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## VULNERABILITY OF CENTRAL ASIAN STATES TO RISKE OF TERRITORIAL AND POLITICAL CONFLICTS APPEARANCE

*The collapse of the socialist bloc and multiethnic federations has become one of the most important events defining the modern World political map. This process accompanied by the emergence of a number of new borders and international and domestic conflicts. After 25 years of gaining independence still preserved a risk that territorial claims and mutual misunderstandings that may escalate to violent conflicts, mainly because of the increasing authoritarian tendencies in post-Soviet states. From this perspective, many of new states characterized as conflict-prone. The article proposes perspective pattern of estimation of the state' vulnerability degree to the conflict. The paper reviews a number of scientific approaches to explanation the content of "vulnerability" in the modern geographical narrative. The peculiarities of the development of the concept of "vulnerability" in political geography are considered. It is justified the assumption that the state, the region can have different sensitivity to the risks that provoke territorial and political conflicts. Research pattern allows assess the degree of vulnerability in five main parameters: positional, historical, structural, dynamic and functional. The purpose of the paper is to show the effectiveness of using the multi-parametric vulnerability approach on the example of Central Asia. The region constituting by five post-Soviet countries and is capable to investigation because of it relatively cultural and political homogeneity. The methodology for the analysis of territorial conflicts at the macro-regional level is proposed. The level of vulnerability of various countries in the region to the manifestation of territorial conflicts assessed on the ground of 23 indicators. 5-score scale method is the way to formalize the correspondence between the nature of the indicator's and the level of risk that occurs with this precondition value. Results demonstrate the different degrees of vulnerability Central Asian states to international and domestic conflicts.*

**Keywords:** territorial conflicts, vulnerability, preconditions to conflict, Central Asia.

**Formulation of the problem.** The collapse of the socialist bloc and three socialist federations, such as the USSR, the SFRY and Czechoslovakia, has become one of the most important events defining the modern world political map. This process was accompanied by the emergence of a number of territorial conflicts. Various historical, cultural (ethnic and religious), political, economic and environmental factors had led to their emergence. Some of them were the heritage of the pre-socialist period; others arose when sovereign states were members of the socialist federations, while the third group appeared only in the post-socialist period. Since the beginning of some conflicts in the post-socialist space, the whole human generation has passed - 25-27 years. The generation brought up in the territorial reality of the post-socialist era of the newly formed independent states starts its adult life; therefore, critical understanding of the historical background should obviously not be expected from the new generation. It is urgent to make the geographic research of the current state of territorial conflicts, which should reflect spatial characteristics of the spread of conflicts as well as to reveal the vulnerability of numerous post-socialist states to violent conflicts. The Central Asian region constituting by five post-Soviet countries and is capable to investigation of vulnerability because of it relatively cultural and political homogeneity.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** There is quite a vast experience of geographers in researching vulnerabilities of people, territories, settlements who are exposed to negative effects of natural hazards and threats, or vulnerabilities caused by political conflicts or other economic and social factors. As O. Kononenko et al. [3], and R. Slyvka [30] notes, "vulnerability" is a concept which is characterized by many interpretations in the scientific literature. In UN's "Glossary of Environment Statistics" vulnerability defined as the degree to which a community, structure, service or geographical area may be damaged or destroyed, based on their natural properties or locations under the influence of specific hazardous risks [17, p. 76]. In addition, vulnerability can be defined as the result of physical, social and economic factors and the environment, which increases the community's susceptibility to dangers [25, 34]. S. Sterlacchini notes that vulnerability reflects the ability of an item or a set of items (organised into the system) exposed to danger to withstand the damage [32]. The concept of "vulnerability" is characterised in detail by the authors of United Nations' "Human Development Report 2014". It states that in places where social and legal institutions, authorities, political space or social and cultural norms and traditions fail to serve the members of the society equally, and where they create structural barriers for some people and groups preventing them from implementing their rights and choices, they generate structural vulnerability. The report indicates major threats that affect the growth of vulnerability: 1) economic shocks, health shocks; 2) natural disasters, climate change and industrial hazards; 3) conflicts, civil unrest. Three main prerequisites for vulnerability growth are defined: 1) limited capabilities; 2) location, position in society, sensitive periods in the life cycle; 3) low social cohesion, irresponsible institutions, poor governance [18, p. 19]. Nowadays, vulnerability considered the property of regional systems [32]. Vulnerability is the interaction between threats (in the territorial conflicts – political and military threats) and systemic vulnerability that produces certain results. It is clear that vulnerability is a dynamic characteristic [9]. The resilience of the territory is an opposite category to vulnerability. Most authors consider the concept of vulnerability and resilience as complementary: the greater the vulnerability of the system, the less its resilience and vice versa [3, p. 243].

