

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

Rethinking the Implications of NATO's Afghanistan Operation and Its Partnership for Peace in Central Asia: Is It the End of NATO's Presence in Central Asia?*

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Abstract

NATO's partnership policy, including its Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, which aims to develop cooperation and dialogue with non-NATO countries, represents the first steps for an essentially Euro-Atlantic alliance to establish an institutional relationship with Central Asian states. The war on terror discourse after the September 11 attacks, the US intervention in Afghanistan in 2001, and NATO's takeover of the ISAF mission in 2003 made it easier for NATO to establish institutional relations with Central Asian states. This study first discusses the effects of the end of the Afghanistan operation on NATO's approach towards Central Asia in light of current developments, such as the Russia-Ukraine war and NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept. It then explains why the PfP program did not produce the desired results in developing relations with Central Asian states.

Keywords

Partnership for Peace, NATO, Central Asian States, Afghanistan, ISAF.

* Date of Arrival: 24 April 2023 – Date of Acceptance: 18 July 2023

You can refer to this article as follows:

Bağbaşıoğlu, Arif. "Rethinking the Implications of NATO's Afghanistan Operation and Its Partnership for Peace in Central Asia: Is It the End of NATO's Presence in Central Asia?" *bilig*, no. 108, 2024, pp. 01-26, <https://doi.org/10.12995/bilig.10801>.

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Introduction

As definitions and perceptions of threats in the international conjuncture evolve, international actors change their behaviors. Changes in the understanding of security since the Cold War ended has begun a transformation process that includes innovation in the discourse and activities of NATO, which was established as a collective defense organization. NATO's new mandate now encompasses issues that threaten Alliance members, such as ethnic and religious conflicts, regional conflicts, human rights violations, and the fight against terrorism. Within this framework, the Alliance has carried out tasks that have expanded its sphere of influence across a wide geography from the Balkans to Afghanistan and from Libya to Somalia. Besides achieving collective defense, as stated in the North Atlantic Treaty, NATO's objectives have included providing crisis management and developing a cooperative security understanding. Crisis management has not only provided a legitimate basis within the Alliance for out-of-area operations but has also expanded its scope of intervention globally.

The development of a cooperative security approach, on the other hand, has focused on relations established with non-NATO states within the framework of the Alliance's partnership policy, enabling the Alliance to establish institutional cooperation and dialogue with countries outside the Euro-Atlantic Region. Despite being an essentially Euro-Atlantic Alliance, NATO has established relations with Central Asian states¹ in the context of its partnership policy and the Partnership for Peace program (PfP), which is an instrument of this policy. Following the United States' (the US) intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 and NATO's takeover of the ISAF mission in 2003, NATO's relations with Central Asian states were largely defined through NATO's Afghanistan operation. The geographical proximity of the Central Asian states to Afghanistan and their expectations from NATO and NATO members on military and political issues made this relationship meaningful for all parties. However, the end of the Afghanistan operation and poor relations between Russia and NATO have limited NATO's development of institutional relations with these states.

This study examines changes in NATO's activities towards Central Asian states in light of current developments, particularly NATO's withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, the Russia-Ukraine war, and NATO's

new strategic concept adopted in 2022. This study has two fundamental aims in understanding NATO's relations with Central Asian states. The first is to explain why the PfP program did not produce the desired development of relations with Central Asian states. In accordance with this aim this study examines implications of the PfP on Central Asia towards its 30rd Anniversary. The second main aim is to discuss the implications for NATO's approach towards Central Asia of ending the Afghanistan operation. This was NATO's largest-scale military operation in terms of the number of personnel involved and the width of the operation area, in which NATO engaged in ground combat against an asymmetrical threat. The main claim of the study is that the nature of NATO-Russia relations directly affects the development of relations between NATO and Central Asian states. Given NATO's stance in the Russia-Ukraine war and its state-based threat discourse towards Russia, relations with Central Asian states are unlikely to reach the desired level in the short term.

This paper first discusses NATO's relations with Central Asian states and the factors affecting these relations from a historical perspective. It then evaluates how the Afghanistan operation has affected relations between NATO and Central Asian states, NATO solidarity, relations between allies, and changes in NATO's official discourse towards Russia. Finally, the paper examines the role of PfP in developing NATO's relations with Central Asian states and the difficulties encountered in this respect.

Historical Background and Drivers of NATO's Relations with Central Asian States

The official framework of NATO's relations with Central Asian states was first established through NATO's partnership policy. These relations then improved with the Afghanistan operation. However, NATO's cooperation with these countries has also always been determined by the state of NATO-Russia relations. Hence, we can examine NATO's relations with Central Asian states in four historical periods: 1992-2001; 2001-2014; 2014-2021; and 2021 onwards.

