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**Fragility in Central Asia: the politics of Kyrgyzstan's and Tajikistan's securitarian instability**

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**Abstract:** *The nature of social mobilization, civil wars and terrorism dissemination in Central Asia bring a volatile characteristic to national security to the states of this region. The main scope of this article will involve the explanation of divergent types of order maintenance, relative or not, in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In Kyrgyzstan, mobilizations are complex, secessionist, borderlike and marked with ethnic ordains, although sporadic. The securitarian process in Tajikistan is derived in precarious economic development factors, political fragility, excessive corruption, cooptation of the Islamic extremism, hence of the terrorism often linked to it. Based on the precepts of neoliberal institutionalism, this article will argument that to build democratic values and promote the strengthening of national security, it is necessary to reestablish a discourse of governance towards international cooperation and institutionalization of transparency and defragmentation of the securitarian policies in these states as a tool to reduce the insecurity and vulnerability margins.*

**Keywords:** Central Asia; political fragmentation; neoliberal institutionalism; national security.

## Introduction

In the last decade many subjects were discussed on the international agenda and a highlight was the maintenance of security in Central Asia facing new challenges and the participation of new actors like the dissemination of Islam, international terrorism, competition for energy resources and peripheral social mobilizations. To analyze the relevance of new forms of cooperation between the effects of internal and external participation of new regional and international actors and the dynamics of security agents in Central Asia, it is necessary to conceptualize the spectrum of a security complex. Buzan *apud* Allison (2001) states that a security complex is:

[...] a group of states which securitization concerns of first order interconnect so close to each other that national security can't be dissociated from regional reality.

The understanding that this security process in Central Asia supports the principle of non-dissociation between national and international complex for purposes where the fragility of its structure does not allow it, it is also understood that the principles of 'friendship' and 'enmity' stipulated by Buzan, can be applied with more accuracy in this context, translated as 'partner' and 'suspect' (Allison et al, 2002). Therefore, it is possible to stipulate an area where the distinction between cooperation and securitization can be made and apply them in a volatile environment? There is room for a liberal discussion in Central Asia?

Once considering that there are Central Asian countries where the distribution of power and the population favors a more competitive force in the proportionality of security, such as Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan respectively, there is a gap in the analysis of other countries that still suffer from unevenness in containment of internal tensions, the difficulty of co-optation of foreign investment and the institutionalization of organizations and regimes that may facilitate development.

Through inferring contemporary perceptions about this theme, this essay will discuss the institutionalization of regimes, international actors and neoliberalism as being the main ingredients for dissociation of fragmentation and political stagnation in the securitarian policies of the countries in analysis: Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

At first, it will be identified how the securitarian policies of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan transformed due to recent events such as September 11 and the introduction of Islam, thus showing how external agents were participants of this process. Secondly, it will be shown as a neoliberal strategy may be a viable and feasible alternative to the containment of the insurgency and the spread of a more uniform development. The conclusion highlights the current fragility of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and lists, through recommendations, points that suggest a greater involvement of the international community and the institutionalization of regimes and how organizations contribute significantly to the further development of these countries and consequently the total situation of the *supercomplex* that is Central Asia.

### **Politics after the Soviet Union break-up and 9/11**

By analyzing the security process in Central Asia, it is necessary to bring out two historical moments that reshaped their development. Those are the breakdown of the Soviet Union (USSR) in 1991<sup>i</sup> and the terrorist initiative against the United States of America in September 11, 2001<sup>ii</sup>. The dissolution of the USSR created five independent countries, completely reconfiguring the geostrategic complex that is Central Asia today. Consequently, after two decades these countries have managed to become, in a special way, countries with unevenly divided and unprotected borders, identities to validate and economic development in constant struggle to rise. In counterpoint, they became members of the international community through the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Organization for Shanghai Cooperation (SCO), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Organization of the Collective Security Treaty (CSTO)<sup>iii</sup>. Concerning the following 09/11 securitarian policy, Afghanistan, which is the main target for Al Qaeda and contribute to the Taliban extremism, transformed Central Asia in a military route that triggered and potentiated insurgencies that could lead to conflict, and even war, since its boundaries and securitarian systems faced many challenges that turned the countries within its borders, extremely vulnerable.

Insecurity and inequality are the main categories that shape and guide bilateral and multilateral relations within the conflicts in Central Asia. Proximal causes such as ethnic discrimination, political manipulation, corruption, mismanagement of energy resources, violations of basic human rights are also

characterized as factors that fragment and destabilize the region (Nielsen, 2004: 2-3). The consequences of international interference varied from country to country, being in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, both states being socially and economically fragile and susceptible to securitarian insurgencies, the most affected by the transformations of international actions against the Central Asian complex, and also being equally and directly influenced by Russia and the USA. The hegemonic powers played a specific role in the securitization process not only in their own state essence but also participating through major economic and security organizations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and SCO.

