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Central Asia and B. Buzan's regional security complex theory

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Abstract. This article explores regional security and the functioning of related institutions and partnerships in Central Asia through the lens of the regional security complex theory formulated by Barry Buzan in his book “Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security,” published in 2003. This theory introduces four levels of analysis to conceptualize security constellations, one of which is applied to Central Asia to examine the region's capacity to establish a coherent security framework. It provides insights into the evolving relationships, power dynamics, and balance of power within the region.

The analysis highlights the leading role of Kazakhstan in fostering political will to drive regional discussions toward achieving consensus on issues of security and stability in Central Asia. Kazakhstan's initiatives are presented as a strategic effort to overcome the region's long-standing challenges in forming security complex-type relations. Such relations are characterized by integrated and cooperative approaches among member states. By promoting dialogue and partnership-based models, Kazakhstan seeks to build a collective security framework where all regional states jointly define and address shared challenges.

This study contributes to understanding the interplay of regional dynamics, the evolving balance of power, and the potential for a unified security structure in Central Asia. It also sheds light on the broader implications for regional stability and the role of cooperative partnerships in international security frameworks.

Keywords: security, Central Asia, Buzan's theory, regional security complex, Kazakhstan, foreign policy.

Introduction

The end of the Cold War led to the realities in which various regional security arrangements have become an integral part of the world security system centered in the UN Security Council [1]. Those arrangements attract greater attention as the ongoing geopolitical tension between

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major powers continues to increase by escalating frozen and long-protected conflicts in regions from Latin America, Africa, Europe, to Middle East and Asia [2]. Such unprecedented escalation of conflict potential brings greater understanding of the fact that:

First, all the security threats are of regional rather than of local, national, or global nature. Second, today's security problems do not have a one-nation identity and cannot be neutralized within the confines of a single nation's borders. Third, the modern state has its own limitations to provide security, which pushes political elites to search for alternatives and to set up regional arrangements to ensure long-term stability within the country's borders and beyond [3]. They are ready to share the burden in security and conflict management with other states at the expense of squeezing national sovereignty.

The growing number of world leaders considers regional arrangements as a massive pillar of the world security system that plays a significant role in managing conflict potential, while the UN Security Council continues to prove its dysfunction. In a statement made by the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, at the UN Security Council meeting on April 19th, 2021, he stressed that "collaborative effort between the UN and regional and sub-regional organizations has grown exponentially on a roster of crucial issues ranging from counter-terrorism and the women, peace and security agenda to urgent efforts to confront the COVID-19 pandemic" [4]. As conflicts continue to emerge and deepen worldwide, the UN demonstrates a growing dysfunction in dealing with such crises on its own. "In recent times, multilateralism has faced immense difficulties in holistically addressing such crises as some states prioritize nationalism and isolationism." Regional and subregional organizations have unique roles to play in enhancing dialogue in conflict prevention and resolution," UN Secretary-General Guterres said [4].

Buzan's regional security complex theory is instrumental in ongoing efforts to understand regional dynamics in the global level security arrangements, the relationship between them, power balance within each security frame, as well as their impact on Central Asia.

Materials and research methods

This article is based on information and statistical data from various scientific works in the field of foreign policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Among the methods used in the study, it is worth highlighting the analysis, thanks to which individual vectors and constituent elements of Central Asian states' foreign policy were studied; synthesis, which made it possible to bring together, generalize the data obtained as a result of the analysis.

Buzan's Regional Security Complex Theory. In his study, Buzan had combined an operational theory of regional security, realism, liberalism, and constructivism analyzed them against the empirical application of security-related practices across the world in the years that followed the Cold War. And what he frames was the regional security complexes in Africa, the Balkans, CIS-Europe, East Asia, EU-Europe, the Middle East, North America, South America, and South Asia [2].

The theory helps to understand relations between regional and global trends. It distinguishes between the global level interplay of the big powers and the regional level interplay of the middle or smaller powers. The central idea of this theory is that "threats travel more easily

over short distances than over long ones.” Therefore, “security interdependence is normally parented into the regional-based clusters” that play the role of regional security complexes [5]. These complexes build on security interdependences that usually grow over time, and despite the penetration of global powers, they keep their relative autonomy.

Following Buzan’s logic, regions are geographical clusters embedded in a larger security system that “has a structure of its own.” It hinges on the pattern of amity and enmity between its units, defining the constant evolution that the regional system has to go through. It is the place where global security level interplays with the national security of various states, with a consensus agreed on the security agenda. The main actors or units of analysis in Buzan’s theory are defined states [2].

