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THE ROLE AND POSSIBILITIES OF THE ORGANIZATION OF TURKIC STATES IN THE GLOBAL COMPETITION FOR THE CENTRAL ASIAN REGION

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Abstract

This article addresses the emergent contest for influence in Central Asia through the prism of respective foreign policy strategies pursued by key international players, including the United States, Russia, and China. Further, it identifies interests enabled by resource security, new economic opportunities, geopolitical dominance, and regional stability. Against this background, the role and the potential of the Organization of Turkic States for shaping the dynamics of Central Asia are assessed, as well as enhancing the capacity for regional stability and countering external influence in the region.

KEYWORDS: Central Asia, Organization of Turkic States, geopolitics, regional security, foreign policy, economic cooperation, strategic partnership.

INTRODUCTION

The role and opportunities of the organization of Turkic states in the global competition for the Central Asian region are increasing in today's changing geopolitical landscape. Central Asia has long been a region of strategic importance due to its rich natural resources, geographical location, and the presence of important trade routes, including those linked to the "One Belt, One Road" initiative. In this context, competition between major global powers such as the USA, Russia, and China is intensifying, each of them is fighting for influence and strategic partnership in the region. This article is particularly relevant in that it examines the foreign policies and interests of these key actors in Central Asia, providing insights into the changing dynamics of global competition. It

examines the potential of the OTS in relation to its economic, political, and cultural interests in Central Asia, and shows its opportunities and limitations in an increasingly competitive environment as a major regional actor.

RESULTS

Foreign policy of major geopolitical powers towards Central Asia. The United States has maintained a strategic interest in Central Asia due to the geopolitical importance of the Central Asian region, its proximity to major powers such as Russia and China, and its potential role in ensuring regional security related to Afghanistan. The three main vectors of the US foreign policy strategy in Central Asia can be defined as follows: geopolitical

vector - manifesting itself in diplomatic activities and efforts in the field of military and weapons cooperation to balance global powers such as Russia and China in the region; economic vector - maximum control by the American state and business over the very important energy resources of Central Asia, primarily the very important energy resources of Kazakhstan, which has natural gas, oil, and uranium deposits; political-ideological and humanitarian vector - the implementation of the long-term plan of the USA on the “democratization” of Central Asian countries based on Western principles.

The US Central Asia Strategy for 2019-2025, adopted by the Trump administration in February 2020, reflects the continuation and deepening of mutual relations, emphasizing the development of political, economic, and security relations that ensure stability, independence, and cooperation in the region [13]. This strategy includes supporting and strengthening the sovereignty and independence of Central Asian countries individually and as a region, reducing terrorist threats in Central Asia, ensuring stability in Afghanistan, Encouraging communication between Central Asia and Afghanistan, reforming the rule of law and respect for human rights, and promoting US investment and development in Central Asia have been cited. According to V. A. Ponomaryov [6.445-459], in recent years, Washington and US non-governmental non-profit organizations have become more flexible in their influence on these countries in the political, ideological, and humanitarian spheres, showing respect for the “unique development path” of the Central Asian states. However, it remains persistent and targeted, and is expressed in influencing the countries of the region by reminding them of the need to liberalize national laws governing the electoral process, create a “free media” and introduce a “multi-party political system”. The withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan in 2021 marked a significant turning point in US foreign policy towards Central Asia. The end of the “forever war” led to a reassessment of US priorities, pushing the region lower on the US foreign policy agenda. While counterterrorism remains a challenge, particularly in Afghanistan, due to the rise of the

Islamic State Khorasan Branch, the US has turned its attention to strategic competition with Russia and China, recognizing their growing influence in the region [8]. This shift was reflected in the New Silk Road initiative, which prioritized economic development and trade, and encouraged US companies and investment in the region to counter China’s Belt and Road Initiative [12].