Kyrgyzstan in particular is a country that meets the military interests of the United States, Russia and China because of its geographical position. The three countries maintain military bases and invest in strengthening its security, despite its constant attempt to keep Russian non-governmental organizations and the American military presence less prominent in his most influential and regional portion that is Bishkek, its capital<sup>iv</sup>. After the war in Afghanistan, the vulnerability and insecurity in Kyrgyzstan increased considerably, despite the efforts of the international community, through the growth of regional conflicts, ethnic disruptions and social mobilization. In Osh, a southern city in the border with Uzbekistan, the conflict of ethnic bias and lower secessionist Marxist adhesions against local residents of Uzbekistani origin, marked a period that almost resulted in a civil war between the two countries. This sense of vulnerability is considered by Allison (2002: 8-12) as one of the most dangerous for Central Asia, and this can only be controlled with the spread of

democratic ideals in favor of a perspective of trade openness and community efforts from the international cooperation in profiling schemes since realizing that Kyrgyzstan alone, is not yet able to balance a regional or international security-policy.

In the mid-1990s, Tajikistan sheltered a large Russian military base that led directly to the Afghan border. After the relentless presence of the U.S. and NATO in Afghanistan and the transformation of the security priorities of Central Asia that alternated border conflicts for insurgencies and regional mobilizations. This epicenter involved domestic rebellions that embodied matters of national security. Tajikistan is now part of the international route of drug trafficking and terrorism, a problem originated in Afghanistan, its main neighbor and despite the intense and varied attempts at containment of this practice, the insecurity generated by it has become one of the major concerns and challenges for the country. The post 11/09 transformed the politics of Tajikistan regarding its increased cooperation with NATO for Afghanistan and increased cooperation with its neighbors, especially China, Pakistan and Uzbekistan.

Thus, it is understood that the securitization process for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is a socioeconomic dichotomy, a paradox in construction and a challenge that tries to be institutionalized by states seeking to interfere directly or indirectly in the region. Aware that the instability is growing in these states and that despite efforts by the international community to curb the increasing securitarian vulnerability, could it be argued that there might be a space where a neoliberal ideology can be build in the region? Could inserting

democratic values and ideals of peace by democracy and institutional promotion of cooperation be possible even for such fragile states, and if so, this construction is really necessary?

### **Security in Central Asia: is there a window for the neoliberal discourse?**

The creation of legitimacy in a neoliberal view, the creation of legitimacy and the evaluation of state inconsistency in Central Asia can be understood in terms of Oskanian (2013: 37-46), as 'a phenomenon of inherent weakness'. The materialization of the deterioration of a democratic ideal<sup>v</sup> in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan can be explained by the following hypotheses:

- 1) Presence of repression and legitimacy of authoritarian regimes, which represents a non-spontaneous *qualis*. A democratic state should not show signs of censorship, physical repression and political and economic corruption to retain control over their society.
- 2) Corruption is a sign of rejecting the very legitimacy of the state and welfare. It is an obvious characteristic that if the state is legitimate, society will willingly obey norms and institutionalized rules as a symptomatic act of the need for democratic values, aiming for high standards. So if there is retrogression in compliance with international standards, the institutionalization of a neoliberal ideal becomes compromised, since this regulatory compliance is corrupted.
- 3) Stability in these countries will become truly compromised if its maintenance of elites in closed circles of power remain impenetrable.



The restructuring of economic integration, deterrence of protectionist measures and a smoother control of internal policies to accommodate social diseases in natural behavior, are also factors to be considered. This is because until now, no development model chosen by the countries of Central Asia has been, in its entirety, successful. Approximately 1-2% of Kyrgyzstan's population are refugees and about 80% of Tajikistan's population lives below the poverty line, an increasing number that has affected the country especially after the Civil War 1994-1997 and the Color Revolutions of 2004 (Malashenko, 2012). The deteriorating social conditions in the most marginalized countries in Central Asia creates an atmosphere of insecurity that enhance the deterioration of the state-building process, currently in-progress, fighting against the conceptualization of fragile states.

Consequently, this opens up the opportunity and especially the need for a neoliberal discourse of integration and cooperation through open markets and more commercial trade and energy resource expansion in Central Asia. With Kyrgyzstan's social fragility and the political and economic instability in Tajikistan, the need for institutionalization of systems has never been greater. Institutions would be able to coordinate the insurgency in a way that the countries themselves currently show themselves incapable, and to defray the procedures of cooperation, would also turn viable the promotion of stronger securitarian barriers.

### **The securitarian instability in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan**

In Kyrgyzstan, the domestic policy faces a dubious paradox between a promising state development and external threats to national stability, since the country is geographically, ethnically and politically divided between the north-south regions. In 2010, violence linked to ethno-nationalism (or ethnic nationalism) among the peoples of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, in the city of Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan, victimized more than 500 people; 1,900 wounded and between 50000-70000, were displaced to other peripheral regions.

