

GORDIAN KNOT IN CENTRAL ASIA REGIONAL SECURITY COMPLEX: A MULTI-VECTOR ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan have gained their independence. The characteristics of the region, some of which are the Turkish-Islamic identity, common history, common culture, and shared state borders, interconnect the fates of these newly independent states. Therefore, the cooperation and integration of these states are essential for the security of the region. However, this cooperation and integration are obstructed due to some policies implemented during the Soviet Union period and the policies of the two great powers close to the region. In this study, which aims to analyze Central Asia within the framework of “Regional Security Complex Theory” and its analysis units, we try to evaluate the intra-regional problems and the policies of Russia and China through the philosophical-ideological base, economic, political, and security units.

Key Words: Central Asia, Russia, China, Regional Security Complex.

INTRODUCTION

The disintegration of the Soviet Union caused a geopolitical power vacuum, especially in the Central Asian region. The transition process of the five Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, which gained their independence) into the nation-state model and their integration with the international system continues with certain problems.

From the historical perspective, Central Asian states carry the Turkestan heritage with their kinship ties, religion, similar language structures, and common culture. The fact that the regional states have kinship ties, common religion, and their adjacent borders may especially ensure the integration of the region in a geopolitical context. In this respect, the “Regional Security Complex Theory”, which is effective in the formation of a regional security complex, suggests that the existence of elements such as common history and culture, the imagination of civilization, and the neighbouring borders to each other helps us to analyze the region through this theory.

This study aims to analyze Central Asia within the framework of “Regional Security Complex Theory” (RCST) and through the analysis units of the mentioned theory. It also evaluates intra-regional problems and Russian and Chinese policies and strategies towards the region due to their geographical proximities using the philosophical-ideological base, economic, political, and security units.

REGIONAL SECURITY COMPLEX THEORY

The Regional Security Complex (RSC) refers to the consistent functioning of geographically interdependent patterns in a sub-global form within the framework of lasting friendship or hostility relationship. In other words, the unique formations of RCSs are influenced by the long-running hostilities in the region or by the historical processes of the common understanding of cultural civilization. The RCS consists of, on the one hand, the relationship between the anarchic structure of the international system and the results of the balance of power; and, on the other hand, the effects brought by local geographic proximity. Geographical proximity helps states to interact with each other in the military, political, social, environmental, and economic fields within the context of security sectors. However, in contrast to the fact that the security of geographical proximity is a mutual consideration for the states, there is also the fact that the source of insecurity emerges because of geographical proximity. In this case, mutual security perception does not express a complete understanding (Buzan ve Waever, 2003: 45-46). For the formation of RCS, the states in the region must have a common security threat and/or a common national interest. The reason for this is that both situations (especially the existence of the first situation –security threat– may bring the second one –common national interest– with it) are stabilizing factors for the full integration of RCS.

RCS analysis is performed in four stages and their relations with each other are thus revealed. These four levels are as follows (Buzan and Waever, 2003: 51):

- Security vulnerabilities that may emerge in the states of the region (especially within the states), in the consistency between state and nation and stability of

the internal order, (A state's specific vulnerability defines its security fears and sometimes makes another state or group of states a structural threat even without any hostile intentions).¹

- Inter-state relations,
- Interaction of the region with its neighbouring regions,
- The role of global powers in the region and the interaction among them. (The role of the superpowers or global powers on the RCS within their capacities and the struggle, which they can endure among themselves, are closely related to the security of the region).

CENTRAL ASIA REGIONAL SECURITY COMPLEX

In the historical process, Central Asia emerges as a unified structure in its culture and as a divided structure (Turkish domination before and after Islam, Persian and Mongolian influence, Tsarist Russian domination, and after the Soviet Union) within the framework of the conditions of the respective periods and the policies of the respective dominant forces (Gleason, 1997: 25). For the centuries, Central Asia has acquired elements such as the common history, similar language structures, common religion –and thus a common culture– and neighbouring borders (Klimenko, 2011: 9). These elements are of great importance for the production of an RCS.

After gaining their independence, Central Asian states were confronted with several security problems, whereas they also had problems in reaching sufficient capacity to solve these problems. Although regional cooperation emerged as an inevitable imperative in the face of two basic problems (security problems and lack of capacity), the policies implemented by the Soviet Union throughout its period of governance left behind very unstable geography and a region full of chronic problems. Therefore, comprehensive and effective cooperation between the Central Asian states could not be achieved when they gained their independence (Birdsli, 2017: 124).

