

Beyond borders: Navigating non-traditional security challenges in Central Asia

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Abstract

Since the end of the Cold War, non-traditional security threats have been a significant concern for five post-communist Central Asian powers, namely Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan. Security strategy for Central Asian powers remains predominantly entrenched in hard or military-oriented security. However, the contemporary challenges to regional security in Central Asia are related to human security stemming from the growth of transnational criminal groups, illegal immigration, water security, climate change, and others. Determining how non-traditional threats have impacted regional stability in Central Asia is, thus, the primary objective of this research. The descriptive method, a prominent social research method, sheds light on the recurrent pattern and meaning of complex security issues affecting CARs. The data is collected both from primary and secondary sources such as government reports, e-resources, news articles, journal articles, and others, to facilitate a deeper understanding of the different dimensions of security issues. By juxtaposing both data, this article highlights the interlink between traditional and non-traditional security challenges. The findings of this study suggest that Central Asian republics are required to become more resilient to shocks from the inside and avoid state failure. Sustainable development strategies must be embraced by governments with support from major powers such as Russia, China, and the US to lessen the political unrest, violence, and conflicts.

Keywords: climate change; human and drug trafficking; Central Asia; landlocked; non-traditional security

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Introduction

The Central Asia Region, or CAR, consists of five post-communist countries: Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan. The nations of Central Asia are being severely impacted by non-traditional threats. The nature and objectives of conflicts in the CAR are diverse, ranging from conflicts over border disputes, political revolutions, violent labor unrest, and inter-ethnic violence (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute [SIPRI], n.d.). With the growth of transnational extremist networks and the withdrawal of the NATO-led international coalition from Afghanistan, the security situation in Central Asia is even more appealing and requires urgent support from both civilian governments and the international community (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute [SIPRI], n.d.).

Like other post-communist states, with the fall of the mighty Soviet empire and the creation of newly independent states, the Central Asian powers have focused on ensuring economic growth. Protecting territorial integrity and revitalizing domestic economic sectors have been the primary motivations of the post-communist states. Thus, the entire spectrum of securitization in the CAR in the first half of the twenty-first century revolves around hard or military-oriented security. The contemporary challenges to regional security in Central Asia, however, stem mainly from the drug trade with Afghanistan. The growth of transnational criminal groups, illegal immigration, the underdeveloped inter-state discourse, and the lack of mutual understanding create a complex security scenario in Central Asia (Somzhurek, Yessengaliyeva, Medeubayeva, & Makangali,



2018). Many of these issues are related to human security. Lack of access to land and water supplies and unresolved border issues have led to mistrust, hostility, and confrontations in the CAR region (Somzhurek et al., 2018).

The CAR's vulnerability to external challenges, despite thirty years of independence, is not attributed to a traditional, military-led approach, as many of these challenges are transnational and unconventional. Dealing with non-traditional security (hereafter NTS) requires a strategy different from traditional security because NTS focuses on people rather than threats. NTS framework requires international, people-centered, multisectoral, and comprehensive (Yangot, 2021). People-based solutions recognize that addressing individual concerns like health may have long-lasting consequences and hence target issues rather than threats (Yangot, 2021). Dealing with non-traditional security challenges requires effective cooperation, collaboration, and communication across national boundaries. However, security concerns in the CAR are linked to and often cause public grievances that lead to protests, which are often met with violent responses. With legitimate concerns often disregarded and blamed on foreign interests, there is a growing lack of trust in public officials and institutions (Jones & Rakhimshoeva, 2023).

Therefore, the main goal of this study is to get a deeper understanding of non-traditional challenges and their impact on Central Asia's perceived regional security architecture. The findings from this study highlight that, like other post-communist nations, Central Asian republics also lack the adequate infrastructure needed to address these security risks on a case-by-case basis. The Shanghai Cooperation and other global and regional organizations, together with diplomatic involvement, can help Central Asian states with small and weak economies combat non-traditional security concerns. The Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan have hydropower; Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have flexible fossil fuels; and trading between countries with complementary energy resources can yield tremendous benefits in the form of renewable energy. The region is distinct in that its water, energy, and land systems are intricately linked, necessitating the coordinated use of transboundary water resources (World Bank Group, 2023).

