



Science Arena Publications
Specialty Journal of Politics and Law

ISSN: 2520-3282

Available online at www.sciarena.com

2019, Vol, 4 (1): 84-92

Narkoterorisme and China's Foreign Policy Strategy in Central Asia

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Abstract: *Considering the formation of terrorist groups from nationals of various countries in recent decades, and taking into account the point that the activities of these groups have exited from the state of activity within a land, and has become an international activity, it has caused more concern for great countries. Central Asia is among the most important regions in which terrorist forces and religious extremists have been strengthening themselves by using revenues resulted from drug transit that have significantly made the Central Asia region and the interests of influential countries face with serious threat. China is among the countries that has a great deal of interests in the energy domain and other dimensions in this region. This research is done by descriptive-analytical method and has obtained the required data from books and articles. Therefore, the main question of this research, which was conducted with the aim of investigating China's foreign policy strategy for narkoterorisme or drug traffickers and their organized assassinations, was proposed as what is the most important strategy Beijing has taken for controlling and managing the drug trafficker forces and their organized assassinations, or in other words narkoterorisme, for its diplomatic system? The research findings, performed using defensive realism, have stated that China is seeking to reduce security problems created by terrorist forces and drug traffickers through multilateralism with Russia and Iran in a bilateral and cooperative way within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the construction of Silk Road to attract capital for Central Asia and the economic development of this region.*

Keywords: *Narkoterorisme, China, Foreign Policy Strategy, Central Asia, Drug Traffickers, Religious Extremism.*

INTRODUCTION

The fight against drugs is considered among the most important part of the domestic and foreign policy of any country, especially in Latin America and Central Asia. The terroristic measures resulting from the activities of drug trafficker groups in these countries have led statesmen of these regions to use the term "Narkoterorisme", that is a combination of drug trafficking and terroristic action. The term "Narkoterorisme" is used for terroristic actions, including assassination, kidnapping, and armed struggle against the police of the concerned countries, which is carried out by drug dealers. This term was first used by the former President of Peru in 1983 to describe the attacks of terrorist type against the Drug Enforcement Police of these countries (Björnskov, 2004: 305-306).

Today, due to the increased level of drug transit in the region of Central Asia and the creation of security issues and problems in this region, the influential countries are becoming more sensitive and the mentioned

governments are trying to void or manage this security problem through regional cooperation. China is among the countries that have significant interests in Central Asia, and the drug traffickers whose actions have affected the interests and security of this country in order to influence the internal policies of their respective government. Since the Central Asia and Caucasian routes that are considered by drug traffickers have long borders with Beijing, this group by drug trafficking can have numerous threats for this country especially in the security, political and also social dimensions (Clarke, 2019: 3-8). Thus, the statesmen of this country monitor any threat and tensions that are present in this region with particular sensitivity. As Beijing has suffered security problems on its northern and western borders in various periods, which has led to the separation of parts of its territory, this point has highly impacted on the foreign policy strategy of this country nowadays. Since China's strategic culture has considered maintaining national solidarity and unity as one of the basic requirements of the country's national security, it considers drug trafficking and the threats resulted from the activities of these groups among the most important threats that may be created through Central Asia. Because under the influence of the Central Asia security environment, the ethnic and religious minorities in these regions have expressed their opposition in various periods to the strategies of the ruling party, and occasionally have caused clashes and repressions from Beijing, under the influence of these issues, the central government of Beijing has regulated its relations with the surrounding environment, including Central Asia (Clarke, 2017: 5).

Therefore, investigating how Beijing adopts a foreign policy strategy in this dimension requires an academic research that the present paper intended to do this investigation. This research has been conducted by descriptive-analytical method and has obtained necessary information from books and articles. Therefore, the main question of this research, which was conducted with the aim of investigating China's foreign policy strategy for Narkoterorisme or drug traffickers and their organized assassinations, was proposed as: what is the most important strategy Beijing has taken for its diplomatic system for controlling and managing the drug traffickers and their organized assassinations or in other words Narkoterorisme? The findings of research, carried out using defensive realism theory, stated that China sought to reduce security problems caused by terrorist forces and drug traffickers through multilateralism with Russia and Iran in the form of the United Nations Drugs Commission and cooperation with Central Asian countries.