The main reason for the problems that arise on a regional scale is that these societies were separate states during the Soviet Union period. These societies, who had lived under the khanates before the Tsarist Russia invasion of Turkistan, faced many socio-political issues in the process of transformation into mukhtar republics during the Soviet Union period. In parallel with this, the “Russification” policy, which had been implemented in the region since the first years of the Soviet Union, and especially by the Stalin administration, overturned the demographic structure of the region and added new problems to the problems already experienced in the process of politicization. Besides, the underground and overland natural resources of the regional states and the strategic importance of the region's geopolitical position have made the region an area for which the

1 The point that Buzan and Weaver draw attention to is the concept of the security dilemma put forward by the realist theory. In general, the reason why states experience security dilemmas is the uncertainties caused by state behaviour. Butterfield summarizes the uncertainty in the *security dilemma* as follows: “You can never be sure of the intentions of that state against you since one state knows (at least) that it will not harm (or at least) the other state (but the other state) cannot fully predict your intentions.” For more information: Herbert Butterfield, *History and Human Relation*, (New York: Collins, 1951), p. 21.

great powers of the international system have competed. At the same time, the fact that the region is an element of balance between Russia and China is another important issue to be taken into account.

RSC of Central Asian will be explained through the analysis levels of RCST, which we have discussed theoretically above. These levels of analysis are as follows:

- Problems within the region: borders issues, demographic conflicts, sharing of water and farmland, and religious radicalism.²
- Policies of the great powers towards the region: Russia and China.

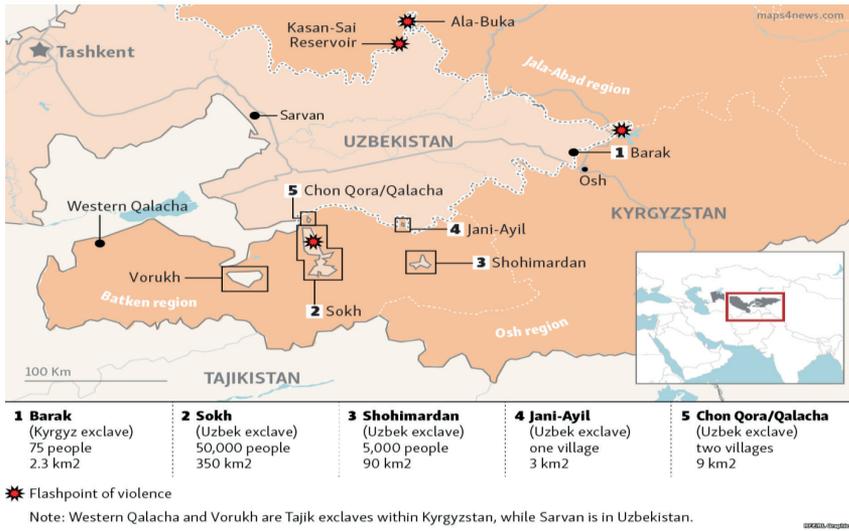
PROBLEMS IN THE REGION

The problems among the Central Asian states are generally caused by border disputes. Border problems are largely motivated by factors such as demographic conflicts, sharing of water and farmland, and the spread of radicalism.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan continued to accept the former Soviet administrative borders as new state borders rather than performing territorial claims in the historical context. But then, these administrative borders have never existed and the borders drawn have made all Central Asian states more complex and at the same time more interdependent. While drawing the boundaries in question, the Soviet Union could not create structures that would contain complex ethnic elements, demography, natural geographical divisions or that would legitimately separate them from each other. Considering that the Soviet Union has drawn the boundaries in a strategic context without allowing groups of states in the region to unite against Moscow, we can say that these tactics and strategies of the Soviet Union are the main causes of problematic border disputes today (ICG, 2002: 1).

The above-mentioned border disputes after the dissolution of the Soviet Union have become known with a series of events. One of these events is the restrictions of mining and free movement on the borders of Uzbekistan to ensure its national security following terrorist attacks on it. The fact that Uzbekistan acted unilaterally has created a driving motive for the other countries in the region to start negotiations on the determination of the borders. Uzbekistan announced that it would withdraw from the Bishkek agreement launched in 1999 aiming to lift the visa application within the body of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) under the leadership of the Russian Federation (Ari, 2008: 436-437).

² With the collapse of the anti-religious Soviet system, Islam became an important identity element especially for Central Asia. Since the 1990s, the Islam in the region continued to exist moderately, based on its basic methodology of Sunni Islam brought from the past. However, some groups have formed a more radical organization, especially due to the criminal past of the Soviets. Today, religious radicalism continues to be a threat to all countries in the region. See Galym Zhussipbek, "Religious Radicalism in Central Asia". *Rethink Paper* No. 12. (Washington, DC: Rethink Institute, 2013) p. 3.

