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ELENA DMITRIEVA THE INFLUENCE OF THE TALIBAN COMING TO POWER IN AFGHANISTAN ON THE SITUATION IN THE REPUBLICS OF CENTRAL ASIA. *Condensed abstract*.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Taliban movement, Central Asian republics, international community, Russia, geopolitics, ethnopolitical situation, international terrorist organizations.

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1. Taher M.T., Ershad A.S. Geopolitical consequences of the transformation of Afghan State after the Taliban came to power for the countries of Central Asia (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) // *Voprosy Politologii, 2022. Vol. 12 Issue 2 (78) P. 550–562.*

2. Zarudnyi B.G. Obstanovka v Afganistane i riski terroristicheskoi aktivnosti v regione // *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn'. 2022. No. 1, P. 28–33.*

The article by Taher M.T, DSc(Law), Wallachian State University, Afghanistan and Ershad A.S, PG student, Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, Tatarstan [1] is dedicated to the analysis of the geopolitical situation in the Central Asian region as a result of the Taliban coming to power in Afghanistan. The authors consider various scenarios and believe that the "Afghan issue" has become a key factor determining the geopolitical stability of the entire Central Asian region. The twenty-year confrontation on Afghan land between the united West, led by the United States, and the Taliban movement* ended in August 2021 when, after the withdrawal of the American military, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani fled the country after resigning his powers. The Taliban came to power.

The entire Central Asian region respond readily to the events taking place in Afghanistan. But the situation in Afghanistan also poses a real danger to Russia's national security: the influx of Islamic extremists and terrorists into Russia is a long-standing problem. The issues of the transformation of the Afghan statehood after the Taliban came to power and its

* An organization banned in Russia.

geopolitical consequences for the countries of Central Asia cannot be called resolved. "Democratic" Afghanistan could not resist the blows of a spontaneously organized Islamist organization and quickly capitulated, and the Taliban who came to power, who seized the capital of the country without a fight, announced their intention to turn Afghanistan into an Islamic emirate. As a result, the Western coalition in Afghanistan has not been able to understand and accept the fact that it is not dealing with a purely military machine called the Taliban, but with a powerful insurgent movement that relies on some popular support and has a simple and understandable ideology.

The "Afghan tangle" has become a test of strength in the field of international relations for many states. The interests of different countries collided on the territory of Afghanistan. Pakistan has been playing the Taliban and the "fight against extremism" card for a long time, trying to obtain as generous financial assistance from the United States as possible in order to receive regular support in the foreign policy confrontation with India. If necessary, Pakistan planned to rely on the Taliban in this confrontation. Peace in Afghanistan largely depends on the relations between the two nuclear powers – Pakistan and India.

Russia, China and Iran, in turn, also joined the "big game" after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. This explains the holding of a series of high-level meetings with the Taliban delegations in Moscow, Beijing and Tehran. The anti-American alliance "Moscow-Beijing-Tehran" contributed to the fall of Kabul, thanks to the demonstration of indirect support for the Taliban. For the same reason, the embassies of all the three countries listed above are now fully functioning in the capital of Afghanistan, while many states have hurried to evacuate their personnel.

Speaking about the current state of affairs, the authors note that the new Afghan paradigm is changing the entire Central Asian political landscape, and, apparently, for a long time. The states directly bordering Afghanistan found themselves in a

difficult situation. The specifics of the situation in each of these countries are based on fundamental differences in the positions and priorities of foreign and domestic policy in relation to Afghanistan, as well as the goals pursued by each of these States. Tajikistan, which has the longest common border with Afghanistan (more than 1,000 km), is historically related by blood to the second (after the Pashtuns) largest ethnic group in Afghanistan – the Afghan Tajiks. Uzbekistan, with its small section of the common border with Afghanistan, has historically acted as a corridor through which close contacts have been maintained for many years with the leader of the Afghan Uzbeks, R. Dostum, who has always sought to pursue an independent policy in the territories under his control (in the so-called "Dostumistan"). Turkmenistan is a country very ethnically close to the Afghan population. This state is largely isolated and its foreign policy is characterized by little activity. Turkmenistan declares the principle of neutrality in the international arena, but at the same time established diplomatic relations with the Taliban regime back in the period of their first coming to power in the 1990s.

The three states listed above – Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan – differ markedly in their positions in relation to modern Afghanistan, but at the same time they all pursue quite specific goals within the framework of dialogue with the new Afghan government. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan not only do not have a common border with Afghanistan, but the ethnic connection with the Afghan people for them is either minimal (Kyrgyzstan) or completely absent (Kazakhstan). So for these two countries in the region, Afghanistan is an unpromising territory in terms of building long-term partnerships, the issue of which is raised on the agenda only in the context of international anti-terrorist and humanitarian operations.

The complexity of interstate contacts for the territories neighboring Afghanistan lies in the fact that they are dominated by the history of relations with the Afghan authorities and the

status of the Taliban movement. So far, the ruling elites of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have taken a wait-and-see attitude: most border checkpoints have been closed and the influx of Afghan refugees is strictly regulated. But if the Taliban regime is strengthened, recognition of the new Afghanistan will only be a matter of time and diplomatic comfort.