The first period began on 5 June 1992, when Central Asian states joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), established on 20 December 1991 as an instrument of NATO's Partnership Policy. This policy, which

aims to deepen dialogue between NATO member states and non-member states, is an integral part of NATO's security policy. The NACC was the product of the need to create an advisory mechanism between NATO and Central and Eastern European countries. In addition to Warsaw Pact countries, newly independent former Soviet Republics joined the NACC. In the new security environment, however, NACC was unable to meet all the needs of the participating countries. NATO's PFP program, designed to institutionalize the partnership between itself and NACC members, was proposed by the US Secretary of Defense, Les Aspin, at the NATO Defense Ministers Meeting held in Travemund, Germany, in October 1993 (Yost 97). It was then announced at NATO's Brussels Summit held on 11 January 1994. Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan became members of the PFP in 1994, Kazakhstan in 1995, and Tajikistan in 2002. The PFP still constitutes the institutional basis of relations between NATO and Central Asian states.

The second period started with the Afghanistan operation and ended with Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014. Russia's invasion of Crimea strengthened NATO's rhetoric of state-based threats. Earlier, the attacks on September 11, 2001, on the US Department of Defense and New York's World Trade Center towers, which had represented the technological and social power of the international system established at the end of the 20th century, had many chaotic consequences affecting international politics, such as strengthening Islamophobia in the West under the label of the 'War on Terror'.

The high symbolic value of the targets and the fact that the US has never previously encountered a similar event on its own territory, started a period in which the balance between security and stability deteriorated. Another tangible result of the attacks was that NATO, despite being a regional collective defense organization, conducted the largest and longest operation in its history in Afghanistan. On September 12, 2001, NATO, for the first time in its history, invoked Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which regulates the collective right of self-defense. This stipulates that an attack on one member is an attack on all members. Accordingly, on October 7, 2001, the US military launched Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. Operation Active Endeavour was also launched under Article 5, on October

26, 2001, and continued until it was terminated in October 2016 (NATO, *Operation Active Endeavour*). Within the framework of UN Security Council Resolution 1386 adopted on 19 December, 2001, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was established to ensure security and prevent Afghanistan from descending into a power struggle. One of ISAF's main objectives was to empower the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) to conduct operations throughout the country to support the Afghan government and weaken the insurgents' capacity (NATO, "NATO and Afghanistan").

UN Security Council Resolution 1510 of December 13, 2003, expanded ISAF's mandate, initially limited to Kabul and Bagram Airfield, to cover the whole of Afghanistan. ISAF command, under the UK between December 2001 and June 2002, was transferred to Türkiye in June 2002, Germany and the Netherlands in February 2002 and NATO in August 2003. This was the first time that NATO participated in a large-scale military operation outside Europe.

ISAF's mandate, which grew to 130,000 personnel from 50 countries, was terminated in 2014 (NATO, "NATO and Afghanistan"), and replaced by the Resolute Support Mission (RSM). The RSM continued NATO's training support and envisaged that the US would provide air support to Afghanistan's military operations against Taliban forces. Thus, the RSM was established as part of NATO's goal of giving the ANDSF responsibility for ensuring Afghanistan's security. To do so, the RSM had approximately 17,000 military personnel from 39 NATO member states and partner countries. However, NATO was clearly unsuccessful. Due to their geographical proximity to Afghanistan, NATO's partner nations in Central Asia made particularly significant contributions to conducting operations in Afghanistan, such as by securing borders and providing military bases and transit routes, which drew more attention from NATO. NATO's entry and presence in the region were made possible by the relationships forged with these states as a result of the partnership policy (Bağbaşıoğlu 89).

The third period began with Russia's invasion and annexation of Crimea. This led to NATO's discourse on combating asymmetric threats, which had been the main focus of its policies in Central Asia since 9/11, being replaced by a state-based threat discourse. Russia's actions dominated a discourse

that emphasized the increase of the Alliance's collective defense task and deterrence. This then directly and decisively affected NATO's official discourse and activities in that NATO's collective defense mission and deterrence were placed at the center of its official discourse. Since NATO's state-based threat discourse was directed at Russia, Central Asian states limited their relations with NATO because they did not want to damage relations with Russia and had established institutional relations with Russia and China through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

The fourth period began with NATO's withdrawal from Afghanistan. During this period, NATO-Central Asian relations have also been affected by the Russia-Ukraine war, which started on February 24, 2022. On February 29, 2020, an agreement was reached between the US and the Taliban to bring peace to Afghanistan, under which all foreign forces would leave Afghanistan by May 1, 2021. In April 2021, NATO foreign and defense ministers decided to start withdrawing troops from Afghanistan, which ended in September 2021.

Evaluation of the Consequences of the Afghanistan Intervention for NATO and its Relations with Central Asian Countries

In the post-Cold War era, due to its geopolitical location and rich natural resources, Central Asia became a prominent arena where great powers struggled for influence in terms of military security, energy security, economic interests, and regional integration. Regarding military security, the Central Asian states were seen as unstable in the years following their independence, and both before and after September 11. The US government's subsequent war on terror discourse and Afghanistan operation legitimized the US and NATO's military presence in Central Asia. Central Asian states thus became strategically important for NATO, given their proximity to Afghanistan, which was the center for the US, United Kingdom, France, and NATO to project influence into the Eurasia heartland, curb terrorism, and balance China and Russia (Sun and Elmahly 446).

