SOME ASPECTS OF THE THEORY OF REGIONAL SECURITY COMPLEXES AS APPLIED TO STUDIES OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM IN THE POST-SOVIET SPACE

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Introduction

The first shoots of a new regional political system appeared in the post-Soviet space early in the 1990s, the previous hierarchical system of which became anarchical when the Soviet Union collapsed, while the key vectors of security interdependence of the newly independent states remained in place.

Here I have attempted to assess the regional system which is functioning across the post-Soviet space from the point of view of the Theory of Regional Security Complexes (TRSC),[1] which offers the most comprehensive and effective explanation of how the security sphere is developing in the post-Soviet macro-region. However, its application creates several problems, an assessment of which belongs to the range of questions raised in this article.

[1] In 1983, Barry Buzan formulated the conception of the regional security complex in his *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, 1983). This, as well as the second edition of the same work (B. Buzan, *People, States and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, Second Edition, Lynne Rienner Publishers Boulder, Colorado, 1991), demonstrated a classical approach to the security complex conception. Much later, together with co-authors (B. Buzan, O. Wæver, J. De Wilde, *Security. A New Framework for Analysis*, Rienner Publishers Boulder, London, 1998; B. Buzan, O. Wæver, *Regions and Powers*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003), he made an attempt to go beyond the limits of the classical conception of the security concept. The authors introduced, among other things, two types of security complexes (homogeneous and heterogeneous) and the securitization conception to remedy the current disparages with the classical conception of the security complex, such as concentrating on the military and political spheres of relations or inadequate attention to the non-state actors, which also create additional vectors of inter-sectoral interdependence.

On the Regional Security Complex Concept

The regional security complex (RSC) model rests on the interdependence among the key national security interests of a geographically compact group of states. Barry Buzan identifies RSC as "a

group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely, so that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another."[2]

The intrinsic interdependence of the security of states under the RSC model is generated in several dimensions, such as common and conflicting interests, interdependent behaviors, and interconnected perceptions. And, of course, all of this has a regional geographic foundation. "They (the security complexes.—*J.E.*) represent the way in which the sphere of concern that any state has about its environment, interacts with the linkage between the intensity of military and political threats, and the shortness of the range over which they are perceived. Because threats operate more potently over short distances, security interactions with neighbors will tend to have first priority."[3] The relations within RSC are determined not only by the geographic proximity of the states involved, but also by the anarchic nature of the international political system. In other words, RSC is a geographically limited and materially and perceptionally specific example of international anarchy with the corresponding internal amity/enmity relationships.[4]

The mutual perception of amity/enmity is the key to the dynamics of the security relations within RSC. Barry Buzan has written on this score: "…regional security subsystems can be seen in terms of patterns of amity and enmity that are substantially confined within some particular geographical area."[5]

The TRSC offers various types and forms of regional complexes; the most general typology distinguishes between standard and centered RSC.[6] According to Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, in the centered RSC, the dynamics of security relations are determined by one power found in its center.[7] The authors go on to identify three forms (depending on the specifics of the central actor) of this type: centered on a great power—Russia in the post-Soviet space; on a superpower—the United States in North America; and, finally, on an institution (institutional RSC)—the European Union.[8]

Both types (standard and centered) are anarchic albeit to different degrees. In the standard RSC, which has a relatively balanced power structure, the participants are more autonomous when it comes to establishing bilateral relations. In the centered RSC, on the other hand, these relations are de facto regulated by the central actor either with the help of the classical use of force or through institutional mechanisms, while the participants remain de jure independent.

Collapse of the Soviet Union and Emergence of a New Regional Security System

In the context of RSC evolution, the collapse of the Soviet Union meant a transfer from a rigidly hierarchical single actor to an anarchically organized regional system, RSC, to be more exact.

