Transnational Security of South Caucasus

Tamta TSKHOVREBADZE*

Abstract

Despite of occupying a comparatively small territory, The South Caucasus exhibit a bizarre cultural, religious, linguistic, ethnical diversity. The region is squeezed between Caspian and Black Seas, comprising the states of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Region has considerable interest from the global players of international politics since it occupies a key strategic location and frames a bridge between Asia and Europe through linking the Caspian Sea and Central Asia with the Black Sea and Western Europe. Furthermore, South Caucasus is an important transport and energy corridor, notably as a hydrocarbons transit route from Caspian Sea region to international markets.

This paper examines general view of security architecture in South Caucasus with the aim of emphasizing most prominent security challenges and threats. It also assesses the transnational security challenges that the region faces, demonstrating the lack of regional cooperation and considers the potential for cooperation in the future. The central research question here is what are the most prominent transnational threats for the region and how can these threats be addressed? Is there enough individual effort for South Caucasian States to eliminate the threats or a basis for broader cooperation and efforts to collective security should be formed?

Keywords: Armenia, Azerbaijan, collective security, Georgia, South Caucasus, threats and challenges, transnational security

Introduction

The stability of the South Caucasus is imperiled by its geopolitical significance, likewise numerous domestics and transnational security challenges, such as: unresolved conflicts, organized crime, trafficking and migration. The scale and scope of these transnational problems require a coordinated action. Since South Caucasus is intensely divided by conflicts and the competing interests of regional powers, the region would benefit from a greater cross-border collaboration. However, regional cooperation is not as well developed as it could be, hampering economic development, security and further destabilizing the area.

Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are countries encircled by the so-called "frozen conflicts," the legacy of ethnic self-determination and bloodshed that still remain unresolved. Recently, in August 2008, when Russian air force and separatist rebels launched an all-out attack on Georgian forces, the world saw the threat of how quick these "frozen" conflicts may turn to "hot" stance.

Despite the tensed situation among states, the necessity of collective security efforts still arises. In spite of security sectors being interconnected and politicized, "apolitical" cooperation over particular security aspects of security should provide platform for dialogue between neighbors.

The conflict parties are always blaming each other. For instance, they have accused each other of illegal activities, including black market, drug smugglings, trafficking, polluting water and destroying forests and etc. Of course this mutual accuse and shift of blame on each other gives incentives to security deficit.

To form the complete picture of security movements in the region we should assess the regional situation in terms of comparatively new types of threats. For example, ensur-

* M.A., International Black Sea University, Tbilisi, Georgia.
  E-mail: ttskhovrebadze@ibsu.edu.ge

ing information security remains one of the most significant problems in the era of technological advancement. The importance of fostering informational security become crucial during past decades for the whole world but the region has experienced the problem in 2008, when Russian – Georgian war was attached to not only military confrontation but also cyber-attack on Georgian informational and communication means.

Another threat that the region should identify as being one of the major is terrorism, the biggest concern of international society after 9/11 attacks. Regions location, pro-western policy of states (Georgia and Azerbaijan) and their contribution to NATO-led operations, with contribution troops to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) makes region vulnerable to terrorism.

Other emerging or encompassing security problems include: organized crime, corruption, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, trafficking, drugs and etc. International society agrees on common ides of "collectivism", since these threats do not halt at national borders. South Caucasian states, as well, need to work together for analyzing threats and conjoint struggle against them. Otherwise, situation in the region will remain in the "no war, no peace" stance.

To compound this unruly picture, the South Caucasus has in the last few years been increasingly affected by other security threats of a more transnational nature, including organized crime, specifically trafficking of narcotics, arms and persons, and the rise of Islamic radical movements and etc. (Svante E. Cornell et al, 2002)

Security Deficit in the Region

The security deficit in the South Caucasus includes internal, regional and transnational challenges. The intra-regional challenge to security, consisting of the unresolved territorial conflicts and economic hazards (energy security) can also be referred as transnational threats of the region. Firstly, the conflicts prove that tensions between ethnic groups remain a threat to peace and security not only for Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan but perhaps for the wider region and whose peril may be increasing rather than decreasing with time (as the escalated 2008 conflict in South Ossetia illustrates). Secondly, even if the range of economic development was expanded, the interest of foreign players in the South Caucasus still focuses mainly in the region as an energy producer and supplier. Furthermore, apart from the intra-regional security challenges, the regional countries are affected by interlaced relations with the regional and global powers that apparently have certain interest in the region. The unruly picture of each South Caucasian State is allying with a different power and exposing national interests different from other regional states makes the region even more polarized.

The third category (and perhaps one of the most important in the international security agenda of uprising concerns) is the bunch of newly emerged transnational threats, including terrorism, organized crime, drug smuggling and arms race which are escalating time by time and were virtually unchecked until the Georgian change of Government in late

2003. (Cornell, n.d.)

