
THE ROLE OF THE EXTERNAL FACTOR IN CENTRAL ASIA: ANALYSIS OF OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS

Sarbinaz Reipnazarova

*Doctoral Researcher, International Relations Department,
University of World Economy and Diplomacy Tashkent, Uzbekistan
sarbi_reipnazarova@mail.ru*

Abstract. *The geostrategic importance of the Central Asian region is associated with its geographical location, the presence of significant reserves of natural resources, as well as its important transit potential. Today, the countries of Central Asia are going through a stage of serious transformations associated with the strengthening of the role of external players in the region. The Central Asian region is becoming the target of major power confrontation and geopolitical confrontation between the world's leading players for resources and political influence. In this context, it is important for the Central Asian countries to assess both emerging opportunities and risks to maintain geopolitical balance and create a belt of security, stability and economic development around the Central Asian region.*

Key words: *Central Asia, external forces, transport and logistics corridors, geopolitical confrontation, geopolitical balance, USA, Russia, China, EU, regional cooperation.*

MARKAZIY OSIYODAGI TASHQI OMILNING ROLI: IMKONIYATLAR VA XAVFLAR TAHLILI

Annotatsiya. *Markaziy Osiyo mintaqasining geostrategik ahamiyati uning geografik joylashuvi, tabiiy resurslarning katta zaxiralariga ega bo'lishi hamda muhim transport va logistika salohiyatiga ega bo'lishi bilan bog'liqdir. Bugungi kunda Markaziy Osiyo davlatlari mintaqadagi tashqi kuchlarning rolini kuchaytirish bilan bog'liq jiddiy transformatsiya bosqichini o'tayapti. Markaziy Osiyo mintaqasi dunyoning yetakchi davlatlari o'rtasidagi resurslar va siyosiy ta'sir uchun raqobat va geosiyosiy ziddiyatlar ob'ektiga aylanmoqda. Shu nuqtai nazardan, Markaziy Osiyo davlatlari yangi imkoniyatlar va xavflarni baholashlari, geosiyosiy muvozanatni saqlab qolish va Markaziy Osiyo mintaqasining atrofida xavfsizlik, barqarorlik va iqtisodiy rivojlanish kamarini yaratish zarurligini tushunishlari muhimdir.*

Kalit so'zlar: *Markaziy Osiyo, tashqi kuchlar, transport va logistika yo'llari, geosiyosiy ziddiyat, geosiyosiy muvozanat, AQSH, Rossiya, Xitoy, Yevropa Ittifoqi, mintaqaviy hamkorlik.*

РОЛЬ ВНЕШНЕГО ФАКТОРА В ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ: АНАЛИЗ ВОЗМОЖНОСТЕЙ И РИСКОВ

Аннотация. *Геостратегическое значение Центральноазиатского региона связано с его географическим положением, наличием значительных запасов природных ресурсов, а также его важным транзитным потенциалом. Сегодня страны Центральной Азии переживают этап серьезных трансформаций, связанных с усилением роли внешних игроков в регионе. Центральноазиатский регион становится объектом соперничества крупных держав и геополитической конфронтации мировых ведущих игроков за ресурсы и политическое влияние. В этом контексте важно, чтобы страны Центральной Азии оценили как возникающие возможности, так и риски для поддержания геополитического баланса и создания пояса безопасности, стабильности и экономического развития вокруг Центральноазиатского региона.*

Ключевые слова: *Центральная Азия, внешние силы, транспортно-логистические коридоры, геополитическая конфронтация, геополитический баланс, США, Россия, Китай, ЕС, региональное сотрудничество.*

The modern world is faced with global changes that are associated with competition between states for spheres of influence, conflicts, and ongoing wars. Against the backdrop of these events, the countries of Central Asia are undergoing a stage of serious transformation associated with the strengthening of the role of external players in the region. The intensification of the role of leading world and regional powers can be associated with the geostrategic importance of the Central Asian region, namely its geographical location, and the presence of noticeable reserves of natural resources, as well as its important logistics and transit potential of the region.

Conventionally, there are several stages of geopolitical confrontation between the world's leading players for resources and political influence in the Central Asian region. The first stage is associated with the gaining of independence of the Central Asian countries, when the leading world and regional powers began to officially proclaim and implement their so-called Central Asian strategies. These documents put forward reasons for pursuing a more active and long-term policy in the Central Asian region. The United States, the European Union, Russia, China, Turkey, Japan, India, and South Korea have put forward their strategies. And the Central Asian countries themselves at that time were absorbed in the problems of state formation and tried to find their way in foreign policy. The second stage is associated with the entry of the international coalition into Afghanistan after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001; the Central Asian countries are pursuing a multi-vector foreign policy. The influence of not only traditional actors represented by states is growing in the region, but also non-

traditional actors: transnational companies and corporations have begun to promote their interests. Today, precisely with the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, many Central Asian experts have started talking about the third stage of strengthening external players in Central Asia with the participation of Russia, China, the USA, the EU, Turkey, India and Arab countries.