Methods

A hotbed of geopolitical competition between the US, China, and Russia, Central Asia witnesses various security issues that go beyond conventional military threats and are frequently disregarded. The neglect of non-traditional security threats has led to a catastrophe that has affected not only the domestic economy but also the peace and stability of the Central Asian region. The important aspect of this study is to uncover the pertinent nontraditional security issues of Central Asian Republics. In this aspect, the trajectory, current existing policies, and actions of the Central Asian states can help us to explore the possibilities of multilateral and unilateral strategies required to overcome such challenges. Hence, a comprehensive understanding of the available sources is required to consider both the theoretical and practical feasibility of conducting the study.

The descriptive method, a prominent social research method, sheds light on the recurrent pattern and meaning of complex security issues affecting CARs. To facilitate a deeper understanding of different dimensions of security issues, the data is collected both from primary and secondary sources such as government report, e-resources, news articles, journal articles, and others. By juxtaposing both data, this article highlights the interlink between traditional and nontraditional security challenges.

Results and Discussion

Exploring the theoretical landscape of non-traditional security

The concept of security has undergone significant and transformative changes in recent years. The traditional Westphalian model of security emphasizes state and national security, placing

obligations on states to ensure territorial integrity, autonomy, and domestic political order from other states (Lahiry, 2020). However, the traditional military-centric focus on security is no longer sufficient to explain the nuances of global politics. The fall of the Soviet Union and the commencement of globalization have led to a broader perspective of security that includes non-traditional dangers in security studies. However, the complex and multidimensional nature of non-traditional security makes it difficult to define. Since there is disagreement over which issues should be classified as non-traditional threats, the National Threat Scale framework aids in the identification and classification of threats and concerns that come under this category (Caballero-Anthony, 2016). According to the National Threat Scale framework, such problems are frequently characterized, and they all have non-military roots, human-caused disruptions, hard-to-reverse effects, insufficient governmental responses, an emphasis on people's survival, and others (Caballero-Anthony, 2016).

In academic discourse, political, economic, sociological, and ecological security are the four additional areas that Barry Buzan added to the security agenda in his 1983 book *People, States, and Fear* (Biba, 2016). This expansion sparked conversations about institutions other than the government, particularly the idea of human security (Biba, 2016). The idea of security shifted from the state to the individual, as noted in the United Nations Development Programme's 1994 Human Development Report. The report identified seven dimensions of human security: political, social, environmental, health, food, and personal security (Biba, 2016). Human security is a multifaceted crisis that impacts and redefines the meaning of security. Our conception of security has been radically altered by globalization. In terms of security, it contends that three major consequences of globalization are the rise of identity, diversity of dangers, and non-physical security (Cha, 2000). In addition to making conventional approaches to strategic thinking and rational deterrence less and less applicable, globalization forces the consideration of new combat strategies (Cha, 2000). Therefore, traditional state-based, military conceptions of national security alone are unable to cope with and mitigate such transregional and transnational challenges (Masys, 2021).

Traditionally, security has been explained in geopolitical terms. However, non-traditional security threats (NTS), such as financial instability, cyberattacks, environmental degradation, drug trafficking, nuclear proliferation, new terrorism, and others, are raising doubts about the security framework (Wang, 2004). Governments, particularly those in small states, need more expertise or infrastructure to identify and address these dangers. Such hazards have unprecedented effects on both domestic and global politics (Wang, 2004).

Although the distinction between conventional and non-traditional security may appear arbitrary, dealing with them necessitates different approaches and techniques. Non-traditional security is essentially concerned with issues of survival and well-being of the population (Kim & Blank, 2012). At its core, Non-Traditional Security (NTS) deals with non-military, transnational concerns that go beyond state boundaries and traditional military concepts.

This article is thus an attempt to comprehend and reveal the regional security problems in Central Asia. Non-traditional security issues, such as environmental security and drug trafficking, have been given special focus because of their profound impacts on the politics, society, and economy of Central Asia. However, it should be highlighted that many of the challenges that are perceived as "new" security risks are not, in fact, new; rather, they have just lately started to be observed and managed (Hameiri & Jones, 2013). Non-Traditional Security goes beyond the conventional realist military-centric understanding of security; instead, the Non-Traditional Security (NTS) framework draws on a broad corpus of constructivist and poststructuralist literature to investigate and problematize the idea of security. NTS focuses on the creative agency of policy elites, which provides a more persuasive account of how new challenges are introduced to the security agenda (Hameiri & Jones, 2013).

