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Non-Traditional Security Challenges in Central Asia: A Contested Paradigm

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary decades the notion of security in global politics has undergone significant changes. Generally, there was a tendency to understand security mainly in terms of traditional threats. But with the collapse of USSR and at the onset of globalization, the definition of security has been broadening up to incorporate non-traditional security threats within the framework of security studies. However, it is a challenging task to define the concept of non-traditional security because of its multifaceted and complex characteristics. Although this very distinction between traditional and non-traditional threats are somewhat artificial but it's required to draw different strategies and tactics to deal with them. In simple words non-traditional security deals with such challenges that are connected with the wellbeing and survival of the population. Non-traditional security cater those aspects which are non-military in nature such as human and drug trafficking, biochemical disease, environmental degradation, irregular migration, food supply chain inadequacy, natural disasters and other crime across the geographical boundary of a nation.

Understanding the Security Paradox in Central Asian Region:

Before understanding the security paradox Central Asia, It is pertinent to address the importance of Central Asia which was the leader of Eurasian world till 14th century (Timurid Period). But with the introduction of maritime power and with rise of European colonial powers the influence of Central Asia region got weakened and it transformed into periphery of global politics (Stobdan, 2014). Although with the decline of USSR, this region again come into the forefront of world politics international geopolitics and a pawn of the great powers, where great games were being played.

Although it is very hard to demarcate the states in Central Asia, in general Central Asia consists of five states of the former Soviet republics of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. However in recent times the term Greater Central Asia is well accepted by scholars and policy makers alike which have Western Chinese Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Province, Afghanistan including aforesaid five nations. In the context of Central Asian Region in recent times non-traditional threats are gaining momentum. As most of the countries are landlocked and closely linked with each other, non-traditional threats are not only spreading rapidly, but the very survival and security of the populations are into question (Kim and Blank, 2012). But unfortunately whenever we talk or discuss about Central Asian region, our focus is limited too much of traditional security (Geo-Strategic implication) and new great game over energy sources. Many of these non-traditional security threats such as environmental challenges, climate change, transnational drug trafficking, water security are as important as conventional security challenges. However, like every other region who are greatly affected by such challenges, Central Asia is no exception in this regard. But unlike other regions, the manifestation of such threats are much more intense and

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critical in Central Asian region (ibid).

The security challenges in Central Asia are not only multi-faceted and diverse but it's also full of complexity as most of countries are newly formed and in transition from communist set up to democracy. As the region is marked by political instability, ethnic conflict etc. which in return intensified illicit trade, narco-terrorism and other forms of security challenges. In Central Asian Region religious forces always played a key role in augmenting society. Beinga Muslim dominated region, when the West led by US backed NATO forces started dominating this region after the end of cold war they have failed significantly to understand this issue. Due to this western values were perceived to be an attack on the religious faith of Central Asian States and they take it as challenge to resist this by all of their efforts. Because of these non-State actors such as terrorist outfits started dominating the region often providing challenges to the State forces. Terrorist outfits such as Al Qaeda, Taliban with their contains backing of potential network providing omnipresent Central Asian security and international stability (Joshi, 2010). Now this development is pivotal to understand the complex non-traditional threats in the post-cold War environment. Most of these extremist groups may employ conventional tactics to destabilize the region at the same time non-traditional sources such as energy, drug etc. are also being used extensible by such forces to consolidate their power. For example, Central Asia, and in particular the Caspian region, is rich in minerals and other resources, and over the years there are competition between both State and Non-State actors to control these vital assets. Many terrorists' groups in order to support them financially targeted these energy resources thus greatly affecting the security framework of Central Asian Region. Another threat that is emancipating from non-traditional source is the proliferation of narcotics and narco-terrorism. After the Soviet military intervention of Afghanistan and subsequent collapse of USSR, basic concept of security environment changed (ibid). As most of Central Asian states are newly constituted with massive refugee problem, weak political and economic set up compelled them to rely on drug and narcotics to revive the region. Even in recent times terrorist Golden Crescent consists of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran are being used for massive drugs supplies and monetary assistance to the jihadi groups. So this development highlights the importance of non-traditional security threats in the overall Central Asian security architecture

Narcotics and Illicit Drug Trafficking:

In Central Asian region security of all the states are threatened by Narcotics and illicit drug trafficking. This Non-traditional threats to security in post-communist Central Asian region are complementing traditional threats. Entwined with the traditional threats such as arm production, ethnic clashes, terrorism, black-marketing, Narcotics now a days is contributes as major factor for destabilization and security concern for whole central Asian region (Joshi, 2010). Over the years there has been a tremendous increase in the production and drug strafficking, which are routed from the path of golden crescent.

