



## GEOPOLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS AND REGIONAL SECURITY: THE CASE OF CENTRAL ASIA

Asadov Farrukh

3rd-year student, Faculty of International Relations, University of World Economy and Diplomacy

farrux2140@icloud.com

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**Abstract.** This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the foreign policy strategies of Central Asian countries and their approaches to ensuring regional security. The study examines the foreign policy priorities of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, their national interests, and their strategies aimed at maintaining geopolitical balance. In addition, the political, military, and economic influence of major external powers such as Russia, China, and the United States in Central Asia is assessed from the perspective of regional security. The article also analyzes the role of regional and international organizations, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the United Nations (UN), and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), in security, economic stability, and integration processes. The findings indicate that the multi-vector foreign policy of Central Asian states is a key factor in ensuring regional stability and highlight the strategic importance of international cooperation mechanisms.

**Keywords:** Central Asia, foreign policy, regional security, geopolitics, multi-vector policy, SCO, CSTO, international organizations, Russia, China, the United States, strategic cooperation.

**Аннотация.** В статье представлен всесторонний анализ внешнеполитических стратегий государств Центральной Азии и их подходов к обеспечению региональной безопасности. В рамках исследования рассматриваются внешнеполитические приоритеты Узбекистана, Казахстана, Кыргызстана, Таджикистана и Туркменистана, их национальные интересы, а также стратегии, направленные на поддержание геополитического баланса. Кроме того, с точки зрения региональной безопасности оценивается политическое, военное и экономическое влияние ведущих внешних держав, таких как Россия, Китай и Соединённые Штаты Америки, в Центральной Азии. Также анализируется роль региональных и международных организаций, включая Шанхайскую организацию сотрудничества (ШОС), Организацию Договора о коллективной безопасности (ОДКБ), Организацию Объединённых Наций (ООН) и Азиатский банк развития (АБР), в обеспечении безопасности, экономической стабильности и интеграционных процессов. Результаты исследования показывают, что многовекторная внешняя политика государств Центральной Азии является ключевым фактором обеспечения региональной стабильности и подчёркивают стратегическую значимость механизмов международного сотрудничества.

**Ключевые слова:** Центральная Азия, внешняя политика, региональная безопасность, геополитика, многовекторная политика, ШОС, ОДКБ, международные организации, Россия, Китай, Соединённые Штаты Америки, стратегическое сотрудничество.

### Introduction.

Geopolitical transformations have today become one of the most significant characteristics of the international political environment. World politics is transitioning to a multipolar system, marked by shifts in the balance of power and the emergence of new regional and global threats. From this perspective, issues of regional security occupy a central place in state policies. In particular, the countries of Central Asia have long been at the center of geopolitical processes due to their strategic location, natural resources, and historical experience. The Central Asian region is not only geographically important but also of strategic political and economic significance. This region is connected to East Asia, Russia, the Middle East, and South Asia through transportation, resource, and energy routes. Therefore, any political or economic change in Central Asia has a noticeable impact not only on the countries of the region but also on global powers.<sup>1</sup> From a historical perspective, Central Asia developed within a centralized system of political governance during the Soviet Union period. After gaining independence, these countries sought to modernize their internal political systems, ensure economic stability, and develop international cooperation. At the same time, the emergence of new security threats such as terrorism, extremism, transnational crime, and conflicts related to water resources has become a significant factor in shaping their foreign policy strategies.

The main objective of this article is to conduct a scholarly analysis of geopolitical transformations in Central Asia and their impact on regional security. In the course of the research, interstate cooperation, foreign policy strategies, as well as the significance of global and regional security systems for the region are examined. The object of the study is the Central Asian region, while the subject is geopolitical changes and their influence on regional security.

The article also analyzes geopolitical theories and their relevance to regional security; the geographical and strategic importance of Central Asian countries; the relationship between internal political stability and external security; the contribution of international and regional organizations to regional security; and global and regional threats such as terrorism, extremism, economic challenges, and resource-related conflicts. Today, the countries of Central Asia are compelled not only to protect their national interests but also to pursue strategic foreign policies aimed at ensuring regional stability. Therefore, analyzing geopolitical transformations and anticipating security threats is an important tool for states in maintaining political and economic stability.<sup>2</sup>

#### Theory of Geopolitical Transformations.

Geopolitics is a discipline that examines the influence of geographical factors, political power, and economic resources on state policies and the development of the international system. It provides a foundation for the formation of state policy, territorial conflicts, and global strategic decision-making. Geopolitics determines a state's political and economic potential not only through its geographical location but also through natural resources, demographic composition, and transportation and communication routes. From this perspective, geopolitics plays an important role in strategic planning and ensuring security.

