

CSTO's Intervention in Kazak Unrest of 2022: Nature and Consequences

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Abstract

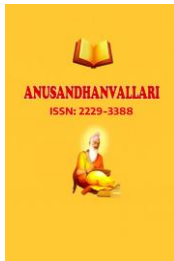
The 2022 unrest in Kazakhstan in January 2022 was a pivotal moment in the politics of the post-Soviet region, and the first noteworthy military intervention by the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). The protests began with an acute increase in the cost of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) prices and quickly turned into the countrywide protests involving violent confrontations, assaults on government facilities, and a provisional loss of state power, especially in Almaty. The President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev responded by seeking military help of the CSTO, arguing that a foreign-trained terrorist group was attacking Kazakhstan. Within several days, some 2,500 troops of the CSTO, comprising mostly Russian forces, was stationed to stabilize the situation and secure strategic infrastructure. It is a critical article on the nature and the impact of CSTO intervention in Kazakhstan. It evaluates the possibility that the deployment was a valid peacekeeping operation pursuant to the collective security provisions or it was primarily a regime protection and Russian geopolitical instrument. Applying theoretical lenses of Realism, Securitization Theory, and Authoritarian Resilience, the paper examines how the intervention was an indication of larger interests of regime stability, regional security, and the sphere of influence of Russia in Central Asia. The paper also contends that the Kazakhstan crisis has turned the CSTO into an active security group besides casting doubts on the concept of sovereignty, authoritarian defense, and selective intervention. In the end, the intervention helped reinforce the strategic position of Russia in Eurasia and set a significant precedent in responding to political instability in the post-Soviet space in the future.

Keywords: CSTO, Kazakhstan unrest, Central Asia, Russia, Collective security, etc.

Introduction

A January 2022 unrest in Kazakhstan (also known as Bloody January or Qandy Qantar) was one of the major political crises in post-Soviet Central Asia in recent years. Starting as a localized movement against soaring fuel prices, it soon turned into nationwide anti-government protests, violent conflict, and a large-scale security crisis that rocked the very foundations of the Kazakh state (Cornell, 2024). The uprising did not only reveal socio-economic and political dissatisfaction in the depth of Kazakhstan but also marked a pivotal point in the local security relations in the post-Soviet environment. Most importantly, the crisis was the first massive military operation by the collective security treaty organization (CSTO) thus redefining the role and operational importance of the organization within the politics of Eurasia.

The instant catalyst of the protests was the steep rise in the cost of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) which is a common fuel to the citizens of the western part of Kazakhstan. With the government announcing the lifting of price caps at the start of January 2022, fuel prices have nearly doubled almost overnight, triggering popular anger in the oil-producing city of Zhanaozen (Kайсаp, 2022). Nevertheless, the protests quickly escalated and extended beyond economic interests to include more far-reaching political protests against corruption, inequality, unemployment, and the old system of authoritarian politics that was linked to the previous President Nursultan Nazarbayev (Plotka, 2023). The demonstrators showed anger at how the political elites are concentrated and that no significant political reforms occur despite the abundance of natural resources and economic development in Kazakhstan.

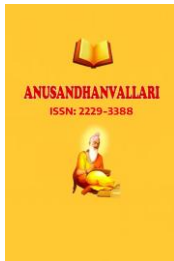


Violent confrontations, attacks on government buildings, looting, and a loss of social order became characteristic of major cities such as Almaty as the protests grew in strength. The Kazakh government characterized the uprising as a staged terrorist attack with the backing of foreign-trained warriors, but there was limited and still disputed evidence to back these arguments. In response, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev dissolved the government, declared a state of emergency, and gave security forces the right to employ lethal force against demonstrators (Stang, 2022). Above all, Tokayev sought the military support of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, which is a regional security organization, headed by Russia and includes some post-Soviet states. The deployment of troops by the CSTO into Kazakhstan was a historic moment in the history of the organization (Stang, 2022). The CSTO had long been accused of being an ineffective or symbolic regional alliance, which had no operational credibility since its formation in 1992 (Ambrosio, 2024). Nevertheless, the action in Kazakhstan proved that the organization is willing and capable of taking action jointly regarding a crisis in one of the member states. Meanwhile, the operation also emphasized the domineering role of Russia in the CSTO and strengthens the position of Moscow as the central security provider in Central Asia (Davidzon, 2023). The intervention also spawned some wider discussions about sovereignty, regime security, and authoritarian resilience, and how regional organizations can be used to quash internal unrest.