Before examining the security conundrum in Central Asia, it is important to consider the importance of CAR in the global political landscape. Until the 14th century (Timurid Period), Central Asia dominated the entire Eurasian region (Stobdan, 2004). However, as colonial powers

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expanded and new maritime powers such as Britain emerged, Central Asia's importance declined, and it was pushed to the margins of global affairs (Stobdan, 2004). With the collapse of the USSR, Central Asia once again found itself at the center of world affairs, used as a pawn in the new great game.

Although delineating the states in Central Asia is difficult, the Central Asian region includes the five former Soviet nations of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. In recent years, scholars and policymakers have adopted the term "Greater Central Asia," which includes all of Afghanistan and the Western Chinese Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Province, Mongolia, in addition to those five states.

Similarly, in the late 1980s, there was a surge of discussion on whether Central Asia was a region. The deteriorating political and economic relations inside the Soviet Union, as well as the precarious sovereignty of post-Soviet nations, have had an impact on the regionalization of Central Asia (Burnashev, 2015). The first goal was to maintain commercial ties and political backing by creating a commonwealth of union republics (Burnashev, 2015). However, in the early 1990s, there were attempts to solve economic concerns and build mutually beneficial regional cooperation. A factor in this regionalization was mutual political support and economic ties. Nevertheless, the absence of rivals and allies among Central Asian nations hinders regional structuring tendencies, and concepts like pluralistic security communities, security regimes, and conflict creation are meaningless (Burnashev, 2015). Furthermore, it is difficult to see Central Asia as a security complex given the globalization and apparent connections to Afghanistan of emerging security threats like terrorism, religious extremism, and illegal drug trafficking (Burnashev, 2015).

Non-traditional threats have increasingly come into focus in Central Asia. Because the Central Asian countries are landlocked and closely linked, non-traditional risks are not only expanding quickly but also posing a threat to people's safety and existence (Kim & Blank, 2012). Our main concerns when talking about the Central Asian region are the new great game of energy security and traditional security (Geo-Strategic implications). However, conventional and non-traditional security threats are equally important. The Central Asian Region is greatly impacted by water security, environmental concerns, climate change, and international drug trafficking. Furthermore, compared to other areas, non-traditional security problems are more common in Central Asia due to its landlocked location and high immigration rate. They become much more serious and intense as a result.

In addition to being vast and diverse, Central Asia's security problems are further exacerbated by the region's recent formation and the region's transition from communism to democracy. Illicit trade, narcoterrorism, and other threats to security are on the rise since the region has been plagued by political instability, ethnic strife, and other security challenges. In order to comprehend the explanations for the current development and growing prominence of these non-traditional security concerns, we must first grasp the historical context of the region. That will make it easier for us to comprehend how the politics, society, and economy of the area amalgamate to produce these intricate security issues.

Religions have always had an enormous influence on Central Asia. At the end of the Cold War, the West, headed by NATO and backed by the US, took control of this mostly Muslim region, but they utterly failed to acknowledge the political role that Islam played in the CAR. The Central Asian countries viewed the US advocacy of Western values as an assault on their faith. As a result, countries in Central Asia decided to take charge and take all necessary precautions to protect their religious beliefs (Joshi, 2010). Several non-state actors, such as terrorist groups, took over the region following the end of the Cold War, often posing problems for the civilian government.