In political geography, a long tradition of vulnerable countries and their separate parts can be traced. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, scientific discourse on the issue of vulnerability of some regions and countries to the conflict emerged. It involved the concept of "Eurasian Balkans" [7], crush zones [24], buffer zones [27], in-between-ness [29], overlapping territorialities [5], or failed/fragile states [21].

We suggest considering the conflict zone a vulnerable territorial and political system. Its opposite in terms of quality is a geographically stable political system. In political geography, it is appropriate to use the term "conflict region vulnerability". It

can be defined as the degree to which the region is vulnerable to political threats based on its geographical location, physical and geographical conditions, socio-geographical structures, political status and functional capacity.

Assuming that the goal of acknowledged rational politics is to achieve a sustainable level of territorial and political system (minimal vulnerability to conflict), it seems logical that another possible extreme manifestation – vulnerable territorial and political system (maximal vulnerability to conflict) is possible as well. The transitional state is a so-called transit territorial and political system. The latter may have three dynamic qualities: 1) structural (aimed at achieving stability of territorial and political systems); 2) destructive (aimed at reducing the stability of territorial and political systems); 3) fluctuating (random deviation from the previous development of territorial and political system).

The aim of territorial and political organization of the society is to achieve resilience to threats and risks that a war, destruction, radical lifestyle changes may bring. At this stage, a territorial and political system may be exposed to fluctuations, i.e. a deviation from the constructive or destructive development as a result of shock effects. The latter include climate changes, ecological crises and spread of epidemics, the deterioration of market opportunities and resource cycles in the world economy and mass migration. According to G. Pocheptsov [4], social sciences turned to the phenomenon of nonlinearity, because they cannot adequately describe, and even more predict the destruction of the system, that is, its crisis or collapse. There is a general tendency both in management and in different academic disciplines to go out today not only for the description, but also for the forecast. The study of the crisis should always give the way out of it. Zinoviev, for example, sees such factors of the crisis: 1) the mechanism of a potential crisis; 2) conditions in which the possibility of a crisis turns into reality; a push to the crisis [2].

The destructive direction of the territorial and political system is carried out by the subjects of the struggle for territory and its resources. Their goal is to take advantage of preconditions that can be well described according to five parameters: 1) positional vulnerability; 2) historical vulnerability; 3) structural vulnerability; 4) dynamic vulnerability; 5) functional vulnerability. If they do not manifest clearly enough, the subject may deliberately act in the direction of individual components of vulnerability. This destructive effect can be amplified or attenuated by shock effects, such as falling prices for energy resources and a decrease in the capacity of "petrol filling countries" in terms of aggressive rhetoric and actions [30, p. 191].

Geographic preconditions of geopolitical behaviour of Uzbekistan are highlighted by D. Spechler, M. Spechler [31]. N. Megoran [22,23] paid much attention to the geography of territorial conflicts among Central Asian countries. The report provided by Rand Arroyo Centre [11] is an example of intelligence analytics that concerns the Central Asian regions. This report identifies and evaluates the key conflict-producing faultlines in Central Asia. The faultlines include the role of state political and economic weakness; the impact of crime and the drug trade; the effects of ethnic tensions and foreign interests and influence; and the impact of competition for natural resources. Internal political and geopolitical factors of conflict potential in Central Asia are investigated by E. Efeğil [10]. Perception of foreign policy relations through the prism of the stability of political regimes in Central Asia is described by A. Razma [28]. Factors of political instability, particularly in Kyrgyzstan, are analyzed by Kılıç [20]; A. Ismailbekova [19] investigated their consequences for vulnerable national minorities on the example of Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan.

