



INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION SECURITY AND THE PRESENCE OF TERRORIST THREATS

SEGURANÇA INTERNACIONAL DA INFORMAÇÃO E A PRESENÇA DE AMEAÇAS TERRORISTAS

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The article examines the impact of the Taliban's rise in Afghanistan on international information security, focusing on terrorist threats affecting Central Asia and Kazakhstan. It explores neighboring countries' response strategies and their implications for regional security.

Objective: To analyze the security challenges faced by Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states due to the Taliban's rise and propose strategies to mitigate terrorist threats and strengthen information security.

Methodology: The research adopted a multidisciplinary approach, integrating a review of indexed academic literature and an expert survey to study the Taliban's activities from 2021 to 2023. A case study on Uzbekistan-Afghanistan relations was conducted as an example of strategic cooperation.

Results: The Taliban has emerged as a catalyst for regional insecurity. Uzbekistan's pragmatic relations with the Taliban offer lessons for Kazakhstan, including cross-border collaboration and counter-radicalization initiatives. The research highlights the urgency of developing information security strategies that balance regional cooperation with robust national measures.

Conclusion: The Taliban's rise exacerbates risks to information security in Central Asia. Kazakhstan must adopt collaborative and strategic approaches to address these threats, leveraging the experiences of neighboring countries like Uzbekistan.

Keywords: Afghanistan; Taliban; ISIS-Khorasan; Information security; Terrorism; Radicalism.

RESUMO

Introdução: O artigo examina o impacto da ascensão do Talibã no Afeganistão na segurança internacional da informação, com foco nas ameaças terroristas que afetam a Ásia Central e o Cazaquistão. A pesquisa aborda as estratégias de resposta de países vizinhos e suas implicações para a segurança regional.





Objetivo: Analisar os desafios de segurança enfrentados pelo Cazaquistão e outros países da Ásia Central devido à ascensão do Talibã e propor estratégias para mitigar as ameaças terroristas e fortalecer a segurança da informação.

Metodologia: A pesquisa utilizou uma abordagem multidisciplinar, integrando revisão da literatura acadêmica indexada e um levantamento com especialistas para estudar o impacto das atividades do Talibã de 2021 a 2023. Um estudo de caso sobre as relações entre o Uzbequistão e o Afeganistão foi conduzido como exemplo de cooperação estratégica.

Resultados: O Talibã emergiu como um catalisador de insegurança regional. As relações pragmáticas do Uzbequistão com o Talibã oferecem lições para o Cazaquistão, incluindo a necessidade de colaboração transfronteiriça e iniciativas de desradicalização. A pesquisa destaca a urgência de desenvolver estratégias de segurança informacional que combinem cooperação regional com medidas nacionais robustas.

Conclusão: A ascensão do Talibã exacerba os riscos para a segurança informacional na Ásia Central. O Cazaquistão deve adotar abordagens colaborativas e estratégicas para lidar com essas ameaças, aproveitando as experiências de países vizinhos como o Uzbequistão.

Palavras-chave: Afeganistão; Talibã; ISIS-Khorasan; segurança da informação; Terrorismo; Radicalismo.

INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan today poses a significant challenge to international security policy, including information security, for all countries in the region and for global security as a whole. The Taliban has emerged as a substantial force in the region, capable of destabilizing neighboring countries both openly and through information influence carried out by Islamist and extremist forces.

Following the publication of a UN Security Council report, a conference on Afghanistan was organized in Tashkent on July 25-27, 2022. The UN Security Council report contained critical information for international security, highlighting the activities of terrorist groups, including Al-Qaeda, which operate under the protection of the Taliban in Afghanistan (Singh, 2024).

The situation in Afghanistan raises concerns about the future trajectory of events in the country. After capturing Kabul in August 2021, the Taliban announced the reinstatement of Sharia law. Simultaneously, the new government launched an information campaign in the media, attempting to present a PR-driven image of





"Taliban 2.0," seeking to convince the international community that a return to the brutal governance methods of the 1990s would not occur (Sharif, n.d.).

Following their rise to power, it was expected that the government would gain official recognition from countries that had legitimized the Taliban in the 1990s, as well as from China and Russia, which had maintained full official diplomatic channels with Kabul. Russia even organized a meeting of the Taliban with nine countries in October 2021 in Moscow (Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan). In the concluding statement, the participants urged the regime to take measures to develop the country, combat terrorism, and curb drug production (Plyais, 2022).

However, a significant obstacle to the new government's recognition under international law remains its ineffective efforts to combat terrorism, including Al-Qaeda and ISIS (Blue et al., 2021).

