

CENTRAL ASIA: GEOPOLITICS, SECURITY, AND DEVELOPMENT SCENARIOS

Eldar GABDULLIN

*Ph.D. (Philos.),
Expert at the Center for Contemporary Policy (CECOP)
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

Introduction

As global power and influence move progressively eastward, all the main international actors have their sights set on playing a leading role in Asia. The world nations are trying to build new relations and form advantageous balances of power with the developing Asian countries, where the soil is already fertile for both expanding cooperation and intensifying competition.

In all likelihood, present-day Asia, where most of the world's population lives and significant achievements in industrial development have been made, will largely determine the future vectors of globalization. The region's countries are also characterized by rampant military spending, fierce competition over resources, and smoldering seats of conflict.

Central Asia, a small energy-rich area, occupies a special place in the Asian architecture. This region determines the flows of energy resources to every corner of the earth, and also neighbors on unstable Afghanistan.

The interests of the largest global players are concentrated precisely on Central Asia; in some sense, the region holds the key to the geopolitical future and stability of the entire Asian continent.

This article presents the author's view of the situation in Central Asia, conducts an analysis of the risks and challenges the region's countries are encountering, and determines the possible paths of development in the context of internal problems and external influence.

Central Asia Today

Central Asia continues to retain its international importance thanks to its advantageous geopolitical location close to Russia, China, Iran, and the Caucasus, its high energy and natural resource potential, its transportation and transit capabilities, and its proximity to the hotbeds of armed conflicts (Afghanistan and Pakistan), which have a strong impact on international security.

In this respect, the region will remain an area where the interests and strategies of the CA states themselves and many external geopolitical players, mainly Russia, the U.S., China, the European Union (EU), Iran, and Turkey, intersect. Defining the development prospects for Central Asia largely depends on the assessments of current policy toward the region, as well as the strategies of foreign countries that are having a crucial influence on the situation and security in the Central Asian region.

Central Asia is a young region that is still building its institutional structure and system of international organizations, as well as searching for its cultural and political identity. The region is charac-

terized by many different cultural practices and identities, as well as by a wide range of interpretations of historical heritage.

It should also be noted that the Central Asian region is developing in the context of the diverse, frequently contradictory, integration projects that are being advanced by powerful geopolitical forces.

Central Asia is distinguished by a unique combination of the diverse challenges and threats that exist in it. The situation is aggravated by the rivalry among external forces and the absence of cooperation among the Central Asian states themselves. Thus, all the attempts of international cooperation to neutralize the risks are reduced to naught.

The Central Asian region is a hostage of the ever-growing global ambiguity; its dependence on the structure of world politics is a long-term problem since the correlation of power on the global arena among the key external players is in constant flux.¹

From the geopolitical viewpoint, Central Asia's security is a complex multilateral structure in which different forces function simultaneously. Moreover, the Central Asian states participate in various regional organizations and are related in the security respect to several geopolitical power centers at the same time.

There are many reasons for the challenges and threats to the stability and sustainable development of the Central Asian states. They are generated, for example, by the aggravated domestic political processes, by the various active extremist and terrorist organizations in the region, by the growing drug trafficking, by migration and city marginalization problems, by environmental degradation and water shortages, by the high conflict-prone nature of the region in terms of ethnic and confessional intolerance, and so on. All the problems related to Central Asia's security are interregional in nature.

Despite the fact that the place and role of Central Asia in the world community have not been ultimately defined, the region is gradually being drawn into various interregional and global processes, including destructive ones.

The transnational nature of the threats and the low level of independence of each of the region's states make it impossible for them to resolve the entire set of current problems unilaterally. Only joint efforts can help to eliminate the threats, increase security, and prevent and overcome crisis situations in Central Asia.

But it should be noted that the prospect of Central Asia's real integration, at least using those models that have already been tested, is very discouraging due to the antagonism existing in the relations among the region's countries. Moreover, all the Central Asian states are developing in diametrically opposite directions.

