



RUSSIA'S INTEREST IN CENTRAL ASIA: CURRENT TRENDS

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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: The article is devoted to the analysis of Russia's interest in Central Asia, as well as examining the further scenarios for the development of Russia-Central Asia relations. It reflected the opinions of leading scientists studying the cooperation of Russia and Central Asia.

ROSSIYANING MARKAZIY OSIYOGA BO'LGAN QIZIQISHI: HOZIRGI TENDENSIYALAR

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MAQOLA HAQIDA

Kalit so'zlar: Rossiya, Markaziy Osiyo, strategik sheriklik, "gorizontal" hamkorlik, Rossiyaning madaniy ta'siri, mintaqaviy hamkorlik.

Annotatsiya: Mazkur maqola Rossiyaning Markaziy Osiyoga bo'lgan qiziqishini tahlil qilish, shuningdek, Rossiya–Markaziy Osiyo munosabatlarining kelgusi rivojlanish ssenariylarini ko'rib chiqishga bag'ishlangan. Unda Rossiya va Markaziy Osiyo hamkorligini o'rganayotgan yetakchi olimlarning fikrlari yoritilgan.

ИНТЕРЕС РОССИИ К ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ: СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ ТЕНДЕНЦИИ

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О СТАТЬЕ

<p>Ключевые слова: Россия, Центральная Азия, стратегическое партнерство, сотрудничество, культурное влияние России, региональное сотрудничество.</p>	<p>Аннотация: Статья посвящена анализу интереса России к Центральной Азии, а также рассмотрению дальнейших сценариев развития отношений между Россией и Центральной Азией. В статье отражены мнения ведущих ученых, изучающих сотрудничество России и Центральной Азии.</p>
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Introduction. The competition of powers in Central Asia is a complex and multifaceted process, determined by the geopolitical position of the region, its rich natural resources, and strategic importance for various actors. Traditionally, the region has been an arena of rivalry between Russia and other major powers, but in recent decades, competition has significantly intensified with the emergence of new players and changes in the balance of power in the world. Today, such players include Russia, China, the USA, Turkey, Iran, and EU countries.

Considering Russia's interests in the Central Asian region, it is necessary to note the trend of maintaining influence in the region, ensuring the security of its borders, maintaining stability in the region, access to natural resources, development of trade relations, and competition with other powers.

According to the Russian Foreign Ministry, for Russia Central Asia is a zone of historically conditioned interests, an important partner for privileged cooperation in the military-political, trade-economic, and cultural-humanitarian spheres, as well as in ensuring the common security of Eurasian states from the southern direction:

- Russia has established strategic partnership relations with all Central Asian states, and with most of them – alliances, which implies mutual assistance in case of aggression or other significant threats to each other's security.
- A regular constructive political dialogue at the highest and high levels has been established.
- Inter-parliamentary ties and "horizontal" cooperation at the level of regions and economic operators of the parties are actively developing.
- Interregional cooperation with the countries of Central Asia is becoming one of the key forms of deepening good-neighborly relations.

- The visa-free regime (except for Turkmenistan), security, and the absence of a "language barrier" determine the high interest of citizens of Central Asian countries in the Russian labor market.

Methods. The following works focus on Russia's (and great powers') interests in Central Asia through historical, descriptive, and interpretive lenses. They do not employ formal quantitative methods, experimental designs, or large-scale empirical data collection (e.g., no surveys with statistical analysis, econometric modeling, or content analysis software). Instead, they rely on traditional qualitative approaches common in area studies and foreign policy analysis.

According to Toropygin A. V. & Mendagaziev A. E. (2020), their core methodology is analysis of historical-periodization and comparative geopolitical/geoeconomic analysis [9]. Their paper divides the evolution of U.S., Chinese, and Russian interests/influence into stages (post-Soviet 1990s, post-9/11, contemporary). It examines interests (security, economic, ideological) and local perceptions in Central Asian states, linking these to multi-vector foreign policies. The strength is clear chronological structure; balances external powers' views with Central Asian agency.

The report of Kortunov A. & Laruelle M. is policy-oriented expert analysis and opportunities/constraints assessment with the following approach: contextualizes U.S.-Russia relations in Central Asia against broader bilateral tensions [1]. Identifies asymmetries in interests, threat perceptions, points of friction, and potential cooperation niches (e.g., counterterrorism, drugs). Emphasizes realism: Central Asian agency, non-zero-sum possibilities, and practical recommendations.

Kuzmina E. made the economic cooperation analysis (sectoral/historical review) and examined Russia's economic ties with Central Asian states (trade, investment, integration like EAEU) [2]. Likely historical and comparative across countries/sectors.

Strategic interests' assessment (contemporary geopolitical analysis from a Russian/Kazakhstani perspective is described in the paper of Laumulin M., who outlines Russia's strategic priorities in security, politics, and influence at a specific post-Soviet stage [5].

These papers reflect mainstream Russian IR scholarship on Central Asia: pragmatic, historically grounded, and focused on strategic/practical implications rather than abstract theory or rigorous positivist methods. They are strong for overview and policy insight but would benefit from more transparent sourcing, primary data, or mixed methods for stronger academic claims.

Results. Experts from the independent Center for Strategic Assessments and Forecasts believe that it is extremely important for Russia to have a stable strategic position in the Central Asian region, because this facilitates its access to China, India, and the Muslim countries of the East, and at the same time ensures a presence in territories that have traditionally been within its sphere of vital interests. In general, Russian interests in Central Asia can be defined as follows: 1) ensuring stability based on cooperation agreements with all countries in the region, 2) utilizing their geopolitical opportunities while addressing practical issues faced by Russia as a global and regional power, 3) international recognition of the key role of the Russian Federation in this region [9].

