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JOURNAL	International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science
p-ISSN	2544-9338
e-ISSN	2544-9435
PUBLISHER	RS Global Sp. z O.O., Poland

ARTICLE TITLE	REGIONAL SECURITY: THE CURRENT SITUATION AND FUTURE TRENDS IN CENTRAL ASIA
AUTHOR(S)	Oyuntsetseg Densmaa, Baasankhuu Suren
ARTICLE INFO	Oyuntsetseg Densmaa, Baasankhuu Suren. (2023) Regional Security: the Current Situation and Future Trends in Central Asia. <i>International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science</i> . 4(40). doi: 10.31435/rsglobal_ijitss/30122023/8095
DOI	https://doi.org/10.31435/rsglobal_ijitss/30122023/8095
RECEIVED	20 November 2023
ACCEPTED	27 December 2023
PUBLISHED	29 December 2023



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REGIONAL SECURITY: THE CURRENT SITUATION AND FUTURE TRENDS IN CENTRAL ASIA

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.31435/rsglobal_ijitss/30122023/8095

ARTICLE INFO

Received 20 November 2023

Accepted 27 December 2023

Published 29 December 2023

KEYWORDS

Regional Security, National Security, Central Asia, Geopolitics, Soviet Union, Geo-economics, Great Powers.

ABSTRACT

In an interconnected world, the security of a nation is closely intertwined with the security of its neighboring regions. Regional security changes have the potential to significantly impact a nation's overall security. In the geopolitical and geo-economic scenario, the strategic position and possession of a state or region remains a challenging issue as evident from the evolving strategic scenario of 21st Century international politics.¹ In this framework Central Asian region is considered to be of major strategic significance because of its geopolitical position. In addition, the region possesses some of the important energy resources, mainly oil and gas, and access to them is of strategic significance to all involved – regional as well as the external players.

This study aims to provide an overview of the current situation of Central Asian countries and their prospects in security. Geographically Central Asia, the central part of Asia, this region is directly bordered by influential players in international relations. Central Asia is bordered by the Caspian Sea in the west, China in the east, Afghanistan in the south, and Russia in the north.² The region consists of former Soviet republics such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan.³

Central Asia has been an area of geopolitical interest due to its strategic location and abundant natural resources. To understand the current situation and future trends in regional security, it is essential to consider a few key factors. First of all, the Political Stability: Central Asia comprises Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. While these nations have made progress in political stability since gaining independence from the Soviet Union, challenges persist. Authoritarian governance, limited political pluralism, and ethnic tensions have occasionally affected stability in the region. Next, Terrorism and Extremism: Central Asia has faced the threat of terrorism and extremism, primarily from groups like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the Taliban, and now the Islamic State (IS). Also, it is Poverty, lack of economic opportunities, and political repression have contributed to the vulnerability of Central Asian populations to radicalization. The intricate balancing act of Central Asian states is examined through the concept of multi-vectors, a strategy used by these nations to diversify foreign alliances and resist domination by any single power.⁴

Citation: Oyuntsetseg Densmaa, Baasankhuu Suren. (2023) Regional Security: the Current Situation and Future Trends in Central Asia. *International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science*. 4(40). doi: 10.31435/rsglobal_ijitss/30122023/8095

¹ S. Showkat Dar, Strategic Significance of Central Asia in 21st Century, page2,

<https://ccas.uok.edu.in/Files/93269b6c-7f53-4439-ae9a-3bdf55a4c649/Journal/d746cf43-0d55-4f58-a74e-5f5a08fc7082.pdf>

² <https://wordspy.com/index.php?word=stans>

³ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Central-Asia>

⁴ Alvaro Mendez, Russia's Backyard: China and Central Asia after the Invasion of Ukraine, SPRINGER LINK, The Great Power Competition Volume 5, pp 199–216, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-40451-1_10

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Introduction.

The geopolitics of Central Asia are shaped by its geographical location and historical context, as well as its natural resources and the interests of regional and global powers. Central Asia is a vast region encompassing five countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Each of these countries has its own unique geopolitical dynamics, but there are common themes that can be observed. Geographical Significance: Central Asia is located at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Its strategic position between major powers and its proximity to important regions like China, Russia, and the Middle East make it critically important in geopolitical terms. Natural Resources: Central Asia is rich in natural resources, including oil, gas, minerals, and agricultural land. The presence of these resources has attracted the attention of global powers seeking energy security and economic opportunities.