NATO policy toward the Central Asian states aimed at facilitating its stabilization efforts in Afghanistan and combatting terrorism, proliferation, and trafficking in arms, drugs, and people. Shortly after September 11, all of

the Central Asian front-line states provided over-flight permissions and other support for the coalition's anti-terrorism operations in Afghanistan. While none of these states contributed soldiers to ISAF, they played other roles in helping NATO secure ISAF's supply channels. For example, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan hosted coalition personnel and granted access to their airfields (Nichol 2). These agreements were mostly bilateral between NATO member states and individual Central Asia states. In addition to the US base in Manas, Kyrgyzstan, NATO members Germany and France also had military installations in Termez, Uzbekistan and Dusanbe, Tajikistan to support operations in Afghanistan. Under ISAF direction, NATO began operations in Afghanistan in October 2001. NATO's first ever mission outside Europe was conducted mainly from coalition bases in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan (Sara 194). NATO's agency in Central Asia aimed to maintain open communication with the local governments by involving them as much as possible in activities like common planning, joint exercises, and information exchanges. Accordingly, some officers from these countries received training at the NATO Defense College, NATO School, and PfP Training and Education Centers.

For the Central Asian states, the presence of US and NATO forces in the region has had various effects. For these newly independent countries, the most important security threats are political repression, inequitable distribution of income, ethnic and tribal unrest, and economic problems. In such an environment, NATO's presence was interpreted politically as a tool for exerting political and military influence over them. For Central Asian states, who were unfamiliar with the means of productive cooperation with NATO and, in some cases, were still getting used to this procedure, this was also a novel experience (Mukhtorova 4). In response, NATO members, particularly the US, spent a lot of money to strengthen ties by encouraging regional governments to work together. An important component of this strategy was increased aid US spending on Central Asia's security sectors (Wishnick 29-34).

Central Asian governments were cautiously receptive to NATO's efforts to assist in reforming their military forces. According to Roger N. McDermott (2004), they were aware of the need to do so but were had been unable to determine how best to implement it and therefore looked to the Alliance

for technical experience and assistance. Gradually, however, the presence of NATO in Central Asia, especially US troops, was seen as a tool to exert political pressure on Central Asian leaders.

One example is the revolt against Uzbekistan's government that occurred in Andijan in the Fergana Valley in May 2005 and resulted in 100 deaths and several hundred injuries. Along with other international organizations, NATO condemned the government's violent repression of civil unrest, which many named the 'Andijan massacre' (Mukhtorova 10). Two weeks later, then NATO Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, re-expressed his concerns at a press conference at the Euro-Atlantic Security Forum in Sweden (Uzbekistan's delegate was absent) by questioning NATO's relationship with Tashkent (NATO, "Press Conference"). Because of these events, Central Asian states lost a great deal of confidence in NATO and especially the US. The Uzbekistan government then ended the activities of Western-based non-governmental organizations in the country, weakened bilateral relations with the US, and suspended its relationships and membership processes with international institutions based on liberal values. As NATO's operations in Afghanistan demonstrated, military force can temporarily reduce violence, but it cannot alone ensure lasting peace. According to Heinrich Brauss (194), this lesson led NATO to shift its main strategy from military interventions to providing assistance to its partners to enhance their resilience and provide security. However, the success of these efforts is a matter of debate.

NATO's failure over about 20 years to achieve its goals in Afghanistan is due to many different factors. As Seren (34) points out in many respects, the nation-building project of the USA in Afghanistan did not coincide with the reality of Afghanistan and had a devastating impact on the socio-political composition of the country. At this point, it would be appropriate to explore how this intervention affected NATO's post-Cold War policies. The Afghanistan operation provided an opportunity for NATO to build interoperability between members and states wishing to become members or affiliated with the Alliance. Interoperability is an important sub-element of strengthening partnerships. In fact, as Maranian (2-3) notes, interoperability is important for the Alliance not only as an element of cooperative security

but also as an inherent responsibility of all allies to optimize efficiency and effectiveness when operating in a NATO context.

The role of the Afghanistan operation in the Alliance's enlargement, partnership policies and its military transformation is crucial in this respect. NATO had 19 members when it took command of ISAF, which was the alliance's biggest operation ever, peaking at 130,000 troops by 2010. After sending troops to the NATO-led ISAF and RSM operations, a number of countries became NATO members: Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia in 2004; Albania and Croatia in 2009; Montenegro in 2017; North Macedonia in 2020. At this point, it should be emphasized that all of these countries are included in the PfP Program, created within the framework of the Alliance's partnership policy. The Alliance's partnership programs that involve non-NATO countries form one of the most important elements of its geographical transformation. The current diverse structure of NATO partnerships with institutional frameworks includes the PfP², Mediterranean Dialogue (MD)³, and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI)⁴. In addition, NATO has established diverse relations on an individual basis with other states, which were initially referred to as "contact countries" but are now referred to as "global partners". The first countries to be included in this classification were Australia, South Korea, Japan, and New Zealand as states that are not part of NATO's institutional partnership programs but contribute to Alliance-led operations, particularly the Afghanistan operation. After the announcement of NATO's new partnership policy in 2011, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Colombia, and Mongolia became global partners. The Afghanistan operation contributed to the Alliance's image as a global security organization by enabling NATO to connect with these countries spread across a vast geography.

