Political Risks to Military Security

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Abstract: The article examines the major approaches to defining political risk to military security. The author identifies the characteristics of the understanding of political risk to security by scientists, details the various aspects of political risk and identifies the characteristics of the notional/categorial apparatus of military security. Through an analysis, the article identifies the distinctive characteristics of political risk to military security. The author has conducted an analysis of possible political risks to Kazakhstan’s military security in the Caspian Sea region.

Key words: Military security - National security - Threat to military security - Political risk

INTRODUCTION

The guiding principles defining the policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the area of military security are expressed in the country’s military doctrine. The first was ratified by a presidential decree on February 11, 1993, the second – on March 21, 2007 and the current one – on October 11, 2011. Kazakhstan’s military doctrine is defensive in nature and its consistent commitment to peace is combined with its determination to guard its national interests and guarantee the country’s military security.

In accordance with the Military Doctrine of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the military security of the Republic of Kazakhstan is the state of the vital interests of individuals, society and the state being protected from external and internal threats associated with the use of or an intention to use military force [1].

It is stated in the document that the military security of the Republic of Kazakhstan is ensured through promoting cooperation and good neighborly relations between different countries, equality and non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, peaceful settlement of international disputes, refusal to use military force first, as well as bolstering the military organization of the state based on threats forecasted and identifying and employing the most effective forms and ways of neutralizing them.

In accordance with the Doctrine, a threat to military security is a factor of instability that implies a possibility of using means of military violence to attain political and other goals and an intention to resolve existing contradictions through military force. The document cites possible external and internal threats to military security.

International political relations have a trend towards a heady build-up of uncertainty, instability and chaoticness in social processes at large and military/political ones in particular. In these conditions, the military/political leadership is expected to come up with well-weighed decisions and thoroughly think through the consequences of these decisions in the context of the state’s military security. Catastrophic consequences that could ensue as a result of taking and implementing ill-considered, erroneous military/political decisions can affect not only particular social groups but the very existence of the state or even the entire global community. The constant presence of such a possibility in the course of the activity of corresponding subjects in charge of ensuring military security requires undivided attention to the issue of political risk and a comprehensive insight into it.

Currently, no scientific discipline offers a clear-cut single approach to understanding political risk. Nor does such an understanding exist in political science. Nevertheless, we can point up several approaches to defining political risk to national, as well as military, security proposed in foreign publications.

The first group features definitions that construe political risk as an action (activity) of a subject in conditions of uncertainty when there is an opportunity to...
assess the probability of its positive and negative outcomes arising \[2\]. Here risk has to do with the subject’s own actions, when the subject, having weighed different options, chooses one of the decision variants for attaining the goals set \[3, 4\]. In other words, it is a special type of the subject’s activity in conditions of the uncertainty of outcomes expected.

Construing political risk as an activity is reflected in the ideas of A.P. Algin \[5\]. He believes that political risk is within the domain of the system of political relations and is an activity undertaken in a situation where making a choice is inevitable and in conditions of uncertainty, in the process of which one can objectively assess the probability of both the negative and positive consequences of such activity.

Currently, this definition of political risk is quite common among researchers. Let us examine a few examples. “Political risk,” explains L.V. Prokhorova \[6\], “is an activity in conditions of uncertainty, in the process of which there are opportunities to evaluate the probabilities of attaining a desired result or failing, or ending up deviating from the goal”. G.I. Plyasulya defines political risk about the same way \[7\]: “… an activity in the area of politics related to overcoming uncertainty in a situation where a choice must inevitably be made, in the process of which one gets an opportunity to quantitatively and qualitatively evaluate the likelihood of achieving, ending up deviating from, or failing to reach a goal”.

The second stance taken by authors specifies and complements the notion of political risk to security – it is a phenomenon pointing to a potential being (possibility), which can become reality in the form of a loss (damage) in putting the subject’s decisions in practice.

In this context, of undoubted interest is a definition of political risk put forward by G.V. Mukhin \[8\], which consistently brings together the categories “possibility, decision and activity”. “The term “political risk,” Mukhin writes, “means a possibility of adverse and dangerous consequences of the subject’s activity occurring, which are associated with making a choice and putting a political decision in practice”. In this regard, it is essential that risk is associated with making a political decision that engages the vital interests of large social groups of society which are dependent on the participation of the political leadership. Outside this relationship, political risk is no longer what it is, which means that not every action in politics can be associated with political risk. Thus, for instance, if a particular politician is pursuing his/her individual (personal) interests, his/her risk can be political in its form but not political in its content. Since the dividing line is not always clear, a politician’s individual risk is oftentimes viewed as political risk. Individual risk (just like narrow-group risk) acquires the properties of politicalness only when the interests of a specific subject of politics are indeed of a collective nature and decisions taken by the subject more or less suit a great many people.