Historical Background of the CSTO

When discussing the relevance of the CSTO intervention in the January 2022 unrest in Kazakhstan, it is crucial to analyse the causes, aims, and institutional development of the Collective Security Treaty Organization as such. (Heggin, 2022). After the collapse of the Soviet state, newly established independent republics were concerned with border security, ethnic conflicts, terrorism, and maintaining a stable situation in the region. Here, some of the former Soviet republics signed the Collective Security Treaty in 1992 in Tashkent as a means of military cooperation and defence against each other. The treaty was subsequently transformed into the collective security treaty organization in 2002 and became a formal regional security alliance, which was led by the Russians (Heggin, 2022).

The main aim of the CSTO was to create some form of collective defence similar to NATO whereby an attack or threat on one member state would be considered a threat to all (Haas, 2015). The organization focused on enhancing military collaboration among the member states, harmonizing reaction to regional security threats and political stability in the post-Soviet area. Besides collective defence, the CSTO prioritized regional security cooperation via common military drills, intelligence exchange and border protection programs. The organization also took counterterrorism as its significant target, particularly following the emergence of extremist groups in Central Asia and the fear that the instability in Afghanistan might spread. The CSTO often identified itself as a regional tool that could fight terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking, and transnational threats that could disrupt Eurasia. It is a six-member organization that includes Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (Haas, 2015). Russia has been the most dominant military and political power among them, providing most of the military capacities, finances and strategic leadership. Historically, Kazakhstan has been among the most significant members since it has a geographic position, economic power, and political influence in Central Asia. Other member states, especially Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have regarded the organization as a significant security mechanism to the instability in the region and militant threats. Nevertheless, irrespective of its declared goals and institutional framework, the CSTO had been long accused of its ineffectiveness and inability to be operationally credible.



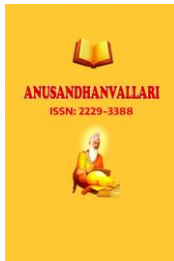
Before 2022, observers used to say that the CSTO was more of a symbolic organization that existed on paper than in reality. The organization has been repeatedly criticized on failing to take effective action to respond to regional crisis, even when the crisis involved its own members (Buranelli, 2022). As one example, in 2010, the CSTO refused to intervene during an ethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan and in 2011, regarding border tensions with Armenia, despite calls to intervene (IDSA, 2024). These events cast doubt on the ability of the organization to operate as a collective defence mechanism and its real capability to actually be a dependable security mechanism. Most observers cited that the alliance was more of Russian geopolitical interests than actual multilateral cooperation. It is in this context that the January 2022 crisis in Kazakhstan became a landmark in the history of the CSTO. The organization has deployed collective peace keeping forces the first time since its inception in response to a big internal security crisis in a member state. The quick response showed an unprecedented degree of coordination and operational preparedness, changing the perception of the role of CSTO in the politics on the region greatly. Simultaneously, the deployment strengthened the Russian hegemony in Eurasian security matters and emphasized the increased significance of regime security in the post-Soviet political framework.

Causes and Nature of the Kazakhstan Unrest

The 2022 January unrest in Kazakhstan can be traced to an intricate blend of economic frustrations, political discontent, and social disappointments that had been a long time coming. The catalyst behind the protests, though it was economically driven, was the rapid spread of protests throughout the nation, which demonstrated that there were deeper structural issues in the society and governance of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Consequently, the uprisings cannot be interpreted solely as an act of response to the escalating fuel costs; instead, it was an act of people displeasure to inequality, corruption, authoritarianism, and the monopoly of political and economic resources in the hands of ruling elites (Bulat Mukhamediyev, 2023).

