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Evolution of military policy in Central Asian States in the Post-Soviet period: Between the legacy of the USSR and new threats

Abstract. The study aimed to examine changes in the military policies of Central Asian countries, with a focus on the Kyrgyz Republic, after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The research used content analysis of the Kyrgyz military doctrine and national security concept, comparative analysis of the military doctrines of Central Asian countries – Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan – and a case study approach on the border conflict with Tajikistan in April-May 2021 and the six-day armed conflict with Tajikistan in September 2022. The results showed that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan faced challenges such as fragmented military infrastructure, resource insufficiency, and cross-border conflict risks. These risks led to a revision of the military doctrine and national security strategy between 2021 and 2023. A distinctive feature of the changed military policy is the pursuit of neutrality, peaceful conflict resolution, and a focus on the transformation of threats – hybrid, informational, and cyber. Unlike other Central Asian countries, the military budget of the Kyrgyz Republic is limited to 1.5% of gross domestic product, which motivates the country to avoid an arms race and opt for a more technological approach to national security. The lack of funds for large-scale rearmament is compensated by Kyrgyzstan's participation in international alliances and military exercises and its agreement to maintain limited foreign presence. The experience of Kyrgyzstan can be used to prevent cross-border conflicts, create an integrated security system, and ensure stable regional development

Keywords: national security; cross-border conflict; regional security; international alliances; military exercises

Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union (USSR) led to changes in the military policies of Central Asian states – Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and the Kyrgyz Republic. The former union members faced challenges such as fragmented military infrastructure and a vulnerable security system. The relevance of this work lies in understanding how Central Asian countries transformed their military policies to overcome these challenges and create an individual trajectory in the changed realities. O. Göksel & N. Huseynova (2024) in their study pointed to the significant influence of the USSR on the formation of the political agenda in Central Asian countries. Using a postcolonial theoretical model, the cited experts argued that Soviet policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia took the form of political repression, economic exploitation, and cultural assimilation, exhibiting key features of colonial rule. Z. Khonelidze & M. Bregvadze (2024) emphasised that after the end of World War II, the collapse of the Soviet Union became the second most significant

historical event, drawing global attention to the issues of peaceful coexistence of the newly independent states. The cited experts noted the priority of international cooperation, which led to the creation of procedures for ensuring military security in the region. Ö.F. Kocatepe & M. Şahin (2024), however, drew attention to the insufficient effectiveness of the protocols implemented, as decades after the collapse of the USSR, Central Asia remains a region of political, socio-economic, and military tension. Experts proposed the need for new approaches to military policy to ensure stability in the region. In academic discourse, the idea was considered that in the post-Soviet period, the development of Central Asian countries was influenced by political and military challenges. S. Chatterjee (2024) argued that during the Cold War, the Soviet member states were in forced confrontation with the countries of the pro-Western bloc, leading to strategies based on harsh military rhetoric. However, these strategies changed after Central Asian countries gained political independence

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and new challenges arose, primarily related to ensuring the security of citizens. According to S. Chatterjee, emerging security issues were driven by the growth of transnational criminal groups, illegal immigration, water security, climate change, and other factors. A. Utebayev (2025) in his work stated that since February 2022, Central Asian countries entered a new phase in the development of their military policies. According to the expert, the beginning of this phase coincided with Russia's full-scale military aggression against Ukraine and the subsequent regional and geopolitical challenges. A. Utebayev also emphasised that these challenges were addressed in 2022 in Cholpon-Ata by the five leaders of Central Asian countries, who expressed their readiness to create a comprehensive regional strategy to address common security issues and ensure the economic and infrastructure development of the region.

S. Krapohl & A. Vasileva-Dienes (2020) in their comparative study argued that the creation of a universal security strategy is complicated by the crisis of the liberal democratic model and the strengthening of authoritarian trends in certain Central Asian countries, including Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic. The researchers pointed out that the spread of these trends is linked to the clearing of political space from opposition, which hinders transformational processes that have proven successful in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The effectiveness of Kazakhstan's and Uzbekistan's approaches to creating an integrated military policy and ensuring regional security was also highlighted by A. Kazhenova (2024), who studied the dynamics of integration processes starting from the 2000s. The expert emphasised that in 2005, new challenges to military-political stability arose in the region related to the refusal of some countries – Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan – to participate in integration processes. A. Kazhenova proposed that the conflicts arising from this refusal could be mitigated by using Stanley Hoffman's model of intergovernmental cooperation. Despite more than three decades of independence, the development of military policy in Central Asian countries, particularly the Kyrgyz Republic, remains an insufficiently studied issue. Analysing the key historical and geopolitical features of the country since 1991, F. Tian (2024) noted that the multi-vector direction of national diplomacy was rolled back in 2021 and replaced with an autocratic governance model. A similar idea was found in the work of A. Serikzhanova *et al.* (2024), who conducted a comparative analysis of the military policies of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and the Kyrgyz Republic. Based on the results obtained, A. Serikzhanova *et al.* noted the fragmentary nature of national efforts to create military policies based on democratic ideals and civic engagement. The analysis of the cited sources indicated insufficient understanding of national strategies for the creation and implementation of military policy in certain Central Asian states. Considering the existing gaps in academic discourse, the goal of this study was to trace the evolution of the military policy of the Kyrgyz Republic since 1991. To achieve this goal, the following tasks were set: to determine the key stages of the country's military policy development in the post-Soviet period; to identify the key factors that influenced its formation; and to propose strategies to mitigate threats for the further development of military policy in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Materials and Methods

