

**“The Events in Afghanistan 2021: Impact on Security in Central Asia”
Subtopic: Central Asian response to security dilemma (Afghanistan 2021)**

Introduction

The Central Asian region faces a huge security dilemma and major concerns on its borders after the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan in 2021. Such a situation increases the disruption of the internal and external security of the Central Asian region. The events in Afghanistan generate a serious plethora and turbulence for the Central Asia region. (Nourzhanov & Saikal, 2021) Equally important, a series of strategic plans and analyses have been one of the most important political discourses for the years in a range of dimensions. Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan engage with Afghanistan in a different way than Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan adopt a different diplomatic response. It is also critical to recognize that events in Afghanistan did not only affect Central Asia but also pique the interest of Moscow and Beijing. Of course, it is understandable that the former Afghan government was isolated, but the new regime, led by the radical group Taliban, is attempting to be recognized as legitimate representatives of the country. There is still skepticism that the Taliban is a new avenue for the growth of extremist groups. In addition the reason of imbalance in the region. In this case, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan deal with Afghanistan in a different relational dynamic, while Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan use a different dimension of diplomatic response. After the Taliban gained complete control, Central Asia experienced a wave of uncontrolled migration. This shows how inconsistent and lack of coordination from the Central Asia region's response is. (Tursa, 2021)

CA region response solely practices defense diplomacy and strategic cooperation with external actors. Obviously, CA states consider both prudence in the region and the process of peace talks. Since pursuing protection in the region is deemed as the main objective. Generally, CA states accept to deal with neighboring states through negotiation because there is no need for tension and rivalry in the region. Moreover, the new government of Afghanistan has been explicitly demonstrating its own position. Even though, CA states military is in a state of preparedness. It is because of the presence and coexistence of other Islamic and extremist groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Diplomatic engagement of CA states and Afghanistan are determined potential tolerance of dialog and willingness. While the complex presence of great power's strategy has been under attention. Major states such as Russia, the USA, and China observe the situation in the region and pursue cooperative and strategic action for security protection. Initially, the USA established strategic formula, which focuses on a balance of power in the region. The paradigm of regional power and major power might be a comprehensive model for the political framework. Hence, the strategic interest of great power indeed identifies in a range of dimensions involving its own centralized concept and agenda. Cooperative initiation of great powers can be considered in the frame of fighting with global terrorism and recovery of Afghanistan as a state including economy, politics, and social order. In the final phase, the capacity of defense diplomacy and strategic interest of great power will illustrate the development of spectra of Afghanistan in Central Asia.

Central Asian response of defense diplomacy

There is evidence that defense diplomacy plays a crucial role in foreign policy for the promotion of peace and the use of the military and security apparatus. In most cases, defense diplomacy is indeed a development for CA states, which have strict borders to monitor and control the situation. Despite the regional scope, such a security dilemma involves the activation of multilateral relations with other military institutions. In other words, the quality and capacity of defense diplomacy of CA states assess the opportunity for the development of peaceful negotiations with Afghanistan. It is important to note that the Afghan previous legitimate government and administration are highly isolated. New austere regimes have dominated Afghan politics and legislature under Taliban rule. UN member states understand the situation and the plausible solution remains as "diplomatic engagement" and negotiation but not recognition. Of course, defense diplomacy shapes the military role in a range of dimensions but also its pursuit priorities of the domestic and external security of each CA state in the region. (Cottey and Forster, 2004) The limbo of coexistence of other Islamic extremist groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan forecast a pessimistic scenario for the CA region. A key aspect of diplomacy demonstrates the regional response. In detail, border countries such as Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan are examined primarily for risk, as border crossings with Afghanistan pose security challenges. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, on the other hand, focus on monitoring and coordination with the aforementioned states. It is equally important to note that Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan approach Afghanistan's events in different ways, which explains positive reactions from CA states. It seems that there is still regional consensus and agreement in recognizing the Taliban's new regime. Whereas Timothy's (2014) research and analysis skeptically assess the capacity for regional response and security. He respectively examines from perspectives of regional trade and security cooperation efforts. Determination of regional response is described in terms of the lack of corresponding regulation and the capacity of military forces. Even though the creation of buffer zone in border countries exercises for protection.