The authors note that the Taliban is not just an organization recognized as a terrorist organization in the world and in the CIS. At least five international terrorist organizations are integrated into the structure of this movement – Al-Qaeda, the Islamic Party of East Turkestan, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Khatib Imam al-Bukhari and Jamaat Ansarulloh, which are active on the ideological and terrorist front against the states of Central Asia and Russia. Today, this destructive force has moved close to the borders of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan and actually controls them. The appearance of such a serious enemy on the borders of the CIS is a reality. The CSTO grouping is able to ensure full control over the Tajik-Afghan border, but the mechanisms of interaction of the CSTO with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan still leave much to be desired. The intelligence potential of Uzbekistan is low, therefore, when assessing the situation on the Afghan territory adjacent to the border, the Uzbek side has to rely on the results of visual observation of border posts and crossings, which is absolutely ineffective, because if the enemy resorts even to a simple disguise and quickly overcomes the border line of defense, then fighting can flare up already on peaceful territory.

In relation to Turkmenistan, the situation is much more complicated, firstly, because of the greater length of the border (about 800 km), and secondly, because of the politically neutral status of the republic. If, in the case of Uzbekistan, a potential enemy may be deterred by the fact that there are military agreements between Moscow and Tashkent and the prospect of joining the conflict, then neutral Turkmenistan may well be perceived by militants as a defenseless victim. That is why,

according to the authors, an equal and interested conversation with the Afghan side can be conducted only after resolving the issue of security guarantees in the region.

Unlike the West, regional actors are more likely to eventually make an outreach towards their southern neighbor, primarily because of their geographical location. At the moment, a kind of reconnaissance is taking place – Central Asian countries are trying to see signs of stabilization of the situation in the fog of civil confrontation in Afghanistan, but they are not observing anything life–affirming yet – the time for an "outreach", in their opinion, has not yet come.

Afghanistan, as an incubator of terrorism, can become an unsolvable problem for many countries in the region who are seriously concerned about the prospects of the appearance of ISIS-K here – the "Islamic State in Khorasan province" (the so-called branch of ISIS* in Afghanistan). Among the states adjacent to Afghanistan, only Tajikistan has taken a decidedly anti-Taliban position (mainly for domestic political reasons). Tajikistan readily hosts the leaders of the Afghan resistance and is unlikely to recognize the Taliban government regardless of potential advantages for such a step. The same can be said about India, which takes into account the close relations of the Taliban movement with Pakistan.

In conclusion, the authors of the article come to the conclusion that the current situation is extremely complex and the threat of its destabilization is very real, but it is possible and necessary to resist destructive tendencies, and this should be done with a united front. With the establishment of Taliban power, the idea of jihad received a powerful impetus, filled with new meanings and became quite tangible for the whole of Central Asia. The countries neighboring the Afghan territories today are forced to maintain contact with the Taliban in one form or another in the interests of ensuring their own national security, as well as to curb

* An organization banned in Russia.

the Taliban's activity by available political means. However, the geopolitical threats that the Taliban movement actualizes for Central Asia should not be underestimated (however, exaggerated either). Time will tell whether the Taliban movement will be able to achieve a change in its image in the international arena and prove to the world community that it is interested in a safe and stable future for the entire Central Asian region.

The head of the Department of the Anti-Terrorist Center of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS ATC) Zarudnyi B.G, Head of the Department of the Anti-Terrorist Center of the CIS member States, [2] notes that this structure pays the most serious attention to the situation in Afghanistan, because it was in this country that the main source of threats to destabilize the situation for the Central Asian states has been for a long time. The coming to power of an organization recognized by the UN Security Council as a terrorist one naturally caused the "admiration" of the entire radical world and the current Taliban government is considered by Islamists as a successful attempt to create a fundamentalist state. The country's leadership consists almost entirely of Pashtun Taliban. The leaders of the Taliban movement (banned in Russia) made a number of assurances, guaranteeing peaceful coexistence with neighboring states. They promise to deter terrorists in their attempts to operate from Afghanistan against other countries, but there are a number of reasons to doubt that the Taliban will be able to do this. In this regard, there are the following main risks: the ideology of the movement does not change, there is an increasing persecution of various groups of the population on political, religious, gender and other issues, public executions have been returned, vaccination against Covid-19, which allegedly defiles Moslems, has been stopped. All these restrictions and cruel punishments will contribute to the growth of protest sentiments and the emergence of local actions of armed resistance, which will negatively affect the security of the states bordering Afghanistan.

Afghanistan, as before, remains the territory of concentration of terrorist organizations. A resurgence of Al-Qaeda is taking place. The number of groups that have joined the Taliban movement reaches 4–5 thousand people, including citizens of foreign countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China (Uighurs), Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan. These foreign fighters have dissolved among the Taliban fighters, having sworn allegiance to them, and now together with them they form a single whole. After the seizure of power, the Taliban released from the prisons of large cities almost all (and this is about 5–6 thousand) detainees on suspicion of terrorism, who are members of other terrorist groups, professional hired guns. The militants of almost all terrorist organizations in Afghanistan actively cooperate with the Taliban movement. The detachments of most of them are concentrated in the northern provinces that border the CIS states. Ethnic Kazakhs, Kirghizs, Tajiks, Uzbeks, people from the Caucasus and Moslem regions of Russia predominate in the groups.