Several tools were used in this study, including content analysis aimed at identifying key concepts, priorities, and changes in the rhetoric regarding the military policy of the Kyrgyz Republic. The content analysis was based on selecting key sources that reflect the official position of the state and current directions in military policy. Foundational documents analysed were the Military Doctrine of Kyrgyzstan (2023) and the Concept of National Security of the Kyrgyz Republic (2021), as they establish strategic priorities and define the framework for defence planning. Additionally, public statements were included in the analysis to assess how these strategic positions were interpreted by senior political and military leadership: President S. Japarov's speech on key security threats (Sadyr Japarov named..., 2021) and the comments of the Chief of the General Staff, E. Terdikbaev, regarding military reforms in 2021–2022 (Military Doctrine of Kyrgyzstan, 2023). The content analysis considered not only military threats but also informational, biological, and hybrid security threats. To contextualise the official positions, an analytical review of Kyrgyzstan's rearmament efforts in 2021–2022 (Olmos, 2023) was used, reflecting expert evaluations of the changes being implemented. Other materials not directly related to strategic documents or lacking sufficient credibility and official status were deliberately excluded from the sample to ensure representativeness and reliability of the analysis results. A comparative analysis of the military policies of Kyrgyzstan (Military Doctrine of Kyrgyzstan, 2023; Wallace & Rodriguez, 2024) and other Central Asian countries – Kazakhstan (Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 554, 2017), Uzbekistan (Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. ZRU-45, 2018), Tajikistan (The national army..., 2024), and Turkmenistan (Military Doctrine of Independent..., 2014) – was conducted to identify common trends and differences in the evolution of security approaches in the region. The comparison focused on parameters such as key provisions of national military doctrines, military budgets, the presence of foreign military forces in Central Asian countries (including the Russian Federation, United States, and China), membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), frequency and forms of participation in military exercises, including CSTO and SCO Peace Mission, anti-terrorism exercises in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (XUAR), Birlestik and Steppe Eagle of NATO, and the weapons used.

Given the emphasis on military policy in the Kyrgyz Republic, a historical-genetic method was used to study the logic and causes of transformations in the national military-political field. The historical-genetic method relied on data from ten (N = 10) academic sources (Gyene, 2022; Ismailbekova, 2024; Biswal, 2024) that helped highlight and study key phases in the evolution of the Kyrgyz Republic's military policy: Soviet legacy, the establishment of the army, transformations after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks (Dzhuraev & McGlinchey, 2022; Nurlankyzy & Abildayev, 2024); integration processes after 2005 (Omidi *et al.*, 2024); and current transformations in national military policy. The historical-genetic method helped identify key factors in the development of

Kyrgyzstan's national military doctrine that were significant during its time in the USSR and remain relevant after 1991 (Thees & Erschamber, 2022; Saqib & Naazer, 2023; Usenaliev, 2024). In addition to these methods, a case study approach was used to gain a deeper understanding of how specific events in the country's history influence the choice of military-political strategies. Two case studies were analysed: the border conflict with Tajikistan in April-May 2021 (Dzhuraev & McGlinchey, 2022) and the six-day armed conflict with Tajikistan in September 2022 (Human Rights Watch, 2023). These cases were analysed from the perspective of the causes of escalation, the

consequences of the conflict, and its impact on changes in Kyrgyzstan's military policy.