The TRSC does not envisage this stage in RSC development; according to the TRSC, changes in the security complex structure either change it or transform its inner dynamics, while preserving

[2] B. Buzan, *People, States and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era,* p. 190.
[3] Ibid., p. 191.
[4] See: B. McSweeney, *Security, Identity and Interests: A Sociology of International Relations,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 63.
[5] B. Buzan, *People, States and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era,* p. 190.
[6] See: B. Buzan, O. Wæver, op. cit., pp. 55-61.
[7] See: Ibid., p. 55.
[8] See: Ibidem.

the RSC structure intact. Regional political integration (several states merge into one political actor) can be described as the final point according to the first scenario.[9] This transformation stems from the changes in the first component— the structure's ordering principle. What K.N. Waltz has to say about the two types—anarchic and hierarchic—of this ordering[10] corresponds to the RSC transformations described above. Anarchy as the main attribute of relations within the RSC develops into a hierarchy very close to that present inside the states. "Beyond security community lies regional integration which ends anarchy and, therefore, moves the regional security issues from the national and international to the domestic realm."[11]

The TRSC says that structural changes may occur in the regional security system even if the general structure of the complex remains intact. They are based on the differences in the dynamics of the relations within any given RSC. A transfer from one level of dynamics development to another is stimulated by changes in the amity/enmity relations. As distinct from the previous scenario, in this case the regional system remains anarchically organized, while the changes are limited to the perceptional-behavioral component of regional interdependence. The TRSC offers a general model of these changes and identifies the initial, final, and intermediary levels (chaos-a regional conflict formation-security regime-security community).[12]

This means that RSC restoration as a result of the Soviet Union's collapse does not completely fit the way the TRSC describes the development of the regional security systems, however this restoration can be explained. This theory presupposes that regional systems develop through evolution and that the transfer from one level to another is caused by internal sociopolitical, economic, and sociocultural development of the member states accompanied by corresponding stages of maturity in their relations. In our case, the Soviet Union's emergence as an integrated actor in the first third of the 20th century was nothing more than the strongest actors taking over the weakest. The evolution of the RSC to the level of a security community was cut short in a "revolutionary" way by enforced amalgamation. Within the TRSC, this situation is described as "overlay." The key material and perceptional-behavioral problems that unite regional social-political units into an interdependence web remained unresolved, while the security relations dynamics were suppressed by harsh administrative measures typical of the Soviet Union. This explains why the weakening and later disintegration of the command-control system at the turn of the 1990s restored the anarchical ordering of the political structure in this space and the functionality of interdependence of the central security interests of the newly independent states typical of the regional complex.

The RSC that came into being in the post-Soviet space was very specific; its size and the structural and political features set it apart from standard RSCs within which security interests are closely connected because of geographic proximity[13] and are localized by a geographically compact inter-

[9] See: B. Buzan, O. Wæver, J. De Wilde, op. cit., p. 12.

[10] K.N. Waltz uses the ordering of the international and domestic systems to explain the difference between the anarchic and hierarchic types of ordering (see: K.N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, McGraw-Hill, Boston, 1979, p. 88).

[11] B. Buzan, *People, States and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, pp. 218-219.

[12] According to B. Buzan, in the conditions of chaos, the entire set of the security relations in the region is determined by enmity since each of the regional actors sees an enemy in the others. As distinct from the initial level, amity is possible even at the first intermediary level—regional conflict formations—dominated by conflict relations among the actors. At the next intermediary level—security regime—regional states cooperate in order to settle the conflicts and avoid a war; they rely on mutually acceptable forms of behavior to achieve security in their relations. At the final stage of the transfer within the functioning security complex and according to Buzan's conception, a security community appears in which conflicts have been resolved to the extent that none of the members fears aggression from any of the other members of the community.

[13] See: B. Buzan, *People, States and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, pp. 188, 189, 191, 195.

state constellation, and in which "the security dynamics of the region are not dominated from the unipolar power at its center."[14] According to Buzan and Wæver, the regional system of the post-Soviet space is a "centered great power regional security complex."[15]

At the same time, the newly independent states formed their own local inter-state systems—the regional security sub-complexes in the European part (Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia; Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine); in the Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia), and in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan). The regional sub-systems were relatively autonomous, however Russia preserved its function of a center which bound them together into a "web" interdependence of the Post-Soviet Security Macrocomplex (PSM).

In this structure Russia was the only geopolitical actor that could consistently project its influence on the regional scale; it was the key security factor for all the newly independent states in all the sub-complexes. This meant that the development of local complexes and the dynamics of the security relations among the member states and their ties with the "external" centers of power were dependent not only on the endogenous factors but also on Russia's geopolitical activities.

PSM Evolution: The Points Where TRSC Does Not Apply

We have agreed that, first, in the early 1990s the hierarchical structure of the Soviet Union was transformed into an anarchic structure and formed, to borrow what Buzan and Wæver have to say, a "centered great power regional security complex," which here is called the Post-Soviet Security Macrocomplex. Second, at the time of its emergence the PSM consisted of Russia and four regional sub-complexes (Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia; Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine; Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia; and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan).