These ethnic groups pose the greatest threat to Central Asia, since they have certain independence. They have their own programs and goals that they plan to achieve outside of Afghanistan, and they have their own understanding of where, how and when to build an Islamic state. It is possible that at first the Taliban will try to restrain the activity of jihadists on their territory, because during the formation period it is extremely important for them to gain recognition from the world community and achieve the exclusion of the Taliban from the lists of banned terrorist organizations, which will entail the lifting of political and economic sanctions. However, this circumstance will not prevent the radicals from turning the country into a platform for global terrorism, from where their influence will be able to actively spread throughout the region in the future.

After the Taliban came to power, there has been an increase in remote Internet propaganda of extremist ideology. Information and ideological influence is being carried out on the population

of neighboring countries in order to form “sleeping” terrorist cells and involve new recruits in the unsystematic activities of lone terrorists. Analysis of social networks and other electronic resources shows that the largest number of “letters” and “congratulations” to the Taliban after the seizure of power came from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Bashkiria, the Volga region, and the North Caucasus. In these “letters” it is noted that the Taliban “expelled America”, “forced Russia to reckon with itself”, and now “it is time to establish Sharia in the space from the Caspian Sea and the Volga region to Siberia.”

The Taliban's propaganda in Russian and Tajik has noticeably intensified. Moreover, the quality of propaganda in some positions exceeded the quality of propaganda of ISIS (an organization banned in Russia). These are professional-quality video sequences, short biting videos, bright colors, use of various psychological techniques in audio recordings of a recruiting nature. It can be argued that the Taliban is forming a media project of “successful jihad”. If the ISIS called for moving “to the lands of the Caliphate,” then the Taliban are calling for jihad on the spot. The main financial and resource base for the Taliban is still drug trafficking. Deliveries of Afghan heroin are carried out along routes formed over the years with honed logistics. One of the busiest directions is drug trafficking through Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Russia, followed by transfer to foreign countries. Despite the Taliban's statements about the need to combat drug production, in the country there are still more than 30 thousand hectares of poppy fields of opium, which is the source of 90 percent of the world's heroin production and the majority of the agricultural population of Afghanistan is involved in the cultivation of opium poppy. This product gives a quick and high financial return, much greater than that which can be obtained from the production of traditional crops. Without serious and real humanitarian and economic support from the international community, the current rulers of Afghanistan will not be able to reverse the situation.

With the change of power in the country, there was a sharp drop in the already low incomes and living standards of the population. Now an ordinary Afghan lives on one or two dollars a day. In the conditions of the most severe economic crisis, this income is considered by many to be good. Infrastructure in many parts of the country has been destroyed, including medical facilities, electricity and water supply systems. If the Taliban is unable to stabilize the situation, there is a high probability of a relatively rapid displacement of the population into extreme poverty. The risks of social riots are increasing and, as a result, the emergence of an uncontrolled flow of refugees, including terrorist fighters who have gained combat experience in Afghanistan and Syria and may leak into the territory of neighboring Central Asian states.

The author notes that it is necessary to take into account that ethnic Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Uzbeks are fighting in the Taliban and other terrorist groups, and many of them are doing it for ideological reasons - as opposition to the authorities of their country. So the Taliban handed over six northern provinces of Afghanistan, including the Afghan-Tajik border, under the operational control of the terrorist organization "Jamaat Ansorullah" – a combat unit of the "Party of Islamic Revival of Tajikistan", banned by Dushanbe. In this context, the prospect of militants crossing the Panj River into neighboring Tajikistan becomes a reality.

The activities of the ISIS fighters continue to pose a danger to neighboring countries. Since 2018, after causing significant damage to the "Islamic State", in the Middle East there has been an ongoing transfer of militants to Afghanistan. These are mostly citizens of Central Asian states. The territory of Afghanistan is considered as a reserve site for creation of strong points for further expansion into Central and South Asia.

The revival of Al-Qaeda* in Afghanistan is also quite real. Its activation is facilitated by the emergence of disagreements between the Taliban field commanders, some of whom share the principles and methods of action of Al-Qaeda. The center of Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan was and remains the eastern province of Nuristan.

Summing up, the author comes to the conclusion that the current situation in Afghanistan is extremely dangerous for the countries of Central Asia, although at the moment there is no direct threat to the region from the Taliban, because its leaders are absorbed in forming a new government, building a state management system and solving economic issues, primarily the problem of population survival. There is no doubt that separate terrorist detachments operating on the territory of the country pose a danger. It is impossible to predict their actions, which, against the background of the victory of the Taliban, will most likely transform into an irreconcilable "jihad".

* An organization banned in Russia.