FOREIGN POLICY AND NATIONAL INTERESTS IN POST-SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA

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Summary

This article assesses the formation of the Central Asian Republics (CARs) foreign policy and focuses on the three major issues that are especially important for policy makers in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. First is the historical and geopolitical settings and new dimensions of security issues in the post-Soviet CAR. Second is the determination factors of their national interests and perception of security issues by the Central Asian elite, both nationally and regionally. Third is the evaluation of the security issues and national interests on the national level, new emphases in policy directions which are emerging in these republics and their impact on the perspective of the CARs foreign policy.

The author argues that the CARs are determining their national interests and security agenda in a context of changing domestic environment, and in a wider context of international and regional environment. The 'Power Vacuum', created by Moscow’s political withdrawal from this region, placed security issues on the agenda of the CARs leaders. Since 1991, the CARs foreign policy makers have tried to assess the major internal and external factors, which determine security and stability in the region. Due to the Russia's internal political instability, absence of the leadership qualities and vulnerability of Kremlin's foreign policy, the CARs made considerable efforts to reassess internal and external threats to security of the region. They attempted to involve new outside actors into the regional affairs with whom they could co-operate in maintaining the security balance and stability.

Introduction

Before 1991, the national interests and security issues of all of the Soviet republics, including the Central Asian Republics (CARs), were determined by the status of the USSR as a world superpower; by the military and ideological confrontation with the west during the Cold war, by the possession of nuclear weapons; and by perceptions of security issues in a global context. During Soviet era, the CARs were a part of the Soviet security system. They had limited autonomy in administrative and cultural issues, but they had no authority to conduct their own foreign, military, security, and economic policies.

After disintegration of the Soviet Union into fifteen independent states, national interests and security problems of every republic underwent tremendous change. Political sovereignty gave the CARs an opportunity to formulate for the first time their own internal and external policies independently from Moscow. In order to meet the challenges of independence, the new states of Central Asia needed to determine their national interests and security policy in accordance with their new status. They were all relatively small states of the Eurasian continent, with no efficient military forces and little economic potential to build up a large army in the near future. There were a number of other internal and external factors, which affected their security. Some of these factors have been associated with transitional period and were changed over time, but other factors have had long term implications and were a fundamental nature.

Determination of national interests and formulation of a security policy for the CARs were complicated by two major factors. First, the historical legacy of the 'Great Game' played by Tsarist Russia and changes imposed during the Soviet era. This includes the division of the single historical-cultural space of 'Great Central Asia' into several political-geographical spheres of influence of the Great Powers. Political and economic modernisation of the region, conducted according to political traditions and ideological system of the dominating colonial states, drove people of this region further apart politically, culturally, and socially. Additionally, the 'iron curtain' separated the 'Russian Turkistan' from other Asian countries and contributed to the consolidation of the former Soviet CARs as a separate geopolitical and geoeconomic entity.

The second factor is an extremely dynamic internal and external environment. The Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, the defeat of Soviet troops in Afghanistan in the 1980s, political and military withdrawal of Russia from the region in the 1990s, interethnic conflicts and internal political tensions are just a few changes that have brought instability into post-Soviet CARs. Additionally, Economic transition and limited political reforms have changed domestic environment of the policy making process.

The Central Asian republics are facing uncertainty in their future internal and external development, therefore there is still a number issues which are need to be addressed. How do the CARs policy-makers formulate their national interests and what are the security concerns of the CARs policy-makers? What are the priorities for international co-operation in the CARs foreign policy? How do they view the new geopolitical balance and political situation in the region and the CARs' future opportunities and perspectives? For this reason, an analysis of foreign policy perception of the CARs elite and the CARs domestic determination of their foreign policy is particularly important.

The main focus of this paper is on how the governments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan determine their national interests and threats to their security and the co-operation priorities in the region. The first section provides a brief introduction to the historical and geopolitical settings of the CARs and its implication for the security policies. The second section analyses internal and external factors that determine security in the CARs. The third section assesses the security perceptions of the Central Asian policy-makers and develops some comparisons between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan in their evaluation of security threats. The concluding section summarises the findings of the article and highlights some implications of for the foreign policies of the CARs.
1. Post-Soviet Security Dilemma: Historical and Geopolitical Settings

The Post-Soviet security system and security balance in the CARs is affected by numerous factors. Political turmoil of the 20th century, social and demographic changes, economic problems of post-Soviet transition, and even geopolitical location inevitably determined the peculiarities of national interests of individual states and security concerns of Central Asian policy makers.

