

THE SHADE OF EXTREMISM OVER CENTRAL ASIA

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Nowadays international terrorism, religious extremism, organised crime and drug trafficking has developed into real threats to peace and stability in Central Asia.

The 1999 Batken incidents in south Kyrgyzstan were a serious test for the whole of our peaceful nation. At that time, Kyrgyzstan was not ready for military action on neutralisation on its territory of armed bandit groups of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. They captured hostages, including Japanese citizens, and demanded that the authorities provide them with a great amount of money and a corridor for free access to neighbouring Uzbekistan. Still, at the cost of human lives, we succeeded in displacing the terrorist groups from our territory and released all the hostages they captured. In the autumn of 2000, these events occurred again but, with the military-technical support of friendly countries, the Kyrgyz army resisted the efforts of international terrorists to intervene on our territory again.

The Batken events of the last two years have again drawn the attention of the world to the strengthening of the 'Islamic factor' in Central Asia. Unfortunately, there is every reason to assume that in the near future similar events will be repeated. The current military-political situation in the south of our country is the result of the intersection of a number of urgent problems, which cover all of Central Asia.

Afghanistan represents the main source of threats to the stability and security in the entire Central Asian region. The United Front finds itself in a critical situation and, should it be destroyed, the Taliban may reach the border with Tajikistan, which is part of the Commonwealth of Independent States' southern frontier. Under these circumstances, the situation may become unpredictable. In a number of statements, Taliban representatives have said that their plans are limited to Afghan territory, that they do not intend to take action against the Central Asian states, and that if the Taliban brings the whole of Afghanistan under its control, the long-awaited peace would be established. Naturally, these statements should be taken into consideration. However, proceeding from the fact that the Afghan government headed by Rabbani, is recognised and represented in the UN, Kyrgyzstan believes that long-lasting and stable peace is possible in Afghanistan only through developing mutually acceptable terms that answer the interests of all sides and ethnic groups. Peaceful regulation in this country could have been reached long ago if it had not been for the clash of interests of other states. It is natural that no single government officially acknowledges its geopolitical involvement in that country. At present, Afghanistan is one of the largest drug-producers and a great amount of money circulates around it. We should also bear in mind that the roads of this country could be used for transportation, including the transportation of oil. Therefore, unless the confronting sides sit around the negotiation table, Afghanistan will continue to be a 'failed state'. In view of the impossibility of a concord between the Taliban and the United Front, further developments may turn out to produce even worse results, which may lead to the growth of the number of refugees and immigrants forced out of Afghanistan into Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. According to preliminary estimates, their number may reach around two million people. This will be a true humanitarian catastrophe for the entire region.

Kyrgyzstan is convinced that only peaceful political means at the negotiating table can make long-lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan possible and that even if one of the confronting sides gains full control of Afghan territory it cannot save the situation.

War torn for more than 20 years already, the country has developed into a hotbed of religious extremism and international terrorism - the main provider of drugs.

Realising control over almost the whole territory of Afghanistan, the Taliban movement continues to follow a domestic and foreign policy that gives the most intent attention to its nearest neighbours - the Central Asian states - alarming the overwhelming majority of the world's public.

To some extent, the increase of drug trafficking from Afghanistan through Central Asia, to Russia and Europe may account for this. According to current data, around 30 percent of world of drug production is concentrated in Afghanistan, from where 65 percent of heroin and hashish is delivered to Europe. This is a source of financial support for the Taliban in realising their far-reaching strategic target, i.e. the establishment of political influence in Islamic countries and regions. Since Central Asia has been undergoing both border and internal problems for a long time now, the region is quite suitable for a possible attack of Islamic extremism.

The threat of the religious extremism is imminent for the Fergana valley, which has gross problems of overpopulation and distribution of land and water among the Asian peoples of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan - neighbours for many centuries. It is in this region that religious extremism and terrorism may find the nutrient medium for its widespread manifestation. One of the reasons for this that Islam is undergoing a process of renewal and is implanted there in the mass consciousness of the local population. A slow process of democratisation of society against a background of the weak socio-economic development of the region only promotes fundamentalism.

The consolidation of the Central Asian republics' efforts to solve the problems of regional security, which are becoming more and more urgent, are very important. To confront these threats at the interstate level, the Central Asian countries are making definite efforts within the framework of both the Agreement on Collective Security of the CIS member-states and the 'Shanghai Five'.

The summit meeting of member states of the Agreement on Collective Security of the CIS, held in Bishkek on October 2000, demonstrated to the world our solidarity and resoluteness in the struggle against these threats and challenges to stability and security in Central Asia.

Central Asia faces very dangerous and growing risks and challenges to peace and stability, not only for the region but also for the entire world. We must not be indifferent to the long-lasting conflict in Afghanistan.

Kyrgyzstan approves all steps for the peaceful resolution of the Afghan crisis and confirms its readiness to contribute to maintaining peace and stability in the Central Asian region. Being a neutral party, Kyrgyzstan confirms its adherence to the principle of finding a political solution to this conflict at the table of peaceful negotiations. We came out with the proposal to hold an international conference on the Afghanistan problem with the participation of the interested sides, and that proposal is still valid. I believe that the co-ordinated and subsequent joint action of the whole world community in the settlement of the Afghan problem can help us reach our goal. Kyrgyzstan wants to contribute to the solution of the Afghan problem because we realise the necessity of joint efforts to exert influence on this problem, which is painful both for the region and the whole world. President A. Akaev always draws the world's attention to the fact that Kyrgyzstan is ready to offer its mediation services for peaceful negotiations on Afghanistan. A recent example of the political will of our head of state was his appeal to the UN Secretary-General to hold a peace conference in Kyrgyzstan with a view to revive the negotiation process with the participation of all the interested sides.

Another initiative of the Kyrgyz President, at the summit of the OSCE on November 1999 in Istanbul, was a call to establish a dialogue between the OSCE and OIC. President A. Akaev came out with the idea of establishing a dialogue between the OSCE and OIC member-states to jointly seek decisions on mankind's global problems and in support of security and of co-operation. The OIC fully supported this idea. The said initiative foresees the creation of a mechanism of consultations. With a view to realising this step, Kyrgyzstan proposes that all the interested sides hold an international conference on Afghanistan in Bishkek within the framework of the dialogue 'OSCE-OIC'.