

Political Processes and Regional Security of Central Asia

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Keywords: Central Asia, Political Process, Kushan Empire, Regional Security, International Relations, International Cooperation, Political Conflicts, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan. Geopolitical Threats, the Trans-Caspian Route, and International Security.

Abstract: The article analyses the geographical location of Central Asia, changes in its governance throughout history, common problems of the countries of Central Asia, and prospects for their solution. The article also provides an analysis of the causes of local and national problems. Based on the analysis of the geopolitical situation of countries, the interests of world powers (Russia, USA, China) in this region, as well as their natural resources, available resources, trends, and development challenges are revealed. The main economic and geopolitical threats to the modern political system of the countries of Central Asia have been identified, and the reasons for their occurrence have been scientifically analysed. Scientific and practical recommendations for creating a regional security system have been developed.

1 INTRODUCTION

The main difference between any regional system of international politics is a set of common system-forming factors that distinguish it from other systems and determine its qualitative characteristics. Modern Eurasia is the basis of international security, plays a balancing role in global processes, and relies on the stability of its strategic regions. Central Asia (CA) is considered one of them.


Central Asia: The region includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, a landlocked region of Asia. It is located in the center of the Eurasian continent, with a total area of 3,882,000 km² and a population of more than 60 million people (2017), with more than 82% of the population living in the Aral Sea basin. It borders Afghanistan and Iran in the south, China in the east, and Russia in the west and north [1]. Contrary to modern interpretations, there are varying definitions of the Central Asian region, making the regional policies of the world's major powers a complex issue. This is due to the fact that the region itself is heterogeneous, which makes it difficult to adopt a uniform approach.

During the Middle Ages, until the Mongol conquests, Central Asia experienced economic and cultural

prosperity. The Kushan Empire and the Khorezmos dynasty were the richest countries of that time. Timur's empire later ruled the Middle East, modern-day southern Russia, and the Delhi Sultanate. Subsequent Central Asian states were transferred to the Russian Empire and the USSR. This led to changes not only in national values in the region, but also in standards of governance and government structure, and since 1924, the Central Asian region has emerged as 5 states. Although the 1924 delimitation was carried out in accordance with the national ethnic units of the region, this, in turn, also led to disputes between the newly formed states over the border issue.

After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the question of a strategy for modernizing economic and political systems in the process of forming independent Central Asian states became the main problem for their leaders. However, nevertheless, for more than 30 years, every 5 countries were able to build their own statehood. Although, of course, these countries differ from each other in socio-economic indicators, the problems that must be solved in the region require the same approach from these countries.

After gaining independence, the countries of Central Asia had several ways of relationship.

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The first path: striving for the West as a developing economy. But in the West, there was no inclination towards the newly independent states of Central Asia, which did not yet have a stable government. The second path: was the path of rapprochement with Arab countries and the Muslim world, and these countries were not accepted because they viewed the Central Asian countries as countries that did not understand Islam well.

Third way: Central Asian countries that have border disputes and are not favored by the West and the Muslim world understand the need for unification. They realized that the problems that had accumulated in the region needed to be solved together. As a result, the heads of state of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan signed an agreement in 1994 to create a unified economic environment. The main attention was paid to the issue of opening customs between countries. **Fourth Way:** Began in 1998. The stage of revision of integration ideology has arrived. This required abandoning concepts based on mutual ambitions and developing common mechanisms. The implementation of agreements on the use of water and energy resources has begun. If only the state could organize large-scale massacres, such an opportunity would appear for individuals.

2 RESEARCH AIM

Analysis of common and ongoing problems in Central Asia. Conducting a systematic analysis of analytical information provided by think tanks that analyze international politics and study its general aspects. It is about finding solutions to existing problems.

3 METHODOLOGY

The article widely uses empirical research methods, as well as methods of content analysis, induction, and deduction.

4 RESULTS

This research work was carried out within the framework of political sciences and can be used in the analysis of foreign policy activities in Uzbekistan, as well as in training programs in foreign policy and applied sciences in higher educational institutions.

5 LITERATURE REVIEW

The article analyzes the opinions of the following experts, including Nikolai Podguzov, Chairman of the Board of the Eurasian Development Bank (EDB), Almaty, Kazakhstan (July 25, 2023).