These approaches are quite similar. The main difference between them is that in the first case risk is looked upon as an entire process of activity, i.e. no distinction is drawn between risk and risky activity, while in the second – as a situational characteristic of activity, which reflects a possibility of negative consequences resulting from this activity.

The logic behind further analysis of political risk to military security leads to the need of defining the acting person, i.e. the risk subject, whose decisions in conditions of uncertainty can lead to adverse consequences.

According to L.T. Aubakirova, the primary bearers of political risk are: first of all, individual and collective actors, immediately effecting political activity in conditions of uncertainty \[9\]. When it comes to the area of military security, it, in the first place, is the government.

Political risk to military security concomitant to the activity of the government is much broader than that borne by other political subjects, for the government bears imputed responsibility for regulating social relations and ensuring the safety of the population and is supposed to strive to live up to its role in taking and implementing decisions dealing with these aspects of life in society.

Political risk can also be manifested at the level of a particular individual (for instance, the head of government). In present conditions, the role of the political leadership is still rather important. Not just the affairs but even the image of the leader and his/her retinue can lead to augmenting political risk to military security.

The objects of political risk to military security are individuals, social groups and social establishments, which are affected by the consequences of political decisions.

An analysis of scientific literature reveals the following causes for political risk to military security: the insufficient rationality of political actions associated with the paucity and incompleteness of information and the abnormality of the political situation; failure to properly maintain a tally of all acquisitions and losses; misunderstanding and ignoring the interests of other participants in political activity; a lack of experience and competence, the irresponsibleness and adventurism of
political leaders (experts); the erraticalness, radicalism and aggressiveness of the course of activity of certain political establishments.

We can mention other causes as well: the polyvariantness of cause-and-effect nexuses in politics, which inevitably yield ambiguous results; fear and self-deception, when rational actions are perceived by political leaders as irrational and vice versa; the scarcity of resources for putting actions conceived in practice; the abuse of power by primary decision-makers; the unfairness of competition; the exaggeration of threats; the existence of stereotypes; etc.

These causes are behind the emergence of a political risk situation, which implies the presence of such mandatory conditions as: the presence of uncertainty; the need for choice between alternative options (note that a refusal of choice is also a kind of choice); the availability of an opportunity to evaluate the likelihood of alternatives chosen materializing.

However, studying and covering issues of national, as well as military, security and working out ways to resolve these issues calls for the clarity of initial positions, the strictness of notional language and the need to identify the internal interconnection between phenomena inspected. This, in turn, requires that the notional/categorial apparatus be worked through thoroughly. Therefore, of principal significance, especially in terms of scientific cognition, are such definitions of notions that give us objectively accurate meanings which are free of ideological implications and immune to the impact of the political environment.

In the theory and practice of ensuring military security, the terms “risk”, “danger” and “threat” characterize exerting a destructive, subversive, damaging and harmful influence upon various social objects, as well as the lives and activities of people. That said, we have not yet arrived at a universally accepted understanding of the essence and content of these terms, there being different views on the interrelation between them, which oftentimes contradict each other and inject confusion into the cognitive process and the practice of ensuring security.

In essence, a danger is quite a definite danger, which, however, is not so topical as to necessitate the immediate devising of strategies of defence. A threat is a more topical danger which requires immediate and energetic action on neutralizing it.

Considering the fact that the term “threat” is used in Kazakhstan’s Military Doctrine, a thorough analysis of political risk in ensuring military security requires a specification of the interconnection between the terms “threat” and “risk”.

Thus, for instance, according to A.V. Brega, the main common trait of these two terms is that both a threat and a risk imply a possibility of negative consequences, which can constitute certain damage, arising, whereas the two terms differ mainly in terms of: a) the degree of how likely the occurrence of damage is as the causes for the possibility becoming reality take shape; b) the influence of subjective and objective factors; c) specific targeting intentions in influencing the object.

A.V. Brega points out the following differences between a risk and a threat.

First of all, compared with a threat, a risk implies a possibility of avoiding or minimizing damage. Unfortunately, this circumstance is oftentimes given little heed in assessing the military-and-political situation and military-and-strategic planning. As a rule, the focus is on just the capacity of some forces to inflict damage, but not on the probable advantages of accepting (or minimizing) risk with a view to attaining one’s goal. Such a narrow-minded understanding of risk considerably simplifies its essence.

Second of all, a threat is associated with external influence. In this sense, a situation of threat is not always risky. Whereas a situation of risk is based on a possibility of damage in the course of activity by the subject itself, which can effect internal regulation of its own actions and, consequently, either increase or reduce the extent of damage. In other words, a threat is, for the most part, in the area of external (real) events, while a risk is in the area of the internal motivation of the acting subject.