Geopolitical factor. The CARs occupy a pivotal area of the Eurasian continent where the Great Chinese, Muslim and Christian civilisations meet. Modern political geography refers the term 'Central Asian Republics' to five newly independent countries, namely: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, although historically and culturally the term 'Central Asian region' included Afghanistan and some parts of the Western provinces of China. Throughout history, this vast region had been united several times in huge and fragile nomadic empires, but by the 19th century it was divided between several small independent and semi-independent city-states and Khanates. The area occupied by the republics is a landlocked region with a population of 52 million people (1995). The region, which is around 4 million square km., borders with China, Afghanistan, Iran, and Russia. The convenient location on the cross road of China, Europe and South Asia has prompted the CARs leaders to declare the region 'Europe-Asia transportation corridor'.

Political rivalry of the Russian and British Empires in the 19th century for areas of influence in the region established the Russian area of political influence in Central Asia. The Russian area of control in the region did not coincide with the ethnic patterns of the Central Asians and their cultural links with people who remained beyond Russian influence. Consequently, the Central Asians became detached from their kinship in Iran, Afghanistan, and China, where until now we can find a large groups of Kazakh, Uzbeks, Tajiks, etc. (in Afghanistan alone Tajiks and Uzbeks combine together between 18 to 30 per cent of the population). The legacy of great Soviet experiment and the 'iron curtain' has widened the gap between Central Asian people of the USSR and their southern neighbours, and the latter often perceived them as a new political entity.

In 1924-1936 the Kremlin leaders complicated further the political geography of the region during the national delimitation of Central Asia. They introduced a national system that reflected distribution of the political power, but not historical, cultural and political traditions. That action also created highly disputable borders between these republics and with other states including the Russian Federation itself.

Another problem inherited by the region was the 'Great Game' that was also called by Milan Hauner the 'railway imperialism'. All railways, pipelines, highways, etc. headed towards Russia and the CIS. This peculiar infrastructure pattern tied Central Asia to the CIS and Eastern Europe, and isolated it from South Asia. The CARs are rich in various natural resources. According to the estimations of The Economist, the region's potential oil reserves range from conservative 70 to optimistic 200 billion barrels of oil4. Additionally, Turkmenistan has vast unexplored reserves of natural gas. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan are rich in gold and some other metals. Uzbekistan is the biggest producer of cotton in the CIS, while Kazakhstan is third biggest producer of grain in the former USSR. However, the exploitation of the natural resources is expensive and the region needs huge investments to update the existing infrastructure and especially to build up new roads, railways, pipelines, and telecommunications.

And last, but not least, the environmental disaster of the Aral Sea has become a serious problem in the CARs. Intensive use of water for irrigation especially of large cotton plantations has destroyed the water balance in the region. The water level in the Aral Sea has dropped significantly and the sea is under the threat of disappearing. If the sea dries up, it may lead to a serious climate change with disastrous consequences.

Ethnic composition and demographic changes. Ethnic and demographic composition in the CARs dramatically changed during the 20th century. The largest republic, Kazakhstan, occupies almost two thirds of the territory of the region, but it has currently only 16 million people (1995), which is about 30% of the whole population of Central Asia. Meanwhile the most populated republic, Uzbekistan, is a dwelling place for almost 40 per cent of the entire population of the region. The main ethnic groups of the region are Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, and Uzbeks who are culturally, religiously and linguistically close to each other.

In the 1930s, a first wave of Soviet modernisation forced the nomads of Central Asia, who until then were engaged in nomadic pastoralism, to settle down. They were organised into state-run co-operatives (kolkhozy). This action created a large stratum of state-employed peasantry who worked mainly in sedentary intensive agriculture. In the 1940s, during World War Two, Soviet leaders relocated a number of military and civil plants along with their workers from the area of military operations to Central Asian cities and towns. The newcomers were mostly skilled workers of Slavic origin. They were employed in the state-run industrial sector and administration in the large cities. Their relocation contributed largely to the rapid urbanisation of the region and creation of an extensive and diversified industrial sector in the CARs. During World War Two, the Kremlin leaders also ordered to relocate some ethnic groups5 from the areas of potential military actions to Central Asia. Finally, in the 1950s, the All-Union Virgin Land Campaign brought another wave of migrants to the region, which affected mainly Kazakhstan and to a lesser extends Kyrgyzstan. As a result of the Soviet nationality policy, the Slavic population dominated in the industrial and military sectors, including the Army and security forces deployed in the region throughout the Soviet era.

The demographic pattern established in the 1950s remained without significant changes until the 1990s. According to the Census of 1989, the non-titular people constituted 60.1% of the population in Kazakhstan, 47.6% in Kyrgyzstan, 37.7% in Tajikistan, 28% in Turkmenistan, and 28.6% in Uzbekistan6. This makes the issue of inter-ethnic relations a very important factor for securing stable political development in these republics at least at the present stage7. The issue of rights of the ethnic minorities may also become a bone of contention in relations between the states, as happened in the early 1990s in the CARs' relations with Russia.

