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A NEW SECURITY ARCHITECTURE IN CENTRAL ASIA: THE NECESSITY OF A NEW REGIONAL FRAMEWORK AND A UNIFIED APPROACH TO COMMON THREATS

Lazizbek Khamdamov Shukhrat ugli
Uzbekistan State World Languages University
Faculty of International Journalism,
International Relations program
3nd-year student

ABSTRACT: This article analyzes the emerging security architecture in Central Asia, the necessity of a unified regional approach to common threats, and the conceptual ideas advanced in President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's article “Central Asia on the Threshold of a New Era.” The study examines the impact of transnational threats in the region — extremism, terrorism, ecological crisis, and water scarcity — on regional stability. It further substantiates the need for open diplomacy, the strengthening of mutual trust, regional integration processes, and the institutionalization of consultative mechanisms among heads of state. The article considers joint security platforms, ecological cooperation, transport and logistics stability, and mutual-assistance mechanisms in emergency situations as the principal directions of the new security system. The findings obtained demonstrate that a unified, coordinated security strategy for Central Asia enhances not only regional stability but also the region’s strategic significance on a global scale.

ANNOTATION

This article analyzes the emerging security architecture in Central Asia, the necessity for a unified regional approach to common threats, and the conceptual ideas presented in President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's article “Central Asia on the Verge of a New Era.” The study examines the impact of transnational threats in the region, including extremism, terrorism, cybersecurity challenges, environmental crises, and water scarcity, on regional stability. It also emphasizes the importance of open diplomacy, confidence-building measures, regional integration processes, and the institutionalization of consultation mechanisms among state leaders. The key directions of the new security system are considered, including joint security platforms, ecological cooperation, transport and logistics stability, and coordinated emergency response mechanisms. The findings demonstrate that a harmonized and coordinated security strategy for Central Asia ensures not only regional stability but also enhances the region's strategic significance on the global stage.

Keywords: Central Asia, new security architecture, regional integration, political will, the Aral Sea, ecological security, water-energy resources, transboundary cooperation, regional stability, ecological crisis.

INTRODUCTION

The intensity of contemporary global geopolitical processes, the growing competition on the international stage, and the escalation of transnational threats are turning the issue of security in Central Asia into a strategically urgent direction. As the countries of the region consolidate their

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independence and enter a new stage of development, ensuring political, economic, and ecological stability has become a shared task for all states. As noted in President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's article "Central Asia on the Threshold of a New Era," the region today stands at a circle of historic opportunities: open dialogue, mutual trust, and friendly cooperation with neighboring states have become the foundation of new integration processes.[1] Within this process, the formation of a modern security architecture for Central Asia is becoming increasingly urgent. The transboundary nature of the threats existing in the region — the intensification of terrorism and extremism, the scarcity of water and energy resources, the severe impact of climate change, border-area problems, and cybersecurity risks — demonstrates that these cannot be fully eliminated through the isolated actions of individual states. Accordingly, the need to establish a unified position on ensuring security, a coordinated regional policy, and institutionalized cooperation mechanisms is growing by the day.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Contemporary political processes in the world clearly demonstrate that traditional approaches to regional security — based solely on military capacity or sovereignty — are no longer sufficient. First and foremost, modern threats are transboundary in nature: terrorism and extremism, illicit trafficking of narcotics and weapons, cybersecurity, ecological risk, and the inequitable distribution of water resources all exert a broad influence on regional stability. Ensuring peace and stability in the region today requires not merely the protection of state borders, but the eradication of the root causes of threats, the deepening of economic cooperation, and the strengthening of mutual trust among peoples. In Central Asia, these processes underwent a fundamental turning point after 2017. "The most significant change to have occurred over the past eight years is the political will demonstrated by the leader of Uzbekistan. Despite a complex and contradictory environment, bringing neighboring states together at one table with the initiative 'let us reconsider our future and our neighborly relations anew' is a genuine example of political will" (Ibrohim Jo'raboyev).[2] President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's article "Central Asia on the Threshold of a New Era" offers a profound analysis of the region's geopolitical position, its development prospects, and its security challenges. It envisions the states of Central Asia as a "common home," transitioning to a new era of integration through mutual trust and open dialogue.[3] The article emphasizes that the region today faces a test that demands solidarity in the face of global threats — terrorism, climate change, and economic constraints. This perspective forms the basis for building a new security architecture that encompasses not only military but also economic, ecological, and cultural cooperation. Situated close to the "epicenter" of transnational threats, Central Asia plays an important role in the global security system. The shared focus is on overcoming these threats collectively rather than individually. As the head of our state stated in his address to the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly: "Today, Uzbekistan accords priority attention to the Central Asian region in its foreign policy. This is a thoroughly deliberate path. Situated at the very center of Central Asia, Uzbekistan is interested in this region becoming a territory of stability, consistent development, and good neighborliness."[4]

