

# FORECAST ON THE MILITARY-POLITICAL SITUATION EMERGING IN THE WORLD AND THE CENTRAL ASIAN REGION

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## *Introduction*

Today, the effects of worldwide globalization are being felt far and wide, while the old international world order, which toppled in the first decade of the 21st century, has become one of its victims.

Globalization has intruded into the spheres of the vitally important interests of individual states and the world community as a whole, which can be described as one of its worst impacts. This has added urgency to several extremely important problems, such as peace and universal security; arms control; disarmament; deterioration of the environment; demography; depletion of natural resources; energy production; space research; poverty and backwardness; drug trafficking and international terrorism.

The negative charge of these transnational problems is immense; moreover, they are intertwined to form an entanglement of all sorts of inner ties and links.

Globalization is gradually destroying all structures—national, political, economic, social, and others—the negative impact of which (ethnic

separatism, confessional and ethnic clashes, consolidation of ethnic groups in the economy, corruption, social contradictions, etc.) require state interference. Today, however, the state is slowly but surely losing its functions, which is narrowing down its role.

Today's global players (countries, transnational corporations, and regional alliances) have mastered new methods and strategies: economic intrusion into domestic markets; fast movement of finances; migration of highly skilled human resources; the use of information as a weapon of struggle, etc.

The wars have differed: new strategies rely on terrorist operations, the mass circulation of drugs, non-conventional types of weapons, etc.

This has already changed the international security structure, thus creating new challenges and threats.

Today, the West and the Islamic world are locked in a geopolitical confrontation which has assumed the form of a smoldering Middle Eastern conflict and the West's determination to re-

duce its dependence on Middle Eastern oil. Most of the Muslim states are dead set against the West, its domination, and its desire to impose “alien” Western values on them. From time to time, the struggle assumes hypertrophied forms.

The world is gradually acquiring several diversified models (the centers of military might will not necessarily be centers of economic power or cultural impacts); this means that in the future, the system of international relations will acquire several levels and several dimensions.

## 1. The Military-Political Situation in the Contemporary World

In the last decade the number of military conflicts in the world has not decreased. In some regions, the number of local wars and armed clashes might increase.

In the mid- and long-term perspective, the military-political situation in the world will be greatly affected by strategic rivalry over energy resources; terrorism; the spread of high-tech WMD technologies; cyber crimes, etc.

Since the end of the bipolar confrontation, states have acquired more opportunities to cooperate at the regional and global levels; today, the U.N. and other international organizations are involved more actively than ever in establishing regional and global cooperation, which is helping to reduce the threat of a global armed conflict to the minimum.

“The leading countries, however, do not haste to discard their obviously superfluous arsenals, which are consistently upgraded with new types of offensive weapons.”<sup>1</sup>

On the one hand, economic globalization and informational support of international relations have already created unprecedented development potential; while on the other, under their impact, the international security system is growing increasingly vulnerable to terrorism, WMD, and information weapons.

An increase in the number of conflicts inside states and their higher intensity cannot be excluded either. This is primarily true of some of the Middle Eastern, African, and Balkan states, as well as of several post-Soviet regions (such as the Ferghana Valley and the Caucasus).

The security challenges along Russia’s borders, namely the permanent presence of a NATO military group (within the framework of the Alliance’s eastward expansion policy) and the American MD system, are doing nothing to improve the military-political situation in Europe.

Today, the world is moving from the unipolar to “a multilayer and highly mobile international and interstate system,” which has already pushed to the fore global problems calling for new multisided mechanisms and adequate institutions.

Confronted with global problems, the world needs new multisided mechanisms and institutions to avoid destabilization or even chaos<sup>2</sup> fraught with loss of control and undermined security.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton once said that it was necessary to tilt “the balance away from a multi-polar world toward a multi-partner world” in which America would abandon its “the only superpower” strategy for the sake of leadership in the polycentric system of international relations.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> S.V. Kortunov, “Military-Political Situation in the World: The Year 2025,” *International Affairs*, No. 3, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> See: *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> See: S.M. Rogov, “Amerikanskoe liderstvo v mnogopoliarnom mire. Osnovy ‘Strategii natsionalnoy bezopasnosti’ administratsii Obamy,” *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, No. 21 (618), 2010, p. 6.