Its evolution, however, revealed several problems which cast doubt on the PSM idea. In the most general form they can be discussed within the PSM border issue.

For example, one wonders, while assessing the Caucasian segment of the PSM, whether the Caucasus as a whole should be seen as the RSC or the RSC is limited to three independent states—Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia?

It must be said that in the post-Soviet period several authors tried to apply the TRSC to the Caucasus[16]; some of them tended to include broad sections in the spatial-political borders of the security region. Bruno Coppieters has the following to say about the spatial outline of the Caucasian RSC: "Both the Transcaucasus and the North Caucasus may be thought of as parts of a larger security complex, comprising Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and part of Russia. The North Caucasus continues to play a decisive role in the future of the Transcaucasus and the Caucasian security complex as a whole."[17] Svante Cornell goes even further: "…the Caucasus is a region; but more than being a region, it is a security complex: the national security of one of the Caucasian states cannot realistically be consid-

[14] B. Buzan, O. Wæver, op. cit., p. 55.

[15] Ibid., pp. 55, 62, 343.

[16] See: B. Coppieters, "Conclusions: The Caucasus as a Security Complex," in: *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, ed. by B. Coppieters, Vubpress, Brussels, 1996, pp. 193-204; S.E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers. A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus,* Curzon Press, Surrey, 2001; B. Buzan, O. Wæver, op. cit.

[17] B. Coppieters, op. cit., p. 195.

ered apart from that of the other two. As far as the three regional powers (Russia, Turkey, and Iran.—*J.E.*) are concerned, the security of the Caucasus does have a direct bearing upon the national security of these states that justifies their inclusion into the security complex."[18]

Indeed, the security interests of these powers are involved in the region; or to be more exact, we are talking about an interdependence between them and the Caucasian states which, in some cases, ties together the central (existential) security interests of the three power centers and the region. For example, Armenia's territorial claims to Turkey[19] and the perceived threats and historical insults caused by the 1915 events in the Ottoman Empire, which the Armenians call genocide, are an interdependence of this type. There is a fundamental interconnection between Iran and Azerbaijan created by the tens of millions of ethnic Azeris living in Iran in the territory which is called "Southern Azerbaijan."[20] In both cases, the reference is to the territory and population, two elements of the state's physical base which cannot, by definition, be removed beyond the limits of the state's key security interests.

A similar problem in the European segment of PSM (Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine) is related to the closest geographical neighbors, former socialist allies which joined the EU (Poland and Rumania). We can hardly ignore the obvious national kinship between Moldova and Rumania and the two states' perceptional-behavioral interdependence based on it. It is also impossible to ignore the Western Ukraine and Western Belarus issue with their Catholic Slavic populations, while looking at the web of interdependence which ties Ukraine and Belarus with Poland.

From this it follows that having accepted the above examples of interdependence between the PSM states' security and "external" actors, we should treat not only Russia, but also Turkey and Iran (the Caucasian segment) as parts of the PSM, as well as Poland and Rumania, at least, in the European segment. Iran (with the ethnic Turkmen who live as a compact group in its northern part and a score of still unsettled Caspian problems) should be included in the Central Asian sub-complex together with China (because of the "Uighur factor").

According to the TRSC, it is hardly realistic to expect that these actors can be treated as parts of the corresponding regional PSM sub-complexes; the theory rules out what is called "overlapping membership."[21] In other words, one and the same actor cannot belong to two or more RSCs. Hence Turkey and Iran, as elements of the Mid-Eastern RSC, and Poland and Rumania, as part of the European (institutional) RSC, cannot belong to the PSM. The theory describes any power's actual involvement in interactions within different complexes as "overlay" or "penetration."[22]

It goes without saying that at the theoretical level, any discussion of regionalization in any sphere (the security sphere in our case) calls for a clear delimitation between regional systems. When identifying a constellation of geographically close states as RSC, the TRSC proceeds from the assumption that security interdependence among the constellation's parts is much stronger than between them and the external actors.[23] Regional complexes are separated by what is described as a zone of "relative indifference,"[24] otherwise any regionalization theory becomes senseless. A power might be involved

[18] S.E. Cornell, op. cit., p. 391.

