

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS OF RUSSIA'S POLICY FOR ENSURING REGIONAL SECURITY IN CENTRAL ASIA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE AFGHAN FACTOR (2019–2024)

MECANISMOS LEGAIS E INSTITUCIONAIS DA POLÍTICA DA RÚSSIA PARA GARANTIR A SEGURANÇA REGIONAL NA ÁSIA CENTRAL NO CONTEXTO DO FATOR AFEGÃO (2019–2024)

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Albert Beloglazov*

*Kazan Federal University, Volga region, Kazan, Russia

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1982-9519>

albert.beloglazov@kpfu.ru

Rustem Chanyshv*

*Kazan Federal University, Volga region, Kazan, Russia

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6482-1703>

rnchanyshv@kpfu.ru

Boturzhon Alimov*

*Kazan Federal University, Volga region, Kazan, Russia

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4951-3379>

alimovb68@mail.ru

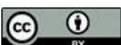
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Abstract

This study analyzes the evolution of Russia's legal and institutional mechanisms for ensuring regional security in Central Asia between 2019 and 2024, with an emphasis on the Afghan factor. It examines how Russia's foreign policy concepts, Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) frameworks, and multilateral diplomatic platforms have been used to address terrorism, border threats, and geopolitical challenges. The research applies a geopolitical and comparative legal-political analysis of Russian foreign policy documents, CSTO decisions, bilateral treaties, summit communiqués, and official statements. Primary sources include speeches by top state officials, CSTO operational documents, and records of the Moscow Format on Afghanistan. Findings indicate a shift from generalized CIS-focused approaches in earlier policy documents to explicit prioritization of Central Asia in the 2023 Foreign Policy Concept. The CSTO has served as the primary institutional mechanism for securing the Tajik-Afghan border, developing targeted interstate programs, and conducting joint exercises such as "Rubezh." Diplomatically, Russia revitalized the Moscow Format to engage Afghanistan and regional stakeholders, coordinating counterterrorism

Resumo

Este estudo analisa a evolução dos mecanismos jurídicos e institucionais da Rússia para garantir a segurança regional na Ásia Central entre 2019 e 2024, com ênfase no fator afegão. Examina como os conceitos de política externa da Rússia, as estruturas da Organização do Tratado de Segurança Coletiva (OTSC) e as plataformas diplomáticas multilaterais foram utilizados para lidar com o terrorismo, as ameaças nas fronteiras e os desafios geopolíticos. A pesquisa aplica uma análise geopolítica e jurídico-política comparativa de documentos de política externa russa, decisões da OTSC, tratados bilaterais, comunicados de cúpulas e declarações oficiais. As fontes primárias incluem discursos de altos funcionários do Estado, documentos operacionais da OTSC e registros do Formato de Moscou sobre o Afeganistão. Os resultados indicam uma mudança de abordagens generalizadas focadas na CEI em documentos de política anteriores para a priorização explícita da Ásia Central no Conceito de Política Externa de 2023. A OTSC tem servido como o principal mecanismo institucional para garantir a segurança da fronteira tajique-afegã, desenvolver programas interestatais direcionados e conduzir exercícios conjuntos



strategies and addressing narcotics trafficking. The Afghan factor, especially threats from groups such as Vilayat Khorasan and the Islamic Party of Turkestan, remains central to Russia's security agenda in the region. Between 2019 and 2024, Russia institutionalized its regional security policy through legal codification, multilateral coordination, and operational readiness. Sustained engagement with Afghanistan, including the potential reclassification of the Taliban, is viewed as essential for long-term border stability.

Keywords: Collective Security Treaty. Develop Relations. Regional Security.

como o “Rubezh”. Diplomáticamente, a Rússia revitalizou o Formato de Moscou para engajar o Afeganistão e as partes interessadas regionais, coordenando estratégias de combate ao terrorismo e abordando o tráfico de narcóticos. O fator afegão, especialmente as ameaças de grupos como o Vilayat Khorasan e o Partido Islâmico do Turquestão, permanece central para a agenda de segurança da Rússia na região. Entre 2019 e 2024, a Rússia institucionalizou sua política de segurança regional por meio de codificação legal, coordenação multilateral e prontidão operacional. O engajamento contínuo com o Afeganistão, incluindo a possível reclassificação do Talibã, é visto como essencial para a estabilidade da fronteira a longo prazo.

