York Times, 2004). As it turned out, there was no relationship between Al Qaeda and Iraq. This experience clearly showed that the strategy of preventive war can be wrong and lead to different consequences as a military security threat to the country that was even not connected to terrorism because of a false perception of the relationship between terroristic state and others. For instance, due to the fact that Central Asia had some meetings with Afghanistan, the strategy can consider Central Asia as a supporter of terrorism, and if the strategy once failed and it can fail again and lead to a similar situation with Iraq. Therefore, the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan impacts the military security of Central Asia because of *different preventive war strategies and "offense-defense balance" which can result in wars with a lot of victims from both sides*.

The fourth sector is the economic one. **Economic security** is "revolved around access to the resources, finance and markets necessary to sustain acceptable levels of welfare and state power" (Williams, 2018). According to the earlier mentioned strategies as "War on terror", not only countries that possess terroristic attacks but also countries which somehow related to those countries are responsible for the crime. Thus, all countries that participate in terroristic attacks and their allies should be punished under international law. Moreover, almost all international organizations and documents are against both terroristic countries and states who support terroristic countries. It means that if Afghanistan violates human rights or commits terroristic attacks, countries that were negotiating with it will be under thorough control too. For instance, "A number of Security Council resolutions adopted under chapter VII of the United Nations Charter have established an international sanctions regime against Al-Qaida and the Taliban which is binding on all State. Sanctions now cover individuals and entities associated with Al-Qaida, Usama bin Laden and/or the Taliban wherever located" (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009). From this example, it can be seen that all entities associated with Al-Qaida are under international sanctions by all member states of the United Nations. In other words, if Central Asian countries continue negotiation processes with Afghanistan, the region's authority and reliability will be questionable. These kinds of things will impact the region's economy and trade because other countries and organizations will not want to cooperate with non-reliable countries that support the terroristic country. In the worst case, some bans or sanctions that prevent economic development can be applied in relation to the Central Asian region. All mentioned factors affect the region's image in the international arena, access to finance, and markets which is a violation of economic securit*y*.

It means that *the events occurring in Afghanistan and its attempts to negotiate with Central Asian countries* affect the region's economic security.

The last but not least sector is environmental. **Environmental security** is "concerned with the maintenance of the local and the planetary biosphere as the essential support system on which all other human enterprises depend" (Williams, 2018). The environmental consequences of war and terrorism are diverse, including bomb damage, modified urban and rural environments, polluted air, wasted forests, and wildlife, etc (A. M. Mannion, 2003). The fact that Central Asia already has problems with fresh and clear air will not surprise anyone. For instance, "The concentration of harmful particles in Nur Sultan exceeds the annual norm by 2.5 times. Air quality in Almaty did not exceed the norm for only one day in five months. Bishkek often falls at the top of the most polluted cities in the world. Air in Tashkent was harmful 80% of the days in 2019" (Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting, 2020). To understand the scope of the problem, we can even not look at Central Asia, but at Asia as a whole because air pollution levels prevail dangerously there according to the data from the World Health Organization (WHO, 2018). It means that if Central Asia is having problems with ecology now even without terrorism, the consequences of terrorism on ecology will be too difficult to cope with. "1% increase in terrorism gives rise to at least 0.13% increase in the CO_2 emissions. The effect of terrorism on the environment is not limited to CO_2 emissions, terrorists use also a large scale of various chemicals" which are harmful to individuals and wildlife (Bildirici & Gokmenoglu, 2019). Considering the fact that Central Asia is already facing a lot of environmental and ecological problems, the impact of events happening in Afghanistan on the ecology of the region can be huge. It is because all countries live in one atmosphere and one county's environmental problems affect the second one. This means that the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan and its continuing wars, terroristic acts have a big impact not only on its own ecology but also all other regions especially the neighboring Central Asian region which is indeed a *violation of environmental security*.

Conclusions & Recommendations

In conclusion, I tried to observe the impacts of the events happening in Afghanistan on security in Central Asia by applying Barry Buzan's framework with five different security sectors which are societal, political, military, economic, and environmental. As a result, Central Asia is affected by the events happening in Afghanistan in each respective sector. For instance, the societal sector is impacted because of the rise of nationalistic sentiments, the spread of extremist ideologies, and social struggles between different groups. While the political sector is at risk because the events happening in Afghanistan and negotiation processes with it will result in rallies and conflicts among civilians which happen because of the absence of the needed reliability and authority of the governments. The sector that can be affected the most is the military because of different preventive war strategies and "offense-defense balance" which can result in wars with a lot of victims from both sides. Another sector that helps to understand the overall impact of the Taliban takeover on Central Asian security is economic because the region's image in the international arena, access to finance,

and markets can be harmed because of the events occurring in Afghanistan and its attempts to negotiate with Central Asian countries. The last but not least sector influenced by the Afghanistani events is environmental because its continuing wars and terroristic acts have a big impact not only on its own ecology but also all other regions especially the neighboring Central Asian region. Considering the fact that all mentioned sectors will be somehow affected by the events in Afghanistan, we can state for sure that Central Asia's overall security will be challenged.

Even though Central Asia will face some challenges because of the ongoing events in Afghanistan, it is possible to create conditions to make the region more secure and stable. My first suggestion will be using the strategy of anti-terrorism in Central Asia which focuses on defending society by implementing rules, laws, and other different measures to decrease a society's vulnerability to terror. It aims to protect people by strengthening border controls, security regulations at airports, transportation centers, or creating new laws. In other words, its focus is more on the centralization of security. Thus, I would recommend regulating border controls, checking thoroughly tourists or refugees who came to Central Asia from Afghanistan. Moreover, the creation of observer groups that check refugees and control them at the first stages of adaptation will strengthen the country's security.

The second recommendation would be to stop for a while negotiation processes with Afghanistan. However, the provision of humanitarian aid as food or medical treatments to Afghan people should continue because they are victims of the situation too. If countries will have a lot of meetings with Afghanistan it will mean that Central Asia is cooperating with them which can be harmful to the image of the region in the international arena.

The third recommendation would be increasing the social awareness of the population about the potential risks of joining extremist organizations or groups in order to prevent the spread of extremist ideologies in the region. Moreover, to make this act more officially valid the strengthening of laws and punishments for people who spread these ideologies or join extremist groups would be a good idea. It means that to decrease the security threat from Afghanistan not only the implementation of international law should be done, but also domestic application of such laws should be equally achieved.

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