The profound threat to the security and stability of Central Asia is the presence of terrorist groups with extensive networks, including the Taliban and Al Qaeda (Joshi, 2010). Understanding the complex non-traditional risks in Central Asia's post-Cold War environment now depends upon this development. While most of these extreme organizations may use conventional strategies to

destabilize the region, they also use unconventional sources of means, including energy, narcotics, and other substances. Minerals and other resources are abundant in Central Asia, particularly in the Caspian region, and over time, state and non-state actors have vied for control of these vital resources. Hence, energy resources have become the focus of several terrorist groups seeking financial support, which has had a major impact on the security situation in Central Asia. The proliferation of drugs and narcoterrorism is another issue with non-traditional origins. With the USSR's military involvement in Afghanistan and the eventual demise of the USSR, the security environment in the region changed significantly. Unstable political and economic systems have forced most of the Central Asian states to turn to drugs and narcotics to revive their economies. Until recently, various terrorist groups have received substantial financial support and drug supplies from the Golden Crescent of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. This recurrent pattern of events highlights the importance of non-traditional security concerns in the overall security framework of Central Asia. Terrorism is a problem for several Central Asian republics, including Uzbekistan's Islamic Movement, which has ties to the Taliban in Afghanistan. After the mid-1990s, Central Asian governments have exhibited a favorable disposition towards the US objective of eliminating terrorism. In an effort to find a peaceful end to the Afghan civil war, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan have joined the "6+2" initiative, which is supported by the UN (Hill, 2001).

Dilemma of Central Asia - addressing the threat of drug trafficking and narcotics

Drug trafficking and narcotics pose a threat to the security of every state in the Central Asian region. In the post-communist period of Central Asia, non-traditional security challenges add an extra dimension to traditional concerns. For all five Central Asian republics, drugs represent a significant destabilizing factor and security concern, intertwined with shared worries about terrorism, ethnic strife, illicit weaponry production, and black markets (Joshi, 2010). Drug production and trafficking along the Golden Crescent route has increased over time.

Over the last two decades, there has been a significant increase in drug trafficking from Afghanistan to Central Asia, resulting in the nation providing three-fourths of the world's heroin. These narcotics products are primarily exported to Europe and Russia (Lubin, 2001). Narcotics and illegal substances are a significant source of income for terrorist and extremist groups. The Taliban has taxed opium production and sale, earning between \$10 million and \$75 million annually (Lubin, 2001). These proceeds are used to support terrorist operations and hostilities against resistance troops. Many Afghans and Central Asians rely on growing opium poppies for survival. Western governments and donors have allocated millions of dollars to start drug education programs, establish interdiction institutions, and reduce heroin and opium production in Afghanistan (Lubin, 2001).

However, despite increased opium production in Afghanistan, state collaboration in the region has resulted in a decline in the seizures of cannabis and opiates from Afghanistan in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. With nearly 3.1 tons of drugs captured in only nine months in 2021, Kyrgyzstan's anti-drug-trafficking agency claimed bigger yearly drug seizures than Tajikistan (Marat & Botoeva, 2022). Although Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan record greater seizure rates, it is possible because drug traffickers do not want law enforcement to notice them (Marat & Botoeva, 2022). Civilian Governments in CAR are aware of this, but they have not been able to put a stop to the illegal drug trade, which smuggles drugs from Afghanistan to distribute in Central Asian and European Markets. At the same time, criminal groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) have used terrorism to maintain and secure drug transit routes to benefit financially from the drug trade (Rashid, 2002). The Taliban initially viewed drugs as anti-Islamic, but after 9/11, they started supporting its production to finance their operations. The economic and socio-political consequences of illicit drug trafficking are more significant and worrisome (Swanström, 2010). As most of these Central Asian states have weak economic and political infrastructure, this drug trade is not only threatening regional security but also affecting the conventional national interests of the states concerned.

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It is anticipated that drug trafficking in Central Asia will persist due to poverty and corruption in the bureaucracy (Peyrouse, 2017). Central Asia encounters several obstacles to drug transit and insurgent activities, with criminal groups utilizing new loopholes to avoid law enforcement, border control, and counterterrorism initiatives. International initiatives, mostly from the United States and Russia, have marginally increased the law enforcement and technology capabilities of security agencies. However, there is minimal cooperation among these agencies inside each state. The presence of state entities also reduces their willingness to address the link. The problem of drug trafficking in Central Asia necessitates collaborative national and international initiatives. The Regional Office for Central Asia (ROCA) is providing technical assistance in law enforcement under Sub-programme 1 of the UNODC Programme for Central Asia, focusing on establishing new structures, enhancing capacity, and fostering cooperation related to transnational organized crime, illicit drug trafficking, and preventing terrorism (UNODC Regional Office for Central Asia, 2024). Three projects - KGZ/K50, project H03, and project TKM/X57 - are being implemented to support the creation and growth of national organizations in Central Asia. Project KGZ/K50 and Project H03 aim to regulate illegal drug situations in the Kyrgyz Republic and enhance international cooperation in Tajikistan (UNODC Regional Office for Central Asia, 2024).