Theoretical Framework

From the realists' viewpoint, issues such as the immaterial value and benefits, morality, norm, cultural and ideological differences, and the nature of the political system do not have any position in the foreign policy of countries. This school emphasizes on suppositions such as being state-centeredness, survival, balance of power, self assistance and anarchy of the international system. In realism, the main purpose of governments is to defend and protect the country and the survival option is at the top for them, because without the existence of survival element in the behavior of states, no state will take any step to enhance national power in the field of international politics; therefore, the increase of national threats provides the context for power enhancement of the protection of political survival (Waltz, 1979: 12). Survival is the main incentive in the international politics, and since contrary to the internal structure, the structure of international system is anarchic, each one of the units composing the system is responsible for its security, and every state is free to try pursuing its internal and external goals, as it finds more it appropriate (Yazdan Pham, 2007: 730). Therefore, in a chaotic structure, self-assistance is the most necessary probable rule (Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, 2009: 144). From the point of view of Waltz, international politics is not merely the collection of foreign policy and approaches, but in fact it is the structure of international system that forms its members' relations in the global scene. The structure also refers to the arrangement of units in the international system. Also, the distribution of abilities is performed as a result of the mechanism that determines the structures of system (Mohammad Khani, 2009: 94).

Balance of Power as a model of global system indicates a community that embodies the states in which all actors maintain their identity and independence in order to create it. Although the balance is not just power oriented, fear of power in an anarchic environment is followed by the guidance of governments in a system towards balance against each other. Waltz believes that the security and survival of governments depends on effort to prevent centralization and accumulation of power. According to him, the accumulation of power and the desire for hegemony ends with a balance; a more powerful government always seems to be threatening, because weaker governments can never be certain that the stronger government won't use the power to violate and invade their sovereignty or would not be a threat for their survival or security (Waltz, 1979: 58-69). When the signs of the efforts of a great power to control the international system are observed, other powers will unite with each other to preserve their security and maintain their position in the international system through a balancing factor. Thus it can be said that the balance of power is the main factor and mechanism of stability in the international anarchy system (Mohammad Khani, 2009: 95).

In the following, this question is proposed that in which form of the international relations' theories of China's strategy towards the threat of the narkoterisme of Central Asia for controlling and managing this security crisis can be explained? According to the authors of this research, although the foreign policy of mentioned country can be explained and analyzed in the form of various international relations theories, the theory of "Threat Balance" has a proper capacity to address this issue. The threat balance theory is one of the theories emerged from defensive realism theory. Until the late twentieth century, the balance of power theory of realists was regarded as one of the most important theories for explaining the relations between states. But events such as the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the bipolar system, the United States becoming the important superpowers of the international system, and the lack of formation of a balance against it until the late twentieth century, put the application and the power of explaining the power of balance theory under doubt by many theorists of international relations and criticisms by them come to this theory. Because after the collapse of the Soviet Union, despite the transformation of the United States into an important international power, no serious desire was observed for creating a balance against this power on the part of other powers (Abbasi and Qiasi, 2013: 177).

The lack of balance realization against the potential hegemony concerning the United States after the Cold War pushed one of the most important thinkers of the tradition realism named as Stephen Walt towards the replacement of focal point of realism from the balance of power to the threat balance, thereby according to his claim, the blind knot of neo-realism would be opened. He says that with this approach, this important point can be explained that why the coalition for balance is not performed against the United States at the current period either (Little, 2010: 31).

Walt is one of the realists who has tried to strengthen the foundations of this theory by designing new and different ideas from traditional theories of realism and even the structural realism of Waltz. By criticizing the balance of power principle, he has been practically able to make the topics of realism in the security domain more enriched by proposing threat balance theory. The focal point of his topics was the investigation of the cause of alliances, military-political coalitions with the aim of creating balance, in reaction to the feeling of threat. Contrary to what is thought, according to him, countries do not attempt to create balance against the power increase of others. In contrast to what pushes countries towards balance, is the threat ratio they perceive. When a threat is felt, countries either try to create balance against it or join the threatening country (Torabi, 2005, 21).