Results

The content analysis of documents – Military Doctrine of Kyrgyzstan (2023), Concept of National Security of the Kyrgyz Republic (2021), President S. Japarov's statements on national security threats, and the explanations from Chief of General Staff E. Terdikbaev – identified several thematic clusters that provide insights into the country's military policy. The key thematic clusters and their sources or context are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Thematic clusters in selected documents revealing Kyrgyz Republic's military policy

Theme	Frequency of mentions	Source/context
Defense of national sovereignty	High	Doctrine, statements by the General Staff and President
Transformation of threats	High	Statements by the President, national security concept
Information and cyber security	Medium	National security concept, statements by the President
Neutrality in regional conflicts	High	Statements by the General Staff, national security doctrine
Military reform	High	Statements by the General Staff, national security doctrine
Participation in international alliances	Medium	National security concept
Countering terrorism	Medium	National security concept

Note: frequency of mentions was calculated based on manual selection of key themes formally recorded in texts, recurring across multiple sources or by multiple speakers, and representing the conceptual emphasis in the analysed documents

Source: compiled by the author

From the table provided, it follows that Kyrgyzstan is undergoing a systematic update of its national defence policy in response to the changing nature of threats. In the rhetoric of the leaders, including S. Japarov and E. Terdikbaev, there is a clear orientation towards preventive and peaceful measures, with a focus on resilience and digital transformation. It was also concluded that the military doctrine of the Kyrgyz Republic and the national security concept are synchronised and reflect a priority on defence, neutrality, and a reformist approach. The content analysis showed that the Military Doctrine of Kyrgyzstan (2023) is a strategic document aimed at ensuring state security and the sustainable development of the country in the face of modern challenges. The doctrine focuses on the protection of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the security of citizens. It emphasises the necessity of adapting the armed forces to new forms of threats, including instability in neighbouring regions and the transformation of the nature of potential conflicts. In this regard, the doctrine is oriented towards preventive measures, with an emphasis on reducing the risks of armed clashes. One of the key points in the new document is the strengthening of Kyrgyzstan's military power based on defensive policies. The doctrine explicitly states the priority of peaceful means to resolve international disputes, which is reflected in the statement by the Chief of the General Staff, E. Terdikbaev, that Kyrgyzstan rejects the use of force to resolve regional disputes. This statement reflects the country's commitment to neutrality in international conflicts and its desire to position itself as a responsible participant in regional security, avoiding escalation and militarisation of foreign policy. The doctrine also outlines significant steps in the reform of the national armed forces. Key measures include the reorganisation of the army structure, the creation of new battalions, improvements in logistics, and enhancing

personnel training. Special attention is given to increasing the motivation of military personnel and ensuring their social protection. These reforms were carried out in 2021-2022 and became a logical continuation of the state's efforts to modernise the defence sector, strengthen internal resilience, and improve the ability to respond effectively to a wide range of threats in a rapidly changing regional and global environment.

The Concept of National Security of the Kyrgyz Republic (2021) reflects the country's transition to a more comprehensive and adaptive understanding of modern threats. One of the key provisions of the document is the recognition of the transformation of traditional challenges – from direct military aggression to hybrid, informational, and cyber threats. The concept emphasises that the vulnerability of state structures, limited resources, and weak institutional resilience make the country susceptible to destabilising factors. The analysed document also addresses threats from international terrorism and extremism, the rise of transnational crime, as well as environmental and technological risks, which are exacerbated by the unstable situation in neighbouring countries. In response to these challenges, the Concept formulates a series of strategic priorities aimed at strengthening national security at all levels. First and foremost, it focuses on enhancing the protection of state borders as the foundation of territorial integrity. Cybersecurity is given significant importance – in the context of the digitalisation of public and state life, the protection of information systems has become an integral part of national defence. At the same time, the document stresses the need to strengthen state institutions, improve their resilience to internal and external pressures, which implies the implementation of reforms aimed at enhancing management efficiency and ensuring transparency in decision-making processes (Isaev *et al.*, 2025). A key focus

of the concept is the development of international and regional cooperation in the field of security. Kyrgyzstan reaffirms its commitment to participating in multilateral structures such as the CSTO and the SCO, viewing them as platforms for coordinating efforts to combat transnational threats. Ensuring information security and countering disinformation and fake news, which can influence public opinion and provoke destabilisation, is also an important direction. Thus, the Concept of National Security reflects Kyrgyzstan's aim to build a comprehensive, balanced, and resilient system for responding to the full spectrum of modern challenges.

