



FEATURES OF THE GEOSTRATEGIC CHARACTERISTICS OF CENTRAL ASIA

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Abstract: This article highlights the distinctive aspects of Central Asia's geostrategic characteristics, examines scholars' opinions on this topic, and presents the author's proposals and recommendations.

Key words: Central Asia, geopolitical competition, region, classical geopolitical theory.

From a geopolitical perspective, the global significance of the Central Asian region depends on the geopolitical processes occurring around it. In this regard, when discussing long-term stability in the Central Asian region, it is appropriate to note that the direction of events is always linked to geopolitical competition in the region, and this situation remains an important issue that Central Asian countries need to address.

Therefore, the security of the region is based entirely on its geopolitical significance, in other words, on the geographical, economic, and social characteristics that determine its potential. In this context, it is important to recall the opinion of the well-known American political scientist Z. Brzezinski, who stated that "whoever gains the advantage in approaching this region will inevitably achieve geopolitical and economic success"[1]. Indeed, these ideas determine the directions of geopolitical influence on the Central Asian region from outside.

The experience of socio-political life during the period of the former Soviet Union and subsequent years of independence has shown that changes in the internal political climate of certain Central Asian states or the entire region, the destabilization of the situation in multinational areas, especially in border regions, can create serious threats for the entire region. Therefore, geopolitical external influences remain a constant concern that troubles the peoples of our region.

In his book "The Great Game Against Russia: The Asian Syndrome," the English geopolitical scientist Peter Hopkirk explains the renewal of the "Great Game" over Central Asia as follows: "It is no secret that Central Asia possesses one of the greatest treasures of the twenty-first century - oil and natural gas reserves that far exceed the potential of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. If we add to this the rare metals such as gold, silver, zinc, copper, iron ore, and cotton, it becomes clear why foreign powers are vying to strengthen their positions in the new states of Central Asia"[2].

It is known that the geopolitical position of the region depends on several factors. According to classical geopolitical theory, the geopolitical position of each region is determined by the following factors:

- Geographic location and natural and climatic features of the territory;
- The region's economic potential;
- The level of intellectual abilities and traditions of the peoples of the region, formed under the influence of natural and geographical factors;
- the nature of the political system formed under the influence of these characteristics.

However, the study of subsequent periods of development of countries in the world shows that the geopolitical position of regions or states is largely determined by economic factors. Of course, the main reason for this is the increase in global energy consumption and a sharp increase in demand for them. Without forgetting that the economic potential of Central Asia is the main source of geopolitical interest in it, we will dwell on the aforementioned features of the region.

When we think about the geographical dimensions of Central Asia, the regional location and indicators of the region are important natural factors that determine its geopolitical potential and strategic potential. The centuries-old geopolitical processes in the Eurasian region show that both scientifically and practically they are oriented towards its central part, more precisely, the "heartland" ("heart of the Earth"). When studying the opinions of specialists in this regard, this part of the Earth (i.e., the heart) also includes Central Asia. Of course, although this region does not form the center of the "heart," "some artery vessels that go to the heart" passed through this area. We can agree with this opinion, taking into account the past of Central Asia, we can learn from the unceasing struggle for its territory, the intense processes that continue to this day.

According to the definition of the precise geographical location of the region by Russian geopolitical scientist Alexander Dugin, the territory of Central Asia extends from the Caspian in the west to the Altai region in the northeast, from the north to North Kazakhstan and from the south of some of the higher Russian provinces to Pakistan.[4]

The following information can be said about the geographical location, area, and demography of Central Asia. The region is a vast geographical unit that extends from the Caspian Sea in the west to the Xinjiang Autonomous Region of China in the east, from Kazakhstan to Pakistan in the north, and covers a vast area of 4 million square kilometers, including the central part of the Eurasian Plain. Nearly 77 million people (2022) live in the region, which is bordered by geopolitically important countries such as Russia, Iran and China. If we include the population of Afghanistan in this region, the demographic indicator will be around 110 million people.

