

# *ISAF's Security Transition in Afghanistan*

*and CSTO's Search for a New Role  
in Central Asia*

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## **Abstract**

*The article discusses the impending withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) from Afghanistan and its possible impacts on the Central Asian region. As has been widely accepted, and as the author of the paper agrees, the main challenge is will be security.*

*This is because Afghanistan's current government is not considered stable or legitimate by the majority of the population. Therefore, many experts predict that the Taliban will return to the power following the withdrawal of ISAF forces from Afghanistan, and will spread their influence to Central Asia. Additionally, after the withdrawal, along with the ethnic Uzbek and Tajik radical terrorist groups in northern Afghanistan, international Jihadist organizations such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Hizb-ut-Tahrir, Tabligi Jamaat, Muslim Brotherhood, Jamaat Ansarullah, or Jundullah will operate more freely on the ground. At this juncture, a serious question arises: how will regional countries, particularly Russia, respond to such threats? Accordingly, the article discusses the response of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to the possible destabilization of Afghanistan and the Russian policy in Central Asia in the light of the ISAF coalition's withdrawal. CSTO is seen as a military-political organization led by Russia to oppose or balance NATO in the Central Asia. As such, NATO's enlargement reduces Russia's traditional sphere of influence, and vice versa. In this sense, in the absence of a strong NATO presence, CSTO is planning to fill the vacuum by building up its military capacity, taking preventive measures to ensure regional security, and providing support to Afghanistan to enable it to stabilize as a peaceful, sovereign and independent state free of terrorism and drugs. The paper concludes by arguing that regardless of the benefit for the individual countries in the region, Russia is pushing the CSTO to enhance its own influence and interests in Central Asian region.*

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The withdrawal of the ISAF from Afghanistan in 2014 has generated heated discussion among scholars and politicians of Central Asian states on the possible impact on the security of the region.

Many experts argue that the withdrawal will create serious threats and challenges to the regional security of Central Asia, especially in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, which will face the spread of international terrorism and possible territorial incursions by terrorists. Some experts have speculated that the Batken 1999-2001 scenario could be repeated.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, other experts disagree that the withdrawal

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will have a huge impact on Central Asian countries. They believe that the terrorist forces have been weakened over the past decade by NATO's presence in the country. However,

<sup>1</sup> Tajikistan: Shadow-Boxing with Militant Threat, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 3 October 2006, at <http://iwpr.net/report-news/tajikistan-shadow-boxing-militant-threat>

many countries are preparing for the worse and making efforts to strengthen and equip their armed forces.

The NATO/ISAF mission has been engaged in Afghanistan for more than a decade, following the tragic events of 9/11. Since 2003, NATO has led the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF). During the Lisbon NATO Summit, it was decided that the coalition forces would withdraw from Afghanistan by the end of 2014.<sup>2</sup> As of August 2013, the ISAF mission comprised 87,207 units of 49 ISAF Troop Contributing Nations, including all 28 NATO members, plus several signatories of the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP), the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD)<sup>3</sup>, the Istanbul Cooperative Initiative (ICI), and some Contact Countries and Partners Across the Globe.<sup>4</sup>

Central Asia Analyst Thomas Lake believes that Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are the most likely to be affected, especially when the activities of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) are taken into

<sup>2</sup> Daniele Riggio, *NATO Support to the Afghan Stabilization Process: An Evolving Mission for a Long-Term Commitment*, in Oktay F. Tanrisever (ed.), *Afghanistan and Central Asia: NATO's Role in Regional Security since 9/11*, IOS Press, *NATO Science for Peace and Security*, Netherlands, 2013, pp. 23-24.

<sup>3</sup> *International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF): Key Factors and Figures*, Available at: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/images/stories/File/Placemats/2013-08-01%20ISAF%20Placemat-final.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Daniele Riggio, *NATO Support to the Afghan Stabilization Process: An Evolving Mission for a Long-Term Commitment*, in Oktay F. Tanrisever (ed.), *Afghanistan and Central Asia: NATO's Role in Regional Security since 9/11*, IOS Press, *NATO Science for Peace and Security*, Netherlands, 2013, p.21.

consideration<sup>5</sup>. Without a common enemy – the U.S. – the terrorists will fight their respective governments. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, who have strong ex-Soviet leaders, have effective state suppression systems, while Kyrgyzstan is vulnerable due to its weak government, inter-ethnic tensions (mostly with Uzbeks). As such it faces the highest risk of inter-state tension in the region.