The Afghanistan operation is also important as a test of the Alliance's military transformation and its ability to counter asymmetric threats. Military transformation encompasses the dynamics of the development of the armed forces, modernization policy, and the provision of security to increase NATO's defensive capacity. NATO's military transformation refers in practice to a change in its command and force structure. At the 2002 Prague Summit, NATO approved a new structure for the governing institutions of allied forces to increase the effectiveness and reliability of

its forces and developed its infrastructure for rapid deployment of forces (NATO, *A Transformed NATO* 42). However, the most important aspect of NATO's military transformation is the aim to change the understanding and culture of the Alliance's modus operandi. At this point, it should be noted that the change in the military structure of the US, especially after the September 11 attacks, within the framework of the pre-emptive intervention approach, has also shaped NATO's military transformation.

As can be seen, NATO's Afghanistan operation has contributed to its enlargement and partnership policies, and military transformation. However, this operation is also important in terms of monitoring divergences among Alliance members. The Afghanistan operation took place just when the impact of the global financial crisis on Alliance members became more pronounced and the US was shifting its foreign policy priorities towards the Asia-Pacific region. Consequently, when the Afghanistan operation (especially after 2009) is evaluated in terms of the participation and roles of NATO members, there are significant differences between participating countries. Despite being led by NATO, European allies contributed less to the Afghanistan operation than the US wanted. Only the US, UK, Australia, the Netherlands, and Canada contributed military personnel that fought Taliban forces directly. Furthermore, except for the UK and US, these countries reduced their forces after 2011. As Demir (127-128) points out, the differences between NATO countries in their political attitudes regarding Afghanistan's future indirectly reduced the operation's chance of success. By February 2013, Australia ranked 10th among 50 countries contributing to ISAF with 1,096 personnel (NATO, "International Security"). Until ISAF was terminated in 2014, Australia was one of the largest non-NATO member state contributors to the operation and the subsequent RSM. That is, although Australia is not a NATO member, it provided more support than many of NATO's European members. The above-mentioned reasons prevented the implementation of a common policy or strategy within the Alliance in combating the asymmetrical threat, which is inherently difficult. The main reason is that the gap between security perceptions and interests among Alliance members was greater than at any time in the Cold War.

After 2010, there were serious disagreements between NATO member states on several international issues that dominated the political agenda:

Syria's civil war, Russia-Ukraine relations, struggles in Southeast Asia, and the potential of Russia and especially China to become global powers. These developments and the multipolar international conjuncture also affected relations between NATO and the Central Asian countries. For the latter, the CSTO and the SCO provided an alternative to Western-centered institutions like NATO. The current international conjuncture and a decline in its global power mean the US cannot gain as much support from its allies as it would like regarding international problems, whereas it was able to during the Cold War for the first decade afterwards. The US has experienced conflicts with its allies, especially Germany and France, over what measures to take against Russia regarding the crises in Ukraine and Syrian, and regarding relations with China within the framework of the trade war discourse. Such conflicts generally result from a lack of mutual understanding and growing mistrust between the parties (Kanat 86). Disagreements on these issues and differences in the geopolitical priorities of allied states in general are manifested in various issues within NATO, the institutional symbol of transatlantic relations.

The Afghanistan operation ended unsuccessfully in terms of the context described here. According to Ringsmose and Rynning (158), the US's decision to end it demonstrated the European allies' inability to resist or influence US policy. Whatever the reason, the ending of NATO's Afghanistan operation and the subsequent evacuation process, although interpreted as showing a lack of coordination among member states and the decline of US power in the international system, once again demonstrated that the US still maintains its superior position within NATO. Against the backdrop of these developments and problems, the Russia-Ukraine war started in February 2022, with significant consequences that completely froze Russia-NATO relations and damaged NATO's presence in Central Asia.

Russia-Ukraine War and NATO's Official Discourse

On February 24, 2022, the Russian-Ukrainian war de facto started after Putin authorized Russia's armed forces to conduct special military operations in Ukraine. Putin's first claimed that it was intended to demilitarize Ukraine, which he described as a constructed entity that historically belonged to Russia, and to prevent NATO from gaining a foothold in Ukraine (Kirby). Putin's statements emphasized that the US and NATO were trying to encircle

Russia through Ukraine and Georgia. The threat that Russia perceived from this expansion was the clear focal point of Putin's discourse on the causes and objectives of the war.

In the Western literature, however, the war is seen as a consequence of Russia's "militarized" foreign policy. For example, Fix and Keil (1-2) claim that Russia's foreign policy approach, in which military methods and tools are used much more, has an aggressive and revisionist character. Criticism of this approach has also dominated NATO's official discourse since the war started. On February 25, 2022, the NATO Heads of Government and State Meeting, which was also attended by two non-members at the time, Sweden and Finland, described the Russia's "full-scale invasion attempt" as a threat to regional security and condemned the Russian and Belarusian governments (NATO, "Statement by NATO"). The Declaration of the Meeting stated that NATO had started to take all necessary measures under Article Four of the North Atlantic Treaty. Thus, NATO activated its defense plans and deployed both national elements of member states and elements of the NATO Response Force on NATO's Eastern flank. Apart from this joint declaration, many NATO member states also declared on various platforms that Russia's aggression was unacceptable. Finally, NATO and EU members adopted resolutions aimed at excluding Russia from the international financial system while the US administration imposed sanctions on Russian officials and increased both security and non-security assistance to Ukraine (U.S. Department of State).