According to expert assessments, in the next 10 to 15 years, a fierce struggle for access to energy resources will strongly affect the military-political situation in the world. To retain control over their natural riches, states will have to steadily build up their defense capabilities with an accelerated arms race as a byproduct.

Weapon technologies are obviously developing: new cruise missiles can reach much more distant targets; air and sea-based delivery systems have been greatly improved; conventional weapons have acquired much greater destructive force, while a surprise attack has become much more probable. This means that those who own them are relatively more secure than the rest of the world; it also means that preemptive strikes might look advisable or even imperative.

So-called destabilizing weapons—small yield nuclear warheads and non-nuclear strategic missiles—have become a much more real threat than before.

Some countries, intent on placing their weapons (including nuclear weapons) in outer space, might initiate operations in outer space and launch network attacks and information wars.

America's intention to impose a unipolar world order (in which it will enjoy the right of unilateral use of force) on the world community and its determination to adjust the key international institutions (the U.N., OSCE, and ASEAN) to its interests can be described as two negative trends of planetary dimensions.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, the United States is ready with a strategy of achieving its foreign policy goals irrespective of what the other states want. The White House is convinced that military-technical domination is enough to secure world leadership.

It should be said that today the role of the United States in the international relations system is determined by its huge military potential present in all key regions of the world and the well-oiled mechanism of alliances and partnerships which includes all or nearly all of the important states, as well as America's well-developed economy.

In the military-political sphere, America, the military budget of which is equal to 40 percent of what the entire world spends on defense, has left all the other countries far behind.

According to experts, the United States has outstripped the rest of the world by at least 15 to 20 years in terms of technical equipment of its army with new types of weapons.

In addition, the United States controls the main sea routes and has over 700 military bases throughout the world. The military programs underway in this country suggest that in the next 8 to 10 years the gap will become even wider.

It should be said, however, that its military domination is useless when confronted with guerilla warfare and international terrorist networks: this is amply confirmed by what is going on in Iraq and Afghanistan.

American experts expect their country to remain the key state in the mid-term perspective; its global impact on international processes, however, will inevitably weaken even though its influence in the economic, technological, military, and diplomatic spheres will survive and acquire more weight.

There is the opinion in the Russian academic circles that in the next few years America will lose some of its influence and will succumb to the "post-Iraq syndrome" some time in the future.

The United States intends to restore, albeit partly, its international position by the end of 2017 even though it will never regain the "only superpower" status.<sup>5</sup>

According to Russian experts, the United States is geared toward preventing Russia's resurgence as a strong power and a "center of attraction" for the Soviet successor states. It should be said that

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<sup>4</sup> See: A.I. Vladimirov, "Strategiia gosudarstva v voenno-politicheskoy sfere," available at [[http://www.kadet.ru/lichno/vlad\\_v/Strategiya\\_Gos.htm](http://www.kadet.ru/lichno/vlad_v/Strategiya_Gos.htm)].

<sup>5</sup> See: S.A. Karaganov *et al.*, *Mir vokrug Rossii: 2017. Kontury nedalekogo budushchego*, Council for Foreign and Defense Policy, Moscow, 2007, p. 7.

from the military-strategic point of view, Russia stands no chance of becoming America's equal partner in the near future (with the exception of nuclear weapons).

The Russian expert community regards all the various foreign policy, military-political, economic, information, and other plans devised in the United States as a threat to Russia's national interests.

So far, despite all the problems and contradictions that regularly emerge between Russia and the West, Moscow has been coping with the task of cooperating with NATO, the U.S., and the EU on key security issues for the simple reason that all countries are prepared to act jointly to keep the global challenges and threats in check.

On the whole, Russia has elaborated a strategy for building its relations with the West; in the near future it intends to develop partnership with the United States, NATO, and the European Union in the security sphere. It also plans to establish and strengthen contacts with the CIS countries and the "Asian giants" (China and India) within the SCO, among other things.

## 2. The Military-Political Situation in Asia

The military and political instability in Asia might negatively affect the rest of the world.