In addition to the aforementioned sources, understanding the national military policy is provided by the speech of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, S. Japarov, on November 27, 2021, which served as a signal for the revision of established approaches to national security issues (Sadyr Japarov named..., 2021). In his speech, the head of state indicated a shift in the nature of modern threats, emphasising that the country faces not only traditional military challenges but also new forms – informational, hybrid, and biological. The President specifically pointed out the vulnerability of existing state structures in the face of these transforming risks. According to him, the adaptability of institutions is insufficient for effective responses to new challenges, requiring urgent and systemic changes. In this context, S. Japarov emphasised the importance of a flexible policy based on the ability of government agencies to quickly adapt to the changing external and internal environment. He called for the immediate update of key strategic documents – the Concept of National Security and the Military Doctrine – to enhance their relevance and applicability in practice. The analysis of the President's rhetoric revealed a course towards the modernisation and reform of the security sector: the head of state consistently advocated for strengthening the management and analytical capacity of the government, paying attention not only to the defence aspect but also to informational, technological, and institutional dimensions.

The speech of S. Japarov can be seen as an impetus for the broader transformation of Kyrgyzstan's strategic culture – shifting from reactive to proactive thinking on national security, which was later reflected in the updated versions of the military doctrine and concept. In his speeches, the Chief of the General Staff of the Kyrgyz Republic, E. Terdikbaev, emphasised that the primary goal of the new Military Doctrine of Kyrgyzstan (2023) is not offensive actions but ensuring sustainable peace and preventing armed conflicts. This position reflects the strategic choice of the republic in favour of a peaceful foreign policy and demonstrates a desire to strengthen regional security through deterrence rather than escalation. Emphasising the defensive nature of the state's military strategy, E. Terdikbaev focused on the commitment to international obligations and peaceful resolution of disputes, which is particularly important given the complex situation in Central Asia. He also detailed the steps taken within the military reform carried out in 2021-2022. Specifically, the organisational structure of the armed forces was revised to increase mobility and efficiency. One of the key directions was the increase in personnel numbers and the formation of new battalions, which allowed for strengthening territorial defence and enhancing the army's operational capabilities. At the same time, measures to improve professional training for servicemen were strengthened, including education, technical re-equipment, and improving command mechanisms. According to E. Terdikbaev, these reforms aim to enhance the country's defence potential without departing from the policy of non-aggression and respecting the principles of international law. Despite the existence of several military policy documents and concepts, the national military doctrine is one of the key documents. Therefore, a decision was made to conduct a comparative analysis of the Military Doctrine of Kyrgyzstan with the military doctrines of other Central Asian countries – Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan. The results of this comparison are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparative analysis of military doctrines of Central Asian countries

Criteria / Country	Kyrgyzstan	Kazakhstan	Tajikistan	Uzbekistan	Turkmenistan
Key doctrinal provisions	Defensive orientation, neutrality, conflict prevention, military reforms	Defensive policy, sovereignty preservation, army reorganisation, weaponry modernisation (Mi 8, Su 30, etc.)	Defensive course, enhanced cooperation with Russia, emphasis on combating transnational threats	2017 Doctrine: rearmament, establishment of a domestic military-industrial complex, structural reorganisation, arms purchases from Russia and China	Official status – neutrality; doctrine less publicised, focus on internal security
Military budget (2023-24)	≈1.5% GDP, ≈USD 209 million	≈3% GDP, ≈USD 7.5 billion	≈1% GDP, ≈USD 120 million	Official data unavailable	Official data unavailable
External military presence	Russia: Kant base (~500 troops, Su 25, Mi 8, drones) and air defence system with Russia under CSTO	Baikonur space base (Russia), Sary Shagan range (Russia)	Russia: 201st base in Tajikistan (~7,000 troops), Chinese PAP base in the Pamirs since 2016	No permanent Russian or Chinese bases; cooperation on supplies and exercises	Neutrality: absence of official foreign military bases

Table 2. Continued

Criteria / Country	Kyrgyzstan	Kazakhstan	Tajikistan	Uzbekistan	Turkmenistan
Frequency and forms of exercises/ operations	Annual joint exercises with CSTO members, participation in CSTO Peace Mission, China-Kyrgyz anti-terror exercises in Xinjiang, participation in Birlestik 2024	Participation in CSTO exercises (annually), SCO Peace Mission, regional manoeuvres like Birlestik 2024 without Russia/China, exercises with India and neighbours	Regular CSTO exercises, joint operations with China (Cooperation series), counter-terrorism exercises on the Afghan border	Participation in SCO and Peace Mission exercises, NATO PfP training (Steppe Eagle until 2019), cooperation with Turkey, USA, China	Fragmented participation in international military exercises

Note: GDP – Gross Domestic Product; NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization; CSTO – Collective Security Treaty Organization; SCO – Shanghai Cooperation Organization