He notes that in the region's sectoral structure, there are four key "pain points" that produce the largest volume of greenhouse gas emissions and which should be given special attention: fugitive emissions, electricity and heat production, agriculture, and construction. These industries produce about 80 percent of Central Asia's greenhouse gas emissions. Coal power continues to account for a significant share of the region's total greenhouse gas emissions. This leads to high emissions in the electricity and heat generation sectors, as well as in construction. For example, the electricity and heat sector produces 42.5 percent of greenhouse gas emissions in Kazakhstan, while buildings account for 37.5 percent in the Kyrgyz Republic. He is also confident that the Region needs additional investment in the development of new generating capacities, including hydroelectric power plants, solar and wind power plants, construction and modernization of water treatment facilities, and so on. Climate finance instruments provided by multilateral development banks (MDBs) for adaptation and mitigation can further accelerate the region's low-carbon transformation. Experts

Rakhimbek Abdrakhmanov - economist and coordinator of the Kazakhstan School of Applied Policy (KSAP) and Kamshat Zhumagulova - chief analyst of the Kazakhstan School of Applied Policy (KSAP) (August 16, 2023) in their article "Trans-Caspian route: Kazakhstan's gateway to Europe" argue that, In particular, for Kazakhstan, the development of the Middle East corridor will provide greater access to world markets. On August 6, Ukraine issued a coastal notification, declaring the waters of six Russian ports on the Black Sea (Anapa, Novorossiysk, Gelendzhik, Tuapse, Sochi, and Taman) a "military threat" zone. This comes after Russia last month withdrew from an agreement that would have allowed Ukrainian grain to be safely exported. Moscow said it considers all ships heading to Ukrainian ports on the Black Sea to be carriers of military cargo, and the countries under whose flags these ships are registered to be participants in the war on Kiev's side. They also argue that given that oil is the main export commodity that ensures the influx of foreign currency into Kazakhstan, trade with the European Union is a critical element of the country's economic stability and security architecture. Katherine Putz, editor-in-chief of The Diplomat,

argues that the Central Trans-Caspian Network (CTN), crossing southern Kazakhstan, provides “the most sustainable transport links between Europe and Central Asia,” especially with a “two-tier catchment area.” an area covering 300 km north and 600 km south of the main route is taken into account, thereby affecting all five Central Asian states. This so-called “Middle Corridor” covers four of the five most populous cities in Central Asia (Tashkent, Almaty, Bishkek, and Shymkent).

The study, however, notes two conditions necessary for “the broader benefits of regional development to materialize” and these could pose significant obstacles for Central Asia: “all countries provide equal and fair access to their network to all regional peers and players” and “countries are investing in expanding their domestic network, aligned with international corridors and cross-border connections in a coordinated manner”.

According to Wilder Alejandro Sanchez, president of the consulting firm Second Floor Strategies in Washington, D.C., Kazakhstan is betting big on the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), or Middle Corridor, as an alternative to entering European and international markets by bypassing Russia. There are many factors to consider to determine whether a corridor will thrive in the short or long term; One of the vital topics is the future of Kazakhstan’s ports[3]. When discussing the “Middle Corridor,” the emphasis is naturally on energy products such as oil and gas. This is understandable since Kazakhstan’s main exports are related to energy. Due to the war in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Europe are seeking to find alternative ways to bypass Russian territory and minimize their dependence on the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) pipeline (the infamous Trans-Caspian Pipeline will not be built any time soon (the infamous Trans-Caspian Pipeline will not be built anytime soon).

In Central Asia, the strengthening of independence coincided with a recession that caused a decline in economic ties. This situation has led to a decline in overall gross national production as well as agricultural production, which accounts for about 30% of GNP.

