

THE RISE OF THE TALIBAN MOVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN: SECURITY ISSUES FOR CENTRAL ASIA

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Abstract. The article examines the consequences of the arrival to power of the terrorist organization "Taliban" (banned in Kazakhstan) in Afghanistan in 1996 for the countries of Central Asia, analyzes possible scenarios for the development of the current situation after the withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan and the return of the Taliban to power on September 7, 2021.

At the beginning of the article, the reader is introduced to the events that influenced the situation in post-Soviet countries with the coming to power of the Taliban organization in Afghanistan in 1996, after which the author draws parallels of events twenty years ago with the returning of the Taliban to power in 2021. In conclusion, the author predicts a possible scenario for the development of the situation in the region from the point of view of modern reality. In this regard, the opinions of Kazakhstani and foreign politicians and experts are analyzed and comprehensively discussed.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Taliban, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, terrorism, drugs, security issues, Islamic Emirate.

Аңдатпа. Мақалада 1996 жылы Ауғанстандағы «Талибан» (Қазақстанда тыйым салынған) террористік ұйымының билікке келуінің Орталық Азия елдері үшін салдары қарастырылған, Ауғанстанан НАТО әскерлерінің шығарылуы нәтижесінде 2021 жылғы 7 қыркүйекте билікке тәліптердің қайта оралуы және олардың Ауғанстан Ислам Әмірлігін құрғаннан кейінгі ағымдағы жағдайдың ықтимал даму сценарийлері талданған.

Мақаланың басында оқырманды 1996 жылы Ауғанстандағы "Талибан" ұйымының билікке келуімен посткеңестік елдердегі жағдайға әсер еткен оқиғалармен таныстырады, содан кейін автор жиырма жыл бұрынғы оқиғалардың Ауғанстандағы қазіргі билікке Талибанның келуімен параллельдерін жүргізеді. Мақаланың соңында автор қазіргі шындық тұрғысынан аймақтағы жағдайдың ықтимал даму сценарийін болжайды. Тақырыпқа байланысты Қазақстандық және шетелдік саясаткерлер мен эксперттердің пікірлері талданып, жан-жақты талқыланып болады.

Түйін сөздер: Ауғанстан, "Талибан", Қазақстан, Өзбекстан, Қырғызстан, Тәжікстан, Түрікменстан, терроризм, есірткі, қауіпсіздік саласы, Ислам әмірлігі.

Аннотация. В статье рассмотрены последствия прихода террористической организации «Талибан» (запрещен в Казахстане) к власти в Афганистане в 1996 году для стран Центральной Азии, проанализированы возможные сценарии развития текущей ситуации после вывода войск НАТО из Афганистана и возвращения талибов к власти 7 сентября 2021 года.

В начале статьи читателя знакомят с событиями, повлиявшими на ситуацию в постсоветских странах с приходом к власти организации "Талибан" в Афганистане в 1996 году, после чего автор проводит параллели событий двадцатилетней давности с возвращением талибов к власти в Афганистане. В заключении автор прогнозирует возможный сценарий развития ситуации в регионе с точки зрения современной реальности. В связи с этим будут проанализированы и всесторонне обсуждены мнения казахстанских и зарубежных политиков и экспертов.

Ключевые слова: Афганистан, "Талибан", Казахстан, Узбекистан, Кыргызстан, Таджикистан, Туркменистан, терроризм, наркотики, вопросы безопасности, исламский Эмират.

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Introduction

Thirty years ago, a new world order was established as a result of the collapse of the bipolar world, which existed before. These changes subsequently had a positive effect on regions and states, while some regions became subject to a deep political, economic, and military crisis. Although with the collapse of the dualistic system the Western countries considered themselves the winners in the West-East confrontation, the Eastern part had a different view on things. The disability to come to a consensus solution led to new conflicts and tensions in international relations. After the Cold War, some states formed in a new situation chose their development directions considering present-day challenges and threats, while the other tried to establish justice for themselves, taking into account their history. As a result of this, military-political unrest took place in some countries, leading to a deep crisis in the state. It is known that Afghanistan is one of the countries which experienced a difficult situation of this kind.