Open trade policies and collaboration of Central Asian states in borders may have some advantages, but combating poverty and corruption is the real issue. Similarly, the role of Central Asian states to combat illicit drug trafficking is a serious issue. Marat and Botoeva (2022), in their remarkable study, highlight the state-crime relationships in the Central Asian region. According to Marat and Botoeva (2022), state structures, such as border guards and the police, are involved in organized crime. Particularly in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, state institutions like border guards and police are implicated in organized crime. Police in Kazakhstan are involved in criminal behavior while also providing protection to drug dealers. Border guards control the routes used by drug traffickers in Kyrgyzstan, and political figures and local police agencies are also engaged. Higher-ranked authorities in Tajikistan are involved in illicit companies, including members of the president's family and intelligence personnel (Marat & Botoeva, 2022). Drug trafficking is supported by the state and is carried out in Uzbekistan by established criminal organizations. Afghan heroin is smuggled into Tajikistan and Uzbekistan by means of national airline operators and railways (Marat & Botoeva, 2022).

The Central Asian states have begun introducing new measures to combat the growing drug trade, with Tajikistan requesting an independent agency from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Fazl-e-Haider, 2024). Uzbekistan has improved its capabilities to stem drug flow, while Kyrgyzstan seized 10 tons of drugs during a sting operation in November and December 2020 (Fazl-e-Haider, 2024). However, underpaid and corrupt civil servants in Turkmenistan have failed to reduce drug trafficking significantly (Fazl-e-Haider, 2024). Narcotrafficking in Central Asia has worsened since the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan in 2021. Central Asian governments need a joint regional response and to invest more in capacity-building for border forces (Fazl-e-Haider, 2024). Authorities may need to work closer together to find and destroy links between extremist groups and drug traffickers. The ability of foreign aid, especially from China's OBOR initiative and the EEU, to provide socioeconomic advantages and eventually lessen drug trafficking is critical, as is the political resolve of Central Asian governments to confront corruption and enact reforms (Peyrouse, 2017). More open trade agreements between and among Central Asian republics may help the region's economy grow, create jobs, and have fewer social issues.

Environmental security and climate change in Central Asia: A new agenda of securitization

Central Asia is confronted with a falling economy, refugee crisis, energy, water, and other security challenges. However, the mainstream discourse on security tends to focus on military and geostrategic challenges to the state. "Softer" issues such as the environment, trade, transnational crime, human security, and others are not considered to be potential security threats (Buzan, Wæver, & De Wilde, 1998). However, such softer concerns have not only become more pervasive

in recent decades but also pose an existential threat to nations and communities alike. China and Russia, in the post-Soviet period, started augmenting their power in CAR, thus affecting the hegemonic position of the United States. None of them, however, has anticipated the increased security challenges posed by the region's growing environmental problems and climate change.

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have made enormous strides in poverty alleviation and economic growth. However, the extraction of oil and gas depletes these countries' natural capital. Land use practices in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are unsustainable, resulting in soil erosion, water depletion, and reduced carbon sequestration capability (World Bank Group, 2021). The arid, desert-like landscape also poses a threat to transboundary water sources. Climate change exacerbates environmental restrictions such as deforestation in mountainous areas, soil erosion, changing water flows because of the drying Aral Sea, and resource-intensive industry because of urban pollution (World Bank Group, 2021).