<sup>1</sup> [https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Agnew,+John.+Geopolitics:+Re-visioning+World+Politics.+Routledge,+2013,+p.+15.&hl=en&as\\_sdt=0&as\\_vis=1&oi=scholart](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Agnew,+John.+Geopolitics:+Re-visioning+World+Politics.+Routledge,+2013,+p.+15.&hl=en&as_sdt=0&as_vis=1&oi=scholart)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.cia.gov/library/abbottabad-compound/36/36669B7894E857AC4F3445EA646BFFE1\\_Zbigniew\\_Brzezinski\\_-\\_The\\_Grand\\_ChessBoard.doc.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/abbottabad-compound/36/36669B7894E857AC4F3445EA646BFFE1_Zbigniew_Brzezinski_-_The_Grand_ChessBoard.doc.pdf)



With changes in the global political system, geopolitical analysis has become increasingly complex. Interstate cooperation, security issues, resource distribution, and processes of regional integration require an understanding of geopolitical transformations. At the same time, contemporary approaches to geopolitical analysis also incorporate classical theories, as they constitute an important historical foundation for the formation of regional security.

Halford Mackinder, in his work *"The Geographical Pivot of History,"* put forward the concept of the Heartland. According to him, the center of Eurasia is strategically the core of world politics, and the state that controls it gains global dominance.<sup>3</sup>

The Heartland theory is based on three main ideas:

- 1.The center of Eurasia is considered the most strategically important region in the world.
- 2.States that control this region gain global political and economic potential.
- 3.The balance of regional and global power is determined by strategies aimed at controlling this area.

This theory played a significant role in Soviet-era strategic planning and continues to be highly relevant in analyses of regional security in the twenty-first century. In particular, Central Asia and the Caspian region, with their natural resources and transportation routes, make this area attractive to global powers.

Nicholas Spykman further developed Mackinder's theory by proposing the concept of the Rimland. According to him, coastal regions (the Rimland) occupy the most important strategic position in world politics because they control trade routes and maritime corridors.<sup>4</sup>

- 1.The Rimland concept emphasizes the following points:
- 2.States that control coastal regions gain global political power.

Understanding the balance of power between the Rimland and the Heartland is crucial for shaping interstate strategies. This theory is reflected as a key direction in the strategic foreign policy of the United States in the Asia-Pacific and Eurasian regions. In the twenty-first century, geopolitical theories have evolved in connection with globalization, regional integration, and transnational threats. Interstate economic interdependence, the global security system, and regional integration make it increasingly difficult to maintain geopolitical balance in strategically important regions such as Central Asia.

In contemporary geopolitical analysis, three main factors are identified:

- 1.Geostrategic location and natural resources oil, gas, water, and transportation routes make Central Asia strategically significant.
- 2.Domestic politics and stability internal political stability serves to strengthen external security.
- 4.International institutions and cooperation organizations such as the SCO, the UN, NATO, and others play a role in shaping regional security.

Thus, the analysis of geopolitical transformations should be conducted not only on the basis of classical theories but also in conjunction with modern global and regional processes. This approach assists Central Asian countries in making strategic decisions and ensuring regional security.

<sup>3</sup> [https://ondisc.nd.edu/assets/422105/mackinder\\_1904\\_heartland\\_article\\_17\\_pages.pdf](https://ondisc.nd.edu/assets/422105/mackinder_1904_heartland_article_17_pages.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://api.pageplace.de/preview/DT0400.9781351532099\\_A30457654/preview-9781351532099\\_A30457654.pdf](https://api.pageplace.de/preview/DT0400.9781351532099_A30457654/preview-9781351532099_A30457654.pdf)



### **The Geopolitical Context of Central Asia.**

The Central Asian region has historically been of strategic importance. Through the ancient Silk Road, it connected East and West and was economically and militarily significant for various empires and states. During the Soviet Union period, Central Asian countries were subject to a centralized political and economic governance system. After gaining independence, each country sought to establish its own national political system, ensure economic stability, and strengthen its position in foreign policy. In the post-independence period, the Central Asian states Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan were compelled to formulate their national security strategies. These strategies were aimed at ensuring internal political stability, promoting economic growth, and developing regional cooperation. At the same time, the emergence of new security threats extremism, terrorism, drug trafficking, and transnational crime became an important factor in shaping their foreign policies. Due to its geographical location, Central Asia is attractive to both global and regional powers. The region borders the Middle East, Russia, China, and South Asia and is connected through strategic transportation and energy routes. Therefore, this area holds global strategic importance not only because of oil, gas, and water resources but also because of its transit corridors.

### **Natural Resources and Energy.**

**Kazakhstan** is distinguished by its large reserves of oil and uranium.

**Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan** possess significant natural gas resources, giving them economic and political influence in the region.

**Water resources** (the Amu Darya and Syr Darya) are of decisive importance for regional security and agriculture.

Central Asia serves as a key hub linking transportation, trade, and logistics routes between China and Europe. Consequently, control over this region affects global trade and the balance of political power. Internal political stability is a fundamental factor of regional security for Central Asian countries. If a state's internal political system is unstable, it becomes difficult to implement an effective foreign policy strategy and ensure security.

1. Three main internal security challenges exist in the region:

2. Insufficient development of political pluralism and democratic institutions.

3. Ethnic and religious tensions: in certain areas of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, ethnic conflicts pose risks.