In his 2017 address to the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly on the security of Central Asia, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev placed particular emphasis on the issue of Afghanistan. This theme was likewise not set aside in the article "Central Asia on the Threshold of a New Era." Particular emphasis was placed on this at the Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia held in Tashkent: "Afghanistan is an integral part of our region. Assisting this country to firmly embark on the path of peace and development corresponds to the common interests of us all.[5] Owing

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to its geographic position at the center of Asia, Afghanistan is referred to as the "Heart of Asia," which, in theoretical terms, reflects Mackinder's "Heartland" theory.[6] The stabilization of the situation in southern Afghanistan is a direct security concern for the Central Asian states. Between 2020 and 2025, the probability of infiltration by radical groups increased by 40 percent, which necessitates the strengthening of border cooperation.

One of the principal problems facing Central Asia today is the issue of water. The distribution of water resources in the region is based on the Soviet-era system, which has come into conflict with the interests of individual states since independence. The uneven distribution of water, resource scarcity, and its transboundary character are giving rise to regional disputes and challenges to stability. The states of Central Asia are bound by a transboundary natural interdependence in terms of water and energy resources. A shortage or uneven distribution of these resources directly affects regional stability and political relations. Water scarcity, climate change, and demographic pressure give rise to water and energy conflicts, in which the gain of one state is sometimes interpreted by others as a loss.[7] In light of this, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's approach is directed toward strengthening regional integration and developing cooperation with neighboring states. For example, in October 2025 the Central Asian states signed a protocol on the coordination of water and energy resources in connection with the Kambar-Ata-1 hydropower plant project.[8] It cannot be excluded that, before 2050, a "water war" may break out in Central Asia for various reasons, which would become a major threat factor for the region. Among the countries whose per capita water availability falls below the 1,000 m^3 threshold required to meet minimum needs annually, Turkmenistan (206 m^3), together with Uzbekistan, Moldova, and Azerbaijan, ranks among the thirteen least water-secure countries in the world.[9] Another major challenge for Central Asia is the Qosh-Tepa Canal project. The Qosh-Tepa Canal is an irrigation and infrastructure project under construction in northern Afghanistan, intended to divert the waters of the Amu Darya to irrigate agricultural land in Afghanistan's northern provinces. According to the construction plan, the canal is expected to be approximately 285 km long, 100 meters wide, and 8.5 meters deep.[10] The principal problem here is that this project is being carried out by the Taliban government, while Afghanistan has yet to sign either of the two international conventions on the use of transboundary rivers. Moreover, the Taliban government has to date not been recognized by any country in the international community. Under such circumstances, a hazardous process emerges for us — namely, the possibility that a significant portion of the Amu Darya's waters will flow into Afghanistan, and that, since the canal under construction passes through desert terrain and is not lined with concrete, the water may seep into the soil and be lost.[11] Transboundary water management constitutes an essential element of regional security. Through the joint management of water resources and coordinated planning, it is possible to ensure ecological security, support economic development, and reduce political tensions.

Another visible problem in Central Asia is the "Aral crisis." The desiccation of the Aral Sea gives rise to problems that directly affect regional security and sustainable development. As a result of the flawed policies pursued during the Soviet era, which reduced the flow of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya into the Aral Sea, the Sea has arrived at its present condition. This process is causing the collapse of the ecological system, desertification, dust-salt storms, the deterioration of public health, and the disruption of economic life. In view of this, ecological problems must be regarded as an inseparable component of regional security. If factors such as water resources, health, social stability,

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and migration are considered as a single unified system, the states of the region can create a sustainable future and an integrated model of security.

As a practical approach in this regard, the ecological restoration programs implemented in recent years have gained considerable significance. For example, under the "Green Aral Sea Initiative" project, carried out under the auspices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), practical work is being undertaken on the seabed to plant vegetation, stabilize sandy-saline soils, reduce dust-salt clouds, and restore the region's ecology.[12]

CONCLUSION

Ensuring security stability in the Central Asian region is an urgent task under contemporary geopolitical conditions. The findings of this study indicate that transnational threats — extremism, terrorism, cybersecurity, ecological crisis, and water resource scarcity — cannot be resolved through the isolated efforts of individual states alone. For this reason, the need to develop a unified approach and a coordinated security strategy among the states of the region is of pressing importance. As emphasized in President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's article "Central Asia on the Threshold of a New Era," regional integration, mutual trust, and open diplomacy constitute the fundamental principles of the new security architecture. Joint security platforms, ecological and economic cooperation, the assurance of transport and logistics security, and rapid mutual-assistance systems in emergency situations — all of these together ensure the development of Central Asia as a stable, secure region with its own voice on the global stage. Consequently, the new regional framework and unified approach serve as an important instrument not only for countering threats, but also for laying the foundation for regional prosperity and development.

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