Political environment in the region and in the neighbouring countries. Politically, the Central Asian Republics had a very different pattern of political cultures, political loyalties and institutions. This area is populated by predominantly Muslim populations, with their distinguish tribal and communal differences, traditional political institutions and loyalties. For example, historically, Kazakhstani society was divided into three Hordes (Zhaizes), which the Soviet authorities brought together as one state, Kazakhstan. However, the political process in the republic was always centred around the tribal loyalties. The same true for political process in Kyrgyzstan (where Southern clan competes with Northern one), Uzbekistan (Fergana clan vis-à-vis Surtash and Tashkent clans), Turkmenistan and Tajikistan.

Due to these factors, Central Asia was one of the unstable regions in the former Soviet Union throughout the 1980s, especially on the eve of their independence. Bloody inter-ethnic conflicts of 1986-1991 shook the very foundation of stability of the CARs society and claimed hundreds of lives in every republic of the region. The Soviet political machine and security services suppressed these inter-ethnic tensions, but have not resolved the existed problems. These problems still remain at the top of political agenda of the CARs governments.

All present Central Asian leaders (except Tajikistan) came to power shortly before the independence and were widely regarded as representatives of the former Soviet nomenclature. Most public figures associated with the Communist legacy, showed themselves as advocates of westernisation of their countries, and introduced some important political and economic changes in the post-Soviet era. Nevertheless, the credibility of their political power was challenged by various political groups from radical nationalists to resurgent Islamic political organisations. Thus, the rising tensions within the society itself became the main feature of political relations in the CARs of the 1990s.

One of the examples of such development was Tajikistan. In this country, a combination of factors, complicated by the power struggle between political, ethnic, and clan factions has had a devastating effect. It undermined
the very foundation of the existence of the Tajik state, and led to the most disastrous and bloody Civil War (1992-1997) seen there since the Basmachi resistance to the Soviet regime of 1918-1928. Indeed, the other republics are also predisposed to potential instability and political violence, although the case of Tajikistan proved to be the only case in the region.

The political environment in the neighbouring countries, such as Iran, Afghanistan, Russia, and in the western part of China also remains unstable and may bring insecurity to the CARs. In this regard, the Civil war and chaos in Afghanistan is the biggest problem for the CARs. Not only local politicians, but also the international community have been already alarmed by drug-trafficking, illegal arms smuggling, forced migration and by a number of other issues.

In general, the CARs are confronting a complex of intractable social, ethnic, and political issues. Some of these problems are the historical legacy of past, but some of them are the result of recent political and social development in the region. Consequently, all these factors predetermined a number of particularly complex issues in the CARs during 1990-1992 transition to independence.

2. Determination of National Interests and Formulation of Security Policy

The first steps of the CARs in the international arena were quite contradictory. On the one hand, the CARs strengthened consistently their relations with Russia and even expressed their readiness to reintegrate within the CIS. On the other hand, they indicated their readiness to integrate with other organisations, such as the Economic Co-operation Organisation (ECO) and the Central Asian Union (CAU). Also, they have become the members of the NATO programme of Partnership for Peace. Additionally, the CARs expressed their interest in intensifying relations with leading western countries as well as with their neighbours, including China, Iran, and Turkey.

However, in spite of desire of the CARs to reinforce foreign relations with Western countries, the Republics declined to include and follow some normative values, such as human rights and liberal democracy, as the foundations of their policy principles.

This contradiction may be explained from a realist theoretical perspective. The realists consider states to be the primary actors in international relations. Preservation of national interests of these individual actors is an ultimate goal of their foreign policies. This includes formulation of national interests and foreign policy objectives, that define preservation of sovereignty of nation-states. One of the important elements of the realist approach is a belief that every nation-state exists in a hostile environment and that the neighboring states as well as other countries exercise their power and influence at the expense of others. Therefore, a vital objective of internal and external policies of a nation-state is to ensure the survival of a state as an independent entity. Within this framework, a state policy is not bound by any strict moral principles and a state can form and change allies without any moral obligations in order to promote its own national interests.

The realist approach explains the CARs’ unwillingness to limit their sovereignty by any multilateral agreements within a concept of defence of perceived ‘national interests’. The CARs leaders participated in various regional and supra-regional organisations to gain some advantages and benefits without having any obligations. They also often considered normative liberal values as an instrument used by the world powers to limit the CARs’ freedom of manoeuvring in their domestic and international affairs.

2.1. Internal factors and External factors

In general, after gaining independence, the CARs faced numerous problems. From the very beginning, CARs foreign policy makers and experts recognised two groups of factors that defined the security environment of post-Soviet Central Asia (Table 1). One is the domestic (internal) group of factors. The other group is the international (external) group of factors.

Internal factors.

Internal factors have seriously affected the security of the CARs because these newly independent states inherited numerous political, economic, and social problems from the past. Inefficient governments and absence of strong political and economic institutions have made the situation even more complicated. The escalation of political conflicts in Yugoslavia and Tajikistan demonstrated to the CARs that unresolved internal problems might threaten the very existence of the newly independent states.