The protests began as a result of the sudden rise in the price of the liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), a fuel commonly used by car owners in western Kazakhstan. At the beginning of January 2022, the government removed state price controls and shifted LPG pricing to an electronic market system. Due to this, the price of fuel increased almost overnight by nearly two times especially to the common people in the areas that highly rely on LPG in transportation and sustenance. The demonstrations first started in the oil-producing city of Zhanaozen, which was already linked to labor unrest and anti-government feeling following the violent crushing of oil worker demonstrations in 2011 (Dossym Satpayev, 2015). Inflation, increased cost of living, unemployment, and loss of purchasing power contributed to the escalation of economic frustrations. Although Kazakhstan had enormous oil and gas reserves and was seen as the richest economy in Central Asia, most citizens felt that the wealth was enjoyed by very few political and business elites as the masses faced economic insecurity and lack of opportunities.

The unrest however soon turned to the economic needs or rather obtained a strong political aspect. Kazakhstan had a long history of centralized and authoritarian rule by the previous President Nursultan Nazarbayev who ruled the country since it gained independence in 1991 until his resignation in 2019 (Stang, 2022). Even though Kassym-Jomart Tokayev officially assumed the presidency later, Nazarbayev remained a very influential politician due to the influence he had in the security institutions, economic networks, and the ruling elite. The political transition was seen by many protesters as merely the tip of the iceberg and that the actual power was still held by the Nazarbayev family and other related elites. Dissatisfaction with corruption, absence of democratic reforms, and suppression of political opposition, and elite control were increasingly evident during the protests. Slogans like



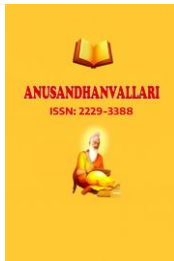
Old Man out were an outlet of the anger of the people towards the continued influence of Nazarbayev in the politics of Kazakh (Johny, 2022).

There were also social factors that contributed significantly to escalation of the unrest. The youths, especially the young people, complained about unemployment, lack of social mobility, and lack of participation in political activities. The fact that urban centers and peripheral areas had inequalities also helped to create resentment among the people. Although cities like Nur-Sultan and Almaty underwent economic modernization, most rural and western areas were not developed despite their role in energy sector of the country (Weitz, 2008). The demonstrations thus included the economic relief, but also political reforms, social justice and the government becoming more accountable. As protests swept the state of Kazakhstan, things quickly got out of control into violence and lack of order. In large cities, particularly Almaty, demonstrators invaded government buildings, burned down administration buildings, and engaged in conflicts with security agencies. Airports and police stations were stormed, and non-selective looting led to the creation of chaos and a sense of insecurity. The government was unable to regain control since security forces were seemingly overwhelmed in some regions. President Tokayev later termed the unrest as a planned terrorist act of foreign trained militants and criminal gangs who were trying to bring the state to its knees. This story came to the forefront of the government to seek help of the CSTO (Buranelli, 2022). Critiques however claimed that the language of terrorism and foreign conspiracy was employed by the authorities to legitimize real public grievances and to legitimize brutal repression by the state.

Nature of the CSTO Intervention

The January 2022 unrest in Kazakhstan and the intervention of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), was a historic and extremely controversial event in the politics of the post-Soviet region. This was the first time the CSTO had engaged in a massive military operation since its formation, in response to internal unrest in a member state. The intervention itself caused instant controversy about what it was really and what it set out to achieve. Although the CSTO formally framed the operation as a temporary peacekeeping operation aimed at stabilizing the situation and securing strategic facilities, critics claimed that the operation was more of a regime protection mechanism that sought to keep the Tokayev government intact (IDSA, 2024). Accordingly, some critical questions arose on the legality of the operation, Russian hegemony in the operation, and the overall consequences of the operation on sovereignty and the collective security of the post-Soviet region.

The legal justification of the intervention was based on Article 4 of the CSTO collective defense agreement according to which aggression against one of the member states is to be considered aggression against all the members (Beliakova, 2024). President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev officially invited the CSTO to intervene by claiming that Kazakhstan was being aggressed by foreign forces as terror group trained abroad wanted to disrupt the nation. The Kazakh government said that protests had been infiltrated by organized militant networks, which were the cause of the assaults on state institutions, security facilities, and critical infrastructure. Based on this, the CSTO rationalized the deployment as part of a collective response to terrorism and foreign intervention and not as an intervention in a domestic political crisis. Nevertheless, most observers doubted the authenticity of these allegations because there was no obvious evidence in the public that it was involved on a large scale. Opponents claimed that the uprisings were mainly based on local socio-economic and political dissatisfaction, rather than foreign aggression, thus casting uncertainty on the legality of the use of Article 4 (Beliakova, 2024). In response to the request of Tokayev, the CSTO quickly sent about 2,500 troops to Kazakhstan under the title of peacekeeping forces. Even though the deployment officially included the presence of forces of a number of member states, such as Belarus, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, the Russian troops made up the vast majority of the force (Socor,