Despite being geographically more distant from Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan may also face the threat of Islamic incursions due to their vast energy resources, which could become key terrorist targets.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, recent activation of radical groups in Kazakhstan has been observed.

Expert M.B. Olcott also believes that there is a risk of destabilization of Central Asian region after the withdrawal of ISAF forces from Afghanistan in 2014 despite the efforts of Central Asian states to strengthen their National Armies<sup>7</sup>. Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov noted that an ethnic Uzbek and Tajik terrorist group in northern Afghanistan has plans to invade territories of post-

5 *Afghan Withdrawal: Domestic And Regional Implications*, Business Monitor International, Available at: [http://www.riskwatchdog.com/2013/08/13/afghan-withdrawal-domestic-and-regional-implications/?utm\\_source=Adestra&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_content=Click%20here%20to%20listen&utm\\_campaign=Central%20Asia%20podcast&utm\\_term=BMO%20Free%20Trials](http://www.riskwatchdog.com/2013/08/13/afghan-withdrawal-domestic-and-regional-implications/?utm_source=Adestra&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Click%20here%20to%20listen&utm_campaign=Central%20Asia%20podcast&utm_term=BMO%20Free%20Trials)

6 *Ibid.*

7 Vadim Volovoi, *Afghanistan i Stabilnost v Tsentralnoi Azii (Afghanistan and Stability in Central Asia)*, Available at: <http://www.geopolitika.lt/?artc=3676>

Soviet countries.<sup>8</sup>

Georgian diplomat and politician Gamlet Chipashvili stated in an interview that the Taliban will return to power following the withdrawal of ISAF forces from Afghanistan, and will spread their influence to Central Asia, particularly Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. He also believes that the Taliban will move towards the South Caucasus, and that these events will increase the volume of drug-trafficking.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, there is also a view that the exacerbation of the situation around Afghanistan and the Central Asian region is advantageous for unstable countries like Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and for Russia, which as ever wants to enhance its role and dominance in the region. Experts note that Afghanistan's current government is unstable, and that its legitimacy is rejected by the majority of the country's population. Many experts predict return of the Taliban to power in post-2014 Afghanistan.<sup>10</sup>

Sergei Masaulov, the Head of the Center for Perspective Research, be-

8 *Radikalnii Extremizm-Ugroza dlya Vseh (Radical Extremism is a Threat for Everybody)*, Available at: <http://newkaz.ru/comment/20130620/5231325.html>

9 *Taliby Rasprostryanyat Svoe Vliyanie na Tsentralnyu Aziju, Osobenno na Kyrgyzstan i Tajikistan (Talibans Will Spread Their Influence to Central Asia, particularly to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan)*, Available at: <http://www.stanradar.com/news/full/3847-taliby-rasprostranjat-svoe-vlijanie-na-tsentralnuju-aziju-osobenno-na-kirgiziju-i-tadzhikistan.html?page=17>

10 *Viktoria Pafilova, Uhod SSHA s Afghanistana – Chas X Dlya Vsei Tsentralnoi Azii (The U.S.A.'s Departure from Afghanistan is X Hour for Central Asia)*, Available at: <http://www.afghanistan.ru/doc/62828.html>

believes that the U.S. wants to maintain its presence in Afghanistan even after the withdrawal of its core contingent. He notes that the division of Afghanistan is the only possible threat. He speculates that Afghanistan could split into three states: to the north, the Islamic state of Horasan; Pashtun on the south; and Hazara Khanate in the center.<sup>11</sup>

Shohrat Kadyrov, Senior Editor of Central Asia website and an Orientalist at Russia's Academy of Science, argues that the Taliban never posed a threat to the Muslim countries of the former Soviet Union, and further, that the demonization of the Taliban enables the Central Asian ruling elites to justify their power and their inability to develop national ideology. He notes that ruling elites fear that ethnic nationalism in their countries will be replaced by Islamic ideologies. Another expert, Leonid Gusev, argues that even if the Taliban poses no threat to Central Asia, there are radical movements such as Al-Qaida, IMU and other terrorist groups in northern Afghanistan that do pose real threats to regional countries. He cites the 1999-2001 incursions of these movements to Central Asia<sup>12</sup>.