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The legitimacy of ruling elites of the CARs, and cohesiveness of Central Asian regimes were challenged by different groups within the societies. This included ethnic, religious, and tribal (clan) groups. Different ethnic groups and minorities in the CARs went through shocking interethenic conflicts on the eve of independence. Therefore, in the post-Soviet era, they demanded guarantees of their security, representation at all levels of power and respect of their culture and language. It was an important factor in internal politics of the CARs, which the CARs governments could not ignore, because it could lead to rise of separatists tendencies and interethenic tensions. Religious fundamentalists also challenged the legitimacy of the elite in these Muslim republics. They challenged both the legitimacy of the former communist elite for their collaboration with Soviet regime, and present political systems of the CARs for their negligence of Islamic political tradition.

Additionally, strong tribal and kinship relations and loyalties in the CARs society complicated internal politics of the CARs. Representatives of powerful tribal and regional elite competed between each other for influence and power throughout the history of the region. In fact, even powerful medieval Khans (kings) were obliged to keep the balance of various tribal and clan interests. Although, the Soviet authorities tried to undermine the power of the traditional elites and purged their representatives in the 1920s-1930s, the network of tribal and regional identities and affiliations reintroduced itself and penetrated even the Communist Party apparatus. After 1991, the conflicts of the tribal, regional and group interests within the societies in the CARs became one of the most important issues in the republics' internal affairs, making these republics particularly vulnerable to external interventions.

External factors

External factors in the form of complex unresolved problems inherited from the past seriously affected security regime in the CARs. It was perceived that the external threats might range from direct military threat and conflicts over the highly complicated territorial disputes to complication of the relations with neighbouring countries.

The territorial claims and border disputes with neighbouring countries and among the CARs were the most important topics in the post-Soviet environment. The events in Caucasus and Yugoslavia showed that the historical memory over the past strife and disputes over arbitrary set borders may lead to devastating wars and ethnic cleanings in the Newly Independent States. Moreover, the CARs exposed and vulnerable to the regional conflicts, such as a civil war in Afghanistan and armed clashes between various political factions in Tajikistan, due to their geographical proximity and multiethnic composition.
There also was a fear that the weakness of political institutions and general dissatisfaction of the people will make the Central Asian politics vulnerable to the radical political ideologies, including religious fundamentalism. At the end of the 1980 and the beginning of the 1990s there were fears in the air among both local and international experts in regard to Iranian politics in Central Asian region. These fears were founded on an assumption that Iran would attempt to ‘export’ the Islamic revolution and Islamic model of development to the newly independent states of Central Asia through nursing and supporting radical Islamic groups in the CARs.

The collapse of the former Soviet common market, opening the CARs economies for international competition and Globalisation brought a new economic dimension of the external factors. The transitional recession, the end of the former Soviet economic assistance and economic co-operation have made the CARs quite dependent on international economic, technical, and humanitarian assistance from major Western donors. This also made these Republics quite vulnerable to the influence of various international actors. Therefore, it was important for the CARs to maintain positive relations both with leading world powers, such as the USA, Germany, England, Japan, Turkey, Russia, and with their neighbouring countries. Part of the economic dimension of the regional security was the issue of exploitation of the natural resources. Considerable reserves of natural resources in Central Asia provoked competition between various multinational companies and states that were interested in exploitation of these resources. One of the examples of such clashes of interests was a conflict over directions of oil and gas pipelines from the region. Russia, Iran, Afghanistan China, and the USA had their own strategic interests and considerations on this issue.

The problem of the post-Soviet co-operation and/or integration within the region and with supra-regional organisations was another issue for the CARs foreign policy makers. However, despite the formal support of various integration ‘models’ (CAU, CIS, ECO, etc.), none of these organisations succeeded. Even such regional organisation as the CAU, which initially was founded in 1990 to develop common regional stand and co-ordination of the policies toward Russia, failed to integrate the CARs politically or economically. It also failed to develop the regional co-ordination of the domestic and foreign policies or prevent trade wars between these countries.

The multitude of various interests in the region has formed a delicate balance of interests in the region by the middle of the 1990s. Therefore, withdrawal of any of the outside actors or break of positive relations with any of these states could destabilise the fragile balance of power in the region.

2.2. Stages of Development of Security System

After disintegration of the USSR and creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan started formulating their own independent foreign policies. This included the conceptualisation of the national security policy, development of an entire system of the foreign policy institutions, and a search for a model of economic and political co-operation in post-Soviet era. Assurance of a system of regional and national security became the highest priority for the CARs.

Despite the fact that the CARs have had quite a short history of independent development, they have experienced dramatic changes in the status of their security system. I would discern three stages of development of the security system in Central Asia.

