

Failure of Collective Security in Central Asia? The Reasons Behind the OSCE and
CSTO's Inaction in the 2021 and 2022 Border Clashes Between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan

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by

Anis Alibakhshov

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis project, **“Failure of Collective Security in Central Asia? The Reasons behind the OSCE and CSTO’s Inaction in the 2021 and 2022 Border Clashes between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan,”** has been done by me and has not been submitted to any other university or educational institution before. The data obtained from the existing literature are properly acknowledged in the footnotes and bibliography. I declare that this thesis has not been previously presented by anyone for any purpose. I am the one who have conducted this research and responsible for the work.

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the role of membership in collective security international organizations (IOs) as means of prevention of border clashes in Central Asia by taking the case study of armed clashes between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in 2021 and 2022. It concentrates on the reasons behind what this thesis argues as the failure or inaction of two regional IOs of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in the prevention and resolution of the said border clashes. During the two waves of the conflict studied here, around 150 people died, many others injured, as well as US\$18 million of damages inflicted on infrastructure on both sides. This thesis argues that the role of the said collective security IOs can be decisive in the prevention, but also the recurrence of similar clashes in the future. There are three hypotheses of this study: H₁ claimed that the key regional hegemonic power—the Russian Federation—with significant influence in the two IOs, has been preoccupied with its own war in Ukraine and, due to the same, has lost much of its soft power, influence and credibility in Central Asia and thus been both unable and unwilling to intervene in resolving the Kyrgyz–Tajik border conflict. H₂ claimed that the United States, in turn, with its own significant influence over the OSCE has shown little interest in the prevention and resolution of the Kyrgyz–Tajik border conflict due to (i) its and its Western allies' preoccupation with assisting the ongoing war in Ukraine against Russia, as well as (ii) the overall disillusion with engagement in Central Asia given the 2021 de facto defeat in neighboring Afghanistan and consequent rise of the neo-Taliban. The last hypothesis, H₃, claimed that the internal factors of populism (in Kyrgyzstan) and hypernationalism (in Tajikistan) were key in both escalating the border conflict and not seeking assistance and mediation from the collective security IOs of CSTO and OSCE. Using literature review and expert interviews (*N*=9) and relying on the theories of Realism and Regional Hegemonic Stability, this study largely confirmed its premises: It failed to reject H₁ and H₃, while only partially failed to reject H₂.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EU	European Union
GKNB	State Committee for National Security
HRW	Human Rights Watch
HST	Hegemonic Stability Theory
ICG	International Crisis Group
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
IO	International organization
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
pS	Participating States (of the OSCE)
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
UN	United Nations
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The border conflict between the two countries of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan is considered as one of the most long-lasting and still indecisive issues in the post-communist region of Central Asia.¹ One source puts the number of border incidences between the two states at over 150 during the ten year period of 2013-2022.² The origin of the conflict comes from the controversial border delimitation and demarcation by the Soviet Union and post-Soviet states.³ In recent years, there have been several clashes between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan leading to negative consequences including deaths and injuries of civilians from both sides. In 2021, 50 people were reportedly killed in the border clashes between the two states.⁴ The victims were both soldiers and civilians, including children. Due to the lack of significant actions for the resolution of the conflict, a second wave of violent conflict occurred in 2022, which resulted in the deaths of 100 people on both sides.⁵ In the 2021-2022 clashes, a large amount of infrastructure including homes, schools and government structures were burnt and destroyed⁶, with damages estimated at US\$18 million.⁷

Despite both states being members of various international organizations (IOs), including the United Nations (UN) and at least three regional collective security organizations—the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Shanghai Security Organization (SCO)—it is unclear as to why the said collective security IOs, whose very supposed tasks are to prevent conflict were unable to prevent the 2021 and 2022 deadly clashes between

¹ Anna Matveeva, “Divided we fall or rise? Tajikistan–Kyrgyzstan border dilemma,” *Cambridge Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 2017, pp. 1-20.

² Nazir Aliyev, “Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan border disputes continue for 31 years,” *Anadolu Agency*, 23 September 2022, shorturl.at/ayBW6 (accessed 19 December 2023).

³ Eric McGlinchey, “The April 2021 Kyrgyz–Tajik border dispute: Historical and casual context,” *Crossroads Policy Brief*, No. 2-21, 2021, pp. 2-6, tinyurl.com/2p8xjbd3 (accessed 8 November 2023).

⁴ Syinat Sultanalieva, “Kyrgyzstan–Tajikistan border clashes prove deadly for civilians,” Human Rights Watch, 2021, tinyurl.com/2z682v7p (accessed 10 July 2023).

⁵ Alys Davies, “Kyrgyzstan–Tajikistan border clashes claim nearly 100 lives,” *BBC News*, 19 September 2022, bbc.com/news/world-asia-62950787 (accessed 20 July 2023).

⁶ Asel Doolotkeldieva and Madeleine Reeves. “Escalating conflict on the Kyrgyz–Tajik border: Whither the regional security order?” *The Diplomat*, 22 September 2022, tinyurl.com/ukr9mcxf (accessed 9 May 2023).

⁷ Interfax, “В Киргизии предварительно оценили ущерб от конфликта Таджикистаном в \$18 млн [Kyrgyzstan has estimated the damage from the conflict with Tajikistan at \$18 million],” 19 September 2022, interfax.ru/world/862870 (accessed 12 November 2023).

the two relatively small state of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Since the beginning of the 2021-2022 Tajik–Kyrgyz border conflict, there have been some statements coming from the above-mentioned IOs regarding the conflict. In 2021, for example, the CSTO Secretary General Stanislav Zak called on both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to resolve the conflict stating that “the conflict should be stopped and the situation should be defused peacefully,” and that the CSTO was ready to assist these states in resolving their conflict.⁸ In 2022, the CSTO Secretariat stated that the organization is monitoring the situation hopes that there will be no more clashes and fatalities, and expect both sides to come to a common consensus through diplomatic relations including negotiations.⁹

Besides the CSTO, in 2022, the OSCE Chairman in office, Zbigniew Rau, also expressed his concern regarding the conflict and called on both sides “to put efforts into de-escalation.”¹⁰ Rau further mentioned that “the OSCE stays ready for assistance ... , if requested.”¹¹ In the same year, the SCO’s General Secretary, Zhang Ming, stated that the organization is “carefully monitoring the situation of the Tajik–Kyrgyz border conflict and calls both states to resolve the conflict through diplomatic efforts and the principles of Shanghai Spirit.” Ming also mentioned that the SCO “intends to play an active role to assist both states in restoring good relations and maintaining stability in the region.”¹² Overall, however, there is not much information as to actions taken by the above-mentioned collective security organizations during or after the two waves of the Tajik–Kyrgyz border conflict in 2021-2022. It appears that there were no decisions to intervene and no concrete actions to be taken by these IOs to resolve the conflict. However, the two IOs did mention that they are standing ready for assistance, if requested. It is one of the main puzzles of the study that will be investigated by this research.

Research question and sub-questions

This research aims to define the reasons behind the CSTO and the OSCE’s possible

⁸ CSTO-a, “The conflict on the border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan should be resolved peacefully,” 2021, tinyurl.com/mfdapx35 (accessed 24 July 2023).

⁹ CSTO-b, “The CSTO Secretariat Commentary on the situation on the Tajik-Kyrgyz border,” 2022, tinyurl.com/m6xtsddb (accessed 25 July 2023).

¹⁰ OSCE, “OSCE Chairman-in-office and OSCE Secretary General welcome ceasefire and call for continued de-escalation along Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan,” 16 September 2022, tinyurl.com/yejv8buw (accessed 28 July 2023).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² SCO, “General Secretary comments on the Tajik–Kyrgyz border conflict,” 22 September 2022, tinyurl.com/7wc5n3r7 (accessed 20 July 2023).

shortcomings in the prevention of the Tajik–Kyrgyz border clashes of 2021 and 2022. Moreover, it aims to measure the potentiality of these organizations in further prevention and resolution of what appears to be a recurring and still unresolved conflict. The main research question to be answered is the following: *Why membership in the collective security organizations of the CSTO and OSCE were unable to prevent or resolve the border clashes between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in 2021 and 2022?*

As follow-up to the above main research question, this thesis attempts to respond to the following four sub-questions, as well: One: *To what extent has the Russian invasion of Ukraine weakened the previously strong Russian influence on the three key Central Asian security and Russia-influenced collective security organizations which Russia, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan are members of?* Two: *To what extent has the de facto August 2021 victory of the Taliban in Afghanistan and loss of the U.S.-led Western alliance—the members of which were also OSCE participating States (pS)—weakened the resolve of that collective security organization to intervene and attempt to prevent or resolve the Tajik–Kyrgyz border dispute?* Three: *To what extent have the Ukraine and Afghanistan wars prevented the OSCE and the CSTO to in turn entice the Tajik and Kyrgyz Governments to seek the assistance and intervention of the said collective security IOs in resolving their border conflict?* And four: *Have, and if so to what extent, hypernationalism and populism played roles in preventing the Governments of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to not extend a concrete invitation to any of the said collective security IOs to intervene in resolving their border conflict?*

Hypotheses

Corresponding to the above research question and sub-questions, this research will test the following three hypotheses:

- H₁ (The External Factor of Russia—its preoccupation with Ukraine):** Despite Russia being a key player in the CSTO, SCO, and OSCE, its invasion of Ukraine has weakened its state capacity to influence affairs in Central Asia and lowered its credibility in the eyes of Central Asian leaders who had largely ignored any advice by Russia to resolve the Tajik–Kyrgyz border dispute peacefully, and weakening any pull that Russia-led or Russia-influenced collective security IOs have on mediating and resolving the 2021-2022 Tajik–Kyrgyz border dispute.
- H₂ (The External Factor of the West—its de facto defeat in Afghanistan and preoccupation with Ukraine):** The OSCE pS have shown little interest in preventing or resolving the Tajik–Kyrgyz border dispute by way of enticing the Governments of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to seek the assistance and invite the intervention of the OSCE in resolving their 2021 and 2022 border conflict. This failure has been due to: (a) The

disillusion of Western pS from the August 2021 victory and rise of the Taliban (and de facto Western defeat) in Afghanistan, and (b) The political, military and financial preoccupation of Western OSCE pS with the ongoing war in Ukraine.

H₃ (The Internal Factors of Central Asian populism and hypernationalism): While the ongoing war in Ukraine and Western defeat in Afghanistan may be the key external reasons why the collective security IOs have not enticed the Governments of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to formally invite the same IOs to resolve their border dispute, it is hypernationalism (in particular by Tajikistan) and populism (in Kyrgyzstan) that serve as the main internal reasons for the escalation of the said conflict and why the two conflicting parties have, in turn, not extended invitations to the same collective security IOs to resolve their border conflict.

Methods

The research design of this thesis consists of qualitative data collection and analysis. The study will access available documents related to the border conflict being studied hereby as issued by the Governments of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, in addition to statements and documents related to the same conflict by two IOs of CSTO and OSCE. The research will also use other secondary sources including academic articles and news items related to the Tajik–Kyrgyz border conflict. As primary data, this research relies on expert interviews ($N = 9$), preferably from nationals of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, but also international experts knowledgeable about the Tajik–Kyrgyz border conflict and the collective security IOs the countries are members of.

Importance of study

It has been argued that the recurring Tajik–Kyrgyz border dispute are the result of the controversial delimitation and demarcation by the Soviet Union.¹³ The 2021 and 2022 border clashes have become a trial or test for the three collective security IOs discussed in this thesis and which both countries are members of. Both the Tajik and Kyrgyz sides have blamed the other for the use of aggression and direct invasion of their territory with only haphazard indications of fully resolving the conflict. Due to the less than enthusiastic resolve of both countries in once-and-for-all resolving the conflict and the lack of sufficient attention by regional security organizations, other waves of border conflict between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan may occur in the near future.

Many foreign and local scholars have conducted research both on the Tajik–Kyrgyz border conflict and the role of international organizations in border conflicts. None,

¹³ McGlinchey *op. cit.*

however, have tied these two points together. The findings of this thesis it is hoped will contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of collective security IOs and the potential means of their engagement in pacifying violent inter-state conflicts in Central Asia and the greater region.

Chapter II

HISTORY OF THE TAJIK–KYRGYZ BORDER CONFLICT

This chapter focuses on the overall historical background of the Tajik–Kyrgyz border conflict. It is divided into four sections that describe the possible root causes of the conflict as well as the current updates on efforts towards the resolution of the border dispute. The sections deal with conflict in the Soviet era, the role of water and pasture as sources of conflict, history of the 2021-2022 conflict, and negotiations between the Governments of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan towards border delimitation and conflict resolution.

Back history: The imperfect Soviet delimitations

Disputes and conflicts among peoples and states, including wars, have historically begun for both major and minor reasons. The reasons can be personal, ideological, as well as political and economic.¹⁴ In most cases, competition over resources can be one of the main reasons leading to a conflict between states.¹⁵ Clashes can be observed intra- or internationally, including with neighboring states. As history shows, without rational decisions, even small conflicts may lead to clashes and deadly wars that cost the lives of thousands, even millions, of people. The 2021-2022 Tajik–Kyrgyz border dispute can be considered as a similar—albeit on a small scale—case, but with still tragic outcomes.

The roots and origins of the border conflict between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are decades old. There are many factors for this dispute including ethnicity, territory, and claims over territories.¹⁶ According to Anna Matveeva, the Tajik–Kyrgyz border conflict is intertwined with the legacy of the Soviet Union’s nation-building and associated territorial delimitation and demarcation. Deadly disputes among independent Central Asian states, however, began after the collapse of the USSR.¹⁷ The controversial and incomplete delimitation of Central Asian borders goes back to the 1920s under Joseph Stalin’s

¹⁴ Joshua Sipper, “Causation of war at the state level,” 2015, tinyurl.com/5hfddhtf (accessed 21 December 2023).

¹⁵ Hannah Brock, “Competition over resources: Drivers of insecurity and Global South,” *Oxford Research Group*, September 2011. tinyurl.com/ykh5mmn4 (accessed 21 December 2023).

¹⁶ Karacalti, Asenna. “Everlasting or ever-changing? Violence along the Kyrgyzstan–Tajikistan border,” *ACLEDA*, 8 June 2020, tinyurl.com/4vpf9nd3 (accessed 21 December 2023).

¹⁷ Matveeva *op. cit.*

premiership of the Soviet Union.¹⁸ Since the Soviet collapse, pieces of territories between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have remained undetermined. During the Soviet era, there were many border changes with the supposed aim of economic development. Many peoples and groups from various ethnicities were moved throughout the Union and united and worked together, especially in the agricultural sector.¹⁹ This strategy appeared to have resulted in a common system where ethnic groups not only worked but also lived together as there were no clear borders nor did inter-republican Soviet boundaries appear highly problematic.

