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## **THE IMPACT OF FRENCH FOREIGN POLICY IN AFGHANISTAN ON CENTRAL ASIAN SECURITY**

**Abstract.** From the first days of independence, the countries of Central Asia faced a lot of unsolved problems and issues in domestic politics. The overall difficult situation in the world arena, and instability inside and outside the region, has led to an increase in their agenda. One of the main factors that influence on a permanent basis the foreign policy of the Central Asian states and have sufficient potential to influence both intraregional and intrastate processes is undoubtedly Afghanistan.

The article analyses and overview the role and influence of France’s foreign policy towards Afghanistan to the security issues in Central Asian region by using the methods of chronological systematization, comparative and statistic analysis.

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, Central Asia, France, world politics, security, foreign policy, geopolitics, international relations, Aid to Afghan reconstruction

The system of international relations, like other phenomena and structures of global scale, is in constant motion and dynamics. Year after year, new actors and centers of power gradually appear in it, as it was at the end of the twentieth century. With the collapse of the communist system and the end of the Cold War, new young states have emerged, the overall picture of world politics has changed. The interconnection and interaction of countries has increased. These changes have led to the fact that problems and challenges of a local or regional nature have become global.

Instability, internal decentralization, a fairly high level of organized crime and drug business, religious radicalism and a constant political struggle between the government of the country and religious and ethnic groups, and as a result a rather low level of economy, science and education, makes Afghanistan with its geopolitical significance, the main theme of many scientific analysis, political debates, research and projects. In particular, recently the scientific circles of the countries of the Central Asian region have studied and continue to examine at a fairly good level the direct influence of the internal political situation in Afghanistan in the region, the development of bilateral and multilateral partnership with Afghanistan, the role of historical heritage and consciousness, science, education, cultural - humanitarian factors in stabilizing the internal situation in Afghanistan.

But it should be noted that the policy and aspirations of other countries, in particular the powers, can influence the relations of Afghanistan with the countries of Central Asia and in the Afghan processes. One of these powers is France. What is France’s foreign policy in Afghanistan, what are its interests, how can France’s presence and efforts in Afghanistan influence security in Central Asia? These pressing questions require to be studied and answered.

So, despite the relatively passive presence of France in Afghanistan than the United States, Germany, India, China, or even Iran, it historically actively participates in the socio-political life of Afghan society and has its spheres of influence in certain areas.

In this regard, to identify the overview of the French foreign policy in Afghanistan and come to conclusions regarding its impact on security issues in Central Asia, first of all, we need to consider the historical background of the relationship between the two countries.

Despite the rather long official history of diplomatic relations — the countries established diplomatic ties in 1922, relations between France and Afghanistan developed slowly. France at the beginning of establishing relations with Afghanistan had more cultural and humanitarian and, to a lesser extent, geopolitical interests in the land of Afghanistan: these countries have signed numerous bilateral agreements such as the University of Paris and Kabul University (1960); Agreement on Health Cooperation (1963); Cultural and Technical Cooperation (1966); Agreement on Agriculture Cooperation (1969).<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the year will come down from the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1923, France opened a diplomatic representation in Kabul, as well as a branch of the French archaeological delegation in Afghanistan. 5 years later, in 1928, the Shah of Afghanistan Amanullah Khan made an official visit to France. Prior to World War II, France was a donor to Afghanistan in the development of the social sciences, mainly the social sciences, national education and agriculture. But, in 1943, during the Second World War, France closed its diplomatic representation in Kabul. A year later, Afghanistan closed its diplomatic mission in Paris, because the Vichy regime refused to extend accreditation to Afghan diplomats in France and Switzerland.<sup>2</sup> Soon after the end of the war, countries resumed diplomatic relations and reopened embassies in capitals. The growth of relations occurred in 1960 and the end of the 70s of the twentieth century: in 1965, the Afghan king Zahir Shah made the second official visit to France and met with the President Charles de Gaulle. In 1968, French Prime Minister

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<sup>1</sup> La France in Afghanistan, [https://af.ambafrance.org/histoire/relations\\_01&](https://af.ambafrance.org/histoire/rerelations_01&)

<sup>2</sup> Afghanistan.- New York: 1978. V.31. P.58

Georges Pompidou made an official visit to Afghanistan. However, with the invasion of the USSR troops in Afghanistan in 1979 and the beginning of the Afghan war, relations between Afghanistan and France ceased to exist officially, and even after the end of the war in 1989.<sup>3</sup> So, as the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan and was in power until 2002.