At the same time, the Taliban's declared victory over the forces of the Western coalition poses a serious threat to the information security of Central Asian states, including Kazakhstan, where the majority of the population practices Islam.

To counter this threat, the authorities of the Republic of Kazakhstan are making every effort to neutralize potential dangers posed by radical Islamic elements. These elements incite opposition to representatives of other religions (kafirs), demonize symbols of other religions and secular life, call for combating "apostates" (taghuts), and oppose Kazakhstan's judicial system, claiming that secular authorities lack the right to judge Muslims. They also provoke interethnic discord rooted in religious segregation and supremacy. All these threats to the information security of Kazakhstan's population require a responsible approach and decisive actions.

In light of the established problem of terrorist threats and Kazakhstan's information security, analyzing the situation in Afghanistan during 2021–2023 following the withdrawal of the international counterterrorism coalition—and the Taliban's rise to power—becomes particularly relevant.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A significant factor affecting the situation in Afghanistan is the issue of terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, which researchers argue can be considered from two perspectives (Giyosov, 2015; Nessar, 2022).





The first dimension is terrorist attacks. For many years, Afghanistan has been characterized by a very high level of terrorism (Konarovsky & Nessar, 2022). According to the Global Terrorism Index 2020 report prepared by the Institute for Economics and Peace, Afghanistan again ranked first in the world for terrorist threats. Although the number of deaths from attacks decreased in 2020, it still accounted for the highest percentage globally (e.g., in 2019, it was 41% of the total, affecting 5,725 people) (Machitidze, 2020). The number of attacks and victims remains exceptionally high. Afghan Taliban were responsible for 87% of total attack victims, 6% were linked to ISIS-Khorasan, and the rest were attributed to other groups, including Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) (Giustozzi, 2023).

The second dimension is the informational and material support provided by the Taliban to various terrorist or Islamist organizations, as well as the activities of unsupported radical groups in the country, including those associated with ISIS (Safian, 2023; Saul, 2022). Another critical manifestation of this support is the Taliban's backing of Al-Qaeda (Nessar, 2023).

Afghanistan remains a hub for various Islamist organizations, regardless of whether they receive Taliban support. An example of this is ISIS-Khorasan, a branch of the Islamic State established in 2015 in the Khorasan province. This group seeks to expand its influence by attacking both civilians and the Taliban, resulting in armed clashes, among other consequences (Rizoyon & Giyosov, 2023). A striking example of this was the deadly attack on August 26, 2021, at Kabul International Airport, which claimed the lives of approximately 170 Afghans and 13 U.S. servicemen (Rizoyon et al., 2022).

In 2023, Kazakh security services managed to thwart an attempted bombing of the Khoja Ahmed Yasawi Mausoleum in Turkestan. In March 2024, two ISIS-Khorasan militants preparing an attack on a synagogue in Moscow were eliminated in the Kaluga region.

These incidents highlight the serious threat to information security, as citizens of Kazakhstan, influenced by radical religious propaganda, are becoming significant terrorist threats (Katkova & Mekka, 2022).

Despite its operational freedom, like the "Islamic State," ISIS-Khorasan is currently in conflict with the Taliban. The Taliban seeks to implement Sharia law aligned with Afghan nationalism, which contradicts ISIS's aim to unite Muslims across





national borders, further exacerbating security risks for Kazakhstan (Nessar & Komleva, 2022).

Thus, the purpose of this article was to analyze the situation in Afghanistan during 2021–2023 after the Taliban's rise to power, focusing on terrorist threats and Kazakhstan's information security.

METHODS

Stage 1:

In the initial phase, sources necessary to achieve the research objective were selected. Data for the study were derived from articles and reviews published in journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science. Information was retrieved using keywords such as "Afghanistan," "Taliban," "security," "information security," and "terrorism" in English and Russian, appearing in titles, abstracts, or keywords. Based on the analysis of these sources, the situation in Afghanistan from 2021 to 2023 was examined regarding information security and terrorist threats for Western countries and Kazakhstan.

Stage 2:

In the second phase, an expert survey was conducted to create a case study using the Republic of Uzbekistan as an example. This case study aimed to assess the potential for effective relations with the new Taliban authorities to prevent terrorist threats and strengthen the country's information security—a strategy potentially applicable for Kazakh authorities.

The case study sought to answer the following research question:

What is the dynamic of political relations between Uzbekistan and the Taliban after 2021?

To answer this, an analysis of events from 2021 to 2023 in the context of attempts at peaceful coexistence was undertaken. Additionally, a secondary research question was posed:

How has the model of cooperation between the Taliban and Uzbekistan's authorities developed?