What is known, however, is that the border delimitation process by the Soviet Union was done hastily and at places without little consideration of the ethnic factors of the people living around the borders. In reality, the Soviet authorities dealing with the border delimitation process were likely not sufficiently familiar with the cultural, ethnic, and religious differences of the local peoples. A hurried delimitation process with insufficient consideration of cultural and historical factors eventually led to controversies and conflicts between the soon-to-be independent states and their citizens living in the border areas.²⁰ Among other things, for example, there are nowadays ethnic Tajiks living in Kyrgyzstan's territory and vice versa.

Besides the factor of ethnic differences, there are other important reasons that can lead to border clashes between local citizens of the two states under study. When the Soviet Union collapsed, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan were not prepared for such a scenario both economically and politically. The collapse brought with it an end to the Soviet subsidies at a time when both states had also been economically dependent on their agricultural sector as one of their key sources of income, in particular, in rural and outlying regions. For this purpose, water and pasture resources have been and still are very important for both states and their citizens in rural areas, including those living near the border areas where clashes have occurred in the post-independence era, including during 2021-2022.²¹

After the Soviet collapse, a range of claims on the disputable and unrecognized

¹⁸ Gulzana Kurmanalieva, "Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan: Endless border conflicts," *Institute of European Politics* No. 4, February 2019, pp. 1-10, tinyurl.com/42h3jay9 (accessed 2 November 2023).

¹⁹ Matveeva *op. cit.*, p. 3.

²⁰ Zhulduz Bizakova, "Border issues in Central Asia: Current conflicts, controversies and compromises," *UNISCI Journal*, No. 45, October 2017, pp. 221-234, www.redalyc.org/pdf/767/76754084010.pdf (accessed 1 December 2023).

²¹ Asel Murzakulova and Irene Mestre, "Natural resource management dynamics in border communities of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan," *HAL Open Science*, April 2016, shs.hal.science/halshs-01442764v1/document (accessed 2 May 2023).

borders began among the newly independent republics in the region, including between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. From the 971 kilometers (km) of shared border between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, for example, the two states have only succeeded in delimitating just over half or 512 km, while the other 459 km remain disputed and unrecognized.²² The indecisiveness on this issue has led to many mini-clashes, in particular between citizens of border regions of the two states, involving a total of 58 disputable sections wherein clashes have occurred throughout the years.²³

Even during the Soviet era, there were some incidents observed among the citizens of the two states living near the border—primarily over natural resources. In Central Asia, the Ferghana Valley is home to a rich agricultural territory where cotton, fruits, and vegetables are sown and animal husbandry practiced; the Valley is also precisely the region where territorial disputes and conflicts among Central Asian states have occurred. The Ferghana Valley goes across northern Tajikistan, eastern Uzbekistan, and Southern Kyrgyzstan.²⁴ The most disputable places that divide the borders of these states go through the Batken province region of Kyrgyzstan and the Sughd province of Tajikistan. These territories are considered as the flashpoints of the Tajik–Kyrgyz border conflict. Moreover, the problem is complicated by the fact that there are two enclaves of Tajikistan—Vorukh and Qalacha—located in the Batken province of Kyrgyzstan, territories which were subject to violent clashes among civilians and even military forces of the Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan during 2021 and 2022.²⁵ There are also four enclaves of Uzbekistan located in the Batken province.

The historical appearance of enclaves in Batken has been a source of confusion and debate in the post-Soviet era. Under Soviet rule, the Ferghana Valley was, in general, a commonly friendly place where the people from all three states were living in relative harmony and tolerance—even after Stalinist delimitations.²⁶ Others claim that the lands were divided by the regional representatives who made decisions based on the cultural

²² Kurmanalieva *op. cit.*

²³ Matveeva *op. cit.*

²⁴ UNDP, “Investment guide to the Ferghana Valley,” *UZInfoInvest*, 2009, tinyurl.com/ydzjva7k (accessed 5 November 2023).

²⁵ Kemel Toktomushev, “Understanding cross-border conflict in post-Soviet Central Asia,” *Connections* 17 (1), 2018, pp. 21-41, tinyurl.com/2ywejfny (accessed 1 May 2023).

²⁶ Central Asia Guide, “Fergana Valley enclaves,” 2023, tinyurl.com/2r55ecks (accessed 1 November 2023).

factors of the people living in these lands.²⁷ By considering the cases of ethnic clashes in the Batken province, the literature on drawing borders by the Soviet government thus seems relevant.

Kyrgyzstan's Batken province consists of 17,000 square km with nearly half-a-million population, while the territory of Tajikistan's Sughd province is 25,400 sq km with a population of just below 2.5 million people.²⁸ Though there are significant differences in size and, in particular, population among the two provinces, there are many similarities between them, as well. For instance, the Batken and Sughd provinces are both dependent on the agricultural sector, primarily livestock and cultivation.²⁹ Moreover, in both regions, in particular for the peoples living in the rural areas, there is heavy reliance on labor migration (primarily to the Russian Federation) and the sending of remittances back home.³⁰ Similarities of reliance on agricultural and reliance on natural resources have periodically been a subject of disputes and clashes in the post-Soviet era among the civilians of the two states. Aside from the violent clashes between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in 2021-2022, there have also been major and minor incidents among both civilians and military forces of the two states in 2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, and 2015 within the border provinces of Batken and Sughd.³¹

Post-Soviet era: The water and pasture factors of conflict

Chief among the vital resources in the region under study is water. There are about 40 water channels shared between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.³² One of the main issues leading to conflicts between civilians and states is thought to be the use of a common water resource, but also the poor mechanisms of water resource management. The fact that the per capita availability of water in both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is much higher than some

²⁷ Rashid Gabdulhakov, "Geographical enclaves of the Fergana Valley: Do good fences make good neighbors?," *Central Asia Security Policy Briefs*, No. 14, 2014, 7 pp., tinyurl.com/29ca2sk5 (accessed 1 May 2023).

²⁸ Konstantin Larionov, "Why Kyrgyzstan won't gain from a protracted border dispute with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan?" *Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting*, 17 November 2020, shorturl.at/ixGKO (accessed 2 January 2024).

²⁹ Murzakulova and Mestre *op. cit.*

³⁰ Irene Rohner, "National and international labour migration," *IP6 Working Paper* No. 8, March 2007, tinyurl.com/56zxspte (accessed 4 December 2023).

³¹ Toktomushev *op. cit.*

³² *Special Eurasia*, "Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan: Causes and analysis of an endless border dispute," 29 September 2022, tinyurl.com/376b482y (accessed 2 January 2024).

of the European countries.³³ It is thus the unequal distribution and/or use of water resources that serves as a highly problematic issue rather than an overall shortage of water. In brief, the use of too much water resources by the people of one state or province irritates the people of the neighboring state and thus leads to conflicts and clashes. Farmers of both Kyrgyzstan's Batken province and Tajikistan's Isfara district of the Sughd province are the ones who use the water resources regularly.

During the irrigation periods, the neighboring farmers often complain about a shortage of water and frequently accuse each other of greedily using too much water. The incidents of conflict among the people over water resources are mainly observed from April to June of each year, which is considered as the peak irrigation period.³⁴ Provoking actions by civilians have also led to armed conflicts between the Tajik and Kyrgyz military forces. During such incidents, local civilians have fought each other via the throwing of stones, in addition to the use of garden tools, such as shovels and rakes.³⁵ Among other tactics has been the diversion of water. Among the recent conflict tactics, the border residents of one of the two states, for example, shut the canal flowing to the facilities of the other state.³⁶ In these border areas, such tactics are a well-known method for provoking and trolling the alleged offender of the other side, often causing the inevitability and escalation of the border conflict.

Besides the endless clashes over water resources, the Batken and Sughd provinces have been a scene of conflicts over pastures—lands used by farmers to feed their cattle, sheep and other livestock. The factor of pasture and its potential to induce violence has mainly emerged in the region since the collapse of the Soviet Union. During the Soviet era, the communities of both states were able to graze their livestock in these pastures in a largely well-managed, cooperative and orderly manner.³⁷ By the end of the Soviet Union, however, much of the pastures remained on the Kyrgyz side. Despite this fact, the Tajik side considered these pastures as a common, and thus continued using them what Murzakulova and Mestre claim as a main factor for the 2021-2022 violent conflicts. According to the Kyrgyz law, grazing in the Kyrgyz pastures is prohibited to foreigners, and therefore the Tajik herders are frequently arrested by the Kyrgyz police while illegally

³³ Murzakulova and Mestre *op. cit*

³⁴ Kurmanalieva *op. cit.*

³⁵ Toktomushev *op. cit.*

³⁶ Osmonalieva *op. cit.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

grazing in the Kyrgyz pastures.³⁸

Throughout the conflicts in different years, there have been some violent clashes with injuries and deaths. For instance, in 2014, the border soldiers of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan had a confrontation and later a violent clash that led to the death of three Tajik and five Kyrgyz soldiers. In one case, soldiers of both sides used weapons and shot each other. The problem was that the Kyrgyz side planned to construct an alternative road near the Vorukh enclave for Kyrgyz citizens while the territory was under the contest of the states and did not belong to any.³⁹ The road construction caused a misunderstanding between the two sides and finally resulted in the deaths of young soldiers. A similar case with tragic outcomes was observed in 2015. This time, the Kyrgyz soldiers shot and injured two citizens of Tajikistan, with suspicion of preparing an attack on the Kyrgyz side.⁴⁰ Besides this case, there were many smaller incidents with minor damages to humans and property on the two sides.

The 2021–2022 conflict

The indecisiveness and unwillingness of the states to any compromises are thought to have led to the deadly events of 2021-2022—clashes which became the most violent events ever recorded in the Tajik–Kyrgyz border conflict. Overall, about 50 people died in 2021⁴¹ and 100 people in the 2022⁴² border clashes between the two states. By mid- to end-2023, there had been some progress observed by the two sides in the resolution of their border issue. However, a full resolution may take a long time and would need far more serious efforts and willingness by both sides.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the newly independent states in the region, including Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, have claimed the territories on their border based on different facts and pieces of evidence and documents. Tajikistan, for example, has requested to delineate the borders based on the Soviet maps from 1924-1939, while Kyrgyzstan has rejected this option and brought reference to maps from 1958-1959 as evidence.⁴³ The differing Soviet maps used by the two states are one of the main factors that have made the dispute more complex and confusing. Based on the maps from 1924-

³⁸ Murzakulova and Mestre *op. cit.*

³⁹ Toktomushev *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ Bizakova *op. cit.*

⁴¹ Sultanalieva *op. cit.*

⁴² Davies *op. cit.*

⁴³ Osmonalieva *op. cit.*



Figure 1: Map of the conflict zone

Source: [Eurasianet](https://eurasianet.org)

1927, for example, the Tajikistan-claimed Vorukh enclave surrounded by Kyrgyz territory has been part of Tajikistan, while using maps of 1958-1959, the said territory is a part of Kyrgyzstan.⁴⁴ In March 2021, the head of the State Committee for National Security (GKNB) of Kyrgyzstan, Kamchibek Tashiev, had even claimed that the Vorukh enclave could be included in Kyrgyzstan’s territory in exchange for land in Batken closer to Tajikistan.⁴⁵ However, the Tajik side immediately protested this statement. In this case, none of the states has agreed to fulfill the demands of the other side as well as not ready for a compromise. Another existing issue between the states is the perceived unfair use of the Golovnoi sluice water facility, a structure which border residents of both states are dependent upon.⁴⁶ The above map illustrates the structure of the disputed Golovnoi water facility, which goes among the Ak-Say and Isfara rivers. The disputed Vorukh enclave is also shown on the map. State officials from both sides frequently argue about their

⁴⁴ Bizakova *op. cit.*

⁴⁵ Bruce Pannier, “Conflict on the Tajik-Kyrgyz border moves from sticks and stones to bullets and bombs,” *Radio Free Europe*, 30 April 2021. tinyurl.com/3uasv6bt (accessed 2 January 2024).

⁴⁶ Nicole Wolkov, “Tensions simmer in the wake of Kyrgyz–Tajik border clashes,” *Caspian Policy Center*, 15 June 2021. tinyurl.com/53rnkave (accessed 2 January 2024).

historical ownership of the Golovnoi by sharing differing arguments and documents.⁴⁷

Intergovernmental Commission on Delimitation and Demarcation

There have been many meetings on the border issue through the “Intergovernmental Commission on Delimitation and Demarcation of the Kyrgyz–Tajik State Border” (aka ‘Joint Commission’) created by the two states in 2000, albeit with little progress to fully resolve the long-lasting border dispute.⁴⁸ In some of the meetings, the Tajik side has demanded to divide the disputable territories into two, while Kyrgyzstan has considered this option completely unfair and rejected it altogether. Due to the indecisiveness of the two states in the post-Soviet era, much of the disputed territories have been declared as temporary neutral zones. Since the 2021–2022 clashes, however, some progress has been observed in the bilateral state discussions.

The main figures in the negotiations have been the respective GKNB chairmen of the two sides: Tashiev of Kyrgyzstan and Saimumin Yatimov of Tajikistan. Right after the border clashes between the states in April 2021, the delegations held a joint meeting on 6 May to negotiate the border issue.⁴⁹ The violent border clashes had become a moment of truth, illustrating the seriousness of the issue at hand and enticing both states—albeit temporarily—to pay serious attention to the dispute at hand. During the May 2021 meeting, the Commission agreed to withdraw the military forces of both sides from the border and to start topographical works in disputed areas.⁵⁰ However, despite the apparent efforts by the Joint Commission, the second wave of deadly clashes between the two states occurred in September 2022, leading to more tragic outcomes.

The regular meetings of the Joint Commission have not stopped and has convened periodically. In October 2022, for example, the Commission met in Dushanbe where the heads of states—President Emomali Rahmon of Tajikistan and President Sadyr Japarov of Kyrgyzstan—signed a protocol on delimitation and demarcation and agreed to further meet

⁴⁷ Ayzirek Imanaliyeva and Kamila Ibragimova. “Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan: Solving water puzzle key to preventing fresh fighting,” *Eurasianet*, 19 May 2021, tinyurl.com/4b6due7f (accessed 1 January 2024).

⁴⁸ Bizakova *op. cit.*

⁴⁹ 24KG-a, “Border demarcation: Statement of joint commission of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan,” 6 May 2021. tinyurl.com/28xb3yu3 (accessed 23 December 2023).

⁵⁰ Kabar-a. “Joint statement of governmental delegations of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on delimitation and demarcation of borders,” 5 June 2021, tinyurl.com/yc3ypf4w (accessed 23 December 2023).

in Kyrgyzstan.⁵¹ By 18 October 2023, the Joint Commission had agreed on the delimitation of 14 km from the disputable territory,⁵² which was considered to be a significant progress. And on 14 December 2023, the topographic groups of both states met in Batken and agreed to demarcate a further 47 km of the disputed border.⁵³ Moreover, the presidents of the two states frequently discuss the border issue while meeting during regional inter-governmental summits or conferences. As of end-2023, the overall process is going smoothly. Relative to the total disputed border, however, the amount of delimitation has been small and a the full resolution to the border dispute is probably far from now.