Despite statements by NATO officials, the Afghan authorities and Afghan police that Taliban forces have

11 Viktoria Pafilova, *Uhod SSHA s Afghanistana – Chas X Dlya Vsei Tsentralnoi Azii (The U.S.A.'s Departure from Afghanistan is X Hour for Central Asia)*, Available at: <http://www.afghanistan.ru/doc/62828.html>

12 *Ibid.*

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*There have been several border clashes recently, across the Uzbekistan-Tajikistan, Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan, and Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan borders.*

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been weakened<sup>13</sup>, there is still a risk that the Central Asian region will be destabilized after the withdrawal of ISAF forces from Afghanistan in 2014. Therefore, the ongoing withdrawal of coalition forces from Afghanistan in 2014 will have a major impact not only on war-torn Afghanistan, but also the whole region of Central Asia, giving rise to intra and inter-state tensions. Prohibited extremist groups, such as IMU, Hizbut-Tahrir, Tabligi Jamaat, Muslim Brotherhood, Jamaat Ansarullah, Jundullah (Allah's Warriors), Jihadism and others, are actively functioning in Central Asian countries. The situation is exacerbated by the collusion of high-level officials and law-enforcement personnel<sup>14</sup> with these movements.

Additionally, the post-2014 stability prospects are endangered by the existing inter-state tensions in Central Asia. For example, cooperation between Central Asian states is very fragile, where downstream countries

13 ISAF spokesman: *Taliban are considerably 'weakened'*, Available at: <http://www.dw.de/isaf-spokesman-taliban-are-considerably-weakened/a-16372534>, [Accessed on 20 September 2013]

14 Viktoria Pafilova, *Uhod SSHA s Afghanistana – Chas X Dlya Vsei Tsentralnoi Azii (The U.S.'s Departure from Afghanistan is X Hour for Central Asia)*, Available at: <http://www.afghanistan.ru/doc/62828.html>

Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan accuse upstream Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan of water misuse. Another issue is undefined border lines, a problem inherited from the Soviet Union. The countries have been unable to agree on the demarcation and delimitation of their state borders, which creates a great deal of misunderstanding between authorities and local populations. There have been several border clashes recently, across the Uzbekistan-Tajikistan, Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan, and Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan borders. In addition, there are eight enclaves in Central Asia: Kyrgyzstan has two Tajik and four Uzbek enclaves, and Uzbekistan has one Tajik and one Kyrgyz enclave on its territory. The most dangerous of these is the Uzbek Sokh enclave in Kyrgyzstan<sup>15</sup>, which has regular clashes. Kyrgyzstan's deputy PM on security, rule of law and border issues stated that borders with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are the most difficult for Kyrgyzstan, and noted that there are 58 hot spots on Kyrgyz-Uzbek border. More than 371 km of Kyrgyzstan's national border has still not been delimited.<sup>16</sup>

Due to competing interests, low levels of trust, and tension among the regional actors, Central Asian coun-

15 Porofovaya Bochka Tsentralnoi Azii (Powder keg of Central Asia), 9 January 2013, Available at: [http://forbes.kz/process/porofovaya\\_bochka\\_tsentralnoy\\_azii](http://forbes.kz/process/porofovaya_bochka_tsentralnoy_azii)

16 Do Sih Por Naibolee Slojnyy dlya Kyrgyzstana yavlyayutsa Granitsy s Uzbekistanom i Tajikistanom – Atakhanov (Borders with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan still remain the most difficult for Kyrgyzstan – Atakhanov), 13 May 2013, Available at: <http://kg.akipress.org/news:574499>

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tries cannot cooperate effectively. It is expected that Uzbekistan will inherit a significant volume of the U.S. weaponry. It already has the largest military in the region<sup>17</sup>, and Kazakhstan, which has the most advanced economy in the region, is its opponent. These two countries are competing for regional dominance.