Figure 1. Areas of Border Conflict

Source: azadliq.org

The unresolved border dispute between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan has been going on for almost two decades. Although there is no direct conflict between these two states regarding border issues, events may cause the states' security forces to confront each other. Tensions rose in 2016 when Uzbekistan sent its troops including armoured vehicles to the disputed area to take "Orto Tokoi Dam" from Kyrgyzstan, and then Kyrgyzstan responded in the same way. Uzbekistan insisted that Orto Tokoi Dam was built with its own resources during the Soviet Union period and therefore it should have the dam, while Kyrgyzstan claims that the dam resides within its territory, therefore the dam belongs to itself (Toktogulov, 2018: 87).

In 2019, Prime Minister of Uzbekistan Abdulla Aripov met his Kyrgyz counterpart Muhammedkaly Abulgaziyev in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan and the two prime ministers addressed border problems between the two countries. In the statements made after the meeting, it was announced that 92% of the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border was organized. In the same meeting, negotiations related to other water resources problems were discussed, in addition to the agreement on the joint use of Kasansay Water Supply reached in QHA (2017).

Border problems between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan also include ethnic conflicts and radical religious movements. In this regard, the Fergana Valley, where the Central Asian population is the most concentrated, causes problems mostly among Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Besides, the Fergana Valley is also a region neighbouring Afghanistan, Pakistan, and China (East Turkistan) and this fact deepens the problems anlaşılmaktadır (Birdisli, 2017: 127).

Border disputes between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan also include many elements. According to the agreement in 1991, Uzbekistan gave most of its leased lands back to Kazakhstan. However, Bagys Village -80% of its population consists of Cossacks- was not returned to Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan did not intervene

in order to prevent escalation in the tension escalation at the beginning but the importance of the region made the problems chronic. The area is close to the most densely populated areas of Kazakhstan and has characteristics such as arable land and water resources. At the same time, the rising influence of religious radicalism in the southern regions raises national security concerns in Kazakhstan

In this context, the border problems arising in the RCS of Central Asian states create a security dilemma as an inevitable consequence of their adjacent borders. The reason for this is the fact that the borders of the regional states are so intertwined with each other that a border problem between the two states may affect another state (or other states) in the region or may create an unstable area within the centre of the region, which will affect the entire RCS (ICG, 2002: 8).

POLICIES OF THE GREAT POWERS TOWARDS THE REGION

Famous geopoliticians' comments on Central Asia have influenced some countries' policies towards the region. Three reasons make the region strategically important in terms of global policies: The first one is the position of Central Asian geopolitics among important countries such as India, China, Iran, Russia, and Pakistan; the second one is the energy resources of the region and Caspian Basin; finally the third one is the threat to international security due to factors such as illegal drug production and trade and the presence of radical terrorist elements in the region, especially in Afghanistan (Rahimov ve Urazaeva, 2005: 17).

Central Asia RCS has become a field of competition and cooperation of regional or global powers with its positive and negative features. Although the strategies and policies of the mentioned states include different motivations, continuing their activities in the region remains their main target. Russia and China, which are the subjects of the study, try to realize their political strategies for the region through "philosophical-traditionalist ideals" and "international and/or interstate organizations".

Russia: Cooperation or Russian Commonwealth?

Understanding Russia's policies towards RCS of Central Asian is closely related to understanding Russia's historical and geopolitical situation. In terms of its geography, Russia lacks natural shelters (elevation, sea, or wide riverbeds) at its borders. In this regard, occupations against the country have become easy. During Tsarist Russia, certain parts of the country were considered as buffer zones against threats: the East Europe region against the West, the Caucasus region against the Ottoman Empire, and the Central Asia region against India (during the British occupation of India) and China. During the Soviet Union, the same buffer zones were used against different actors for the same purposes. The main reason for the creation of these "buffer zones" is to create a barrier in order to keep the threats away from the core region of the country. In the course of the Soviet Union, the state applied expansionist policies to protect its periphery against the siege/encircling policies implemented by the USA against itself.

The geopolitical gap that emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union also weakened Russia's influence in Central Asia. At the same time, the gross na-

tional product of the countries of the region decreased remarkably, when the 70 years of economic relations with the Russians during the Soviet period had disappeared. The region was also badly affected by the economic breakdown in Russia.

In Central Asia, issues such as economic instability, border conflicts, ethnic conflicts, local separatist movements, the security of ethnically Russian people living in the region, the appearance of some weapons of mass destruction from the Soviet Union era in the region have also raised several controversies.