Chapter conclusions

As mentioned above, the roots of the Tajik–Kyrgyz border dispute has historical roots in the Soviet history, while the post-Soviet competition over water and pasture in addition to a still not fully delimited border has compounded the problem and at times led to deadly ethnic clashes and hostility between the two neighboring states. The border conflict is thus far from over. The following chapter, in turn, will deal with the role of collective security organizations (in particular, the CSTO and the OSCE) which both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are members of, in addition to a discussion of the methodology and proposed theories to be used when analyzing the three hypotheses of this thesis.

⁵¹ Kabar-b, “Meeting on delimitation and demarcation of Kyrgyz–Tajik state border held in Dushanbe,” 14 November 2022, tinyurl.com/mr4cba87 (accessed 22 December 2023).

⁵² 24 KG-b, “Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan agree on 14 more kilometers of border,” 19 October 2023, tinyurl.com/wcmwcvaz (accessed 1 January 2024).

⁵³ Silkway News. “Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan agreed on 47 km of state border,” 14 December 2023, tinyurl.com/592fnp73 (accessed 1 January 2024).

Chapter III

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY

This chapter focuses on the sections of literature review and theory as pertaining to this thesis. In the literature review, the chapter brings the work of scholars with a particular focus on border conflicts and intermediation of international organizations. In the theory section focuses on the overall theory of “Realism,” in addition to the “Regional Hegemonic Stability Theory,” both of which are expected to be of use when analyzing the hypotheses of this thesis. In the short methodology section, the chapter talks about the proposed data collection methods to be used to gather reliable and relevant information for this study.

Literature review: IOs and conflict resolution

Ideally, membership in IOs by way of collective security organizations should prevent and/or resolve conflicts among member states. In this regard, David Meyers focuses on the role of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in interregional conflict management.⁵⁴ Among the main purposes of the OAU is the safeguarding of the territorial integrity of the African states, as well as to protect their sovereignty and independence.⁵⁵ Meyers states, however, that “The OAU has not been ... effective [enough] in preventing and resolving conflicts among its members, and seemed to [only] be effective in some of the international conflicts where it has been involved.” Meyers further mentions that “the causes of the failure in prevention of inter-state conflicts by the OAU have been the carelessness and indifference of great powers such as the United States and the Soviet Union in the prevention of the conflict.”⁵⁶ The great powers could, Meyers claims, entice and assist the OAU and thus contribute to the prevention and resolution of disputes in the region. Without what that we can label the ‘external factor’ of ‘great powers’, therefore, the OAU has in its history been less than fully successful in preventing and resolving Africa’s internal disputes due to a lack of sufficient abilities, power, will and backing by great powers. Another scholar, C.K. Lal, in turn, conducted research on the complexity problem of border conflicts in South Asia. By using qualitative methods and secondary sources, Lal concludes that “the lack of effective and purposeful regional organizations in the region, as well as the presence of previous hostilities among the states, are the reasons

⁵⁴ David Meyers, *Intraregional Conflict Management by the Organization of African Unity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974.

⁵⁵ African Union, “The main objectives of the Organization of African Unity,” n.d., tinyurl.com/2p87mphj (accessed 18 December 2023).

⁵⁶ Meyers *op. cit.*, p. 372.

for the complexity of border conflicts in South Asia.”⁵⁷ He mentions, however, that the establishment of a regional (collective security) regime may lead to the resolution of the complex conflicts in the region.

Thomas Diez and Stephan Stetter, in their part, investigate the European Union’s (EU) impact on border conflicts, focusing on both the positive and negative impacts of the EU. They claim that one of the positive impacts of the EU in managing border conflicts is providing the conflicting states with “diplomatic assistance through negotiations and cooperation by supporting peace-oriented groups in the conflict.”⁵⁸ As for the EU’s negative impacts on border conflicts, Diez and Stetter state that it mainly “relates to the perception on the part of conflict parties” to determine if “the EU is biased in favor of one side of the conflict [or another].” In the end, they consider the EU as an effective union for conflict de-escalation and resolution.⁵⁹ Ernst B. Haas, as well, claims that regional organizations “can be a tool for prevention as well as failure in the prevention of conflicts,”⁶⁰ depending on the conditions and different factors at the time of the conflict.

Paul B. Stares and Micah Zenko, in turn, researched the functions of IOs in conflict prevention. In brief, they provide some crucial stages such as “eliminating risks of the conflict that may occur” and “mitigating the further crisis.”⁶¹ The first stage by IOs, claim Stares and Zenko, contains several components, such as “reducing the impact of upcoming threats and tensions” as well as “early monitoring of places where the potential conflict may occur.”⁶² For other benefits of IOs, Stares and Zenko bring the example of the case of the United Nations (UN) activities before or during a conflict. The UN and other IOs can conduct investigations in the suspected countries which can become an initiator of a conflict.⁶³ Moreover, such IOs including the UN have the ability to suggest their diplomatic assistance to the conflicting states or threaten them by imposing economic and /or political sanctions in case of being a hindrance to the mitigation of the conflict.

A similar study was conducted by Michael O. Slobodchikoff in his research on the

⁵⁷ C.K. Lal, “The complexities of border conflicts in South Asia,” *South Asian Survey* 13 (2), 2012, pp. 245-263.

⁵⁸ Thomas Diez and Stephan Stetter, “The European Union and Border Conflicts,” *International Organization* 60 (Summer), 2006, p. 588.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 589.

⁶⁰ Ernst B. Haas, “Regime decay: Conflict management and international organizations,” *International Organization* 37 (2), 1983, p. 223.

⁶¹ Paul B. Stares and Micah Zenko, “Partners in preventive action: The United States and international institutions,” *Council of Foreign Relations*, 2011, p. 6.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

effectiveness of IOs in the resolution of territorial disputes. He mostly concentrates on the EU and how it resolves and manages territorial disputes among its member states. Overall, he writes, the EU can resolve or manage disputes “through diplomatic relations” as well as “by intervening and conducting investigations on conflicts among EU members with or without their permission.”⁶⁴ All in all, and in relations to borders, the literature at hand claims that regional and international organizations can prevent, but sometimes fail to prevent, border conflicts.

Theory

This section focuses on two theories relevant to the topic of this study:

Political Realism

The first is that of Political Realism— “Realism” in short—a theory which has remained pivotal in international relations. Over the years, Realism has been developed by a myriad scholars and politicians and is considered as the “most dominant” school of thought since the end of the Second World War.⁶⁵ Realism has ancient roots, having been developed by age-old political thinkers, including Niccolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thucydides and Chanakya Kautilya,⁶⁶ thinkers who frequently mentioned or alluded to Realism in their writings and creations.

Realism comes from the term “Realpolitik,” itself having emerged in the 19th century and used in politics and practice of the state.⁶⁷ Some of the modern contributors to Realism are Hans Morgenthau, Reinhold Nieburhand, and Kenneth Waltz.⁶⁸ According to Sandrina Antunes, the main assumptions of Realism are that in international relations, the state is the main actor along with its national interests while other bodies including organizations exist but with limited power.⁶⁹ This theory is applicable to this research as it

⁶⁴ Michael O. Slobodchikoff, “How effective are international organizations at resolving territorial disputes among member states,” *Studies of Changing Societies: Comparative and Interdisciplinary Focus*, 1 (2), 2012, pp. 29-59, tinyurl.com/54h4cksz (accessed 18 December 2023).

⁶⁵ University of Notre Dame, “An introduction to Realism in International Relations,” International Security Center, 21 July 2022, tinyurl.com/44smekak (accessed 12 July 2023).

⁶⁶ Robert Schuett and Miles Hollingworth, *The Edinburgh Companion to Political Realism*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015.

⁶⁷ John Bew, “The real origins of Realpolitik,” *The National Interest*, No. 130, 2014, pp. 40-52.

⁶⁸ Oxford Bibliographies, “Introduction to Realism,” 27 February, 2020, tinyurl.com/5bwwcjpm (accessed 3 December 2023).

⁶⁹ Sandrina Antunes and Isabel Camisao, “Introducing Realism in International Relations Theory,” *E-International Relations*, 27 February 2018. tinyurl.com/bdf6j3kd (accessed 28

covers both states and IOs.

For the purpose of this thesis, the states in focus are those of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which happen to be in conflict, while the collective security IOs are the OSCE and the CSTO, with both states being members of. As mentioned above, under Political Realism, states are the main actors while non-state actors, chief amongst them IOs, exist with limited power. In the case of the border conflict under study here, it is argued that Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan consider their own interests while the influence of the collective security IOs of OSCE, CSTO, and SCO are considered to be limited—unless influenced by key great powers which affect the direction of the IOs.

The said IOs possess liberal norms by way of principles of cooperation and non-violence expected to be followed by their member states. However, as the 2021 and 2022 border clashes showed, the actions and directions of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan differed radically from the spirit of cooperation and non-violence by way of preventing violent conflict along the disputed border. Realists would argue that these two states are strictly considering their perceived national interests and survival while ignoring the liberal mandates of the three collective security IOs. In 2021 and 2022, both governments initially did not take into account the advice of the above IOs which called for a peaceful resolution of the conflict through diplomacy and dialogue. Moreover, only one the two, Kyrgyzstan, is known to have invited observers and security forces (from the CSTO) to intervene and prevent the escalation of the border conflict—that too unsuccessfully.

Although both states have signed conventions and agreements with the above organizations that prohibit violation of the state's integrity and sovereignty, the actions of both states during the 2021 and 2022 clashes contradicted such notions. What appears to have been at play during the said clashes can more so be understood using the Theory of Political Realism and perceptions of state interests rather than the principles of Liberalism and conflict prevention. As of early-2024, although the border violence between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan has subsided, it is still not fully resolved, while the influences of the OSCE, CSTO and SCO in this process appear rather weak.

Regional Hegemonic Stability Theory

The term “hegemony” is from Ancient Greece, with Merriam-Webster dictionary defining it as “domination” by an entity by way of culture, ideology, economy (and military). Despite the ancient reference to “hegemony,” going back to the Peloponnsian War of 5th century BC, the concept was revived by the revived by the Italian philosopher Antonio

September 2023).

Gramsci.⁷⁰ From a political perspective, a hegemonic power (or hegemon) can be described as a powerful state with political, military, and economic influence and control over another state or even the whole region.⁷¹ The term hegemony is nowadays frequently used in political science and international relations. Michael C. Webb and Stephen D. Krasner have used the term in their “Hegemonic Stability Theory” (HST) whereby the hegemonic distribution of power indicates the superiority and influence of a single state over others with the supposed benefit of political and economic stability for all.⁷²

The Regional Hegemonic Stability Theory, as proposed by this thesis, is a modification of HST and is proposed to be applied to the case of the Central Asian region. In fact, the presence of hegemony has been observed in Central Asia for many centuries. Throughout the years, Russia—whether in its Imperial tsarist, Soviet Communist, or post-Soviet Federalist varieties—has acted as a regional hegemon in its underbelly of Central Asia and Caucasus, with significant cultural, economic, political, and military influence and dominance in the region.⁷³ At least this scenario had been the case for decades, both during and after the Soviet Union.

There appears, however, to be a significant turn of events in status of Russian hegemony given the February 2022 “disastrous invasion” of, and ongoing war with, Ukraine. According to Andrew Roth, quoting a protester in Tbilisi, capital of the former Soviet Republic of Georgia, “Russia [appears to have] lost its [formerly held] soft power.”⁷⁴ A case study of inter-state violent conflict amongst post-Soviet states is that of Nagorno-Karabakh, an ethnically-Armenian territory belonging to Azerbaijan but occupied with Armenia-backed rebels in a for nearly 30 years in the post-Soviet era in a conflict that had taken tens of thousands of lives. And though the activities of collective security IOs, such as the OSCE (in which Russia has played as a key member), may not have been deal during that period, it was only in the escalated 44-day war in 2020 between Armenia and

⁷⁰ Thomas R. Bates, “Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 36 (2), June 1975, pp. 351-366.

⁷¹ Goda Dirzauskaite and Nicolae Cristinel Ilinca, “Understanding hegemony in international relations theories,” *Development and International Relations*, May 2017, p. 17, tinyurl.com/msdee69a (accessed 3 November 2023).

⁷² Michael C. Webb and Stephen D. Krasner, “Hegemonic Stability Theory: An empirical assessment,” *Review of International Studies* 15 (2), April 1989, pp. 183-198.

⁷³ Ruth Deyermond, “Matrioshka Hegemony? Multi-levelled hegemonic competition and security in post-Soviet Central Asia,” *Review of International Studies* 35 (1), January 2009, pp. 151-173.

⁷⁴ Andrew Roth, “‘Russia has lost its soft power’: How war in Ukraine destabilizes old Soviet allies,” *The Guardian*, 11 March 2023, tinyurl.com/na3bakke (accessed 4 January 2024).

Azerbaijan that casualties once again shot up into thousands.⁷⁵

One credible hypothesis for this upshot is proposed to have been the weakening of Russian hegemonic hold in the region due to its preoccupation and meddling with Ukraine. Even before Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, according to a commentary by the Alexa Fults and Paul Stronski, Russia seemed "unable (or unwilling) to enforce the peace" in Nagorno-Karabakh as it had evacuated its peacekeepers from the region. The OSCE's so-called Minsk Process which aimed to "find a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict" was also thought have become "a casualty of [Russia's] war in Ukraine."⁷⁶ A similar process may have been at work in Central Asia. Eugene Rumer of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace writes that, also due to the Ukraine War, "[in] the zero-sum game of Eurasian geopolitics, the signs point to a decrease in Russian influence."⁷⁷

As Johan Engvall reminds us, Russia is Kyrgyzstan's (and Tajikistan's) "dominant security partner."⁷⁸ Among other things, the two states are among the ten countries worldwide where Russia has military bases outside of its own borders. Furthermore both states are members of the Russia-influenced collective security IOs of the OSCE and SCO, while they are also members of the Russia-dominated IOs of CSTO and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In addition to being Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan's "principle security ally,"⁷⁹ Russia is also one of the key trading partner for both countries, in particular with the volume of imports, whereby one-third of imports for both countries are from the Russia.⁸⁰ Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are also among the top five remittance-receiving economies in the world (using data from 2022 and as percentage of their gross domestic product, GDP), while the majority of such remittances are sent by Tajik and Kyrgyz nationals working in Russia as economic migrants.⁸¹ From among the two, Kyrgyzstan is also a member of the Russia-dominated Eurasian Economic Union (EEU).

The case of Armenia, where Russia has one of its few military bases abroad and

⁷⁵ Ariel Karlinsky and Orsola Torrisi, "The casualties of war: A excess mortality estimate of lives lost in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict," *Population Research Policy Review* 42 (3), p. 41, 2023, tinyurl.com/3btmv9pa (accessed 4 January 2024).

⁷⁶ OSCE, "OSCE Minsk Group," n.d., osce.org/mg (accessed 4 January 2024).

⁷⁷ Eugene Rumer, "Russia's wartime foreign policy: Regional hegemony in question," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 17 August 2023, tinyurl.com/3crw677y (accessed 4 January 2024)..

⁷⁸ Engvall *op cit.*, p. 2.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Economist Intelligence Unit, "Country Report: Tajikistan," June 2023.

