

Manifestations of Separatism in Central Asia and Peculiarities of Counteraction

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Abstract: This article examines the threat of separatism to regional security in Central Asia. It explores the historical roots, causes, and factors contributing to this issue. Through factor and comparative analysis, the author identifies key patterns and drivers of separatist movements in the region. The study highlights the complex interplay of historical grievances, ethnic tensions, economic disparities, and external influences that fuel separatist sentiments. Based on the findings, the author offers recommendations for countermeasures tailored to the unique context of Central Asia. These recommendations aim to address the underlying causes of separatism, promote social cohesion, and enhance regional stability. The study underscores the importance of a multifaceted approach, including political, economic, and social strategies, to effectively mitigate the threat of separatism and ensure long-term security in the region.

1 INTRODUCTION

Despite the intensive progress of globalization and regional integration, the self-determination of ethnic minorities and separatist movements is gaining momentum in many countries of the world. The situation on the borders of states is particularly tense due to constant territorial claims and disputes. In some cases, ethnic communities express dissatisfaction with their position in the state and demand greater regional autonomy. In other cases, ethnic communities may struggle to secede from the state.

The works of Russian researcher Daniil Kotsyubinsky "Global separatism - the main plot of the XXI century" (Blanken, 2012) and "Age of secession" by Syracuse University professor Ryan Griffiths (Gibler et al., 2014) prove that this century will be "the century of separatism". Experts estimate that only about 25 Member States of the United Nations can boast of the absence of secessionist movements on their territory. Analyses suggest that, on average, about 52 separatist movements have emerged each year since 1945, rising to about 55 by 2011. Research from other academic papers shows

that between 1945 and 2012, 464 separatist groups in 120 countries were identified.


2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The object of the research is the Separatism phenomenon in the Central Asian region. Factor analysis, systematic analysis, historical, comparison, and generalization methods were used in the research.

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

During the study, the causes and factors influencing the manifestation of separatism were identified, as well as the differences in this phenomenon in the Central Asian region. Methods of counteraction were studied and recommendations were developed in this direction.

Most new states arise because of separatism, which can be direct or indirect. The separation of the part from the whole or the disintegration of multicomponent societies causes this phenomenon. However, open separatist movements do not always lead to political independence, except in some cases,

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such as the former Soviet Union or the states of Eastern Europe, including the former Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. Separatism most often represents political activity aimed at reducing the central government's control over a certain territory and transferring power to the population. According to John Wood, separatism includes any political action that seeks to weaken the power of the central government over a particular territory" (Griffiths, 2016).

When a state faces an external threat, the government takes all possible measures (including the use of violence) to preserve its territorial integrity. The main reason for such actions is the possibility of hostile foreign states finding supporters in the secessionist areas. The central government is intensifying its efforts to counter the division even though these measures may limit the right of the society to self-determination. Researchers also argue that the government, by resorting to violence and similar methods, provokes negative reactions among the "outcasts" and thus contributes to the violent mobilization of minorities. (Kotsyubinsky, 2013).

According to studies on colonialism, it has become clear that in almost all cases, when informal leaders realized that the government was neglecting their interests, the colonies began to push for secession. [6] Territorially localized ethno-cultural minorities are at the greatest risk of oppression. Research shows that most secessionist conflicts (57 out of 60) are ethnic or pseudo-ethnic. The authors emphasize that the likelihood of separatist conflicts is higher when ethnic groups are excluded from political decision-making and live in large countries or countries with high ethnic diversity.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, new cases of division and inter-ethnic conflicts emerged in the newly formed independent countries. Contemporary challenges in Central Asia, such as religious extremism and terrorism, are accompanied by the increasingly worrying phenomenon of separatism in the border zones of Central Asian states, causing inter-ethnic divisions.

3.1 Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan is mostly associated with the problem of separatism, which includes Karakalpakstan, an autonomous republic within the country. From 1917 to 1920, the territory of modern Karakalpakstan was included in the revived Khanate of Khiva. At that time there were uprisings, but they were not ethnic, such as in Abkhazia or South Ossetia, which were a manifestation of ideological differences between the

Bolsheviks and the authorities of the khanate. These uprisings resulted in the proclamation of the Khorezm People's Soviet Republic, later divided between the Uzbek and Turkmen SSRs and the Karakalpak Autonomous Region of the RSFSR. From 1936, the Karakalpak ASSR was incorporated into the RSFSR and then into the Uzbek SSR until 1991. Thus, from 1936 to 1991, the territory of Karakalpakstan was formally under the jurisdiction of Tashkent.