In our opinion, today all 5 Central Asian republics have realized that in times of global change, they must join forces in ensuring peace and stability in the region, jointly searching for a solution to the political situation in Afghanistan and supporting the Afghan people. This was due to the following factors:

- The stability and security of the countries of Central Asia are the common interests of the countries.
- Infrastructural restrictions, low quality of human capital, climate change, difficulties in maintaining social stability, the need to transform economic models, sanctions pressure - all this forces the Central Asian countries to act together.
- For Central Asian leaders, fear of a surge in radical extremism and other factors have played a decisive role in containing them.
- From time immemorial, the socio-economic development of the region has depended on water and land resources.
- The countries of Central Asia are interested in minimizing such global risks as international terrorism, radicalization, transnational crime, and illicit trafficking in weapons and drugs.
- Central Asia has always been culturally diverse. Despite the high level of emigration, ethnic minorities still make up 15 to 30 percent of the population of the Central Asian republics.
- In Central Asia, areas of compact residence of ethnic minorities remain.
- Until now, the most common language in the region is Russian. Supporting the Russian language as a means of interethnic communication, as a regional lingua franca, will not only help maintain stability in the region - the Russian language gives access to the Russian labor market, higher education, technological solutions, and a huge layer of Russian culture. Not using this tool, much less artificially limiting it, can be a big mistake.
- The geographical location of Central Asia has both positive and negative sides. On the one hand, the countries of Central Asia are located at the intersection of north-south and east-west trade routes, which is very beneficial from the economic side. On the other hand, the territories of these countries are located between powerful neighbors such as Russia to the north, China to the east, and the troubled Islamic states of Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan to the south and southwest. Since the Central Asian countries gained independence, a previously less prominent geostrategic issue has been the geographic isolation of Central Asia.

- Became more obvious. In this regard, we can say that the region is isolated from global political and economic flows and does not have direct access to international waters. Due to their geopolitical position, the states of Central Asia, on the one hand, cooperate not only with each other, but also with their powerful neighbors (mainly Russia and China), and on the other, they are trying to find new points of entry into the world market.
- In addition, for the countries of Central Asia, first of all, the priority in foreign policy has always been economic interests and security issues in the region in relations with major powers, and in this regard, the United States is much inferior to Russia and China. Despite Western sanctions, the countries of Central Asia are developing economic relations with Moscow and Beijing, since there is no other alternative option, and since Blinken's announcement in February of this year to issue \$25 million to mitigate the consequences of sanctions in the region demonstrates a very weak economic position and Washington's intentions.

Over the past three decades, the security situation in Central Asia has been generally stable, especially compared to the Middle East. It should be noted that today Central Asia is faced with challenges that can only be overcome by joining forces.

Today, leaders of the countries in the region are striving to revive the Great Silk Road. Railways and transport roads have been built between Turkmenistan and Iran, and between Kazakhstan and China, which makes it possible to develop cooperation with Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, and other countries in the region. In 2009 - 2014, the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran International Transport Corridor North-South Railway was built in Central Asia, connecting Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Iran. Another name is the Eastern Route North-South. A recent European study on sustainable transport links to Central Asia concluded that the Central Trans-Caspian Network (CTN), passing through southern Kazakhstan, provides "the most sustainable transport link between Europe and Central Asia", especially given the "two-tier zone" coverage." It affects all five Central Asian countries as it covers an area extending 300 km north and 600 km south of the main route. This so-called "intermediate corridor" covers four of the five most populous cities in Central Asia (Tashkent, Almaty, Bishkek, and Shymkent) (International Fund for

Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS)(n.d)- Asian Development Bank (ADB). (n.d.)).

It is worth noting that Central Asia is becoming one of the important centers of economic growth. According to many experts, the total GDP of the countries of the region over the past four years has grown by 25% and exceeded \$300 billion. At the same time, intraregional trade is also growing dynamically: in 2016-2019, the volume of trade between Uzbekistan and the countries of the region more than doubled and amounted to \$5.2 billion. Trade with Kyrgyzstan increased 5 times, with Tajikistan - 2 times, with Turkmenistan - 2.6 times, with Kazakhstan - almost 2 times.

Western countries do not know how to deal with Russia and China at the same time. The best solution they have found is the threat to the security of Central Asia, where Russia and China have common security interests. This will prevent China from focusing on the Pacific region and Russia from focusing on Europe. The countries of Central Asia cannot cope with these challenges on their own; a number of restrictions prevent this. For example, low quality of human capital, lack of technology, lack of capital. Times have changed, and the concept of technological sovereignty is more relevant than ever. It is obvious that the countries of Central Asia cannot independently develop complex technological chains, but they can use the potential of industrial cooperation within the EAEU and participate in joint technological projects with Russia.