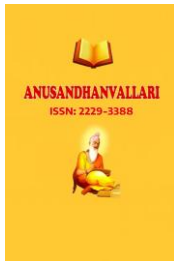
2022). Most of the logistical support, military transportation, coordination of the command, and operational planning was also provided by Russia. The pace and success of the operation was evidence of the capability of the Moscow to marshal local military capabilities swiftly and efficiently in reaction to a political crisis in its area of influence.

The scopes of the operation of the intervention were officially narrowed. CSTO troops were deployed to guard key infrastructures like airports, government offices, communication systems and military bases. This enabled the Kazakh security forces to concentrate on the suppression of unrest and restoration of the order in the population. The intervention also sought to stabilize the government authority at a period when state institutions seemed to be weakened and overwhelmed due to increased violence (Buranelli, 2022). Though CSTO troops were not officially involved in direct combat operations against protesters, their presence was paramount in supporting the Tokayev administration and indicating foreign support of the regime. The superiority of Russia during the operation was indisputable. The logistical infrastructure, military coordination and general strategic direction of intervention were controlled by Moscow. This deployment thus not only underscored the operational reliance of the CSTO on Russian capabilities but also the more general fact that the organization operates in many ways in the context of Russian regional security interests. Meanwhile, the short-term character of the mission turned out to be a significant factor in the process of the CSTO setting the intervention in the international arena. After the government announced that the situation was stabilized, within several weeks the CSTO forces started to withdraw out of Kazakhstan. The reason that the withdrawal came so fast was touted as a sign that the action itself was a temporary operation that was peacekeeping and not an occupation or permanent military presence. However, the intervention essentially changed the way the CSTO is perceived by changing it into a rather symbolic alliance to an active security mechanism that can intervene in the situation decisively in crises in the region.

Consequences for Kazakhstan

The unrest in January 2022 and the ensuing CSTO intervention had far-reaching political, security and social consequences to Kazakhstan. Although the government managed to stabilize the situation and avoid the breakdown of state power, the crisis had a huge impact on the inner political processes in the country and reinforced the status of President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. Meanwhile, the incidents of the so-called Bloody January added to the anxieties over the issue of authoritarian regimes, state repression, and the future of civil liberties in Kazakhstan.

The establishment of Tokayev as a political leader in the Kazakh political system was one of the most significant political implications of the unrest. Tokayev used to be seen as a transitional leader who was still working under the shadow of former President Nursultan Nazarbayev and his political networks before the crisis. Despite having officially resigned as President in 2019, Nazarbayev had retained much influence as the Leader of the Nation and chairman of the Security Council (Hosaka, 2022). However, the January crisis opened an opportunity to Tokayev to reduce the political position of the elites of the Nazarbayev era and gain more influence on the state machine. In the process, Tokayev dissolved the Security Council with Nazarbayev and fired some of the top officials of the inner circle of the former president. This change was a major alteration in the power balance in Kazakhstan and was a sign that the political influence of Nazarbayev was gradually fading away after almost 30 years of supremacy (CNBC, 2022). The disturbance also led to significant cabinet changes and political reforms to regain confidence among the people as well as stabilize the government. Tokayev has overthrown the current cabinet, changed major ministers and came up with reforms that aimed at curbing the societal dissatisfaction regarding inequality and corruption. The months after the crisis, the government declared the constitutional changes which

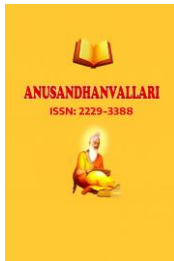


were promised to decrease the presidential power, enhance parliament and decentralize the political power. Tokayev encouraged the notion of the construction of a New Kazakhstan, introducing reforms as an indication of the political modernization and attention to the needs of the population. However, opponents claimed that most of these reforms were small scale and only worked to reinforce the legitimacy of Tokayev instead of essentially democratizing the political system.