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's announcement on February 27 that Germany would establish a special fund of 100 billion Euros for defense spending (Connolly) was of great importance in terms of NATO's burden-sharing problem, which has been on the agenda at various times since the Alliance's establishment. In addition, the Baltic states and Poland also increased their defense spending, while a referendum in Denmark on June 1, 2022, approved the country's inclusion in the EU's Security and Defense Policy (Henley). In addition to these decisions by NATO members to increase their individual and collective defense commitments, Sweden and Finland's NATO membership applications were also important as concrete indicators that the Russian-Ukrainian war strengthened Alliance solidarity.

On 24 March 2022, at the NATO Summit of Heads of Government and State in Brussels, NATO declared that it had taken “preventive, proportionate and non-escalatory measures”, activated its defense plans in response to Russia’s actions, deployed 40,000 troops to NATO’s Eastern flank, including a significant air and naval presence, and would send multinational combat forces to reinforce Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia. Importantly, these decisions did not bring the Alliance into direct military confrontation with Russia in Ukraine. Rather, as Tardy (17) puts it, this was “trying to win the war without fighting it”.

While time will tell how successful the Alliance will be in this regard, the US and certain NATO members are already waging a proxy war with Russia by providing Ukraine with military and economic aid. The tangible effect for NATO of this war environment has been a visible increase in its effectiveness and activities. Until 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea, NATO had deployed almost no ground combat forces in those countries (geographically close to Russia) that joined the Alliance after 1999, a situation that began to change after Russia’s seizure of Crimea (Pifer). The Russia-Ukraine war not only increased NATO’s military presence on Russia’s western borders but also initiated a process that to add Sweden and Finland to NATO’s membership. Finland became the 31st member of NATO on 4 April 2023. With Finland’s accession, the land border between NATO and Russia doubled.

NATO’s 2022 Strategic Concept

The Madrid Summit, held on 28-30 June 2022, adopted a new strategic concept outlining the threats to NATO in the current international conjuncture and the means to counter them. The document, the Alliance’s fourth post-Cold War strategic concept, consists of four chapters and 49 articles covering NATO’s aims and principles, the current strategic environment, the Alliance’s core missions, and the requirements for ensuring continued success (NATO, “NATO 2022”). The section entitled “Strategic Environment” describes an international conjuncture that is significantly different from the that when the previous strategic concept was announced at the Lisbon Summit in 2010. Unlike NATO’s three previous post-Cold War strategic concepts, the 2022 version marks a significant shift in the Alliance’s official discourse by stating that the Euro-Atlantic region is not at peace and identifying the Russian Federation as the most important and

direct threat to NATO members. The document therefore prioritizes an increase in NATO's defense and deterrence capabilities. More specifically, the document accuses Russia of being the greatest threat to the rules-based international order, describing the Russian-Ukrainian war as a "brutal and unlawful invasion" that has caused "unspeakable suffering and destruction". The document also declares that Alliance membership is decided by NATO allies, with no involvement of third parties, although the addressee of these statements is clearly the Russian leadership, which considers NATO's enlargement unacceptable. Unsurprisingly, document's rhetoric on Russia is in line with NATO's decisions since the Russian-Ukrainian war began.

The NATO Strategic Concept 2022 also considers China's foreign policy and military activities. The document claims that China conducts hybrid and cyber operations that threaten the security of Alliance member states, and uses its economic power to create strategic dependencies that increase its influence over target countries, seeking control over important sectors and supply chains. The document also emphasizes that NATO faces "systemic competition from assertive and authoritarian powers", meaning Russia and China. However, despite all these negative statements, it should be noted that the document also states that channels will remain open for dialogue with China, especially those that are mutually transparent. Meanwhile, US methods of solving problems within NATO have not changed much. In both 1997 and 2002, prior to NATO's 1999 and 2004 enlargements, steps were taken to improve bilateral relations with Russia. In 1997, the Founding Act was signed with Russia while the NATO-Russia Council was established in 2002. Having identified Russia as a partner and established necessary channels of dialogue and cooperation, NATO then implemented its enlargement policy by accepting new members. NATO's discourse and methodology regarding China arguably has similar qualities.

The Implications of PfP on Central Asia: A Robust Bond towards Its 30th Anniversary?

The concept of a partnership was first used in 1990 during contacts between the US and the Soviet Union regarding post-Cold War European security issues. Since then, US foreign policy decision-makers have predominantly used it to describe relations with former Eastern Bloc states seeking to adapt to Western norms (Kay 19). Originally shaped by US foreign policy, the

concept soon became the focus of NATO's partnership policy, which aimed to strengthen NATO's ties with non-member states. Thus, the PfP is NATO's post-Cold War program to improve relations with non-NATO Eastern and Central European states and other states that gained independence after the Soviet Union's collapse. Launched in 1994 with the slogan "Europe in peace from the Atlantic to the Urals", the PfP has been one of the most effective instruments of NATO's partnership policy. The PfP is based on its Framework Document, which states NATO's commitments to the "partner country" state (North Atlantic Council). The first article states that the PfP was created to contribute to the Euro-Atlantic Area's security by strengthening political and military ties between NATO members and PfP signatories.