Palavras-chave: Tratado de Segurança Coletiva. Relações de Desenvolvimento. Segurança Regional.

1 INTRODUCTION

Central Asia has always been an important region for Russia. This is due to external historical, geopolitical, military-strategic and economic factors, which have been repeatedly described in scientific documents.

However, at the present stage, its importance has increased even more. Afghanistan's strategic location as a crossroads between Central and South Asia, with proximity to major powers including Russia and China, has been recognized as conferring distinct geopolitical and geo-economic significance to the broader region (Yar et al., 2023). Scholarly analysis has examined how Afghanistan's political instability and regime changes directly affect security risks for neighboring Central Asian states, particularly regarding spillover effects across shared borders (Rasool et al., 2024).

Firstly, in the conditions of the aggravation of the confrontation with the collective West, Russia needs to ensure the preservation of stability on its vast southern borders – a region separated from its land border by more than 7.5 thousand kilometers. Russia's opponents are considering the issue of developing a "second front" in Central Asia, destabilizing the region and undermining its security.

In recent years, this has manifested itself in the transfer of radical Islamists from Iraq and the United States, in the withdrawal from Afghanistan leaving behind a large number of weapons, in provoking Tajik-Kyrgyz confrontations, in supporting mass protests and pogroms in Kazakhstan, in supporting the political elites of the countries of the region, as well as in the intensification of the activities of government organizations controlled from abroad. Research on Afghanistan-related security challenges has identified the persistence of non-traditional threats – particularly terrorism and narcotics trafficking – affecting Russia and broader Eurasia, with specific concern regarding ISIS's Afghan affiliate (Vilayat Khorasan) and fragmented Central Asian militant groups operating from northern Afghanistan near the borders of CSTO member states (Stepanova, 2022). Research on regional counterterrorism dynamics has identified organizations such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) as posing persistent cross-border security threats to Central Asian states, necessitating coordinated multilateral responses through established regional security frameworks (Rasool and Zaheer 2024).

Secondly, within the framework of economic sanctions from unfriendly conditions, the state increases the role of trade with friendly states, capable of providing not only the replacement of falling positions with their goods, but also parallel supply of imports. And here, the countries of Central Asia, especially Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, have become an important route for supplies. Studies of regional geoeconomics have emphasized Central Asia's potential role in facilitating trade and energy transit between resource-rich and resource-deficient regions, with Afghanistan positioned as a critical crossroads despite structural impediments to realizing this potential (Yar et al., 2023).

Thirdly, in the context of Russia's "turn to the East" and the strengthening of its contacts with alternative politicians and economic partners, the importance of transit routes from Russia to friendly states, in particular, to China and Iran, is increasing. In the context of the construction of a new geopolitical triangle Russia-China-Iran, Central Asia is becoming a link between them.

The purpose of this article is to change Russia's policy in the regions in the field of security from 2019 to 2024 through the prism of neutralizing the threat and challenges

emanating from the territory of Afghanistan. During this period, many important events occurred that broke out in the foreign policy of the Russian Federation in the countries.

In 2019, both the US and the EU adopted new strategies for Central Asia, which are in effect today. Analyses of US strategic calculations in Afghanistan have identified counterterrorism, regional stability, and containing rival power influence as primary objectives shaping American engagement and eventual withdrawal (Imranullah and Hakimuddin, 2024). Thus, the latter document directly pointed to the need to limit the influence of "malicious actors" in the regions (U.S. Government, 2019), by which was meant, first of all, Russia and China. At the same time, the political activity of the government, which leads high-ranking emissaries in the region, has also increased. Thus, in February 2019, there was a major turnaround in the achievement of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. And in February 2023, there will be a visit by Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, who became the head of the foreign policy departments of all five states.