In this context, Russia tried to produce political- economic- and security-oriented policies towards the region and defined the region as its a “near abroad” in the doctrine, published in the first years of its independence (1993). These policies of Russia included an integration strategy, which has been implemented across Central Asia through organizations such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). The “philosophical-ideology” infrastructure of the policies was built on “Neo-Eurasianism”.³

In the Soviet era, many Eurasianists were exiled to the remote corners of the country, and any ideological element other than Marxist thought was denied the right to life. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Eurasianism, which has got rid of its strict discipline, entered into the agenda once again. In this period, although Neo-Eurasianism experienced some breaks from the “classical Eurasianism”⁴ line in certain ways, it preserved its basic motivation however it contains different perspectives, not a single intellectual and spiritual element (Zengin, 2019: 57).

Aleksandr S. Panarin, Rustan Vakhitov, Mikail L. Titarenko, Boris S. Erasov, Eduard Bagramov, and Aleksandr G. Dugin are among the most important Eurasianists of the new era (Imanov, 2008: 213).

Table 1 presents a comparison of Neo-Eurasianist on the intellectual basis and

3 There are several important reasons why Classic Eurasianism was resurrected as Neo Eurasianism. These reasons are generally normative. Westerners did not show enough economic and political interest in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Russians thought that they were moving away from Europe geographically and regressed geopolitically and even became as a Third World country. In the 1990s, some powers in Asia such as China, India, and Japan became able to compete with Western civilization in many areas by becoming a rising power after following their unique development paths without disrupting their traditional structures. All these rhetoric disappointed Russians but also motivated them. Tani Bora, “Rusya’da Radikal Sag ve Avrasyagilik”, Uygurigin Yeni Yolu Avrasya, ed. Erol Goka and Murat Yilmaz, (Istanbul: Kizilelma Yayincilik, 1998) p. 113.

4 In its classic form, Eurasianism is the political, social, and ideological movement of the first wave of Russian immigrants (after the 1917 October Revolution). Classical Eurasianism was developed not only with a philosophical, abstract perspective but also with the participation of people from many different fields. See: “Eurasianism”, *The Fourth Political Theory* (4pt), accessed April 4, 2020, <http://www.4pt.su/en/topics/eurasianism>. Classical Eurasians first tried to clarify the entourage of Russian culture. In this regard, they rejected the European culture based on the idea that what the Russian culture was not more than what it was. In this respect, the Russians claim that they do not belong to either a European culture or an Asian culture, but that they have an exclusive culture in a special mixture of Eastern and Western culture. The basic views of classical Eurasianism can be analyzed under the headings of “civilization approach”, “geographical factor”, and “state and nation”. In the civilization approach, a criticism of the Roman-Germanic peoples was formed, claiming that the West was against humanity. The concept of geographical determinism has been explained in the geographical factor, based on the fact that we cannot understand them without considering the environment where nations flourish. A dialectical perspective on national history has been developed by evaluating the concepts of state and nation on the axis of Pan Slavism and Turan. Alexander G. Dugin, *Insanligin On Cephesi: Avrasya*, trans. Erdem Ergen, (Istanbul: Kaynak Yayinlari 2017), pp. 19-26.

through units such as the level of analysis of Eurasia, its basic mission and criticism, Russia's mission in Eurasia, and fundamental threats against Eurasia.

Table 1. *Comparison of Neo-Eurasianists*

Neo-Eurasianists	Level of Analysis	Basic Mission	Its Criticism	Russian Mission in Eurasia	Fundamental Threats
Panarin	Historical interpretation of civilization process	Shared traditions and unity of fate	West, USA, Modernity	Russia should turn to East and stay away from Western-type projects	West, Eastern Asia-Pacific
Erasov	Civilization Approach and Civilization Theory	Great Ideal, local regional civilization	Concept of Eastern Despotism and globalization	It should form its own civilization foundations	
Bagramov	Russia and CIS, democratic integration	Multi-identity, integration in diversity		It should not lose its multi-cultural structure	Russian Nationalism, disintegration from a federation into a nation-state
Titarenko	China and Asia-Pacific	Economic development		The most appropriate ideology is the integrative Eurasianism	Controversy of different ideas in domestic and foreign policy
Vakhitov	Marxism, Turkish-Slavic brotherhood	Re-building of socialist order	Liberalism and democracy	Communist Party should be strongly supported	Atlantists, Westernist capitalists
Dugin	Regionalism, scientific patriotism, trans-disonalism	CIS, multi-polarity	Unipolar, USA-centred system	Eurasinism is not a choice but a matter of life or death	USA/ Atlantism