The region where US and Russian military bases are situated is encircled by unstable areas such as Iran, China's Xinjiang, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The aim of sectarian groups in Central Asia is to create an Islamic caliphate in Xinjiang, a region that is susceptible to ethnic and religious conflict. The situation of international relations is currently unstable, and the relations between the major powers can shift at any moment. If the relations between the great powers escalate and eventually lead to war and armed conflict, there will be an attempt by them to use the vast territory of Central Asia as a war zone and its preparation stock and the probability is high. In order to prevent this type of risk, it has been more than 20 years since Turkmenistan announced its policy of constant neutrality, but it can be seen that the major powers are not favorable to this policy.



In order not to be affected by the conflict of interests of the great powers, it is necessary for the countries of Central Asia to finalize their territories and borders with each other and with other countries.

Historical background.

After the break-up of the Soviet Union, the republics that were part of it declared their independence, and several new regions such as Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia, etc. They were established within the boundaries of the Soviet sphere of influence. Central Asia is a concept that encompasses the five republics of the former Soviet Union, including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, after the breakup. Under this study, let's review the general trends and achievements of the current and future social and political reforms taking place in these countries from the socio-political transition process of the above country.

The post-Soviet Union situation.

Since the Central Asian countries declared their independence in 1991, in the process of organizing their independent states, they have faced enormous external and internal difficulties of both objective and subjective natures. The economic crisis began as a result of the decline in the economic strength of these countries. The center provided subsidies to four countries, except for Turkmenistan, during the Soviet Union. The trend of separatism became more pronounced due to the rapid decline in production after disintegration, the sharp rise in inflation, and the deterioration of people's livelihoods. This process is primarily affected by the collapse of centralized planning, investment, and supply. However, in the future of the independence and socio-economic development of the Central Asian countries, it was important to search for new forms and opportunities for cooperation and integration with each other and with Russia and other countries.

Two periods can be used to divide the actual development of new democratic institutions. It includes:

First period: 1991-1995. A period of democracy that is both natural and chaotic.

The general strengthening of parliament as a form of national representation was a major outcome of this period. Attempts by the parliament to interfere in the issue of executive power led to a crisis of governance, a decrease in the level of professionalism of governance, and thus the executive government limited the functions and activities of democratic institutions. The state was observed to be losing control and management of social and economic processes in the countries of this region.

The second period began in 1995, when the presidential government began to gain strength.

Most of Central Asia's countries continued to experience this process. For example, the Constitution of Kazakhstan adopted in 1995 established the executive power or the Government, the legislative power or the parliament, the judicial power or the Supreme Court, and other courts. Also, according to the Constitution, the President is the head of state, the guarantor of the observance of the Constitution, and the coordinator of the activities of each branch of government.

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan all have strong presidential systems, and in both Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, the presidents head the government, and in other countries, the president plays a decisive role in forming and dismissing the government.

The conflict between democratic reforms.

The process of democratic transition and development of countries in this region is unique, as can be said. First of all, there is a strong concentration of ethnicities. The following two characteristics are that the society of the Central Asian countries is traditionally structured by tribes and clans, which affects all policy processes, and the balance of power between these clan groups was taken into account even during the Soviet era. Political stability is ensured by the competition between these clans and tribes, which represents the political balance of the time.

The third aspect is a significant disagreement between the application of the political policy process and the established model of judicial power. The implementation of public policies in Central Asian countries is influenced by various traditions and informal methods that bypass and ignore existing democratic institutions. The public service's widespread use of nepotism and nepotism is hampering the normal functioning of modern legal institutions. An overview of the transition process of these five Central Asian countries shows the balance of power is unpredictable and the trend of super-presidential rule has been trending for the last years.¹

¹ Pagma.A, Academia, Political and economic transitions in central Asian countries, New Mirror magazine, Number (40), 2002.

The Current Situation in Central Asia.