Stephen Walt stated that when a country faces numerous choices for coalition, calculating the risk ratio and threat level, and not the power, acts as the most important factor in decision making. For example, if a country considers another country as a direct threat for its survival, it will try to create the balance of power, regardless of the superiority of the influence power of the target country. On the other hand, if a country does not regard another country a threat for its survive at all, it does not typically move towards adopting a balance of power strategy, even if the negotiated country has a tangible superiority of power and influence

(Sazmand et al., 2010: 157-158). In this way, the threat balance is a kind of balance that believes that the coalition for balance is formed against threats, and not just the power; threats that can be originated from power, proximity, aggressive capabilities, and aggressive expansionism intentions (Little, 2010: 23).

By describing the above points, if we accept the view of Kenneth Waltz indicating that countries rather than seeking their power increase, are going to prevent others' power increase and upgrading and preserving their position in the international system, hence we can consider the creation of coalition and alliance, as well as a balance against the source of threat by countries as a rational strategy. The creation of such a balance, emerged in the form of coalition and alliance, which is created in two ways by the countries: 1. Inner Balance, which means increasing the internal power of the countries, 2. Outsourcing Balance, which is the same as coalition and the alliance (Dehghani Firoozabadi, 2012: 40). The threat balance is considered by defensive realists. Therefore, its theoreticians recommend the creation of coalition and alliance against any kind of threat to the countries (Hedayati Shahidani and Moradi, 2016: 94). Therefore, in order to analyze the foreign policy of China in Central Asia, this theoretical framework has been used in the present study. Because issues and topics that cause security problems in Central Asia have an impact on Beijing's internal and external environment, therefore, the statesmen of this country are seeking to prevent the spread of these security problems inside the borders of country through international and regional cooperation. In this part of the research, the most important measures of China against narkoterorisme have been addressed in the framework of the theory of defensive realism and threat balance.

- **Narkoterorisme and the Regional Strategy of China in Central Asia**
- **Coalition in the Form of the Regional Organization of Shanghai**

After the September 11, 2001 event, that America put the topic of Islamism and its link with terrorism on its agenda in order to prevent and abolish it, it attempted to increase its range of influence and expansionism in various regions, including Central Asia. This point was not pleasurable for countries like Russia and Beijing, as well as Iran. Therefore, against this action and threats that drug traffickers had created in Central Asia for the region and Beijing, China along with Russia created the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2001, and it began working in 2002. Beijing in the form of this organization has tried to introduce the threats of drug traffickers and their organized assassinations as a threat in order to influence the internal policies of its concerned countries, both internally and externally. Therefore, Beijing tried to develop its multilateral cooperation with Central Asian countries in order to actualize its own strategies to achieve this important point (Keyvan Hosseini and Omrani Manesh, 2017: 459).

Shanghai is an intergovernmental organization composed of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The mentioned organization was firstly created to build trust among Central Asian countries to solve domestic and regional tensions, as well as to provide necessary information about how to manage drug trafficking and the threats that this group can have for the region and the member countries of the organization. Nowadays, with regard to the expansion of the range of drug transition ratio all around the world, including China, Russia and the European Union, the Chinese-led organization is trying to flourish the region's economy as much as it can by overthrowing the culture of drug trafficking and extremism. For this purpose, plans such as the integration of the Silk Road Economic Company of China and the North Eurasian Economic Union have been put on the organization's agenda and consensus of the countries in this region. The plan is being pursued by this organization and China, because Central Asian countries in terms of economic recession and inflation have a significant statistics in the world, therefore by actualizing this point, the economic boom and the reduction of unemployment rate becomes public in the Central Asia region, which is necessary to prevent drug trafficking and terrorism. In other words, in case of integration and cooperation in the form of Silk Road and the Eurasian Economic Union, economic boom in this region is carried out in such a way that the Central Asian countries eradicate the contexts of drug trafficking and assassinations that are poverty, unemployment, inflation, prejudice inside their countries that are performed by their people in order to facilitate the drug transit process; and the threats resulted from the

activity of conflicting groups for neighboring countries including China will be reached to the least possible limit (Albert, 2015: 2-3).