It also recommends researching four levels of analysis to set up a security constellation of the regional architecture that includes.

First, analysis of domestic vulnerabilities that pose threats to unites’ security.

Second, analysis of in between the states relations that constitute the region.

Third, analysis of the region’s interaction with the neighboring regions.

Fourth, analysis of global powers’ interests in the region, as well as the role those interests play to ensure greater security or undermine it [2].

There are four types of regional security complexes defined by Buzan. The first two types are a unipolar model in which all the security relations set up by a leading regional power, like Russia in the CIS or a superpower like the United States in North America. The third type is an integrated model where security is defined by all state-members in a cooperative, partnership-like mode. The fourth type is when actors failed to generate their own patterns of security independence and missed an opportunity to set up a regional security complex [2]. It happens when:

1) great power interests dominate a region so heavily that local governments do not engage into security-framed relations.

2) local states lack the resources to transcend their powers across the national borders;

3) geographic landscape makes the in-between-governments interaction impossible (island and mountain separation, etc.).

Regional Security Complex and Central Asia. Central Asia is the region of five countries that includes Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan. All five countries have found themselves at a turning point with approximately 83 million of an ethnically diverse population with a median age of 26.6 years [6]. It shares historic, economic, cultural and military ties within the region, as well as with Russia, China, and other powers, including the European Union and the United States [7]. All of them are quite active and have organically coexisted until recently, when the growing geopolitical tension between countries of the West and countries of the East have spurred waves of instability around the world, including in Central Asia [3].

The region, as a part of the former Soviet Union, requires a profound adjustment of IR theories and concepts due to decades-long asymmetrical relations that the region has survived. Following Buzan’s theory of regional security complex concerning Central Asia, the main question that needs to be answered is how effective these states around Russia in gain enough independence, resources, knowledge and equality to establish normal security-type relations with Russia, other outside players, and among themselves.

To answer this question, one needs to understand the security constellation of the regional architecture at all four levels: domestic, regional, cross-regional and global.

At the first level of analysis, all Central Asian countries are united in their efforts to ensure domestic security. Political stability and continuity become top priorities for political elites who struggle for political power and build relations with outside players.

At the second level of analysis, that is regional, Central Asia observes security dynamics that in the past resembled with rivalry over the long-term dominance in the region. This state of in-the-region affairs start shifting towards allies-type relations between five central Asian countries with Kazakhstan leading this process through various incentives and trade-offs.

Central Asian states started engaging with other countries, as well as with each other on matters of security. And as President Tokayev said in his statement at the SCO Plus Summit in Kazakhstan on July 5th this year, “the spirit of cooperation has never been higher. At peace with all the major powers, and with one another, countries stand as a region on the threshold of great opportunity” [8].

At the cross-regional level, Central Asia shares a common institutional legacy with Russia that underpins strong security and military ties that have been supported by the public. Russia's role in ensuring peace and stability, as well as across-the-region security, remained unquestionable. Russia's dominance was universally recognized and sealed in bilateral security- and military-type agreements that were institutionalized in various regional security settings, including the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

China has been reluctant to assume a role similar to Russia in defense and security dimensions in Central Asia, while supplanted Moscow in the economic, financial and commercial realms. Some observers called this China's strategy a “Free Riding Strategy,” when, at the expense of Russia and the CSTO, Beijing has refrained from direct intervention in the regional security arrangements while concentrating on economic partnerships within the frame of the Belt and Road Initiative. Such a decision has influenced a pervasively passive stance by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on threats that endanger the security domain in Central Asia. It has also released additional resources by China to address competition in other regions, notably in the Asia-Pacific.

China's decision to delegate Russia the security and defense responsibilities in Central Asia has been challenged right after Moscow's decision to renew the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Since the state of Moscow's domination affairs has started gradually eroding, with Central Asian states' distancing themselves from Russia's military campaign. Although Russia has long served as the region's primary security guarantor, its role has become diminished [9].

At the global level, Central Asia quite effectively balanced their intra-regional security partnerships with outside powers. The U.S., together with the E.U. and other European countries, has established and continues developing various forms of security-related relations by providing military equipment, conducting training for military personnel [10].