The coronavirus pandemic and the related quarantine measures and restrictions of 2020 have sharply worsened the socio-economic situation in Central Asia. At the same time, they have complicated hard and political contacts between Russia and its southern neighbors, but at the same time have actualized cultural and humanitarian cooperation, in particular, in measures to combat the pandemic, delivery, including vaccines and their production in conditions.

In 2022, the events of "Black January" in Kazakhstan led to an unprecedented development of military-technical cooperation within the CSTO during the joint peacekeeping mission. And the attempt to launch Russia by unfriendly states after the start of the Special Military Operation of Russia strengthened it in parallel with imports and intensified contacts with another region.

In 2023, the Central Asian country was under increased pressure from the US and its allies with threats of secondary sanctions to continue contacts with Russia and ensure parallel imports. Also this year, both China and the US held six third-party summits for the first time with the leaders of Central Asian countries that had held earlier this year.

During the period under review, many threats to regional security remain relevant. However, the most obvious were the challenges and threats associated with the Afghan threat, which were exacerbated by the policy of the collective West within the framework

of the so-called "New Great Game". Existing scholarship on Russia's Afghanistan policy has noted Moscow's prioritization of collective action through multilateral frameworks including the CSTO rather than unilateral military engagement (Stepanova, 2022). However, assessments of the CSTO as a collective security organization have identified significant challenges in implementing security commitments, including weak institutional links among member states and competing national interests that have limited operational effectiveness (Scott and Askerov, 2024). The Russian policy to neutralize this threat is the subject of this study.

2 METHODS

This research employs a **qualitative geopolitical and comparative legal-political analysis** to trace how Russia's mechanisms of ensuring regional security in Central Asia evolved between 2019 and 2024 under the influence of the Afghan factor.

The **empirical base** includes more than 60 official documents — such as the *Foreign Policy Concepts of the Russian Federation (2016, 2023)*, the *National Security Strategy (2021)*, and the *CSTO collective decisions and summit communiqués (2019–2024)* — as well as speeches by Russian and Central Asian political leaders, and the *Moscow Format* statements on Afghanistan.

In addition, **academic and analytical sources** (Valdai Discussion Club, Russian International Affairs Council, MGIMO analytical papers, and international journals such as *Central Asian Survey* and *Eurasian Geography and Economics*) were used to ensure triangulation and academic depth.

The research procedure consisted of three main stages:

1. **Document collection and classification** by type (legal, institutional, diplomatic).
2. **Qualitative content analysis**, identifying recurring categories such as “security threats,” “Afghan factor,” and “regional cooperation.”
3. **Comparative synthesis**, examining how institutional mechanisms (CSTO, Russia–Central Asia Summits, and the Moscow Format) changed in response to evolving regional challenges.

This combination of geopolitical contextualization and content analysis made it possible to identify both the **continuity and transformation** of Russia's security policy tools in Central Asia.

3 CHANGES IN RUSSIA'S FOREIGN POLICY APPROACHES TO CENTRAL ASIA AT THE PRESENT STAGE

In conceptual Russian foreign policy documents, legislative and adopted in recent years, the role of Central Asia is increasingly increasing. This is especially noticeable if you compare the last two Concepts of the Russian Federation's foreign policy. Thus, in the fifth Concept of 2016, which was in effect for the first four years of the period of validity, Central Asia was not included in the number of regional regions and was only considered within the CIS.

In particular, Article 49 stated that "The priority areas of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation are the development of bilateral and multilateral cooperation of the member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and further compliance with the legislation in the CIS space of integration structures with external participation" (President of the Russian Federation, 2016). Of the five countries in the region, only Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were named in the document in the article on the development of relations within the EAEU.

A similar situation is observed in the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation, where the region is not "specifically" named, and the priority task mentions "deepening cooperation with the CIS member states" (President of the Russian Federation, 2021).

If we change the sixth Concept of the Russian Federation's Foreign Policy for 2023, then Central Asia is already specifically singled out. Article 49 emphasizes that "In order to further transform the near abroad into a zone of peace, good neighborliness, development and prosperity, the Russian Federation intends to pay priority attention to ... deepening the principles of Russia's interests, integration processes, ... a system of mutually beneficial global long-term cooperation, conditioned by the greatest probability of conjugation of the potentials of the CIS and the EAEU, as well as the development of

many additional factors of forms, including the mechanism of interaction between the states and states of the Central Asian region" (President of the Russian Federation, 2023).