Evaluation of the Current Development of the Region's States

The region's states have reached a crossroads, whereby each of them is promoting its own scenario of future development, which is not only having a significant impact on the situation in the Central Asian region, but is also increasing misunderstanding among the regional players.

¹ See: A. Kazantsev, *Bolshaia igra s neizvestnymi pravilami: mirovaia politika i Tsentral'naia Azia*, Nasledie Evrasii, Moscow, 2008, 241 pages.

Kyrgyzstan. From the political viewpoint, present-day Kyrgyzstan is an extremely unstable state formation in which forced changes in power periodically take place. A systemic socioeconomic crisis is going on in the country that is retaining the tension (social and ethnic).

Moreover, the country does not have enough military and force potential, which makes it a favorable environment for transnational organized crime, the drug mafia, and religious extremist groups. And they, coalescing with the authorities at different levels, are becoming even more firmly ensconced on the republic's political scene.

From the economic viewpoint, Kyrgyzstan is an industrially undeveloped country with a low standard of living and high level of unemployment, which prompts workers to leave the country in search of a living. Remittances from Kyrgyz guest workers are a principal component of the state's financial system.

The republic also has untapped economic potential that is primarily concentrated in the farming (fruit and vegetables), energy (hydropower), and resource (water and gold) branches of the economy, as well as a certain amount of human capital that actively participates in regional labor migration (low-qualified specialists).

Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy course is aimed toward multivectoral cooperation with Russia, the U.S., China, and Kazakhstan; on the whole, however, the country is in favor of regional integration as the best way to ensure its integrity and strengthen national security.

In recent years, Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy has also been characterized by instability, fluctuating along with the changes in its relations with Russia and the U.S., which are trying to put pressure on Bishkek.

Kyrgyzstan does not have enough political clout; its capabilities are stymied by the strong influence and pressure of neighboring states, as well as by the existing territorial disputes with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. It should be noted that Bishkek makes active use of the economic levers of pressure (the region's water and energy supply) to defend its interests.

Tajikistan. From the political viewpoint, present-day Tajikistan is an extremely unstable state that is subject to domestic political fluctuations and sociopolitical crises. Religious-extremist groups and criminal syndicates that control drug trafficking from Afghanistan have a strong influence on the republic. The political situation in the country is severely aggravated by the systemic problems of socioeconomic development, which remain unresolved and so are causing permanent tension and a power crisis in the country.

In economic terms, Tajikistan is an industrially undeveloped country with an extremely low standard of living and high level of unemployment. Remittances from Tajik migrant workers are a major element of the financial system. The republic also has untapped economic potential that is primarily concentrated in farming, and in the energy (hydropower) and resource (water and gold) industries. The country also has certain amount of human capital that actively participates in regional labor migration (low-qualified specialists).

The country's foreign policy course is aimed toward multivectoral cooperation with Russia, the U.S., the EU, China, and Iran, on which Tajikistan is very economically and politically dependent. The country's main military and political priorities are largely related to developing cooperation with Russia, as well as with the U.S. and EU (via NATO).

The main stakes in trade and economic and investment activity are placed on relations with China and Iran, with the help of which Tajikistan is trying to solve various problems, including building its infrastructure.

So Tajikistan's activity in the integration sphere is directed toward resolving problems of economic development and strengthening national security.

Tajikistan has relatively weak political potential; it is under strong pressure from Uzbekistan and Afghanistan and also has several political and territorial disputes with some neighboring countries (Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan).

Dushanbe defends its interests by making active use of the levers of pressure it has (water supply, territorial disputes, drug trafficking), as well as by means of its involvement in the processes going on in Afghanistan, with which it has close ethnocultural ties.

Turkmenistan. Politically, Turkmenistan is a country with relatively stable sociopolitical conditions ensured by the country's closed nature, rigorous domestic course, and relatively high (in regional terms) standard of living. Turkmenistan is less subject to outside pressure, although the republic's domestic political situation is characterized by unstable legal rules and an unsophisticated mechanism for transferring presidential power.

Economically, Turkmenistan is a country with a relatively high standard of living, which is largely maintained by exporting energy resources (gas and oil).