The Russian Federation, the United States, the European Union, and Turkey are all involved in influencing the geopolitical situation in Central Asia, in addition to China. Central Asia's current situation is impacted by various political, economic, and security factors. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are the five countries that make up Central Asia. Although every country has its own unique circumstances, there are certain common themes that shape the overall situation of the region. The political landscape in Central Asian countries is diverse, with a range of political systems, ranging from authoritarian regimes to more inclusive ones. Some of the challenges related to political stability, human rights, and democratic governance have been faced by these countries. Recent years have seen some nations experience more political openness and reforms, while others have remained relatively closed. The regional cooperation and addressing common challenges are the goals of several regional organizations and initiatives in Central Asia. Today, there are many negative issues that affect the development of the countries of the region and increase their reputation on the international stage. It includes: International terrorism, Religious extremism, Separatism, Cross-border drug trafficking, Illegal arms trade, Environmental degradation, Problems related to the use of fresh water and transboundary rivers, Power supply, Transport and communication system /logistics/ with the capacity of countries to pass, Border disputes, Customs bans, visa and border entry difficulties in economic relations, Inter-ethnic and internal conflict, Poverty of the population of the peripheral areas, Bribery, Competition between tribes, Weak development of agriculture and industry, The presence of factors such as large migration of the working-age population abroad, which threatens the stability and security of the countries of the region.

These problems are grouped as follows. It includes: 1. Islamic extremism, separatism, terrorism; 2. Includes illegal trade in drugs and weapons.

One. Islamic extremism, separatism, and terrorism. One of the main threats to the security of the Central Asian region is Islamic extremism. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the successor Russia faced many new problems in its vast territory, and the countries of the Central Asian region were partly neglected. Central Asia is one of the regions that have been affected by Islamic extremism, separatism, and terrorism to a certain extent compared to other regions of the world, and may spread further. The activity of Islamic extremists in the region has increased.

First: the social environment of the post-Soviet Central Asian countries, the backwardness of development, and the internal crises caused by it,

Second: This crisis in Central Asia has been cleverly used by the supporters of the prohibited sects of the countries of the Islamic world with the same religion as them to expand their scope and influence.

Third: Since 1979, when the Soviet Union used its military forces to participate in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, it used mainly military personnel drawn from Central Asian countries, which in turn became the conditions for the spread of Islamic extremism in Central Asia.

As a result, since other Islamic countries and other extremist organizations began to influence them by helping them with weapons and introducing ideology along with economic support, favorable conditions for the expansion and transit base of international illegal business have been created in this region. The majority of the region's population, which is poor and uneducated, has supported the expansion of these processes.

The active activities of Islamic extremist groups in the region are more focused on factors such as terrorism, ethnic separatism, and Islamic extremism. And troubling regional problems such as organized crime, and drug and arms trafficking are all overtly linked to heretical Islamic extremism. Islamic extremist groups interfered in the political and social governance of Central Asian countries, influenced political forces, formed political parties, represented themselves in the government, and asserted their interests through intimidation.

Also, the interests of external great or regional powers are numerous in Central Asia.

Most interests are, however, driven by the need for natural resources and energy. Important powers such as China and India face a growing need for resources along with their economic and demographic growth. To meet this need, the states of Central Asia are considered to be potentially strong cooperation and trading partners. In addition, it has become clear to most actors, such as the EU, that depending on one single leading supplier implies vulnerability in the geopolitical and geo-economics sphere: Central Asia has thus become a way to diversify sources of natural resources vis-à-vis other

suppliers like Russia or Middle-Eastern countries. Furthermore, Central Asia's geographic situation makes it a bridge between continents and markets: Large-scale railway and pipeline projects would allow and increase connectivity with the global market. The Belt and Road Initiative, an instrument of China's economic and political policy, aims to achieve this goal through significant investments to develop Central Asian infrastructures.¹

Over the past three years, China, Russia, and the European Union have separately held summit meetings with Central Asian leaders and focused on developing relations. Also, the United States hosts an annual meeting known as C5+1 with foreign ministers instead of heads of state in Central Asia.²

Great powers have interest in central Asia.

Let's explore how the great powers are pursuing their interests in Central Asia.

Russia's strategy regarding Central Asia: The concept of foreign policy followed in Russia today states that "the development of bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is the priority of Russia's foreign policy."³

The interest of Russia in Central Asia has been determined this.