Asia, which is actively involved in shaping a new system of global relations, is a factor of the geopolitical and geo-economic changes in the worldwide configuration and distribution of strategic forces. The impact of China, India, and the APR countries on world economy is mounting; new international organizations, unions, and alliances are appearing everywhere in the world.

The geostrategic changes are caused by technological breakthroughs and new conceptions related to the use of military force; the role of the Asian region has been likewise revised and reassessed.

The so-called Chinese factor, which is gaining momentum, aggravates the old and creates new contradictions, while the mounting rivalry might inflate the significance of military force.

By fortifying its position on the world arena, in the APR and in Central Asia in particular, China is out to retain its rivals (Russia, the United States, and India) in the zone of its strategic interests. Experts believe, however, that China's ambitious plans will force it to seek bilateral relations with the same rivals.

By the mid-21st century, China is expected to become a superpower with a lot of military-political influence throughout the world (to say nothing of the APR and the Central Asian Region). With this aim in view, Beijing is concentrating on the country's dynamic economic development; it is further fortifying its political regime and building favorable external conditions very much needed to modernize the country (its armed forces in particular).

The report of the U.S. National Intelligence Council *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World* says in part: "China is poised to have more impact on the world over the next 20 years than any other country. If current trends persist, by 2025 China will have the world's second largest economy and will be a leading military power... U.S. security and economic interests could face new challenges if China becomes a peer competitor that is militarily strong as well as economically dynamic and energy hungry."<sup>6</sup>

China, which needs latest military technologies at the lowest possible prices, is attaching special importance to its military-technical cooperation with Russia; it is interested in the most promising types of weapons, a field in which the country is still lagging.

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<sup>6</sup> [[http://www.dni.gov/nic/PDF\\_2025/2025\\_Global\\_Trends\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/nic/PDF_2025/2025_Global_Trends_Final_Report.pdf)].

Some Chinese experts think that China's current security-related sphere includes three extremely important aspects: border security; the separatist movements in East Turkestan and Tibet; and the geopolitical factor. Separatism in East Turkestan and Tibet is treated as an absolute priority, which is much more important than the geopolitical security issues.<sup>7</sup>

Chinese experts make no secret of the fact that Kazakhstan is the key country in the struggle against the East Turkestan Islamist Movement.<sup>8</sup>

The ongoing political crisis in Iraq, where political consensus remains outside the reach of the main national forces and leaders, is one of the most serious threats to Asia's military-political stability. The political instability inside the country, from which America has started to pull out, narrows down the country's foreign policy leeway.

Some believe that the armed opposition, terrorists, and criminals might exploit the political vacuum; mass protests of the impoverished population which flare up across the country create even more problems.

The fact that foreign armed forces still remain in the country is stirring up the Islamic radicals, who regard Iraq as a "battle field" with the West.

The prevailing doctrines of the Iranian leaders are neither confrontational nor aggressive; they look at the United States and Israel as political and ideological opponents rather than military adversaries. Some experts believe that Tehran's interest in the Soviet successor-states (the countries of the Southern Caucasus and the Central Asian Region in particular) is explained by its fear that Washington and its allies might gain a military-political toehold in both regions to be used to undermine Iran's political system; Tehran, in turn, is trying to prevent unwelcome developments.<sup>9</sup> The United States, in turn, regards the Iranian nuclear file and Iran's hegemonic designs as the region's main military threat (up to and including the countries of the Central Asian Region), which makes a military conflict possible rather than probable.

### ***2.1. The Military-Political Situation in Afghanistan***

War in Afghanistan has an essential impact on military-political situation in Asia. The upsurge in Taliban operations shows that the counterterrorist coalition has so far failed to achieve its original aims.

Indeed, the mounting scope of ISAF military operations in the country's south and southeast did nothing to quench the Taliban's activities in large cities and some of the provinces. Subversion and terrorism have worsened the situation across the country, where central power is limited to the capital and some of the provinces.

In recent years, the Taliban has stepped up its activities: whereas in 2007, it controlled 54 percent of the country's territory, in December 2009, its presence was felt in a much vaster area (which covered 72 percent of the territory). According to military observers, today the Taliban has spread its influence to practically every province.