In this context, the importance of the region from a geopolitical and geo-economic point of view is emphasized. It should be noted that the activation of external players in the Central Asian region creates both opportunities and risks for the countries of the region. Speaking of opportunities: this is the development of transport and logistics projects, which will create conditions for Central Asia to become an important transport and logistics hub of Eurasia. For example, today the countries of Central Asia are increasingly paying increased attention to the development of transport and logistics corridors. For example, according to data, more than 80% of land transit traffic along the China-Europe corridor passes through the territory of Kazakhstan. In addition, Kazakhstan approved the concept for the development of transport and logistics potential until 2030. The main goal of this concept is to become one of the regional leaders in terms of the level of development of transport and transit potential, providing both internal and external needs for efficient transportation. Uzbekistan has also begun to pay great attention to the development of transport and logistics routes, for example, on the initiative of Uzbekistan, in 2023, negotiations were held between representatives of the transport and railway departments of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran and Turkey, who discussed the transport corridor “China – Kazakhstan – Uzbekistan – Turkmenistan – Iran – Turkey – Europe.” In 2022, the Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Turkey railway route was launched. This corridor has become the shortest and most convenient way for Uzbekistan for export-import transactions with Turkey. Central Asia can become an important transport and logistics hub for Eurasia.

Opportunities are opening up in attracting new investments and relocating part of foreign business. Today, more than 60% of foreign investment in Central Asia comes from Kazakhstan. Also, to attract investors, the leadership of Uzbekistan is placing a serious emphasis on the development of green energy in the country. For example, the construction project of a wind power plant in the city of Zarafshan, Navoi region, received the PFI Awards as the deal of 2022 in Central Asia. This project is being implemented by Masdar from the United Arab Emirates. This trend could make Uzbekistan one of the leaders in the region in the development of green energy, which may be of interest to new investors.

But we should not forget that the activation of external players brings not only opportunities, but also risks. We see geopolitical destabilization growing in the region. The region is surrounded by countries that are under Western sanctions: Russia, Iran, Afghanistan. In turn, China and the United States are in a

state of frozen confrontation. All this makes the geopolitical balance in Central Asia very fragile.

In addition, the region is witnessing increased competition between different countries for the extraction and processing of critical raw materials and rare earth metals. In particular, Europe is interested in importing critical materials in order to reduce the EU's dependence on the supply of these materials through Russia from China. This explains the recent statement by the European Union of its readiness to help the countries of Central Asia not only in the extraction of rare earth and other metals, but also in their processing. For example, Tajikistan may also become an area of increased interest from different countries of the world due to the presence of significant reserves of antimony, which currently amount to approximately 600 thousand tons. This is the third place in the world, after Russia and China. The first to show interest in these reserves was the United States, which has already created an appropriate joint Tajik-American venture. As Tajik experts note, the US interest in Tajikistan in this matter is due to the fact that the Americans received antimony mainly from China and partly from Russia. But amid increasing tensions with China and the outbreak of war in Ukraine, the United States is trying to find an alternative because antimony is critical to the defense and semiconductor industries. In parallel, the positions of Russia and China are strengthening, offering new formats for interaction with the countries of the region.

Based on the above, the question arises of how Central Asian countries can build relationships with external players so that this interaction with them leads to the achievement of more favorable conditions for the countries of the region.

First of all, closer regional cooperation within Central Asia is needed. Namely, close interaction and cooperation on a parity basis. Firstly, cooperation between Central Asian countries will help unlock the economic potential of the entire region. Secondly, interaction between countries in the region can become an effective defense against unfriendly economic and political interference from external forces.

Against the backdrop of events around the Central Asian region, it is important to form and develop our own Central Asian agenda in the areas of security, economic cooperation, energy, agriculture, transport and logistics. Ultimately, the United States, Russia, China, the EU, and other geopolitical players always proceed from their own interests when starting a game in our region. And only we ourselves need to develop our own agenda for the development of the region, minimizing the risks that have arisen and, without ignoring the emerging opportunities, attracting equal partners who are ready to help us.

Ultimately, it is very important that the countries of the region are able to balance their relations with various external actors, taking into account their national interests and characteristics. Dialogue, cooperation and the development of mutually beneficial relations can contribute to the sustainable development of Central Asia and ensure its security and prosperity.

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