⁸¹ World Bank, "Data," n.d., data.worldbank.org (accessed 4 January 2024).

which it theoretically serves as a security guarantor for the country, demonstrates, however, as seen by the tragic events in Nagorno-Karabakh, that “institutional enmeshing with Russia is no guarantee that these security guarantees will be honored.”⁸²

The weakening of Russian hegemonic power in the region, is agreed by many, has been a key factor for the potential instability in the region. At the same time that the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, was using hard power aimed at Ukraine, he had also called on the Governments of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan “not to allow for further escalation [of violence] and take measures for a quick and peaceful resolution of the situation,”⁸³ advice which was largely ignored by the parties and pointed at the weakening of credibility and influence of the Russian Federation in the region.

Chapter conclusions

This chapter discussed the literature review and theory as related to the theme of this thesis. The literature review presented some reasons for both the failure and success of the collective security IOs in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, especially those in border areas. Among other things, the chapter indicated how some IOs have the ability to resolve or mitigate conflicts among their member states through diplomatic intervention, including negotiations.

In the theory section, the chapter described the application of Political Realism and the Regional Hegemonic Stability Theory as pertaining to inter-state wars, including the situation of the 2021-2022 Tajik-Kyrgyz border conflict. While Political Realism can explain why states engage in violent conflict due to threats to the safeguarding of their perceived national interests, including survival, the Regional HST proposed that the instability in the Central Asia and neighboring Caucasus regions are due to the relative weakening of the traditional hegemonic power in the region—the Russian Federation.

⁸² Johan Engvall, “Russia’s menu of manipulation in Central Asia,” *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 27 November 2023, p.1, tinyurl.com/9xmnawtf (accessed 4 January 2024).

⁸³ Gian Volpicelli, “Putin urges Kyrgyz, Tajik leaders to de-escalate border tensions,” *Politico*, 18 September 2023, tinyurl.com/yc8bf6n6 (accessed 4 January 2024).

Chapter IV

ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS TESTING

“The only way to test [a] hypothesis is to look for all the information that disagrees with it.” –Karl Popper ⁸⁴

This chapter is divided into three key sections devoted to testing the three hypotheses of this thesis, those of **H₁**: The External Factor of Russia—its preoccupation with Ukraine, **H₂**: The External Factor of the West—its de facto defeat in Afghanistan and preoccupation with Ukraine, and **H₃**: The Internal Factor of Central Asian populism and hyper-nationalism. These hypotheses are explored and tested via the collected literature and semi-structured interviews ($N = 9$) with Tajik, Kyrgyz, and international experts (see Appendix A for the list of the interviewees and Appendix B for list of the interview questions).

Hypothesis 1: The External Factor of Russia—its preoccupation with Ukraine

H₁: Despite Russia being a key player in the CSTO, SCO, and OSCE, its invasion of Ukraine has weakened its state capacity to influence affairs in Central Asia and lowered its credibility in the eyes of Central Asian leaders who had largely ignored any advice by Russia to resolve the Tajik–Kyrgyz border dispute peacefully, and weakening any pull that Russia-led or Russia-influenced collective security IOs have on mediating and resolving the 2021–2022 Tajik–Kyrgyz border dispute.

As part of testing H₁, nine interviews were conducted with Central Asian and international experts on border conflicts and potential role of collective security IOs. Here, those experts share their thoughts on changes in the perceptions of Russia’s credibility and influence in Central Asia, in particular after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. In this regard, Temur Umarov, an expert on China and Asia and a fellow at the Carnegie Eurasia Center, claims that as a result of the Ukraine War, Russia’s position in its regions of influence appears to have weakened but is not fully erased. Umarov states:

It seems to some extent that Russia’s position as a great power has weakened in the region. However, ... it is also hard to say that Russia’s influence is completely over in Central Asia. Russia’s role as a security provider is not resolving all of the security issues in the region but if there is a specific problem—such as a threat to the stability of the political regime—in any of the Central Asian states, Russia would consider intervening if a

⁸⁴ Quoted in Subramanian Haritharan, “Understanding hypothesis testing to end case study,” Analytics Vidhya, 6 December 2021, tinyurl.com/2p95payh (accessed 7 January 2024).

certain state (asking for support) guarantees Russia that it will keep its political regime, and the regime will remain under the friendly influence of Russia. All other problems of the Central Asian states should be resolved by themselves and these states understand this [fact well].⁸⁵

It is hard to say if Russia has significantly lost its power in the region. For many years, almost no actions have been observed by Russia or Russia-dominated collective security IOs when it comes to border conflicts in Central Asia. One analyst claims that the CSTO, for example, was never fully serious about intra- or inter-state security issues of its member states. Dmitri Stratietski of the Berlin Center for East European Studies writes that even during the 2010 deadly inter-ethnic feud of Osh province of southern Kyrgyzstan, there was practically no desire of interference by the CSTO and Russia and that then-Russian President Dmitry Medvedev had “ruled out the deployment of CSTO troops,” having called the bloodshed in Osh as “an internal affair” of Kyrgyzstan.⁸⁶

During the CIS Summit in October 2022 held in the Kazakhstan’s capital, Astana, the President of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon, openly expressed his dissatisfaction with Russia and asked for “respect” for his country. According to Mirzokhid Karshiev, a Tajikistani researcher based in Finland, President Rahmon “understands that Russia has fewer friends now [given the Ukraine War-induced Western sanctions] and Tajikistan is among them.”⁸⁷ Rahmon’s seven-minute “seemingly unscripted and off-the-cuff tirade”⁸⁸ at the CIS Summit addressed to Russia’s President Putin appeared to analysts to be a demand for more financial and security assistance from Russia. About this incidence, Umarov says that “with Russia so diplomatically isolated [given the Ukraine War], Tajikistan is a prime position to extort concessions, and has already done so” One such concession has been the Russian Supreme Court’s 2022 decision to designate the Islamic Revival Party, banned in Tajikistan since 2015, as a terrorist organization, in addition to the regular “deportation of Russia-based Tajik [opposition] political activists” back to Tajikistan.⁸⁹

During the same CIS Summit, the issue of the Kyrgyz–Tajik armed border dispute appears to have only been discussed informally. According to Kyrgyzstan’s presidential

⁸⁵ Interview with Temur Umarov, Expert on China and Asia and Fellow at the Carnegie Eurasia Center, Skype interview, 18 November 2023.

⁸⁶ Stratietski, Dmitri. “Why the CSTO failed to become Russia’s NATO,” Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, September 2023, tinyurl.com/2w5kwxm4 (accessed 4 January 2024).

⁸⁷ Quoted in Eurasianet, “Was Tajik president’s rant at Putin defiance or plea for greater dependence?,” 17 October 2022, tinyurl.com/h6ft49rj (accessed 5 January 2024).

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

spokesperson, the Russian president, Putin, had told his Kyrgyz counterpart, Sadyr Japarov, at a sideline meeting at the CIS Summit that he “was ready to assist in resolving border disputes between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.”⁹⁰ A month prior, in September 2022, President Putin had urged both sides of the conflict “to prevent further escalation and to take measures to resolve the situation exclusively by peaceful, political and diplomatic means as soon as possible.” He had also stated “Russia's readiness to provide the necessary assistance to ensure stability in the Kyrgyz–Tajik border region.”⁹¹

What is also known is that in October 2022, Kyrgyzstan’s Defense Minister Baktybek Bekbolotov had proposed to the CSTO the following:

In the meeting, we had with the CSTO Secretary General Stanislav Zas, ... [I told him] that there will be no peace between us (Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) until a third judge stands between us. To resolve the conflict, I proposed the deployment of a small CSTO contingent in our disputed territories ... to supervise the ceasefire and withdraw heavy equipment from the state border.⁹²

Weeks prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Russia-led security alliance CSTO had indeed sent a few thousand troops to Kazakhstan to assist the Kazakh Government suppress what had become the country’s largest unrest in its history and restore law and order in the country.⁹³ Alexander Libman et al., however, claim that:

While there is substantial evidence of authoritarian regimes working together to ensure mutual stability, autocracies are ... notoriously mistrustful of one another. Therefore, they prefer to limit the assistance from other autocracies to rhetoric, to avoid the emergence of excessive dependencies. ... [T]he case of the [CSTO] intervention in Kazakhstan in 2022 [was] an example of an authoritarian regional organization sending a military mission to one of its member states. ... [T]heir intervention [however] was more of symbolic importance than having an actual military role, and

⁹⁰ Radio Free Europe, “Putin agrees To present archive maps to help solve border disputes between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan,” 17 October 2022, tinyurl.com/4xhfx6z6 (accessed 5 January 2024).

⁹¹ Maxim Rodionov, “Putin calls on Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to de-escalate,” *Reuters*, 18 September 2022, tinyurl.com/4vtm8ypj (accessed 5 January 2024).

⁹² Sabir Askeroglu, “Kyrgyzstan’s appeal to the CSTO regarding the border with Tajikistan,” ANKASAM, 14 November 2022, tinyurl.com/33deu9dy (accessed 4 January 2024).

⁹³ Jakob Hedenskog and Hugo von Essen, “Russia’s CSTO intervention in Kazakhstan: Motives, risks, and consequences,” *Stockholm Centre for Easter European Studies*, January 2022.

precisely for that reason it was acceptable to the leadership of Kazakhstan and other CSTO countries. The balance of power in central Asia (and in particular the role of China) ensured the credibility of commitment of the CSTO to keep its mission a symbolic one.⁹⁴

No such decision, symbolic or otherwise, were made, however, by the CSTO during the 2021-2022 Kyrgyz–Tajik unrest, with the CSTO Secretariat only having issued an advisory by way of a statement on 17 September 2022 reading that “the use of force is unacceptable” and that “[o]nly political and diplomatic methods should be used to resolve contradictions.” The CSTO statement further read that the border conflict between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan “must be resolved exclusively at the negotiating table by peaceful means.”⁹⁵ And as late as early-March 2023, the Chief of the International Military Cooperation Department of the CSTO, Valery Revenko, had written on his Twitter account that the CSTO was “ready to propose measures to relieve tension on the Kyrgyz–Tajik border”⁹⁶—also a comment which likely had been mere rhetoric.

On further analysis of H₁ (The External Factor of Russia), an expert on peace and Central Asia from Kyrgyzstan (Anonymous-b) states that given the Ukraine War, Russia is in a tough spot due to its invasion of Ukraine, and possesses few options:

Russia’s focus is currently on Ukraine and the military actions in that country. [And due to the Western sanctions], there are [increasing] trade projects between China, Asia, and Europe that bypass Russia. The factors [of the Ukraine War coupled with its associated sanctions regime] influence Russia’s position and opportunities in ... regional issues, such as Central Asia.⁹⁷

Another interviewee (Anonymous-a), an expert on International Relations from Tajikistan concurs on the issue of a weakened Russia, claiming that a weakened Russia in the region may lead to the scenario of Central Asian states forging ties with other great and/or middle powers. The interviewee says:

I do believe that the Russian invasion of Ukraine has weakened Kremlin’s influence in Central Asia enormously. There is a slight appearance and negotiations between Iran and Tajikistan, for example, where [Iranian

⁹⁴ Alexander Libman, Igor Davizon and Rhea Sagar, “How to intervene symbolically: The CSTO in Kazakhstan,” Chatham House, [tinyurl.com/ytw6rsz5](https://www.tinyurl.com/ytw6rsz5) (accessed 6 January 2024)

⁹⁵ CSTO-b *op. cit.*

⁹⁶ *Special Eurasia*, “Kyrgyzstan–Tajikistan border dispute: Might CSTO guarantee regional security?,” 15 March 2023, [tinyurl.com/bd3hzumw](https://www.tinyurl.com/bd3hzumw) (accessed 4 January 2024).

⁹⁷ Interview with Anonymous-b, Expert on Peace and Central Asian Studies, Zoom interview, 10 November 2023.

President] Ebrahim Raisi and [President] Emomali Rahmon highlighted their common heritage, Pan-Iranian and Persian legacy in addition to the sale of military hardware to Dushanbe. Moreover, we can see similar motives in Kazakhstan's turn to the West and its increasing independence of its oil industry from [Russia's] Gazprom.⁹⁸

In such a scenario, the same interviewee considers opportunities for another great power in the region—China:

The most important factor here is the rise of the Middle Kingdom. The Ukrainian crisis brought Sino-Russian relations to the point that Beijing is using Russia as a cheap rentier state purchasing Russian gas and oil in [Chinese] yuan. China has [not only] been enhancing its [own currency] exchange system, [but also] expanding its Belt and Road Initiative, doing patronage politics in Central Asia, and [even] stationing its military in Tajikistan.⁹⁹

Some other experts interviewed are of the opinion that if Russia's influence in the region has weakened in some aspects, it has also increased from other perspectives. Here, Anonymous-c, an expatriate political scientist teaching at one of the universities in Kyrgyzstan, states that Russia's influence in Central Asia is not completely gone but only weakened relative to China's rapid rise in the region:

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has weakened its position [in Central Asia] in some areas but also increased its influence in others including economics (such as the rise of remittances from Russia). I therefore do not agree that Russia's influence has decreased drastically [in the region]. ... We see that China's [power] is increasing and thus think that Russia is decreasing. I think that Russia has not lost credibility in the region. It is not only an issue of hard power but also soft power.¹⁰⁰

Another interviewee (Anonymous-e), a Tajikistani expert on politics, claims that although Russia's position has weakened in Central Asia, it is still the power that dictates the order. He elaborates:

... Russia's reputation and position have truly weakened in the region. However, despite this weakened position, [President] Putin remains the one who dictates the conditions and order. Moreover, despite the distrust towards Russia, Central Asian states are not strong and stable enough to fully turn away from Russia and express their discontent. This point

⁹⁸ Interview with Anonymous-a, Expert on International Relations, Email interview, 27 October 2023.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Anonymous-c, Expatriate political scientist, Associate Professor at a university in Kyrgyzstan, in-person interview, 11 November 2023.

especially relates to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan which are heavily dependent on Russia.¹⁰¹

Interviewees had differing views on the reasons behind a lack of involvement of the Russia-led collective security IOs in the Kyrgyz–Tajik border conflict. A journalist and political scientist from Kyrgyzstan (Anonymous-d) claims that the IOs under question lack sufficient knowledge and information. “It is not possible to understand and incorporate all of the details of the border conflict in a short period of time” and thus such “IOs would not be able to suggest ... initiatives that would be accepted and beneficial for both states ...,” says the interviewee.¹⁰²

Anonymous-f, a journalist from Tajikistan elaborates as such on the role of the CSTO and OSCE in the border conflict:

The CSTO is not an independent organization. All decisions are made by the leadership of Russia, for which the war against Ukraine is now a priority. In this regard, Russia does not want to waste its resources in this direction. The OSCE could play a positive role but [only] with the goodwill (permission) of the authorities of the two countries.¹⁰³

Umarov, in turn, suggests that firstly, there was never an concurrence between the two states to invite CSTO peacekeepers—even though Kyrgyzstan appears to have been far more open to the idea. Secondly, he is of the opinion that “the CSTO was not established to resolve all security issues of the member states but [only] those considered as threats to the political regimes—as was observed during the [2022] protests in Kazakhstan.”¹⁰⁴

H₁ was set up to examine Russia’s state capacity to influence affairs in Central Asia, in addition to Russia’s perceptions of credibility in the eyes of Central Asian leaders after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The hypothesis included a judgment on how the Ukraine War has negatively affected the Russia-led collective security IOs and their involvement in, at best, preventing, and, at least, resolving the 2021-2022 Kyrgyz–Tajik border conflict.