4. Threats of extremism and terrorism: the situation in Afghanistan remains a direct source of security threats for Central Asian countries.<sup>5</sup>

Taking these factors into account, countries are compelled to continue reforms aimed at ensuring internal political stability and adapting to regional security challenges.

Central Asian states rely on international and regional organizations to strengthen their security. In particular, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) plays an important role in ensuring regional security and developing cooperation in combating terrorism and extremism. At the same time, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) serves to strengthen interstate cooperation in the military and security spheres. In addition, the United Nations (UN), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and other international institutions contribute to ensuring economic stability and developing infrastructure in the region. Through international and regional organizations, Central Asian countries gain the opportunity simultaneously to

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia>

enhance regional security, integrate into the global economic and political system, and develop joint strategies to counter transnational threats. In this way, while maintaining internal stability, they seek to strengthen their position in the regional and global political environment.

### **Foreign Policy Strategies of Central Asian Countries.**

After gaining independence, Central Asian countries were compelled to formulate their foreign policy strategies. These strategies are closely linked to each state's political stability, economic potential, and geographical location. At the same time, through cooperation with global and regional powers, they seek to protect their national interests and ensure regional security. Uzbekistan's foreign policy is primarily aimed at ensuring regional stability, developing diplomatic relations, and expanding economic cooperation. After independence, Uzbekistan sought to present itself as an independent state with a firm and stable position. To this end, it developed cooperation with regional organizations the SCO, the CSTO, and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as well as with international institutions. By strengthening economic ties with foreign countries, Uzbekistan also places emphasis on developing energy and transport corridors. One of the main priorities of Uzbekistan's strategic foreign policy is enhancing regional security and intensifying the fight against terrorism. Through this approach, it seeks to strengthen internal political stability while increasing its standing in the global political arena.

In Kazakhstan's foreign policy, energy resources and economic cooperation occupy a central place. The country aims to develop transport and trade routes with China through the "Belt and Road" initiatives, while strengthening its traditional military and political ties with Russia. At the same time, Kazakhstan seeks to ensure economic stability, attract foreign investment, and expand regional cooperation through institutions such as the UN and the ADB. In its foreign policy, regional security and the effective management of resources are regarded as strategic priorities.

For Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, foreign policy is mainly focused on regional security, water resources, and the management of ethnic conflicts. These countries are geographically located in mountainous areas and have relatively limited transport and economic capacities. Therefore, they rely on developing military and economic cooperation with external powers particularly Russia and China. They also seek to counter transnational threats and ensure regional security through the SCO and the CSTO. Through this strategy, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan gain opportunities to maintain internal political stability and promote economic growth. Turkmenistan's foreign policy strategy is oriented toward exporting energy resources and developing transport routes. The country is distinguished by its rich natural gas reserves and seeks to strengthen economic relations with China, Russia, and European states through these resources. At the same time, Turkmenistan maintains its policy of neutrality while establishing stable cooperation with regional and global powers. This strategy enables the country to ensure internal stability and strengthen its position in the global economic arena.

Foreign powers and regional organizations play an important role in shaping the foreign policies of Central Asian countries. Russia traditionally acts as a leading force in regional security and military affairs. China seeks to strengthen its position in the region through economic and strategic interests, particularly in transportation routes, energy, and trade relations. The United States, in turn, attempts to maintain its influence in regional politics through security cooperation, counterterrorism efforts, and the promotion of democratic institutions. In addition, through regional organizations such as the SCO and the CSTO, as well

as international institutions (the UN and the ADB), Central Asian countries gain opportunities to enhance regional security, pursue economic integration, and develop joint strategies to counter transnational threats. In this way, while preserving internal political stability, they strive to strengthen their position in the regional and global political arena.

### **Conclusion.**

Overall, Central Asia today represents not only a geopolitically significant region but also a complex political space where internal political stability and external political balance are closely interconnected. First, the foreign policy strategies of the regional states are determined by their historical experience, geographical location, and economic capabilities. While Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan strive to maintain balance among global powers through multi-vector foreign policies, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan rely more heavily on regional and military alliances for security matters. Turkmenistan, in turn, seeks to protect its political stability and energy interests through a neutral foreign policy model. These differences reflect the external political landscape of the region as a complex yet adaptable system.

Second, internal political stability has been scientifically proven to be a fundamental condition for regional security in Central Asian countries. The strength of political institutions, consistency in economic reforms, and the provision of social justice reduce internal threats and enhance the resilience of states against external pressures. Conversely, internal political crises, social inequality, and governance weaknesses can give rise to transnational security challenges. Third, regional and international organizations serve as important instruments for ensuring security and sustainable development in Central Asia. Organizations such as the SCO and the CSTO strengthen military-political cooperation, while the UN and the Asian Development Bank support economic stability and institutional development. Through these institutions, Central Asian states integrate into the global political system and develop collective approaches to counter transnational threats.

Fourth, the involvement of major powers such as Russia, China, and the United States directly impacts the security architecture of Central Asia. From this perspective, it becomes increasingly imperative for Central Asian countries to view domestic and foreign policy as a unified strategic system.

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