During the 20th century, the Karakalpaks expressed their insistent desire to create an "own" union republic, but this aspiration remained unrealized. In 1990, Karakalpakstan declared its state sovereignty, and in 1993 signed an interstate treaty to join the already independent Uzbekistan, becoming an autonomous republic there and never realizing secession. A referendum that would have settled the status of the territory never took place. Karakalpakstan is not only open to exit but also the possibility of irredentism - the desire to unite with Kazakhstan, based on the ethnic affinity of the Karakalpaks with the Kazakhs. In fact, in some actions of Astana, one can catch irredentist attempts: dissemination of information through mass media that Karakalpaks are a Kazakh sub-ethnos and their language is a dialect of Kazakh (Wimmer et al., 2009).

Another direction of exit is rapprochement with Russia, with which Karakalpakstan was part of the Soviet empire for some time, but currently has no common border with it. In 2014, after the Crimean events, there was a growing interest in this direction: some representatives of the public movement "Alga, Karakalpakstan" spoke about the possibility of joining Russia, but did not receive support from the population. (Wood, 1981). In addition, the July 2022 event in Nukus caused serious concerns on the part of the government, which in turn required the leadership of Uzbekistan to adopt the necessary reforms to prevent an internal conflict situation in the country. In addition, the low standard of living and the historical memory of living as part of another state are factors contributing to the emergence of centrifugal processes. However, the authorities are taking measures to improve the socio-economic situation in the region and reduce radical Islamization.

3.2 Kazakhstan

Since the collapse of the USSR, Kazakhstan has attracted the attention of analysts several times due to the increasing separatist sentiments of the Russian population in the northern regions of the country. However, due to its unitary form of administrative and territorial structure, there are no potential

separatist ethnic regions in Kazakhstan and, accordingly, there is no state that could secede from Kazakhstan. The country's borders are fortified and historically have not been expanded at the expense of other states' lands. Kazakhstani authorities have also successfully combated separatist manifestations following Russia's reintegration of Crimea by increasing criminal penalties for separatism. After

30 years of Kazakhstan's independence, and despite ethnically motivated incidents in the media, the country's political nation including the Russian-speaking population has been formed. This circumstance is an additional factor that makes manifestations of separatism in the country unlikely.

Some Uzbek communities living compactly in the Osh and Jalal-Abad regions of the Kyrgyz Republic have clearly expressed separatist tendencies. In the past, in 1990 and 2010, such aspirations led to armed conflicts, but they were not accompanied by either increased autonomy of these oblasts or secession. One of the ideologues of the 2010 events was accused of attempting to create Uzbek autonomy in the southern part of the country. [11] In both cases, representatives of Uzbeks, who were not united in organized political movements, advocated the creation of autonomy and raising the status of the Uzbek language.

However, it should be noted that the experience of Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan cannot be called separatist because, firstly, there was no common political force advocating the principles of separation, and secondly, the majority of protesters did not demand secession from the country. The events in Osh in 1990 and 2010 were related to domestic and nationalistic aspects rather than political motives.

3.3 Tajikistan

Tajikistan's Republic of Gorno-Badakhshan existed as a de facto state from 1992 to 1997 but has attracted less academic interest compared to European and Caucasus regions of the former Soviet Union. Annexed to the Tajik SSR by Moscow in 1925, Gorno-Badakhshan exercised self-rule and expressed a desire to join Russia, even using the Russian rouble. Although its regional parliament proclaimed sovereignty, it was not recognized nationally. The separatist movement was relatively successful due to an organized political force and the central government's weakness during the civil war. However, without a suitable supporting state, the separatism ultimately failed, as Russia neither bordered Gorno-Badakhshan nor had a dominant ethnic presence.

In Uzbekistan, the Republic of Karakalpakstan is an autonomist territory with a separatist movement led by "Alga Karakalpakstan." The region has its own language, Karakalpak, and a distinct ethnos favoring secession. Despite having a history of armed struggle for autonomy, notably in July 2022, it lacks a patron state and borders with a supportive state of the same ethnicity. The ASSR Supreme Council declared its independence, but it was not successful. Transferred by Moscow, Karakalpakstan has been part of Uzbekistan since 1936 and previously existed within the Kirghiz SSR and RSFSR between 1925 and 1936.

3.4 Kyrgyz Republic

The Osh and Jalal-Abad regions in Kyrgyzstan are not formally segment states as the Kyrgyz population exceeds the Uzbek population by more than two times in both areas. There is no separatist political organization, although there is a separate ethnos in favor of secession, and the language differs from the "mother state." There is no patron state, but there are borders with a state sharing the same ethnicity, and there is historical experience of armed struggle for autonomy. They have not declared independence, and the parent state has not responded to such a declaration. Since 1990, Jalal-Abad was separated by Moscow from Osh, and both regions have existed within Kyrgyzstan as regions, without being part of another state.