The far majority of the experts interviewed for examining H₁ claimed that Russia’s influence has indeed weakened in the Central Asian region, but in no way has it disappeared—and that Russia still has the capacity to still call much of the shots in the

¹⁰¹ Interview with Anonymous-e, Tajikistani expert on politics, Zoom interview, 15 November 2023.

¹⁰² Interview with Anonymous-d, Researcher and Political scientist, Zoom interview, 13 November 2023.

¹⁰³ Interview with Anonymous-f, Tajikistani journalist and media expert, Email interview, 18 November 2023.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Umarov *op. cit.*

region. Russia's credibility, however, has weakened in the eyes of the Central Asian leaders, including when it comes to conflict resolution. However, in many other areas, including security guarantees for pro-Russian regimes, Russia remains an important and influential player.

As for the question of weakened influence of Russia-dominated collective security IOs which both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are members of, such as the CSTO, there is no strong evidence that the said IO made a decisive effort to either put the case of the Kyrgyz–Tajik violent border “wars” on its agenda, let alone offer the deployment of peacekeepers to the zones of conflict. In the end, however, if (and the majority of interviewees point to it) Russia had not been involved in a long-running war in Ukraine, its diplomatic pressure and advice to Central Asian Governments to resolve their differences peacefully would have been heeded, and the Kyrgyz–Tajik dispute, “one of the longest-running border disagreements between two former Soviet republics,” would not have resulted to the degree of violence that it did in 2021–2022.¹⁰⁵ Evidence, however—aside from the case of January 2022 violent uprisings of Kazakhstan—does not exist in the deployment of CSTO troops to any Central Asian crisis, let alone a border dispute.

In the end, so far as the testing of H_1 is concerned, it can be argued that that evidence points to the direction that the null hypothesis of no relationship between the Ukraine War and Russia's influence to keep the peace in Central Asia—including in the case of the Kyrgyz–Tajik violent border conflict—can be rejected, and therefore **we fail to reject H_1** .

Hypothesis 2: The External Factor of the West—its de facto defeat in Afghanistan and preoccupation with Ukraine

H₂: The OSCE pS have shown little interest in preventing or resolving the Tajik–Kyrgyz border dispute by way of enticing the Governments of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to seek the assistance and invite the intervention of the OSCE in resolving their 2021 and 2022 border conflict. This failure has been due to: (a) The disillusion of Western pS from the August 2021 victory and rise of the Taliban (and de facto Western defeat) in Afghanistan, and (b) The political, military and financial preoccupation of Western OSCE pS with the ongoing war in Ukraine.

The lack of strenuous involvement and significant actions by the OSCE in the 2021 and 2022 Kyrgyz–Tajik border clashes is among the most intriguing questions of this study. In H_2 , two key components of the External Factor of the West are the August 2021 defeat in Afghanistan and the ongoing costs of supporting the war in Ukraine. According to Hunter Stoll of Rand Corporation, Central Asia has “seldom [been] a top priority for U.S. foreign policy.” From shortly after the terror bombings of September 11, 2001 (aka

¹⁰⁵ Chris Rickleton, “Can Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan consign their deadly border conflict to the past?,” *Radio Free Europe*, 19 December, [tinyurl.com/3zk5mmuv](https://www.tinyurl.com/3zk5mmuv) (accessed 4 January 2024).

“9/11”) up until the victory of the Taliban in August 2021, Central Asia had largely served as a mere “launchpad for U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, and little more than that.”¹⁰⁶ Nikolay Bobkin, in turn, refers to the 20-year U.S.-led war in Afghanistan as “a complete failure” not only for the U.S., but also for the EU and the Western collective security IO, NATO. Bobkin also refers to the “chaotic and swift collapse” of the U.S.-backed Afghan Government as “an ignominious end to American intervention ... with dangerous consequences for the [greater Central Asian] region.”¹⁰⁷

A Woodrow Wilson Center public opinion poll of Central Asian public found the U.S. being the least favorable great power from amongst three choices of Russia, China and the U.S. When the Kyrgyzstani and Tajikistani public were asked which among the three powers they find as “friendly and reliably helpful,” the far majority of respondents in both Kyrgyzstan (87%) and Tajikistan (78%) chose Russia, while only 2% of the public in the two countries identified with the U.S.¹⁰⁸

As for the Ukraine factor, according to a report by the International Crisis Group (ICG), Russia’s invasion of Ukraine “put tremendous strain”¹⁰⁹ on the OSCE, a collective security IO with 57 members or “participating States” (pS). During 2014-2022, the OSCE is known to have allocated and diverted a large part of its budget to its Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) in Ukraine. During 2022, out of the total OSCE Unified Budget of EUR135 million, 39% was allocated to South and Eastern Europe, while only 16% was allocated to Central Asia and Caucasus.¹¹⁰

In addition, since the Russian takeover of Crimea in 2014 and the 2022 full-scale Russian invasion, much of the discussions in the Vienna-housed Permanent Council of the OSCE have surrounded around the ongoing Ukraine War. The ICG writes that not only is Russia’s invasion of Ukraine “a glaring violation of the OSCE’s foundational principles,” it also “calls into question the viability of an organisation set up to promote cooperative security arrangements involving Russia and the West.” The ICG further writes that: “These

¹⁰⁶ Hunter Stoll, “A case for greater U.S. engagement in Central Asia,” *The Diplomat*, 11 September 2023, [tinyurl.com/4mdkaefy](https://www.tinyurl.com/4mdkaefy) (accessed 6 January 2024).

¹⁰⁷ Nikolay Bobkin, “The end of the war in Afghanistan: The defeat of the United States and the consequences for regional security,” *Institute for U.S. and Canadian Studies*, 15 February 2022, [tinyurl.com/4jv39j68](https://www.tinyurl.com/4jv39j68) (accessed 6 January 2024).

¹⁰⁸ Marlene Laruelle and Dylan Royce, “No Great Game: Central Asia’s public opinions on Russia, China, and the U.S.” *Kennan Cable*, No, 56, August 2020, [tinyurl.com/yc8bf6n6](https://www.tinyurl.com/yc8bf6n6) (accessed 7 January 2024).

¹⁰⁹ ICG, “Seven priorities for preserving the OSCE at a time of war,” *Crisis Group Special Briefing*, No. 9, 19 November 2022, [tinyurl.com/2snvv5ju](https://www.tinyurl.com/2snvv5ju) (accessed 6 January 2024).

¹¹⁰ OSCE, “2022 financial report and financial statements and the report of the external auditor,” 14 July 2023, [tinyurl.com/4txkrzef](https://www.tinyurl.com/4txkrzef) (accessed 6 January 2024).

are hard times for [the OSCE], [an inter-governmental IO] that had helped safeguard regional security in the post-Cold War era ... [including in] Central Asia.”¹¹¹

Hereby, some of the Central Asian and international experts share their thoughts on this point. The interviewees were asked about the reasons behind the OSCE’s lack of interest in intervening and resolving the border conflict. The majority of the experts claim that the factor of preoccupation with the war in Ukraine has played a significant role in the lack of involvement by the West and Western-backed IOs with the Kyrgyz–Tajik border conflict, albeit they name some other reasons, as well. However, the factor of Taliban’s victory in Afghanistan, in the opinion of interviewees, is not a significant reason for the lack of interest by the West in the Kyrgyz–Tajik border conflict.

An international expert on security studies (Anonymous-h) interviewed for this study states that Western lack of interest “is not [just] about the Ukraine War and now the war in Gaza which are taking Western attention away [from Central Asia] but the insignificance and unimportance of the Kyrgyz–Tajik border conflict in the global arena.”¹¹² Anonymous-h thus implies that the relatively small size of the Kyrgyz–Tajik conflict makes it appear an insignificant issue for the West and Western pS of the OSCE, which would in turn not advocate an intervention, even if there were no Ukraine War or the current war in Gaza. Since 2022, nearly all of the OSCE’s North American and Western European pS have been contributing financially and militarily to Ukraine in its war with Russia.¹¹³ For expert interviewee Temur Umarov, it is senselessness to expect intervention by the West in the Kyrgyz–Tajik border conflict. He says:

Afghanistan was a magnet of interest for the West. However, I would not say that even during the presence of the West in Afghanistan, the West took significant actions in the Central Asian conflicts. The [border] issue is [considered] as an internal problem of Central Asia, to be resolved by these states, themselves. It is only possible to receive some resources or experience from the West for resolving the conflict. However, nothing more should be to expected from them.¹¹⁴

Though no intervention has been made by Western-backed IOs in the 2021 and 2022 border clashes between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, during both waves, some Western powers have commented on the conflict. On 6 May 2021, after the first violent clashes in

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Interview with Anonymous-h, an international expert on security issues, in-person interview, 30 November 2023.

¹¹³ Kristine Berzina and Sophie Arts, “Europe’s Ukraine contributions reveal a reliable partnership with the Unites States,” *GMF*, 12 October 2023, tinyurl.com/bdcujmc8 (accessed 6 January 2024).

¹¹⁴ Interview with Umarov *op. cit.*

late-April, the U.S Mission to the OSCE stated that “the United States welcomes the ceasefire agreed between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan” and “encourages both states to work closely with the OSCE Field Operations in their countries to quickly deploy confidence building measures on the ground.”¹¹⁵ At the same time, the EU, as well, had its own statement on the conflict, stating: “The EU welcomes the ceasefire agreement reached by the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Tajikistan and stands ready to provide mediation and technical assistance regarding border management and water management, as well as continued political support for stability and prosperity in the region.”¹¹⁶ As history shows, however, none of the external actors could play a crucial role in the de-escalation and resolution of the border conflict in 2021, which later led to the second wave of violent clashes between the two states in 2022.

In this regard, Anonymous-e also thinks that the Kyrgyz–Tajik border conflict is out of the current priorities of IOs and says:

The said IOs are in reality promoting the interests of the states that were initiators of the establishment of these organizations. Within the frame of the U.S., EU, and the OSCE, the Ukrainian issue is much more significant and principal than the case of the Kyrgyz–Tajik border conflict.¹¹⁷

Umarov, in turn, claims that the West does not see the Tajik-Kyrgyz border dispute as Russia does. He adds:

We need to understand that Ukraine is located in Europe and thus the interests of the OSCE and the U.S. are much higher in Europe than in Central Asia. I think that the comparison is not relevant as the world sees Ukraine as a very important country located in the buffer zone between Europe and Russia. Also, the Kyrgyz–Tajik border conflict is not that large in comparison with the Ukrainian case. Thus, there will not be much interest nor a desire for intervention by the West.¹¹⁸

Aside from the size and duration of the conflict, in addition to the number of fatalities, all of which have been significantly higher in the Ukraine War, as Umarov correctly states, Ukraine is located in Europe and closer to the Western world. Thus, the factor of geopolitics is another reason for the lack of interest and involvement of the Western states and Western-influenced IOs in the Kyrgyz–Tajik border conflict. In brief, Ukraine is much closer to and more important for the West than is Central Asia.

¹¹⁵ U.S. Mission to the OSCE, “On the recent escalation of tensions at the Kyrgyz-Tajik border,” 6 May 2021, tinyurl.com/ypzs7u2m (accessed 5 January 2024).

¹¹⁶ OSCE, “EU Statement on the recent escalation of tensions at the Tajik-Kyrgyz border,” Vienna, 6 May 2021, PC.DEL/691/21, 13 May 2021, tinyurl.com/2m4ubvxj (accessed 5 January 2024).

¹¹⁷ Interview with Anonymous-e *op. cit.*

¹¹⁸ Interview with Umarov *op. cit.*

The above said, the OSCE, and the European countries along with the US have nonetheless expressed their concerns regarding the second wave of the Kyrgyz–Tajik border conflict. After the violent clashes between the two states in September 2022, the United Kingdom (UK) made a statement regarding the border conflict. The UK Deputy Ambassador to the OSCE, Deirdre Brown, stated: “We urge both sides to pursue a diplomatic solution to this conflict” and “the United Kingdom remains committed to supporting the OSCE in its efforts to help facilitate a peaceful and lasting resolution [to the border conflict].”¹¹⁹ The EU pS of the OSCE, in turn, following the September 2022 border clashes, stated that: “The European Union reiterates its offer to provide assistance, as well as continued active political support for stability and prosperity in the region.”¹²⁰ After the 2022 clashes, the U.S. also had a statement: “We urge both sides to withdraw all forces from the shared border” and “The United States welcomes a diplomatic resolution to the conflict and stands by, ready to support.”¹²¹

Such statements, which had also been observed after the 2021 clashes, refer to the apparent good intentions and readiness of the Western states in preventing and escalation and resolving the Kyrgyz–Tajik border conflict. In this regard and on the broader Western engagement in the region, Anonymous-f claims that the U.S. and other Western powers have in fact intensified diplomatic work in the region:

The West is calling for the development of regional cooperation, which can have a positive impact on the stabilization of Central Asian borders. But, again, the authorities of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan must agree to the mediation role of the West in their border dispute.¹²²

The above implies that the OSCE has not been invited by Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan as a mediator in their border conflict. At the same time, what is known is that the two states to the conflict are also holding bilateral negotiations regarding their dispute where none of the external actors are asked to be play a role. The decisions of the two states on whether to invite or not any external actor are made behind closed doors within a small circle of decision makers. As such, the unwillingness and disinterest of the two states in having the

¹¹⁹ Government of the UK, “Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan border conflict: UK statement to the OSCE,” Foreign Commonwealth Development Office and Diedre Brown, 26 September 2022, tinyurl.com/yp7eh6y6 (accessed 30 December 2023).

¹²⁰ OSCE, “EU Statement on the latest border clashes between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and the ceasefire,” European Union, OSCE Permanent Council 1390 [22 September 2023], PC.DEL/1333/22, 23 September 2022. osce.org/node/527316 (accessed 3 January 2024).

¹²¹ U.S Mission to the OSCE. “On the latest border clashes between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and the ceasefire,” 23 September 2022, tinyurl.com/y65pbsx2 (accessed 2 January 2024),

¹²² Interview with Anonymous-f *op. cit.*

a collective security IO as mediator may be among the main reasons for the lack of involvement and intervention by this organization in preventing and resolving the conflict. On this issue, Umarov claims that even if being sufficiently interested in inviting the OSCE or others, the IOs would not necessarily be able to prevent the skirmish in the borders:

The reason is that the said IOs have very low access to the people making the decisions on such issues. They can communicate with the MFA [Ministry of Foreign Affairs] of the states, but are not necessarily able to influence their decision, which are taken by several people inside the governments in a closed format. The said IOs may rely on institutions that are not influential in the states. It is [thus] unrealistic to imagine that the said IOs can through contacting the MFA of the states be able to influence their decisions, especially the decisions of the state leaders. These IOs are only able to call upon both states to conduct peaceful negotiations.¹²³

It is hard to imagine a scenario in Central Asia where a single person can make a decision on behalf of the whole country. When it comes to the national interest, none of the states would change its decision due to the advice by a foreign IO or state, which are located far away. The state could still listen to the advice of external actors but the final decision would only be based on the interests of the states. As the expert mentioned, the said IOs called on both states for a peaceful resolution in the 2021 clashes. However, as history shows, nothing changed and the states commenced a more serious wave of clashes in 2022.