Emails inviting participation in the survey were sent to 49 experts from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Russia. The selection criterion for the expert pool was having at least three articles or publications on the research topic in peer-reviewed





journals or media outlets. A total of 44 experts agreed to participate, after which research questions were sent to them via email.

Participants were asked to share their reflections and conclusions on the research questions in free form. All respondents were informed about the survey's objectives and that the study's results would be published in aggregated form.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Afghanistan in 2021–2023 as a Threat to International Security

The presence of the international coalition in Afghanistan provided a degree of security against Al-Qaeda's terrorist attacks and helped curb the flow of migrants from Afghanistan to Europe (Kortunov, 2021). However, by the fall of 2021, heads of American and German intelligence agencies expressed concerns that Afghan terrorists might resume sending attack groups to Europe. German political circles, considering the situation in Afghanistan, currently view Islamic radicalism as a significant security threat, including the potential presence of ISIS-Khorasan jihadists in Europe (Veretilnyk, 2022; Shafak, 2022). A scenario similar to Syria, where jihadists arrived from around the world, and the potential reentry of religious terrorists into Europe, represents a tangible threat. This was confirmed during interrogations of a detained Tajikistani terrorist (Rizoyon & Giyosov, 2022).

Researchers highlight the role of ISIS-Khorasan terrorists, who exploit Afghanistan's internal destabilization to strengthen their networks in the region. They mobilize supporters from neighboring countries to weaken the Taliban and its ally, Al-Qaeda (Giustozzi, 2023).

Analysts suggest that the Taliban's seizure of power could escalate the terrorist threat to Europe and the United States. This includes the resurgence of Al-Qaeda's structures and influence in Afghanistan. Al-Qaeda has maintained a presence in Afghanistan, supplying fighters for the Islamic "holy war" and supporting the Taliban financially and ideologically. Currently, it is gradually rebuilding its operational and logistical base in the country (Rizoyon et al., 2022).

The United States has frozen Afghanistan's access to nearly \$10 billion worth of national reserves. Should the West accept the Taliban as Afghanistan's governing authority, access to these reserves would depend on their use for stabilizing the Afghan economy. Afghanistan is heavily reliant on foreign aid, and its economy would collapse





if the international community decided to fully suspend this support. Such a collapse could deepen migration and trigger an economic crisis, forcing millions of people to emigrate to neighboring countries (Zimin, 2023; Khlebushkin et al., 2021).

2. Afghanistan in 2021–2023 from the Perspective of Information Security

Iran expressed satisfaction with the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan and the Taliban's rise to power. However, Iran's interests lay in establishing a government of national consensus in Afghanistan based on various Islamic forces rather than exclusively the Taliban. As a result, Iran adopted a cautious approach, quietly intervening in western Afghanistan by building social infrastructure in border provinces, particularly in Herat, where the Iranian consulate remains active. However, the Taliban's image in Iran remains highly negative due to their 1990s rule, which included the killings of Hazara Shias and 23 Iranian diplomats in Mazar-i-Sharif (Hokayem, 2011). Nonetheless, Iranian authorities recognize that without a stable Afghanistan, Iran's internal security cannot be ensured. Tehran has thus repeatedly served as a venue for negotiations between the international community and the Taliban.

After the Taliban regained power in Kabul, the Pakistani government declared its absolute support for the group. By endorsing the Taliban's takeover, Islamabad hoped to end recurring conflicts in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (Swat region) and address the issue of Afghan migrants who had previously collaborated with the Taliban but have since returned to their families. This allowed Pakistan to temporarily alleviate concerns about Pashtun autonomy movements. Taliban-established checkpoints are expected to control migration, especially among Pashtun nationalists advocating for Pashtunistan autonomy. Afghan migrants represent a significant issue for Pakistan, which has long sought to limit their numbers (Zhou et al., 2022).

For Pakistan, cooperation with the Taliban primarily ensures control over Pashtuns, who tend to collaborate with those offering the greatest benefits under given conditions.

For India, the situation in Afghanistan is complicated by ties between the Indian Sunni Deobandi movement and the Taliban. Maulana Arshad Madani, an influential Muslim leader from Uttar Pradesh (Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind), expressed support for the Taliban. India must also contend with the growing threat posed by terrorist organizations in Kashmir, which borders Afghanistan (Singh, 2024).