At present, Ashgabad is placing its stakes on extensive and active development of infrastructure, particularly in the transportation and telecommunications sphere.

The republic's service sphere has reached a high level of development, much higher than the growth of the industrial and agricultural sectors.

Turkmenistan's foreign policy course is based on the principle of neutrality. The country does not participate in international and regional integration structures, while it establishes its relations with different states on an exclusively bilateral basis.

The republic is primarily interested in attracting large investments into Turkmen energy projects (from China, Iran, and Europe), as well as developing multivectoral transportation corridors (to China, India, Iran, and Europe), including pipeline routes that bypass Russia.

Turkmenistan has a low level of political and economic influence. The republic pursues a cautious policy toward its regional neighbors (primarily in the economic sphere), with an emphasis on keeping the existing problems in check.

Uzbekistan. In the political respect, Uzbekistan, the most densely populated Central Asian country, is a state with a strict authoritarian regime, the mechanisms of which make it possible to keep socio-political tension and discontent in the country under control.

Uzbekistan's state and political structure is distinguished by high personalization of the current president's power; the ruling regime tries to retain total control over all the processes going on in the country and keep the clamps on any liberal initiatives. The unstable legal rules and unsophisticated mechanism for transferring presidential power are the main threats to destabilization of the situation.

Uzbekistan is characterized by a high level of poverty and unemployment, which is aggravated by the specifics of the state's economic policy based on repressive and confiscatory methods. Business is strictly controlled, and remittances from migrant workers are a principal component of the financial system.

Uzbekistan has a large amount of untapped economic potential that is primarily concentrated in the farming (fruit, vegetables, and cotton), industrial (food and chemical), and energy (gas) branches of the economy, and it also has colossal (by regional standards) demographic resources.

Uzbekistan's foreign policy course greatly depends on the changing geopolitical situation in the world at large; whereby Tashkent tries to maneuver between Russia and the West, periodically shifting the military and political accents, while at the same time establishing close ties with China (mainly in the economic sphere). Uzbekistan is inconstant with respect to its participation in integration (international and regional) and military-political structures.

Uzbekistan does not have common borders with Russia, China, Iran, or other large countries, which greatly hinders realization of its potential. But thanks to its advantageous geostrategic location (the republic borders on all the CA countries and Afghanistan), Uzbekistan has significant political and economic influence on the Central Asian region and openly demonstrates its claims to regional leadership.

The republic has a whole set of tools for influencing its neighbors and makes active use of pressure in establishing regional relations and meeting its national interests.

Kazakhstan, in contrast to the other CA countries, is not trying to preserve its fundamental civilizational values. Nevertheless, this country suffers from such regional “illnesses” as semi-authoritarian rule, corruption, a resource-oriented economy, and so on.

In order to occupy a worthy place among the Eurasian leaders, Kazakhstan is exerting unremitting efforts to change the vector of its development by actively transforming the existing political and economic system. But, despite the republic’s potential, it faces a multitude of geo-economic challenges.

Its course toward economic growth, gradual liberalization, and stability of foreign political priorities has made Kazakhstan an attractive target for foreign investments, which stimulate the republic’s development.

Kazakhstan also differs from the other states of the region in the fact that it tries to derive as much benefit as possible from close cooperation with Russia, the West, and China, as well as from active participation in international processes.

It cannot be claimed that Kazakhstan’s current identity is related only to its post-Soviet past, or to its affiliation with the Asian area; nor is there a pro-western tilt in the republic’s policy.

Kazakhstan is trying to position itself as a Eurasian integration bridge; various projects (mainly utopian) are being put forward aimed at turning Central Asia into a united political and economic union of sorts (a Union of Central Asian States) that so far have no prospects.

On the whole, it seems that precisely by retaining the current model of state development and fulfilling the declared plans, Kazakhstan will be able to distinguish itself among the CIS transit states and spearhead Central Asia’s evolution.

The “-stan” identity that has survived from the common historical past continues to play its part; it could also become the basis of a new dialog among the CA countries destabilized by regional rivalry.