The **purpose** of the paper is to show the effectiveness of using vulnerability to conflicts pattern on an example of Central Asia.

**Main material.** Central Asia is a historical and geographical region that encompasses five post-Soviet states: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The main characteristic of the region is its land-lock position. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, states that had been formed in the region lost their independence and subsequently became an integral part of the Russian Empire. In the pre-Soviet period, none of the mentioned above states were like they are today. Borders of these republics are the result of intra-state administrative boundary establishment. After the proclamation of independence in 1992, all these states, except Turkmenistan, entered the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States). Turkmenistan's declaration of "permanent neutrality" was formally recognized by the United Nations in 1995 [14]. Under Russian initiation, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan joined an economic bloc – the Eurasian Economic Community, and a military-political bloc – the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Uzbekistan became the member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization another Eurasian political, economic, and security organization, which clearly shows the leadership of the Russian Federation and China. According to the data of "Conflict Barometer" (2017) [8], there are several interstate territorial conflicts in the region (Table 1).

**Table 1.**

**Some features of the territorial conflicts in Central Asia**

Name of conflict	Conflict parties	Conflict items	Start	Change in 2016	Intensity in 2016	Average intensity 2002-2016	Highest intensity (year)
Russia - Kazakhstan et al. (Caspian Sea)	Azerbaijan vs. Iran vs. Kazakhstan vs. Russia vs. Turkmenistan	territory, international power, resources	1991	no changes	1	1,3*	3 (2013)*
Kyrgyzstan – Uzbekistan – Tajikistan (border communities / Fergana Valley)	Kyrgyzstan vs. Uzbekistan vs. Tajikistan	territory, international power	2000	no changes	3	3 **	3 (2014-2016) **
Other conflicts influencing territorial conflicts							
Uzbekistan – Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan	Uzbekistan vs. Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan	international power, water resources	2010	grows gradually	2	1,3 (2010-2016)	2 (2012, 2016)

Tajikistan (Gorno-Badakhshan)	drug traffickers, Pamiri people vs. government	autonomy, subnational predominance	2012	no changes	1	2,4 (2012-2016)	4 (2012)
* Estimated by "Conflict Barometer" reviews only from 2003 until 2016							
** Estimated by "Conflict Barometer" reviews only from 2014 until 2016							

Besides, there were internationalized internal conflict related to the participation of Russia and Uzbekistan in the resolution of the internal conflict on the territory of Tajikistan in the late 90's. The problem of the region is a high probability of inspiration with political separatism: 1. Northern regions of Kazakhstan, where there is a large number of Russian-speaking population. 2. Kara-Kalpak autonomy in Uzbekistan. 3. Mountainous Badakhshan autonomy in Tajikistan. Such superpowers as Russia, China and the USA, as well as regional states such as Iran, Turkey, compete for influence in Central Asia. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan do not hide their ambitions as regional leaders. Competitions for international influence, resource allocation, control of transborder trade and migration flows can disrupt the balance between states.

Quantitative approach allows assess the preconditions for conflicts in each of the countries of the region. In total 23 indicators have been proposed to quantify positional, historical, structural, dynamic and functional vulnerabilities. They reflect the varied characteristics of the studied countries. The five-point scale allows reconciling the various indicators to assess the level of vulnerability of the country to conflict. The maximum score of "5" means greater degree of vulnerability of the country to conflict according to the given indicator, while the minimum "1" is the smallest one. 5-score scale method is the way to formalize the correspondence between the nature of the indicator's and the level of risk that occurs with this precondition value. The final summing of points allows determine the general level of vulnerability of the country (Table 2). The disadvantage of this approach is ignoring the nature of the impact of each vulnerability indicator on the overall level of risk, as the contribution of each factor to the probability of occurrence of a risk event, as a rule, is not equivalent.