Source: Zengin (2019: 57)

When Table 1 is examined, the Neo-Eurasianists' emphasis on regional civilization and traditionalism is remarkable. Civilization and traditionalist imagination proposes an integration within the framework of the CIS in the context of factors such as harmonization in Central Asia and economic, political, and security. The main threats conceived by the Eurasianists are the West-Atlantic line and demographic issues. The enlargement of NATO and the EU towards Eastern Europe had an impact on the definition of threats of Neo-Eurasianists. Since the security threats for Russia came from the West and Atlantic through Eastern Europe, this region was considered as a line that must be defended and protected. On the other hand, Central Asia has been seen as a living area, which requires integration based on cooperation in various fields. In this respect and from a traditionalist perspective, the idea of Russia's civilization and living space lies within Central Asia. Today, the motivations of this traditionalist point of view are the energy resources of the region, the strategic importance of the Muslim population, the

balancing and/or blocking of China and the US's activities in the region.

Eurasianism's influence on Russia's policies also shows itself in the article titled "A New Integration Project for Eurasia: The Future in the Making" and written by the President of Russia Vladimir Putin on 3 October 2011 (who was the Prime Minister at that time). The article highlights the successful and unsuccessful aspects of the CIS and four analyzes by Putin on the integration of Eurasia, which attract attention. First, the article emphasized that said integration does not intend to revive the Soviet Union. At the same time, an effective and strong transnational association was depicted between Europe and Asia-Pacific regions, stating that there is integration towards the requirements of the modern international system. The second factor, which the author stated, is that it is the gradual unification of the customs union and the common economic area. The need for the integration of the Eurasian Union with the CIS constitutes the third analysis. Finally, he stated that the Eurasian Union could be successful by acting together with the countries of the region in the 21st century (Putin, 2010).

The main organizational structure of Russia's regional policies and integration with the region is the CIS. In the first years after the establishment of the CIS, there were developments in the context of resolving border disputes, removing customs barriers disrupting trade among the countries of the region, and an attempt to establish a common customs union. At the same time, there were some initiatives regarding activities conducted under the common security umbrella and common foreign policy steps.

CIS is an organization closely related to Russia's national security because any unstable environment in the region may affect Russia directly or indirectly. For example, the fact that the USA or China enters into the region or that radical groups and terrorism spread throughout the region may create a national security problem for Russia. Since the energy resources of the region are a centre of attraction for global powers, this region may turn into a battlefield, just like the Middle East. Thus, Central Asia is essential for the security of the southern borders of Russia. This region, which had been regarded as a buffer zone against the British threat from India in the past, provided the same function for Russia to protect itself from different powers after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Therefore, the establishment of the CIS immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union reveals the functionality of this organization.

Another organization led by Russia in the region is CSTO. Undoubtedly, the events of 9/11 have had a major impact on the transformation of the Collective Security Agreement into CSTO. In this context, Russia offered a framework of the common struggle against international terrorism, and the regional states, which considered effective security structuring in Central Asia as a necessary attempt, welcomed this situation per their own interests. In this framework, third parties are prohibited from establishing a military base in these countries and if a member country does not conform to this ban, dismissals and sanctions were brought into the agenda. The banning of any states other than member states from establishing a military base in the region has been used as a strategy by Russia to prevent the USA and China from showing military service in the region. The "crisis commissions" established within CSTO has been the way for the organization to intervene in the cases where member states cannot overcome on their own. It can be said that these commissions aim to defend the organiza-

tion against the “colour revolutions”⁵ in the region. The main reason for making CSTO effective is that integration activities tried to be provided by CIS are performed at the desired level. Therefore, full stability was aimed to be achieved in the region through the establishment of an organization whose security-oriented objectives were determined.

Another organization led by Russia, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), was established for the economic integration of the region. The organization aims to raise economic development and living standards among member states. Gross Domestic Product of the EAEU is \$1.9 trillion and the volume of external trade with third countries is \$753.8 billion. Total oil production of member countries is 647.8 million tons (1st in the world) and total natural gas production is 781.7 million m³ (2nd in the world) (EAEU, 2020).

The establishment of EAEU is the economic pillar of political and security-oriented organizations in the region led by Russia. Although the establishment phase of the organization has been based on some of the past studies, the main reason for the start of its operations in the first quarter of the 2000s was China. Russia has tried to eliminate high investments of China in the region and its increasing economic relations with the countries of the region through this organization. The fact that China has gained an effect in the region and especially in the economic area means that Russia is losing power in the region.

