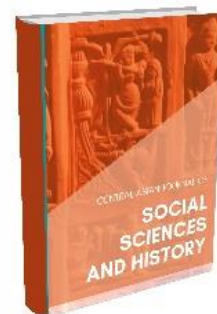




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## Main Features of Chinese Policy in Central Asia

**Mukhtor Nazirov**

Ph.D. in Political Sciences, Senior Lecturer, International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan

### Abstract:

This article considers some features of the foreign policy of the People's Republic of China on ensuring the stability of social and political processes in the states of Central Asia and promoting economic prosperity of the region. In particular, the article studies the role of China in Central Asia, its economic and political interests. The article also considers new opportunities and obstacles to the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative. The article reveals the consistent development of constructive, good-neighborly relations between China and the Central Asian states by increasing the potential of the region within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative.

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## INTRODUCTION

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, five new independent states were formed in Central Asia. For many reasons, China was interested in creating mechanisms for constructive interaction with the states of the region. The first necessary condition for this was the formation of conditions for maintaining a strategic balance of forces in the region, ensuring social and political stability and security, preventing the emergence of real and potential threats to China.

In particular, as President of Republic of Uzbekistan Sh.Mirziyoyev underlined, "Confidently and dynamically developing, having great authority and influence in the world, China has become a close and reliable partner for Uzbekistan, with whom we have strong traditions of strong friendship, mutual understanding and respect." [1]

## DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

In the first half of the 1990s, China's policy in Central Asia, being in the process of establishing a foreign policy line for the countries of the region, was very careful and moderate. As the borders with the neighboring countries of the region were unsettled, and the destabilization of the political situation carried a potential threat to the political stability and economic development of the north-western territory of China.

As the Chinese researcher Xing Guangcheng noted, the basic principles of China's foreign policy towards Central Asia were formulated only in 1994. The Chinese researcher summarizes them as maintaining friendly neighborly relations and peaceful coexistence, developing mutually beneficial cooperation and promoting common prosperity, respecting the choice of each state and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, respect for sovereignty, promoting regional stability. [2]

In order to ensure stability in the neighboring states of Central Asia, it was first of all necessary to settle border issues, on which the PRC concentrated its efforts after establishing diplomatic relations with these countries.

It should be noted, that in order to maintain peaceful relations on the border in April 1996, China initiated the establishment of the "Shanghai Five" group, which unites China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Therefore, the issues of the border between China and Kazakhstan were finally settled in 1998, between China and Kyrgyzstan in 1999, China and Tajikistan in 2002. [3]

In addition, after the "Shanghai Five" group was transformed into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2001, China and the Central Asian states signed a number of documents to strengthen cooperation against the "three evils" - separatism, terrorism and extremism. In particular, in 2002, China signed such an agreement with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, in 2003 - with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. [4]

As the Kazakhstan scientist K.Syroezhkin emphasizes, the Central Asian strategy of Beijing is aimed at actively participating in solving the problems of Central Asia, developing the relations with the countries of the region, promoting to their stability and prosperity, relying on the SCO. [5]

Strengthening the political and legal framework for good-neighborly relations was a necessary condition and basis for further deepening bilateral cooperation between China and the states of Central Asia. In this connection, treaties on good-neighborliness, friendship and cooperation were signed in 2002 with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, in 2007 - with Tajikistan.

As a result, China has had the opportunity to concentrate on developing trade and economic cooperation. China has for this purpose both opportunities and motivations, including: the economic strength that is growing year by year, the stability of the foreign policy line, the growing demand for energy resources and the need for their land transit, the need for markets for their industrial products, etc.

As noted by researchers V.Paramonov, A.Strokov, O.Stolpovsky, since 2002 China has gradually focused to intensive expansion of trade-economic, project-investment, financial cooperation and active participation in key sectors of the region's economy. According to researchers, the trade turnover between the PRC and the countries of Central Asia, which in 1996 amounted to 674 million US

dollars, by 2000 increased to 1.041 billion US dollars. During the period 2001-2007, trade turnover increased by about 11 times, amounting to about 16 billion US dollars. [6] In 2015, the trade turnover between China and the five countries of Central Asia in general reached about 50 billion US dollars. [7]

The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the relations between China and the countries of Central Asia is characterized by rapid growth in turnover and the beginning of the practical implementation of the largest, strategically important joint projects in the energy sector.

