

BILTEK-IX

9TH INTERNATIONAL BILTEK CONGRESS ON CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

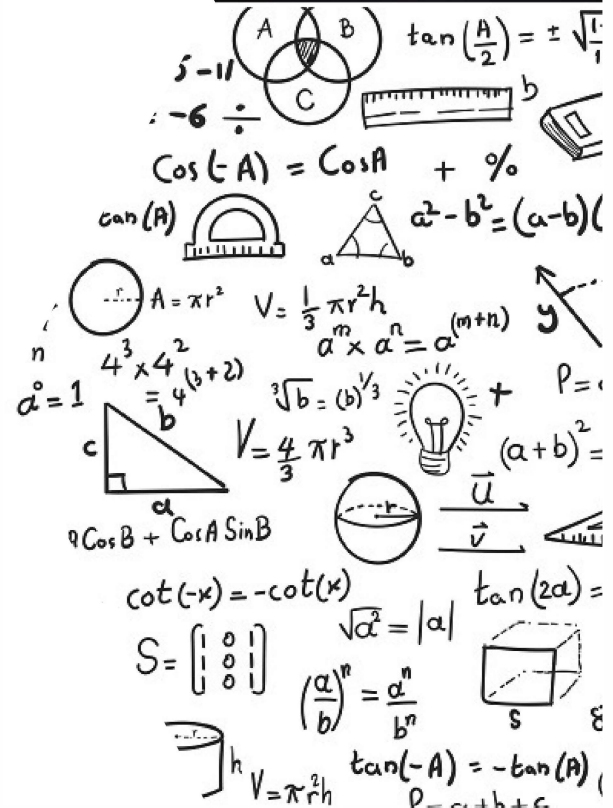
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- Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ayşegül AYYILDIZ

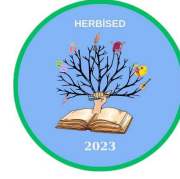
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CURRENT SECURITY ISSUES IN CENTRAL ASIA ORTA ASYA'DA GÜNCEL GÜVENLİK MESELELERİ

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ÖZET

Orta Asya, jeopolitik konumu, etnik ve dini çeşitliliği ve kaynak zenginlikleriyle önemli bir bölgedir. Ancak, bu bölge aynı zamanda bir dizi güvenlik meselesiyle karşı karşıyadır ve bu meselelerin çözümü veya çözümsüzlüğü bölgedeki istikrar ve güvenliği etkilemektedir. Bu araştırma, Orta Asya'da güncel güvenlik meselelerini ele alarak derinlemesine incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. İlk olarak, İslami köktencilik ve İslami radikalizmle bağlantılı terörizmin bölgedeki en büyük potansiyel tehditlerden biri olduğunu belirtmek yerinde olacaktır. Özellikle IŞİD ve El Kaide bağlantılı grupların bölgedeki etkinlikleriyle birlikte köktenci İslami anlayışı benimsemiş birçok diğer örgütün de bölgedeki radikalleşme ve aşırılığı arttırdığı gözlemlenmektedir. Bu gruplar, sınır ötesi saldırılar gerçekleştirme potansiyeline sahipken, yerel nüfusu da radikalleştirme eğilimindedirler. İkinci olarak, uyuşturucu trafiği Orta Asya'nın güvenliğini tehdit eden bir diğer önemli faktör olarak zikredilebilir. Bölge, Afganistan gibi ana uyuşturucu üreticisi ülkelerle sınır komşusudur ve bu durum uyuşturucu ticaretinin bölgeden geçişini kolaylaştırmaktadır. Uyuşturucu trafiği hem içerde hem de uluslararası alanda, terörizm ile olan ilişkisi de dikkate alındığı zaman ekonomik ve sosyal anlamda ciddi biçimde istikrarsızlığa yol açmaktadır. Üçüncü olarak, bölge devletlerinin merkezi otoritelerinin zayıflığı bölgedeki güvenlik meselelerini daha da karmaşık hale getirmektedir. Zayıf devlet kurumları, yerel ayrılıkçı hareketlerin, etnik çatışmaların ve siyasi istikrarsızlığın ortaya çıkmasına zemin hazırlamaktadır. Bunun sonucunda, bölgedeki iç çatışma potansiyeli artmakta ve bölgesel istikrar tehlikeye girebilmektedir. Bu araştırma, Orta Asya'daki güvenlik meselelerinin karmaşıklığını ve önemini vurgulamaktadır. Ayrıca, bölgedeki istikrar için etkili politika önerileri geliştirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bunlar arasında, sınır güvenliğinin artırılması, radikalizmin önlenmesi için stratejik ortaklıklar kurulması ve yerel yönetim kapasitelerinin