The collapse of the USSR has caused a fundamental change in Russia's policy in Central Asia. In the post-Soviet period, the policy followed by the Russian Federation in Central Asia was divided into 4 main stages.⁴ It includes:

The first phase, the beginning of the nineties. During this period, in line with Russia's artificial efforts to make itself a part of the West, Central Asia was not included or excluded from the priority goals of its foreign policy.

The second stage, the late nineties. At this stage, the Russian Federation made a principled assessment of its foreign policy, including its policy in Central Asia, and was critical of the situation.

The third stage⁵ - after V. Putin came to power in 2000, or the first 10 years of the new century. At this time, Russia was in a phase aimed at fully attracting the region politically in order to strengthen its position on the international stage.

The fourth phase – the period after 2010. The proposals put forward at this stage were defined by the former President of the Russian Federation D. Medvedev and the current President V. Putin. From here, it is clear that Russia is trying to take practical steps on certain issues to strengthen its position in Central Asia. Especially in the last few years, Russia has taken a strong interest in Central Asia and paid attention to the development of cooperation through regional and international organizations in the military (especially from the security perspective) and in the oil and natural gas sector. This is confirmed by the concept of foreign policy of the Russian Federation as mentioned above.

On the other hand, a clear understanding of strengthening Russia's position on the world stage and implementing profitable trade and commercial projects in the region has not been fully developed. In particular, some researchers note that the Russia does not have a unified policy on how to use this region in order to create a comprehensive economic development that is beneficial to itself, and to maintain and expand the potential of industry-innovation in the globalized world economy, and there are many factors affecting this.⁶ In other words, it means that the Russian Federation is demanding a clear and consistent policy and strategy for its current efforts in Central Asia.

Researchers believe that the future of relations between Russia and Central Asia depends a lot on Russia. For example, researcher V. Paramonov⁷ said, "Russia should take into account its economic and geopolitical potential and scale, and assume the role of a locomotive aimed at the comprehensive development of the economy of Central Asian countries".

¹ <https://www.kas.de/de/web/mongolei/publikationen/einzeltitel/-/content/geoeconomics-in-central-asia-great-powers-and-regional-countries>

² <https://news.mn/r/2653700/>

³ <http://www.kremlin.ru>, Concept of the Russian Foreign Policy, approved by the decree of the President of the Russian Federation DA Medvedev on July 12, 2008.

⁴ Konstantin Syroezhkin "The policy of Russia in Central Asia: a perspective from Kazakhstan

⁵ V. Paramonov, A. Stokov "Russian Foreign Policy in Central Asia", Central Eurasia – Politics

⁶ Marie Raquel Freire "Russian Policy in Central Asia: Supporting, balancing, coercing or imposing? ASIAN Perspective, Vol.33, No.2, 2014, pp125-149

⁷ V. Paramonov – Central Asian and Central Eurasian issues, such as regional integration, CIS, Collective Security Treaty Organization, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, policy researcher, expert, expert group leader.

On the one hand, Russia pursues a policy of activating bilateral political and military relations in order to strengthen its geostrategic position and influence in Central Asia and expand its security zone, while on the other hand, it aims to develop multilateral cooperation aimed at establishing a security system in the region and establishing the West's thrust led by the United States. Russia is still cooperating with the 'Stans' in the political and defense sector and providing significant aid in the training of personnel for law enforcement agencies. Important military installations of the Russian Federation are still located on the territory of Central Asian countries. **China's policies in Central Asia:**

China pays particular attention to three important issues: political relations, economic relations, and security. China's political relations with Central Asia focuses on two things:

First, to reaffirm the position and attitude of Central Asian countries which support China's territorial integrity, especially concerning Taiwan.