In 2007-2010, the Taliban captured several local centers in the south and remains in control there. It set up alternative administrative structures; controls local traffic; collects taxes; regulates trade;

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<sup>7</sup> See: Zhao Huasheng, "Kitaysko-kazakhstanskies otnosheniia: nastoiashchee i budushchee," *Analytic*, No. 1, 2010, p. 28.

<sup>8</sup> See: *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>9</sup> See: J. Eyvazov, "Postsovetskoe prostranstvo skvoz prizmu interesov bezopasnosti Irana," *Sardar*, No. 1 (6), 2010, p. 86.

controls morality; and applies the Shari'a laws. The ISAF can do nothing to weaken the Taliban's influence; its presence is especially obvious in the fighting zones.<sup>10</sup>

The counterterrorist forces in Afghanistan include servicemen from 46 countries (NATO members, Mongolia, Georgia, Ukraine, and other non-members); between 2003 and 2010, their numbers increased from 5 to nearly 100 thousand; however almost everywhere they remain disunited and, therefore, highly vulnerable.

The bulk of the ISAF tries to maintain security in the provinces, provide assistance in restoring the social and economic infrastructure, and help the local administrations to be more efficient in what they are doing. Americans, British, Dutch, Canadians, and Australians, on the other hand, are fighting in the south and southeast.<sup>11</sup>

The nine years of the counterterrorist operation have done nothing to stabilize the situation; the central government has so far failed to draw the Taliban into a reconciliation dialog: fighting goes on very much as before (according to official sources, the war has already caused tens of thousands of civilian deaths). The Taliban argues that national reconciliation can be negotiated only if and when the foreign troops have been removed from the country.

It should be said that the military operation of the United States and its allies has not brought security to Afghanistan's neighbors or to the West. A network of Islamic extremists was exposed before its members managed to organize resounding terrorist acts in London, Berlin, and Paris.

Terrorist organizations have been traced to Pakistan which, while remaining a U.S. ally, has become a "safe haven" for terrorists. This is particularly true of North Waziristan, a so-called tribal region which borders on Afghanistan. It is commonly believed that the Taliban leaders and, according to some sources, Osama bin Laden, head of al-Qa'eda, are based there. So far, the Western special services have not found, let alone liquidated, the Number One terrorist.

The expert community agrees that the Taliban cannot be defeated as long as its rank-and-file fighters remain the main target. There is no shortage of warriors of Islam to join its ranks: three decades of fighting have made armed struggle and violence a salaried job. The Taliban leaders are relatively safe in Pakistan, where they concentrate the financial and material resources coming from all sorts of "sponsors."

American drone attacks on Waziristan did kill fighters, but they also fed extremist feelings in Pakistan.

The active attempts of the neighboring states (particularly Pakistan, India, and Iran, which have aims of their own) to interfere in Afghanistan's internal affairs add to the confusion.

The never-ending regional crisis adds an edge to the ongoing confrontation between the U.S. and NATO and the Muslim world; the Taliban regards all countries which help the coalition in one way or another as their foes.

The chances of prompt military-political stabilization of the situation in Afghanistan are too vague to be discussed. Force is impotent in Afghanistan; the military campaign did not liquidate the centers of international terror and the drug business. Neither the Afghan administration nor the international coalition can destroy the fighters' training camps scattered across the country. A final victory requires even larger forces and assets of better quality. No political settlement is feasible while the profound ideological contradictions survive.

The Americans, who expected Pakistan to act as an effective ally, pumped billions of dollars into it, but the Pakistani special services continued to support the Afghan militants.

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<sup>10</sup> See: V.V. Evseev, "Afganskaia problema: vzgliad iz Moskvy," *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, No. 10, 2010, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> See: *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.



Pakistan, where radical Islam is one of the strongest pillars, cannot afford to withdraw its support of the fighters, even though Islamabad is fully aware of the great threat the Taliban presents to the country.

The Indian factor is another reason for Pakistani support of the Taliban: Islamabad is very much concerned about India's consistent efforts to establish close relations with the Karzai regime. The Pakistani generals do not want an Indian ally in their strategic rear.

The middle and higher ranks of the Pakistani army are stuffed with Pashtoons (a tribe to which the Taliban also belongs); very strong clan ties force them to be loyal to the Pashtoons of Afghanistan.