Security Risks in the Central Asian Region

At present, the factors listed below, which are often interrelated, are arousing particular concern in the development of the regional situation in Central Asia.

The existing internal development problems are promoting the emergence of and increase in overall destabilizing factors. All the region’s countries have serious population problems in terms of both quantity and quality; overpopulation and the polyethnic nature of many countries are aggravating the socioeconomic and political situation even more. Moreover, in addition to the increased tendency toward conflicts, rise in extremism, uncontrollable migration processes, and higher transnational crime, spiritual-cultural deformation, which is also stimulating the emergence of overall destabilizing factors (domestic and regional), is seen in some states.

Mid- and long-term development of the Central Asian states is characterized by unpredictability. In this context, it seems appropriate to mention the ongoing negative processes and phenomena that could have a dramatic effect on domestic political development and cause profound and extensive domestic political instability in Central Asia prompted by destabilization of the ruling regimes and the use of force during changes in power.

It is also possible that states could split along ethnic or territorial lines (Tajikistan-Gorny Badkhashan and the regions contiguous to Uzbekistan; Uzbekistan-the Fergana Valley), or interstate tension increase.

The region is still under the influence of asymmetrical threats and challenges that form both within the CA states and beyond them. In the context of the weak state regimes, extensive corruption, and difficult socioeconomic situation in several CA countries, transnational entities (religious-extremist organizations, drug cartels, cross-border criminal groups, and so on) are becoming independent players in the region. They have significant resources (financial, human, and infrastructural), as well as a large military arsenal, and in the future their influence will most likely grow.

So in the next few years, there will be a shift in the vector of activity of the CA states toward ensuring national security. Particular attention must be directed not to the risks posed by the influence of external nations, but to the growing threats from transnational criminal entities.

The region is being subjected to Islamism, which is related to the development of extremist trends and the increase in terrorist activity. International Islamist forces are taking advantage of the specifics of the ethnocultural composition of the CA states. In light of the events of 2010, it can be claimed that extremist organizations are continuing to destabilize the situation in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. They are also spreading their influence to Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan (AfPak), as well as to the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) with the aim of creating an "Islamic state."

The absence of the necessary measures for opposing the activity of the sufficiently widespread and coordinated network of Islamist organizations is creating the real threat of extremist ideas spreading in the northwesterly direction.

A major difference in interests is seen among the ruling elites of the CA countries with respect to national interests, preferences, and development goals and objectives; several interstate problems remain unresolved. It is extremely likely that if the existing situation continues, the misunderstanding among the CA states with respect to many regional issues will significantly grow (in the medium and long term).

Relations with neighbors are essentially continuing to occupy a secondary place in foreign political priorities of the CA countries and this tendency is growing, which could greatly hinder the establishment of a regional dialog.

Preservation and periodical intensification of disputes in relations among the region's countries. One of the most controversial issues involves the balanced distribution of water resources. For example, Uzbekistan is extremely displeased with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan's attempts to implement hydropower projects.

Moreover, there are unresolved issues among the three countries concerning state borders and territorial claims, which is aggravating the existing ethnic contradictions and could lead to conflicts.

Ongoing economic instability and the region's insufficient potential. The global economic crisis has become a serious challenge for the CA countries; it is very likely that its negative repercussions will be felt for the next several years.

The economy of most of the CA countries, which is oriented toward the raw material sector, has been dealt a severe blow by the negative changes in the global situation. The matter primarily concerns the least developed countries of the region, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which are more subject to systematic energy crises. There has also been an abrupt drop in demand for migrant workers from these countries, primarily in the Russian and Kazakhstan markets.

It should be noted that instead of establishing close economic cooperation, the CA states prefer to rely only on their own capabilities or on interaction with external actors.

Influence of external factors on regional destabilization. In order to redistribute and reinforce the zones of their influence and domination, the external actors are exerting various levers of pressure

on the region's states, the geopolitical rivalry of which is in all likelihood gradually growing into a new active phase.