Russian policies towards Central Asia implemented through these organizations can be clearly seen in the security documents. Two security documents in which the security policies of Russia and military and political strategies developed according to these policies are put forward are “National Security Strategy” (NSS) and “Military Doctrine” (MD). The “National Security Strategy” was prepared by the Security Council of the Russian Federation and the “Military Doctrine” was prepared by the Ministry of Defence (Haas, 2004: 33).

CIS was seen as a key actor for foreign policy in the “National Security Strategy”⁶ document published in 2015. Integration activities within the CIS are carried out gradually as they are vital. In particular, a strategy of harmonious action in foreign policy is pursued. Russian language and culture studies are also supported in the CIS states. CSTO has been seen as the main organization in solving military-political, military-strategic threats such as international terrorism and extremism, illegal drug production and sales, illegal immigration, and regional disputes. EAEU has been defined as the main motivation for economic integration under the principles of increased trade in the region and mutual enrichment and free distribution of resources (NSS, 2015: 70, 89, 90).

5 Colour revolutions or flower revolutions refer to a series of popular movements that spread to post-communist Central and Eastern Europe and then immediately to Central Asia. Participants of these revolutions often use non-violent revolutionary actions to protest settled authoritarian governments and to advocate democracy, liberalism, and national independence. As a symbol, a certain colour or a flower is generally adopted. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and especially student activist organizations play a major role in these non-violent protest movements. So far in Serbia (the overthrow of Milosevic in 2000), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries, Georgia (Rose-Carnation Revolution in 2003), Ukraine (Orange Revolution in 2004) and then as more severe events ever than before in Kyrgyzstan (Tulip Revolution in 2005), these nationalist revolutions have been successful. Saynur Giray Bozkurt, “Bagimsiz Devletler Toplulugu’nda Renkli Devrimler- Kirgizistan Ornegi”, *Akademik Incelemeler Dergisi*, 1, no. 1 (2006), p. 118.

6 When referring to the National Security Strategy document, the article numbers were taken as the basis.

According to “Military Doctrine”⁷ published in 2014, CSTO and CIS were seen as the main structures against regional instability and general threats. Therefore, it envisaged to increase and support the capacity and impact of these organizations. Russia considers any attack against the member states of these organizations as an attack against it, just as it was agreed in the CSTO treaty. In this context, “peacekeeping troops” established within CSTO have been considered important assets to maintain the stability of the region (MD, 2014: 21, 25, 29).

It is noteworthy to emphasize the studies on the Russian language and culture in the CIS and the various articles of the document have defined the region as the post-Soviet region (NSS, 2015: 81, 97). Emphasis on the troops established in CSTO is to show that Russia has increased its military influence on a more legitimate ground rather than its military bases in the region. Although the documents emphasize various achievements through the integration of the region and organizations, the main goal was different. It is an undeniable fact that Central Asia has achieved some gains through the above-mentioned organizations, but it is clear that Russia sees the region as the “Russian Commonwealth”.

China: One Belt- One Tianxia

The main motivations of China’s policies towards Central Asia are shaped around factors such as security, economic, energy, and population. In order to realize its current policies, China effectively uses organizations such as the “Shanghai Cooperation Organization” (SCO). At the same time, China constitutes the “historical-philosophical” basis of this policy within the scope of the “One Belt One Road” (OBOR) project in order to achieve its economic targets both on a global scale and within the countries of the region.

On September 7, 2013, President Xi Jinping made a speech titled “Promote People-to-People Friendship and Create a Better Future” at Kazakhstan’s Nazarbayev University. He spoke highly of the traditional friendship between China and Kazakhstan and then gave a comprehensive explanation of China’s policy of good-neighbourly and friendly cooperation toward countries in Central Asia. He suggested joining hands in building a Silk Road economic belt with innovative cooperation mode and to make it a grand cause benefiting people in regional countries along the route. The name of the “One Belt One Road” (OBOR) project was first announced in this speech. It has been emphasized that the relations between Central Asia and China have been going on for more than 2000 years and mutual profit can be achieved thanks to this project (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, 2013).

⁷ When referring to the Military Doctrine document, the article numbers were taken as the basis.