Whereas new optimistic view explain the positive reaction and open dialog with Afghan's new government for the future cooperative Islamic world. Uzbekistan has warmly acknowledged and accepted the Taliban's role in Afghanistan as a government. In this case, Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev stated:

"our defense is ready for any situation, we are in control of the situation... They [Afghanistan] are our dear neighbors, they cannot move, neither can we. (2021)

On the other hand, it is important to recognize that there is exists a weak branch of defense diplomacy in Central Asia. There is the only pure diplomatic dialog with the new Afghan government, which provides security not only for Uzbekistan but also for the entire CA region. Taliban continue to guarantee stability in the region in current peace talk. Surprisingly, diplomatic relations between Afghanistan and the CA states are valued as a "bridge to regional integration." (Gallagher, 2020) Such phenomena give rise to the idea that Afghanistan could serve as a potential economic partner in the region. At this stage of the peace dialog, Turkmenistan's neutrality would be seen as a lack of support for either anti-Taliban or pro-Western phenomena. (Hashimova, 2021) Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan are to some extent positive about this neutrality in order to maintain the balance of consensus in the regional framework under the provision. While Tajikistan opposes strong position and president of Tajikistan Rahmon ultimately stated:

“Tajikistan will not recognize any other government formed in this country through oppression, without taking into account the position of the entire Afghan people, especially all of its national minorities.” (2021)

The geopolitical game urges Central Asian governments to exhibit the circumstances and provisions that would satisfy and fulfill the wishes of the new Afghan administration while also waiting for the Afghan government to consider their requests to maintain peace. Taking into account the current situation in Afghanistan and Central Asia, CA states' response follows the decent measure of relations providing humanitarian assistance and dealing with uncontrollable migration. The two bordering states (Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) explicitly expressed “friendship and good-neighborliness” which proves the current and further development of trans-regional infrastructure. (Meyer, 2021) Whereas compliance of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan internal doubt despite peaceful process in the region. Nevertheless, unlikely internal struggle and oppression of Afghan people (especially female population) cause hesitation and preservation of strong opposition towards Taliban new regime as Tajikistan have been demonstrating these days. According to the Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO) (2013), the conference of discussion forecasted several scenarios of the CA region. It is based on indeed optimistic view involving implementation of national framework and reintegration of regional program. Although, it could be elaborated in other words such as consolidation of regional powers to hold strong ties in the representation of the political and regional interest and security. Primarily, one of the regional objectives aims in neutralization of the region and elimination of threats (Islamic extremist groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan). In the long term, the CA states are focusing on regional protection against external threats and developing joint strategic projects in the energy and transport sectors.

Great powers' strategy for CA region

The strategic interest in the context of the US, Russia, and China was examined and interpreted greatly. The simple presence of great powers embraces various dynamics and challenges security in the CA region. Equally important to know each major powers have a certain interest in Afghanistan. That is the reason; Russia, the USA, and China actively participate in the Afghan question and security dilemma of the CA region as well. On the other hand, great powers understand the vulnerability of the CA region especially China and Russia. Such involvement of great powers can be assessed as a shadow of competition and enhancement of cooperation in the region. Since CA plus Afghanistan demonstrates prodigious potential in the area of energy resources and infrastructure. In this case, one of the examples can be exercised strategy “C5+1” as a five CA states and Afghanistan. According to the Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting (2020), the geopolitical formula can be interpreted differently in the frame of Russia, the USA, and China. Besides, each state embraces its priorities and responds to the region in a long term. Of course, such a regional political framework draw a lot of attention but there is still anticipation of huge provocation and strict evaluation of the security region. Some experts believe that formula indirectly links with phenomena of “tug of war”. In detail, the geopolitical triangle of powers (Russian -USA- China) in scheme realpolitik.

USA was the first initiator of the geopolitical model “C5+1” as a strategic normative in the CA region. American strategical concept views Afghanistan under the responsibility of the CA states or region, which was far from it. It explains the absence of visible participation of the USA in Afghanistan scope. Even though, they markedly represented a series of improvement sectors including the following: counter-terrorism, future energy, transport corridor development, supporting national and regional adaptation planning. (U.S.