The climate of the region, which consists of plains and lowlands, is mainly continental, temperate, and in some mountainous areas has an arctic character. Although most of Central Asia consists of sandy deserts and plains, about one-fourth of the land is considered fertile and suitable for agriculture. It is necessary to emphasize that, depending on the natural and climatic conditions of the region, agriculture should be conducted in accordance with the timeliness of the four seasons, and there are opportunities for growing agricultural products in the region under very favorable conditions. Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan are mainly desert, semi-desert, plains and lowlands.

The territories of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan consist mainly of Ferghana, Zeravshan, Vakhsh, Kofarnikon, and other fertile valleys and oases. 93% of Tajikistan's territory is mountainous, while 94% of Kyrgyzstan's total land area is occupied by the Pamir and Tian Shan mountain ranges, located at an altitude of more than 1000 meters above sea level. The region is mainly composed of plains, the Caspian Sea and the Aral Sea (lake) are located in this region. The mountainous region consists of the Pamirs and Tian Shan, as well as several systems with their foothills.

One of the most important geopolitical factors in Central Asia is water resources. Water reserves used for irrigation are mainly formed in the Pamir, Tien Shan, Hissar-Zarafshan,

Nurata-Turkestan, Chatkal-Kuraminsky, Alain, and other mountain ranges. The Amu Darya and Syr Darya, as well as hundreds of other small rivers and canals, are the main sources of water supply for agriculture and agriculture. Therefore, although there are large rivers such as the Ural and Irtysh in the northwestern and northeastern parts of Kazakhstan, they cannot be used for the agricultural needs of not only the region, but also Kazakhstan from the point of view of their flow. There are also hundreds of small rivers in the republic, some of which are seasonal rivers that dry up during the summer months. Most of its rivers flow into internal reservoirs (the Caspian and Aral Seas, Lake Balkhash, etc.). Most rivers flowing from the plains dry out in the summer. Mountain rivers are rich in water and hydropower. The main rivers are the Irtysh, Ural, Chu, Ili, and Syr Darya. There are thousands of lakes in Kazakhstan, with a total area of 45,000 square kilometers. Large lakes: Balkhash, Zaysan, Alakul, Tengiz, Sassykkul, Markakul, and others. In addition, there are Chordara, Bukhtarma, Kopchigay and other reservoirs. It should be noted that along with the lack of water resources in Central Asia, there are also certain difficulties in their distribution. The Amu Darya and Syr Darya, the largest rivers in the region, have an annual water flow of 78 km³ and 36 km³ respectively.[5]

The region's drinking water reserves are mainly composed of mountain snowfalls and glaciers. The water of rivers originates in the mountains, which mainly enter the territory of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and is consumed jointly with all other republics of the region. This, in turn, requires coordinated action and control in water distribution. Another water-related problem in the Central Asian region is related to the Irtysh River, which flows through the territory of Kazakhstan, and the negative impact of Chinese dams built on this river starting from the territory of the Chinese state on the Irtysh ecosystem is one of the issues that concerns the state of Kazakhstan. Today, all Central Asian republics require serious attention to the use of transboundary waters, regional ecosystems, and seismic stability in the construction of large structures. For republics located in the upper reaches of rivers, there is a high probability that they will remain under geopolitical pressure from external forces in order to provoke a regional conflict.

There is the Caspian Sea in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, the Aral Sea in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, and the Issyk-Kul in Kyrgyzstan, and the problems surrounding them cover almost all republics in the region. For example, there is no single solution regarding the natural and geographical status of the Caspian, that is, whether it is a sea or a lake. This issue is an important regional issue that occurs from time to time depending on the geopolitical strategy of the parties in the Caspian Sea. It should be noted that the issue of the status of the Caspian is not related to its water resources, but rather to the distribution of mineral resources at its bottom.

In his speech at the UN in September 2020, President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev reminded that the Aral Sea region became the epicenter of an ecological tragedy as a result of the drying up of the Aral Sea. And he proposed to solve this problem jointly, including through the formation of new landscapes, forests and soil cover on an area of two million hectares. This proposal of the President of Uzbekistan was unanimously approved at the UN General Assembly, and the resolution was signed, thereby the Aral Sea region was declared a "Zone of Environmental Innovations and Technologies." Due to the fact that the problem in the Aral Sea region is one of the most serious environmental problems that occurred on Earth in the

20th century, it is planned to solve it through the unification of the possibilities of the world community.

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