Second, it focuses on reaffirming the position and attitude of friendly relations of Central Asian countries toward ethnic separatists of China. As for economic and trade relations, China and Central Asian countries are gradually developing a strategic approach to strengthen their energy resource strategy, expand trade, and enhance energy cooperation with Central Asian countries, especially Kazakhstan. China continuously focuses mainly on the traditional security situation and fighting against the three forces of evil (terrorism, separatism, and extremism). There are following reasons for China's interest in Central Asia. It includes:

First: Ensuring security: After becoming an independent state, the "Stans" faced the problem of conflicting ethnic groups due to territorial and border disputes. China began to worry that this regional influence would affect Xinjiang, where the Uyghur ethnic minority lives, which borders directly with Central Asia. Also, the development of Islam in Central Asia may affect the activation of the separatist movement in Xinjiang, which may undermine the security of China's western border, so China has to participate in strengthening the stability of the Central Asian countries, willingly or unwillingly, in order to strengthen the stability of the Central Asian countries.

Second: Making energy imports multi-pillar: China's major goal is to reliably supply its growing economy and domestic needs with energy. The fact that the Central Asian region, which has significant oil and natural gas reserves, has been weakened by the influence of major foreign powers, has become a favorable ground for China to achieve this goal.

Therefore, China's interests in Central Asia:

1. Satisfying geopolitical interests, it was important to prevent the influence of rival and competing powers with interests in Central Asia from strengthening in the region and coming to the edge.
2. Aiming to expand the market. In industrialized China, it is very important to expand the external market for the sale of goods.

The SCO is the primary and important tool for China's political deals in Central Asia. Within the framework of the SCO, China has managed to increase its investment in member countries by almost eight times in ten years since the establishment of the organization.

Russia and China can make this region a field of cooperation rather than competition and mutual coordination of their activities may have an important effect on establishing stability in this region. If the two neighbors turn the region into a competitive arena, it is clear that the stability of Central Asia will be threatened. This situation will have an extremely negative impact on the security of both Russia and China. In order to avoid this, it is important for our two neighbors to establish a comprehensive mechanism for the development of mutually beneficial and multilateral cooperation in Central Asia.

The United States' policies in Central Asia:

Central Asia is a region of secondary importance for the United States. Washington increased its loans and aid to Central Asia and played a balancing role in regional security. It opened the possibility of using military facilities in Central Asia for U.S. military operations. However, when the "authoritarian" regimes of Central Asia sometimes act countermeasures to the values of democracy and human rights, Washington continued to condemn them. As a result, bilateral relations between the United States and Central Asian countries have deteriorated.

The US is interested in the region as a battleground for energy, raw materials and an important base in the war on terror. This economic and defense interest of the United States in Central Asia can be understood to reduce its dependence on imports from the Persian Gulf and to control the energy resources of the Caspian Sea. Russia is also interested in Central Asia as an area suitable for limiting

the influence of China and the threat of Iran. The United States has a strategic plan to "democratize" the region in Central Asia, not only in terms of energy and economy.

In particular, in order to expand the sphere of influence in the region, it is believed that the region is very interested in defense and economy.

The traditional "three-vector strategy" of the United States regarding Central Asia.

Regarding the three principal vectors:

- The geopolitical vector manifested by diplomatic activities and efforts in the field of military and defense cooperation;

- An economic vector manifested by the interest of the government and business, which seeks to control the most important energy resources of Central Asia, especially Kazakhstan's resources with natural gas, oil and uranium deposits;

- First of all, it can be defined as a political-ideological and humanitarian vector that will be manifested in the long-term plan of the United States to "democratize" the Central Asian countries according to the Western model.

These vectors have always included opposition to Russian and Chinese influence in the region. For example, the geopolitical vector is directed against Russia. Russia's geopolitical influence in the region is evident in its bilateral cooperation with Central Asian countries in the political, defense, and security spheres. ***C5+1 platform***¹

The C5+1 diplomatic platform is a platform for the United States administration to cooperate with the governments of Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) and implement comprehensive approaches and policies aimed at Central Asia. Within this format, the administrations of the last three presidents aim to expand the cooperation between the "states" and between the "states" and the "states" in all directions in order to achieve the goal of an independent, prosperous and secure Central Asia that solves common problems together. Since its establishment in 2015, the C5+1 has strengthened dialogue and expanded cooperation between the parties through ministerial and expert meetings and special thematic working groups. Furthermore, the C5+1 is regarded as one of the means by which the United States supports the C5's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity.²

The second goal of the C5+1 is to help Central Asian countries work together as a regional bloc. Because Washington believes that the conflict between the "states" weakens their capabilities and creates opportunities for foreign countries to use them, the policy of the United States:

- Respecting the multilateral foreign policy pursued by Central Asian countries;

- Increase the frequency and level of US diplomatic relations within the framework of bilateral relations and C5+1.