China's interest in Afghanistan is less about economic concerns and more about security, specifically domestic security. Stabilizing Afghanistan is crucial for China to prevent terrorist attacks, particularly by anti-Chinese groups like the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, which seeks to establish an enclave within China. During meetings with Chinese politicians, the Taliban assured that Afghanistan would never host military bases threatening China's vital interests. Additionally, China has gained an ally against India in the Taliban, potentially reigniting the Kashmir conflict in the long term (Zhou et al., 2022; Liu, 2023).

Russia also seeks to strengthen its influence in Afghanistan by improving relations with the Taliban. This strategy aims to position Russia as a key player in the peace process, influencing its participants and enabling Russia to control the situation in Afghanistan. Russia believes that positive relations with the Taliban are possible and has declared its support for their efforts to achieve international legitimacy. Russia's policy toward Afghanistan aims to influence the country's internal conflict and limit terrorist organizations' activities that threaten Russian security, thereby managing migration flows (Faruk, 2022).

On the other hand, despite its optimistic assessment of the Taliban's governance and the potential for establishing a *modus vivendi*, Russia is conducting extensive military preparations in collaboration with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to ensure regional security (Akhmedov, 2019). These measures should be seen as precautionary, even amidst favorable official working relations with the Taliban.

3. Case Study: Relations Between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in the Context of Information Security

The Taliban's takeover of power in Afghanistan posed a threat to the stability of neighboring countries, including the Republic of Kazakhstan, which has long struggled with the issue of Islamic radicalism. Under the influence of Islamist propaganda, some Kazakh citizens participated in the Afghan conflict during the period of Taliban opposition to the Western coalition (Alimova et al., 2023; Kaulin, 2023). These citizens joined not only the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (Eastern Turkestan) but also other groups and movements created by various terrorist networks operating within Afghanistan. Later, with the infiltration of ISIS forces into Afghanistan, some Kazakh "Islamist internationalists" aligned themselves with these groups as well.





With the Taliban's rise to power, Kazakhstan found itself at risk despite its geographical distance from Afghanistan and its Central Asian partners (Uzbekistan and Tajikistan). In this context, Kazakhstan could benefit from the experience of Uzbekistan's interactions with the Taliban (Muratzhan et al., 2021; Klimenkova et al., 2022).

For example, decision-makers in Tashkent had reasons to fear retaliation for actions taken during the first Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (1996–2001). During that time, Uzbekistan supported groups opposing the Taliban government and facilitated NATO's military operation that led to the fall of the first emirate by providing military bases (Sarimsokov, 2022). These actions were driven by the Taliban's support for the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), a radical organization seeking to overthrow President I. Karimov and transform Uzbekistan into an Islamic state (Baktybaeva, 2020).

Political changes in Afghanistan necessitated adjustments to the established norms of political and economic relations to accommodate the new reality. Decision-makers in Tashkent and Kabul, recognizing the importance of mutual cooperation, began resolving differences, enabling the continuity of relations that had been reestablished following the U.S. intervention in 2001.

The primary goal of Uzbek diplomacy was to secure safety guarantees. To achieve this, the Uzbek administration undertook several steps to assure the Taliban that Uzbekistan would not interfere in Afghanistan's internal affairs, as it had during their first rule (1996–2001). However, the Taliban's failure to adhere to these assurances during their initial rule prompted Uzbekistan to join the NATO coalition in 2001. Consequently, normalizing relations after 2021 required securing robust safety guarantees.

The Taliban's delay in providing security guarantees forced Uzbek authorities to explore preventive measures. Proposals were made regarding the potential reopening of a U.S. military base. This base was unfavorable to both Uzbekistan, which sought to maintain neutrality between two major military blocs—CSTO and NATO, and Afghanistan, which wanted to avoid the stationing of U.S. forces near its border. Agreement on this matter led to the provision of security guarantees, allowing the Uzbek Ministry of Foreign Affairs to officially refute rumors about the consideration of reestablishing a U.S. military base in the republic on October 14.





Declarations required actionable support. On April 27, 2023, the Taliban announced the commencement of an anti-terrorism operation in northern Afghanistan, and the declaration of war on Islamic extremists was fully recognized and approved by Uzbekistan. Uzbek authorities expressed readiness to provide support, which materialized in the form of Uzbek military patrols in the operation area with prior Afghan approval. Both sides also strengthened cooperation between their border services.

Tashkent's interest in Afghanistan's security is also tied to the presence of a large Uzbek minority in northern Afghanistan. According to the latest census in 2011, Uzbeks made up 6.9% of the population. To maintain control over the Uzbek diaspora, it was necessary to restore permanent air links. On October 31, 2022, the reconstruction and repair work on the airport in Mazar-i-Sharif was completed, enabling regular Tashkent–Mazar-i-Sharif flights. Successes were also achieved in education and culture. On December 1, 2021, Kabul authorities guaranteed the teaching of the Uzbek language in schools in northern Afghanistan.