Mission Uzbekistan, 2018) In other words, American initiators focus on unrealized targets in what they could not achieve for the past 20 years in Afghan territory. Obviously, the main objectives would be under attention to protect regional stability. In contrast, US's political expert believes that presence of Russia and China:

“But it is unlikely that China or Russia will promote systemic reforms that the United States considers essential for long-term stability in the region.”(Eugene, et.al, 2007)

Consequently, the US establishes a “regional–centric” model and passive presence in the region. While Russia interprets the formula as “C5+1=6”. Moscow's strategy is based on the unification of states including literally Russia as a new member state of the region. The reflection of Russia in the region reminds previous organization so-called Central Asian Union (CAU) excluding Turkmenistan because of its neutrality in the international arena. However, Russia exercise quite cordial diplomatic relations with CA states. In most cases, scholars elaborate that cooperation between CA states and Russia is not for the long run. On the contrary part, China presented the formula as “C5+1=x”. China refers to the uncertainty of the region but focuses on real objectives such as overcoming the consequences of the pandemic in Afghanistan and recovery of the economy in the regional long term. Moreover, China proposes a China-centric approach concerning developing Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). On the one hand, the Chinese version of the desired format seems to reflect the recognition of the regional power and on the other, it does not yet declare a more specific vision in development perspectives. China is quietly concerned about regional security as a neighboring country with Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Although, the anxiousness of CA states towards China still plays a huge role since the region evaluates how far China can dig the hole for them. The “Community of Common Destiny” alarms uneasiness under this narrative. International experts assess active participation of China associated with domination in the region, which would provoke the USA. Apart from that, Chinese governance and varies between xenophobia and sin philia assessments of China's growing presence in the region. China renders different motifs, which causes vague apprehension in CA states. It usually ties with a negative reaction from civil society. Most compelling evidence connects with the case in Kazakhstan in 2016 including temporary transferring of the land, non-transparency of Chinese contracts, and noncompliance with regulations and guidelines of the local legislature. (Laruelle, 2018)

The reaction of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan reflects quite an unclear picture in conjunction with the strategy of “C5+1”. According to Consultative

Meetings of the Presidents of the CA states in 2020 October illustrated “brotherhood relation” and ties of “good neighbor”. Such regional dynamics show significant features of the CA region in the international arena. That cordial feature of regional scope usually relates to the normative quality of the CA region, which contributes to mutual understanding and overcoming tension and further promotion of consolidation of powers. (Tolipov, n.d)

Geopolitics of CA orientates clear cooperative regional development so CA states avoid dependence and pressure of the major powers and factors. CA states propose clarity in terms of assistance and balance in the region. In the final stage of the actuality of the formula lies down on “C5+0”. CA concept and model function in relation to structurally integrated region.

Conclusions & Recommendations

In the final stage, the dynamics and challenges of the CA region and Afghanistan itself generate a prodigious case of peaceful dialog. Taking into account, the new radical regime in Afghanistan still holds a security dilemma. Even though, having a peaceful process can develop geostrategic framework in the CA region with potential construction of economy. I assume that consolidation of the Central Asian states and Afghan's decent diplomatic relations would maintain balance in the region. The current afghan crisis such as the big flow of migration and internal imbalance requires time to restore all sectors of governance and economy. Despite the "good neighbor" feature, CA states are predominantly prudent since unexpected situations would happen until there would be the liquidation of extremist and terrorist groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Equally important to emphasize that neighboring countries and major powers need assurance of regional security. On the positive side, CA states may form regional unity in long-term objectives, which would serve as strengthening ties with each other in a decent manner. Despite the optimistic scenario of the CA region and Afghanistan, there is exist various models of statehood and approaches concerning the expression of religion in a range of Islamic groups. It refers to the presence of other actors of the region such as the Turkistan Islamic Party, Hezbollah, ISIS-K, and Al-Qaeda. (Cohen, 2021) Radical ideology and regime stress invisibly CA states approach and capacity to influence. Scholars forecast events in Afghanistan on both positive side and negative sides. The role of diplomatic defense diplomacy would be exercised greatly in further decades as a "*nonviolent use of military forces*". (Winger, 2014) Important to realize that the Taliban new regime does not demonstrate clear agenda since it seems new government practices uncertainty and unpredictability for great power. While CA states follow with the flow of diplomatic process and remain cordial relationship to a certain extent. Alarming phenomena lie down on the Islamic movement and dealing with them.

Afghan question will be under attention for a long run until there would be the resolution of fundamental needs and recovery of Afghanistan in all dimensions. Geopolitical strategies remain the interest of great power especially in terms of security and development of energy infrastructure. Regional-centric strategies probably would be utilized in regional scope. CA states' response was passively evaluated since Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan recognized the Taliban as a new government of the state. As result, there will not be strong tension or pressure from both sides but prudence in the region would remain for so long.

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