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## Threats and Challenges to the Regional Security in Central Asian Region (the Example of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan)

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### Abstract

The article describes main challenges and threats to the Central Asian region, including the so-called "unconventional" associated with the threat of potential access to toxic, radioactive waste and dual-use technologies in the light of the terrorist threat, growth of religious extremism, and also the presence of vulnerable elements in the export control system, on the example of Kyrgyz Republic.

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### 1. Introduction

Central Asian region occupies the area of more than 4 million square kilometers, and has a population of more than 55 million people. After dissolution of the Soviet Union, former union republics faced new, previously unsolved on their own, tasks of transformation of economy and social sphere, building the system of political and governmental management, creation of their own security systems on different levels – military, economical, technological, informational, ecological, etc.

These processes touched Central Asian republics, whose basic problems on the stage of building of independence were serious threats and challenges in the sphere of ensuring the security. Fulfillment of the requirements of existence of any sovereign state is strongly connected with ensuring of its own security and necessity of protection its own interests. Security is a key moment in the national history, when not only a possibility of people's existence and development is preserved, but also its territory, property, culture, language

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and system of values (Abramzon, S.M.,1971) (Asankanov, A.A., 1997). At the same time, these threats and challenges can be classified as internal, regional and external ones.

## 2. Internal threats

Internal threats, which are typical for almost all countries in the region including Kyrgyzstan, include:

- internal political and social-economic instability, including such negative factors as ethnic tensions, confrontation of internal regional elites and clans, high level of unemployment (especially among the youth), impoverishment of inhabitants, deeper inequality in incomes, internal and external migration, corruption, low effectiveness of governmental institutes – all that led to the so-called «color» revolutions in 2005 and 2010;
- growth of influence of radical islamism among population of the republics (especially among the youth), its preparedness to use any tensions and social problems for this purpose: low level of incomes, unemployment, absence of social lifts for the youth, etc.;
- growth of influence of drug mafia connected with increasing drug traffic from Afghanistan through the region to Russia and further to the EU, increasing number of drug-addicted people;
- Kyrgyzstan is typical for marked increase in the impact of the crime on the processes in society; the crime tries not only to ensure control over economy, but also to enter political establishment. According to the police, today Kyrgyzstan is a home for nearly 20 sustainable criminal gang groups. During one of the interviews, President Atambayev admitted, that criminals pressured deputies in the period of decay and formation of the next parliamentary alliance – “There was blackmail, including representatives of various corrupt, criminal groups. No secret that there are crime representatives even in the parliament” (Babakulov U., 2013).
- moreover, there is a problem of real absence of institutes of power continuity of top political leadership in some republics in the region.

## 3. Regional threats

Regional threats include:

- transboundary water and energy problems, which exist between the countries of upper and lower stream lines of major rivers Amudarya and Syrdarya. These problems include: building of large hydroelectric power plants in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan that is strongly opposed by Uzbekistan at first; use of existing hydroelectric power plants in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan not for irrigation, but for energy production – the water is discharged in the winter period, while in the summer period there is not enough water for irrigation in neighboring Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (in the Soviet period hydroelectric plants were usually used for water accumulation for irrigation in the summer period, and in the winter period Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan supplied Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan with gas, coal and fuel oil for the work of thermal power plants);
- unsolved border disputes for territory, tensions for industrial capacities, which is especially typical for Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan in areas containing enclaves of neighbor countries, entities existing since the Soviet times and aggravated by the lack of resources, first of all water, pasture areas (considering demographic situation in the region). According to the head of the Department of border delimitation and development of border territories of Kyrgyzstan government K. Iskandarov, the length of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border is 970 km, with only 567 km described (nearly 60 sections), among them only 519 km are approved by governmental delegations. The length of the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border is 1378 km, with only 1062 km described (nearly 60 sections), among them only 1007 km are approved by governmental delegations. And according to Vice minister for internal affairs B. Alymbekov, law enforcement agencies detected 53 incidents in 2012: 14 on the border with Tajikistan, 39 on the border with Uzbekistan (Ivaschenko E., 2013) (Shestakov I., 2012).
- struggle for regional leadership, which is more typical for Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

#### 4. External Security Threats

The most serious external security threats include:

- growth of Islamic extremism in the region,
- growth of number of terroristic organizations,
- growth of transboundary crime and drug traffic.