güçlendirilmesi gibi önlemler yer almaktadır. Orta Asya'nın güvenliği, bölge devletleri ve uluslararası toplumun birlikte çalışmasıyla sağlanabilir ve bu, bölgede sürdürülebilir kalkınmanın temelini oluşturacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Orta Asya, Güvenlik Meseleleri, İstikrar

ABSTRACT

Central Asia is an important region with its geopolitical location, ethnic and religious diversity and resource wealth. However, this region also faces a number of security issues, and the solution or lack of resolution of these issues affects the stability and security in the region. This research aims to examine in depth the current security issues in Central Asia. First, it is pertinent to note that Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism associated with Islamic radicalism are one of the biggest potential threats in the region. It is observed that especially the activities of ISIS and Al Qaeda affiliated groups in the region, as well as many other organizations that have adopted the fundamentalist Islamic understanding, increase radicalization and extremism in the region. While these groups have the potential to carry out cross-border attacks, they also tend to radicalize local populations. Secondly, drug traffic can be mentioned as another important factor that threatens the security of Central Asia. The region borders major drug-producing countries such as Afghanistan, making it easier for drug trade to pass through the region. Drug trafficking causes serious economic and social instability, both domestically and internationally, considering its relationship with terrorism. Thirdly, the weakness of the central authorities of the regional states further complicates the security issues in the region. Weak state institutions pave the way for the emergence of local separatist movements, ethnic conflicts and political instability. As a result, the potential for internal conflict in the region increases and regional stability may be endangered. This research highlights the complexity and importance of security issues in Central Asia. It also aims to develop effective policy recommendations for stability in the region. These include measures such as increasing border security, establishing strategic partnerships to prevent radicalism, and strengthening local government capacities. The security of Central Asia can be ensured by the regional states and the international community working together, and this will form the basis of sustainable development in the region.

Key Words: Central Asia, Security Issues, Stability



INTRODUCTION

Central Asia is becoming an increasingly significant area in global politics. This study outlines the key issues influencing and arising from Central Asia, and examines the extent to which these issues draw the attention of major powers. It also highlights the main principles and concerns guiding their policies and explores how the institutional frameworks, which are the focus of this research, intersect with these policies and principles.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s was an unprecedented event with profound impacts on Central Asia. A new international region and geopolitical space, which had previously existed under the secure patronage of Imperial and then Soviet power, entered the international system (International Crisis Group, 2008). Central Asia was a blank slate, where the power vacuum left by the withdrawal of Russian influence, coupled with the successor state's unwillingness to assume responsibility for sustained and engaged regional leadership, plunged the emerging region into a state of immature anarchy, in which the norms and patterns of international order had not yet been established (World Bank, 2005).

This situation attracted the interests of various actors who saw an opportunity to expand their influence, against the backdrop of Russian attempts to reassert its lost dominance (Chernykh & Burnashev, 2005). Additionally, the newfound sovereignty of these countries raised questions about their domestic governance structures. Although there was a relatively quick move towards democracy after independence, the regimes established in the newly independent republics bore little resemblance to established democratic systems. Instead, the leaders who emerged were typically former members of the local communist parties, who maintained power through corrupt deals, the capture of state institutions, and widespread corruption (International Crisis Group, 2009). These illiberal regimes often restricted the freedoms of the diverse ethnic groups within their borders, exacerbating political divisions. Consequently, power in these states is often seen as illegitimate and highly contested (Buisson, 2007).