#### Positional Vulnerability Indicators:

- (P1) Compactness of the territory of the state estimated by the formula:

$$K = 4\pi S/L^2 [1, c. 186]$$

where K – compactness' coefficient; S – state area; L - length of borders.

Results: 1 point to Kazakhstan (33908232); 2 points to Turkmenistan (5901944); 3 points to Uzbekistan (5343024); 4 points to Kyrgyzstan (2409008); 5 points to Tajikistan (1814920).

- (P2) Landlocked position of the state estimated in 4 points, double-landlocked position in 5 points. Results: 4 points to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan; 5 points to Uzbekistan.

- (P3) Number of neighboring states (including neighboring states across a Caspian Sea). Results: 1 point to Kazakhstan (5+2); 2 points to Turkmenistan (4+3); 3 points to Uzbekistan (5); 4 points to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (4).

- (P4) The length of the border (including maritime borders). Results: 1 point to Tajikistan (4,130 km); 2 points to Turkmenistan (4,158 km); 3 points to Kyrgyzstan (4,573 km); 4 points to Uzbekistan (6,893 km) and Kazakhstan (13,364 km).

- (P5) Fragmentation of the territory (the presence of enclaves): there are no exclaves – 1 point; there are small exclaves – 5 points. Results: 1 point to Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan Kazakhstan; 5 points to Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan.

- (P6) The participation of the region' states in political conflicts. Results: 1 point to Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan (1 conflict): 1. Kazakhstan vs. Turkmenistan vs. Iran vs. Azerbaijan (territory, international power, resources; 1991-2017); 3 points – Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan (2 conflicts in the each state); 5 points – Tajikistan (3 conflicts): 1. Domestic conflict Tajikistan in Gorno-Badakhshan (autonomy, subnational predominance; 2012-2017); . Uzbekistan – Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan (international power, resources; 2010-2017); 3. Kyrgyzstan – Uzbekistan – Tajikistan, border communities in Fergana Valley (territory, international power; 2000-2017).

#### Historic Vulnerability Indicators:

- (H1) Allied military and political relations with the hegemon state. Results: 1 point to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan (Russia is a hegemon state, de-jure protector); 2 points to Uzbekistan (as a member of CIS' integration projects); 3 points to Turkmenistan (neutral state).

- (H2) Number of military conflicts during the period of independence. Results: 1 point to Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan (not one); 4 points to Kyrgyzstan (1 conflict); 5 points to Tajikistan (2 conflicts).

#### Structural Vulnerability Indicators:

- (S1) Presence of national territorial autonomies (no autonomy – 1 point, autonomy – 5 points). Results: 1 point to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan; 5 points to Uzbekistan (Republic of Karakalpakstan) and Tajikistan (Gorno Badakhshan Autonomus Region).

- (S2) Total natural resources rents in 2015 (% of GDP). Total natural resources rents are the sum of oil rents, natural gas rents, coal rents (hard and soft), mineral rents, and forest rents [35]. Results: 1 point to Tajikistan (2,0 %); 2 points to Kyrgyzstan (7,7 %); 3 points to Kazakhstan (9,2 %); 4 points to Uzbekistan (9,4 %); 5 points to Turkmenistan (19,0 %).

- (S3) Percentage of the population with an age under 25 for the countries of the world [33]: 1 point to Kazakhstan (39,96 %); 2 points to Uzbekistan (42,4 %); 3 points to Turkmenistan (44,18 %); 4 points to Kyrgyzstan (47,09 %); 5 points to Tajikistan (50,94 %).

- (S4) Fearon ethnic fractionalization index [12]. Results: 1 point to Uzbekistan (0.392000); 2 points to Turkmenistan (0.485000); 3 points to Tajikistan (0.513000); 4 points to Tajikistan (0.513000); 5 points to Kyrgyzstan (0.679000).

- (S5) Fearon Cultural Diversity Index [12]: 1 point to Uzbekistan (0.442000); 2 points to Turkmenistan (0.328000); 3 points to Tajikistan (0.492000); 4 points to Kazakhstan (0.620000); 5 points to Kyrgyzstan (0.620000).