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During the first stage of the post-Soviet development 1991-1995, the international status of the CARs security system was mainly determined by the CIS Treaty on Collective Security and the presence of a nuclear arsenal. The CIS Treaty on Collective Security was signed on 15th May 1992. According to the Treaty, ‘in event of an act of aggression being committed against any of the participating states, all other participating states shall give it the necessary assistance, including military assistance...’15 The United CIS Command would control all strategic forces, including strategic missiles and nuclear arsenal. The Treaty also secured equal representation, at least formally, of these states in the CIS military and strategic decision making. In June 1993, however, the CIS members lost this privilege when Russia declared the establishment of its exclusive control over all the former Soviet strategic forces. The second factor was the presence of a nuclear arsenal in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan had a third largest nuclear arsenal in the CIS, after Russia and the Ukraine. It also was a sixth largest nuclear power in the world.16 Additionally, there were some suspicions about nuclear potentials and capabilities of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, since these republics were involved in the Soviet chain of nuclear producing industry. However, under the pressure of leading western countries, especially the USA, Kazakhstan agreed finally to sign the Lisbon Protocol to START (May, 1992), and to become a nuclear free country by joining the Non-Proliferation Treaty (1994).

The second stage of independent development of the CARs security system started in 1995. The beginning of this stage was associated with shipping of the entire nuclear arsenal out of Kazakhstan to Russia and dismantling of all of the weapons associated with military nuclear potentials of the republic under international control. This action increased the need of the CARs to rely on their own remaining military potential in dealing with both internal and external problems, though Russia was still the main military and security partner to the CARs.

The third stage of the independent development of the CARs security system started in 1999. In February 1999, Uzbekistan announced a plan to quit the CIS Security Treaty, and in April 1999, it decided to join the GUAM alignment. This organisation is generally perceived as a pro-western grouping, which unites countries resisting the attempts to establish Moscow’s dominance in the post-Soviet space. Meanwhile, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan decided not to quit the CIS Security Treaty, although they insisted on replacement of the Russian border guards by their national border guards.

2.3. Perception of National Interests and Formulation of Security Policy

Perception of national interests and security policy is an important part of foreign policy formulation. This perception covers not only influence of the past historical and cultural experiences but also influence (or perception of influence) of the present internal and external environment of decision making. This also includes immediate interests of decision-makers.

Identification of the priorities of national interests and security policy appeared to be the most challenging task for the newly independent Central Asian states. One of the most important factors, which affected the identification of these priorities, has been their historical experience and perceived internal and external environment. The leaders of these republics sought to maintain their security and defend their national interests within framework of the renewed Union, i.e. the CIS, unlike the former Soviet Baltic republics. Explaining the needs for the co-operation, the President of Uzbekistan brought the following arguments: ‘Lack of rudimentary mechanism for maintaining security and settling currently existing disagreements in the solution of interstate disputes, could potentially upset on the negative development of the situation, the relative stability in the region provoking a catastrophe or unpredictable ranges.’19
Nevertheless, the CARs remained quite flexible in their foreign policy and were able to make some radical shifts in their international relations, often regardless of the public opinion in their countries and the past experience. For example, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan had been able to declare pro-Turkish orientation in the early 1990s, and they easily dropped out this declaration later. Such twists are possible for several reasons. On the one hand, there is a tradition of highly elitist policy-making process. On the other hand, the foreign policy making in the CARs has a highly bureaucratic nature. The weakness of political institutions of the society, the low level of public involvement in political process, and the peculiarities of leadership qualities of the CARs elites contributed further to the exclusive nature of the foreign policy making process in these republics.

In such an environment, relatively small group of the local policy makers and experts participate in foreign policy making process and formulate foreign policies in the CARs. This policy increasingly relies on their perception of the internal and external factors that affect national interests and security policy in these republics.

3. Evaluation of National Interests and Security Issues

Political behaviour of the CARs foreign policy makers suggests that they have been operating from the realist perspective. The CARs policy makers have been evaluating the security and co-operation in post-Soviet era by the means of such concepts as ‘the national interests’, ‘the acquiring of power’ and establishing of a ‘balance of power’ of outside actors.

National interests.

National interests for the CARs have been closely associated with security and stability in this region as a whole and in every republic in particularly. During first years of the independent development it was a matter of survival to outline vital interests and security concerns in order to address these issues promptly. It has been an important task for the CARs governments to clearly formulate the CARs national security policy and a blueprint of their foreign policy. This implies that as far as Moscow became outside player with its own national interests, the CARs needed to define their national and regional interests, which had become increasingly different from Russia's one20.

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Acquiring of power.

Because all the economic, political, and military power had been exercised by the Communist Moscow, the Soviet CARs had limited power before 1991. Thus, for the CARs governments, independence implied first of all acquisition of power by all of the means. This included creation of sound political, economic and military institutions of these independent states, a search for allies, and creation of alliances, which might help and support defence of their national interests against potential threats and hostile actions of other countries.

Establishing of balance of power.