In the framework of this organization, through political, security, economic and military cooperation with these Central Asian countries and Russia, Beijing is also trying to prevent threats that may damage the Beijing's security through the north and south borders of this country, because the statesmen of China has realized that supplying security in Central Asia is actualized through the creation of coalition and numerous cooperation with the countries of this region and the influential states, but it does not seem to be possible in individual form (Kang and Bodeen, 2018: 1-6).

Many believe that the presence of China and Russia in the Shanghai Organization, in addition to trying to reduce the influence of the West, especially the United States and NATO, strengthening multilateralism, fighting against drug trafficking and terrorism resulted from it, as well as the threats originated from it, are among the important objectives of these countries. The reason for this can be clearly observed in the approvals of the Seventh Summit of the Heads of Shanghai in 2002. At this summit, a charter of 26 articles was approved to establish the Secretariat of Shanghai and a "Counter-Terrorism Center" on its basis. Therefore, considering the goals of this organization, that are struggles against three evil forces, that is to say "Religious Extremism, Separatism and Terrorism", whose important part is due to narkoterorisme in the region, and it can be said that the establishment and then the expansion and development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization more than anything else is rooted in regional security concerns, and the over-alliance of the member countries of this organization in facing with these treats has encouraged them to cooperate to remove these threat contexts (Adamy and Azizi, 2013: 16- 17).

- **Construction of Silk Road and Multilateralism in Central Asia**

China is trying to revive the historic trade Silk Road in order to connect its borders through Central Asian countries to Europe. This strategy was announced by President Xi Jinping in 2013, which brings two new ways of land trade and the other marine trade of the country with its neighbors in the West Central Asia, the Middle East and Europe, towards cooperation in various dimensions. Naji Rowlan, the analysts of National Headquarter of Asian Researches stated in this regard that "this is not an economic project; it is a geopolitical and highly strategic project". This trade road makes the China's strategy in the economy be changed tactically, as relations with the ASEAN region, Central Asia and European countries will be significantly improved. Because by actualizing and strengthening the cooperation between the countries mentioned above, China will guide most of its capitals towards developing abroad infrastructure"(Lockhart, 2016: 1-2).

In addition, by bringing economic and cultural partnerships with other Central Asian and European countries, China stabilizes its position as a dominant player in the global affairs. China has highlighted its role in the global affairs especially in Central Asia by presenting a project of economic and commercial belt in the form of Silk Road. China, in the form of this strategic road, has committed itself to establish transportation and trade routes in Central Asia to Europe in various dimensions. Various dimensions mean that supplying the security of this road has been put on the agenda of the authorities of countries of this region by creating cooperation with Central Asian countries. Basically, we can talk about the long-term international development plan for Central Asia, stated by China that supplies Beijing's geostrategic goals by linking to remote regions and bordering with major trade routes (Anton, 2017: 1).

But in this case, several points should be mentioned. In 2011, the United States expressed its view about the economic integration and strengthening the infrastructures of Central Asia in order to create political stability in this region after leaving Afghanistan. The point that was not pleasurable for the authorities of Beijing, regarding that the Central Asia shares border with China. Contrary to it, in 2013, the Chinese president approved his comment on the creation of the Chinese Silk Road in Central Asia. China's most important goals in the form of this trade road are: 1) facilitating foreign trade, 2) providing sustainable energy to the country's economy, and 3) strengthening the infrastructure of Central Asian countries, which will make Beijing's penetration in its neighbors expanded, despite competitions with the United States and Russia. The

main Silk Road increases and accelerates trade networks across Central Asian countries, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. China has several reasons to track the new Silk Road: 1) This issue will allow China to reach markets for consumption of the products and injecting high financial resources into its economy, 2) Another major concern is the promotion of economic development in the west of Xinjiang province, where separatism violence and drug trafficking due to the narkoterorists' activity of Central Asia are increasing, and 3) Also, it supplies long-term energy. Of course, the point should be mentioned that in the framework of mentioned road, China is trying to connect Central Asian countries to Europe in order to boost their economies, and follows strengthening the infrastructure of these countries, which is the basis of foreign investments in the form of this road. By developing the economic cooperation of these countries, the existing contexts for extremism growth and drug trafficking in this region that is performed due to the poverty, inflation and unemployment will be vanished, which is the most important part of Beijing's goals (McBride 2015: 1-5).