- Encourage soft power engagement, including more educational exchanges;

- Encourage cross-border community trust and resource sharing in the region, particularly around the disputed enclaves of the Fergana Valley;

- Supporting regional media initiatives and focusing on the use of media as a tool for public participation in positive change.

Therefore, the combined power of these three powers, America, Russia, and China, has the advantage of slowing down the influence of the ***"three forces of evil" (terrorism, separatism and religious extremism)***, i.e. Separatism, drug and illegal arms trade, from spreading out of this region. Taken together, the Central Asian region will continue to be a fiercely competitive arena where the three military and political powers of Russia, China, and the United States struggle to squeeze out their rivals, establish their own control, and avoid being squeezed by others. It can be observed that the interest of the great powers in Central Asia is growing more and more.

Turkey's policies in Central Asia. At the governmental level, Turkey is interested in becoming a leading power in Three Evils (三股势力)³: (The Three Evils is a political slogan of the People's

¹ The C5+1 diplomatic platform represents the U.S. government's whole of government approach to Central Asia, jointly engaging all five Central Asian governments (Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan). <https://www.state.gov/c51-diplomatic-platform/>

² U.S. interests in Central Asia are emerging amid strategic competition, Institute for Security studies, 30 March, 2023. <https://niss.gov.mn/archives/3041>

³ Three Evils (三股势力) : The Three Evils is a political slogan of the People's Republic of China defined as **terrorism, separatism and religious extremism**. The phrase refers to declared counter-terrorism operations undertaken by China, Central Asian republics, and Russia, primarily as related to Xinjiang.

Republic of China defined as **terrorism, separatism and religious extremism**. The phrase refers to declared counter-terrorism operations undertaken by China, Central Asian republics, and Russia, primarily as related to Xinjiang.)

Modern Turkey's economic interests in Central Asia can be determined by the following areas. Rich energy resources; - Transit location for goods; - A large market where all kinds of goods can be sold. After the independence of the Central Asian countries, Turkey's economic policy in the region was implemented in the form of "expanding its economic influence based on a policy of soft power and subjugating the region to its influence".

European Union policies in Central Asia.

Areas and categories of European Union policies and actions in Central Asia It is possible to identify four main directions for the development of relations between the Central Asian countries and the European Union since 1991.

a. Relations between the European Union and Central Asia Institution. Direction and form: Political relations. Areas of foreign policy: global policy, Asia-Pacific region, Central Asian region. The multilateral strategy of the European Union to Central Asia. The European Union's official development assistance. Other aid programs to Central Asia.

Goals and objectives: General orientation of "normative policy" based on the values, principles and norms of the European Union. From the point of view of geostrategic interests, the need to be present in Central Asia and to maintain a strategic balance with other major powers (Russia, China, the United States, India, and Turkey). Geopolitical interests¹ political² diplomatic vision of the European Union³. The Geoeconomic interests (trade and economic relations, energy security, infrastructure links between regions).

b. Bilateral relations; Direction and form: common directions of bilateral relations and cooperation in the political, diplomatic, trade, economic, and security fields developed by the member states of the European Union with the countries of Central Asia. It is common for a state-owned enterprise of a country or a multinational company registered in that country to develop bilateral relations in the form of protecting its interests and ensuring its business security.

Goals and Intentions: The national interests of the country and the interests of the country's large companies and corporations are at the heart of the goals and intentions of bilateral relations. However, some criteria of the "Normative Policy" of the European Union: common values, market economy, governance, anti-corruption, democracy, human rights, and equality are not mentioned.

c. Corporate Relations; Direction and form: When operating in Central Asia, companies and firms from European Union member states have learned to communicate in an appropriate manner, taking into account the specifics of local authorities, political heritage, culture, values and religious norms of the people.