Anonymous-h, in turn, claims that the West was not invited to intervene, but and at the same time was not interested in intervening to solve the Kyrgyz–Tajik border conflict:

In reality, these IOs [OSCE and CSTO] were saying: “We wish you well!” “Go for a ceasefire!” “Russia can help you with maps!” or “We can help with an intermittent force.” However, the [Kyrgyz–Tajik dispute] is not a big, but only a limited conflict, one which did not even make it to the headlines. And the chances, in light of the Ukraine war and the Gaza war, is very little that you could basically make this conflict a prime-time issue. [Non-intervention, therefore] is actually quite convenient.¹²⁴

As told, the above experts see the Kyrgyz–Tajik border dispute as a small and unworthy conflict where the OSCE and other collective security IOs are not sufficiently interested in, while they could also intervene only if there had been an exclusive request or invitation from the two states involved.

At the same time, as suggested by H₂, the disillusionment of the Western states due to the Taliban’s victory in Afghanistan can be among the reasons for the lack of interest by

¹²³ Interview with Umarov *op. cit.*

¹²⁴ Interview with Anonymous-h *op. cit.*

Western-dominated IOs in the Kyrgyz–Tajik conflict. But another interviewee, Anonymous-g, a political scientist from Tajikistan, opposes this supposition and says:

The United States has used Afghanistan exclusively for its own purposes and exactly as much as it needed. There was no victory of the Taliban, especially over the U.S. troops. The U.S. did everything to ensure that it was the Taliban who will receive American weapons and equipment. Today, the Taliban are dealing with an extremely difficult economic conditions for Afghanistan and are busy with handling the internal problems of the country, as well as caring about maintaining their own power.¹²⁵

The above expert (Anonymous-g), therefore, thinks that the Taliban factor does come into play with the lack of interest by the West in the Kyrgyz–Tajik border conflict as the U.S., at least as far as Anonymous sees it, did not lose the war to the Taliban. In addition, other experts claim that besides the Ukraine War, the Western world has been and still is preoccupied with other conflicts such as Nagorno-Karabakh and, more recently, the war in Gaza. In this regard, Anonymous-e elaborates:

Nowadays, there are also Nagorno-Karabakh and the Palestine-Israel conflicts which still keep the West busy and uninterested to involve itself with the Kyrgyz–Tajik border conflict. This, however, does not mean that the above powers have lost their interest in the region. Moreover, it is not appropriate to say that the [OSCE] has not done anything regarding the Kyrgyz–Tajik conflict. The IO [or its key players] has already expressed its thoughts on the conflict and provided some advice to both sides of the conflict. I think that for now these IOs are not needed [for the resolution of the conflict] as the conflicting sides are coming to a common point [of understanding, by themselves].¹²⁶

In reality, even without the presence of the external actors, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan appear to be making progress in resolving the border conflict. However, if not in terms of the specific border conflict, Western states' interest in the region is still observed in other spheres. For decades, the U.S. and the EU have been contributing to Central Asia in different sectors including economic development, educational institutions, as well as promotion of transparent and free media.¹²⁷ It may thus be inappropriate to imply that the West has no interest in the region. Besides, with the long presence of Russia and China's influence in the region, it would be very hard for other powers to take the role of a key external actor in the region.

¹²⁵ Interview with Anonymous-g, Journalist and Expert in Political Science from Tajikistan, Email interview, 20 November 2023.

¹²⁶ Interview with Anonymous-e *op. cit.*

¹²⁷ Eurasian Rail Alliance Index, "Central Asia in change amid the New Great Game," 31 October 2023, tinyurl.com/3tw5mwuh (accessed 5 January 2023).

What is certain, however, is that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has significantly changed the global order. Since its occurrence, Russia's influence in Central Asia has not been as strong as before. Here, the rise of China's influence in the region can also not be denied. Overall, it might be a new era and a crucial moment for the region where the hegemonic power that had guaranteed stability for the region is under the threat of being replaced by rivals. Related to this issue, Anonymous-d claims that great powers may only be temporarily distracted from the region:

Central Asia will always be under the focus and attention of the leading countries. Thus, the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan has not led to the loss of interest of the West in Central Asia. [In fact] Central Asia is becoming a more [not less] economically important region in the international arena. The initiatives by the Central Asian leaders (such as the economic initiatives by Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev) show that the region will stay under the radar of the Western world. However, this will all also depend on the stability of the region. If there is stability, the process of economic cooperation and development will be accelerated.¹²⁸

H₂ was proposed to explain the reasons behind the Western powers and Western-influenced IOs' (chiefly the OSCE's) apparent lack of interest and engagement in intervening, preventing, and resolving the 2021 and 2022 Kyrgyz–Tajik border conflict. It explained the Western non-involvement in conflict resolution in Central Asia and that of the OSCE to be due to the West's disillusionment over the 2021 Taliban's victory in Afghanistan and the Western OSCE pS' preoccupation with the ongoing war in Ukraine. On H₂, the majority of the experts interviewed, in addition to the literature on the topic, indicate that the preoccupation with the war in Ukraine is indeed a significant factor for the lack of interest by the West. Currently, the Ukraine War is a far more important issue for the Western OSCE pS than the relatively small and geopolitically distant conflictual border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

The majority of the interviewees, however, do not see Western non-involvement in the Central Asian border conflict to be affected by the Western defeat or the Taliban's victory in Afghanistan. As was noted by one more of the experts, even during the presence of the West in Afghanistan, there was not an active role by the West in Central Asian conflicts. In addition, the OSCE and its pS have not been invited and asked for support by the two conflictual parties—albeit the statements by key Western OSCE pS alluded to their readiness to support Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (likely only diplomatically) in resolving their border conflict. Given the above interview data and literature cited,

¹²⁸ Interview with Anonymous-d *op. cit.*

therefore, **the null hypothesis of no relationship associated with H₂ is only partially rejected.** Logically, we only partially fail to reject H₂.

Hypothesis 3: The Internal Factors of Central Asian populism and hypernationalism

H₃: While the ongoing war in Ukraine and Western defeat in Afghanistan may be the key external reasons why the collective security IOs have not enticed the Governments of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to formally invite the same IOs to resolve their border dispute, it is hypernationalism (in particular by Tajikistan) and populism (in Kyrgyzstan) that serve as the main internal reasons for the escalation of the said conflict and why the two conflicting parties have, in turn, not extended invitations to the same collective security IOs to resolve their border conflict.

Central Asian nationalisms have their root in policies of the Soviet Union. On the one hand Soviet communism promoted a philosophy of “rational internationalism” and promotion of “shared socialist values.” On the other hand it also created “titular ethnic republics” and encouraged forms of “ethnic nationalism”¹²⁹—the version of nationalism which has been dominant in Central Asia in the post-Soviet era. Kevin Clements defines “atavistic nationalism” as advocacy for “a return to a romanticised and idealised past when the nation was reputedly great and its culture homogenous.” This sort of hypernationalism “challenges democratic and agonistic politics by closing down spaces for civil society actors ...” In addition, via “dehumanising enemies, this type of nationalism creates conditions conducive to violence at local, national, regional and [even] global levels.”¹³⁰

“Populism” has been referred to as “a loose ideology ... empower[ing] opposition parties and movements through a strong, appealing anti-elite message.”¹³¹ For Cas Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, populism is a “thin ideology” that separates society into two: The “pure people” and the “corrupt elite.”¹³² An extreme form of populism, per Ana Carolina Balthazar, is that of “right-wing authoritarian populism,” an ideology that “reinforces autocratic, xenophobic, and fascist movements” and potentially serve as a sort of

¹²⁹ Payam Foroughi, “Tajikistan: Nationalism, ethnicity, conflict and socio-economic disparities—sources and solutions,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 22 (1), p. 41.

¹³⁰ Clements *op. cit.*, p. 2.

¹³¹ Paolo Magri, “Introduction,” in Alberto Martinelli (ed.), *When Populism Meets Nationalism: Reflections on Parties in Poverty and Community* (Milano: Ledizioni Publishing, 2018), p. 7.

¹³² Quoted in Kevin P. Clements, “Authoritarian populism and atavistic nationalism: 21st-century challenges to peace building and development,” *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, 13 (6), p. 1.

“nostalgic nationalism.”¹³³ It is argued that although both states discussed in this thesis—Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan—engage in promoting forms of “hypernationalism,” the term, in particular, fits that of Tajikistan. It is also argued there that from among the two states discussed, it is the current politics of Kyrgyzstan which can be described as “populist.”

The 2021-2022 Kyrgyz–Tajik border conflict along with the claims over territories has become a symbol of nationalism between the Tajik and Kyrgyz peoples and states. The presence of a populist leadership in Kyrgyzstan and hypernationalist state ideology in Tajikistan can be argued are among the main reasons for the escalation of the border conflict. Interviewee Anonymous-f blames poverty and low level of education, in addition to “weakness of public institutions” as factors that led to the escalation of the conflict. He adds:

An even greater role was played by the factor of the large number of security forces which were driven to the border [by both sides]. There is, however, still a chance to avoid a Karabakh-like scenario and make the Tajik–Kyrgyz border the border of friendship.¹³⁴

In reality, there have been plenty of acute statements by the representatives of both sides which had led to the escalation of tension. The situation appears to have turned ugly around when the elites of the two states decided to utilize nationalistic rhetoric in relation to the border conflict. In March 2021, the Kyrgyz GKNB head Kamchibek Tashiev during his public statement alluded to the possibility of taking ownership of the Vorukh enclave in exchange for 12,000 hectares of Kyrgyz’s Batken province near the border areas with Tajikistan.¹³⁵ This was kind of a sharp speech which spread in the Kyrgyz media and which antagonized the Tajik authorities. Moreover, the residents of the Vorukh enclave were concerned and frightened due to such a speech from the Kyrgyz side. Here, a response from the opposing side was not long in coming.

On 9 April 2021, the president of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon, in a meeting with the residents of the Vorukh enclave stated: “There have not been any talks about the possible exchange of Vorukh for another territory in the last 19 years, and there is no possibility for it.”¹³⁶ It was a statement that assured the local people not to panic. Moreover, it was also a speech that encouraged the residents to feel a sense of patriotism.

¹³³ Quoted in Clements *op. cit.*, p. 2.

¹³⁴ Interview with Anonymous-f *op. cit.*

¹³⁵ Catherine Putz, “Violent clashes at the troublesome Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border,” *Land Portal News*, 4 May 2021, tinurl.com/hwbpv7vy (accessed 1 January 2024).

¹³⁶ Radio Free Europe. “No plans to swap volatile Vorukh exclave for Kyrgyz land, Tajik president tells residents,” 9 April 2021, tinurl.com/537xrnj9 (accessed 3 January 2024).

This moment not only encouraged the local people but inspired a sense of heightened nationalism throughout the country. After such statements, the people of both states began exchanging provocative messages on social media and calling each other aggressors. Furthermore, both governments accused each other of violating protocols and use of aggression. On 18 September 2022, the Government of Kyrgyzstan stated the following on its official website:

We strongly protest the unlawful destructive actions of the Republic of Tajikistan, which violated all previously reached agreements by sending in advance its military forces to the border of Kyrgyzstan and unreasonably attack[ing] border and civilian facilities ...¹³⁷

Tajikistan, in turn, opposed the above statement and provided its own version of events. On its official statement to the OSCE in 23 September 2022, Tajikistan accused the Kyrgyz side of “continuing its provocative actions through heavy military deployment at the border areas even after the reached ceasefire agreement.”¹³⁸ This further escalated tensions and hostility between the two nations and states. On social media, people from different regions of the two states, in turn, expressed their readiness to go to the disputed border areas and defend their territorial integrity. Regarding this period, Anonymous-e says:

[The conflict served as a tool] for the elites of both states to raise the patriotic spirit of their people and distract their attention through the difficulties (the border conflict). The conflict is solvable. Moreover, the presence of hypernationalism and populism by the two sides was there. It is one of the reasons for the escalation of the border conflict and non-invitation of external actors.¹³⁹

In reality, there had been some serious internal issues in both countries which coincided with the border conflict. For instance, during 2021-2022, the case of protests and violence in the Mountainous Badakhshan Autonomous Province (aka “Badakhshan”) of Tajikistan was among the potential threats to the stability of the Tajik regime. The Pamiri ethnic minority in Badakhshan had expressed their discontent against the central government for injustices towards them. The violence, according to *The Guardian*, caused

¹³⁷ Cabinet of Ministries of the Kyrgyz Republic. “Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic,” 18 September 2022, tinyurl.com/mrynf9t (accessed 31 December 2024).

¹³⁸ OSCE, “Statement by the Delegation of Tajikistan on ‘On the continued provocative and aggressive military actions by the Kyrgyz Republic against the Republic of Tajikistan’,” Permanent Mission of the Republic of Tajikistan to the OSCE, OSCE Permanent Council 1390, PC.DEL/1355/22, 23 September 2022, tinyurl.com/3d6pf4ky (accessed 2 January 2024).

¹³⁹ Interview with Anonymous-e *op. cit.*

the lives of 25 people killed by the government security forces.¹⁴⁰ At about the same time, the situation in Kyrgyzstan was not smooth either, where the country was experiencing a weakening of its democracy and a shift towards authoritarianism. Among other things, in 2022, the Kyrgyz authorities began pressuring and chasing independent journalists in the country. In one incidence, a well-known journalist and human rights defender, Bolot Temirov, was accused of “illegal border crossing” and “drug possession” two days after releasing a report which alleged that a relative of the GKNB head Tashiev “was profiting from the private re-sale of oil produced by a state-owned refinery.”¹⁴¹ This situation caused anti-governmental sentiments by the Kyrgyz public. Thus, the 2022 border conflict served as an opportunity for the states to distract the people’s attention from problematic internal issues and ref-focus the people’s anger towards an outside adversary. On this issue, Umarov claims the following:

The conflict was some kind of an advantage for the states as not everything were perfect in both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Thus, the respective leaders of the countries needed to have some internal excuse that could consolidate society around them. Hence, both decided to use military force as the first approach to the border conflict. However, the situation went out of control and led to the emergence of new problems. In the end, however, it was not possible to endure further hostilities among the two states.¹⁴²

Another interviewee (Anonymous-c), however, states that the reason for not inviting the said IOs by the two states was “to keep the conflict at the minimum level and not to escalate high attention.”¹⁴³ But according to the rest of the experts and the existing literature, the governments of the two states were the ones who escalated the conflict in various ways. For instance, Anonymous-a mentions:

National pride, populism, and the cult of personality are the keys to preserving the conflict ongoing. Any soldier fighting and dying on the battlefield would not think of the interests, resources, and routes that elites strive for but with a sense of patriotism and the aim of defending the homeland.¹⁴⁴

In fact, those speeches of encouragement by the elites of the two states have only raised the feeling of patriotism and nationalism. However, the true intentions and interests of the two governments were never fully known. The outcome was the appearance of hostility

¹⁴⁰ Lorenzo Tondo, “Twenty-five ethnic Pamiris killed by security forces in Tajikistan protests,” *The Guardian*, 2022, [tinyurl.com/yckvacu2](https://www.tinyurl.com/yckvacu2) (accessed 4 January 2024).