### *The CSTO and Its Role in Security of Central Asia*

In the light of the coalition's withdrawal from Afghanistan, the top candidate for ensuring the security and stability of Central Asia is the Russian-led CSTO, as Central Asian countries are incapable of doing so independently. Recently, Russian influence in Central Asia has decreased. Uzbekistan broke off its CSTO membership and began to cooperate closely with the U.S., and Moscow has faced problems during talks with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan on long-term leases for its military bases there. Russia is insisting on extending the lease for Kant Air Base

17 Afghan Withdrawal: Domestic And Regional Implications, Business Monitor International, Available at: [http://www.riskwatchdog.com/2013/08/13/afghan-withdrawal-domestic-and-regional-implications/?utm\\_source=Adestra&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_content=Click%20here%20to%20listen&utm\\_campaign=Central%20Asia%20podcast&utm\\_term=BMO%20Free%20Trials](http://www.riskwatchdog.com/2013/08/13/afghan-withdrawal-domestic-and-regional-implications/?utm_source=Adestra&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Click%20here%20to%20listen&utm_campaign=Central%20Asia%20podcast&utm_term=BMO%20Free%20Trials)

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(in Kyrgyzstan) to 49 years, although the agreement was only signed for 15 years. Further, Kyrgyz authorities approved the closure of the U.S. Manas Transit Center. Russia has written off 488.9 million USD of Kyrgyzstan's debt. The agreement with Tajikistan on the Russian military base was reached after long negotiations, and was prolonged until 2042.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, Russia has promised to allocate a 1.1 billion USD military-technical aid package to Kyrgyzstan and 200 million USD to Tajikistan under the auspices of the CSTO. It is expected that the aid to Kyrgyzstan will include artillery, armored vehicles and portable surface-to-air missiles, and air defense upgrades and current equipment repair to Tajikistan. Moreover, Russia has extended its leases on military bases located in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> Vadim Volovoi, *Afghanistan i Stabilnost v Tsentralnoi Azii (Afghanistan and Stability in Central Asia)*, Available at: <http://www.geopolitika.lt/?arte=5676>

<sup>19</sup> Joshua Kucera, *Great Game in Central Asia After Afghanistan*, 27 March 2013, Available at: <http://thediplomat.com/2013/03/27/the-great-game-in-central-asia-after-afghanistan/>

The U.S. has suggested it will shift its interests to Asia-Pacific<sup>20</sup> rather than Central Asia and the Middle East. Currently, China and Russia cooperate in different spheres of influence in the region, as there is third player, the U.S., with its own hegemonic aspirations. The growing economic influence of China in Central Asia affects Russia's regional interests. Russia is dominant in the military sphere, as it is difficult for Russia to compete with China in the economic sector.

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Russia is trying to strengthen its military presence in the region via the CSTO platform, and through establishing military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and the rearmament of those countries. These actions will help Russia to contain the U.S. in Central Asia and counterweight to economic presence of China.<sup>21</sup>

The CSTO, previously the Tashkent Treaty, was established on 7 October 2002, and is a post-Soviet regional security bloc. Currently, it has six members: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. Uzbekistan was a member for four years but officially withdrew

<sup>20</sup> Barack Obama says Asia-Pacific is 'top US priority', *BBC News Asia*, 17 November 2011, Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-15715446>

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

its membership in December 2012.<sup>22</sup> The Organization is seen as a military-political organization lead by Russia to oppose NATO, as the latter's enlargement threatens Russia's traditional sphere of influence. Moreover, Russia perceives the establishment of anti-missile systems in Eastern Europe countries as a threat to its own national security. Hence, through enhancing regional integration through the CSTO, Russia is strengthening its traditional influence in Central Asian and the post-Soviet region, in opposition to the strategy of the U.S. and NATO.

Russia's main reason for establishing the CSTO was the integration of its 'near abroad'. The escalation of situation in Afghanistan posed serious threats to the security of all the CIS member states, including Russia, and southern regions of the CIS needed protection. After taking control over Kabul<sup>23</sup>, the Taliban activated military activities near the southern borders of the CIS, and launched incursion attempts in autumn 1999 and spring 2001 in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>24</sup> In addition, car bombs were planted in

Tashkent<sup>25</sup> by members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).