- (S6) Alesina religious fractionalization index [6]. Results: 1 point to Uzbekistan (0.213300); 2 points to Turkmenistan (0.232700); 3 points to Tajikistan (0.338600); 4 points to Kyrgyzstan (0.447000) and Tajikistan (0.513000); 5 points to Kazakhstan (0.589800).

#### Dynamic Vulnerability Indicators:

- (D1) GNP growth for 10 years (2005 and 2015). Results: 1 point to Uzbekistan (468 %); 2 points to Turkmenistan (442 %); 3 points to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (343 %); 4 points to Kazakhstan (323 %).
  - (D2) Population growth for 10 years (2005 and 2015). Results: 1 point to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (115 %); 2 points to Turkmenistan (117 %); 3 points to Uzbekistan (199 %); 4 points to Tajikistan (125 %).
  - (D3) Changes in the military strength rating (2015 and 2017) [15]. Results: 1 point to Kazakhstan (increase in 11 positions); 2 points to Uzbekistan (increase in 6 positions); 3 points to Turkmenistan (increase in 4 positions); 4 points to Kyrgyzstan (reducing in 30 positions); 5 points to Tajikistan (reducing in 31 positions).
  - (D4) Changes in the Risk Level (2011 and 2016) by UN' World Risk Report [36]. Risk Level characterizes country's vulnerability and its exposure to natural hazards. Results: 1 point to Uzbekistan (- 0,78 %); 2 points to Tajikistan (- 0,75 %); 3 points to Kyrgyzstan (- 0,74 %); 4 points to Turkmenistan (- 0,75 %); 5 points to Kazakhstan (- 0,48 %).
  - (D5) Changes in the Fragile States Index (2006 and 2016) [13]. Results: 1 point to Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (increase in 38 positions); 3 points to Kyrgyzstan (increase in 36 positions); 4 points to Kazakhstan (increase in 25 positions); 5 points to Tajikistan (increase in 15 positions).
  - (D6) Difference in resource rent rates (2000 and 2015). Results: 1 point to Turkmenistan (- 48,7 %); 2 points to Kazakhstan (- 15,3 %); 3 points to Uzbekistan (- 2,6 %); 4 points to Tajikistan (+ 1,6 %); 5 points to Kyrgyzstan (+ 6,6 %).
- Functional Vulnerability Indicators:
- (F1) Fragile states index in 2016 [13]. Results: 1 point to Kazakhstan (113); 2 points to Turkmenistan (83); 3 points to Kyrgyzstan (64); 4 points to Uzbekistan (60); 5 points to Tajikistan (57).
  - (F2) Peace index in 2016 [16]. Results: 1 point to Kazakhstan (113); 2 points to Turkmenistan (83); 3 points to Kyrgyzstan (64); 4 points to Uzbekistan (60); 5 points to Tajikistan (57).
  - (F3) State's level of democracy by the M. Marshall' "Polity data series in 2015" [26]. Results: 1 point to Kyrgyzstan (Democracy "+ 7"); 2 points to Tajikistan (Closed Autocracy: "- 3"); 3 points to Kazakhstan (Autocracy: "- 6"); 4 points to Turkmenistan (Autocracy: "- 8"); 5 points to Tajikistan (Autocracy: "- 9").

Table 2

Total vulnerability of post-Soviet states in Central Asia

State	Positional vulnerability						Historical vulnerability		Structural vulnerability						Dynamic vulnerability						Functional vulnerability			Total vulnerability
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	H1	H2	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	F1	F2	F3	
Kazakhstan	1	4	1	5	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	4	4	5	5	1	1	5	4	2	1	1	3	56
Kyrgyzstan	4	4	4	3	5	3	1	4	1	2	4	5	5	4	3	1	4	3	3	5	3	3	1	75
Tajikistan	5	4	4	1	5	5	1	5	5	1	5	3	3	3	3	5	5	2	5	4	5	4	2	85
Turkmenistan	2	4	2	2	1	1	3	1	1	5	3	2	1	2	2	3	3	4	1	1	2	5	4	55
Uzbekistan	3	5	3	4	5	3	2	1	5	4	2	1	2	1	1	4	2	1	1	3	4	2	5	64