The mentioned mechanism was launched at the First Russia-Central Asia Summit in October 2022 in Astana. The very fact of creating such a form speaks of the growth of innovations in the region for Russian foreign policy. The immediate reason for this was the anniversary date - 30 years of the State Agreement on Relations between Russia and all five states of the region. However, it was not devoted to historical issues.

The real reason was explained by V.V. Putin in his speech at the plenary summit: "The escalating situation in the world and in relations is pushing us to intensify all interactions between us, it is not simple, and most importantly, the attempt on the part of others to stimulate the development of our leaders in the spheres, restraining the close ties and interactions that have been moving throughout history in defense, in the economy, in the humanitarian sphere" (Putin, 2022).

And at it, a Joint Statement by the head of state was adopted, which noted "the mature level of alliance or central partnership that has developed between the states of Central Asia and the Russian Federation based on power, equality, consideration of each other's interests and mutual assistance" (Joint statement, 2022).

This Statement can also be considered a conceptual document of Russian foreign policy. The security region was given a central place in it. In particular, the regime of "six-party cooperation and exchange of information aimed at combating terrorism and extremism, illegal borders, hidden corruption and drug trafficking" was recognized (Joint statement, 2022).

Discussing the situation in Afghanistan, Russia and its Central Asian partner countries, she "coordinates our actions in the region with international terrorist, global extremist groups and drug crime" (Joint statement, 2022).

V.V. Putin paid special attention to the security of the region. Here it was not only about the military-political aspect, but also about financial, energy, transport and logistics, sanitary and epidemiological security. Considering the security threat associated with Afghanistan, the President of Russia the destructive influence of the West: "Western, primarily in America, British intelligence services are fueling the formations opposing the Taliban, aiming them to fire on the border areas of some of our countries" (Putin, 2022).

In addition, in recent years, Russia has initiated six meetings of foreign ministers. At the time of writing, there were seven such meetings. At the last one, held in Minsk on April 12, 2024, Russian Foreign Minister S.V. Lavrov noted that "of course, we set ourselves the task of our leaders to develop recommendations for the long-term development of cooperation in the economy, energy and ecology. ... The Russia-Central Asia format is very important for regularly discussing opinions on regional security issues and current international issues" (Lavrov, 2024a).

Great attention is paid to Central Asia and its security, as well as during the foreign visits of the President of the Russian Federation. During the relevant period, he visited the region twelve times: four times in Kazakhstan, three times in Kyrgyzstan, twice in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and once in Turkmenistan. Here it should be taken into account that in 2020-2021, there were practically no side meetings due to restrictions in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic. And even more often during this period, he met with the heads of Russian regions - and not only in Moscow, but also in St. Petersburg, Sochi and Kazan.

Thus, the intensification of the crisis in Russia's relations with the replacement of the "collective West" and complex forces and means in the Ukrainian direction not only did not push Central Asia to the periphery of Russian policy, but, accordingly, required closer attention to this region.

4 THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN AND ITS IMPACT ON CENTRAL ASIA

After the defeat of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and last year, the surviving militants began to take steps in their countries to increase the level of threat to regional security. Many of them moved to Afghanistan with the release or direct maintenance of reserve forces. As a result, the province of Nangarhar was almost completely captured by IS militants, and support bases were also created in other provinces, including the northern regions from Badghis to Badakhshan near the borders of the CIS countries (Panarin and Kazantsev, 2017). The so-called Vilayat Khorasan (Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, 2025), a branch of IS in Afghanistan and Pakistan, led in the number of terrorist attacks among other regional regions during this period (Bakhriev et al., 2020).