These facts represent a major turnaround in foreign policy and one of the most violent conflict ever seen in the 20 year history of independent Kyrgyzstan. This model of protest and unexpected revolution can be interpreted as a product replicated in a modern context of the revolutions of 1990, also occurred in Osh, and a clear example of the null attempt by the government of Kyrgyzstan to keep its security system under control in order to avoid such tensions. Due to its internal political weakness, securitarian volatility and ethnic handcuffs, Kyrgyzstan is represented as a threat, in social and political nature to the development of Central Asia.

According to Matveeva (2011: 45-56), the reasons that accentuate the conflict and evidentiate the threats to regional and international security are:

- a. Weakening of political authority and the division of power between social and economic fragmentation - the Tulip Revolution of 2005<sup>vi</sup> (this revolution impeached former President Askar Akaev) explains about the siege of its extension as the political and business elites

- maintained relationships with certain localities that weakened the government's authority over regimes and institutions;
- b. Disrespect for human rights and weak reinforcement of regional laws. Some of those laws can also be insufficient to attend to all the necessary demands of the population, due to the authoritarian regimes and lack of representativity of its congresses.
  - c. Ethno-nationalism, under the aegis of predatory political and social elites. These elites see the state only as a tool for private enrichment (Juraev, 2010: 3-4);
  - d. An atmosphere of permissiveness or neglect, which allowed the protests to and its evolution to armed conflict to happen;
  - e. Sense of historic opportunity through accumulation of income and external investment, which seemed impossible in other contexts of political development in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan;
  - f. Fear against the current governmental system.

Instability and fragmentation in Tajikistan is a constant concern, alongside with the border conflicts, the presence of Islam and the trade routes of drugs emanating from Afghanistan<sup>vii</sup>. Formerly, it was hoped, that the fragility of these countries would put internal and external crises into account and that the international community would intervene in favor of the dissolution of these conflicts and mediate a democratic solution, through the CIS, Russia or even the EU and US. These interventions never reached cooperation heights, nor established a true, necessary bond between organizations, hegemonies and Central Asia.

As a counterpart, when dealing through international cooperation, Tajikistan is one of the countries most open and prone to firm reconciliation treaties and co-optate investments (Matveeva, 2011). International actors such as NATO and the EU invested substantially in the securitarian industry of the country, however, few results could be presented towards conflict prevention, since despite the political openness of the country, it has serious shortcomings in the distribution of international aid to fight corruption and low capacity for direct application of these investments.

The difficulties faced by Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are ablaze and it is safe to say that this should compel international actors to be more cautious and more eager to cooperate with their domestic policies. Events of mass violence are not foreseen in the near future, but these countries are still likely to transboundary conflicts and tensions between the South-North relations and regional disputes.

Due to social fragmentation, lack of democracy and inter-ethnic mobilizations, these represent, alongside a decline in economic and political development, a process to a great challenge towards a possible ideal of integration for the countries of Central Asia. Depending on this thought, it appears that the insecurity in these countries are mixed thoroughly with feelings of discontent and national stagnation, on all sides of its domains - political, economic, ethnic, religious and cultural.

In order to provide the progress and post-conflict recognition, international actors<sup>viii</sup> need to propose a stronger and more strategical

cooperation. This cooperation should target vital sectors such as energy, and stimulate a sense of perspective of economic growth, despite facing social difficulties (Matveeva, 2011). In order to reestablish a thought directed to a democratic order, trust is a necessary tool to react to political-economic-social insurgencies, whether borderly, regional or external.

The precepts of Keohane (1984) on the neoliberal institutionalism applied in the practical case of insurgencies in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, creates a divergent tone. Cooperation would also be seen as a challenge for Central Asia, such as corruption, the questioning in the induction of investments and the economic-security-insurgency are. As a branched region between sensitive borders, Central Asia positions itself strategically in a volatile battlefield. There is a clear lack of transparency in the policies of security institutionalization, such as there is a need for dialogue and establishment of basic principles of democracy. Nevertheless, in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, it becomes impossible to dissociation of Asian intercultural factors, ideals and political legacies of the former Soviet Union. It is noted that the discussion on the process of security-building in Central Asia is still newborn, just as is its construction as a geographic region.

## **Conclusion**

Stability and transformation in Central Asia are the central points of its securitarian needs. In the examples followed by Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the mobilization was used as a tool for social and structural change as a way to express their political, economic and ethnic dissuations. In the case of

Tajikistan, where the process of recovering from civil war and the establishment of terrorism and trafficking routes as new agents challenge the development of a stable and transparent security process and make the establishment of a democratic system even more complex.