Moreover, Chechen separatists were becoming increasingly active and demanding independence from Russia. The activation of extremist-Islamic groups in Central Asia, supported by the Taliban and other radical groups of Arabic-Muslim world represented a significant challenge for Russia. These events generated heated discussions in regard to peacekeeping, conflict resolution, economic cooperation and organized crime.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks marked a turning point in further development within the CSTO. Central Asian countries began to cooperate more closely with the West, and agreed to host NATO bases on their territories. Consequently, Russia sought to strengthen its role in the region through the CSTO, and opened Kant Air Base on Kyrgyzstan's territory, which is 30 km away from the U.S. Manas Transit Center in Bishkek<sup>26</sup> as well as another base in Tajikistan with 5,000 troops<sup>27</sup>. Russian RIA Novosti published an article in 2009 stating that Russia wants a strong military contingent in Central Asia within

22 *Sessiya Soveta Kollektivnoi Bezopasnosti 19 Dekabrya 2012 (The session of the Collective Security Council 19 December 2012)*, Available at: [http://www.odkb-csto.org/session/detail.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=1544](http://www.odkb-csto.org/session/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=1544)

23 *Alyayev Andrei, Dehkanov Suleiman, ODKB kak Sistema Kollektivnoi Bezopasnosti: Sovremennoe sostoyanie i perspektivy (The CSTO as a System of Collective Security: Modern Conditions and Prospects)*, *Observer* 1/2007, pp. 67-77, p. 68.

24 *Amin Said, Analiz Batkenskikh Sobytiy 1999-2000 (Analysis of Batken Events in 1999-2000)*, Available at: <http://easttime.ru/analytics/kyrgyzstan/2013/05/14/analiz-batkenskikh-sobytiy>

25 *Polat Abdumannob, Butkevich Nikolai, Unraveling the Mystery of the Tashkent Bombings: Theories and Implications*, Available at: [http://www.gwu.edu/~ieresgwu/assets/docs/demokratizatsiya%20archive/08-4\\_PolatButkevich.PDF](http://www.gwu.edu/~ieresgwu/assets/docs/demokratizatsiya%20archive/08-4_PolatButkevich.PDF)

26 *Radyuhin, Vladimir, A New Big Game in Central Asia*, *CDI Russia Weekly*, July 18, 2003, Available at: <http://cdi.org/Russia/268-12.cfm>

27 *Olcott, Martha Brill, Central Asia's Second Chance*, Washington DC.: *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2005, p. 189

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the CSTO comparable to the NATO forces in Europe, and that the CSTO is gradually transforming itself into a full-blooded military set-up<sup>28</sup>. The CSTO established the Collective Rapid Deployment Forces (CRDF) to combat terrorism in 2001, comprised of battalions from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Tajikistan, with a total manpower of 1,500.<sup>29</sup> Later on, in 2009, the CRDF was became the Collective Rapid Reaction Forces (CRRF).<sup>30</sup> 95 percent of troops of the CRRF are military staff belonging to Russia and Kazakhstan.

The CSTO is an observer in the UN General Assembly and fully recognized by the UN as a regional organization. According to the Charter of the CSTO, the members of the bloc cannot join other military alliance or groups of states, and aggression against one member state is per-

28 Russia Wants CSTO to be as Strong as NATO, May 29, 2009, Available at: <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20090529/155118377.html>

29 Allison, Roy, *Central Asian Military Reform: National, Regional and International Influence*, in Cummings, Sally (ed.), *Oil, Transition and Security in Central Asia*, London, New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003, pp. 227-228

30 Tolipov, Farkhod, *CSTO: Collective Security or Collective Confusion*, Available at: <http://old.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5168>

ceived as an aggression against the all member states.<sup>31</sup> The Organization is open to accepting new members and observers, and current members have right to leave the bloc if they wish.