This Taliban movement was actively expanding its influence and, on the eve of the reduction of the period, was active in 70% of the territory of Afghanistan (BBC News, 2020). Against this background, on February 29, 2020, in the capital of Qatar, Doha, the Agreement on the restoration of peace in Afghanistan was signed between the Taliban and the United States of America (U.S. Government, 2020). It was the first agreement between them, putting an end to the longest war in the history of the United States. From the Taliban, its supporter Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the political leader of the movement, and from the United States - the special representative of the US President in Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad. The United States pledged to abandon Afghanistan within 14 months in the event of a sharp stabilization of the situation with the Taliban and a transition to a political process for resolving the conflict.

The Joe Biden administration did not abandon the agreement with the Taliban reached by the previous Trump administration, but postponed its implementation. The US President said that American troops should leave Afghanistan not by May 1, but by September 11, 2021, that is, 20 years after the invasion of the country (Biden, 2021). However, in fact, this happened even earlier, at the end of August 2021, and the Taliban seized power.

After the victory of the Taliban, Afghanistan became a platform for additional attraction of Islamists and a springboard for their penetration into the Central Asian CIS countries. Given the political instability in the country and the large amount of weapons left by the United States, the threat to their southern borders increased. In addition, among the militants who returned from the Middle East, there were many people from Central Asian countries.

At the beginning of 2024, the Secretary of the Security Council of the Kyrgyz Republic, Marat Imankulov, estimated the number of radical groups located in the Middle East, in Afghanistan and adjacent territories, at 100 thousand people. At the same time, he noted that "the escalation of the movement in Central Asia is beneficial to global players as a tool for creating an additional source of slowdown" (Ozmitel, 2024). He named regional organizations, primarily the CSTO, as a guarantor of security in this situation. At the same time, M.M. Imankulov emphasizes that "the key role in it belongs to Russia as a country with the most independent economy and great military-technical potential" (Ozmitel, 2024).

In these conditions, Russia has made efforts to prevent the penetration of radical Islamists into Central Asia from Afghanistan. In order to minimize the terrorist threat emanating from its territory, it has, in the fair opinion of RIAC expert Andrei Kazantsev, solved this problem on two levels. "The first is the efforts of the Russian Foreign Ministry to ensure the complex complex complex and regional knot that has formed around Afghanistan" (Kazantsev, 2021).

The second level is "efforts through the Russian Ministry of Defense and the CSTO aimed at ensuring the stability of the defense of Central Asian countries, whose security is ensured by Russia" (Kazantsev, 2021).

4.1 Russia's diplomatic efforts to neutralize the Afghan factor while ensuring regional security

As part of its economic policy, Russia has activated the Moscow Format, which was created back in 2017. At the same time, four of the six meetings on this platform took place after the victory of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

On October 20, 2021, the third meeting of the Moscow format on Afghanistan was held in Moscow with the participation of representatives of Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, India, all five Central Asian republics, as well as a high-ranking Taliban delegation. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S.V. Lavrov addressed the event. He also had a separate meeting with the external management of the Taliban movement on the sidelines.

When discussing the prospects for the development of military-political trends in the country, the Russian side emphasizes "the importance of forming an inclusive Afghan government that reflects the interests of all ethnopolitical forces in the country, as a key step towards promoting inter-Afghan reconciliation" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2021a). At the same time, "concern was expressed about the activity of international terrorist organizations in Italy, primarily ISIS" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2021a).

As a result, in the Joint Statements adopted in accordance with the protocol of the protocol, all participants took part in the meeting "confirmed their readiness to continue ensuring security in Afghanistan in order to ensure regional stability" (Ministry of Foreign

Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2021b) and "taking into account the adoption of other agreements with confirmation by the temporary agreement of Afghanistan, previously assumed, in connection with the prevention of the use of the territory of Afghanistan against the security interests of neighboring countries, states of the region and the entire world" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2021b).

On November 16, 2022, the West, despite an attempt to "collectively" isolate Russia, held another, fourth meeting in this form in Moscow. Representatives of Qatar, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Turkey also spoke as guests on behalf of the countries participating in the previous meeting. Interestingly, representatives of the Taliban were not invited to this meeting due to the lack of live representations of an inclusive government with the participation of all ethnic groups.