The return of the Talib regime to power is undoubtedly one of the most important issues on the today's agenda of the world community. This problem is a particular matter of concern for the Central Asian countries bordering Afghanistan. For this reason, to closely study and evaluate any political change in this country is a vital matter for Kazakhstan. The current research, by studying the period of the Taliban's rise to power, aims to analyze the threats that emerge for the Central Asian states and to suggest their solutions.

Methodology

The relevance of the research topic is related to the possible consequences that can fundamentally change the security system for the countries of the Central Asian region. The methodological basis of the research is based on historical-analytical and comparative methods and the principles of scientific knowledge, scientific objectivity and reliability, methods of empirical research analysis, comparative analysis, synthesis and analysis. Using the method of expert evaluation (multiple-choice survey) and the SWOT-analysis, it is possible to determine the achievements on the way of building

resilience for the prevention of safety in our society, as well as to find problematic "pain" points.

Discussion and results

The rise of the Taliban movement. The leading military and political groups in Afghanistan underestimated the pending menace of the Taliban organization, having realized their mistake only after in 1996 the Taliban took over Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. Subsequently, in 1998, Talibs controlled approximately 90% of the Afghan territories. After their coming to power, such changes based on sharia law as restriction of women's rights and tightening of policies against ethnic minority groups, were introduced in the country. These processes show that ethnic Pashtuns, who are considered the main force of the Taliban, have become the leading political group. In 1996-2001, the Taliban government was recognized by Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" was located in Kandahar, its capital [1].

After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York, the situation in Afghanistan dramatically changed. Negligence to human rights, al-Qaeda's covert operations through Afghan territory, and refusal to hand over Osama bin Laden to the US led to the UN-sanctioned invasion of Afghanistan by US troops and their allies. As a result of hostilities in 2001-2002, the Taliban regime fell, but was not destroyed. On the contrary, the Taliban movement intensified its guerilla warfare in subsequent years.

In April 2021, US President J. Biden announced the withdrawal of all American troops by 9/11/21, the 20th anniversary of the tragedy in the United States. Immediately after the withdrawal of American forces, the Taliban captured the main cities of Afghanistan with little resistance, and on August 15 they established full control over Kabul. According to representatives of the US administration, Afghan government forces, trained by NATO and US instructors for 20 years, were supposed to show resistance to the Taliban actions. However, in practice, the Afghan government surrendered without a fight and conceded

defeat, claiming that they wanted to avoid mass casualties of civilians [2].

The impact of the Afghan crisis in the late 1990s on the Central Asian states

For the republics of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, the threat from the flow of various destructive religious groups, in particular, the Taliban organization, prevailed as compared to other republics. The primary reason for this is the geographical one, for the above-mentioned states are located in the close proximity to Afghanistan and share a common border. The dissolution of the USSR, the overthrow of the pro-Soviet regime of the Afghan politician Mohammad Najibullah, as well as the beginning of the political struggle for power by mujahideen factions - all these events led to the growing tension in the socio-political situation of Afghanistan and Central Asia [3].

It should be noted that the political struggle intensified in Tajikistan after gaining independence due to the support of the Tajik political opposition by the Taliban gaining strength in Afghanistan in the early 1990s, as well as some international Islamic organizations. In 1990-1995, concerns arose regarding the idea of Afghanistan and Tajikistan's unification into a single state, initiated by Afghan Islamic leaders. It is clear that such actions have a negative impact on stability in the Republic of Tajikistan [4].

In 1997-2000, the military-political situation in Afghanistan was characterized by the gradual establishment of control over many territories by the Taliban, as well as the increasing numbers of foreign mercenaries from various international terrorist groups, including Al-Qaeda. During that period, ardent supporters of the "Taliban" played an important role in the escalation of the conflict in Pakistan, where attacks with the participation of Pakistani intelligence agencies and the army were more effective. At the same time, extremist organizations led by the Taliban made repeated attempts to expand their influence not only in Tajikistan, but also in neighboring Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan by destabilizing the socio-political situation. Thus, in February 1999, a number of terrorist acts that threatened the national security of the CA countries took place in Tashkent. In 1999-2000, the invasion of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan by

militants of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) trained in Afghanistan was marked by large-scale fighting in the southern part of Kyrgyzstan and attempts to occupy the densely populated Ferghana Valley. The intensification of the joint efforts of the CIS member states was required in order to neutralize the danger caused by such military-political tensions in the Central Asian republics. For example, after the collapse of the USSR in 1992, the CIS emphasizes the fight against international terrorism in the Central Asian region as a priority [5]. Further, in 2003, the six CIS countries participating in the Collective Security Treaty Organization continued to develop the CSTO, whose main task was to counter any threat to the security of the Central Asian republics [6].