The effectiveness of the CSTO and CRRF was questioned during the Osh 2010 inter-ethnic clash in Kyrgyzstan. The request of Kyrgyzstan's Interim Government's for assistance during the event was rejected. The Secretary General of the organization stated that the CRRF can be used only in case of external threats.<sup>32</sup> The Charter of the Organization states that '...matters falling within the national jurisdiction of the member state' shall be strictly respected and the mechanism of joint consultations to resolve the threat is activated only in case of international threat to security, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the member states.<sup>33</sup>

The discussion of the withdrawal of ISAF forces is also on the CSTO's agenda in regard to the possible implications for its southern member-states. Recently, the leaders of the Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan) and Russia held an unofficial meeting

31 *Ustav Organizatsii Dogovora o Kollektivnoi Bezopasnosti (The Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization)*, Available at: <http://odkb.gov.ru/start/index.htm>

32 *Bordyuja: ODKB ne Budet Zadeistvovat Silovoi Potentsial v Kirgizii (Bordyuja: The CSTO Will Not Use Forces in Kyrgyzstan)*, Available at: [http://www.odkb-csto.org/news/detail.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=594](http://www.odkb-csto.org/news/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=594)

33 *Ustav Organizatsii Dogovora o Kollektivnoi Bezopasnosti (The Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization)*, Charter II, Article 5, Available at: <http://odkb.gov.ru/start/index.htm>

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in Bishkek on 27-28 May 2013<sup>34</sup> in addition to the CSTO Summit on 23 September 2013 in Sochi<sup>35</sup> to discuss the development of the situation in Afghanistan after 2014, equipping the CSTO's CRRF with modern weapons, and cooperation among agencies dedicated to fighting against extremism. The Presidents agreed to build up the CSTO military capacity and to take preventive measures to ensure security in Central Asia. They considered the possibility of protecting the Tajik-Afghan border in light of the withdrawal of coalition forces from Afghanistan, and providing support for Afghanistan to help it stabilize and become a peaceful, sovereign and independent state free of terrorism and drugs.

Nikolai Bordyuzha, the Secretary General of the CSTO, stated that the possible developments in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of the ISAF forces in 2014 were discussed at the Bishkek Summit. According to Bordyuzha, there is a risk that the situation will worsen, and will thereby affect the CSTO countries. He high-

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34 *V Bishkeke Zavershilsa Neformalnii Summit ODKB (The Unofficial Summit of the CSTO in Bishkek is Over), The Official web-site of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, 28 May 2013, Available at: [http://www.president.kg/ru/news/2131\\_y\\_bishkeke\\_zavershilsya\\_neformalnyy\\_sammit\\_odkb/](http://www.president.kg/ru/news/2131_y_bishkeke_zavershilsya_neformalnyy_sammit_odkb/)*

35 *Deistvovat na Upredjenie (Act in Advance), Kyrgyzstan's Newspaper Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 25 September 2013, pp.1-2.*

lighted four factors: first of all, Afghanistan is an instability zone, and this will necessarily impact bordering countries. Secondly, a large number of radical movements are located in the country, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The aim of these movements is the invasion of Central Asian CSTO members. Thirdly, there is ongoing drug-trafficking through Central Asia and Russia to the EU. And finally, Afghanistan hosts radical extremists from Central Asian countries, and these militants are trained to fight the political regimes in their home countries.<sup>36</sup> As a result, the CSTO will work in two directions. The first is toward the enhancement of interaction with Afghan authorities, and the second is aimed at strengthening the CSTO's force potential. Moreover, the CSTO intends to enhance protections on the Tajik-Afghan borders, which is 1,344 km<sup>37</sup>.