In order to safeguard democratic societies, each signatory to the PfP Framework Document makes far-reaching political commitments, such as upholding the principles of international law, fulfilling UN Charter obligations, and complying with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Helsinki Final Act, and international disarmament treaties. NATO's most important commitment to the signatory states is set out in Article 8. Reminiscent of Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty, this stipulates that any partner state may consult NATO if it perceives that its territorial integrity, political independence, or security faces a direct threat. Critically, however, NATO has no obligation to provide military guarantees to applicant states in such consultations.

According to Keagle (60), because the majority of PfP states are former Communist states from the Warsaw Pact or Soviet Union, NATO sees these new avenues for cooperation as an important aspect of changing mind-sets, such as encouraging support for democracy, as well as enhancing security through increased military interoperability. The partners are provided with offices at NATO headquarters and at a Partnership Coordination Cell adjacent to Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) (Borawski 234). The PfP has contributed both to NATO's enlargement policy and to establishing dialogue and cooperative relations with non-NATO states. All 15 states that joined NATO after the end of the Cold War became NATO members after joining the PfP. Sweden, whose membership process is ongoing, is still a PfP member.

Although Central Asian countries are PfP members, have declared a wish to cooperate with NATO, and tried to balance their relationship with regional powers, especially Russia, they have never requested NATO membership. The Central Asian states' lack of interest in, or expectation of joining NATO has constrained its influence over them. However, the Afghanistan operation greatly raised the significance for NATO of cooperating with these countries (Bağbaşıođlu 91). NATO needed Central Asian countries particularly to use their air space and for refueling. In addition, the US has cooperated with these countries in the fight against illegal drugs and weapons smuggling, and human trafficking. However, this was suspended due to the color revolutions in Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, and Ukraine, the activities of US-funded and supported non-governmental organizations, and changes in the Central Asian states' security perceptions (Nogayeva 51).

NATO has created a number of partnership tools and mechanisms to promote cooperation with partner countries through a combination of policies, programs, action plans, and other arrangements. Table 1 shows the PfP tools used by NATO with Central Asian countries, including the Individual Partnership Cooperation Programme (IPCP), Individual Partnership Action Plans (IPAPs), and Planning and Review Process (PARP), and their participation in these tools. The IPCP offers a wide range of partnership activities, including defense reform, civil-military relations, education and training, military-to-military cooperation and exercises, civil emergency planning, and cooperation on science and environmental issues. The IPAPs and PARP are more complex programs that require a higher level of cooperation with NATO, but allow access to a wider range of partnership activities (NATO, "Partnership Tools"). Except for Turkmenistan, all Central Asian Republics participate in PARP.

IPAPs, which are more advanced cooperation mechanism, offer partners the opportunity to deepen their cooperation with NATO. In early 2006, Kazakhstan became the only Central Asian country so far to agree an IPAP with the Alliance. Kazakhstan's IPAP covers several key areas, including military, political, and security-sector reforms. Kazakhstan also subscribes to the Partnership Action Plan on Defense Institution Building, which provides tailored advice and assistance programs regarding defense sector reform. As a member of NATO's PARP, Kazakhstan also has a wide array

of partnership projects while the first PfP training center in Central Asia, called the Kazakhstan Center (KAZCENT), was opened in the Military Institute of Ground Forces in Almaty in 2008, and was accredited by NATO as a Partnership Training and Education Center in December 2010 (Aben). Through the PfP with Kazakhstan, NATO has developed the most concrete cooperation among Central Asian countries.

Table 1

Participation of Central Asian Countries in PfP Tools

	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan
IPCP	+	+	+	+	+
IPAP	Since 2006	-	-	-	-
PARP	Since 2002	Since 2007	Since 2019	-	Since 2002
Partnership Interoperability Initiative	Since 2014	-	-	-	-
Defense Education Enhancement Programs (DEEPs)	Since 2007	Since 2013	-	-	+
Building Integrity (BI)		Since 2015	-	-	-
Science for Peace and Security (SPS)	Since 1993	Since 1993	Since 1996	Since 1993	Since 1993
Partnership for Peace Training and Education Center	Kazakhstan's PfP Training Centre (KAZCENT)	-	-	-	-
The Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC)	Since 2003	Since 2005	Since 2009	Since 2014	Since 2003

There are two main challenges to NATO's development of relations with the Central Asian states stemming from the structure of the current international conjuncture. The first challenge is that Russia and China have institutionalized their relations with these countries through the CSTO and

the SCO in an international system that has evolved into multipolarity. The second challenge is the lack of motivation for NATO and Central Asian states to work together. This can also be expressed as finding new ways to ensure interoperability.

The first challenge concerns the international system evolving into multipolarity. This refers to the distribution or sharing of power elements, such as development, population, geography, wealth, industry, and military capacity, among states. This international system can be described as unipolar, bipolar, or multipolar. Global powers are actors that can use military, economic, and other elements to change international politics to suit their own interests and agenda. Regional powers can similarly shape politics within their region.