Moreover, the region's border areas are potential sources of challenges and threats to its stability, primarily from Iran (risks related to the military threat from the U.S.) and possibly Mongolia (risks related to aggravation of the domestic political situation in that country). The permanent negative impact Afghanistan is having on the situation in Central Asia also undermines the region's stability.

The security problem is complicated by the fact that there is not one state in the region capable at present of independently opposing mass threats and challenges for an extended length of time, particularly if they become institutionalized, that is, turn into a mass movement or organized institution. This likelihood will significantly increase if new economic or political problems emerge in the CA countries.

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Analyzing and forecasting the development of the CA countries is complicated by the fact that many different internal factors (low level of socioeconomic development, political uncertainty, uneven state-building processes) are causing the internal regional situation and dynamics of relations among the states to constantly change. Many risks are also generated by Afghanistan's proximity (drug trafficking through the region, active religious extremists and transnational crime groups).

Central Asia becoming a target of geopolitical rivalry among the major international players is also fraught with unpredictable consequences.

Policy, Interests, and Degree of Influence of the External Players and Transnational Entities in Central Asia

Today, the main participants in the Great Geopolitical Game in Central Asia are Russia, the U.S., and China; the EU, Turkey, India, Pakistan, and Iran are also showing an increasing interest in the region.

However, the players' interests do not always coincide and often escalate into severe geopolitical conflicts that have a negative effect on the regional situation. So successful political and economic development of the Central Asian region in the long term largely depends on the quality of relations with external actors.

The G-4 in the Region

Russia has always regarded Central Asia as a zone of its vitally important interests. Moscow is trying to retain a high level of influence on the region's countries by making active use of the economic ties developed in Soviet times and of the integration structures (CIS, CSTO, EurAsEC, and Customs Union). Russia is particularly interested in expanding its own and putting the clamps on external military presence in the region, increasing its economic influence, developing new raw

material and hydropower resources, controlling oil and gas transportation routes, and forming a common information and cultural expanse with the CA countries aimed at ensuring Russian information dominance.

For historical and geographic reasons, Russia is very involved in the processes going on in the region and has the most effective levers of pressure on the CA countries. It is also trying to acquire monopoly access for its companies to the development of valuable mineral and energy resource fields.

The Russian side is not interested at all in diversification of the national economies of the region's countries, since this process could undermine its influence and lead to the appearance and development of alternative economic projects (without Russia's participation).

On the whole, Russia's long-term strategy in Central Asia will be targeted at forming and implementing reliable ways of having an influence on the region's states.

The U.S., like Russia, regards the Caspian-Central Asian region as a sphere of its vitally important interests; its Eurasian geostrategy is based on the Greater Central Asia conception that envisages recruiting the region's countries to support the military campaign in Afghanistan.

The U.S.'s main interests are concentrated in the production and transportation of energy resources, while its military-political presence in the region's countries is of particular strategic importance to it (due to the proximity of Russia, China, Iran, and the AfPak zone). In other words, the U.S. regards the region's territory as a favorable springboard for exerting direct political influence on Russia and China, carrying out military action in AfPak, or launching a potential military strike on Iran. Whereby it is crystal clear that the U.S. is trying to distance the CA states as much as possible from Russia's influence; to this end, Washington is using political levers of pressure, democratic rhetoric, and exerting all the influence it can on the region's countries (directly and through international organizations or NGOs).

On the whole, the U.S.'s strategy in Central Asia does not envisage large investments in the socioeconomic development of the region's countries and is mainly directed toward the energy and resource-producing sectors of the economy.

The PRC regards the CA in the long term as a zone of its domination and a source of cheap energy and natural resources. China is slowly, consistently, and cautiously building its relations with the region's countries while trying to increase its own economic influence on them. So China's strategic task is to fortify its own position in the CA region, which is necessary for its large-scale economic expansion.

China's powerful financial and investment capabilities are making it possible for it to penetrate the region's economy and, in so doing, prepare the way for exerting its political influence. China's long-term goal is to gain as much economic control over the CA states as possible and turn them into its raw material base.