There are four key pain points in the region's sectoral structure that produce the largest amount of greenhouse gas emissions and which should be given special attention: fugitive emissions, electricity and heat production, agriculture, and construction. These industries produce about 80 percent of Central Asia's greenhouse gas emissions. Coal power continues to account for a significant share of the region's total greenhouse gas emissions. This leads to high emissions in the electricity and heat generation sectors, as well as in construction. For example, the electricity and heat sector produces 42.5 percent of greenhouse gas emissions in Kazakhstan, while buildings account for 37.5 percent in the Kyrgyz Republic. The region needs additional investment in the development of new generating capacities, including hydroelectric power plants, solar and wind power plants, construction and modernization of water treatment facilities, and so on. Climate finance instruments provided by multilateral development banks (MDBs) for adaptation and mitigation can further accelerate the region's low-carbon transformation.

6 DISCUSSIONS

Uzbekistan occupies a strategic position in the heart of Asia and plays an important role in ensuring the security and stability of the entire continent.

It is difficult to overestimate the role of the Central Asian Summit, initiated by the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev, in the formation of a new political atmosphere in Central Asia. Regular contact at the highest level allows the region to fully realize its potential. Meetings at the level of partner organizations also play an important role in constructive dialogue.

It should be noted that only in 2023, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev made an official visit to 13 countries. At these meetings, the head of state mainly discussed issues of bilateral relations, economic cooperation, and the implementation of previously reached agreements, as well as issues of regional security and stability. It should also be noted that there is not a single visit or meeting at which Sh. Mirziyoyev did not raise the issue of ecology in the region. From 2015 to 2021, Central Asia received US\$8.9 billion in green finance from MDBs. In particular, Uzbekistan received almost half of the total amount – \$4.4 billion (49.1 percent). Reforms launched in Uzbekistan in 2017 (currency and price liberalization, customs and tax reforms, etc.) have increased the flow of climate finance. Kazakhstan received \$2.6 billion (29.4 percent), Tajikistan received \$1.1 billion (12.1 percent), and the Kyrgyz Republic received \$0.8 billion (9.2 percent).

And also, the President of Uzbekistan has repeatedly spoken about the importance of developing common approaches of the world community towards Afghanistan, without bringing the situation to the international isolation of the state and a large-scale humanitarian crisis. Of particular note is the fact that Uzbekistan continues to supply electricity to Afghanistan. It provides humanitarian assistance, and in 2022 the country contributed to the restoration of the airport in Mazar-i-Sharif.

Central Asian countries are able to attract more external climate finance due to higher physical climate risk. Without external funding, the green transition in Central Asia will become a burden on national budgets. Implementing green projects, low-carbon technologies and digital solutions to mitigate climate change and protect the environment is highly capital-intensive. For example, according to some estimates, achieving carbon neutrality will cost countries in the region between 100% (Kyrgyz Republic) and 300% (Republic of Kazakhstan) of

their gross domestic product (GDP). However, there are several ways to attract green finance for low-carbon development in the region.

First, countries can provide better, more cost-effective projects and develop links with MDBs operating in the region. For example, Turkmenistan has great potential to expand cooperation with MDBs, especially in the areas of modernizing extractive industries and reducing fugitive emissions. Uzbekistan can serve as an example of successful cooperation between Central Asian countries and MDBs. Second, Central Asian governments can focus on investing in renewable energy. Central Asia has great potential in hydro, solar, and wind energy. At the same time, countries must continue to develop balancing energy capacities, such as gas and nuclear power. In particular, Central Asia has great potential for the development of nuclear energy, since Kazakhstan is the world's largest producer of natural uranium and one of the main producers of nuclear fuel components.

Thirdly, external support can be linked to the development of domestic policies. Equally important are internal regulations, such as the Green Classification Law. For example, Kazakhstan has already adopted its own taxonomy of “green” projects, and in Kyrgyzstan, a taxonomy of “green” finance is being developed. Fourth, supranational support from multilateral agencies can be effective in building regional capacity. For example, countries can share regional experiences successfully implement measures, and disseminate energy efficiency technologies in the region. Improving energy efficiency is a key factor in reducing carbon intensity and should be part of green transformation strategies in agriculture, industry, and construction.