Source: compiled by the author based on B. Jardine & E. Lemon (2020), R.E. Hamilton (2024), V. Wallace & A.M.Rodriguez (2024), N. Drost *et al.* (2025), Permanent mission of the Republic of Tajikistan to the OSCE (2025)

The analysis revealed that the Kyrgyz Republic adopts a balanced and pragmatic approach to military policy, focusing on a defensive strategy and regional stability. Unlike Kazakhstan, with a military budget of 3% of GDP, Kyrgyzstan concentrates on the structural modernisation of its army despite limited resources. The military reform carried out in 2021–2022, which included increasing the number of troops and creating new battalions, demonstrates the country's aim to enhance its defence capabilities without adopting an aggressive stance. Kyrgyzstan plays a key role as an ally of Russia within the CSTO, hosting the Kant airbase, emphasising its involvement in collective security. At the same time, the country engages in military exercises with China, including counter-terrorism manoeuvres, reflecting a balancing act between the major foreign policy players in the region. Kyrgyzstan actively participates in CSTO and SCO exercises, but, unlike Tajikistan, it does not allow Chinese military installations on its territory, indicating a more cautious approach to relations with Beijing. Despite a relatively modest military budget, amounting to around 1.5% of GDP, Kyrgyzstan continues to develop its own forces, focusing on cybersecurity, personnel training, and enhancing the resilience of state institutions in the face of new threats. This approach is similar to Tajikistan's, yet Kyrgyzstan demonstrates greater openness to reforms and foreign policy balance. Thus, Kyrgyzstan serves as an example of a small but flexible state that, despite limited resources, prioritises regional cooperation, institutional renewal, and strategic neutrality in military policy.

The analysis also concludes that the military policy of the Kyrgyz Republic is an evolutionary process, with the collapse of the USSR being one of its key milestones. From 1991 to 2025, five stages of national military strategy development were identified: the formation of policy foundations; the stage of regional threats and defence institutionalisation; a period of political uncertainty and military stagnation; the era of reforms and regional integration; and the current period of ongoing transformations. In the early years of independence (1991–1999), Kyrgyzstan began developing its own military policy amid severe resource and infrastructure shortages (Biswal, 2024). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the country inherited a fragmented logistical base, lacked a professional military,

and heavily relied on assistance and personnel from former Soviet centres, primarily Russia. In 1992, the National Guard of the Kyrgyz Republic was established as one of the first attempts to institutionalise the security structures of the new independent state. A strategic step was the signing of an agreement in 1993 to create the Armed Forces of the Republic, legally formalising their status and initiating military development. The 1994 Military Doctrine, based on the principles of neutrality and a defensive strategy (Usenaliev, 2024), was a key document. It relied on the concept of collective security within the Commonwealth of Independent States and did not foresee offensive capabilities. The army remained poorly structured, with a limited budget and low combat readiness. Officer training and technical support were largely dependent on Russian assistance. Overall, this period can be characterised as the stage of institutional birth and external political dependence in military matters.

At the start of the 2000s, Kyrgyzstan's military course was shaped by growing regional threats, including conflicts in neighbouring Tajikistan and the rise of international terrorism, including the activities of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (Omidi *et al.*, 2024). These challenges prompted the republic to strengthen its defence planning and enhance flexibility in security matters. In 2001, in response to the global counter-terrorism agenda, Kyrgyzstan provided the USA and its allies with the Manas airbase to support Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan (Densmaa & Suren, 2023). This marked the beginning of NATO's military presence in Central Asia. Two years later, in 2003, Kyrgyzstan signed an agreement with Russia to host the Kant airbase as part of the CSTO, solidifying Russian influence in the defence sector. This period marked the start of a balancing policy between the two main external actors – the USA and Russia – in military affairs. Kyrgyzstan simultaneously developed cooperation with the CSTO and participated in NATO's Partnership for Peace programmes. The first steps towards the structural modernisation of the Armed Forces were also taken, including the creation of national command units and participation in multilateral international exercises. This period became a turning point from a passive defence policy to a more active, multi-level strategy for ensuring national and regional security. The period from 2005 to