A significant part of the CARs' post-Soviet strategy is establishment of 'balance of powers' in the Central Asian region of all actors, including the great powers. One of the instruments of achieving this balance is involvement of as many as possible foreign actors in the region's affairs. The main goal of this policy is to play outside actors against each other and to avoid political domination of any individual states, including Russia, in the region. The CARs may also use the presence of other actors to maintain the balance of influence of their powerful neighbours.

By and large, the perception of the national interests and security policy have been different from country to country despite the fact that all of the CARs are parts of one geographical region. The main question is to be examined in this section what is the CARs governments' perception of national interests, security concern and balance of power in the region?

3.1. Kazakhstan

In Kazakhstan, formulation of security policy was an especially complex task. The republic was one of the first countries in the CARs, where the public actively debated issue of national interests and security policy and introduced the Law ‘On National Security of the Republic of Kazakhstan’21.

The leaders of the republic faced an urgent need to preserve territorial integrity and political stability of the country. A significant proportion of ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan and 6,846 km. of common borders with Russia allowed the Russian ultra-nationalists make claims over almost one third of Kazakhstan. There is also rise of separatist tendencies in Kazakhstan's northern 'oblasti' where the ethnic Russians are in the majority. An intensive public debate on the status of Russian language has also made inter-ethnic problems a delicate issue for the government. Moreover, the political interventions of the Moscow nationalistic ruling elite into Kazakhstan's internal affairs created quite regularly numerous crises in relations between the two countries. Kazakhstan also shares 1,533 km. of boundaries with China, some of which is disputed and there is a quickly growing Chinese community in the republic. Therefore, Kazakhstan policy-makers have also been increasingly sensitive in establishing the positive relations and keeping balance of power between China and Russia.

The economic dimension of the national security is also quite important for the country. Despite being the richest country in natural resources including oil, uranium, iron ore, zinc, and copper Kazakhstan faces a particularly difficult economic situation. Kazakhstan has inherited an extremely diverse economy that was in a state of virtual collapse in 1992-1995 due to the break up of economic relations with Russia and the CIS. In 1999, Kazakhstan produced mere 64 per cent of 1989. The only way to solve Kazakhstan's economic problems and to undertake industrial reconstruction has been to take the country's vast supply of crude oil to the international market. That would be possible if the leaders of the republic resolve three major issues. First is related to the juridical status of the Caspian Sea and demarcation of coastal borders with such neighbours as Russia, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Iran. Second is the task of building up the multibillion oil pipelines that could take Kazakhstan's oil to the international market. Third is finding ways of involvement of as many international actors as possible, including the US, China and other countries, in the development of the oil sector to depend avoid dependence on Russia.

As a cornerstone of country's foreign policy, President Nazarbayev promoted the idea of Kazakhstan as a Eurasian country that would play an important role in the international arena as 'a connecting chain between Europe and Asia-Pacific region'22. When it became apparent that the CIS was in permanent crisis, the President proposed an idea of 'Eurasian Union', which might bring together politically and economically all of the former Soviet and East European countries23.
In his internal policy, Nazarbayev pioneered idea of 'social stability first'. He managed to set up an inter-ethnic dialogue, a roundtable with political opposition, and a public discourse on the economic reforms. In his economic policy the President enunciated a 'strategy of rapid development' based on the principles of 'equal opportunity' and 'progressive structural perestroika of the economy'. In 1997, President Nazarbayev displayed a serious and genuine intention to replicate the 'economic model' of Southeast Asia, by emphasising long-term priorities and promoting an open economy.

Despite implementing a wide range of political and economic reforms, Kazakhstan experienced severe economic crises and rise of social and political unrest during the first stage of the independence. This prevented the country from building large and efficient military forces and kept Kazakhstan's army heavily relying on the military co-operation with Russia. Although Kazakhstan was in the focus of political attention of the world's superpowers (mainly because of Kazakhstan's short-lived status as a nuclear power), it was not followed by anticipated high level of international economic assistance and financial investments.

3.2. Kyrgyzstan

For this small republic of 4.5 million people, formulation of security policy was a challenging task. Kyrgyzstan has no economic potential of building up an effective military capacity. Kyrgyzstan has no common boundaries with Russia, but it borders with Tajikistan (870 km of common boundaries), which has been in the state of civil war and mass unrest for the last 8 years, and which is stuffed with weapons and illicit drugs. Kyrgyzstan also shares borders with China (858 km of common borders) and has some territory disputes with it. There is also serious knot of contradictions at south-west borders of the republic (Fergana valley), such as unresolved territorial claims and community disputes with Tajikistan.

President Akayev of Kyrgyzstan was the first among the CARs leaders to realise that democratic reforms were the only way to promote credibility of his republic in the international arena. In his foreign policy, he continuously supported idea of the integration within the CIS and the Central Asian region with emphasis on conflict-resolution and economic co-operation. The republic's policy-makers tried to promote democratic reforms to improve the inter-ethnic relations between major ethnic groups affected by bloody conflicts in the summer 1990 and the following unrest spread almost all over the republic.