The events of 1999-2000 in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan confirmed that no military-political problems in a single sub-regional geopolitical space are limited to local, territorial frameworks, as in the case of IMU, which with the support of Taliban and Al-Qaeda became a real threat to the national and regional security of the entire Central Asia. In 2002-2003, as a result of the post-9/11 anti-terrorist operations of the US and NATO international coalition in Afghanistan, the Taliban and Al-Qaeda were largely defeated and expelled from the Afghan territory. However, many members of these movements managed to escape to the border areas of Pakistan. Since the first military operations, almost all militants have been hiding in the territory of neighboring Pakistan or living among the local Pashtun population. Despite this, the military operations of the coalition forces in Afghanistan made it possible to significantly reduce the level of tension in Central Asia thus protecting the southern states of the CIS from extremism and terrorism. However, the leaders of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan were not caught, which allowed the movement to retain its organizational structure.

Most of the leaders of the Taliban, Al-Qaeda and other movements are engaged in drug business in order to provide financing for their military formations delivering drugs largely to CIS countries. For example, important transit drug routes pass through Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan, these countries themselves becoming major

producers of opium. Because of this, Tajikistan has become a major hub for Taliban drug traffickers, who transport narcotics through Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to Kazakhstan and then to Russia. The leaders of all states of this region constantly talk about the growth of illegal drug production of and their transportation through Central Asian countries. With the drug trade becoming one of the main sources of funding for the Taliban movement, such illicit trafficking has a direct impact on the CIS states' national security [7].

After the expulsion of the Taliban in 2001, the probability of another political crisis in Afghanistan remained on a high level, and in the context of military-political instability, this could have serious negative consequences not only for Afghanistan, but also for the countries of Central Asia, because the Taliban movement was not completely destroyed. On the contrary, staying abroad it increased the military potential year by year. Experts expressed some opinions about the Taliban's return to power. After announcing the start of the US and NATO troops withdrawal, the Taliban overthrew the Afghan government and officially declared the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan on September 7, 2021. It is clear that the Afghan problem has not yet been resolved and the danger of its transition to a crisis still remains, which in turn will directly affect the general security and stability of the Central Asian countries [8].

How the coming to power of the "Taliban" organization affected the CA countries?

After A. Ghani fled the country on August 15, 2021, and the US and NATO Armed Forces withdrawn from Afghanistan, the Taliban's quick seizure of power was not a surprise for the countries of the Central Asian region.

Although Afghanistan has always been considered a hotbed of radical Islam for Central Asia, it is an integral part of the region due to its border with Central Asian countries. First, the CA countries have two different views on the shift of power in Afghanistan. For instance, the countries like Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan approve of the Taliban regime's coming to power and consequently, are interested in establishing

connections with them. Tashkent went as far as to participate in the Doha talks with Talibs. Tajikistan being the opponent of the regime, takes a directly opposite position on this issue. The contradictory views of the Central Asian countries towards the Taliban can be explained by a number of reasons. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are primarily interested in the trade and economic component of bilateral relations with the state of Afghanistan. This is clearly seen from the statistical data presented by the Trend Economy portal, which shows that trade turnover between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan accounts for approximately \$234 million, a large part of it being the export of Uzbek electricity. Turkmenistan is interested in the construction and implementation of the TAPI gas pipeline to be laid over the territories of Pakistan and Afghanistan, through which gas will be delivered from Turkmenistan to India. It can be said that the government of Turkmenistan does not want its relationship with Pakistan (which supports the Afghani government) and Afghanistan to worsen, because the future development of the economic component of Turkmenistan will depend on the nature of these relations [9].

Tajikistan's position against Afghanistan can also be understood. In 2020, the trade turnover between these states comprised about \$70 million, most of which is Tajik electricity imported to Pakistan and Afghanistan. However, due to lowering the water levels in its reservoirs, Tajikistan experiences a shortage of electricity for domestic use, not to mention export to other countries. In addition, Tajikistan, like other states of the CA, is concerned about the spread of radical Islam, which may negatively affect the country's national security. However, despite the aforementioned facts, at the last meeting of the SCO, the head of Tajikistan E. Rakhmon said that "all ethnic groups, including Tajiks, should participate in the new Government of Afghanistan" and emphasized the need to establish contact with the Taliban.