For instance, Tajikistan experienced a complex and prolonged civil war immediately following independence, resulting in the deaths of an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 people. Violence erupted in May 1992 when ethnic groups from the Garm and Gorno-Badakhshan regions, underrepresented in the government, rose up against the regime of President Rahmon Nabyev, which was dominated by individuals from the Leninabad and Kulyab regions (Buisson, 2007). The factions opposing the regime included liberal democratic reformists and Islamists, who later united under the banner of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO). The war concluded in June 1997 with an agreement between President Rahmonov, UTO leader Sayid Abdulloh Nuri, and UN Special Representative Gerd Merrem. However, the fundamental issues were not resolved, and some experts suggest that the failures of the Tajik leadership could lead to state failure if not addressed (Buisson, 2007).



In Kyrgyzstan, the fifteen-year rule of Askar Akayev, who came to power in 1990, ended with the Tulip Revolution, which installed Kurmanbek Bakiyev as president. Early signs of unrest were evident during the Jalal-Abad demonstrations in support of opposition leader and Member of Parliament Azimbek Beknazarov, who had been arrested for abuse of power. The police responded forcefully to disperse the over 2,000 demonstrators, resulting in six deaths and 61 injuries (International Crisis Group, 2009). Following the 2005 elections, which Akayev was expected to step down from but were widely seen as rigged, vehement protests erupted. The candidacies of both his son and daughter for parliamentary seats sparked fears of a dynastic succession. Akayev ordered an inquiry into the election results but soon fired the Interior Minister and General Prosecutor for failing to quell the protests. The upheaval culminated on March 24, 2005, when demonstrators stormed the presidential palaces, leading to the installation of President Bakiyev, who eventually adopted similar authoritarian methods as Akayev (International Crisis Group, 2009).

These episodes in different countries and times illustrate the volatility and instability that the region faces. The interaction between the power vacuum and competition, and the domestic political transitions create motivations for involvement and conflict resolution among powers seeking a prominent role in the region.

Security concerns in Central Asia include crime, corruption, Islamic extremism and terrorism, ethnic and civil conflicts, illegal narcotics, and the potential proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (Chernykh & Burnashev, 2005).

RADICAL ISLAM AND TERRORISM

Despite distinguishing between Islam and terrorism, it is a fact that terrorism in Central Asia often has an Islamist dimension. Radical Islam, though usually non-violent, manifests in groups such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir Al-Islami. The threat of Islamism must be contextualized. Various sources agree that Central Asia, with its predominant Sufi and Hanafi traditions, Slavic influences, and Soviet past, is not conducive to radical or orthodox interpretations of Islam, which are often seen as foreign (Gunn, 2004). Wahhabi-inspired fundamentalism is typically regarded as a non-indigenous form of Islam, alien to Central Asia's Turko-Persian heritage and hostile to the prevailing Sufism. However, Central Asian societies identify as profoundly Muslim, partly in reaction to the Soviet suppression of religious practices. Although Central Asia is not a Jihadis time-bomb, militant Islam remains a medium-term threat. The recent increase in terrorist violence in Kazakhstan underscores this ongoing threat. Contributing factors include social and economic hardships and the repressive political climate imposed by governments. Additionally, instability in Afghanistan serves as a focal point for regional Islamic radicalism. The degree of vulnerability varies by country: Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are more secular, whereas traditional Islam has a stronger influence in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (Swanström, 2007).



Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are the main centers of militant Islam in the region. The Ferghana Valley, spanning these two countries and southern Kyrgyzstan, is a hotspot for radicalization. In the 1970s, Tashkent became the center of a Salafi-Wahhabi revival in Central Asia, initiated by missionaries from the Muslim Brotherhood who formed the Tashkent Group, aiming to establish an Islamic state by recruiting students from local universities. Militant groups, emboldened by the weakening Soviet rule during Perestroika, have grown and now include various franchises with different levels of radicalism and endorsement of violence. These include Hizbut-Tahrir and its splinter groups, Akramiya and Hizbun-Nusrat, as well as Uzun Soqol, Tabligh Jamaat, Lashkar-i-Taiba, Hizballah, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Although the IMU was significantly weakened post-9/11, it has not been completely eradicated, with splinter groups such as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), the Islamic Movement of Central Asia (IMCA), and the Islamic Jihad Group (IJG) emerging from its remnants.