Since the term “risk” works to a greater extent as a characteristic of a situation of choice faced by a subject responsible for ensuring security, risk implies management. The latter is not applicable to a threat, since a threat refers to just the capacity of a particular party to inflict damage (a possibility of his happening) but does not imply a possibility of minimizing the damage. Consequently, the term “risk” deals not only with a possibility of negative consequences arising, but a degree of orientedness towards success while not being completely confident of being able to avoid losses in attaining one’s national security goals. [10]

Thus, based on the above approaches to defining political risk, we can come up with a definition of political risk to military security, which reflects the major attributes of these approaches.

Political risk to military security is a possibility of adverse consequences arising, which emerges as a result
of the making and implementing of political decisions in the area of military security by social actors and unforeseen circumstances in the external and internal political environment.

Large-scale regional destabilization in the region of the Caspian Sea can become one of the possible political risks to military security in Kazakhstan. Thus, one of the possible external threats cited in the Military Doctrine of the Republic of Kazakhstan is about the unresolvedness of the issue of the Caspian Sea’s legal status, the aspiration of some Caspian-bordering states to boost their military potential and the existence of disputed oil deposits, which can result in the escalation of the military-and-political situation in the region in the future.

From the standpoint of economic processes taking place in Kazakhstan, which as a result of the division of the shelf received the largest and resource-richest part of the Caspian Sea, of great importance is the issue of reinforcing the legal status of this sea. The bilateral agreements signed by the member states of the Caspian region have established the geographic coordinates of the demarcation lines (along the so-called “modified median line”), which delimit tracts of the seabed within the boundaries whereof the parties can exercise their sovereign rights in the area of exploring and extracting mineral resources. That said, the water area remains in joint use.

Kazakhstan’s stance, which is now supported by Russia and Azerbaijan, suggests dividing the Caspian Sea into special economic zones along a median line drawn equidistant from the opposite points on the shores of the neighboring states, within which each state will have an exclusive right to tap the natural resources. In this regard, the coastal states should have exclusive rights to independently engage in the exploration and extraction of the natural resources. The rest of the sea and its surface should be open for free navigation. The air space above the sea should be open too, to allow aircraft to travel along routes coordinated by the member states. Commercial fishing and exploitation of other bio-resources should be conducted in respective fishing zones and by way of setting quotas on and licensing fishing activity.

This position is challenged by Iran. Teheran claims that the Caspian Sea is a lake and should be in joint use. Iran suggests dividing the shelf into equal shares (each state gets 20%). This would make Iran’s national sector larger compared with what it would get if the sea were divided based on a median line (14% of the Caspian Sea).

The lack of agreement on the Caspian Sea leads to a naval arms race. Iran has been most active in this regard with its policy aimed at aggressive vindication of its special stance on dividing the sea. In 2010, Iran upped its naval firepower at the Caspian Sea by sending over the largest of its ships, the “Jamaran” class guided missile destroyer. Likewise, Russia has intentions to employ its military potential at the Caspian Sea with a view to counteracting construction of a Trans-Caspian pipeline.

The fact that Iran possesses the means to conduct military operations at the sea gives the US reason to bolster its military-and-political presence in the region. The US has begun to render financial and logistics assistance to the Peri-Caspian states in the form of forming, training and equipping antiterrorist units and establishments to ensure the defence of vital communications facilities and the energy export infrastructure. As part of the “Caspian Guard” program, the US has allocated around 135 million dollars to Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. With the aid of the US, Azerbaijan has created a special naval task force and received several smaller ships from Turkey and the US. Kazakhstan received on a gratuitous basis four landing craft from the US in 2009 as part of a programme on cooperation between the defence ministries of the two countries.

Kazakhstan’s naval forces currently number 3 thousand men. The primary base is stationed at the Aktau port on the Caspian Sea. It is made up of naval infantry, coastal artillery and the Caspian Flotilla. The flagship of the Caspian Flotilla is the missile-artillery ship “Bars-MO” which includes four gunboats. In the near future, Kazakhstan’s naval forces will receive three South Korean missile boats type “Yoon Young-ha” and six missile-artillery ships type “Tornado”. Besides, in 2014 the flotilla will receive a multi-purpose ship “Bulan” and a mine-warfare ship “Kormoran 2”.

Bolstering Kazakhstan’s naval forces, as well as bolstering the frontier, becomes a necessity given the presence of high risks in the Central Asia/Caspian Sea region. At the same time, in ensuring Kazakhstan’s security one should prioritize diplomatic means and cooperating with all the interested parties as part of the republic’s multi-vector policy.

REFERENCES