



MILITARY CONFLICTS IN AFGHANISTAN AND ONGOING IMPORTANCE OF TERMEZ AS A SPRINGBOARD

The necessity for a comprehensive review of armed conflicts that lasted in Afghanistan for centuries is caused by the need to identify both the current situation and the possible prospects of development in the region. Being a strategic springboard on the Amu Darya's shore the Termez city, located on the most southern border of Uzbekistan, has always played an important role in shaping Afghanistan's geopolitical agenda both in the ancient and in the modern history.

Established 2500 years ago, Termez is the administrative center of the Surkhandarya region of the modern Uzbekistan. It was originally founded as a strategic crossing point over the Amu Darya River. Located on the most convenient transportation route between India and Central Asia, Termez became an important part of the Great Silk Road. Thus, since the 2nd century B.C. the city has provided caravan trade on the largest transcontinental route protecting crossing point over the Amu Darya.

Throughout its long history, Termez suffered from a long list of conquerors who came to the region from the West, the East, the North and the South, namely, the Achaemenid Persians, the Greeks of Alexander the Great, the Tocharians and other tribes. Since the Muslims occupied the region in the 7th century A.D. Termez has become an essential part of the Islamic culture.

Since the Russian conquest of the Central Asia in the second half of the 19th century A.D. the tsarist policy has promoted a largescale colonization of the region. Therefore, in 1884 the Russian Empire established the Turkestan Military District, which included Termez as a strategic outpost. Its construction started in 1894 and over the next few years the Russian authorities created a new settlement in the city. Moreover, construction of the port, which had both commercial and military importance, launched the regular navigation on the Amu Darya River.

It was decided to implement a largescale railway project running through Termez due to its strategic importance. So, initially

the Petersburg - Tashkent - Termez - Kabul - Delhi railway project was developed by Ferdinand Marie Vicomte de Lesseps, widely known as the designer of the Suez, Corinth and Panama canals projects, in the early 1870s. Despite the fact that during the mentioned historical period the construction of such a railway was not economically feasible, the military-political significance of this project outweighed the possible economic costs. However, the Russian authorities failed to complete the project in accordance with the initial plan. Therefore, construction of the railway was finished only in 1916 and its final destination was Termez.

As the Russian outpost, Termez served as an essential part of the Great Game between the British Empire and the Russian Empire for the supremacy in Central Asia. According to 1898 Plan, which was designed to put forward the details of the invasion of Afghanistan, Termez was elected as the main operating base of the forces of the Turkestan Military District that aided in providing military operations against the Anglo-Afghans and in crossing over the Amu Darya. However, despite the fact that the last Emperor of Russia, Nicholas II, encouraged the strengthening of the Russian influence in the East, it was decided not to implement the aforementioned plan because of its high economic costs. Moreover, the Russian authorities had to postpone any plans of the invasion of Afghanistan after Russia recognized the protectorate of the Great Britain over Afghanistan and agreed not to enter into direct relations with the Afghan Emir in 1907. Significantly, weakened Russia made such a decision after the defeat in the war with Japan in 1904-1905.

However, after the October Revolution of 1917 in Russia, Afghanistan joined the so-called Eastern Front of the world communist revolution. The agents of the Communist International from Termez founded the Central Committee of Revolutionary Council in Afghanistan in 1920. During the Soviet period the city became the stronghold of the invasion to Afghani-

stan several times. During the first Soviet-Afghan campaign of 1929 the northern Afghanistan has been occupied for a short period of time. However, the second Soviet-Afghan campaign of 1979-1989 transformed into a largescale war which led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Thus, plan of the invasion of Afghanistan via Termez developed in the late 19th century A.D. was implemented only during the Soviet period.

Since the beginning of the war with international terrorism declared by the U.S. and the beginning of the NATO operation in Afghanistan operated by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) the world community, once again, has focused its attention on Termez. At the beginning of the 21st century A.D. the main outpost of the Republic of Uzbekistan on its southern borders became a stronghold of the ISAF. During the period of 2002-2015 the NATO used the facilities of the airport located near Termez for providing technical and logistical support for its military divisions in Afghanistan. The decision to close the landmark corresponded with the provisions of the Foreign Policy Doctrine of the Republic of Uzbekistan adopted in 2012, according to which, the country prohibits dislocation of any foreign military bases and armed forces on its territory.

Since Uzbekistan got its independence, Termez has retained its traditional importance and inherent functions, as well as acquired new ones, successfully moving on to the next stage of development. Termez became the industrial, agricultural, educational and cultural center of the Surkhandarya region. In addition, after launching the 75 km long Hairaton - Mazar-i-Sharif railway constructed in Afghanistan by Uzbekistan in 2010-2011, Termez has significantly increased its role in the transformation of Afghanistan into a docking port of the European-Middle Eastern, former Soviet and Indo-Pakistani rail systems.

