

OBOR PROJECT NEEDS COMPREHENSIVE SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS

The OBOR super project is considered by the USA strategists as threatening to American global dominance. These plans rest on the TPP and TAIP super projects and are aimed at perpetuation of American global hegemony. The Chinese OBOR project, after receiving active support from Russia, opens the possibility of creating the new Eurasian trade, economic, culture and defense space which resembles the “Heartland Theory” in Sir Helford John Mackinder’s works on geopolitics which greatly influenced the strategic perceptions of many generations of Western military and foreign policy leaders. According to Mackinder the Heartland lay at the center of the “World Island”, stretching from the Volga to the Yangtze and from the Himalayas to the Arctic. In 1919 Mackinder summarized his theory as: “Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; who rules the World-Island commands the world.” (Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, p. 150). Any power which controls the World-Island would control well over 50% of the world’s resources. The Heartland’s size and central position made it key to controlling the World-Island.

Mackinder’s idea may be right or wrong but it serves as the fundamental theory for the “neo-cons” controlling now the White House, the State Department and the Pentagon. Their answer to the “Peaceful Rise of China” was “Pivot to Asia” strategy. Their answer to the OBOR and the looming Sino-Russian deep strategic partnership shaping “the Heartland” will be even more harsh. USA and its allies — Japan, South Korea and Australia as well as some South China Sea countries including Vietnam, Singapore and the Philippines — can create insurmountable obstacles for realization of the “Maritime Silk Road” part of the OBOR.

The possible routes of the “Silk Road Economic Belt” (SREB), especially the Northern one, beside China, will go through the friendly territories of Russia, Kazakhstan and other Central Asia countries. Still there are potential threats even for this and other land-based routes. Several American bases will remain in Afghanistan even after the promised “complete withdrawal” and they can be used for intelligence and all forms of support for guerrillas in Chinese Xinjiang, in the Ferghana valley and along the border with China, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kirgizia and Turkmenia. Another threat comes from the Islamic State which is becoming more and more visible in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Earlier this summer the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) officially swore allegiance to the Islamic State’s emir, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. “Color revolu-

tions” is one more strategic tool for disruption of the OBOR. US experts in staging “color revolutions” recently were appointed to ambassadorial positions in Uzbekistan and Kirgizia. The unstable situation in the Central Asia states, problems of succession in the leadership of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan add to the possible instability and even temporary cuts of infrastructure.

There are several ways to minimize these and other strategic threats to the OBOR. The Trans-Siberian and the Baikal-Amur railways could be used as alternate routes. The same goes even to the Polar Sea route. The existing and planned oil and gas pipelines on the Russian territory can also serve the purpose. Yet the most efficient way of securing the safety of the SREB seems to lie in uniting and developing the defense and security potentials of all the stakeholders of this project of historic proportions.

There are already several organizations dealing with security problems on the part of the SREB. The biggest and possibly most efficient is the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) which operates the Collective Rapid Reaction Force composed of Special Forces from Russia, Byelorussia, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Kirgizia and Tajikistan. It maintains permanent bases in Armenia and Tajikistan and holds regular drills. The last one took place in Russia this August.

Another one is the Anti-Terrorist Center of the Commonwealth of Independent States (ATC). It coordinates anti-terrorist activities of Special Forces, Armed Forces, Border Guards and Police of the member states, holds annual large scale maneuvers and manages a detailed data bank on terrorist organizations and its members. The ATC in recent years pays special attention to the problems of safety of infrastructures and growing activities of Islamic State and other terrorist and radical organizations in Central Asia.

Shanghai Cooperation Organization’s (SCO) has established its Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) as late as in 2002 but for almost a decade it did not play a significant role limiting its efforts to rare joint military drills and some intelligence sharing. Large scale military drills started a few years ago when China, a key member of the SCO, has grown increasingly concerned about the “three evil forces”: terrorism, separatism, and extremism. The last drill “Peace Mission 2014” was held in Inner Mongolia and was unprecedented both in terms of scale and in terms of the weaponry being used. Drills of that size could be instrumental for the success of China’s SREB project. But they are only an annual affair. China, Russia and other “stakeholders” of the SREB need a lot more for ensuring permanent security along the planned routes stretching through restive regions in Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East.

As the OBOR and especially the SREB project are developing with impressive speed in organizational and financial dimensions, it is high time to start thinking about equally big scale se-

curity establishments. One of them could be a Silk Road Security Organization (SRSO). It should establish and maintain Joint Rapid Reaction Forces comprising either national units of the member states or mixed formations. Regular drills along the SREB are necessary to maintain security forces presence. Permanent bases with air support units and stockpiles of heavy armaments could be instrumental. SRSO would also need intelligence networks and a detailed data banks on terrorist organizations.

Of course, such an organization resembles a military alliance group. At the present stage the Chinese leaders are rejecting the utility of alliance networks as “not conducive to common regional security”, although the SRSO can operate as a broad regional organization that is non-aligned, non-confrontational and not targeted at any particular country. Beijing’s cautious approach can change as the strategic and local forms of subversive activities aimed at China itself and the SREB will intensify.

Meanwhile, another framework for security along the SREB could be established as the first stage of comprehensive security buildup. It is private security companies or private military companies. This format is being widely used now in more than 50 states. Big state-owned monopolies in Russia are preparing to hire local private military companies. Professionals with some regional experience from the stakeholder nations of the SREB could be even more efficient than regular troops. Their activities could concentrate on ensuring the safety of railroads, gas- and oil pipelines as well as new industrial hubs along the SREB while the Collective Security Treaty Organization’s Collective Rapid Reaction Force, Anti-Terrorist Center of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization’s Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure would coordinate their activities on regional and strategic problems.

The SREB project is too promising for the future of Eurasian nations not to be securely defended against the forces of instability.