Afghanistan who is the producer of opiates accounts for 93 percent of global opiates production Illegal Drugs and narcotics are major source of extremist and terrorist groups Even though governments are already aware of it they are more or less unsuccessful to stop these illicit narcotics transactions that operates from central Asian regions and Afghanistan towards the European markets. At the same time criminal groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in order to financially gain from narcotics' used terrorism to maintain and secure routes for transporting narcotics (Rashid, 2002; Joshi, 2010). Although drug trafficking was considered as un-Islamic by the Taliban but after 9/11 this was encouraged by them for the financial reasons. These illicit drug trade have a larger consequences both socio-politically and economically (Swanstrom, 2010). As most of these Central Asian states have weak economic and political infrastructure this drug trade is not only threating regional security but also affecting the conventional national interests of the states concerned.

Environmental Security and Central Asia: A Key Concern:

It is undeniable that Central Asia is suffering from so many security challenges such as weak economy, refuge crisis, energy and water conflicts, and many more. Yet in the discourse of security studies the focus is limited to military and Geo threats for the states undermining issues such as human security, climate, trade, transnational crimes considering them as softer issues. However, in recent decades these softer issues are not only increased in depth but also challenging the vary survival of states and societies alike. Recently both China and Russia

increased their presence in an order to draw more power in the region and also US is trying to maneuver their hegemonic position. However, none of them are anticipating the greater security threats that emancipated from the growing environmental concerns and climate change in the region. In recent times Central Asia has been suffering from hot and humid temperature. This year Turkmenistan taking along south parts of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have suffered under 44 degree C. Heat, while some regions of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan may witness rise up to 45 degrees in temperature in summer months (Sharifzoda, 2019). More heat implies least productivity and negative economic growth of the region.

Similarly, the impact of global climate change on the states of Central Asia are also frightening. Even though all these states combined are the least carbon emitted countries yet they have to suffer the consequences of global warming and abnormal weather change. It is expected that in the next decade the temperature will rise by 3-5 degree Celsius in this region. Due to this abnormal rise in temperature the number of droughts will rise as well. As we all know that Central Asia is landlocked region, having limited fertile agricultural soil and drought in this region destroy regional crop at very large level. Which subsequently results in an unequal household income, poverty but most importantly food insecurity in the region. Many of these Central Asian states Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are already suffering from poverty and malnourishment and this adverse impact of global warming will make it even harder. Similarly, Water security is another major problem confronting this region. Right after dissolution of USSR, Central Asian countries were engaged in a power struggle to control water and other resources still they haven't been able to cooperate on these issues (Kim and Blank 2012). Increasing temperature and faster melting of glaciers of central Asian region posing the threat of water level decrease up to 40 percent in Amu Darya one of the two main rivers in the region.

Non-Traditional Threats and its implications for Central Asian Regional Security?:

Majority of the Central Asia's population lives in rural areas and heavily relies on agricultural crops and products for sustaining the economy (Hamidov and et al. 2016). Agriculture is a key sector in Central Asian region that makes nearly 25& GDP and 45% of gross employment for all the five states (Leman and Stanchin, 2006). However, due to the climate change and less availability of water bring significant challenges into agricultural production which in return affecting national development and economic growth of the region. However, the national governments of central Asian states for a long time ignored such soft issues and defined security only in military terms. Because of this states were unable to manage the natural disasters effectively resulted in unemployment, falling productions and so on. Another consequence of such negligence lead to proliferation of terrorist outfits operating in the region. As most of these Central Asian states are suffering from unemployment, poverty etc. Vulnerable and backward communities, younger generation from Central Asia in order to survive are joining these outfits in large number putting the states security at higher risk. Similarly, in recent times water and other natural resources are becoming socontentious issue in Central Asia that may lead to full-fledged wars in near future. Both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan were engaged in a power tussle over the construction of dams in the region. This whole issue revolves around construction of Rogun Dam in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan was against such construction fearing it may affect the water resources of the country and cotton production (Menga and Mirumchi, 2016). Similar leading to the water dispute between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan In the non-availability of proper policies and dispute settlement mechanism, Central Asia may face conflicts among upstream countries like Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and their much stronger downstream neighbors Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan(Sharifzoda, 2019).