The mass flow of refugees leaving the country after the regime change in Afghanistan presents a notable problem for the CA countries. Tashkent is not particularly happy with the influx of asylum-seekers and has a strict policy on refugees, as illegal crossing of the Uzbek border is punishable

by criminal law. Tajikistan, on the other hand, is receiving refugees from the border areas of the northern part of Afghanistan. However, both countries try not to publicize their actions [10].

The conference "Afghanistan: security and economic development" was held in Tashkent on July 25-26, hosting over 100 delegations of international organizations and more than 20 countries. During the meeting attended by representatives of the Taliban movement, issues such as continuous violation of human rights in Afghanistan, especially the rights of women and ethnic minorities, as well as initiatives related to the country's development prospects were discussed.

The Tashkent conference is the first large-scale international meeting with the participation of the Taliban since their coming to power last year. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan are trying to develop mutual relations with the Talibs using diplomatic channels.

According to Uzbek politician Farhad Tolipov, "this is a failed state. Whoever is in power, until the state is fully formed, its institutions function properly, the people support their government and the threat of terrorism is eliminated, it is practically impossible to establish any relationship."

The political scientist, a former Kazakh diplomat Kazbek Beisebaev says that trade is important for the people of Afghanistan, regardless what government is in power. According to him, neighboring countries, especially Central Asian states, should develop trade and economic relations with Afghanistan [11].

Kazakhstan is the only country in Central Asia that does not border Afghanistan, which reduces the potential dangers. The main part of Kazakhstani export to Afghanistan is flour and wheat. Afghanistan is an important market for Central Asia. Also, hundreds of students from Afghanistan study in higher educational institutions of Kazakhstan.

The President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev announced that he is ready to establish constructive business relations with the new government of Afghanistan. First of all, acute humanitarian problems should be solved.

As for the internal situation of Afghanistan, Ahmadullah Vastok, the

chairman of the public association "Ariana Afghan Center" speaks about two current threats. The first is that since Afghanistan is an Islamic state, many external players are likely to use it to mislead peaceful Afghans. The second point is the illiteracy of the local population, which can also lead them astray. "90% of people in Afghanistan are ill- or non-educated. And an illiterate person can be sent anywhere, as if he is blind. Ignorance can cause many problems," explained Mr. Vastok [12]. According to the political analyst Dosym Satpayev, the aim of the Taliban is to establish an Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan. To our opinion, they are trying to strengthen their position in the country for the first time. But if succeed in it, the question arises: "what will happen next?" And this is the most unexpected moment. Moreover, the weapons left by NATO in Afghanistan are likely to be used by terrorist forces on the borders of Central Asian countries. Will the Taliban keep security guarantees for Central Asian countries, or will they use radicals in the north of Afghanistan to exert pressure? This is the next scenario we need to be prepared for [13].

President of the Republic of Kazakhstan K.K. Tokaev held the second consultation meeting on Afghanistan. It is clear that Kazakhstan is not a player in Afghan politics, but an external observer. Under President I. Karimov, the Uzbek Armed Forces actively prepared for war with Afghanistan radicals, and the Uzbek army is considered the strongest in the region. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan should create an alliance on the Afghan issue and unite other countries of Central Asia around this alliance, especially Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan which have an agreement on military cooperation. This is important, because Turkmen-Afghan border is the most vulnerable now, being poorly guarded by largely an incompetent army. The Uzbek-Afghan border is more or less protected. Another thing to note is that the Taliban gave certain assurances that they would not attack Uzbekistan in the spring of this year. Uzbekistan has established relations with Turkmenistan in the field of security, and this issue is also important for Kazakhstan. The reason is that if the red line is breached through Turkmenistan, it will be a potential threat for Kazakhstan. And Tajikistan hosts a Russian military base located on its territory.

This prevents the Taliban from attacking Tajikistan, so, it is unlikely that there will be a threat from the Tajik side [14].