The focus on this security aspect stemmed from the desire to prevent a potential wave of Uzbek emigration to their ethnic homeland, which is ill-equipped to accommodate them due to employment challenges and the risk of them carrying radical Islamist ideologies (Foley, 2017). However, the Taliban's rejection of minority persecution and cultural destruction has mitigated the need for repatriating the sizable Uzbek diaspora (Avdeev et al., 2023; Rosevics & Forigo, 2006).

These examples of willingness to cooperate and address mutual security concerns reflect a shift in approach compared to 1996–2001, when mutual accusations heightened distrust and failed to resolve misunderstandings.

Analyzing Afghan-Uzbek relations in a political context, it is clear that for the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Afghan issue remains a tool for strengthening its position regionally and internationally. The main task of Uzbek diplomacy was and remains the recognition of Taliban rule by as broad a range of international actors as possible.

One method of addressing such tasks was the proposal to train future personnel for the reconstruction of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. For this purpose, a specially established Educational Center was opened in the border city of Termez. Through such initiatives, Uzbekistan seeks to draw international attention to the importance of providing Afghan youth with opportunities to study in universities promoting modern ideas, thereby reducing the risk of potential radicalization.





Despite its efforts, Uzbekistan cannot present all Taliban actions in a positive light. One example of inconsistency is the ban on women's education. Upholding the principle of gender equality, Uzbekistan expressed deep dissatisfaction on January 5, 2023, with the enactment of legislation discriminating based on gender. Another issue arose with the UN report of July 16, 2023, which stated that the Taliban continued to maintain ties with terrorist organizations, negatively impacting Afghanistan's international image. In response, Uzbekistan began promoting the Taliban's anti-terrorism operation to enhance the new Afghan government's external perception.

Positioning Uzbekistan as a convenient mediator in contacts with the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has increased interest in cooperation from China, the United States, and Asian countries.

On October 13, 2022, during the VI Assembly of Cooperation and Confidence in Asia, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev called for the establishment of an international dialogue group on Afghanistan, which garnered widespread interest.

Uzbekistan's actions aimed at peacefully resolving the Afghan issue are particularly supported by China, which views this as an opportunity to diminish Russia's influence in the region. In response to President Mirziyoyev's call on September 17, 2021, during the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) meeting, to unfreeze Afghanistan's financial assets, Beijing promptly reacted.

Thus, Uzbekistan's long-standing policy of openness to cooperation with all interested parties while maintaining neutrality serves as a model for other Central Asian countries. Consequently, Uzbekistan's authorities support expanded regional cooperation. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan expressed their positive stance on this during the Central Asian Foreign Ministers' meeting on July 21, 2022.

Addressing the main research question, it can be concluded that the dynamics of political relations between Tashkent and Kabul have persisted after the Taliban took control of Afghanistan. This is evidenced by numerous meetings and consultations—34 in the first year alone (August 2021–August 2022).

Regarding the supplementary question, it can be noted that the peaceful intentions of both sides have influenced the development of a cooperation model between the Taliban and Uzbekistan's authorities. For Uzbekistan, this cooperation was based on the need to recognize the Taliban government as the sole political force capable of governing the entire state. However, in the early stages of its rule, the Taliban struggled to find a partner to help them overcome international isolation.





In summary, both sides approached the rapprochement process based on their respective national interests, which holds relevance for Kazakhstan. As long as both parties benefit, the cooperation will continue to grow, mitigating threats to information security. If this process remains intact over the long term, it will contribute to a dense network of connections, the disruption of which would be disadvantageous for either country. Therefore, at present, no factors seem to hinder the proper development of relations between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and the Central Asian region as a whole.

CONCLUSIONS

An analysis of current events in Afghanistan requires consideration of the full range of factors and variables affecting not only Afghanistan itself but also its relations with neighboring countries. Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan), as well as Russia, China, and Western nations, expect the Taliban to take actions that suppress rather than promote destabilization in the region. This includes quelling extremist forces based in Afghanistan.

Information from negotiations between these countries and the Taliban indicates that the Taliban are also focused on eliminating potential rivals for control over the state or its individual regions, though their motivation lies primarily in retaining their power.

Western countries, pursuing their security interests in Afghanistan, now rely on the Taliban to prevent the resurgence of Islamic extremist groups in Afghanistan. They also expect the Taliban to prioritize the stabilization and development of the country, which would lead to stricter boundaries between ISIS, Al-Qaeda, other terrorist organizations, and the Taliban itself.

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