- **Bilateral Cooperation with Iran**

Drugs produced and distributed in Central Asia have had adverse impacts on the security and community of Iran in various dimensions. Nowadays, drugs are produced in Afghanistan more than other countries in the region, and are transmitted by Taliban terrorist forces to other countries in the region, including Iran, in order to strengthen their economic strength, because 60% of the drugs' production of this region is displaced in order to transmit through the Iranian borders to Europe and China. This issue has led the traffickers use any kind of necessary weapons and engage with the military forces on the Iranian border to transit the mentioned drugs. Like the Central Asian countries, the Islamic Republic of Iran also seeks to use a logical strategy to manage and control this problem and by wide cooperation in various fields, it tries to create a coalition to achieve this important issue (Beehner, 2018: 5).

The Islamic Republic of Iran, in the form of creating coalition and cooperation with countries like China, seeks to contribute in the ratio of security and prevention of any kind of terrorist operation and drug transit. Because drug traffickers perform military operations against border and social security in order to advance their goals in some countries. And this point will make the security of those countries encounter a serious problem. The Islamic Republic of Iran is also exposed to the serious risk of mentioned threats, regarding the common borders it has with some of these countries and also in respect of the geographic location that is the appropriate route for the drug transit. Therefore, cooperation with the countries of Central Asia and China and Russia is for achieving this important point (Lanteigne, 2018: 2-8).

China beside Iran, as it was mentioned in the above points, has introduced terrorist groups and drug traffickers as common threats and they are constantly trying to expand the relationship between the two countries in various dimensions in Central Asia and can prevent the ratio of drug transit and threats that they can have in these countries with more power. Creating a coalition or cooperation in this field makes, in addition to controlling the mentioned security problems, the Islamic Republic of Iran and China to be able to boost their economy, regarding that the Central Asian markets as well as the existing energy in this region be pristine. Of course, the advantage that the relationship with Iran in Central Asia provides for China is the strategic opposition of Iran with China's rival, which is the United States. China can, in this way, expand its cooperation with Iran in order to prevent United States influence. Iran also, through using cooperation with China in Central Asia, controls the threats of drug traffickers and their security problems and also makes the pressure of West's sanctions against itself more limited (Wastnidge, 2017: 3- 6).

- **Bilateral Cooperation with Russia**

Central Asia has become an open trade area. As it was mentioned, China began its initiative in 2013 and has launched programs for massive investments and significant development of transportation infrastructures in the region. Also, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan beside Russia, Armenia and Belarus have created a free trade zone without border control by the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Further communication and the development of free trade zones, in the framework of the Silk Road and the Eurasian Economic Union, despite

the loyalty to the economic advantages, have sometimes opened the borders of these countries to increase illegal trafficking, and in particular the drugs. This concern is considered by many economic regions (including the continent of America and the European Union, Russia, and China) and is currently a possible concern for Central Asia too. Because this region, in the Afghanistan's neighborhood, is the largest opium and heroin producer in the world, and for this reason it is a convenient transportation route for illegal drug transit to China, Russia and Europe, which is now located among the largest illegal drug markets. The opening of internal borders in the Eurasia space and the Silk Road, if it is developed, will certainly create new opportunities for traffickers. This point has led the two countries of Russia and China, despite having a strategic conflict in Central Asia, as the leaders of mentioned economic initiatives, try to minimize or eliminate this security problem (Peyrouse, 2017: 2). This region has always had particular importance and position for the Russian Federation too. When Vladimir Putin came to power and regarding the importance of the Near Doctrine, particularly Central Asia for him, this region was located at a high position in the range of Russia's foreign policy priorities (Haji Yusufi, 2005: 113). For this reason in the upstream documents of Russia, especially in the National Security Document of this country, Central Asia is very important.