France, as a member of NATO, took part in the war in Afghanistan as part of the NATO International Security Assistance Force and in numerous military operations throughout the country. In 2002, France restored diplomatic relations with Afghanistan. As part of NATO, France has played a leading role in ensuring a stable environment in northeastern Afghanistan, especially in the province of Kapisa.<sup>4</sup>

Another interesting fact, Afghan former President Hamid Karzai 4 times made an official visit to France: 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012. French ex-Presidents Nicolas Sarkozy and Francois Hollande made a state visit to Afghanistan in 2011 and 2012. These indicators are twice or three times more than reciprocal visits between France and with certain countries of Central Asia.

The foundation of modern relations between France and Afghanistan is a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. This agreement, concluded for a period of 20 years and entered into force on December 1, 2012, lays down France’s obligations in the long term, and also notes a change in the nature of these obligations - from predominantly military to predominantly civil<sup>5</sup>. As for the economic foundations of French-Afghan relations, in 2018, the trade turnover between the two countries amounted to 29.9 million Euros, and the main imported goods from France are based on exports from France to Afghanistan of pharmaceutical, agricultural, chemical and biological fertilizers, agrofood and also plastic products.<sup>6</sup> Bilateral trade between France and Afghanistan remains low, mainly due to the security situation.

Indeed, like many of the country's western development, France is interested in gaining and maintaining cultural and political influence in a geo-strategically important territory in Afghanistan, where almost all the world powers and regional players are represented. However, foreign policy and France and its presence in Afghanistan are slightly different from the policies of other developed countries. Firstly, even with the establishment of deep relations, France pays special attention to the legal foundations,

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<sup>3</sup> Zalmai Haquani, Les relations entre la France et l’Afghanistan//Académie de géopolitique de Paris, <http://www.academiedegeopolitiquedeparis.com/les-relations-entre-la-france-et-lafghanistan/>

<sup>4</sup> Coalition Challenges in Afghanistan: The Politics of Alliance, ed. Gale A. Mattox, Stephen M. Grenier. - Stanford University Press: 2015. P.136

<sup>5</sup> France and Afghanistan- bilateral relations, France diplomatie, The Ministry for Europe and foreign affairs, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/afghanistan/france-and-afghanistan/>

<sup>6</sup> Relations politiques entre La France et l’Afghanistan, Ambassade de la République islamique d’Afghanistan, <https://ambafghanistan-fr.com/lamitie-franco-afghane/rerelations-politiques/>

the legitimacy of the partnership, and comes to the specification of cooperation. In particular, a five-year action plan was adopted between Afghanistan and France in 2012, which was extended in 2017 until 2021, and in which projects in the following areas are presented in detail:

- security (military training, police training) - despite the fact that France has stopped participation in the military operations of the special forces of NATO in Afghanistan, it remains involved in this process, with its important air and sea means.<sup>7</sup> France is actively involved in training sergeants and commanders of the Afghan army as part of its Full-time training programs for Afghan officers and sergeants (since 2003), as well as under the Commando School program (since 2008). Until 2018, France trained Afghan officers of 7 battalions in short-term courses on field operations, reconnaissance operations, and the intersection of drug trafficking. France, from the 2003 Paris Conference on the intersection of drug trafficking routes, took part in 6 operations to identify drug trafficking routes in Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup>