DRUG TRAFFICKING

Central Asia's drug issues stem from Afghanistan, which consistently produces over 90 percent of the world's opium. The ongoing conflict in Afghanistan has driven factions to rely on opium trade to finance their operations. By the mid-1990s, opium production exceeded 3,000 tons annually, with a significant increase in poppy cultivation reported by UNODC. Central Asian states serve as the primary route for Afghan opium to reach Europe, Russia, and North America. In 2001, significant seizures of heroin and morphine were recorded in countries surrounding Afghanistan, with Tajikistan accounting for a notable portion. By 2005, opium seizures were highest in Iran, followed by Pakistan and Tajikistan. UNODC estimates that the illegal drug trade generates over USD 2 billion annually in Central Asia, accounting for more than 7 percent of the region's GDP. Kyrgyzstan is a key transit point for Afghan opiates heading to Russia, China, and Europe, with new routes emerging due to better governmental control over traditional routes. This transit trade also fuels a growing number of local drug users, with addiction rates in Central Asia significantly higher than in Western Europe. Corruption and the involvement of state officials in drug trafficking exacerbate the problem (International Crisis Group, 2009).

DRUG-TERRORISM NEXUS

The convergence of terrorism and drug trafficking represents a significant threat in the region. The collusion between militants and criminal syndicates creates a cycle where drugs fund terrorist activities, and terror groups engage in trafficking to finance their operations. For example, the IMU's involvement in drug trafficking in Tajikistan and the Northern Alliance's narcotics trafficking revenue illustrate this symbiotic relationship. This dangerous dynamic complicates efforts to achieve regional stability (International Crisis Group, 2008).

STATE WEAKNESS



Central Asia's authoritarian regimes prioritize political survival over building effective state institutions. Corruption and clientelism undermine governance, while crime and militancy thrive. Repressive policies and economic hardships foster radical movements and public discontent. Economically, the region suffers from severe poverty, with significant portions of the population living below the poverty line. Although economic growth since 2003 has been driven by energy resource exploitation, the benefits have not been evenly distributed, leaving many in dire conditions (World Bank, 2005).

CONCLUSION

Despite early volatility, Central Asia has become a strategic region due to its energy resources and geopolitical significance. The power vacuum post-Soviet collapse invited external actors seeking influence, resulting in complex dynamics. Today, major powers continue to navigate these challenges, with evolving policies reflecting changing interests and dynamics (Swanström, 2007).

In conclusion, the discourse on Central Asia presented herein elucidates the intricate interplay of historical legacies, domestic politics, and external influences shaping the region's trajectory. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Central Asia emerged as a pivotal arena where competing interests converge, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and fostering new challenges. The narrative of state weakness, underscored by authoritarian governance, pervasive corruption, and socioeconomic disparities, underscores the imperative for comprehensive reforms aimed at enhancing institutional resilience and societal well-being. Moreover, the nexus between radical Islam, terrorism, and drug trafficking underscores the transnational dimensions of security threats, necessitating concerted efforts at regional and international levels to address root causes and mitigate risks.

Furthermore, the analysis underscores the need for nuanced policy approaches that acknowledge the complexities of Central Asia's geopolitical landscape. Rather than viewing the region through a singular lens, policymakers must adopt context-specific strategies that account for historical grievances, cultural dynamics, and socioeconomic realities. Such an approach entails fostering inclusive governance structures, promoting economic diversification and sustainable development, and bolstering regional cooperation mechanisms to foster trust and enhance resilience against external pressures.

Ultimately, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of Central Asia's evolving dynamics and underscores the imperative for holistic, multidimensional approaches to address its myriad challenges. By engaging in constructive dialogue, fostering partnerships, and prioritizing the well-being of its diverse populations, Central Asia can chart a path towards stability, prosperity, and resilience in an increasingly complex global landscape.



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