The most important goals that Russia seeks to achieve in its "National Security Document" are credibility increase and returning to the Soviet Union's power. In other words, the most important and urgent issue that the Kremlin leaders seek in this document is: "Increasing the International Credit of the Russian Federation in the form of Competition and Cooperation with the Players of This Region, in Order to Create A Secure Environment". The statesmen of Russia are pursuing the mentioned goal in various dimensions, including economic, political, security, and environmental dimensions through cooperation and competition. At the same time, the considerable point is that the National Security Document of Russia is related to Russian Security, Political Sub-Collections, the most important of which includes national security, the quality of life of Russian citizens, economic growth, science and technology, environment, culture and so on. The most important issue that Russia seeks in this document is the debate related to "Value". It means that, they seek to reborn and introduce themselves as a super power. For this purpose, they seek to achieve the strategies proposed in the National Security Document by protecting foreign values through information campaigns and controlling threats` extreme religious forces and drug traffickers to achieve their goals and influence the politics and internal law of Central Asian countries by anti-security and terrorist measures (Oliker, 2016).

The two countries of Russia and China, despite having competition in the economic field in this region, are trying to develop their bilateral cooperation, even outside the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, so that their geopolitical and strategic interests correspond.

Both sides have the need to confront security threats, especially for Russia, that these threats can penetrate towards the North Caucasus, because the migration control from these countries is very weak, and for China, it is the risk of problems growth and social crimes and health and security problems of the community resulted from the drugs transit within the borders of this country.

Conclusion

This paper began with this hypothesis that China in Central Asia, despite the creation of security problems in Central Asia, using the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and cooperating in the template of this organization with the Central Asian countries, as well as creating a convergence in the form of Silk Road and Bilateral Cooperation with Russia and China, is trying to prevent the development of security problems resulted from the activities of drug traffickers, and in other words, the narkoterorisme. In the following, while confirming the mentioned hypothesis, it was concluded that in Central Asia, drug trafficking has become a source of income for the people of this region due to the economic problems such as recession, inflation, and unemployment. In other words, people in the Central Asian countries have inclined towards trafficking and drugs transit because of unemployment. Therefore, with the development and activity of these groups and

strengthening their forces through the source of income resulting from trafficking, they sometimes attempt to influence the internal policies of Central Asian countries and countries where drugs are transited through their routes. This action of northeasternists has often led to conflicts with the border forces of Central Asian countries that have significantly impeded the security required for the investment of foreign countries. Thus, countries like China see their interests in serious danger, because Beijing is attempting to modernize the infrastructure of these countries through the Silk Road to attract foreign investment. However, the existence of mentioned security problems in this road has made investment safety difficult, and thus the interests of influential countries have been encountered with serious risk. In the face of these problems, China is trying not to look at Russia from the competition perspective and to increase its cooperation with it to manage these security problems. Russia, of course, is also embracing this perspective because the two countries, outside the heart of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, require comprehensive cooperation in order to strengthen themselves against the strategies of America in Central Asia. Narkoterorisme also has a lot of threats for Moscow. This country and also China have well understood the point that they cannot prevent this security crisis individually and alone. Therefore, despite the existence of strategic contradictions between the two countries, they have tried to cooperate. Iran also beside China has considered narkoterorisme, as the most important threat for its national security. Because this country is located in the neighborhood of Afghanistan, that is the largest producer of drugs in its various kinds, and the largest drug traffickers exist in this country. Therefore, the Islamic Republic of Iran, with these interpretations, is also in a security crisis on its eastern borders. The statesmen of Beijing have also understood the concern of the Iranian authorities. So the two countries have been trying to develop cooperation to control and manage this security problem. For this purpose, with the development of cooperation between the two countries in Central Asia, China is trying to turn Iran into a major member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to use the capacities of this country against these security problems.

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