2010 was one of internal political upheaval for Kyrgyzstan, including two revolutions, a change of government, and an escalation of interethnic tensions (Gyene, 2022). Amid the overall state crisis, the military sphere was overshadowed by political processes. The Armed Forces demonstrated weak mobility and limited capacity to respond to internal threats. Particularly indicative was the situation in 2010, when, during interethnic clashes in the Osh region, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, volunteer self-defence units, and local authorities became the main stabilising forces, while the army was almost entirely uninvolved. This period was characterised by a decline in the defence budget, a brain drain, and a lack of strategic direction in military policy (Ismailbekova, 2024). The country was in dire need of institutional strengthening of its army, but systemic reforms were not implemented at this time. Dependence on external support grew: it was Russia and the CSTO that acted as guarantors of Kyrgyzstan's security, regularly reaffirming their commitment to its territorial integrity. As a result, at this stage, the republic retained its status as a vulnerable regional security actor with limited own crisis response capabilities. From 2011 to 2020, Kyrgyzstan's military policy entered a phase of gradual reform and active regional integration (Saqib & Naazer, 2023). The stabilisation of state power under Presidents A. Atambayev and S. Jeenbekov was accompanied by attempts to institutionally strengthen the security sector and restore the combat readiness of the Armed Forces. Against this backdrop, the country began to participate more actively in international exercises within the CSTO (e.g., "Indestructible Brotherhood", "Rubezh", and others), as well as in joint counter-terrorism manoeuvres with China and the SCO, reflecting the republic's growing involvement in collective security mechanisms. Simultaneously, a new military concept was being developed, although it remained in draft form until 2021 (Thees & Erschamber, 2022). Bilateral cooperation with China intensified, particularly in securing the southern borders and combating transnational crime, including drug trafficking and illegal migration. During this period, new tasks for the military began to emerge, ranging from cybersecurity to supporting border infrastructure. Kyrgyzstan's military policy took on a more regional focus, coordinating efforts with neighbouring countries to address common security challenges.

With the coming to power of President S. Japarov in 2021, the country's military policy entered a phase of deep transformation aimed at adapting to new types of threats and strengthening national defence capabilities. In light of growing regional instability and global changes in the nature of modern conflicts, the president declared on 27 November 2021 the need to urgently revise the National Security Concept and Military Doctrine, with a focus on hybrid, cyber, and biological threats (Dzhuraev, 2022). This statement marked the beginning of updates to strategic documents and became a turning point in the development of the country's defence sector. Under the guidance of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, the Military Doctrine of Kyrgyzstan (2023) was approved. Simultaneously, in 2021–2022, a large-scale military reform was carried out: the personnel size was increased, new battalions were created, logistical support was enhanced, and the training system was improved. The republic actively participated in regional

CSTO exercises, such as "CSTO Shield", in bilateral manoeuvres with Turkey, and in joint operations with China, including counter-terrorism training (Nurlankyzy & Abildayev, 2024). The country's current military policy is characterised by a desire for balance between external centres of influence – Russia, China, and other partners – while simultaneously strengthening its own territorial defence and institutional stability. Thus, the republic demonstrates a course of strategic flexibility, modernity, and defensive self-identity. The analysis also established that Kyrgyzstan's involvement in regional conflicts has had a significant impact on its military policy evolution, including the border confrontation with Tajikistan in April–May 2021. This began on 28 April near the "Golovnoi" water distribution point in the Batken region – a strategically important site controlling access to an irrigation system crucial for both sides (Dzhuraev & McGlinchey, 2022). As a result of the armed conflict, which involved heavy equipment, mortars, and drones, over 50 people were killed, hundreds injured, dozens of settlements were damaged, and more than 30,000 people were evacuated. The main causes of the conflict were unresolved border delimitation and demarcation issues, water shortages, and competition for control over infrastructure. This case impacted the transformation of the country's military and national security systems. By May 2021, the government focused on strengthening the southern borders and increasing defence capabilities. President S. Japarov initiated a revision of the National Security Concept and Military Doctrine, considering new challenges, including hybrid and transnational threats (Sadyr Japarov named..., 2021). The reform of the Armed Forces was launched, with an emphasis on modernising border infrastructure, equipping it with advanced technology and weaponry, and improving service conditions on the border. Additionally, cooperation with CSTO allies in joint exercises and technical support was intensified. The conflict demonstrated the need for a shift from a primarily political-diplomatic approach to a more balanced defence policy system, combining deterrence, mobilisation readiness, and regional cooperation development.