Figure 2. *One Belt One Road Map*

Source: chinadailyhk.com

The basis of China's policies towards Central Asia within the scope of OBOR is very old and is based on its world order concepts. This concept called Tianxia system (天下一家) (all-under-Heaven) includes the strategies of the Zhou dynasty, which had reigned in the ancient times of China, peacefully connecting other dynasties in the region (Wang, 2017: 1-5). The original intention of the Duke of Zhou in creating the system of Tianxia, nonetheless, yielded a political model that is of universal significance. In this system, states will participate upon their will and protect their interests and independence; the joint earnings will be achieved by taking the mutual interests of the states into consideration, and thus internalization will be provided. (Zhao, 2019: 6-7). China has been trying to make the states and structures within the above-mentioned system dependent on itself. This policy is called "tribute system". In this system, states are forced to become dependent on borrowing and foreign trade under control (Zhao, 2019: 15). Considering their above-mentioned frameworks, the similarities between OBOR and Tianxia system are quite remarkable. Today, China operates in Central Asia with OBOR and it continues to implement the images from the ancient period.

First of all, it should be noted that it is an undeniable fact that the current project benefits the states participating in this project. The total trade volume of countries on the One Belt One Road project reached US \$9.3 trillion in 2017 and 27.8% of the world total. China's trade with countries in the project increased by 11.3% to 4.57 trillion yuan (\$672.1 billion). Since 2013, China has invested \$60 billion in the countries participating in the project (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013).

The rapid development of China in the Central Asian market has been shaped around various strategies. First, China voluntarily invests in economically vital sectors (hydrocarbons) within the region. Thus, it aims to consolidate its political influence in Central Asia. As the second strategy, China supports regional development in order to maintain stability and to prevent its domestic problems regarding the East-Turkistan/Uygur-Xinjiang region to cause a slowdown in

economic relations. Finally, the third strategy of China is to support cooperation between the SCO and the EAEU in geopolitical terms so that Chinese products can reach to all parts of Russia, the West, and new markets (Wu and Chen, 2004: 1061).

Table 2. *China's Import and Export with Central Asian Countries (2018)*

	(RMB 10,000)			(USD 10,000)		
	Total	Exports	Imports	Total	Exports	Imports
Kazakhstan	12139054	7826312	4312742	1794313	1156444	637869
Kyrgyzstan	3678697	3619538	59159	542386	533681	8706
Tajikistan	911751	880058	31693	134811	130138	4674
Turkmenistan	4711254	250475	4460779	694324	36812	657513
Uzbekistan	2854641	1861606	993035	422087	274942	147145

Source: stats.gov.cn

Table 2 shows the import and export rates of China with the Central Asian states in 2018. The use of the Yuan attracts attention in China's trade with the region. When China's total trade volume with Central Asia is calculated according to the Dollar-Yuan conversion (1 USD is approximately 0.14 RMB), the numbers show that the total trade volume is nearly 7 billion USD. Of this total trade volume, 50% is with Kazakhstan, 20% with Turkmenistan, 15% with Kyrgyzstan, 11% with Uzbekistan, and 4% with Tajikistan.

The economic policies of China towards Central Asia are not limited to mutual trade. Within the framework of the "tribute system" mentioned above, China makes unrequited investments in the region and provides debts to the countries of the region. Due to the increasing number of joint projects within the region, Central Asian states' debt to China increases. The best example of China's "tribute system" is Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka rented the port of Hambantota to China for ninety-nine years in exchange for \$1.1 billion because the country was unable to pay its debts in 2017. This raises the question of whether the same kind of problems may arise in Central Asia. The countries most at risk in the region are Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. 45% of Kyrgyzstan's foreign borrowing (\$1.7 billion) and 52% of Tajikistan (\$1.2 billion) are from China. The foreign debt of both countries is more than 20% of their GDPs. In other Central Asian countries, the rates of foreign debt to China seem better: Turkmenistan owes China the equivalent of 16.9% of its GDP, Uzbekistan owes 16%, and Kazakhstan owes 6.5% (Umarov, 2020: 5).

Energy resources of the region are strategically important for China because China's economic growth is directly correlated with its capacity to meet the country's energy needs. According to BP's 2019 data, the average rate of the annual increase in China's energy consumption is 1.1%. By 2040, China's share in global energy production is expected to be 18% and its share in energy consumption is expected to be 22% (BP Statistical Review, 2019).

Along with Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have the second-largest oil and gas reserves in the world. Kazakhstan has doubled its oil reserves and the sum of the natural gas reserves of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan has become the fifth and eighth-largest reserves in the world respectively.⁸ Given that China's natural resources are limited, Central Asia is considered very im-

⁸ BP Statistical Review of World Energy-2019, accessed April 19, 2020, <https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/business-sites/en/global/corporate/pdfs/energy-economics/statistical-review/bp-stats-review-2019-full-report.pdf>.

portant in meeting China's energy demand.