**Conclusions.** The article examines the concept of vulnerability to study the degree of resistance of the country to the manifestation of violent conflicts. The proposed method for calculating the vulnerability of the country to conflicts has significant prospects in political geography, which are related to the implementation of preventive measures to increase the stability of states to national security' threats. The proposed model for evaluating different parameters of vulnerability allowed determine five levels of resistance to conflicts in a relatively homogeneous region. The least vulnerable countries are Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, the vulnerability of other countries increases with approximately the same gradient: Uzbekistan (64), Kyrgyzstan (75), and Tajikistan (85). The presence of a country's propensity to conflict does not mean it fatal occurrence in the future. However, in the context of strengthening authoritarianism, in some of them, further aggravation of interethnic relations, demographic and environmental problems can contribute to armed confrontation in order to demonstrate the resilience of political regimes. An experience of Ukraine and Georgia demonstrates that Russia is able to use the strategy of hybrid warfare in the region of Central Asia [28]. The consequence is that G. Pocheptsov described as a new state of the post-Soviet space "no war-no peace" [4]. The only acceptable way of developing the region is active interregional dialog and cooperation in finding mutually beneficial cooperation models that would contribute to sustainable and healthy development in the future.

Further research should draw attention to identifying the weight of individual indicators of vulnerability of the state and a more complete reflection of historical and functional indicators. The application of proposed methodology has significant prospects for disaggregated researches of first rank administrative regions of states. In accordance to the general tendency of modern political geography to shift the attention from the scale of the state to the level of regions constituting it.

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## **ВРАЗЛИВІСТЬ ДЕРЖАВ СЕРЕДНЬОЇ АЗІЇ ДО РИЗИКУ ВИНИКНЕННЯ ТЕРИТОРІАЛЬНО-ПОЛІТИЧНИХ КОНФЛІКТІВ**

*Проаналізовано наукові підходи до розуміння змісту поняття «вразливість» в сучасному науковому дискурсі. Розглянуто особливості розвитку концепції «вразливості» в політичній географії. Обґрунтовано припущення, що держава, регіон можуть мати різну чутливість до ризиків, які провокують територіальні конфлікти. Запропоновано оцінювати вразливість за п'ятьма головними параметрами: позиційним, історичним, структурним, динамічним та функціональним. На прикладі пострадянських країн Середньої Азії показано прояви вразливості до міждержавних територіально-політичних конфліктів. Розкрито характер впливу вразливості на формування конфліктів, запропоновано методику аналізу територіальних конфліктів на регіональному рівні. Оцінено рівень вразливості різних країн Середньої Азії до прояву територіально-політичних конфліктів.*

*Ключові слова: територіальні конфлікти, вразливість, передумови конфлікту, ризик, Середня Азія.*

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## **УЯЗВИМОСТЬ ГОСУДАРСТВ СРЕДНЕЙ АЗИИ К РИСКУ ВОЗНИКНОВЕНИЯ ТЕРРИТОРИАЛЬНО-ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИХ КОНФЛИКТОВ**

*Проанализированы научные подходы к пониманию содержания понятия «уязвимость» в современном научном дискурсе. Рассмотрены особенности развития концепции «уязвимости» в политической географии. Обосновано предположение, что государство, регион могут иметь разную чувствительность к рискам, которые провоцируют территориальные конфликты. Предложено оценивать уязвимость по пяти главным параметрам: позиционным, историческим, структурным, динамическим и функциональным. На примере постсоветских стран Средней Азии показано проявления уязвимости к межгосударственным территориально-политическим конфликтам. Раскрыт характер влияния уязвимости на формирование конфликтов, предложена методика анализа территориальных конфликтов на макрорегиональном уровне. Оценен уровень уязвимости различных стран региона к проявлению территориально-конфликтов.*

*Ключевые слова: территориальные конфликты, уязвимость, предпосылки конфликта, Средняя Азия.*

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