The six-day armed conflict between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in September 2022 became the most large-scale and destructive escalation in the history of bilateral border disputes. The fighting, which began on 14 September, covered several areas of the border in the Batken region, including the Kulundu, Maksan, Dostuk, and Ak-Sai districts (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Both sides used heavy armoured vehicles, artillery, and drones. According to official data, more than 60 people were killed on the Kyrgyz side, dozens of infrastructure objects, schools, hospitals, and residential buildings were destroyed, and over 140,000 people were evacuated. The cause of the conflict was ongoing territorial disagreements and the absence of a delineated border. However, the September escalation was distinguished by its higher intensity and coordinated nature of attacks, which attracted national and international attention. This conflict marked a key stage in the development of Kyrgyzstan's military policy and accelerated the rethinking of its national security system. The country's leadership concluded that there was a need not only to reform the Armed Forces but also to establish a modern territorial defence system. By the end of 2022, an institute of

territorial commanders was created to ensure mobilisation readiness and coordination in emergencies. Army funding was increased, and programmes for military infrastructure construction, weapon modernisation, and personnel training were activated. The conflict also strengthened the political will to defend territorial sovereignty: Kyrgyzstan refused unilateral concessions in border negotiations and became more active in using international platforms to highlight incidents. Overall, the events of September 2022 transformed the military policy towards increased autonomy, combat readiness, and territorial resilience. Based on the analysis, the collapse of the Soviet Union was a pivotal moment in the evolution of Kyrgyzstan's military policy, which faced the challenge of ensuring national security amidst fragmented infrastructure. A comparison with other Central Asian countries revealed Kyrgyzstan's efforts to modernise its army and enhance its defence capabilities without transitioning to an aggressive model of behaviour in the region. Transformational processes in military policy included the revision of the military doctrine and national security concept in 2021-2023. The evolution of Kyrgyzstan's military policy also involved its participation in CSTO and SCO exercises, while refusing to allow the placement of foreign military facilities, including China, on its territory. Allocating around 1.5% of its GDP to the military budget, the country demonstrates moderation, openness to reforms, and foreign policy balance.

Discussion

In the presented work, the influence of certain elements of the national security doctrine, including the military budget, on the evolution of the country's military policy was examined. This influence was particularly explored in the context of comparing the military budgets of Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic, which constitute 3% and 1.5% of the state GDP, respectively. The comparison concluded that, given the limited resources, the Kyrgyz Republic focuses on regional cooperation, institutional renewal, and strategic neutrality, rather than large-scale modernisation processes in national security structures. The idea presented in this work about the influence of the military budget on national security policy is also confirmed by previously published sources, including S. Floştoiu (2024). Based on the results of a literature review, the cited expert concluded that the military budget has a dual influence on national security strategy – an increase in military sector funding can serve both as a tool for deterrence and for escalating regional conflicts. S. Floştoiu proposed a theory of increased conflict risk with a rising military budget, which was confirmed by the analysis of Kyrgyzstan's military policy. With a limited military budget, the republic seeks regional neutrality and peaceful conflict resolution. According to S. Chary & N. Singh (2024), a limited military budget can stimulate the use of innovative approaches to ensure national security. Correspondences were identified between specific elements of the conceptual model of S. Chary & N. Singh and the country's approaches to national security in the region. Specifically, the analysis of the work suggests the use of adaptive risk management in military policy: as a member of the CSTO and SCO, the country does not aim to expand external military presence on its

territory. S. Qari *et al.* (2024), in their research, pointed out the complex nature of the relationship between the military budget and the choice of national security strategy, which is moderated, in particular, by public preferences regarding defence policy options. A survey of a representative sample of the German population indicated the willingness of taxpayers to finance troop increases, the creation of a pan-European army, and improvements to the air defence system. The European experience can be useful when planning the military policy of the Kyrgyz Republic, whose citizens face the risk of armed conflicts with neighbouring Tajikistan. Despite the relevance of the cited experience, further national military policy planning should take into account the differences in socio-economic conditions between European and Central Asian countries.

The study also examined the influence of regional factors, including cross-border conflicts, on the evolution of national military policy. The topic was explored in the context of the 6-day armed conflict with Tajikistan in April-May 2021, with the results partially aligning with earlier research, including the work of G.A. Seitalieva (2024). The cited author concluded that conflicts over water and energy resources are a key cause of tensions in the region, which corresponds to the results of the case analysis. The difference lies in the fact that G.A. Seitalieva's study focuses on the humanitarian aspect of conflicts, whereas the presented work focuses on the military-political aspect. The impact of regional conflicts on the formation of national military policy was also studied by P. Bocquillon *et al.* (2024), who analysed the influence of regional disputes and asymmetric conflicts on the evolution of national military doctrine. The correspondence between the work of P. Bocquillon *et al.* and the conducted study is in the recognition of the influence of regional factors on the formation of national military doctrine. The difference lies in the fact that R. Grosu's (2024) research has a broader focus, while the present study compares five Central Asian countries, with an emphasis on the Kyrgyz Republic. In addition to the topics mentioned, the work examined the influence of the republic's participation in international military alliances on its military policy. A comparison of military doctrines showed that, unlike other Central Asian countries, such as Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan's participation in international military exercises is active, systematic, and diverse, including initiatives from the CSTO, SCO, and anti-terrorist exercises in Xinjiang. The conducted analysis suggested that international cooperation helps Kyrgyzstan compensate for insufficient funds for large-scale modernisation of its national military structures. This idea was also partially confirmed by previous studies, including the work of A. Sarjito & N. Lelyana (2024). Based on the results of qualitative analysis, the cited experts concluded that the lobbying activities of defence contractors have a significant influence on the distribution of the military budget and procurement policies. According to A. Sarjito & N. Lelyana, the lobbying activities of contractors are reflected in the formation of defence research and development priorities, with a focus on innovations in certain areas, such as cybersecurity. Although the conducted study did not separately analyse the activities of defence contractors, it contained information indicating that the size