Fifth, moving to a regional ESG (environmental, social, and governance) finance market would be useful not only for issuing ESG bonds but also for attracting private capital to green projects. An international financial center in Astana could ensure the development of green finance policies and green finance instruments in Kazakhstan and the Central Asian region as a whole.

Finally, governments, international development agencies, and the private sector must work together to combat climate change. More financial resources, better national policies, and greater cooperation are needed to control the risks associated with climate change. This can subsequently become a valuable factor in long-term and sustainable economic growth. For the Central Asian states, Russia and China remain one of the main factors in their foreign and security policy, but for the United States, this region is of

interest only from the point of view of diplomatic interaction with Moscow and Beijing. In this regard, it can be expected that in the medium term, US attempts to undermine stability in the Central Asian states will be intensified, perhaps relying on the most radical religious elements of the Washington tradition. Central Asia is a testing ground for security tools that Beijing has yet to use elsewhere.

Unlike Russia, which views its security interests in Central Asia in terms of national security and geopolitical competition, China is content to protect its commercial interests and ensure that events in neighboring countries do not jeopardize political stability at home. Xinjiang Province, located in the far west of China, borders Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan and is much more similar in culture, ethnicity, language, and religion than other parts of China. Since the countries gained independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Beijing has sought to establish friendly ties with them, fearing they could otherwise inspire or fuel separatism in Xinjiang.

Another concern for Beijing is that Central Asia could become a bridge for jihadists from Afghanistan to join forces with Uyghur extremists in Xinjiang, especially after the 2016 suicide bombing of the Chinese embassy in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. But especially since the attack on Bishkek, China has held dozens of joint military exercises with its Central Asian counterparts and held hundreds of high-level meetings with its military and intelligence agencies. He also expanded cooperation in military technology, took part in numerous exchange programs linking Central Asian officers with Chinese military universities, and conducted regular joint border patrols.

These exchanges have turned Central Asia into a testing ground for security tools that Beijing has yet to use elsewhere. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, it pioneered the use of private security companies to protect Chinese investment projects. Another such experiment has been sending Chinese paramilitary police units to patrol and guard foreign borders: China has established two such bases on the Tajik-Afghan border since 2018, acting as a force multiplier for Tajik authorities.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan may be tempted to prioritize supplies to China in order to win the favor of their strategic partner and earn foreign exchange earnings, but then this will not be enough for their own people, and repeated domestic energy crises threaten the stability of their political regimes.

In our opinion, the optimal solution would be to start importing gas from Russia and Turkmenistan, since

the infrastructure for pumping gas from these countries has already been created. Like Russia, Turkmenistan is a global gas giant: it has the world's fourth-largest reserves and annual production of more than 80 billion cubic meters. In 2022, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan agreed for the first time on the direct import of Turkmen gas. However, relying only on Ashgabat will not solve the problem.

7 CONCLUSIONS

To summarize, we can admit that the countries of Central Asia still remain the most stable region in Russia's foreign relations in the post-Soviet space. The expected challenges and threats to stability are mainly related to internal factors, and only the interaction of Russia, China, and the countries of Central Asia will determine how dangerous these challenges and threats will become in the coming years.

Political processes in the countries of Central Asia can serve as a good example of the thesis of modern political science about the attractive power of democratic ideals. In the modern world, democratic ideals are popular among leaders of non-democratic regimes, who try to present their regimes as transitional systems that will develop into democratic regimes in the future.

Democratic regimes will become democratic regimes in the future. In this case, it is necessary to take into account the historical and sociocultural features of the political process in Central Asia. Many analytical schemes created by Western political science have not yet received empirical confirmation.

The real processes of democratization and modernization of political systems are very different from those described by theory. Political science still has a lot of work to do to adequately describe the processes that political science still has a lot of work to do to adequately describe the processes taking place here.

- Central Asian countries could attract more external climate finance due to the high physical climate risk in the region. Without external sources, the green transformation of Central Asia will become a burden on national budgets. Implementing green projects, low-carbon technologies and digital solutions to mitigate climate change and protect the environment is a very capital-intensive measure.
- Supranational support from multilateral institutions can be useful for enhancing

regional competence. For example, countries could share regional experiences successfully implement measures, and disseminate energy-efficient technologies in the region. Increasing energy efficiency is key to reducing carbon intensity and should be part of a green transformation strategy for agriculture, industry, and construction.

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