Security implications were also important with regards to the unrest. The violent character of the protests and the provisional collapse of the civil order promoted the reinforcement of the internal security system of the government. The state institutions enhanced their surveillance, intensified monitoring of the political affairs and strengthened the power of the security agencies. The crisis solidified the official discourses of the danger of terrorism, extremism, and foreign intrusion (Johnny, 2022). Consequently, counterterrorism rhetoric became the core of the state policy and political rhetoric. Governments explained the increase in security by the need to avoid future instability and safeguard national sovereignty. Nevertheless, numerous observers cautioned that these policies might continue to cut down political freedom and bring even more state control in regard to civil society. Another significant outcome of the events of January was the human rights issues. In the process of quelling the unrest, security forces were alleged to have been overly forceful towards the protesters and civilians. Authorities estimated hundreds of deaths and thousands of arrests but government statistics were doubted by independent observers (Stang, 2022). The cases of arbitrary imprisonment, torture, abuse of prisoners, and suppression of press coverage caused much criticism on the part of international human rights groups and foreign governments. Crisis-related internet disconnections and restriction of mass communication also brought up the issues of freedom of speech and access to information. The opponents believed that the language of counterterrorism was applied by the government as an excuse to control the opposition and increase the practice of authoritarianism.

Consequences for the CSTO

The January 2022 action in Kazakhstan not only led to deep consequences in the life of Kazakhstan, but also to the institutional identity, credibility, and future role of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Before the crisis in Kazakhstan, the CSTO was often perceived as a weak and more of a symbolic regional coalition that was not only operationally ineffective but also politically disunited. Nevertheless, the prompt mobilization of CSTO troops in the wake of the unrest changed the way people view this institution and the shift in the direction of its development as a security organization in the region (Davidzon, 2023). Simultaneously, the intervention created significant controversies over the notion of sovereignty, the protection of regimes, and the expanded political agenda of collective security institutions in the post-Soviet realm. Among the most important outcomes of the Kazakhstan intervention, the institutional change of the CSTO itself deserves to be mentioned. The organization was able to show its readiness to act swiftly and in unison in addressing a significant crisis in which one of its member states was involved, the first time since it was founded in 2002. The effective movement of forces, the organization of logistics, and the quick stabilization of strategic infrastructure gave the CSTO a degree of operation believability that it had never had before. The organization has previously faced criticism as not intervening effectively when there were regional conflicts and security crises, such as ethnic violence in 2010 in Kyrgyzstan and border tensions involving Armenia (Cooley, 2011). The operation in Kazakhstan thus enabled the CSTO to position itself as an effective security group that could take decisive action in the face of Russian leadership. In a number of aspects, the intervention signified the shift of the CSTO into an active military-security structure as compared to a passive diplomacy structure. Meanwhile, the intervention created a significant and disputed precedent on how CSTO could intervene in the future in domestic political crises in the member states. Traditionally, collective defence organizations are assumed to react mainly to military threats of other countries.



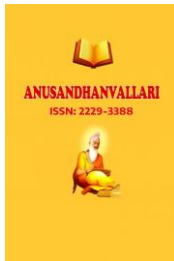
Nevertheless, the operation in Kazakhstan made the line between external defence and internal regime security blurred. Though the CSTO had a reason of using force on the pretext of terrorism and foreign aggression, to many it was clear that the action was actually used to cushion the Tokayev government against domestic unrests and political instabilities (Hegglin, 2022). This led to the concern that the organization may be further used to bolster authoritarian regimes with internal opposition or mass protests. Therefore, critics cautioned that the CSTO could turn into a tool of maintaining political stability and regime sustainability instead of collectively defending against external aggressions.

The intervention also created significant issues of legitimacy in terms of sovereignty, state power, and dictatorial rule. Proponents of the operation claimed that the CSTO had acted within the law since the government of Kazakhstan had officially sought the help of the CSTO as per Article 4 of the collective defense agreement (Florian Kriener, 2023). In this sense, the deployment was a justifiable reaction to a security crisis endangering the stability of the states. Nevertheless, critics doubted that the turmoil was indeed external aggression and believed that the intervention of the CSTO contravened the notion of national sovereignty as it permitted foreign military troops to mediate in an internal political dispute. The mere fact that the intervention was used to aid the state in repressing protesters, as well as enhancing authoritarianism in the region, was further criticized by human rights organizations and international observers. Consequently, the Kazakhstan crisis caused wider arguments as to whether regional security bodies should focus on state security or safeguard democratic rights and civil liberties.