¹⁴¹ IWPR, “Kyrgyz authorities arrest investigative journalist,” 2022, [tinyurl.com/mvv3xezf](https://www.tinyurl.com/mvv3xezf) (accessed 5 January 2024).

¹⁴² Interview with Umarov *op. cit.*

¹⁴³ Interview with Anonymous-c *op. cit.*

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Anonymous-a *op. cit.*

between the two nations who had previously lived side-by-side with friendly relations. The vicious attitudes, even hate, between the Tajik and Kyrgyz people towards each other after the border clashes between the states, as mentioned earlier, could be observed on social media, where the two sides were spreading fake and provocative news.¹⁴⁵ In addition, with a sense of patriotism and nationalism, some among both Kyrgyz and Tajik people had begun supporting and relying on their governments in what they perceived as defending and maintaining their homeland. Here, Umarov states that,:

the conflict ... was used by the political regimes of the states to nourish their supporters. Hence, going for a concession would have led to political suicide by the states, and asking external actors for support would have shown their inability and weakness toward the enemy. Here, their loyal supporters would turn away. Both states said that they would not give a meter of their land to the enemy. Thus, a retreat of the states would be perceived as a betrayal by their supporters who were, in turn, encouraged by the leaders of the states.¹⁴⁶

The situation had thus escalated after the statements by the governments and a concession would have led to more discontent and disillusionment from the people. Both governments had, intentionally or not, succeeded in taking the people's attention from domestic problems and dealing with the neighboring "enemy," instead. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), at least 150—mostly civilians—died in the two waves of clashes during the 2021 and 2022 clashes, with tens more injured, tens of thousands displaced, and millions of dollars of damages incurred.¹⁴⁷ HRW also writes that "during their brief but intense armed border conflict," both sides—Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan—in particular in September 2022, "committed apparent war crimes in attacks on civilians." Some of the deadliest attacks were done via Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 remote control armed drones¹⁴⁸—which Turkey had sold to both sides of the conflict.¹⁴⁹

"The populist statements by the Kyrgyz side and nationalistic by the Tajik side," therefore, according to interviewee Anonymous-b, "escalated the situation and led to brutal clashes and military actions with the terrible outcomes."¹⁵⁰ Still, nowadays, the overall

¹⁴⁵ Cabar.asia, "How did the media and social media cover the conflict on the Tajik-Kyrgyz border?" 8 June 2021, tinyurl.com/bddybe96 (accessed 5 January 2024).

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Umarov *op. cit.*

¹⁴⁷ Sultanalieva *op. cit.*

¹⁴⁸ HRW, "Kyrgyzstan/Tajikistan: Apparent war crimes in border conflict," 2 May 2023, tinyurl.com/3tnx5cwj (accessed 4 January 2024).

¹⁴⁹ Kamila Ibragimova, "Kyrgyzstan alarmed by Tajikistan's reported purchase of Bayraktar drones," *Eurasianet*, 28 April 2022, tinyurl.com/5a8autfw (accessed 4 January 2024).

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Anonymous-b *op. cit.*

tension has decreased substantially as there are ongoing regular negotiations on delimitation and demarcation of the border. This progress is welcomed as the continuance of the previous aggression, enmity, and negative emotions of the states and their peoples could have potentially led to far worse scenarios, such as the Nagorno-Karabakh case, but the endurance of a peace and stability under conditions of populism and hypernationalism remains a wait and see game. In this regard, Anonymous-a claims:

I believe that one nation among these two states has to be more civically responsible to end the conflict [once and for all]. However, it would be that nation that is less affected by the national tales and sacred purposes. In other words, let us see who will first wake up from obscurantism and fanaticism to end the dispute objectively and emotionless.¹⁵¹

Overall, the border conflict between the two states has never been an advantage but a frustration for the ordinary people. Since their creation as Soviet Socialist Republics in the early part of the previous century, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan had always lived side by side in a friendly and amicable environment. The violent clashes of 2021 and 2022, therefore, may have served the short-term interests of the two states, but definitely not benefited the ordinary largely innocent civilians on either side of the border.

H3 was set up to examine the influence of populism (in Kyrgyzstan) and hypernationalism (in Tajikistan) on the 2021 and 2022 Kyrgyz–Tajik border conflict. It aimed to define whether the populist and nationalistic leadership of the two states have been the reason for the escalation of the conflict and for not seeking the assistance of any of the collective security IOs which the two states are members of to resolve their border dispute. The majority of the experts interviewed for this study claim that indeed both populism and hypernationalism have acted as significant factors in the escalation of the conflict and the refusal of formally seeking assistance from collective security IOs in resolving the border conflict.

Nationalistic statements by state authorities appear to have nourished enmity among their supporters against the other side of the joint border. However, as history shows, such rhetoric and sentiments led to tragic consequences. At this stage, as the above experts mentioned, the two states could not seek concessions from the “enemy” or invite third actors to resolve what they felt was their “personal” conflict. Thus, after the 2021 clashes, while being still full of emotions, the two states failed to prevent the far more serious 2022 border clashes, as well. The populist and nationalistic statements by the two governments escalated the military tension on the ground and led to the deepening of

¹⁵¹ Interview with Anonymous-a *op. cit.*

hostilities among the two nations, the effects of which are observed until nowadays. Sending an exclusive invitation by the two states to one of the collective security IOs back in 2021 may likely have prevented the 2022 wave of attacks, thus resulting in a far better outcome today. As is, however, the 2021 and 2022 violent clashes between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are already among the black stains and tragic moments in Central Asian history. For now, it is only possible to imagine “what if” the said IOs had been invited by the states and could they have prevented and resolved the border conflict?

All in all, based on the above responses by the experts and examined literature, we can conclude that the null hypothesis of no relationship between the populism and hyper-nationalism among the two states as factors leading to the escalation of the conflict and for the two states not extending invitation of assistance from a collective security IO can be rejected. Therefore, **we fail to reject H₃**.

Chapter conclusions

This chapter served to test the three hypotheses of this thesis via conducted interviews with experts and review of existing literature. Regarding the first hypothesis (H₁), as the majority of the experts interviewed claimed, given its invasion of and preoccupation with Ukraine, Russia may have lost its formerly strong influence in Central Asia and was thus unable to prevent or resolve the border conflict between the two states. This was observed during 2021 and 2022 when the two sides did not consider any advice from Russia and Russia-led organizations in favor of a peaceful resolution of the conflict—and thus went to war with each other. That said, in other areas (such as culture, education and economics), as the experts also mentioned, Russia's influence is still rather strong in Central Asia. However, there was still strong evidence to conclude that **we fail to reject H₁**.

For the second hypothesis (H₂), as the majority of experts claimed, it is both the lack of sufficient interest by the West and the Western-influenced collective security IO of OSCE in the Kyrgyz–Tajik still minor conflict (as compared to Ukraine War) that lead to their non-insistence of the Western pS of the OSCE to entice and seek an invitation by the two conflicted states for the same IO to assist in the resolution of the border conflict. Moreover, the majority of the experts interviewed agreed that Western preoccupation with the war in Ukraine served as a significant factor in their lack of genuine interest in the border conflict between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. However, H₂'s proposed factor of disillusionment in engagement in Central Asia due to the West's de facto defeat in Afghanistan and victory of the Taliban, according to significant number of experts interviewed, played almost no role in the lack of sufficient interest by the West in the

Tajik–Kyrgyz border conflict. As such our conclusion was that **we only partially fail to reject H₂**.

For the third hypothesis (H₃), the experts at hand claimed and concurred with the proposition that the presence of populism and hypernationalism in the leadership of the two states of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is among the crucial reasons for the escalation of the border conflict and reason for not extending an invitation to any of the collective security IOs to prevent and/or aid in the resolution of the conflict. The populist and nationalistic statements by key Kyrgyz and Tajik state officials gave hope and encouragement to their people, heightening their national pride and patriotism, but also led to the emergence of hostility between the two nations, in turn, putting the governments in a position of non-compromise with the “enemy,” and not considering the option of extending a joint invitation to an external actor, such the CSTO or the OSCE, to aid in the resolution of the border conflict. Therefore, our decision when testing this hypothesis was that: **we fail to reject H₃**.

Chapter V

CONCLUSIONS

“No mother would ever willingly sacrifice her sons for territorial gain, for economic advantage, for ideology.”

–U.S. President Ronald Reagan speaking to students and faculty of Moscow State University, USSR¹⁵²

As was alluded to in this thesis, the roots of the Kyrgyz–Tajik border conflict go back to the Soviet era, a time when the two territories of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan had yet to become full-fledged Soviet Republics. On this point, journalist and researcher Chris Rickleton writes:

Although the dispute did not turn violent until independence [from the Soviet Union], analysts note that Tajik and Kyrgyz opinions on where the border begins and ends have been at odds since 1924, when Tajikistan was still an autonomous territory inside the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic and the territory of modern-day Kyrgyzstan had a similar status inside the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic.¹⁵³

A century later, not only had disagreements on borders not subsided, but the bloodletting and destruction from the 2021 and 2022 waves of violent inter-state border conflict between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan set records for the region, with an estimated 150 deaths, hundreds injured, tens of thousands displaced and incurred damages in tens of millions of dollars on private property and public infrastructure.¹⁵⁴

Repercussions

Overall, the 2021 and 2022 border conflict had negative repercussions not only on the lives and wellbeing of local communities on either side of the often murky border, but also on the overall citizens of the two states, regardless of their location. In the beginning of the conflict in 2021, efforts were made by the each of two states to repress the citizens of the other state. Among others, for example, the first wave of the clashes negatively influenced students from Tajikistan studying in Kyrgyzstan. According to *Eurasianet*, on 21 May, the Government of Kyrgyzstan “imposed [a] temporary restriction on Tajik citizens entering,

¹⁵² Ronald Reagan, “Speech at Moscow State University,” *Digital Library*, ID 1234, 31 May 1988, tinyurl.com/y4fkf4w6 (accessed 7 January 2024).

¹⁵³ Rickleton *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁴ Sultanalieva *op. cit.*

leaving, and transiting its territory.”¹⁵⁵ And on 25 May of the same year, a reported 177 citizens of Tajikistan were not allowed to enter Kyrgyzstan, while arriving by plane (and possibly by other modes of travel, as well) and were sent back to their home country or another country of residence.¹⁵⁶ Since that time, Tajikistani students can only enter Kyrgyzstan with a special permission sent in advance. And after the 2022 border clashes, amid the pressure and tension, many Tajik students studying in Kyrgyzstan were forced to transfer to Tajik universities to continue their studies.¹⁵⁷ In September 2022, Tajikistan’s MFA released a statement documenting “cases of harassment, intimidation, discrimination and persecution [including illegal arrests and extortion]” of its citizens residing in Kyrgyzstan, including forceful deportation back to Tajikistan.¹⁵⁸

Similar problems encountered by Kyrgyz nationals in Tajikistan were much smaller in dimension largely due to the fact that there have always been far fewer Kyrgyzstanis residing in Tajikistan as compared to Tajikistanis in Kyrgyzstan. That said, the Kyrgyz authorities have complained about the persecution of their nationals in Tajikistan. In early-January 2022, Kyrgyzstan’s MFA issued a statement expressing its concern over a reported decision “on mass deportation/expulsion” of Kyrgyz citizens temporarily residing in Tajikistan. In its statement, the Kyrgyz MFA accused Tajikistan of violating Article 36 of the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations whereby “the competent authorities of the receiving state must immediately notify the consular post of the sending state, if a national of that state is arrested, imprisoned or detained pending trial within its consular district.”¹⁵⁹

Silver lining?

Despite the above ordeals on local communities living in border zones and Kyrgyz and Tajik nationals visiting or living in the other republic, it would also be appropriate to posit that the two deadly border clashes, especially that of September 2022, have to some extent awakened and sobered the two states in terms of responsibility and attention to ending their

¹⁵⁵ Ayzirek Imanaliyeva, “Kyrgyzstan turns back Tajik nationals as tensions persist,” *Eurasianet*, 26 May 2021, tinyurl.com/4re65jev (accessed 6 January 2024).

¹⁵⁶ Radio Free Europe, “Kyrgyzstan temporarily bars Tajik passengers after deadly border clashes,” 26 May 2021, tinyurl.com/24bena6 (accessed 6 January 2024).

¹⁵⁷ *Asia-Plus*, “Tajik students want to return home from Kyrgyzstan,” 28 September 2022, tinyurl.com/bdzhc6xc (accessed 6 January 2024).

¹⁵⁸ MFA of the Republic of Tajikistan, “Statement on the continued policy of persecution of citizens of Tajikistan and ethnic Tajiks in Kyrgyzstan,” 22 September 2022, tinyurl.com/u4ebfd3w (accessed 8 January 2024).

¹⁵⁹ 24KG-c, “Foreign ministry comments on the expulsion of Kyrgyzstanis from Tajikistan,” 6 January 2022, tinyurl.com/mr32pfc (accessed 8 January 2024).

long-running border dispute and attempting to find means to prevent future clashes. Already, in the aftermath of the April 2021 clashes, the two sides had met on high level contacts discussing a variety of topics of mutual interest, if not making sufficient progress on border delimitation. Still, in a joint statement on 29 June 2021, the two presidents, Japarov and Rahmon, did mention cooperation on the border issue:

The heads of state discussed issues related to the delimitation and demarcation of the Kyrgyz-Tajik state border. They spoke in favor of accelerating negotiations and searching for mutually acceptable solutions within the framework of the Intergovernmental Commission on the Delimitation and Demarcation of the Kyrgyz-Tajik State Border.¹⁶⁰

And sometime after the end of the 2022 wave of border violence, both states began approaching the issue of reconciliation and discussions on the conflict far more seriously. Here, membership in the same collective security IOs which presumably were rather “inactive” (as the title of this thesis implies) may have been instrumental in sobering the two sides given repeated encounters in forums often in semi-formal, even informal, settings where Kyrgyz and Tajik authorities repeatedly encountered each other as OSCE participating States, CSTO member states and members of other inter-governmental IOs—including the UN.