Having outlined the issues discussed above, it can be understood that the positions of the Central Asian states on the Afghan issue are diversified. As for Tajikistan, they do not welcome the Taliban coming to power. The presence of ethnic Tajiks in Afghanistan and because of the understanding of the importance of supporting minorities, Tajikistan holds an opinion against the Taliban government. E. Rahmon's speech stated that "the terrorist threat from the Afghan land unites the Tajik nation into one whole" [15].

It is unlikely that the Tajik government will radically change its attitude towards the Taliban after the persecution of the leadership of the banned "Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan". In addition, Russia and China can correct the current position of Dushanbe, which is weak in economic and military terms.

From the Central Asian countries, the government of Uzbekistan received political dividends from the withdrawal of the US military from Afghanistan. Promoting the creation of a government in Afghanistan that includes all ethnic groups, it established informal relationship with the Taliban in order to create conditions for solving economic and security issues. Tashkent supports the official recognition of power in Afghanistan, as Taliban has completely taken control into their own hands.

The Government of Kazakhstan is interested in resolving the crisis at the international level on the Afghan issue, maintaining security and peace in Central Asia by providing humanitarian assistance. By establishing contacts with the Taliban and improving the humanitarian situation in the country, Kazakhstan is interested in maintaining security in the Central Asian region.

Conclusion

Before making predictions about the future of Afghanistan and the CIS countries in general, it is necessary to understand that much will depend on the next steps and actions of the Taliban leaders in the domestic and international arena. As for their first steps in power, the Taliban seem to have learned certain lessons from the events of

1996. The problem of human losses, cases of destruction of cultural monuments were not noticed much. If earlier the Taliban relied on Pashtun tribes and Afghan refugees on the border of Pakistan, now they are actively working with all national minorities of the country: Uzbeks, Tajiks, Turkmens, Kyrgyz and others. Such a move on the part of the Taliban is understandable as they have repeatedly stated that they seek international recognition. If the extremes of the late 1990s are repeated, the Taliban are well aware that their reign may be short-lived and losing the gains of a 20-year-long struggle is a worrying prospect.

If we analyze the results of the first months of Taliban rule, it is noticeable that the prestige and influence of the Taliban among the rural and individual urban residents is much higher than that of the previous official government. Local Afghan rulers and elites held talks with Taliban leaders having declared that the military and other security forces were staying away from armed clashes with their units. Some disarmed and went home, while others joined the Taliban or fled to neighboring countries. The current situation in Afghanistan is so far peaceful and can be considered a purely internal Afghan affair without any foreign interference. In our opinion, the Afghan people should be given the opportunity to make their own decisions about the new Government and political regime. So far, the Taliban does not pose a direct global threat to the CA countries.

Concerning the issue of drug trafficking, the Taliban made a promise to fight drug trafficking after coming to power. However, there may be other groups, such as al-Qaeda or ISIS, that still satisfy the demand for narcotics in the post-Soviet space. It should be noted that the drug problem is not only a problem of the Taliban organization, but also a social problem of the region. In the future, the Taliban may tighten controls on the Afghan border for drug trafficking, as they did in Iran. There is also concern about the spread of radical Islam and the escalation of the situation related to international terrorism in the field of national security of the CA countries. There is a danger that organizations such as ISIS, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and many other terrorist groups, inspired by the easy victory of the Taliban, may be able to revive

their activities not only in the regional, post-Soviet space, but throughout the world. It is clear that their victory can change the minds and behavior of other radical groups.

Ensuring regional security is related to the prevention of the main threats and challenges, in particular, the drug trafficking, the spread of religious extremism and terrorism and illegal migration. Regional security is determined by the policy and strategy of the Central Asian states within the

framework of ensuring and protecting their national interests, as well as the level of integration processes in the region. At the present time, the entire palette of relations allows the implementation of the policies of the leading world players, in particular, the multi-vector balanced foreign policy of Kazakhstan to strengthen regional security and expand integration processes with Central Asian states.

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АУҒАНЫСТАНДАҒЫ «ТАЛИБАН» ҚОЗҒАЛЫСЫНЫҢ БИЛІККЕ КЕЛУІ: ОРТАЛЫҚ АЗИЯ ЕЛДЕРІ ҮШІН САЛДАРЫ

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ПРИХОД К ВЛАСТИ ДВИЖЕНИЯ ТАЛИБАН В АФГАНИСТАНЕ: ПОСЛЕДСТВИЯ ДЛЯ СТРАН ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ

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