[19] Armenia claims an eastern part of Turkey called Western Armenia associated with the parts of the Ottoman Empire populated by Armenians. Today they are the vilayets of Erzurum, Van, Agri, Hakkari, Muş, Bitlis, Siirt, Diyarbekir, Erzincçan, Bingöl, Malatya, Sivas, Amasya, Tokat, and part of Giresun (see: *Istoria Osmanskogo gosudarstva, obshchestva i tsivilizatsii*, ed. by E. Ihsanoglu, Transl. from the Turkish, Vol. 1, Vostochnaya literatura Publishers, Moscow, 2006, p. 87 (*History of the Ottoman State, Society & Civilization,* ed. by Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Istanbul, 2001).

[20] Under the Treaty of Turkmanchay of 1828, the territory of Azerbaijan was divided between the Russian Empire and Iran and came to be known as Northern and Southern Azerbaijan.

[21] B. Buzan, O. Wæver, op. cit., p. 48.

[22] Ibid., p. 49.

[23] See: Ibid., pp. 47-48.

[24] B. Buzan, *People, States and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era,* p. 193.

in the security processes in several RSCs but, according to the TRSC, it can belong to only one regional system; in all other cases, it is a free geopolitical player involved in regional interactions in pursuance of its own interests.

The extent to which the actor depends on regional interaction or, to be more exact, the extent to which these interests are important, is of vital significance. What if the interests concentrated in an "alien" RSC are of an existential nature for it and there are stable amity/enmity perceptions between it and the states of the regional complex which might provoke consistent regional activities? This brings to mind, once more, Turkey and Iran with their potential PSM involvement described above.

The same question arises when one considers the Baltic region after its integration into the EU. If interpreted within the TRSC, the current security system in the Baltic region (with Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia being EU members) does not give grounds to say that their security ties within the European Union are less important or looser than with the Russian Federation and other PSM elements. It would be wrong to believe, on the other hand, that integration has destroyed the security interdependence between the "new Europeans" and the post-Soviet space. Besides, the Baltic precedent makes it next to impossible to exclude its repetition with other PSM states.

Afghanistan can be described as another digression from the PSM idea (in the Central Asian segment). Should this state be regarded as part of the Central Asian PSM sub-complex?

Within the PSM conception, Afghanistan does not fit the structure of the local RSCs in Central Asia. Buzan regards it as unrelated to any of the regional systems; it is an "insulator"[25] which separates one RSC from another, that is, a segment of the "relative indifference" zone wedged between the security complexes of Central Asia and South Asia. Today, however, this approach can be accepted with a certain amount of doubt.

Indeed, today, the country can be hardly described as an independent and homogeneous actor to the extent sufficient at least for the securitization and creation of common (all-Afghan) security interests in relation to its neighbors. It entered the post-Cold War period in a state of political chaos and inner fragmentation; the civil war between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance was going on and was responsible for the country's continued fragmentation. Chaos survived in the post-Taliban period and was intensified by the presence of foreign armed forces in its territory; we can hardly regard it as an actor.

This period in the history of Afghanistan and the question of whether it belongs to any of the regional complexes directly refers to one of the two main problems of identifying RSCs which Buzan described as: "…in some areas local states are so weak that their power does not project much, if at all, beyond their own boundaries. These states have domestically directed security perspectives, and there is not enough security interaction between them to generate a local complex."[26] In the Central Asian space, Afghanistan looks like one of the weak states described by Buzan; while all the other states (even Tajikistan which lived through a civil war at the dawn of its independence) can be described as relatively more stable, their perceptions and security interests being oriented toward the outside world.

At the same time, there are enough weighty arguments which allow us to count the country among the members of the Central Asian RSC if we look at the region "not from Afghanistan" but from the other members of the same complex. The thesis of the "relative indifference" zone can be used as an argument in favor of Afghanistan's inclusion in the Central Asian RSC. According to the TRSC, the borders of the regional complexes are formed by "relative indifference" zones, while security interde-

[25] B. Buzan, *People, States and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era,* p. 193; B. Buzan, O. Wæver, op. cit., p. 41.

[26] B. Buzan, *People, States and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era,* p. 197.

pendence inside the RSCs is much stronger than between them and the "external" states,[27] including the "insulators" which form the "indifference" zone.