Prospects of economic development in Kyrgyzstan are seriously undermined by difficult economic situation and existing economic structure, because the republic has almost no gas and oil reserves and its industrial and agricultural sectors are equipped with outdated technologies and need huge investments to make them competitive. The crucial issue was a need to halt the economic decline of this mountainous republic, where economy declined by almost 45 per cent from 1989 to 1990. There is some prospect of positive economic development if the republic attracts foreign investments in developing its natural resources (gold, antimony, uranium oxide and others), and in the hydroelectric energy sector. In his economic policy, the President steadily followed prescriptions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in reforming the country's economic system.

Throughout the 1990s, resolving of the economic problems and of the rise of social and political unrest continued to be one of the highest priorities for the policy-makers in Kyrgyzstan. Although Kyrgyzstan received the highest financial assistance per capita of any former Soviet republic, this could not stop the tremendous decline in standards of living. Moreover, the political unrest in neighbouring Tajikistan constantly threatened Kyrgyzstan's stability by the flow of thousands of refugees, weapons and drugs.

3.3. Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan is a potential regional superpower for several reasons. It is the largest republic of the region in terms of its population; it has substantial economic potential; it is the only country in the region, which has build up strong military capacity, and its strategic position is advanced by its geographical location in the centre of the region. The republic has minor territorial disputes with its neighbours. The dispute, however, is especially complex in its relations with Tajikistan, because of a large Tajik community in Uzbekistan and territorial claims of radical Tajik nationalists in Tajikistan. Uzbekistan's elite perceived civil wars in both Tajikistan and Afghanistan as a serious threat to their security and development with which Uzbekistan shares 1,616 km and 137 km of common boundaries respectively. Additionally, there is a problem with religious fundamentalism, because radical Islamic political groups have challenged the legitimacy of present government, and their actions have undermined cohesiveness of the political regime.

The republic is potentially rich in natural resources (oil, gas, gold and others), but tied by a large uncompetitive agricultural sector that was for a long time narrowly oriented towards the shrinking Russian market. The economic and social problems of the quickly growing population of the republic may lead to social unrest, which in turn may become a serious threat to stability in the republic in the future.

As a cornerstone of the country's foreign policy, Karimov promoted an idea of Uzbekistan to become a strong regional power and promised that under his leadership the country would become a 'new economic tiger'. He also emphasised the need to create the security co-operation framework for the Central Asian republics in co-operation with various international organisations, but not individual states, in order to develop 'indivisible security and means for it achievement'.

Karimov was the first among the CARs leaders who widely applied the idea of 'stability at any cost' in practice. He rejected any radical political or economic reforms and declared its "own way of renovation and progress" targeted at building of a "socially oriented market economy through gradual changes". Karimov was able to strengthen his credibility by halting the social unrest and decline of standards of living among the rapidly growing population. In internal political arena, he emphasised strengthening the state executive power and a cautious approach to democracy. He justified his approach to political reforms by declaring: "Without strong executive power even decisions taken in the most democratic manner can be jeopardised".

During the first stage of independence, Uzbekistan was able to maintain relative economic stability and to halt economic decline, although the country was reluctant to implement radical economic and political transformation as its neighbouring Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan did. Uzbekistan could not prevent the fast decline in standards of living. Moreover, political unrest in neighbouring Tajikistan and Afghanistan have been threatening the very basis of Uzbekistan's security by the flow of refugees, weapons and drugs. Additionally, it is believed that the local political opposition is getting some external support from some other countries through Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

Conclusion: Implication for the CARs Foreign Policies

The post-Soviet demonstrated that the historical and geopolitical settings and political environment both inside and outside the region still plays important role for Central Asian Republics. Practically all of the Central Asian republics, with exception of Tajikistan, were able to preserve their political and territorial integrity and conduct a relatively steady transformation of their national institutions. Despite all existing difficulties in social, political, and economic environment, the CARs were able to implement a wide range of political reforms and to transform their economic systems towards relatively open, stable and market oriented environment.
Despite economic rationality and considerable efforts by the CARs, they not only failed to create any viable integrational or co-operative grouping, but also could not avoid ' balkanisation' of the regional economy and trade wars between them. These three republics, which from the outset have been committed to the regional integration through the Central Asian Union (CAU), are different in their ways of transforming the state institutions and in their intellectual and socio-political environment. Additionally, since Uzbekistan joined the GUAM, these states started to move in different direction in their foreign policy orientations. In spite of expectations about the CARs' deeper involvement in the south and south-west regional politics and groupings (because of their cultural, religious and historical ties), the CARs leaders did not show cohesive movement to emphasise this direction in their foreign policy. In fact, the CARs are in favour of developing a multilateral security system that with the OSCE, NATO's Partnership for Peace and the USA. The 1997 military exercise, involving the military from the USA, Turkey and the CARs, with participation of Russia, may be the first step towards creation of such a system, pointing a way to future development of security and military co-operation in Central Asia.