The United States is pursuing a multifaceted strategy in Central Asia, engaging in various forums and partnerships with countries in the region to balance the influence of China and Russia. In particular, the C5+1 multilateral cooperation format, launched in 2015 with five countries in the region, serves as a platform for dialogue and cooperation on issues of mutual interest, including economic development, energy security, and counterterrorism [2]. The B5+1 forum to support US-Central Asia business cooperation and the C5+1 session on disability rights are also being held.

Russia’s policy towards Central Asia is driven by historical ties, economic interests, security concerns, and the desire to maintain its influence in a region of geopolitical importance [16.77-85]. Russia sees Central Asia as an important buffer zone protecting its southern borders from instability. The region’s proximity to Afghanistan and the associated threats of terrorism, drug trafficking, and radicalization are central to Russian security reporting. Moscow has established military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which are an integral part of its security strategy in the region. These bases not only demonstrate Russia’s military might, but also represent Moscow’s commitment to regional security [1.53-63]. Russia is one of the main members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, which includes several Central Asian countries. The CSTO is a means for Russia to maintain security cooperation in the region, providing a framework for joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, and collective defense mechanisms. The role of the CSTO became more important after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan increased security concerns in the region [14.589-617]. Russia’s leadership in the CSTO allows it to shape regional security dynamics

and prevent external powers such as the US or NATO from filling the gap. Russia's economic policy in Central Asia is primarily focused on the region's energy resources and infrastructure development. Central Asia is rich in oil, natural gas and minerals and is a valuable partner for Russia's energy sector [15]. Moscow tried to maintain its dominance in the energy market of the region through the state-owned company "Gazprom", which remains the main participant in the Central Asian gas trade. Russia imports natural gas from Central Asia and re-exports it to Europe, which not only strengthens its economic position, but also increases its geopolitical influence. One of the important aspects of Russia's economic policy is the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), a regional economic bloc in which Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are members. The EEU serves as an institutional framework to promote trade, investment and economic integration in the region [9.553-561]. While the EEU has not delivered the rapid economic growth that some proponents had hoped for, it remains a cornerstone of Russia's economic strategy in Central Asia and serves to counter the influence of other regional players such as China and the European Union.

From a diplomatic perspective, Russia is able to balance its relations with the various Central Asian states, each of which has its own geopolitical concerns. For example, Kazakhstan has sought to maintain a degree of independence from Moscow by pursuing a multi-vector foreign policy that includes strong ties with China and the West. By contrast, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have relied more heavily on Russian military and economic support, bringing them closer to Moscow's foreign policy goals. Russia's soft power in Central Asia is evident in its promotion of the Russian language and culture. Russian is widely spoken in the region, and Moscow has invested in educational programs, media, and cultural exchanges that enhance Russian cultural influence [11]. Russia also has a large diaspora of labor migrants from Central Asia, and their remittances are important for the economies of Central Asian countries. By regulating the flow of labor migrants, Moscow has significant influence over these governments.

China's foreign policy towards Central Asia reflects a multifaceted strategy driven by economic, political, and security factors [7.50-61]. Since the fall of the Soviet Union and the independence of the Central Asian republics, Beijing has steadily increased its influence in the region, which plays an important role in China's long-term geopolitical and economic goals. At the heart of China's policy in Central Asia is the "One Belt, One Road" initiative, a large-scale infrastructure project aimed at improving connectivity and economic integration with Eurasia [3.71-79]. Central Asia, located at the crossroads of major trade routes, is crucial to the success of "One Belt, One Road" Initiative. China has invested heavily in infrastructure development in the region in the areas of transport, energy, and digital connectivity, which will help ensure the stability of trade flows in the region. China's energy security is another important factor shaping its cooperation with Central Asia [4.53-63]. The region's rich oil, gas and mineral resources are of strategic importance to China, which has sought to diversify its energy imports and reduce dependence on Middle Eastern sources. Key investments include the China-Central Asia gas pipeline, which will deliver natural gas from Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan to China, helping to meet China's growing domestic energy needs.