There is no any doubt, that the growth of external threats is strongly affected by developing situation in neighboring Afghanistan and partly in Pakistan, where major Afghan insurgent forces are based, connected with powerful Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) – the Taliban with its head body “Kvetta shura”, the so-called “Khakkany” network and “Islamic party of Afghanistan” of G.Kheckmatyar. While, according to some experts, such terroristic organizations as “Al-Kaeda” moved basically to the countries of the North Africa and the Middle East, it is absolutely clear that they will quickly return to Afghanistan if the Taliban returns to power, and they will try to spread their regional influence. It is evidenced by their efforts of destabilization of republics in the region: so-called “Batkent” events in 1999, multiple terroristic acts in Central Asian republics during all the period of their independence.

According to law enforcement agencies, the main terroristic organizations in the region are the following :

- “Islamic movement of Uzbekistan” – operates in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan;
- “Khizb ut-Takhrir al-Islami” (“The Party of Islamic Liberation”) – operates in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan;
- “Muslim brothers” (JAMA'AT / HAKAKAT IKHWAN al – MUSLIMEEN) – cells of this organization represent a network of autonomous cells, operating under different names;
- “Islom lashkarlary” (“The warriors of Islam”) – operates in Uzbekistan.

Only in Kyrgyzstan in the period between 1999 and 2010 the number of detected facts of extremism makes 1059 cases (Aleshin Y.N., 2011).

Particularly we should point out the problems, connected with ecological degradation; these problems are related to internal threats as well as to regional and external ones. Nowadays the problems of environment and ecological security in the region become more and more serious. These negative processes are influenced straight by the lack of financial resources in the countries of the region which could significantly improve the situation. The problems of toxic leaks, radioactive contamination, and displacement of toxic chemical storages on the territory of the countries of the region lead to the emergence of the so-called “unconventional” risks. A special threat is represented by “tails” – burials of radioactive wastes. For example, in Kyrgyzstan there is a number of such burials, some of them are situated not far from the borders with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan (Kara Balta, Mailu Suu). This represents a threat to public health of Kyrgyzstan, moreover, Uzbek and Kazakh experts showed awareness that in the spring season during the flood period water can take these wastes to neighbor countries.

The territory of modern Kyrgyzstan was one of the major mineral bases of natural uranium and rare elements in former Tsarist Russia and the USSR. In mountain and border regions of Kyrgyzstan mines and factories of uranium ores and rare elements with thorium mineralization were in function since 1907 (Pogodin S.A., 1977). As the legacy of long-term activities of those facilities, huge amount of radioactive wastes remains stored on the surface in mines and tail storages. In conditions of broken industrial ties after the Soviet collapse, lack of appropriate financial supplement, migration of specialists outside the republic and so on, most of storages stayed without necessary control, monitoring and technical support for a long time. The situation is more than serious, because Kyrgyzstan is a mountain country and tail storages are placed in mountain areas, facing the risks of landslides, floods, close to unpredictable mountain rivers.

According to the Government of Kyrgyzstan, there are 75 places of storage of radioactive wastes from mining industry, which total volume overcomes 145 million m<sup>3</sup>, and total area is 650 hectares (6.5 km<sup>2</sup>) on the territory of the republic. The most serious threat is made by 38 tail storages of radioactive wastes with total volume of 62,12 million m<sup>3</sup>, including 29 uranium tail storages with total volume of radioactive wastes of more than 41

million m<sup>3</sup>. In mining sites for mineral ores there are also 37 uncultivated pits, with unconditional (depleted) radioactive ores with total volume of more than 83 million m<sup>3</sup>. The condition of those sites and especially tail storages did not fulfill security requirements even when mines and factories were operational. In that period there were multiple incidents with catastrophic consequences of transboundary scale (Mailu Suu in 1954, Ak Tyuz in 1964) (National report of Kyrgyzstan, 2010). During the last years after mines and factories were abandoned, the condition of tail storages became critically worse, because of degradation, malfunctions of their protective covers and facilities.