However, the meeting did produce a result – with confirmation of the theses about an inclusive Afghan government and the need to eradicate the security threat emanating from Afghanistan, "a consolidated demand was expressed for the need for Washington to completely unfreeze the blocked Afghan assets". A decisive call was voiced for the US and NATO countries, responsible for their 20-year military presence in Afghanistan, to compensate for the damage inflicted on the Afghans over these years (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2022).

Representatives of nine countries gathered in Kazan on September 29, 2023, at the fifth meeting of the Moscow Format: Russia, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Zamir Kabulov, the special representative of the Russian president for Afghanistan, spoke in Russia. Representatives of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Turkey arrived as invited guests. This time, the negotiations were attended by Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan Amir Khan Mottaki.

The agreement of the participants "noted with concern the difficult security situation in Afghanistan in connection with the intensification of the activities of terrorist groups, primarily ISIS" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2023). At the same time, they highly appreciated the efforts of the Taliban in the region with the so-called "Islamic approach", but the leadership of Afghanistan was ordered to "take measures to dismantle, eliminate and prevent the deployment of all types of terrorist groups, elements in Afghanistan and prevent the emergence of a hotbed of terrorism and

instability in neighboring countries" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2023).

And at the sixth meeting, which will take place on October 4, 2024 in Moscow, the Russian delegation will be headed by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, and the Afghan delegation will be headed by the same Amir Khan Mottaki, who already holds the post of IEA Foreign Minister. The participants were almost the same, only, unlike the Kazan meeting, the pleasant representative of Tajikistan, but the representative of Turkmenistan did not come.

As Lavrov (2024b) noted, opening this meeting, he said: "We are convinced of the need to maintain a pragmatic dialogue with the current government of Afghanistan. Constructive interaction with Afghan representatives is in the interests of security and economic development of the region, as well as the participants of the inter-Afghan national agreement".

This dialogue is extremely important for countering such cross-border threats as drug trafficking and terrorism, freedom without the participation of the Taliban is impossible to play with them. The current government of Afghanistan is negotiating with drug production. Thus, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, voiced by Lavrov (2024b), in 2023, the area of opium poppy crops in Afghanistan decreased by 95% compared to the natural one, the volume of narcotic drugs fell almost 20 times.

On terrorism, the former with variable funding consult with militants of the "Vilayat Khorasan", as well as regional radical Islamist groups affiliated with IS, in particular with the "Islamic Party of Turkestan", a former Islamic movement in Uzbekistan.

In addition, in the "Moscow format", Russia conducted a fairly intensive dialogue with Afghanistan "on the sidelines" of various international events held on its territory. Thus, high-level Afghan tribunes have repeatedly visited the St. Petersburg Economic Forum, the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok, the International Economic Forum of Russia and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Kazan, as well as the Russian Energy Week Forum in Moscow over the past three years.

All this allows us to assert that the Taliban does not consider Russia a direct threat to security, and in the near future we should expect the removal of the label of "terrorist

organization" from it. At the same time, contacts with it are absolutely necessary to stop the threat emanating from its territory towards the Central Asian states.

5 RUSSIA'S ROLE IN ENSURING SECURITY OF THE SOUTHERN BORDERS OF CENTRAL ASIA WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE CSTO

During the period under review, the CSTO has constantly paid increased attention to the Afghan factor in Central Asian security. The focus of all summits in the current period has always been on the issue of the borders of the Central Asian member states, primarily the Tajik-Afghan border.

Thus, at the summit in Bishkek on November 28, 2019, a special document was adopted - "List of additional measures aimed at reducing the temperature in the Tajik-Afghan border area". According to the statement of the CSTO Secretary General Valery Semerikov, "at its core, it contains a set of measures proposed by the state aimed at measures in the Tajik-Afghan border area, stability and security, as well as increasing the effectiveness of the activities of states - representatives of organizations in the Central Asian factions" (CSTO, 2023b).

The summit on December 2, 2020, was held under the chairmanship of Russia via videoconference due to the coronavirus pandemic. The focus was on the understandable events in Belarus and Nagorno-Karabakh. However, among the documents adopted at this summit was the CSC Decision "On the anti-drug strategy of the member states of the Collective Security Treaty Organization for 2021-2025". This strategy paid great attention to countering drug trafficking from Afghanistan (CSTO, 2021a).