The famous American scholar for Central Asia, M.Olcott notes in this connection, that it was China that turned the goals of the Central Asian states into a diversification of markets into reality. Beijing financed the construction of a gas pipeline system on the territory of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. [8]

In September 2013, the Chinese leadership announced a new program to further intensify China's foreign economic activities in Eurasia under the name of the "Economic Belt of the Silk Road" (or the "Belt and Road" Initiative). In the Chinese expert interpretation, this project is an attempt to connect the Central, East, South and West Asia with various ties of economic cooperation. [9]

In fact, the One Place, One Road project, initiated by China, aims to connect more than 60 countries and open new trade routes, including the implementation of more than 800 infrastructure projects (ports, railways, bridges, highways, etc.).

According to experts, this huge project will create opportunities for the Chinese economy to create new markets, increase exports to foreign markets, implement megaprojects and develop cultural and social exchanges. As of December 23, 2021, China has signed a total of 203 agreements with 138 countries and 31 international organizations under this project, which indicates its scale. [10]

A special place in this project is given to the states of Central Asia. The planned North and South routes make Central Asian countries a beneficiary of 890 billion US dollars in total investments, which will go to the development of the road transport system, water supply and much more. [11]

At the same time, in accordance with the project, China intends to strengthen its economic presence in the region in the following areas:

- Promoting regional economic integration;
- Acceleration of the construction of a unified transport network, which would include a through transport route from the Pacific to the Baltic Sea and routes connecting east, west and south Asia;
- Increasing the volume of trade and investment cooperation;
- Reduction and elimination of trade barriers, reduction of costs, simplification of bureaucratic procedures;
- Increasing the share of mutual settlements in national currencies;
- The expansion of "people's ties" with the aim "to strengthen regional cooperation with a strong social and public base." [12]

In this way, with the launch of the "Belt and Road" Initiative, the PRC's role in the economic transformations in the Central Asian states is likely to be at the expense of increasing the project and investment activity. [13]

In this regard, it should be specially noted, that in recent years, in the states of the region, China has

been implementing projects mainly in the energy and transport-infrastructure spheres, in the field of communications.

Among the examples of successful implementation of large investment projects in Uzbekistan are the Central Asia-China gas pipeline, the Angren-Pap electrified railway, as well as production facilities located in the industrial zones of Navoi, Djizak and Angren. In particular, the telecommunication companies Huawei and ZTE opened assembly plants in Uzbekistan.

In 2016, with the assistance of Chinese partners, the longest railway tunnel in the region (19.2 km) was constructed on the Kamchik pass, which allowed to connect the main part of Uzbekistan with the Fergana valley by rail and became a new node of the transport corridor between China and Central Asia.

During the state visit of the President of Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev to China on May 11-13, 2017, 105 bilateral documents worth about 23 billion US dollars were signed. [14] They imply a significant deepening of interaction between the two countries in such areas as energy, oil refining, modernization of power plants, in agriculture, petrochemistry, transport communications and others.

In Kazakhstan in the energy sector, enterprises in China and Kazakhstan are jointly developing oil, gas, uranium and other resources. A China-Kazakhstan oil pipeline with a capacity of 20 million tons per year and a gas chemical complex have been built. Also, Atyrau and Shymkent refineries were reconstructed and modernized.

In Turkmenistan, China replaced Russia's energy giant company Gazprom as the main gas buyer (61% of exports from the country were sent to China in 2014). This was largely due to the opening of the Central Asia-China gas pipeline in 2009.

The Chinese side in Kyrgyzstan is actively involved in the implementation of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway project, and in cross-border trade.

With the help of Chinese capital in Tajikistan, Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan and China-Tajikistan roads have been built, and projects of medium-capacity hydro power plants and the construction of a thermal power station-2 in Dushanbe are being developed. In addition, Chinese companies Huawei and ZTE established partnerships with local operators and became the main suppliers of equipment and services in the communications sector in Tajikistan.

## CONCLUSION

Sum up, the growth of China's role in Central Asia is one of the most large-scale trends in regional politics. In the modern stage, the "Belt and Road" Initiative remains the main engine of China's actions in the region, thanks to which there is an increase in the activity of constructive interaction between the PRC and the states of Central Asia.

Further progressive and dynamic development of mutually beneficial, good-neighborly relations between the PRC and the states of Central Asia will serve not only to maintain stability in the border areas, but also contributes to the long-term stability and further prosperity of the states of the region.

In the long term, the "Belt and Road" Initiative will bring the Central Asian countries to a new level of development by increasing the region's potential.

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