The exposure of inner contradictions of CSTO itself was another significant effect of the intervention. The quick reaction in Kazakhstan posed challenging questions as to why the organization had not been so effective in responding to other crises involving member states particularly the one between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Armenia, a member of CSTO, had several times requested more active assistance of the organization in military conflicts with Azerbaijan but the CSTO did not want to intervene on such a scale. This contradiction led to discontent in Armenia and strengthened the impression that the activity of the organization has more to do with the principles of the collective and more with the interests of Russia as a strategic organization. The difference between the decisive action of the CSTO in Kazakhstan and its weak action in the South Caucasus served to underscore the selectivity of collective security in the post-Soviet region (Davidzon, 2023). Thus, although the intervention in Kazakhstan considerably improved the image of the operational work of the CSTO and showed its ability to act in concert, it also raised the question of the authoritarian shield, the lack of consistency between institutions, and the Russian dominance in the alliance. The January 2022 events fundamentally altered the role of the organization within the Eurasian politics, as well as posed significant questions concerning the future status of the system of regional security regulation in the post-Soviet space.

International Reactions

The CSTO intervention in Kazakhstan had a substantial international response and demonstrated the more geopolitical significance of the January 2022 crisis. The turmoil and the consequent arrival of CSTO troops were of significant interest to major world and regional powers since the events had implications not only regarding the internal stability of Kazakhstan but also the geopolitical equilibrium in Central Asia and the post-Soviet world. Chinese, Western and neighboring Central Asian state reactions were indicative of diverging strategic interests, security issues and views of Russian influence in Eurasia. China reacted to the turmoil by showing strong backing to restoring sanity and by showing favor to the government of Kazakhstan. Beijing perceived the crisis essentially in regional security and political order terms as opposed to democratic protest movements (Krishnan, 2022). Chinese leaders stressed on avoiding chaos, extremism, and outside influence in Kazakhstan which borders on the



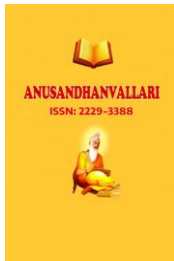
Xinjiang region of China that has a large border. Kazakhstan is also strategically important to China because of the energy cooperation, trade routes and the Belt and Road Initiative that depends largely on the connectivity of Central Asia. As a result, China did not oppose any attempts to restore order, and it did not criticize the CSTO intervention. Simultaneously, the reaction by Beijing was an expression of wider acceptance of non-Western security structures and values of regime stability. Kumar (2025) China tends to favor regional security structures that restrain the influence of the West and emphasize state sovereignty, authoritarian stability, and non-interference in the internal administration. Here, the CSTO intervention was consistent with the overall China geopolitical inclination towards the preservation of political order in the neighboring regions without the intervention of Western powers.

In contrast, the United States and European countries reacted with greater caution and concern. The use of CSTO forces was of great interest to western governments, especially since Russia was the most influential in the intervention. In the United States and Europe, the officials were worried that the crisis would further empower the position of Russia in Central Asia and enhance the capacity of Moscow to intervene in the post-Soviet environment through military means. The leaders of Western countries urged the Kazakh government and the CSTO troops to use restraint and not to use excessive force against protesters (Florian Kriener, 2023). They also insisted on transparency about the nature of the intervention and called to observe human rights and civil liberties. The protests also saw international bodies and the western media-house express concern over the reports of civilian killings, mass arrests, internet blockages and torture claims amid the crackdown of the protests. The intervention consequently fueled wider Western arguments on authoritarian rule, regional security and geopolitical interests of Russia in Eurasia.