Goals and objectives: Corporate relations only mention the shared values, business culture and philosophy that the company proclaims on the international stage. The goal of the companies is to ensure the stability and security of their own business interests and projects while meeting the needs of the country's ruling tribes, parties, and groups in both overt and covert ways.

d. Civil Society Relations; Direction and form: many projects and programs aimed at Central Asian society have been implemented by civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations of European Union countries (not the European Union itself) for more than 30 years. Goals and objectives: One of the characteristics of civil society relations is that they are interpersonal, which makes them more realistic and effective than other policies. Central Asian society and culture are different from European social relations, so it is important to define precisely the goals to be achieved. Since 1991, European civil society activities in Central Asia have been carried out mainly in the areas of civic education, support to small and medium enterprises, gender equality and equal rights in the labor market, basic understanding of democracy, information and training of Internet companies. As for the implementation and the results of these activities, it is difficult to draw common conclusions, as each organization measures this in its own way and the characteristics of each country are different.

¹ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/central-asia_en

² [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/628265/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)628265_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/628265/EPRS_BRI(2018)628265_EN.pdf)

³ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents-publications/library/library-blog/posts/democracy-promotionand-the-normative-power-europe-framework/>

Future trends of central Asia.

Central Asia is a region that encompasses Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. It is a diverse and geopolitically important area situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. *Several trends are expected to shape the future of Central Asia:*

1. **Infrastructure Development:** Central Asian countries are prioritizing infrastructure development to enhance regional connectivity and foster economic growth. Major projects include transportation networks, energy pipelines, and telecommunications infrastructure. These initiatives aim to improve trade links, connect remote areas, and attract foreign investment.

2. **Economic Diversification:** Many Central Asian nations are seeking to diversify their economies beyond a heavy reliance on natural resources. They are promoting sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, and services to reduce vulnerability to commodity price fluctuations and foster sustainable growth.

3. **Regional Cooperation:** Central Asian countries. It is “Working together for Development”¹. The program is a proactive facilitator of practical, results-based regional projects, and policy initiatives critical to sustainable economic growth and shared prosperity in the region.

Trends of the Central Asian countries.

Central Asia is rich in natural resources, and these 5 countries in the region differ greatly in terms of economic transformation. Considering all of the prospects, the relationship between China and Central Asia is set to intensify in the near future. This has several policy implications for both parties and for the wider region. Implications for Central Asian states. There are several pathways for Central Asian states to either fully embrace China’s power or to start mitigating it more consistently. The following policy implications therefore reflect both directions.

- Cooperation under the BRI framework can go beyond just investment projects and present China as an economic role model for Central Asian states based on state capitalism and a personalist political economy. This will mean further internalization of norms that are promoted by China, and prioritization of economic needs over political reforms.²

- Central Asian states should exploit the opportunity to implement necessary fiscal and economic reforms to prevent dependency on foreign loans; introduce robust policies on accountability and transparency of agreements, tenders, and joint ventures; And strengthen the institution of public dialogue to mitigate the challenges entailed by the expansion of trade links, and in order to fully benefit from the advantages that the BRI offers. In addition, policies of control and oversight by either civil society or independent financial institutions over the investments, and the implementation of transparency mechanisms are crucial to gain the support and trust of the public.

- The re-engagement of Uzbekistan within the region is another positive aspect that should give a boost to a much wider regional approach to issues of connectivity, trade and development. Moreover, the stronger the regional ties, the easier it will be to withstand China’s rising influence.

- Engagement with alternative investment sources could also be a way to manage and balance China’s economic power. This is a strategic opportunity for Central Asian states to go beyond the discourses and explore bilateral infrastructure and investment projects in India, Japan, South Korea, the EU and the US. This will, of course, depend on the technicalities of the investment climate and conditions for cooperation that the parties have to agree on. This would mean improving the business environment, investment climate and policies, and the legal protection in order to attract diverse foreign investors. In the security perspective of the Central Asian countries, the solution of the following problems remains a matter of concern. It includes:

1. The leadership of Central Asian countries, including Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, has not identified their successors, which may start a power struggle;

2. Islamic extremist groups and other organizations that have been defeated in Central Asia and the Middle East may become active;

3. The issue of national minorities in Central Asian countries is still controversial;

4. Struggle for power between tribes that covertly influence the country’s leadership;

5. Settlement of territorial disputes;

¹ <https://www.adb.org/what-we-do/topics/regional-cooperation/carec>

² https://www.fiia.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/wp126_china-and-geo-economic-dynamics-in-central-asia_aliyatskhay-1.pdf

6. If a foreign country invades the independence and sovereignty of one of the member states of the SCO¹ and the CSTO², in accordance with the obligations of the member states, they will be involved in armed conflict;

Once these issues are resolved, Central Asian countries can protect their region from traditional threats.