Shortly after the Taliban's victory in Afghanistan, on August 23, 2021, an extraordinary CSTO summit was held via videoconference. At the summit, V.V. Putin "expressed deep concern about the events in Afghanistan and the powerful threats emanating from Afghanistan." It was noted that it is important to prevent the infiltration of terrorist Islamism into the territories of CSTO member countries and to suppress the recruitment of their citizens into the ranks of extremists, including through the Internet and social networks. The problem of Afghan drug trafficking remains extremely acute, and therefore the CSTO will have to very closely monitor how events will develop in the country.

The participants of the meeting, including Vladimir Putin, expressed particular concern over the fact that the terrorist organization Islamic State, banned in Russia, maintains a strong position in Italy – a trend that represents a rather dangerous situation for the CSTO space (CSTO, 2021b).

Less than a month later, on September 16-17, 2021, the scheduled CSTO Summit and the joint CSTO-SCO summit ended in Dushanbe. Both events paid great attention to the Afghan issue, and especially the security of the southern borders of the CIS countries. Assessing the hasty withdrawal of the American from Afghanistan, V.V. Putin emphasized that they "left behind them an open Pandora's box, full of problems, relations with terrorism, drug trafficking, organized crime and, unfortunately, religious extremism" (Putin, 2021).

And the CSTO and SCO should counteract this, using all the capabilities of the relevant organizations. If the CSTO has additional tools to ensure security at the military installations that are active – first of all, the 201st base in Tajikistan and the air base in Kant, Kyrgyzstan – then the SCO could use solutions for the tasks of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) in Tashkent.

2022, the year of the offensive with tragic events in Kazakhstan and the first peacekeeping operation of the CSTO, was accepted by its leadership. Because the extraordinary January summit, held online, was mainly devoted to this issue. However, the issue of strengthening the Tajik-Afghan border was also discussed. Tajik President Emomali Rahmon put forward a proposal, supported by Russia, to create a "security belt" around Afghanistan (RIA Novosti, 2022). However, this soon caused a negative reaction from the Taliban government, which said that their country was safe and there was no need for such a belt. Nevertheless, working initiatives were discussed and promoted.

At the anniversary meeting in Moscow in May 2022, the CSTO Statement on the 30th anniversary of the Collective Security Treaty and the 20th anniversary of the organization created on its basis contained clear commitments to border protection: "The situation in Afghanistan and on other external borders of the CSTO member states is of concern. In this regard, readiness is expressed to ensure the security of the borders of the responsibility zone of the Collective Security Treaty Organization" (CSTO, 2022).

And at the summit in Minsk on November 23, 2023, the CSTO Collective Security Council Decision "On the Protocol on the composition and deployment of national

contingents of the Collective Rapid Deployment Forces of the Central Asian Collective Security Region" was adopted (CSTO, 2023a).

These forces were formed in August 2001 on the basis of the CSTO Collective Security Council Decision of May 25 of the same year "to perform tasks to ensure the military security of the CSTO member states of the Central Asian region of collective security, including participation in the latest military aggression and participation in counter-terrorist operations" (CSTO, 2024a). The current situation required specification of their design, equipment and location.

And finally, the most important document on the emergence of borders was adopted at the CSTO summit in Astana on November 28, 2024 - the Decision of the CSTO Collective Security Council "On the Targeted Interstate Program of the Collective Security Treaty Organization to Change the Tajik-Afghan Border". This program, in essence, is a Roadmap designed for five years, starting from January 1, 2025. It provides for three stages: the first is organizational, including planning and preparation. The second is measures to deliver weapons and military equipment to the border regions of Tajikistan, as well as technical means for the border troops of Tajikistan. The third stage is the complete equipping of the entire perimeter of the Tajik-Afghan border (ODKB News, 2024).

The very drafting of the program, apparently, led to progress, initially specific steps of each of the CSTO members with deadlines were named. Earlier, Russia, with its efforts in the bilateral protocol, strengthened this connection and the security of Tajikistan in general, including equipment and weapons either free of charge or at reduced prices, training personnel of the Border Troops. Also, the 201st base of the Russian Armed Forces in Tajikistan played and plays a major role in this process. And now all CSTO countries will participate in the process except for Armenia, which "froze" its membership in the organization.