- scientific, cultural and technical cooperation (agriculture, research, education, health, archeology, management) - France is the main giant and almost monopoly in archeology in Afghanistan. It is the third country (after the USA and Italy) which more than others finances in the general education sector in Afghanistan. Today, according to the five-year cooperation program in Afghanistan, 4 French lycées are opened, 2 of them in Kabul, and their branches in Jalalabad and Mozori Sharif, the Interdisciplinary Center for Advanced Studies of Teachers. Also, the French government since 2006, as part of a grant from the French Development Agency, has been actively preparing and increasing qualification of managers in the Afghan parliament, deputies and senators, lawyers, judges and prosecutors. Since 2012, the French Cultural Center has been operating in Kabul and the German-French Cultural Center in Herat. In 2013, the National TV and Radio Company of France (INA) took over the development of local Afghan state television channels in Kabul, Herat and Kandahar until 2023. Non-governmental non-profit organizations of France are themselves widely represented in Afghanistan among NGOs in European countries.<sup>9</sup> Such French NGOs as Doctors Without Borders, Doctors of the World (Medicins du monde), AFRANE, CEDERAF, MADERA have their branches not only in the capital-Kabul, but also in the main cities of Afghanistan, like Kandahar, Herat, Mozori Sharif and others.

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<sup>7</sup> Afghanistan : l'armée française quitte le pays après treize ans de présence//Le Monde.

[https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2014/12/31/l-armee-francaise-quitte-l-afghanistan\\_4547621\\_3210.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2014/12/31/l-armee-francaise-quitte-l-afghanistan_4547621_3210.html)

<sup>8</sup> Presence militaire de la France en Afghanistan. <https://af.ambafrance.org/-Presence-militaire->

<sup>9</sup> Zalmai Haquani, Les relations entre la France et l'Afghanistan//Académie de géopolitique de Paris, <http://www.academiedegeopolitiquedeparis.com/les-relations-entre-la-france-et-lafghanistan/>

- infrastructure (irrigation, electrification) - France is now financing 4 major projects to create highways inside Afghanistan.<sup>10</sup> Gradually, it is planned to include these routes in the interregional highway between Central Asia and South Asia.

- economy and trade - mutual trade despite the small indicators, it has been growing since 2006.

So, France, despite the fact that, compared with other developed countries participating in domestic affairs in Afghanistan, remains in the shadow, it is actively involved on a large scale areas in the internal construction of Afghan society. How can this affect security in the Central Asian region? The presence of France in Afghanistan affects more positively than neutrally the overall security in Central Asia. First, France, among other permanent members of the UN Security Council, has a more neutral and non-reactionary position, characterized as a facilitator in the internal socio-economic processes in Afghanistan. Secondly, France is taking real steps to raise the awareness of representatives of Afghan society, enlightenment through education in humanitarian areas, as well as in the field of public health. Year after year, it demilitarizes its attitude toward Afghanistan and takes measures Soft power and diplomacy. But it is actively conducting and financing operations to combat drug trafficking in Afghanistan, which is in favor of the countries of Central Asia. Also, France’s efforts to improve the domestic infrastructure in Afghanistan can in a good sense serve the realization of the logistics ambitions of the Central Asian states in Afghanistan. Based on the above facts, one can say that France is not interested in the escalation of the domestic political struggle on Afghanistan, it advocates a peaceful solution to the contradictions between the official authorities and local radical groups.

Conclusion. France is the country that has always been present in Afghanistan and will be present, to a greater or lesser extent. Its influence is more cultural and humanitarian motives than geopolitical ones. The paradox is that France is one of those few countries that have entered the Afghan society and has its weight in the formation of a new social structure in Afghanistan, which has already been shaped like more than 17 years. The significance of the French foreign policy in Afghanistan for the security of Central Asia is not paramount, but important, which must exist on the Afghan land, at least until the moment when other world powers with higher ambitions and national interests play in it. Without the non-reactive role of France, the situation in Afghanistan would probably not be much worse in number, but would degrade qualitatively. After all, 64% of the current administrators in the Afghan government are essentially

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<sup>10</sup> Relations économiques, Ambassade de la République islamique d’Afghanistan, <https://ambafghanistan-fr.com/lamitie-franco-afghane/relations-economiques/>

graduates of French retraining programs or the French lyceums and Universities<sup>11</sup>. Thus, the French experience in Afghanistan also provides a huge ready-made experience and indicates broad prospects for the countries of Central Asia to expand their influence in Afghanistan.

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<sup>11</sup> La Francophonie en petits pas en Afghanistan, Académie de géopolitique de Paris, <http://www.academiedegeopolitiquedeparis.com/la-francophonie-a-petits-pas-en-afghanistan/>