The responses of the Central Asian states at the regional level were more cautious and ambivalent. The governments in the region were highly worried about the fact that similar upheaval might extend beyond Kazakhstan especially with the prevalent issues of economic inequality, unemployment, corruption and dictatorial rule. To certain regional leaders, the CSTO intervention was an assurance that Russia was ready to back the allied governments in times of instability (Florian Kriener, 2023). The operation thus reinforced the impression that Moscow remains to be the main security enforcer in Central Asia. Nonetheless, the intervention also created a sense of unease over the issue of sovereignty and reliance on Russia. There was concern among some observers in Central Asia that the speedy arrival of CSTO forces set precedent when it comes to foreign military intervention in local political crises. This caused concern that the regional governments would increasingly rely on Russian military assistance in order to ensure political stability. There were also concerns on the long-term effects of the Russian influence on the internal security in sovereign states. Thus, the events in Central Asia, despite the fact that the governments of the countries most of the time tried to keep the criticism of the intervention to themselves, the situation in Kazakhstan made the regional states realise that there is no easy way to balance between security cooperation with Russia and the independent foreign policy.

Conclusion

The January 2022 unrest in Kazakhstan and the consequential intervention by the Collective Security Treaty Organization was a turning point in the political and security environment of the post-Soviet world. What began as a socio-economic protest initiated by increasing fuel prices soon turned into a national political crisis that reflected inherent discontent of the people with inequality, corruption, authoritarian rule and elite control. The bloody nature of protests, the collapse of the state control in large cities like Almaty, and the fact that the government described the riots as a terrorist threat provided the preconditions of an unprecedented military action



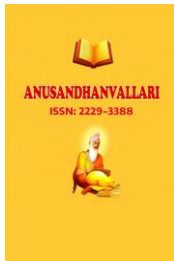
of the CSTO. This made the happenings of the Bloody January not only big regarding the internal politics of Kazakhstan, but also regarding the future of security governance in the region of Eurasia. The intervention completely changed the identity and perception of the CSTO. The organization before the Kazakhstan crisis was a rather poorly regarded and mostly symbolic coalition with a poor operational reputation. Nevertheless, the quick mobilization of CSTO troops showed that the organization had the potential of acting as a security mechanism that could swiftly respond to political instability in member states. The operation thus constituted a historic change in the role of the CSTO as a passive regional organization to an operating tool of collective security. Simultaneously, the intervention erased the lines between external defence and internal regime protection, and it poses critical questions about the future role of regional security alliances in the domestic political crises.

The Kazakhstan intervention also exposed the level of geopolitical calculations and strategic ambitions of Russia in Central Asia. Even though the operation was implemented within the framework of CSTO, it is evident that Russia controlled the operation with its military assets, logistical coordination and political leadership. Through its decisive actions, Moscow strengthened its role as the key guarantor of security in the post-Soviet realm and showed its willingness to maintain its influence in its traditional sphere of influence. The operation conveyed a wider message to other states that Russia was still ready to retaliate against any threats to allied governments and the stability in the region. In this respect, intervention was not confined to the worries about security only, but also the ambition of Russia to ensure geopolitical influence in Eurasia and the absence of political movements capable of disrupting the status quo of power relations in the region. On the level of the whole region, the events in Kazakhstan have certain significant implications on further crises in Central Asia and the post-Soviet region. The intervention set a precedent that CSTO can intervene in cases of internal unrest and can lead to authoritarian governments being more dependent on regional security mechanisms to maintain the regime. This brings up the issue of sovereignty, democratic rights, and the possibility of militarization of internal political conflicts. Moreover, the selectivity of the CSTO action, especially in relation to its weak reaction to similar conflicts in the region (e.g., the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict), revealed inconsistencies within the organization and strengthened the image of Russian control on the group decision-making activities.

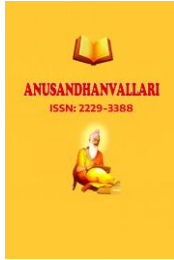
In the end, the crisis of 2022 in Kazakhstan proved that security, the stability of the regime, and geopolitical competition are intimately tied in the post-Soviet space. The incident underscored the vulnerability of authoritarian forms of political regimes, the strategic significance of Central Asia and the increasing function of the regional security agencies in the control of domestic turmoil. Although the CSTO intervention was able to bring short-term stability to Kazakhstan, it created a series of controversies about the resilience of authoritarian regimes, outside intervention and the future of Eurasian politics. Thus, the history of the January 2022 unrest has much more significant implications outside of Kazakhstan, influencing the development of the broader debate on power, sovereignty, and security in the modern world-system.

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