Currently, the most widely debated international political issues are the wars in Syria and Ukraine, the struggles in Southeast Asia, the categorization of Russia and China as regional powers, and especially China's potential to become a global power. The current international conjuncture and the decline in US global power make it difficult for the US to gain as much support as it would like from its allies on international issues, in contrast to during the Cold War or in the first decade after it ended. When the PfP was announced, there was a unipolar world order and Central Asian countries had no alternative to US and Western values, in contrast to today. Although the US and NATO presence in the region was not welcomed by regional powers, there was not much resistance.

After the 2000s, however, this resistance clearly increased. At the International Security Conference in 2007, Putin (*Speech and the Following Discussion*) clearly stated that the unipolar world order was unacceptable, that a multipolar world order was necessary, and that Russia would be part of it. He emphasized that NATO's expansion was a threat to Russia. The results of this attitude can be seen in Russia's 2008 war in Georgia, its annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the Russia-Ukraine war that started in 2022. Especially after 2007, Russia was able to manipulate political, ethnic, or religious problems in the post-Soviet space, especially in Central Asia. Among the factors affecting this situation are Russia's influence inside these countries through organizations like the CSTO, its military bases, economic relations, and Russian minorities. The post-9/11 US presence in Afghanistan

significantly influenced the formation of the CSTO and its transformation into an effective security mechanism. It should also be noted that Russia has used the CSTO to shape the geo-strategic environment in Eurasia in line with its own policies, increasing its influence over member states, and tried to stop NATO's eastward expansion (Nikitina 42). According to Ainur Nogayeva (49), the CSTO, which is intended to become a powerful military formation, could be used as a means of pressure to be used against the US, NATO, and the EU.

Russia has military facilities in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan, and provides half of Central Asia's arms imports. Russia is the principal supplier of military equipment to Central Asia. For example, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Russia has significantly increased its exports of major weapons to Kazakhstan, supplying 76 percent of Kazakhstan's total arms imports (Wezeman et al.). This is very relevant because Kazakhstan has the strongest cooperation with NATO among the five Central Asian states.

China and Russia remain the biggest economic players in Central Asia, with the former having become the largest investor in recent years. Several multibillion-dollar energy projects have benefited from Chinese funding, notably the building of an oil pipeline in Kazakhstan that would transport crude oil almost 3,000 kilometers to Dushanzi City in Xinjiang (Comitato Anlantico Italiano).

Meeting the second challenge, ensuring interoperability among NATO members and partners based on shared goals and interests, is essential for NATO's survival. The most important reason why NATO endures in the absence of a Soviet threat in the post-Cold War era is to ensure interoperability among member states and partner countries eager to remain connected to NATO. Today, there are unquestionably shortcomings in this area. The main reason why the PfP program is considered more successful than other NATO institutional partnerships is that it has ensured the creation of common objectives and made concrete achievements in the participating countries. In the post-9/11 and Afghan context, the PfP has been driven by two factors: ensuring stability in the MENA region and increasing operational capabilities. Since the withdrawal of ISAF from

Afghanistan in 2014, however, the drivers of the Pfp is less tangible, so partnerships in general have weakened (Tardy 37).

Conclusion

As a regional collective defense organization, NATO established a formal framework for relations with Central Asian states through its partnership policy and its Afghanistan operation. NATO's presence in the region was made possible by the ties formed with these countries through the Pfp, which is one of the elements of NATO's partnership policy. However, the degree of NATO's cooperation with these states has also always depended on NATO-Russia relations. In NATO's official discourse, interoperability has a meaning that includes maintaining solidarity within the Alliance and ensuring cooperation with non-Alliance states. Thus, interoperability was one of the main goals for NATO's relations with Central Asian states after the Cold War, and the Afghanistan operation was important for achieving this goal.

Today, however, interoperability has become very difficult to achieve. The end of NATO's intervention in Afghanistan in August 2021, which was a test of interoperability and NATO solidarity, is just one of many examples that confirm this observation. Considering the differences in geopolitical priorities and interests among the Alliance members, it is clear that the current international conjuncture will not allow the Alliance to conduct large-scale, costly, high casualty operations like the Afghanistan operation. Thus, NATO is more likely to opt for low-cost operations that give it a presence beyond the Atlantic, have a lower risk of human casualties, and are positively received by international public opinion.

The September 11 attacks shifted NATO's security perception from conventional and state-based threats to asymmetric threats, such as terrorism from non-state actors. NATO's relations with Central Asian states therefore initially developed within the framework of this counterterrorism discourse. While NATO was developing its relations with Central Asian states, NATO-Russia relations were supported by instruments such as the NATO-Russia Partnership Council and the Pfp, which aimed at dialogue and cooperation.