Politics, Foreign Affairs and Security

- Kazakhstan's ruling Nur Otan party unveiled its election program. The main objectives of the program are further economic integration and strengthening national interests of the country in the Eurasian Economic Union and the World Trade Organization.
- During his working visit to China, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan, Abdulaziz Kamilov, met with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi. The parties discussed bilateral co-operation, issues of international and regional policy, paying special attention to the cooperation in the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.
- During the working visit to Ashgabat, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Sergey Lavrov, met with the President of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov and his Turkmen counterpart, Rasit Meredov. The sides exchanged views on the key issues of the international agenda, the cooperation of the two countries in the framework of the United Nations, the Caspian Five and the Commonwealth of Independent States.
- During the 43rd meeting of the Special Working Group on the development of the Convention on the legal status of the Caspian Sea held in Ashgabat, the Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Caspian littoral states, namely, Turkmenistan, Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Iran, discussed positions of the coastal states regarding the protection of marine biological resources of the Caspian Sea.
- The self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic submitted draft amendments to the Ukrainian Constitution to the Contact Group for consideration. The draft provides real guarantees for special status of Donbas, and political rights of the people.
- According to the Speaker of the Parliament of Russia, Sergey Naryshkin, the country is planning to hand over the unused military training grounds leased from Kazakhstan in order to save approximately \$4 million annually.
- During the visit of the Minister of Defense of Kazakhstan, Imanali Tasmagambetov, to Jordan, the agreement between the governments of Kazakhstan and Hashimite Kingdom of Jordan on military and military-technical cooperation was

signed. In particular, the parties reached an agreement on purchasing Kazakhstani Alan armored vehicles.

Economy, Finance and Energy

- The Parliament of Russia ratified the protocol to the Agreement between the governments of Russia and China on cooperation in the implementation of the Yamal LNG project. The Yamal LNG is a largescale project on creating a liquefied natural gas (LNG) production facility with a capacity of 16.5 million tons per year. The project involves the creation of transport infrastructure, including a seaport and an airport near the Sabetta village at the Yamal Peninsula. The launch of LNG production is scheduled for 2017.
- According to the Ministry of Oil and Gas of Turkmenistan, Turkmengaz State Concern announced its plans to drill and to complete the construction of nine new wells at the Turkmenistan's largest field Galkynysh in 2016. It is expected that the extraction of natural gas from these wells will ensure further increase in production of natural gas as part of the first stage of the Galkynysh field development.
- According to the Ministry of National Economy of Kazakhstan, the country has reduced the oil export customs duty from \$60 down to \$40 per ton since January 1, 2016. Moreover, the Ministry of Economic Development of Russia announced that the oil export customs duty on Russian oil exports dropped by \$21.3 from \$73.3 in January to \$52 per ton in February 2016.
- The Minister of Energy and Water Resources of Tajikistan, Usmonali Usmonzoda, stated that Moscow and Dushanbe agreed on the supply of 830,000 tons of petroleum products to Tajikistan with no export tax in 2016. According to the Minister, Tajikistan imported 576,000 tons of Russian petroleum products in 2014 and 560,000 tons in 2015.
- Azerbaijan's state oil company SOCAR announced its plans to produce about 9,500 tons of oil per year after it commissioned a well at the offshore field Sangachal-Duvani-Khara-Zira. SOCAR is currently implementing a program to increase oil production. The company produced 7.58 million tons of oil from the country's offshore and onshore fields in January-November 2015, compared to 7.7 million tons produced in the same period of 2014.
- During the 10th meeting of the joint Russian-Egyptian Commission on

Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation held in Cairo, the parties signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the establishment of the Russian industrial zone in the area of the Gulf of Suez. Moreover, the sides inked a MoU between the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) and a number of Egyptian commercial banks as part of the project to set up the \$5 billion investment fund of Egypt.

- According to the Director of the Iranian Railroads International Affairs, Abbas Nazar, Iran and Azerbaijan signed an agreement to launch a railroad transit system from Tehran to Nakhichevan. The agreement was inked during the Baku Summit recently held between Iran, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Ukraine on the issue of creation of a composite transit route from the Persian Gulf to the Black Sea and Europe.
- According to the Ministry of Economic Development of Russia, a preliminary draft of the anti-crisis plan of the Russian government for 2016 implies expenditures of 750 billion rubles (\$9.8 billion) with extra-budgetary funds totaling to about 210 billion rubles (\$2.7 billion). It was stated that the draft contained 96 preliminary approved initiatives that worth about 500 billion rubles (\$6.4 billion), 310 billion rubles of which would be directed to support of the regions, while 200 billion rubles were to support non-financial sector of the economy, primarily engineering.

Society and Culture

- According to the Ministry of Health and Social Development of Russia, an outbreak of the swine flu, subtype H1N1 of the influenza A virus, has spread across many regions of the country and has already killed 126 people.
- The Parliament of Kazakhstan ratified the grant agreement on the Youth Corps Development Project between Kazakhstan and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). Under the agreement, the IBRD allocates a grant worth \$21,763 million to assist the financing of the project on the development of the youth corps.
- According to the Russian state-owned agency, Roscosmos, the Proton-M launch vehicle has lifted off from the Baikonur Space Center in Kazakhstan with an European telecommunications satellite aboard.