On 22 September 2022, while speaking at the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna, though the representative of the Tajik delegation accused the Kyrgyz side of “provocative actions through heavy military deployment,” he also stated his country’s stance on “the principles of peaceful settlement of all disputes at the border areas.” The statement further read that: “During the whole period of these unfortunate clashes at the border [with neighboring Kyrgyzstan], Tajikistan has been demonstrating strong political will to solve all border-related issues through negotiations and on the basis of the previously reached agreements.”¹⁶¹ The Kyrgyz representative to the OSCE, in turn, in early-December 2022 stated that his country “stands for solving conflicts exclusively through peaceful negotiations by observing the basic principles of international law, such as sovereign equality, territorial integrity, and non-interference in the internal affairs of the state ...

¹⁶⁰ Sadyr Japarov and Emomali Rahmon, “Presidents Sadyr Japarov and Emomali Rahmon adopted a joint statement,” Office of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, 29 June 2021, tinyurl.com/7htnsvxy (accessed 8 January 2024).

¹⁶¹ OSCE, “Statement by the Delegation of Tajikistan on ‘On the continued provocative and aggressive military actions by the Kyrgyz Republic against the Republic of Tajikistan’,” Permanent Mission of the Republic of Tajikistan to the OSCE, OSCE Permanent Council 1390, PC.DEL/1355/22, 23 September 2022, tinyurl.com/3d6pf4ky (accessed 2 January 2024).

Principles that are enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act ...”¹⁶²

If the factors of populism and hypernationalism played a role in escalating the conflict into a war-like scenario, the conflict, itself, with its shocking intensity and destructive power may have brought up a moment where the two sides saw it as senseless to continue a conflict that would only cause more damage, death, and destruction. The regular face-to-face meetings at international forums by diplomats and high level officials of the two states, even if not discussing the border issue per se may have facilitated a shared sense of humanity and mutual understanding and responsibility to their citizenry. Here, Anonymous-f elaborates:

Peaceful resolution of conflicts is always preferable. [A] conflict should not be allowed to become chronic. Military confrontation consumes huge resources and at the same time gives absolutely nothing useful to the country's economy [considering that] Kyrgyzstan and ... Tajikistan are among the poorest countries in the [postcommunist] world, continuance of the conflict does not make sense for them.¹⁶³

The year of progress?

If 2022 saw the worst inter-state border conflict ever in Central Asia’s history since the creation of its nation-states, 2023 saw major achievements in inter-state dialogue and reconciliation. Efforts in making progress in solving the border dispute accelerated by mid-to late-2023 when the Intergovernmental Commission on Delimitation and Demarcation of the Kyrgyz–Tajik State Border (aka “Joint Commission”) was activated and frequently convened. From among the two heads of state, it was Kyrgyzstan’s President Japarov who brought up the border issue in his speech to the UN General Assembly in September 2023. While surely alluding to their neighbor to the south—Tajikistan— Japarov stated: “We want to live in peace, harmony, and friendship with all our neighbors.”¹⁶⁴ In October of the same year, referring to the ongoing negotiations on border delimitations, Kyrgyzstan’s GKNB chair, Tashiyev, commented: “Until now, we have tried to resolve this issue peacefully, and we will continue to do so. Our head of state has directed us to resolve issues through negotiations. But at the same time, it must be said that an act of aggression was committed against our state last year. We will not allow such aggression in future.”

¹⁶² OSCE, “Statement by the Head of the Delegation of Kyrgyzstan at the Plenary Session of the 29th OSCE Ministerial Council, Łódź, Poland, 1-2 December 2022,” Youtube, 9:45 mins. [youtube.com/watch?v=eaRitP_gJrs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaRitP_gJrs) (accessed 3 January 2024).

¹⁶³ Interview with Anonymous-f *op. cit.*

¹⁶⁴ Sadyr Zhaparov, “Statement by the President of the Kyrgyz Republic H.E. Sadyr Zhaparov at the General Debate of the 78th session UN General Assembly,” 19 September 19, 2023, tinyurl.com/423fc285 (accessed 5 January 2024).

And according to *Eurasianet*, despite some “tempers hav[ing] flared lower in the two countries’ respective hierarchies,” the two heads of state, Presidents Japarov and Rahmon, repeatedly “sought to strike conciliatory notes on the multiple times they ...met” in late-2023.¹⁶⁵

In November 2023, the Secretary General of the CSTO, Imangali Tasmagambetov, referred to progress having been made in the Kyrgyz–Tajik border negotiations and called the potentially impending settlement between the two member states as “an important, positive factor for the region as a whole.”¹⁶⁶ And by mid-December 2023, weeks after having signed what some outlets have referred to as a “mysterious” Protocol 44, the two sides reported that over 90% of their shared border had already been delimited and agreed upon¹⁶⁷—a significant progress given that the two waves of clashes in 2021 and 2022 had occurred when only about half (53%) of the shared 917km of border had been delimited.¹⁶⁸

From here, it is obvious that both states desire an end to future border clashes and are willing to find the means, including border delimitations and other confidence-building strategies to end the conflict and resolve their issue in a peaceful way. In this regard, Umarov states:

I think it is now beneficial for the two sides to find a permanent solution as both states have legibly said that they do not want any problems in the borders and continue negotiations on the issue. However, the question is that how easy is it to handle all of the outcomes from the conflict. Because there are still horrible memories and hostilities among the people with desire for revenge due to the loss of close relatives [or damage to their property] ... It will be very hard and would require many years to change people’s negative attitudes toward each other [abetted by the state] to the previous friendly environment.¹⁶⁹

Where do we stand?

At the end of the day, it is still possible for the two nation-states of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the leaders of which have referred to their countries’ relations being “based on centuries-old historical ties, common cultural and spiritual values”¹⁷⁰ to restore their

¹⁶⁵ Eurasianet, “Cautious hopes mounting for Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan border deal,” 13 October 2023, [tinyurl.com/442df9zk](https://www.eurasianet.com/en/article/442df9zk) (accessed 1 January 2024).

¹⁶⁶ Russia-Islamic World. “CSTO Secretary General notes progress in the settlement between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan,” 23 November 2023. [tinyurl.com/muf9uww7](https://www.russia-islamicworld.com/muf9uww7) (accessed 4 January 2024).

¹⁶⁷ Catherine Putz, “Big promises on the Tajik–Kyrgyz border,” *The Diplomat*, 15 December 2023, [tinyurl.com/bdffhr8k](https://www.diplomat.com/bdffhr8k) (accessed 4 January 2024).

¹⁶⁸ Kurmanalieva *op. cit.*

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Umarov *op. cit.*

¹⁷⁰ Japarov and Rahmon *op. cit.*

previous friendly relations. This, however, would need much more efforts as the 2021 and 2022 conflict caused real enmity between the two neighbors. Here, Anonymous-d elaborates on the overall situation and adds that progress

depends on the border stability of the states. If the border issues and conflicts are decreased and resolved, good relations (mostly trade and economic) will be restored and enhanced. There were times when both states did not have big ambitions but supported each other in many perspectives. A similar case is the civil war in Tajikistan. I believe that the previous warm relations will be restored in the future as these brotherly nations have a common history and historical roots.¹⁷¹

As Umarov, one of the experts interviewed for this thesis, reminded us, it is easier for the states to restore good relations with each other, rather than the people. The national interests of the two states may take a positive or negative character at any time. However, the two ordinary peoples, believing in their governments, had perceived the border conflict as a moment of patriotism and resistance against the supposed enemy. Moreover, the social media platforms of both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan served as forums of provocation and emergence of hostilities between the two nations. Thus, it would need serious efforts and desire for the states to spread a sense of kinship and peace throughout the two countries via every possible means. And this process could well begin when the ongoing border delimitation issues between these states is peacefully resolved. In brief, a full resolution is beneficial for both states as there cannot be significant development under endless chaos and instability. As the former Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee stated: “You can change friends, but not neighbors.”¹⁷²

It is not a secret that both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are the least economically developed countries in Central Asia and in fact in the whole post-communist world.¹⁷³ In this regard, the continuance of the border conflict would serve as a serious barrier for the development of both states. For now, we can only imagine what could have been if the said IOs—the OSCE or the CSTO—would have participated in preventing the escalation of clashes and resolving the border conflict in 2021 and 2022. In such cases, an intervention of a third unbiased actor as a mediator would have been a good option for the states as it could have contributed to the de-escalation of tension among the conflicting parts.

As a Central Asian citizen, I would love to see the presence of the collective

¹⁷¹ Interview with Anonymous-d *op. cit.*

¹⁷² *The Economic Times*, “You can change friend, but not neighbors,” 9 May 2003, [tinyurl.com/363zuaxz](https://www.tinyurl.com/363zuaxz) (accessed 6 January 2024).

¹⁷³ World Bank *op. cit.*

security IOs, in particular the OSCE or the CSTO or the inter-governmental organizations, including the UN, as mediators in Central Asian conflicts, which I think could play a highly positive role and lead to a better scenario for the conflicting parties and the region as a whole. Such IOs are far away by way of their headquarters from the states and most do not have a common historical and cultural tie with these countries. Thus, while intervening, the said IOs could ideally not be biased but serve as an objective and fair mediator. Moreover, we have seen that the said IOs possess significant abilities and techniques that have already been utilized in other conflicts. One of the instances is of the “OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine,” active from 2014 until 2022.¹⁷⁴ For much smaller conflicts, including the Kyrgyz–Tajik and other Central Asian conflicts, similar missions could be a good contribution for monitoring, reducing the tension, and preventing potential clashes. Here, as Anonymous-f mentioned in the analysis chapter, “The OSCE could play a positive role but with the goodwill (permission) of the authorities of the two countries.”¹⁷⁵ It has been already argued that such IOs were not invited by the states studied here to resolve their conflict. Therefore, as of now, it is hard to say what could have been done with the presence of the said IOs as real practice would have shown us more.

Anonymous-g claims, however, that the countries themselves, perhaps with partial assistance from various IOs, can resolve their differences—as what ultimately may be happening with the case of the Kyrgyz–Tajik border dispute:

What is happening in the relationship between the two neighboring countries is really causing serious harm to both their peoples, who have been closely cooperating on mutually beneficial terms for decades. Today, it is safe to say that almost all the existing international organizations have already been divided into camps busy with different issues. But close neighbors and to some extent, kindred people will be able to sort out the disagreements and overcome the current crisis.¹⁷⁶

Realistically, in terms of resolving this border conflict, the attention of many of the key IOs are at the moment far away from the Central Asian region, as there are currently much larger ongoing conflicts, such as the Ukraine War and the war in Palestine that preoccupies the worries of the UN and affiliated IOs. However, a serious involvement of the IOs under study in this research in potentially future Central Asian conflicts, including with border disputes, would well be logical and a positive contribution to stability and prosperity in the region.

¹⁷⁴ OSCE, “OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine,” 13 February 2022, tinyurl.com/2tj2a9aj (accessed 6 January 2024).

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Anonymous-f *op. cit.*

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Anonymous-g *op. cit.*

What of the future?

All in all, the last clashes between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have shown that military intervention by the states was not a good move as it merely escalated the size of the destruction on both sides. The inter-state military confrontation led to some serious outcomes for the local peoples and economy that has likely left disillusionment and opened the door to more troubles. In this regard, it is much beneficial for the two states to come to a common point and enhance a strong diplomatic and economic relations that could potentially open a new and positive historical chapter between these countries. Both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are currently on such a point where going for a military conflict with each other is the worst option. The two states are the poorest in the post-Soviet and postcommunist world. They cannot afford the destruction of their infrastructure, let alone the killing of their military personnel and innocent civilians to serve as options by way of resolving their border conflict. Thus, it is only logical and much more beneficial for both countries to fully resolve their border issue through bilateral negotiations and assistance from IO forums and institutions they are members, and begin mutual cooperation in different fields for a future of common development and prosperity.

A key existential factor not touched upon in this thesis is that of climate change which will increasingly and negatively affect both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and the rest of Central Asia. The effects of climate change and global warming will be cause for various problems such as access to fresh water, agricultural productivity, food security, melting of glaciers, threats to wildlife, etc.¹⁷⁷ In this regard, it is necessary for the Central Asian states to establish a common mechanism that would manage their natural resources, chiefly water, fairly and prevent potential conflicts in the region from the effects of climate change. They should thus collaborate in mitigation and adaption efforts and strive toward co-existence with neighboring states for a prosperous and peaceful future for all.

¹⁷⁷ Bermet Talant, "How is Climate Change affecting Central Asia," *Radio Free Europe*, 1 July 2022, tinyurl.com/yrnx93m5 (accessed January 6 2024).

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APPENDIX A: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

1. Anonymous-a, Expert on International Relations, Email interview, 27 October 2023.
2. Anonymous-b, Expert on Peace and Central Asian Studies, Zoom interview, 10 November 2023.
3. Anonymous-c, Expatriate political scientist, Associate Professor at a university in Kyrgyzstan, in-person interview, 11 November 2023.
4. Anonymous-d, Researcher and political scientist, Zoom interview, 13 November 2023.
5. Anonymous-e, Tajikistani expert on politics, Zoom interview, 15 November 2023.
6. Temur Umarov, Expert on China and Asia and Fellow at the Carnegie Eurasia Center, Skype interview, 18 November 2023.
7. Anonymous-f, Tajikistani journalist and media expert, Email interview, 18 November 2023.
8. Anonymous-g, Tajikistani journalist and expert in politics, Email interview, 20 November 2023.
9. Anonymous-h, International expert on security issues, Zoom interview, 30 November 2023.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. In your opinion, what is or are the cause/s behind the Tajik–Kyrgyz border conflict?
2. Why would Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan choose to target each other militarily? Are there any benefits to be had from the conflict by the sides?
3. Is it not beneficial for the two sides to talk and find a permanent solution to the conflict? If so, what is the most pragmatic way to do so?
4. Were there and can there be a role by international collective security organizations of CSTO, SCO, and OSCE in preventing the original skirmish or today resolving the Tajik–Kyrgyz border conflict?
5. The said collective security IOs which both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are members of appear not to have made concerted efforts to intervene diplomatically (let alone militarily) to resolve the said conflict. What do you think is the reason for their lack on initiative in resolving a conflict between two members of their organization?
6. Given Russia's historic and political weight over the region, its opinions are often either respected and followed by the Central Asian post-Soviet states. Do you agree or disagree that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has weakened both its status as soft and hard power in Central Asia? Furthermore, has not the Ukraine invasion made any call Russia for Central Asians to solve their conflicts peacefully lack credibility?
7. Likewise, have the Western states' focus on the Ukraine war made the relatively small, albeit violent, conflict between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan appear as insignificant and unworthy of intervention by the OSCE wherein the US and key European powers are members of?
8. Much of Central Asia had during the 2001-2021 was used as the "Northern Transition Network" to haul troops and supplies to Afghanistan via land air and the region's stability was largely sought after for that purpose only. In your opinion, has not the US and its European allies' loss to the Taliban lessened their interest in Central Asia? And has does not such loss of interest discouraged the West to get involvement diplomatically in the Tajik-Kyrgyz conflict via the OSCE?
9. The two states (of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) have also not asked for intervention by any of the said collective security organizations. As "internal factors" would you agree or disagree that Tajikistan's decades' long state-engineered "hypernationalism" and Kyrgyzstan's current "populist" leadership have fueled the animosity between the two sides?