Today, the military and the special services are in control of Pakistan's political life, while the civilian authorities are too weak to fight those who support the Islamic extremists. On the whole, this poses a serious threat for Central Asia.

## ***2.2. The Military-Political Situation in the Central Asian Region***

The above should be treated as ample evidence of the fact that the Middle Eastern developments are undermining Central Asian stability. First, the Middle East is a source and, not infrequently, a "sponsor" of all sorts of radical extremist movements and groups; second, its instability affects the world economy and oil prices.

A direct military threat in the short- and mid-term perspective looks highly improbable; however the Central Asian Region is plagued by many other problems: terrorism, religious extremism, separatism, the flow of drugs from Afghanistan, etc.

The illegitimate (unconstitutional) regime change in Kyrgyzstan is another negative factor.

Our analysis has revealed the main trends of military-political developments in the Central Asian Region:

1. Conflict potential will increase because of the following factors:
  - the worsened military-political situation in Afghanistan caused by religious extremists;
  - the gradual strengthening of Islamic extremism amid the unfavorable social and economic developments;
  - the negative impact of the world financial crisis on the local economies;
  - the aggravated interstate contradictions in many spheres, including border issues, distribution of water and energy resources, etc;
  - the continued internal contradictions and the weak ruling elites in some of the countries.
2. The key world powers will step up their geopolitical involvement in the region to gain control over energy resources and transportation routes; to be able to station their military bases in the region; and to impose ad hoc foreign policies on the local states, etc.
3. The Central Asian countries will not abandon the isolationist policy caused by personal disagreements among their leaders, as well as by the already depleted economic potential of interstate cooperation previously rooted in the Soviet past.

It looks advisable to develop the traditional economic branches in Kyrgyzstan and the countries which include the territory of the Ferghana Valley for the sake of restored regional stability.

In the long-term perspective, the same purpose will be served by gas and oil pipelines and transportation routes intended to connect the region with China and India.

These and other strategic projects will create more jobs; remove some of the social problems; upgrade the infrastructure; and, on the whole, stabilize the situation.

## *C o n c l u s i o n*

An analysis of the military-political situation in the world confirms that globalization has radically changed the architecture of the international security system.

Today, a large-scale (world) war seems highly unlikely, but the world is obviously moving toward the greater possibility of regional conflicts; today, local wars and armed conflicts over controversial territories caused by ethnic and religious contradictions, misinterpreted historical justice, etc. are much more likely than before.

The content of military conflicts has changed; *they have acquired the following common features:*

- wide use of indirect, non-contact forms and methods of fighting and long-range fire and electronic systems;
- active information warfare, disorientation of public opinion in individual states and throughout the world community as a whole;
- disorganization of state administration and military command and control systems;
- use of state-of-the-art and highly efficient armament systems and military technologies based on newly discovered physical principles;
- fighting in several sectors involving airmobile forces, landing parties, and special-purpose forces on a wide scale;
- involvement of irregular units in armed conflicts.

Today, some fundamentally new means of warfare based on the latest, primarily information, technologies are being devised, which is slowly but surely changing the nature and methods of fighting.

An analysis of current military conflicts shows that the reduced probability of a large-scale war does not exclude new seats of potential conflicts everywhere, including in the Central Asian Region.

Indeed, tension along the Afghan border with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan might trigger destabilization in these two countries, as well as in Kyrgyzstan, which, in turn, will undermine the region's military security.

All forecasts on the military-political situation in the world should account for the fact that growing globalization largely affects the geo-economic interests of the Central Asian countries with the factor of uncertainty coming to the fore.

This factor extends the sphere in which military force can be used; it retains the efficiency and adequacy of military force when dealing with new threats and challenges such as international terrorism; drug trafficking; organized crime; piracy; uncontrolled migration, etc.

It seems that military force will remain an inalienable (or even determining) element of international relations, irrespective of the future world order.

In the next 10 to 15 years, access to energy and other natural resources against the background of the steadily deteriorating environment might cause military conflicts of various dimensions.



Regional and international security is threatened and will remain threatened by the rivalry among the existing and emerging power centers in the political, economic, and military spheres; the same is true of the potential seats of tension, internal armed conflicts, and the strong armed (including nuclear) forces of certain states.

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