Policy Responses:

It can be clearly stated that both non-military as well as conventional security threats are significant for Central Asia. In this difficult situation Central Asian states along with all major external stakeholders Russia, China, and the United States have responsibilities to formulate policies that not only addresses non-traditional threats but formulate a comprehensive understanding of changing security paradigm and list of priorities in the region. Being economically unstable and weak Central Asian states will require international aids for capacity building to fight the extremism, drug trafficking, smuggling and terrorism. Increased resilience to bear the internal and external shocks by Central Asia is the need of hour. Although Central Asian governments catering the resilience to traditional threats but they either ignored or gave less

attention to various non-traditional security threats (Sharifzoda, 2019). During the communist period, USSR in order to fasten up the production and boosting the economy over utilized natural resources without apprehending the negative consequences of such development and they also lacked the suitable policies and measures to mitigate its harmful effects. Similarly, post-Soviet Central Asian governments have largely ignored or gave little attention to institutionalization and technical capacity building such non-conventional threats (Sharifzoda, 2019). Amidst, this complex situation both the Central Asia states and Russia, China, and the United States need to adopt sustainable development practices to address the internal conflicts, violence and political instability to a larger extent and their interest in regain can be intact (Sharifzoda, 2019). So this very distinction between military versus non-military sources of threats are not only getting obsolete but it also undermines the important interplay between politics, society and economic forces and its impact on overall security of the region. Despite this widening notion of security, the state remains the basic referent object of security (Waltz, 1986). So even if cooperation on non-traditional issues are achieved this won't last long due to the strategic factors and interests of nation are weakened. However, with the advent of globalization and technological revolution there are greater interaction and more avenues for Central Asian states to discuss and deliberate regarding non-conventional threats. Non-State actors such as NGO's and voluntary groups are also expected to play a key role mitigating non-military security threats. Although Need for cooperation among new actors arises due to the new questions. Despitenon-conventional threats have always been major challenges in Central Asia but with the collapse of USSR and end of the Cold War this overriding cleavage between conventional and non-conventional security threats have become obsolete. In current context health, social security and environment challenges such as AIDS, Narcotics Abuse, and poverty are as much important as the military security threats (Swanstrom 2010). In this aspect international organizations such as World Trade Organization, United Nations, World Bank etc. along with regional groupings (Shanghai Co-operation) are expected to play a key role in near future.

Conclusion:

In the current context there is an urgency to incorporate non-traditional security issues within framework of global security discourse. This will be helpful to redefine threat perceptions and extend the avenues for security cooperation in Central Asia. For a long time, security in Central Asia have been understood in narrow and incomplete sense, i.e., (Focusing only on polito-military) issues without apprehending the interplay between military and non-military issues. With the collapse of USSR, a power vacuum and destabilization of regional security was created which became more intensified with Russia's partial military and political departure from the region. Due to this Central Asia faced various both conventional and non-conventional security related issues and now it is an arena for major powers and regional players to compete for influence. In this situation Central Asian states lacked the basic political and economic institutions and infrastructure to address such complex challenges which will not only intensify, the previous tensions leading to exacerbate instead of alleviating the instability in the region. Understanding security from a broad viewpoint will help us to locate both the internal and external anomalies which are responsible for such complex security situation. Unlike conventional threats, non-traditional threats are subtle and transnational in nature, because of this the role of the major powers such as China, Russia, and the United States along with regional powers like Japan, India, and Iran are important to resolve such contagious issues in Central Asia.

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