Human Trafficking

One of most touchable concern of the region is human trafficking. The concerns arising with this serious crime and a grave violation of human rights is familiar for the region. Whether as a home country, transit country or destination for victims, the regional countries are affected by trafficking. Most of these underdogs are subjected to the forced prostitution or forced labor. In 2009, substantial fraction of women and girls from Georgia were forced into prostitution in different regions of Georgia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and Greece. In recent years, cases of forced prostitution of Georgian victims were also documented in Russia, Germany, and Austria. Men and women have been forced into labor in Georgia, Libya and Turkey. (CdeBaca, 2010)

The Government of Georgia with the aim to increase awareness with the threats and modern challenges, sustained capacity building and law enforcement policies for the aim of preventing trafficking in Georgia and nearby region. In this regard, the government produced and broadcast television advertisings and announcements clearly portraying the danger and menace of human trafficking. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education and Science produced a short television announcement targeting school-age children entitled "Do Not Trade Freedom for Slavery," which was regularly aired on television. The government of Georgia permanently distributed flyers and pamphlets in high risk areas of the country and at the main transport areas.

According to the U.S. State Department's annual Trafficking in Persons Report 2014, "The Government of Georgia does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so".(CdeBaca, 2010)

Because of its geostrategic location - Georgia can be a source, transit, and destination country for the forced prostitution of women and the forced labor of men, women, and children. There different cases when women and girls from Georgia were suffering from the sex trafficking, especially in neighboring countries (mainly in Turkey).

Georgia has concluded bilateral International Agreements with twenty countries on police cooperation and on cooperation in the fight against crime, which includes not only combating trafficking in persons but also other types of transnational crime. Therefore, National Action Plan of Georgia in combating trafficking was proposed by the different governmental agencies for the purpose of improving the national referral mechanism.

Transnational Organized Crime

Organized crime generates human insecurity through violating human rights and hampering economic, social, cultural and civil development of societies around the world. Transnational organized crime can be manifested in many forms, such as: trafficking in drugs, illegal arms and even persons

(we have already discussed trafficking in persons above).

Nowadays transnational organized crime successfully seeks shelter in unstable regions, such as conflicting regions and the lawless secessionist territories bounded with frozen conflicts or military escalations.

During the Soviet period, Georgia was adjacent to NATO (Turkey), and armed troops with sophisticated weapons—including strategic and tactical nuclear weapons—were maintained on the entire Georgian territory. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the implementing disarmament policy, 197 discoveries of radioactive materials were made on the Georgian Territory. As many experts have argued, these radioactive materials, both weak and strong, could stipulate hazardous situation if smuggled abroad. Such unwise and illegal dissemination of radioactive materials significantly increases risks of producing "dirty bombs" for the sake of terroristic acts. As uncontrolled territories are the most convenient for smuggling such kind of materials, we can assume that three conflicting regions in South Caucasus are highly exposed to new threats.

The smuggling of nuclear materials through the territory of Abkhazia is a real possibility, but smuggling in weapons and drugs is already a reality. The scale of illegal trade in weapons dropped dramatically after the end of military action in 1993, but demand from criminal groups inside and outside the region has continued to stimulate supply. (Sami Nevala, Kauko Aromaa, 2004)

So, the numerous transnational are present in the South Caucasus today. Unfortunately, regional states are not yet fully capable to eliminate threats of illicit drugs, contraband and other types of transnational crime. While regional states have shown a little capability to solve the related problems, strategic location of the region could become a serious threat to all regional states and broader region as well.

As Afghanistan's production of opium in 2004 is projected to be growing significantly over the already high level of 3,600 tons in 2003, traffickers increasingly use South Caucasus for transit. The trafficking of WMD materials is also a serious issue, particularly in Georgia. (Cornell, n.d.)

Terrorism

Terrorism is relatively hard to define. Understandings of it also differ. For some terrorism can be referred as tactic or strategy, while others define it as a brutal crime, holy duty or justified reaction of oppression.

In many cases, terrorism is thought as a conflict that incompletely realizes the nature of the threat, mistaking terrorism for a criminal activity. For these reason, terrorism has become effective tool for those pursuing extreme goals throughout the world.

In a situation of persisting economic and political instability in the region, combined with the inability of South Caucasian governments to gain control over all their territory, transnational crime is likely to remain a considerable threat in future. Criminal networks have successfully found allies in state institutions, thus ensuring their security from any menial attempts to crackdown on criminality. During periods of instability, for example in the event of a protracted succession struggle or revival of ethnic conflicts, it is conceivable that criminal or terrorist networks in search for a base of operations will seek to find a haven in the South Caucasus – especially given the strategic location of the region.

All countries know that terrorism is most vital threat in 21st century, so collaboration to prevent terrorist activities should be main concern especially in such unstable region as South Caucasus is.

As Radicalization and terrorism have become major problems at national, regional, and global levels, as threat to collective security, the geostrategic significance of the region and its proximity to the terrorism hazard areas genuinely strengthened US and other's interests in the region.