In this regard, Russia faces a number of practical tasks, namely: the effective use of existing multilateral interaction mechanisms, ensuring the security of the southern borders, the continuous development of military cooperation, the use of energy resources, in particular natural gas from Central Asia, supporting the entrepreneurial activities of Russian companies in the energy sector, and encouraging regional states to increase imports from Russia.

As for the countries of Central Asia, they have strengthened regional unity and are building their relations with the outside world based on the principle of multi-vector policy [8]. Dialogue, based on mutual respect and consideration of each other's interests, will become the main tool for implementing foreign policy and protecting the national interests of each subject of international relations in the era of a multipolar world, according to expert R. Khaydarzoda.

TASS reports that over the years of cooperation between Russia and the Central Asian countries of the region, strong trade relations have been established, and trade turnover continues to grow. This became especially noticeable in 2022, when Russian trade and diplomatic priorities were significantly shifted toward the East.

The main international projects between the parties are being implemented in the fields of industrial production, energy, and mineral extraction. Thus, at the end of November, it became known that Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan are discussing the creation of a "trilateral union" in the gas sector. However, no specifics have been reached yet; at this stage, it is about creating a coordination mechanism. But overall, the parties are ready to conduct a dialogue on this topic.

In addition, one of the most pressing issues of interaction between Russia and Central Asia is the issue of joint security provision for the states. For example, in the autumn of 2022, the President of Kyrgyzstan, Sadyr Japarov, proposed that the Central Asian countries and the Russian Federation create a unified system for ensuring food security. Furthermore, it is known that Kyrgyzstan is a country with gold reserves, and after gaining independence, several companies tried to develop the Dzheruy gold deposit. Since 2021, this has been undertaken by

the Russian enterprise 'Alliance-Altin,' which is the largest investment project of Russia and Kyrgyzstan. The total investment in its development is estimated at over \$600 million.

In turn, the President of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, stated that the countries of Central Asia and Russia need to protect their shared history and build a unified future. He called on neighboring countries to intensify efforts to develop intra-regional trade. For example, since 2005, a joint enterprise with Russia for the production of trucks has been operating in Kazakhstan. And in 2021, the parties signed an agreement under which it is planned to create a chemical consortium in Kazakhstan with an investment volume of \$1 billion.

Discussion. Analyzing the cooperation between Russia and Tajikistan, attention should be paid to the "Sangtuda Hydroelectric Power Station-1" project — a joint venture between Russia and Tajikistan established in February 2005 for the completion of construction and its subsequent operation. In the authorized capital of JSC "Sangtuda Hydroelectric Power Station-1", Russia's share is 75%, and Tajikistan's is 25%. Russian investments in the construction of the station amounted to more than 16 billion rubles.

Turkmenistan is one of the main "gas" players in the Central Asia region, and in 2019, Gazprom signed a contract to purchase natural gas from the state company Turkmengaz for five years — until June 30, 2024. According to the contract, up to 5.5 billion cubic meters of gas are supplied annually from Turkmenistan to Gazprom. One of Russia's largest projects in Uzbekistan is the construction of the first Uzbek nuclear power plant. The implementation of the project began in December 2017, when a Russian-Uzbek agreement on cooperation in the field of the peaceful use of atomic energy was signed, according to which a nuclear power plant with two generation 3+ units with a capacity of 1,200 MW each is planned to be built in Uzbekistan by 2028. According to experts, the construction of the nuclear power plant should cost \$10 billion, part of which Russia will provide as an export loan.

On October 4, 2022, the head of Uzbekistan took part in the "Central Asia – Russia" summit, which was held in Astana. The participants of the meeting discussed current issues of cooperation between the countries in the "CA – RF" format, as well as regional and international agendas. In his speech at the summit, Shavkat Mirziyoyev emphasized the fact that in recent years Central Asia has come to be perceived by the world community as one of the key regions of the world. This is also evidenced by the fact that the United States, China, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the European Union, and Russia have established their own formats of interaction with this region.

According to the President of Uzbekistan, the recent meeting of the heads of state of Central Asia and Russia is an opportunity to stimulate the development of multilateral dialogue

and to introduce qualitatively new mechanisms of cooperation, where the region will act from common positions on key issues of interaction in trade and economic, transport and communications, energy, and cultural and humanitarian spheres, as well as on environmental protection issues.

So, analyzing the current relations of the Russian Federation with the countries of Central Asia, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- The main instruments of cooperation are bilateral and multilateral formats, with the economic component of cooperation prevailing, and a noticeable strengthening of Russia's cultural influence in the region (through the Russian language, education) [3];
- Russia's relations with the Central Asian countries are based on historical ties, economic, and political influence;
- The countries of Central Asia strive to strengthen regional cooperation and implement an independent multi-vector policy;
- Competition for influence in the region will continue between Russia and other powers [6].

Maintaining the Central Asian region as a zone of its influence will allow Russia, firstly, to ensure its security, secondly, to pursue its political and economic interests, and thirdly, with the development of energy resources and the preservation of its monopoly on them, if necessary, to use these means as a separate lever in the struggle against Western powers [4].

Thus, Russia, acting as a major global energy supplier and the main purchaser of energy products in the region, makes efforts to preserve its positions and exert control over the influence of other countries. The future of Central Asia will depend on the ability of the countries in the region to pursue an independent and balanced foreign policy [4], develop regional cooperation, and effectively use the opportunities provided by the competition of powers. It is also important to take into account internal factors, such as political stability, economic development, and social cohesion.

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