Challenges to the Regional Security Complex in Central Asia. The ongoing geopolitical tension, instability in the global economy and in the regions surrounding Central Asia, as well as socio-economic problems, have further complicated the security environment in the region [11].

Thus, internal threats, which are typical for almost all countries in the region, include:

– internal political and social-economic instability, including such negative factors as ethnic tensions, confrontation of internal regional elites and clans, high level of unemployment (especially among the youth), impoverishment of inhabitants, deeper inequality in incomes, internal and external migration, corruption, low effectiveness of governmental institutes – all that led to the so-called «color» revolutions in 2005 and 2010 [12];

– growth of influence of radical Islamism among the population of the republics (especially among the youth), its preparedness to use any tensions and social problems for this purpose: low level of incomes, unemployment, absence of social lifts for the youth, etc. [3];

– growth of influence of drug mafia connected with increasing drug traffic from Afghanistan through the region to Russia and further to the EU, increasing number of drug-addicted people [12].

Today's regional threats in Central Asia include:

– transboundary water and energy problems, which exist between the countries of the upper and lower streamlines of the major rivers Amudarya and Syrdarya [12].

– unsolved border disputes for territory, tensions for industrial capacities, which is especially typical for Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, in areas containing enclaves of neighboring countries, entities existing since the Soviet times and aggravated by the lack of resources, first of all water, pasture areas (considering demographic situation in the region) [13].

– struggle for regional leadership, which is more typical for Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan [13].

The most serious external security threats include the growth of Islamic extremism in the region, the growth of number of terrorist organizations, the growth of transboundary crime and drug traffic, and cyber extremism [13].

Kazakhstan Diplomatic Efforts. Kazakhstan's role in building regional consensus on matters of security in Central Asia is discussed by many experts. One believes that it is Kazakhstan's regional ambitions that push political will to allocate additional resources to generate the regional consensus [12]. Others consider Kazakhstan's diplomatic efforts as a rational choice to survive [13]. The third believes that the ongoing process in Central Asia is a part of evolution, with the region becoming more independent from neighboring and global powers [11]. Therefore, it is so instrumental for the purposes of this analysis to understand what Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev proposes at various regional and international forums.

At the first meeting of Security Council Secretaries from all five Central Asian countries in Astana on May 16th, 2024, President Tokayev outlined the main pillars to strengthen security cooperation in Central Asia [14]. First is the fight against international extremism and terrorism, drug and arm-trafficking. Second is to further support economic and trade relations within the region. Third is to enhance comprehensive interaction with external partners within the C5+ formats that include Central Asia-European Union Forum, Central Asian- China Forum, Central Asia – the United States Forum, Central Asia-Japan Forum, Central Asia-Gulf Cooperation Council, Central Asia-Germany Forum. Fourth is to coordinate resistance against external powers attempting to incite conflict and split the region's nations apart.

President Tokayev pushed this agenda through six consultative meetings of Central Asian leaders taking place in various capitals of the region since 2019, with the recent Summit in Astana on August 9th, 2024 [15]. In his address to the regional leaders, he emphasized that regional cooperation in Central Asia is not just an objective reality but a vital necessity to

address shared challenges and unlock the region's vast potential. He proposed a robust agenda that is centered on the principle of regional balance, peace and international law while dealing with great and neighboring powers.

President Tokayev supported his vision by strategic-type initiatives with Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Thus, with Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, he signed the Road Map to strengthen the strategic partnership between two countries, established in 2022 [16]. The Roadmap ensures energy security and greater trade cooperation between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan – two pillars that are crucially important for the “New Uzbekistan” agenda.

The same type of arrangements Kazakhstan signed and implements with all other central Asian countries [17]. All of them are aimed at overcoming region's inability to set up relations of security complex type with integrated model when security defined by all state-members in a cooperative, partnership-like mode.

Conclusion

The application of Buzan's theory of regional security complex to Central Asia helps further contribute to the existing body of knowledge and understand the ongoing security-related dynamics in this region.

First, it shed light on the region's transition from a state of failure to generate any security arrangements to a state of political will and related practical steps to set up an integrated model of security in Central Asia. Second, it helped to understand the space for such evolution when great and regional powers have relocated all their resources to deter threats coming from the growing geopolitical tension. Third, it defined the driving force of the regional security engagements with Kazakhstan, allocating political, financial and strategic resources into building strategic partnerships and merging them into regional platforms for dialogue and discussions.

Contribution of the authors.