A special awareness is caused by the fact, that facilities for extraction and reprocessing of radioactive raw materials on the territories of Central Asian republics (except Turkmenistan) along with the amount of toxic wastes burials and transboundary rivers present a serious threat for people and territories in the region if being used by extremists, terrorists or clan gangs. According to estimations of experts, full devastation of uranium tail storages № 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 18 in Mailu Suu will bring to Fergana valley the amount of radioactive materials, close to 1 million m<sup>3</sup>, and the total radioactivity of nuclides, spread in valley (Kyrgyzstan) and river alluvial fan (Uzbekistan) will reach 10000 curies. The area of radioactive contamination will be make 300 km<sup>2</sup>, and the total population on contaminated grounds in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan will reach 100-120 thousands of people (Torgoev I.A., 2001). A fresh example is the latest scandal, connected with opposition of politic elites, so-called “Yuppi-gate”, that has not been finally justified yet. According to special services, it was planned to poison Naryn river with cyanide and blame the “Kumtor” and governmental authorities for that (Omuraliev E., 2013).

Also, it is more than possible, that withdrawal of the U.S. troops from Afghanistan will contribute to its transformation back again to regional center of radical Islamism, whose extremist and terroristic cells will try to get access to dual-use technologies in the countries of the region for the production of WMD, as well as for manufacturing of the so-called “dirty bombs” with the purpose of blackmailing the world community. According to some experts, the worst scenario can occur if the whole Central Asian region will be taken by Islamic extremists and they will get access to industrial capacities for production of radioactive materials in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

Remembering that, we should pay special attention to possible risks, connected with the national system of export controls of Kyrgyzstan, which can be defined as a set of measures to ensure the order established by the legislation of the Republic of foreign economic activity in relation to a specific group of controlled goods and technologies (raw materials, equipment, scientific and technical information, services, and intellectual property). Export control is one of the most important elements of the system of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Effective export control system helps to reduce the risk of obtaining of certain items, materials and technologies by countries interested in developing nuclear, chemical, biological and other weapons of mass destruction, which is prohibited by international agreements on non-proliferation of WMD and related technologies. If we look at the location of Kyrgyzstan on the world map, we can point out again strong political instability in neighboring Afghanistan which shares border with the Islamic republic of Iran – the state, which causes certain concern of the world community because of its nuclear project. Also we can point out a neighboring of Afghanistan with Pakistan – the state possessing nuclear weapon but without participating in the Nuclear non-proliferation treaty (Data on Pakistan nuclear project). It is clear that the national system of export control is a vital component of the national security policy of any state.

Unfortunately there are number of problems in the national system of export control of Kyrgyzstan, for example, at the level of customs services, ministries and authorities of the republic (News of the Center for issues of export controls). As another example it can be figured out that according to Kyrgyz experts, nowadays all the biological labs on the territory of Kyrgyzstan are abandoned and this causes a risk of getting the pathogens like plague or anthrax by terrorists (News of the Center for issues of export controls).

The risks are growing because the entire region is situated in the area of a large number of transport ways (Toktomushev A., 2005), and corruption remains a serious problem for Kyrgyz customs service (<http://www.24kg.org/investigation/181849-v-kyrgyzstane-vyyavlen-ocherednoj-fakt-korrupcii.html>).

A special challenge for the national export control system of Kyrgyzstan is intangible transfer of technologies that means a transfer of some sensitive technologies via scientific conferences, meetings, public speeches,

lectures, education of foreign students, and also communication through electronic networks like telephone, fax or the Internet. The control of intangible transfer of information is a complicated problem in itself with certain ethic, political, law and technical aspects (Sudakov O.V., 2004).

Strengthening of the export control system is not an absolute way to improve world system of non-proliferation. But export control system helps to support it in the following ways:

- It provides with early understanding of clandestine intentions of the country, whose government decided to develop WMD program secretly;
- The wish of this government to avoid export control makes the clandestine WMD program much more expensive;
- The program becomes more time-consuming, because the country needs time to find a suitable exporter or other ways to achieve its goal. (Andreevsky E.V., 2013).

Unfortunately, all these “unconventional” threats and risks have not yet been properly estimated by the countries of the region, as well as by major external interested “centers of influence” – Russia, the U.S., China, the EU, etc. A very important factor influencing the relations of Central Asian states with Russia and the West is an out-of-date myth of a competition among the great powers in the region, which dominate in the political establishment of the republics. The region of Central Asia is intentionally turned into the arena of opposition but not cooperation (Russian Council for Foreign Affairs, 2014).

As a whole, the increase of the importance and influence of “unconventional” threats and risks create new problems and challenges for the region and the world community in the sphere of regional security (Kulbarakov R.D., 2011). In perspective, it will influence the formation of strategy of ensuring the security in the region as well as the development of long-term policy towards the republics of Central Asian region by the world community (Ramakant T., 2011).

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