In contrast, the Gorno-Badakhshan region of Tajikistan is a secessionist/autonomist territory with the separatist political organization, Badakhshan Gems. The region has its own language and a separate ethnos favoring secession but lacks a patron state and borders with a state of the same ethnicity. Unlike Osh and Jalal-Abad, it has no historical experience of armed struggle for autonomy. The Council of People's Deputies of AR declared independence, which was not recognized by the Tajik state. Since 1925, Gorno-Badakhshan was handed over by Moscow and has existed as an Autonomous Region within Tajikistan, without being part of another state.

4 EMERGENT SEPARATION CAUSE

The emergence of separatism is often rooted in several key factors. These include a state divided into multiple regions with centralized power and weak local governance, exacerbated by political crises and acute socio-economic problems. Factors contributing

to separatist movements include ethno-confessional divisions, where separatist sentiments thrive along ethnocultural borders. Socio-economic disparities between regions also fuel separatism, driven by differing state policies. Many separatist regions are demarcated by natural boundaries, isolating them from the rest of the state. Geopolitical interests of external actors and social mobilization through protests, rallies, and even terrorist activities further amplify separatist tendencies. The presence of political organizations or leaders advocating secession, along with historical precedents of separate state formations, also play significant roles. Additionally, separatist movements often exploit grievances about the exploitation of natural resources by the central government, adding to agitation and unrest.

5 COUNTER SEPARATION MEASURE

Countering separatism necessitates a multifaceted approach grounded in principles of sovereignty, equality, and territorial integrity, while rejecting double standards. Addressing this complex issue requires comprehensive measures spanning socio-economic development, preventive actions, political reforms, legal frameworks, and other initiatives. At the state level, efforts are bifurcated into two main directions. Firstly, there are measures aimed at upholding human and civil rights to prevent conflicts based on national, racial, and religious grounds. Secondly, combating separatism involves actively addressing criminal activities associated with separatist movements.

Non-violent methods play a crucial role in addressing separatism through political and economic incentives. These include granting greater autonomy or devolution of powers to problem regions, providing financial support to regional leaderships, conducting propaganda to discredit separatist leaders, and imposing economic sanctions where necessary. Conversely, when non-violent methods prove inadequate, more coercive measures may be employed. This can involve legal actions such as imprisonment of separatist leaders and activists, and in extreme cases, the use of force to suppress armed separatist activities, including military operations to neutralize separatist bases and restore order.

In situations where armed separatist formations gain local support and pose a significant threat, several key tasks must be addressed. These include building trust

with the affected population through information campaigns, political engagement, and humanitarian aid. Simultaneously, efforts should isolate the region from external sources of support for arms and resources. Finally, decisive actions must be taken to dismantle separatist armed bases and infrastructure. Effective management of these tasks requires timely prediction and strategic planning to anticipate the stages of conflict development, assess territorial coverage, and predict outcomes based on the evolving dynamics.

To effectively prevent manifestations of separatism, further recommendations include enhancing capabilities to counter nationalism and separatism, monitoring and disrupting destructive activities in virtual communities promoting separatist ideologies, analyzing the activities of separatist entities and their supporters, and identifying potential conflict zones along national-ethnic borders. Additionally, fostering positive narratives of inter-ethnic harmony through virtual platforms and social networks can play a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions and countering divisive ideologies, thereby promoting stability and unity within Uzbekistan.

6 CONCLUSION

Based on the above-mentioned it can be concluded that nowadays the phenomenon of separatism poses a serious threat to state security and is a source of ethno-political conflicts in different regions of the world. In the course of research, it was revealed that this phenomenon has a specific character in each case, conditioned by regional and ethno-cultural peculiarities, and requires careful analysis and study. Although separatists rarely manage to achieve independence, they are becoming increasingly pragmatic, making the transition from secessionism to regionalism in their programs.

The analysis of cases of separatism in Central Asia allows us to state with certainty that any attempt to secede from the state is a complex process determined by a multitude of factors: ethnic, cultural, linguistic, historical, political, economic, military, and geographical. However, such processes can create an unfavourable military-political and social environment for the region itself.

Resolution of the problem of separatism should seek to use non-violent political methods, including negotiations with regional political elites, intensification of educational and propaganda activities in the problem regions, and explaining to the population the advantages of stable territorial

integrity of the state and the disadvantages or impossibility of secession and formation of a new country.

Attempts to use force usually do not bring positive results; they only increase the PR of secessionists and separatists and transfer their struggle to the political plane. Avoiding the development of secessionism and separatism is much easier than trying to fight them.

An important legal means of preserving territorial integrity is international cooperation in the sphere of protection of state borders. Foreign policy plays an important role in the fight against secessionism and separatism in general, not only aimed at normalizing relations with the powers that patronize the rebels but also at exerting pressure on diasporas that support secessionist/separatist compatriots from abroad. The success of the policy of countering separatism largely depends on preventive measures aimed at neutralizing the threat of the formation of armed groups that proclaim separatist ideas.

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