Recently, the CAR has been experiencing hot, muggy weather. In 2019, temperatures as high as forty-four degrees Celsius were recorded in Tajikistan, southern Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Temperatures in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan hit 45 degrees Celsius (Sharifzoda, 2019). Reduced productivity and slower regional economic growth are the results of increased heat. The ramifications of worldwide climate change are as serious for states in Central Asia. These countries are all susceptible to the effects of climate change and extreme weather, even if their carbon footprints are the lowest. The CAR is predicted to have a three-to-five-degree Celsius increase in temperature during the next ten years. Such droughts have the potential to destroy a large percentage of the crops in Central Asia because the region is landlocked and has few productive agricultural soils. The region's destroyed food crops are a major cause of poverty, unequal family income distribution, and, most crucially, food insecurity. The economies of several of these Central Asian nations—especially Tajikistan and Uzbekistan—are already severely depressed and undernourished; the effects of climate change will only make matters worse.

Central Asia, unlike many other regions, lacks fresh water sources, and because of climate change, the rate of water evaporation increases significantly, affecting agriculture the most. Over 50% of Kazakhstan's and Uzbekistan's agricultural land has turned saline, and the remaining portions of the Aral Sea's aquatic life are significantly impacted by growing salt concentrations in the water (Sharifzoda, 2019). Regarding water supplies, it is anticipated that the Amu Dary, one of the two major rivers in the area, would have forty percent less water due to rising temperatures and the quicker melting of Central Asian glaciers. Central Asian governments fought each other for control of resources, including water, in the immediate wake of the USSR's collapse. Regarding these issues, there are very few regional mechanisms or security frameworks (Kim & Blank, 2012). Although the primary purpose of many regional institutions is economic, and they do not have a direct defined security role; by promoting the integration of their members, regional groupings subtly support stability, avoid conflicts, and ensure the collective viability of their communities (Bailes & Cottey, 2006). In this respect, the role of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is noteworthy. Although the CSTO is a regional alliance in Eurasia comprised of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, and Tajikistan, it is military in nature. Collective Security Treaty, which has been seen as an instrument for Moscow to project dominance throughout post-Soviet Eurasia (Khamidov, 2023).

China's influence in Central Asia has grown significantly since the post-Soviet period, but its involvement in water management is minimal (Soboleva & Krivokhizh, 2021). China has recently formalized its connection with Kazakhstan, which shares 24 rivers. China does not provide financial support or initiative sponsorship to remain impartial in cross-border water disputes among Central Asian states (Soboleva & Krivokhizh, 2021). Instead, China focuses on financing hydropower projects rather than establishing an institutional framework for cooperation and information sharing (Soboleva & Krivokhizh, 2021). Central Asian republics may diversify their partners to encourage regional hydropower development or resolve water issues, but this may deprive them of a potent domestic political resource. China's investment in Central Asian hydro projects may have a long-term beneficial effect on the relationship, as it is not using its influence

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to encourage collaboration on water management among Central Asian nations (Soboleva & Krivokhizh, 2021).

The World Economic Program has proposed four policies to tackle climate change in Central Asia (World Economic Forum & Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2019). The first is to develop open-access data to monitor and manage climate-related security risks. The second is to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of cooperative frameworks for early warning and disaster relief. The third is to provide technical assistance for low-carbon resilient infrastructure development and social transition policy. The fourth is to facilitate a regional climate change dialogue involving governments, local governments, investors, international organizations, and civil society to build support for climate mitigation, adaptation, and security management strategies (World Economic Forum & Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2019).

Central Asian security at stake: Implications of non-traditional threats on regional security

The majority of people in Central Asia live in rural areas and are mostly dependent on crops and agricultural products for their livelihood (Hamidov, Helming, & Balla, 2016). According to Lerman and Stanchin (2006), agriculture is a crucial industry in the Central Asian Republic (CAR), contributing over 25% of the country's GDP and over 45% of the total employment throughout the five states put together. There are serious obstacles to agricultural output due to climate change and decreased water availability, which is having an impact on both domestic and national economic growth. However, for a very long time, the civilian administrations of the Central Asian countries have disregarded these delicate matters and only considered security from a military perspective. Natural disasters have left states unable to respond effectively, which has increased unemployment, decreased production, and created instability within the country. Another effect of this indifference is the emergence of terrorist organizations and their growing involvement in the CAR.