of the military budget is one of the factors influencing its distribution through the selection of priority strategic goals. This idea was examined in the context of comparing Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic, whose defence budgets constitute 3% and 1.5% of national GDP, respectively. With a significantly smaller budget, Kyrgyzstan has reoriented its military doctrine towards peaceful dispute resolution and investment in information and technology sectors, as identified in the statements of S. Japarov and E. Terdikbaev. Partial correspondence was also found between the results of this study and the work of E. Büyükkakıncı (2024), who examined the adaptation of national military doctrines under the influence of changing power dynamics in the international political arena. The correspondence lies in the recognition of the influence of participation in military alliances on the evolution of national military doctrines, while the difference was found in the focus of the research – regional for the conducted study and international in the work of E. Büyükkakıncı. Correspondences were also found between the presented study and the work of R. Grosu (2024), who studied the impact of asymmetric conflicts on the formation of national military policy, including decisions on participation in military alliances. Based on a systematic review of sources, the mentioned expert concluded that asymmetric conflicts require the involvement of more than two parties in post-conflict stabilisation and reconstruction. In the context of the analysed Kyrgyz-Tajik military clashes in 2021-2022, participation in asymmetric military conflicts implies strategic planning of military alliances and exercises to minimise escalation. The results and ideas presented in this work have been fully or partially confirmed by previously conducted research. The found correspondences suggest that the conducted study is relevant, and its results can be used to form a unified military policy in the Central Asian region. However, the presented work differed from previous studies, including its focus on the Kyrgyz Republic and its involvement in cross-border clashes with neighbouring Tajikistan.

Conclusions

The conducted research established that the evolution of the military policy of the Kyrgyz Republic in the post-Soviet period represents a complex, multi-factorial process, determined both by internal transformations and regional and global challenges. The main conclusion is that the republic demonstrates a stable commitment to a defensive course, relying on the principles of neutrality, a refusal to escalate conflicts, and emphasising the importance of regional cooperation. This is particularly evident in the rhetoric of political leaders and the content of strategic

documents, such as the Military Doctrine of Kyrgyzstan and the Concept of National Security of the Kyrgyz Republic. One of the key results was the identification of a shift in the nature of threats – from traditional military to hybrid, informational, cyber, and biological. The latter lead to cross-border conflicts, as revealed in the analysis of border clashes with Tajikistan in April-May 2021 and the six-day armed conflict with Tajikistan in September 2022. Kyrgyzstan consistently adapts its security strategy in response to these challenges, while paying particular attention to strengthening internal institutional resilience and developing digital and personnel resources. It was also found that, with a limited military budget of $\approx$ 1.5% of national GDP, Kyrgyzstan prefers not to engage in an arms race or scale up military structures but instead forms a robust territorial defence system, modernises its army, and strengthens regional partnerships within the CSTO and SCO. A comparative analysis with other Central Asian states showed that Kyrgyzstan occupies an intermediate position between countries that actively interact with external military actors, such as Tajikistan, and those declaring neutrality, including Turkmenistan. Despite military cooperation with Russia and China, Kyrgyzstan does not allow the creation of new foreign military bases, demonstrating strategic flexibility and a balanced foreign policy course. It was also established that the formation of the modern military policy was significantly influenced by cross-border conflicts with Tajikistan in 2021 and 2022. These cases became turning points, initiating army reform, modernising border infrastructure, and developing mobilisation readiness mechanisms. The escalation at the border prompted the country's leadership to reconsider the threats and integrate territorial defence components more actively into the national security system. A limitation of this study is its focus on official strategic documents and public statements, which may not fully reflect the hidden factors or non-public processes of military policy formation. A promising direction for future research is the analysis of public perception of military policy and citizens' readiness to participate in ensuring national security, including voluntary formations, civil defence, and cooperation with local administrations during crises.

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Conflict of Interest

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