Kurmashev D.S. – collection and analysis of materials, compilation of a scientific article in accordance with the requirements, collection and analysis of theoretical materials;

Kussainova A.M. – definition of the goals and objectives of the scientific article, work with the use of research materials and methods; work with literature, work on systematization of research materials.

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Б. Бузанның Орталық Азия аймақтық қауіпсіздігінің кешенді теориясы

Аңдатпа. Мақала Орталық Азиядағы аймақтық қауіпсіздіке қатысты 2003 жылы жарық көрген Барри Бузанның «Өңірлер мен күштер: Халықаралық қауіпсіздік құрылымы» атты кітабында тұжырымдалған аймақтық қауіпсіздік кешені теориясы негізінде институттар мен серіктестіктердің бірлесе жұмыс жасау тұрғысынан зерттейді.

Бұл теория қауіпсіздік құрылымдарын тұжырымдау үшін талдаудың төрт деңгейін ұсынады, олардың бірі Орталық Азияға қолданылады және аймақтың үйлесімді қауіпсіздік жүйесін қалыптастыру қабілетін зерттеуге бағытталған. Зерттеу аймақтағы қарым-қатынастардың дамуы, күштердің динамикасы және күш тепе-теңдігі туралы түсінік береді.

Талдауда Қазақстанның Орталық Азияда қауіпсіздік пен тұрақтылық мәселелеріне қатысты консенсусқа қол жеткізу үшін аймақтық талқылауларды алға жылжытудағы саяси ерік-жігер қалыптастырудағы жетекші рөлін атап көрсетеді. Қазақстанның бастамалары аймақта қауіпсіздік кешеніне тән қатынастарды қалыптастырудағы ұзақ мерзімді мәселелерді шешуге бағытталған стратегиялық қадам ретінде қарастырылады. Мұндай қатынастар қатысушы мемлекеттердің интеграцияланған және ынтымақтастыққа негізделген тәсілдерімен сипатталады. Диалог пен серіктестікке негізделген модельдерді насихаттай отырып, Қазақстан барлық аймақ елдеріне ортақ мәселелерді бірлесе отырып анықтап ұжымдық қауіпсіздік жүйесін құруға ұмтылады.

Бұл зерттеу аймақтық динамиканың өзара әрекеттесуін, күштер тепе-теңдігінің дамуын және Орталық Азияда бірыңғай қауіпсіздік жүйесін құру әлеуетін түсінуге өз үлесін қосады. Сондай-ақ, ол аймақтық тұрақтылық пен халықаралық қауіпсіздік құрылымдарындағы серіктестіктің рөлі туралы кеңірек түсінік береді.

Түйін сөздер: қауіпсіздік, Орталық Азия, Бузан теориясы, аймақтық қауіпсіздік кешені, Қазақстан, сыртқы саясат.

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Центральная Азия и теория комплекса региональной безопасности Б. Бузана

Аннотация. Данная статья исследует региональную безопасность и функционирование связанных с ней институтов и партнерств в Центральной Азии через призму Теории регионального комплекса безопасности, сформулированной Барри Бузаном в его книге «Регионы и силы: структура международной безопасности», опубликованной в 2003 году. Теория вводит четыре уровня анализа для концептуализации конфигураций безопасности, один из которых применяется к Центральной Азии для изучения способности региона создать согласованную систему безопасности. Работа предлагает взглянуть на эволюцию взаимоотношений, динамику власти и баланс сил в регионе.

Анализ подчеркивает ведущую роль Казахстана в формировании политической воли для продвижения региональных обсуждений, направленных на достижение консенсуса по вопросам безопасности и стабильности в Центральной Азии. Инициативы Казахстана представлены как стратегические усилия по преодолению давних проблем региона в создании отношений, свойственных комплексам безопасности. Такие отношения характеризуются интегрированными и кооперативными подходами между странами-участницами. Продвигая модели диалога и партнерства, Казахстан стремится построить коллективную систему безопасности, где все страны региона совместно определяют и решают общие вызовы.

Это исследование вносит вклад в понимание взаимодействия региональной динамики, эволюции баланса сил и потенциала для создания единой системы безопасности в Центральной

Азии. Оно также проливает свет на более широкие последствия для региональной стабильности и роли кооперативных партнерств в международных структурах безопасности.

Ключевые слова: безопасность, Центральная Азия, теория Бузана, комплекс региональной безопасности, Казахстан, внешняя политика.

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