Interdependence, however, cannot be one-sided by definition; the same is true of securitization and involvement for the sake of the interests of security. If we agree that Afghanistan, for any internal reason, in particular because of its weakness as a state, does not concentrate its interests on its Central Asian neighbors and does not adjust its behavior accordingly, we should not think that the RSC members are equally uninterested in Afghanistan. From the very first day the RSC appeared in Central Asia, its members have regarded Afghanistan as a source of existential security threats and behaved accordingly in relation to their southern neighbor. They are interdependent at least in an ethnoterritorial sense (the northern part of Afghanistan is populated by Tajiks and Uzbeks) and by the so-called new threats: drug trafficking, religious radicalism, etc. This interdependence is objective, however the post-Soviet newly independent states are more aware of this than Afghanistan. This and the possibility that these perceptions (in Afghanistan in particular) will increase fit the securitization conception well.

Moreover, despite its current dependent and fairly pronounced amorphous conditions, Afghanistan is moving toward stronger statehood and a vertical of political power. This and the prospect of it becoming stronger, which will allow it to build up its potential of power projection, will help create a stronger security concept and reorient securitization from internal to external phenomena and processes. This will boost the perceptional-behavioral aspects of interdependence between it and the post-Soviet Central Asian states.

On the whole, current globalization and post-industrialism are pulling the rug out from under the "insulator-state" concept. Afghanistan and Mongolia (another "insulator" state according to Buzan), which historically belongs to Central Asia, serve as examples that this function is largely determined by the specifics of their internal development. The further a state has advanced toward postmodernity, the fewer the reasons to describe it as an "insulator." This is fairly obvious because it presupposes its closer economic, social, cultural, and political interdependence with other states.

On PSM Transformation

The TRSC thesis on the "centered great power regional security complex" has been accepted as a model of the regional security system the post-Soviet space assumed after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is equally obvious that including other powers besides Russia in these subsystems may devalue the PSM idea; this is true, however, only if we treat it as a relatively static system.

When talking about the present security system across the post-Soviet space we should proceed from its fairly pronounced dynamism and unsteady nature. The Baltic states, in particular, prove that structural transformations are possible.

Even if we agree with the TRSC that "overlapping membership" is impossible, we cannot exclude, in principle, a reorientation of Turkey and Iran's security interests toward Central Eurasia, which might be needed for their involvement into the region's security system. Since the TRSC does not regard the regional systems as static units, the principle of staticity should not necessarily be applied to regional concentration of the powers' security interests.

The TRSC's mechanisms of securitization make it possible to expect these developments. Buzan and Wæver have the following to say about RSC seen through the prism of this mechanism: "A set

[27] Ibid., p. 193.

of units whose major processes of securitization, de-securitization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another."[28]

In the theoretical-methodological respect, the securitization phenomenon allows the TRSC to rise from the "Procrustean bed" of positivism. In other words, Waltz's structure or, to be more exact, distribution of power in the system is not the main stimulator of the elements' behavior. It is not the main trigger of securitization as well. As a relative phenomenon, the latter wholly depends on the actor: "Different actors securitize differently: different political and cultural situations enable securitization in different sectors and they have different dynamics."[29]

While the central security interests of any actor are the product of the securitization process unfolding under the impact of numerous factors, any changes in these factors might transform the interests; hence they might become oriented toward an "alien" political space. The geopolitical processes underway in Eurasia display dynamism and changeability which generate factors conducive to shifts in the interests of the Eurasian powers. The outlines can be discerned: the deepening energy crisis has already readjusted securitization in this sphere and stimulated interstate competition in Eurasia. It can be said that under the pressure of securitization of the energy, migration, and other non-traditional threats, the European Union has become a holder of clearly formulated security interests concentrated on the post-Soviet space.

Conclusion

Early in the 1990s, the hierarchically arranged Soviet system was replaced with a developing anarchic regional security system, a process which received its fullest interpretation in the Theory of the Regional Security Complexes. It talks about the system which emerged in the post-Soviet space as "centered great power regional security complex," the structure of which was formed (at the initial stage) by Russia and four sub-complexes (Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia; Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine; Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia; and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan).

PMS's further development revealed that not everything in the system of the post-Soviet space can be explained with the help of the TRSC. Today, when the security interests of the neighboring powers (Turkey, Iran, and China) are also involved in the PSM complexes, when the EU expanded to include the states of the Baltic RSC, and in view of the mounting dependence of the security interests of the states of the Central Asian sub-complex on Afghanistan, it has become much harder to identify the exact borders of the PSM.

This speaks of instability of the present PSM structure, which provides more opportunities to consider it as a transition stage in the development of the security system in the post-Soviet macroregion.

[28] B. Buzan B., O. Wæver, op. cit., p. 44.
[29] Ibid., p. 87.