Politically, China is working to deepen bilateral and multilateral ties with Central Asian states, using forums such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which serves as a platform for regional security cooperation and political dialogue. Through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, China has promoted regional security initiatives aimed at countering terrorism, separatism and extremism [5.59-79]. China and Central Asian countries are cooperating in countering security threats through joint military exercises, intelligence sharing and counter-terrorism training. China is seeking to expand its influence in regional security arrangements and position itself as a key player in stabilizing Central Asia.

The role of the Organization of Turkic States in the Central Asian region. The history of the

Turkic world is deeply intertwined with the political and cultural evolution of the region. Turkic peoples have played a significant role in shaping the cultural and political landscapes of Central Asia, the Caucasus, and beyond for centuries. The resurgence of Turkish identity in recent decades is evidence of the strong development of cultural and linguistic ties that cross political boundaries. The collapse of the Soviet Union created the conditions for the revival of Turkic identities. As the Central Asian republics gained independence, they began to seek ways to restore their cultural heritage and establish new political and economic cooperation. The Republic of Turkey has begun to act as a model state in this regard. It was on Turkey's initiative that the Summit of Turkic-Speaking States was organized in the early 1990s. This summit served as the foundation for all subsequent initiatives. The establishment of the Turkic Council, based on an agreement signed in Nakhichevan, Azerbaijan in 2009, transformed it into the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) at the 2021 Istanbul Summit. This trend can be evaluated as a product of Turkey's long-term strategy. OTS reflects the desire for common prosperity and security in the Turkic world [10.139-162], aims to develop regional cooperation and integration in various fields within the organization.

The OTS has become an important counterbalance to external forces in Central Asia. The organization seeks to create a space for regional autonomy and self-determination while maintaining good relations with the region's geopolitical actors, Russia, China, and the United States. OTS is important in strengthening interstate relations in the region. By promoting dialogue and cooperation, it has contributed to resolving border disputes, strengthening economic ties, and promoting cultural exchanges between member states. It should also be noted that Central Asia, which is far from the seas, plays an important role for logistics cooperation that increases access to the seas and oceans through Turkey.

The Organization of Turkic States is becoming an important platform for coordinating security cooperation. Joint efforts have been made to combat threats, and ensure stability and security in

the region, as the organization tackles issues such as terrorism, cross-border crime, illegal drug and arms trafficking. The OTS prioritized economic and cultural cooperation as the basis of its agenda. Recognizing the need for integrated development, the organization has undertaken several initiatives aimed at promoting economic growth and regional integration. The creation of free trade zones and preferential trade agreements between OTS members is encouraging Turkish interstate trade and helping to increase economic activity in the region. Also, the organization operates the Parliament of Turkic States (TurkPA) aimed at the development of parliamentary relations between the member states and the bodies aimed at increasing cultural cooperation (Turksoy).

CONCLUSION

As the geopolitical landscape in Central Asia evolves, the Organization of Turkic States has the potential to serve as a unifying force among Turkic peoples, allowing them to leverage shared cultural and historical ties to address common challenges and seize opportunities. Although the organization was created for Turkey's geopolitical purposes, it plays an important role in balancing the cooperation of Central Asian states with Russia, China, the United States, and other regional actors, and encourages the regional states to pursue a multi-pronged foreign policy. Also, OTS has the potential to play a decisive role in overcoming transnational problems such as security, terrorism and environmental problems that threaten the stability of Central Asia. By promoting collective strategies and frameworks for cooperation, the organization enhances regional resilience against these threats. At the same time, cooperation in the defense sector helps strengthen the defense capabilities of the countries of the region. Although Turkey and the OTS's influence in Central Asia is not as strong as the region's global competitors, Russia, China, and the United States, it is hoped that Turkey and the OTS will play a supporting role in negotiating and trading with these global competitors, and in the same way, the OTS will help Turkey have a say in its foreign policy on regional and global issues.

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