The annual exercises "Rubezh" also play a major role in ensuring military security of the border. Thus, at the latest exercises "Rubezh 2024", which ended on October 21, 2024 at the Kharbmaidon training ground in Tajikistan, "issues on the preparation and conduct of combat operations to destroy illegal armed groups that invaded the territory of a CSTO member state were worked out" (CSTO, 2024b).

They involved sensors with additional military personnel from units of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, as well as operational groups of the Joint Staff and the second CSTO. The total number of participants was about 1,500 people and 250 units of military and military equipment, including aircraft, helicopters and UAVs (CSTO, 2024b).

As stated by the Chief of the Joint Staff of the CSTO, Colonel General Andrei Serdyukov, "The CAR KSBR will move to a qualitatively new level of training, a captain ready to face modern challenges and threats, who will effectively solve both national and collective tasks facing the CSTO" (CSTO, 2021b).

According to Zhao Huasheng, a Chinese expert on Central Asia, "At present, Central Asia is at low risk of being attacked by large-scale terrorist groups from outside, and it will be relatively easy for it to continue its financial activities. Foreign terrorist groups are usually small armed formations, and if they act openly, it is not scary. Moreover, with the KBOD as a guarantee of military security, China as a partner in security cooperation, and the SCO as a patron, Central Asia is quite capable of responding to armed attacks by terrorist organizations" (Zhao, 2023).

Therefore, in his opinion, with which the authors agree, mass anti-government public demonstrations are much more dangerous.

6 CONCLUSION

To sum up, we come to the following conclusions. At the present stage, Central Asia is increasingly attractive to Russia. This concept includes conceptual documents of Russia's foreign policy, the creation of new forms of cooperation, primarily the six-party forum "Russia-Central Asia", strengthening bilateral contacts with each of the regional states, as well as activities within the framework of integration associations. The central direction of Russian policy in the region is to ensure its security and stability.

Acute challenges to Central Asian security come from the south, from the territory of Afghanistan. First of all, these are terrorist ones – "Vilayat Khorasan", which is an Afghan-Pakistani branch of ISIS, "Islamic Party of Turkestan", also affiliated with ISIS, and a number of other radical Islamist groups with the participation of citizens of the republican organization of Central Asia. One can also imagine drug trafficking from

Afghanistan. To prevent this threat, Russia used both the constitution and military-political instruments.

In the area of economic development, the "Moscow format" of settlement in Afghanistan was revived with the participation of all the Central Asian republics, China, India, Pakistan and Iran, as well as representatives of the IEA government. Representatives of Turkey and the Arabian Peninsula states were also involved in working on its platform. At the same time, bilateral dialogue between Russia and Afghanistan developed. Representatives of its new government, at the invitation of the Russian side, took part in many international forums in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kazan and Vladivostok.

In the military-political main plane, efforts were made within the framework of the CSTO. In all summits of the organization during the limitation period, the problem of the borders of the southern borders of the Central Asian states was discussed and relevant documents were adopted. The 2024 summit, which adopted a three-year detailed Program for the Development of the Tajik-Afghan Border, was especially significant. The decision of the military exercise was to develop bilateral military-technical cooperation with the Central Asian states.

Thus, Russia has done a great deal of work to ensure that the Afghan factor, which influences the security of Central Asia, does not play a decisive role in its destabilization. To continue this work, it is necessary to intensify interaction with Afghanistan, which implies removing the label of a terrorist organization from the Taliban. NATO needs to strengthen comprehensive cooperation with the states of Central Asia to jointly counter threats to security and ensure stability and development in the region.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

These articles may be of interest to scientists - specialists in the field of international relations and political science, as well as Russian foreign policy, political processes in Eurasia, as well as the history and activities of international organizations. They can also be used for students and postgraduates studying in the relevant specialties. Finally, the article can help in planning energy steps to build Russia's foreign policy in Central Asia.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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