In 2014, however, Russia's annexation of Crimea led to a discourse that emphasized the Alliance's collective defense mission and increased deterrence. The Russia-Ukraine war that started in February 2022 has further strengthened this discourse. NATO is now trying to develop an approach that focuses not only on asymmetric threats like terrorism carried out by illegal structures but also on state armed forces - in this case Russia - and its conventional and nuclear assets. Within this framework, considering NATO's stance in the Russia-Ukraine war and NATO's state-based threat discourse pointing to Russia, NATO's relations with Central Asian states are unlikely to reach the desired level in the short term. In such an international conjuncture, NATO's focus on education, which is one of the important tools of the PfP will not break relations with Central Asian states in the short term, but will allow them to develop in the medium and long term. To sum up, a highly delicate balance determines the level of regional security in Central Asia. We can predict that NATO will adopt a gradual peace approach based on advances that can improve the attitudes of Central Asian states by investing in the region's security and providing military education to facilitate future interoperability.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of this study.

Notes

- 1 Central In this article, Central Asian states refers to five post-Soviet republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) with a common history and culture, and similar social structure.
- 2 The PfP countries are Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Ireland, Malta, Moldova, Russia, Serbia, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.
- 3 The MD states are Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia.
- 4 The ICI states are Bahrein, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates.

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NATO'nun Afganistan Operasyonu ve Barış İçin Ortaklık'ın Orta Asya Üzerindeki Etkilerini Yeniden Düşünmek: NATO'nun Orta Asya'daki Varlığının Sonu mu?*

Arif Bağbaşıoğlu**

Öz

NATO'nun ortaklık politikası ve bu politikanın bir aracı olan Barış İçin Ortaklık programı, İttifak'ın Orta Asya ülkeleriyle kurumsal bir ilişki oluşturmasının ilk adımını oluşturmuştur. 11 Eylül saldırıları sonrasında oluşan teröre karşı savaş söylemi ve 2003'te NATO'nun ISAF misyonun komutasını devralması NATO'nun Orta Asya ülkeleri ile kurumsal ilişkiler kurmasını daha da kolaylaştırmıştır. Orta Asya ülkelerinin Afganistan'a olan coğrafi yakınlığı, bu ülkelerin NATO üyelerinden askerî ve siyasi konulardaki beklentileri bu ilişkiyi taraflar açısından anlamlı kılmıştır. Ancak, Afganistan operasyonunun sona ermesi, Rusya-NATO arasındaki ilişkilerin olumsuz doğası, günümüzde NATO'nun Orta Asya ülkeleri ile kurumsal anlamda ilişkiler geliştirmesini sınırlamaktadırlar. Bu çalışmanın iki temel amacı vardır. Birincisi, Afganistan operasyonunun sona ermesinin NATO'nun Orta Asya'ya yönelik yaklaşımına etkilerini tartışmaktır. Çalışmanın ikinci temel amacı ise BİO programının Orta Asya ülkeleri ile ilişkilerin geliştirilmesinde neden arzu edilen sonuçları doğurmadığını açıklamaktır. Çalışmanın temel iddiası ise NATO-Rusya ilişkilerinin niteliğinin, NATO-Orta Asya ülkeleri arasındaki ilişkilerin etkinliğini ve gelişimini doğrudan etkilediğidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Barış için Ortaklık, NATO, Orta Asya Devletleri, Afganistan, UYG.

* Geliş Tarihi: 24 Nisan 2023 – Kabul Tarihi: 18 Temmuz 2023

Bu makaleyi şu şekilde kaynak gösterebilirsiniz:

Bağbaşıoğlu, Arif. "Rethinking the Implications of NATO's Afghanistan Operation and Its Partnership for Peace in Central Asia: Is It the End of NATO's Presence in Central Asia?" *bilig*, no. 108, 2024, ss. 01-26, <https://doi.org/10.12995/bilig.10801>.

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Переосмысление последствий операции НАТО в Афганистане и ее партнерства ради мира в Центральной Азии: это конец присутствия НАТО в Центральной Азии?*

Ариф Багбашлыоглу**

Аннотация

Политика партнерства НАТО, включая ее программу «Партнерство ради мира» (ПРМ), направленная на развитие сотрудничества и диалога со странами, не входящими в НАТО, представляет собой первые шаги на пути создания по существу евроатлантического альянса для установления институциональных отношений с государствами Центральной Азии. Борьба с терроризмом после терактов 11 сентября, интервенция США в Афганистане в 2001 году и принятие НАТО миссии ISAF в 2003 году облегчили НАТО установление институциональных отношений с государствами Центральной Азии. В данном исследовании сначала обсуждаются последствия окончания операции в Афганистане для подхода НАТО к Центральной Азии в свете текущих событий, таких как российско-украинская война и Стратегическая концепция НАТО 2022 года. Это объясняет, почему программа «Партнерство ради мира» не дала желаемых результатов в развитии отношений с государствами Центральной Азии.

Ключевые слова

Партнерство ради мира, НАТО, государства Центральной Азии, Афганистан, ISAF.

* Поступило в редакцию: 24 апреля 2023 г. – Принято в номер: 18 июля 2023 г.

Ссылка на статью:

Bağbaşıoğlu, Arif. "Rethinking the Implications of NATO's Afghanistan Operation and Its Partnership for Peace in Central Asia: Is It the End of NATO's Presence in Central Asia?" *bilig*, no. 108, 2024, pp. 01-26, <https://doi.org/10.12995/bilig.10801>.

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