The post-Soviet development disproved the fears of the military threat from neighbouring countries, including China. Research conducted in 1997 shows that CARs leaders' perceive that the external threat to the security and stability of the region was most unlikely (with a partial exception of Uzbekistan that takes external threats and the possibility of complication of relations with Afghanistan quite seriously due to the civil wars in Tajikistan and Afghanistan). According to the experts, the major threat to the stability and security in the region originated from the internal sources.

The economic dimension of the development and the national security became absolutely central for the CARs. Although the former Soviet elites remained in power in these states and they were able to preserve political stability and avoid conflicts, they could not reverse transitional recession and economic decline. In such difficult economic environment, their survival very much depends on their ability to halt further economic deterioration and maintain the economic development and growth. Stable development in the region very much depended on success of the large-scale economic transition from centralised Soviet planned economy to market driven economy. As a whole, the CARs foreign policy is very complex. It depends on a number of internal and external factors, which restrain these countries from unpredictable steps in their domestic and foreign policies. Their national interests, not foreign actors started to determine their foreign policy outlooks. They realistically identify their problems in dealing with post-Soviet domestic and international environment and prove their strong pro-western foreign policy orientation. If the CARs foreign and domestic policy reflects these realities, it gives hope that the republics will continue their transformation, and they will strengthen the security and co-operation in the region.

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2 He has no publications on Soviet and post-Soviet foreign policy, political and economic reforms in various Kazakhstani, Russian and international academic journals. Most recent articles has been published in International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, Central Asian Survey, Post-Communist Economies, MEIMO and some other journals.

3 See among recent publications:

4 This study was limited to three republics of the CAR because of the following reasons: they have been playing very active in the regional arena; they have founded and joined the Central Asian Union and Central Asian Economic Union. Since Tajikistan has been engaged in the Civil War and Turkmenistan has been promoting isolationism and 'neutrality' policy throughout the 1990s, these two republics were excluded from the study.


7 These ethnic groups included Turks, Crimean Tatars, Chechens, as well as the Germans, Japanese, etc. Some of them left the region soon after the end of World War II, but others remain there until now.

8 At this stage, the author does not have the results of the population Census of 1999, by preliminary reports indicate that there is a strong trend towards decline of the ethnic minorities in the CARs.

9 Razvitiye mezhdionalnych otoshennih v novyh neizvishykh gosudarstvakh Tsentralnoy Azii (Bishkek: Illim, 1995).

10 It is important to note that this ethnic pattern has been formed as recently as the last fifty years of the Soviet system. It is steadily changing as a result of the high birth rate among some of the ethnic groups and recent wave of emigration of the Slavic population. If the scale of emigration of the Slavic population at the rate between 5 to 10% a year in the first half of the 1990s, will remain the same during next decade, however, the CARs may lose highly qualified labor, but they will become ethnically more homogenous republics.


18 For an attempt to assess links between political culture and historical legacy, and foreign policy see: R. Achylova, 'Political Culture and Foreign Policy in Kyrgyzstan', In: Political Culture and Civil Society in Russia and the New states of Eurasia (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), pp. 318-336.
22 N. A. Nazarbayev, 'Strategiya stanovleniya i razvitiya Kazakhstana kak suverennogo gosudarstva, Kazakhstanskaya Pravda (16 May, 1992), pp. 11-12.
24 N. A Nazarbayev, 'Strategiya stanovleniya i razvitiya Kazakhstana kak suverennogo gosudarstva', Kazakhstanskaya Pravda (16 May, 1992), pp. 4-10.
25 Ibid., pp. 8-9.
26 In 1997, a group of high ranked Kazakhstan's administrators and experts spent several months in Malaysia studying the so-called 'Malaysian economic miracle' and trying to re-approach the 'Malaysian model' in Kazakhstan. Finally, in October 1997 it came out as Kazakhstan's long term strategic vision 'Kazakhstan - 2030: Prosperity, Security and Welfare improvements for all Kazakhstane'. See: Kazakhstanskaya Pravda. (11 October, 1997).
32 Here, the author used a copy of the report obtained from Press-office of the presidential administration: A. Akayev, 'O strategii Sotsialno-ekonomicheskogo razvitiya Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki i neotlozhnykh deistviyah. (Bishkek, October-November 1993).
33 Interview with Askar Akayev, Los Angeles Times (07 September, 1997).
34 See: Speech by the President Islam Karimov in: Tashkentskaya Pravda (09 July, 1994).
37 Ibid., pp. 38-57.
38 Ibid., p. 15.
39 See also view on this issue: M. Olcott, 'The Asian Interior: The Myth of "Tsentralnaia Azia"', Orbis, Vol 38, No 4 (Fall 1994).
40 The Central Asian Post (Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 27 Nov 1997).