Figure 3. Oil and Natural Gas Pipelines in Central Asia



Source: dighist.fas.harvard.edu

China has been trying to make a mutual profit through cooperation and by making investments in the energy sectors of the countries in the region. In this respect, joint projects are carried out through inter-state organizations (CIS-SCO). China has also made one-on-one agreements with the states of the region and provided investments for the construction of oil and gas pipelines (Wu and Chen, 2004: 1063).

Central Asia does not pose a main threat to China. However, the fact that the region has become unstable can pose an indirect threat to China, as the OBOR project is at the main crossing-points in the region and any instability may hinder the provision of energy resources. For this reason, China perceives the radical and separatist elements of the region as a threat. Under China's security positioning for the region, border disputes have been settled via structures such as bilateral or multilateral partnerships like SCO, various mechanisms of cooperation such as joint exercises and fight against terrorism have been implemented. The geostrategic position of Central Asia is another security issue for China. China sees Central Asia as a buffer zone between itself and other major powers. In this respect, this buffer zone can also be defined as an external safety limit (Huasheng, 2009: 475).

China's policies towards the region are not only economy-based and security-oriented but they also include culturally based soft power elements. The main symbol of Chinese soft power is the Confucius Institutes whose functions are to teach the Chinese language and to convey the Chinese culture in universities in various countries. There are 13 Confucius Institutes in Central Asia (five in Kazakhstan, four in Kyrgyzstan, two in Uzbekistan, and two in Tajikistan) (Confucius Institute, 2020).

CONCLUSION

When they first gained their independence, Central Asian states tried to solve their border problems within the region and to meet their security needs within the CIS. The main reason for this was that these states did not have sufficient power and capacity to form their independent policies in the beginning. However, now, these states can solve intra-regional problems among themselves. Today, outlining policies based on Russia and China makes the states of the region more dependent on these great powers. The inability of the region to produce independent policies within itself causes a complicated situation in which competing superpowers try to balance or eliminate each other's effectiveness. Therefore, if the Central Asian states do not want to get trapped between the Russian Commonwealth and the Tianxia of Chinese, they must first solve their problems and then create an integrated system.

Although the region seems to be stable except for some negative events today, the presence of radical terrorist groups in the region may create important problems in the future. A Central Asian Spring, similar to the Arab Spring in the Middle East, may throw the region into a battlefield, given its natural resources. It should not be forgotten that if any state in the region experiences security problems, this will have a domino effect on other states in the region.

Russia realizes its policies on Central Asia through organizations such as CIS, CSTO, and EAEU. The integration policies with Central Asia, which are also reflected in Russia's security documents, are directly related to Russia's national security. Since Russia wants the region to remain under its control by maintaining its continuous links with the region for nearly 200 years, it has implemented in different systems throughout history. Although the encircling paranoia by the USA and the West seems to be stopped in Eastern Europe, Russia thinks that if a tendency from the Central Asian countries towards the West has raised, it will consider this as a direct threat to its survival. Therefore, in comparison to Eastern Europe, Central Asia is deemed more important for Russia. Nowadays, Russia has a soft competition with China, where it acts as an assumed partner in various fields. China's economic policies on the region have been shifting the interests of the countries of the region away from Russia and towards China. Therefore, Russia-China unity in action may be cut off in the event of a conflict of interest over Central Asia.

Central Asia is a strategic "buffer zone" for China. At the same time, the main crossing-point of OBOR's road to the West is Central Asia. In this respect, China has increased its investments in the region and has tried to stabilize the region in order to prevent the spreading of the radical groups and to resolve conflicts in the East Turkistan/Uygur-Xinjiang region. China also makes the countries of the region dependent on themselves by providing them debts.

In this respect, it can be said that the security policies of China in the region is established on two basic strategies. China's first strategy is the creation of economic activities in the region through its own resources and transnational organizations (SCO). In this strategy, China increases its investments within the region and tries to integrate all the states of the region with itself through various cooperation agreements or economic, political, and military organizations established. However, in this case, China will be left alone in the region and its

relations with Russia, a country that is its most important rival in the region, will deteriorate. In this context, it does not seem possible, in a short span of time, for China to break the influence of Russia within Central Asia established via various organizations and its common past motivations and to shift the axis of the region towards China. China's second strategy is the establishment of Russia-China cooperation. In this context, the two countries can improve their cooperation through the organizations in which they have significant influence. They do not have to spend their energy to compete for the region, because a fierce competition between these two countries will facilitate the penetration of the USA into the region. In this respect, the convergence of China and Russia is important for the maintenance of Russian power and the strategic balance of China.

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