Unconventional threats in the Central Asian region need to consider the following factors.

It includes:

1. Issues of extremism, terrorism, separatism and illegal drug trade
2. The issue of territorial conflicts between international and inter-ethnic groups
3. Issues related to regional geopolitical and geo-economic conditions, resources, and ethnic territory.

4. Factors include poverty, technological decline, migration, demographics, and ecological problems.

Among the above factors, the problems of extremism, terrorism, separatism and illegal drug trade are most likely to affect Regional security.

Conclusion.

The regional security changes have significant implications for national security, and understanding these dynamics is vital for policymakers. By recognizing the interconnectedness, identifying threats, assessing implications, strengthening diplomatic engagements, fostering cooperative security arrangements, balancing national interests, and investing in defense capabilities, nations can effectively navigate the evolving regional security landscape and safeguard their own security interests. A proactive and cooperative approach is key to mitigating risks, promoting stability, and maintaining national security in an ever-changing world.

This involves analyzing geopolitical tensions, territorial disputes, conflicts, transnational terrorism, migration patterns, and other factors that can affect regional stability.

✓ Assessing the Implications: Once the regional threats and risks are identified, policymakers need to assess their implications for national security. This assessment should consider factors such as proximity, vulnerability of borders, economic interdependence, military capabilities, and the potential for spillover effects.

✓ Strengthening Diplomatic Engagements: Effective diplomatic engagements with neighboring countries play a crucial role in managing regional security changes. Building strong relationships, promoting dialogue, and seeking peaceful resolutions to conflicts can help reduce tensions and create an environment conducive to national security.

✓ Cooperative Security Arrangements: In some cases, cooperative security arrangements can be established to address shared regional security challenges. These arrangements involve collaboration among nations to collectively combat threats, share intelligence, conduct joint military exercises, and enhance border security.

✓ Balancing National Interests and Regional Stability: While safeguarding national security is paramount, it is crucial to strike a balance between national interests and regional stability. Overly aggressive or unilateral actions can escalate tensions and negatively impact a nation's long-term security goals. A comprehensive approach that considers both national and regional interests is essential.

✓ Investing in Defense and Intelligence Capabilities: In light of regional security changes, nations must invest in their defense and intelligence capabilities. This includes modernizing military forces, enhancing surveillance systems, and strengthening intelligence agencies to effectively monitor and respond to evolving threats.

✓ Regional Security Partnerships: Engaging in regional security partnerships, such as alliances or cooperative frameworks, can provide additional support and promote collective security in the face of changing regional dynamics. Collaborative efforts enable nations to pool resources, share expertise, and coordinate responses to common security challenges.

¹ Shanghai Cooperation Organization, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shanghai_Cooperation_Organisation

² The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO),

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collective_Security_Treaty_Organization#:~:text=The%20Collective%20Security%20Treaty%20Organization,and%20Tajikistan%2C%20formed%20in%202002.

Economically, the interests of Russia and China in Central Asia continue to overlap. China is expanding its cooperation year by year, and within the framework of the SCO, it is becoming economically more influential on the member states, while Russia is trying to create a unified cooperation mechanism that includes the Central Asian countries in its "lost" space. Is in the United States, in order to be as influential as Russia and China, we are looking for every opportunity to cooperate in the defense and economic fields. The members of the Eurasian integration are putting a lot of effort into the work of the union, as evidenced by the visits, meetings and agreements of the parties.

While Russia and China have publicly embraced multi-polarity together, their views on global governance and sovereignty diverge, as do their approaches to rearrange the current international order. Russia's recent foreign policy moves highlight a greater ambition to overturn the current liberal order, which it sees as a direct threat to its interests and security.

For Russia, multi-polarity means an international system where power is balanced between influential global players with a diminished role for the United States and the liberal values it allegedly has imposed on other states.

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