In Brussels (February 2003) Mr. Michael Kolher, the representative of the EU Commission's External Directorate-General, mentioned: "The EU should not let Caucasian state, like Georgia, become a failed state because of increasing terrorism concerns in contemporary world and particularly in the region."(Dekanozishvili, 2004)

Transnational terrorism and insurgent groups will continue to evolve in the years ahead. Meanwhile, international criminal organizations remain an intractable problem. Their trade in narcotics, weapons, people, and other illicit commodities is increasingly converging with ideologically-motivated networks, fostering a new generation of hybrid threats. Understanding and responding to this complex and dynamic environment has proven a difficult challenge for governments and institutions designed around the Westphalian model. (Strategic Insights and Bipartisan policy Solutions , n.d.)[1]

Environmental Security

Environmental security deals with environmental issues which threaten the national security. Unlike potential military threats, the environmental threats are real and ongoing. Despite the fact that not every environmental issue will result in a security problem, the most security problems are generated from complex situations absorbing environmental, political, social, and economic issues.

Recent history has taught us that environmental issues need to be addressed from a broad perspective since the

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1 - The Transnational Threats Project assesses terror, insurgent, and criminal networks and the impact of government responses through targeted field work and an extensive network of specialists. More detailed information for the project can be found on the following website: http://csis.org/program/transnational-threats-project

threats are vital and evolving; they do not halt at national borders and thus, are the concern of the whole world. Environmental threats demand states to work together, share information and experiences, to think out of the box and find new solutions for long-standing problems and preserve natural conditions.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters were adopted on 25 June 1998 in the Danish city of Aarhus. In the South Caucasus, all three countries have opened Aarhus Centres: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Working both in capital cities and in regions, these centres have been very active to promote the implementation of the Aarhus Convention on national and local levels, to help governments fulfill their respective obligations under the Convention, and to involve the citizens of the region in environmental decision-making.(Dijck, 2012)

Highlighting the developing importance of the environmental issues as well as their growing blow on the sustainable development of the region and the necessity to intensify the protection of environment, regional states should collaborate to eliminate the potential risks to human health and environment.

Informational Security

Globalization and global interconnectivity is making states vulnerable to new threats. Computer-based assaults or acts of information warfare, on state's systems such as nuclear establishments, energy grids, telecommunications and financial facilities could severely disrupt national defense and social services. The vital example of how harmful effect of information insecurity can impose on the country's national security can be adduced from August War 2008, when Russian forces maintained cyber-attack to Georgian informational sources and declared a blockade.

Cyber force is a form of intervention that can produce harmful or coercive effects, and put national security at risk. It is commonly understood as structured intercepting or manipulating of industrial, military, economic and social data and information systems. However, there are two contrary advert states in the region informational security should be subject of high importance. No nation is home alone. To maintain strong homeland security, states should stand together and collaborate in maintaining international security as well.

Conclusion

In spite of all regional states conceive security concerns differently and having different approaches to state interests, they still can collaborate in terms the aspects threatening all of them and thus are of the global concerns. Socio-economic concerns, energy security, informational security, environmental issues, combating with the terrorism, drug-smuggling, organized crime and etc. are pushing security matters to a high level and make all regional states to sit on the negotiation tale.

These threats are vital and in such a small region like South Caucasus is, one country's problems related to one of the above mentioned security deficit immediately will have impact on other neighboring states.

South Caucasus is in fragile balance in we consider current situation from security point of view. This is conditioned for several reasons. First, each regional state has different vision and approaches towards the problem of security. Then, after dissolution of soviet empire all regional states perceived completely different reasons as the military-political threats and they could not agree on common security policy regarding the following challenges. In this complex scenario of competing interests and cooperation opportunities, the contribution for stability building and enhanced collaboration at the regional level is here the focus of analysis. While each South Caucasian country has different strategic partner and different political interests, speaking about collective security in the region is waste of the time.

Since 2003 the EU has become more of a security actor in the South Caucasus, particularly in Georgia. It has appointed a Special Representative for the South Caucasus, launched a European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) mission, and employed the Commission's Rapid Reaction Mechanism to support post "Rose Revolution" democratization processes. It has included Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and started Action Plan negotiations due to end mid-2006. The Commission has allocated some €32 million for development confidence building programs in Georgia, and it has cooperated closely with the UN and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).(Europe, 2006)

The spread of radical movements, criminalization of state institutions and economic transactions, the increase in cross border drugs smuggling, trafficking and possible proliferation of WMD represent platform of transnational challenges for the states of south Caucasus and serves as a political catalyst for the conflicts in the region. In addition, these transnational issues have the potential to challenge the security of the West.

Organized crime has the ability to corrupt and undermine the already weak institutions in many of these states. To the extent that organized crime takes over the functions of the state, particularly those of local law enforcement and the military, repression of society may increase.

It is extremely important to create an adequate informational space, resources and tools to further develop a public discourse on the above mentioned issues and directions. In order to achieve an impact on a broader public level, the dialogue needs to be continued on different levels and in different formats, with civil society playing a key role in this process.

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