In a contrast to the conflicts in the Middle East and South Asia, these processes of securitarian deconstruction and political fragmentation became convergent points that threaten not only national development but the security of Central Asia as a whole, because despite the region not being politically unified, geographically it becomes inescapable the dissemination of joint threats that interfere geopolitically in the context as a whole (Freire, 2010).

This paper is concluded, in allusion to a neoliberal perspective on the topic, by presenting the following recommendations:

- a. The poor performance of the government of Kyrgyzstan exacerbates proportionally the existing conflicts and undermines socioeconomic development. The remodeling of a state regime to a regime of greater interaction with international organizations would be an acceptable alternative to the international community in order to strengthen political governance gradually, without empowering elites and generating more imbalance between North and South. Ethnic interruptions in Kyrgyzstan are products of political mismanagement, a factor that can be reversed through increased cooperation with international actors. The World Bank, WTO and International

Monetary Fund (IMF) may play an important role to stabilize the country's finances and guide economic fronts policies against corruption, one commonly shared disease in Central Asia. There is the possibility to Kyrgyzstan to pluralize and mix its protectionism, making itself realize that institutionalizing an atmosphere of security, trust consequently generates stata confidence and stabilizes its international relationship with neuralgic zones of conflict.

- b. Tajikistan will continue to progress in terms of their cooperation with Afghanistan, China and Russia. This cooperation is positive, economic and politically. The growing interest of Tajikistan in joining other international organizations signals the need to establish a serious fight against political corruption, drug trafficking, terrorism and the accommodation of Islam. The maintenance of order in Tajikistan is more organized than in Kyrgyzstan and provides its people a sense of hope within the uncertainty, coming this to be a possibility in the long term to reduce its political and economic malfeasances.

These countries need to be encouraged by the international community, not as an act of international interference or intervention. The incentive has to be done through a coordinated cooperation with the institutionalization of principles and rules that organize and dissociate unharmonized policies and broader investment in security in order to protect the human, civil rights, and resolve disputes nonviolently, which proves that not only is there room for a neoliberal thought in Central Asia, but there is evidence of its inevitability.

Regional security is guaranteed with sensible preventive policies, incentives to encourage political stability, justifiable economic progress, social development and political growth dodging corruption. For a solid revenue based on social justice in Central Asia, transparency and openness to external policies sound like the ideal ingredient.

<sup>i</sup> When it comes to the decoupling of the Soviet Union, it should be considered that two decades have passed and they faced diverse processes of development and despite many similarities, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan absorbed divergent alternatives of state reintegration and restructuring of its economic and securitarian policies. Ethnic conflicts in Kyrgyzstan and the civil war in Tajikistan are examples of insurgencies that have emerged from the center to the periphery.

<sup>ii</sup> In citing the terrorist bombing of 11/09, we also consider the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, that in geo-strategic terms influenced the U.S foreign policy toward Central Asia and from Central Asia towards the West and that consequently resulted in positive and negative points to the development of both regions.

<sup>iii</sup> Also known as the Treaty of Tashkent.

<sup>iv</sup> In northeastern Kyrgyzstan where are the borders with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. On the border with Kazakhstan, there is a large presence of Russians, stemmed from migration processes post-USSR. There is also a Russian concern about the Ferghana Valley, in the southeast of the country, bordering Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and consequently with Afghanistan, and is



now considered a route of radical Islamists and terrorists as well as drug trafficking, affecting directly the development of the country and contributing to the vulnerability and international insecurity.

<sup>v</sup> As for impairment of a democratic ideal, we understand the way in how these states have developed their state policy and consequently, how it affected the insurance policy, the concept that both countries are unaware of democratic values in fact.

<sup>vi</sup> See more in: America University of Central Asia (Social Research Center): [https://src.auca.kg/images/stories/files/A%20Tale%20of%20Two%20Revolutions%20DM%20FINAL%20old%20word%20version\\_3.pdf](https://src.auca.kg/images/stories/files/A%20Tale%20of%20Two%20Revolutions%20DM%20FINAL%20old%20word%20version_3.pdf)

<sup>vii</sup> As can be seen in conflicts between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border, where conflicts have worsened up conflicts of lower order for nationals, especially in 2011, after the electoral climate change and, overwhelmingly partisan politics in the states in question. Insecurity on the borders of Tajikistan, the only country that still uses the Persian language in Central Asia has grown considerably, due to its strong ties with Afghanistan and China, regarding the lack of cooperation and border monitoring.

<sup>viii</sup> Particularly Europe, since programs like BOMCA and CADAP, established since 2004, are focused on strengthening the borders and expand securitarian structures in Central Asia. The BOMCA invested over € 4,346,584 in Kyrgyzstan between 2004 and 2010. See more at: <http://bomca.eu/en/kyrgyzstan.html>

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