Central Asian states have been unable to create efficient solutions to natural catastrophes, which has led to a rise in unemployment, a fall in productivity, and other issues. The growth of terrorist groups active in Central Asia is another outcome of this apathy. Youth from Central Asia and other marginalized and vulnerable populations gravitate to these extreme organizations to survive, endangering national security. Like this, natural resources like water have lately grown so contentious in Central Asia that full-scale conflict may break out shortly. The building of dams in the area has sparked a power struggle between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The main point of contention is Uzbekistan's opposition to Tajikistan's Rogun dam (Menga & Mirumachi, 2016). There are several water difficulties between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan is concerned about the possible effects of this development on its cotton crops and water supplies (Menga & Mirumachi, 2016). Central Asia runs the possibility of seeing a revival of conflicts between the upstream republics of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and their considerably stronger downstream neighbors, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, in the absence of adequate policies and efficient dispute settlement (Sharifzoda, 2019).

Charting the way forward: Probable solutions and possible challenges

The preceding discourse highlights the significance of non-traditional security concerns in Central Asia in addition to traditional security hazards. Thus, it is imperative that the Central Asian nations, in conjunction with all significant foreign players such as China, Russia, and the United States, implement policies that address both conventional and unconventional threats. The CAR's security challenges require cooperation between non-state actors and government officials. Given the poor and unstable economies of Central Asian republics, external assistance will be necessary to assist Central Asian governments in better fighting terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking, and smuggling. At the same time, it is more crucial than ever to make Central Asian republics more resilient to shocks from the inside as well as to avoid failure of the state. Until now, governments in Central Asia have either disregarded or paid less attention to a range of non-traditional security risks (Sharifzoda, 2019). The USSR overused its natural resources to increase output and strengthen its economy during the communist period. They were unaware of the risks associated

with this development and did not have the necessary laws and regulations in place to lessen its negative impacts. In a similar vein, the governments of post-Soviet Central Asia have mostly disregarded or considered building strong institutional and technological frameworks to counter such non-traditional challenges. In the face of this difficult scenario, the governments of Central Asia, as well as Russia, China, and the US, must embrace sustainable development strategies to lessen political unrest, violence, and conflicts while preserving the interests of the major powers in the area. Thus, the mere differentiation between military and non-military threats is becoming less relevant and compromises the significance of the interaction between social, political, and economic factors and how it affects regional security as a whole. The state continues to be the fundamental reference object of security, notwithstanding this expanding concept of security (Waltz, 2011).

Cooperation on non-traditional issues can only last so long before collapsing due to a combination of weakening national interests and strategic concerns. However, there is greater contact and opportunity for Central Asian governments to engage and reflect on non-traditional challenges with the advent of globalization and the technological revolution. It is also anticipated that non-state players, such as volunteer groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), would be crucial in reducing non-military security risks. Additionally, because new participants have presented new concerns, the necessity for collaboration has increased (Swanström, 2002). The distinction between conventional and non-conventional security threats has become less relevant with the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, even though non-conventional threats have always posed a significant threat to Central Asia. Concerns about health and social security (AIDS, poverty, drug misuse) and environmental degradation (Aral Sea) are just as significant in the contemporary setting as military security risks (Swanström, 2010). In the near future, regional alliances like the Shanghai Cooperation, as well as global institutions like the World Bank, United Nations, and World Trade Organization, are anticipated to be significant players in this region.

Conclusion

The current environment makes it imperative to include non-traditional security concerns in the global security debate. In addition to expanding the extent of security cooperation in Central Asia, this will aid in reframing views of threats. For an extended period, the concept of security in Central Asia was interpreted narrowly and incompletely, meaning that the interaction between military and non-military concerns was not fully recognized. That has led to a range of traditional and non-conventional security challenges in Central Asia, making the region a battlefield for regional and global countries vying for influence. As a result, in addition to intensifying already-existing tensions, this will eventually worsen rather than lessen Central Asian instability as the nations in Central Asia lack the fundamental political, economic, and institutional frameworks and infrastructure needed to handle such complex problems. Finding the internal and external abnormalities that are producing such a complicated security scenario will be made easier with a comprehensive understanding of security. The role of major powers like China, Russia, and the United States, as well as regional powers like Japan, India, and Iran, is crucial in resolving such contagious issues in Central Asia because non-traditional threats, in contrast to conventional threats, are subtle and transnational in nature.

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