During the Sochi Summit, Tajikistan's President stated that the threat from Afghanistan is growing in border areas. According to the President, the IMU and Taliban are moving closer to the Tajik-Afghan border, and militants are attempting to displace people from those border areas. He also noted that the country does not have the means to protect the border, referring specifically to the 60

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36 *ODKB Gotova Borotsa s Afghanskimi Ugrozami (The CSTO is Ready to Fight Afghan Threats), Golos Rossii (The Voice of Russia), 19 June 2013, Available at: [http://www.odkb-csto.org/obzor-pressy/detail.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=2086](http://www.odkb-csto.org/obzor-pressy/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=2086)*

37 *Ibid.*

percent of the border which is highly mountainous, obviously complicating the situation<sup>38</sup>. After the report by the CSTO Secretary General Nikolai Bordyuzha on the situation on Tajik-Afghan border, the Presidents of the CSTO countries decided to provide assistance to Tajikistan to strengthen its national border. The aid includes the construction of new frontier post buildings, restoration of a warning and signaling system and equipping border troops with of air patrol and surveillance tools, including radar. The CSTO countries will provide military-technical assistance to Tajikistan's border troops according to their abilities within three months.<sup>39</sup>

The closure of the U.S. Manas Air Base was on the agenda of Kyrgyzstan and the CSTO for a long time. In 2008, then-President Bakiev declared its closure, however, and the Base was transformed into the Transit Center. Many experts argued that the closure of the base serves Russia's interests<sup>40</sup>. Kyrgyzstan's Parliament approved a draft law on the denunciation of an agreement between the governments of Kyrgyzstan and the U.S. from June

38 *Vystuplenie Prezidenta Respubliki Tajikistan Emomali Rahmona na Otkrytom Zasedanii Sessii Soveta Kollektivnoi Bezopasnosti Gosudarstv-Chlenov ODKB (Speech of President of Republic of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon on open session of the Collective Security Council of the CSTO member-states)*, 23 September 2013. Available at: <http://www.prezident.tj/ru/node/5196>

39 *Sessiya Soveta Kollektivnoi Bezopasnosti ODKB. Sochi, 23 Sentyabrya 2013 (The session of the Collective Security Council of the CSTO. Sochi, 23 September 2013)*. Available at: [http://www.odkb-csto.org/session/detail.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=2703](http://www.odkb-csto.org/session/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=2703)

40 *Kyrgyzstan: Afghanistan Drawdown Puts Manas in Reverse Gear*, EurasianNet.org, 21 September 2013. Available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/65945>

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*Central Asian Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have competing interests and their cooperation is not effective, while Belarus is a passive member of the CSTO, and Armenia participates in the bloc only because of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.*

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22, 2009 on June 20, 2013. President Atambaev signed the law on June 26, 2013. The closure date for the base is July 11, 2014<sup>41</sup>. Some experts believe that the closure of the base will chill relations between the two countries; however others argue that the base will be moved to other location.

Russia is the main actor and decision-maker in the CSTO, and despite the apparently collective nature of the organization, its main tasks and direction are decided by Russia. Central Asian Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have competing interests and their cooperation is not effective, while Belarus is a passive member of the CSTO, and Armenia participates in the bloc only because of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. These two latter countries ignored the Bishkek Summit in May 2013 and President Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan was absent from the Sochi Summit on September 2013. Thus, Kyrgyzstan and Tajiki-

41 *A. Atambaev Podpisal Zakon o Denonsatsii Soglasheniya s SSHA po TsTP 'Manas' (A. Atambaev Signed a Law on Denunciation of an Agreement with the U.S.A. on Manas Transit Center)*, Akipress News Agency, 26 June 2013. Available at: <http://kg.akipress.org/news:577778>

stan are the most interested in these Summits, as they seek military assistance from Russia to enhance their forces in light of the impending withdrawal of the coalition forces. The Organization is used by Russia as a tool to enhance its military presence in its traditional area of influence, the so-called 'near abroad'. In addition, Russia is also concerned about the possible spread of Taliban forces to its Caucasus territory through Central Asia, where they pick up followers.

## **Conclusion**

The upcoming withdrawal of ISAF forces from Afghanistan will undoubtedly have an impact on the Central Asian region and beyond, especially taking into consideration the possible return of the Taliban to power in post-NATO Afghanistan. Central Asian countries are also mostly Muslim, and with weak governments, the radicalization of Islam in those countries is a real concern shared by many experts. Recently, numerous radical movements have become active in the region, attracting even officials and police officers as their followers. The radicalization of the region is a threat for both Russia and China, who have minority Muslim populations with separatist ambitions. Therefore, ensuring security in the region and fighting against the spread of terrorism and extremism are in the national interests of Russia and China.