At the present stage, Beijing is focusing its attention on reorienting the pipeline routes from Central Asia away from Russia and toward China.

In its regional strategy, China is trying to distance itself as much as possible from geopolitical competition with other external players.

Security in the border regions and primarily in XUAR is an important aspect of China's foreign policy interaction with the CA states. Beijing's steps will be directed toward keeping conflict potential and separatist moods under wraps.

China regards the SCO as an important mechanism for solving its tasks. It holds a dominating position in this organization, and it is this regional organization that will become the main "tool" in Beijing's policy in Central Asia in the future.

Chinese migrants who come to the region (along with investments and commercial business) without attracting attention are posing a particular threat to Central Asia.

As for the EU, it is trying to apply its own more independent approach to Central Asia. The Europeans are making use of detailed programs in their activity and are in general acting in a very organized way. *The EU Strategy for CA until 2013 regards the region as a source of challenges to European security.* Moreover, this document envisages cooperation in bilateral and multilateral formats in various spheres. This approach is noteworthy since it recognizes and keeps in mind alternative ways of promoting regional development and establishing security institutions. So, to avoid additional risks, the Europeans have been adapting their approaches to the real situation in the region from the very beginning.

The main areas of European interests include the production and transportation of Central Asian energy resources (bypassing Russian pipelines) and combating the threats to security coming from Afghanistan. The humanitarian component of European policy toward the CA will include increasing the number of educational programs and issuing study grants. Both existing and new projects promoted by international organizations (the OSCE) and regional programs (TACIS, TRACECA, and BOMCA) can be described as a “soft” means for penetrating the region.

The EU has the opportunity in the medium term to actively join the regional processes aimed at resolving the water and hydropower problems. On the whole, however, the EU’s Central Asian policy is still rather amorphous, although some European countries (Germany, Great Britain, France, Italy, and the Netherlands) are taking active steps on the regional arena, acting largely in keeping with their own national interests.

It should be noted that the EU is prevented from becoming a serious competitive player by the complicated bureaucratic mechanism of collegial decision-making that exists within this organization itself.

New Powers in the Region

Turkish politicians are putting forward the idea of creating a Turkic world under the aegis of Ankara and regard Central Asia as one of its important components. At the current stage, however, Turkey’s foreign political activity in Central Asia is not distinguished by a comprehensive approach and is rather feeble. This is primarily due to the political problems that exist in Turkey itself, as well as its foreign policy strategy oriented toward the EU and U.S.

Although it consistently promotes its Central Asian strategy, Turkey has still not set itself the goal of becoming actively involved in the game. It is integrating into the region’s economy by means of joint business projects and investment programs. Ankara is also putting particular effort into enhancing its cultural influence by introducing a variety of sociocultural and educational projects.

Turkey is currently increasing its political activity in the region; the country is making intensive use of the potential of such regional structures as TURKSOI, the OIC, and CICMA.

An increase in the pro-Islamist political forces within Turkey itself will also promote Ankara’s greater involvement in resolving regional problems.

Iran is striving to increase its influence in the region by developing trade, transit projects, religious propaganda, and cultural kinship with Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Iran, which is in international isolation to a certain extent, is stepping up its foreign policy activity in Central Asia to expand its economic and political contacts; relations with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are particularly important to Tehran from the viewpoint of settling the Caspian question.

Iran’s interests are mainly concentrated in the trade and economic sphere and in the development of transportation corridors through Central Asia toward Russia. Tehran’s striving to find a niche for itself in Central Asia is also prompted by its desire to receive timely information about the U.S.’s

plans, since this country could use the region's territory as a springboard for launching a military attack on Iran.

The Iranian side could also use the religious-extremist channels that pass mainly through Tajikistan and Afghanistan in order to penetrate into the region. In the long term, it is likely that Tehran will toughen up its policy toward certain CA states, which will depend on their stance regarding the Iranian nuclear program and level of development of cooperation with the U.S. and its allies.

Pakistan is establishing cooperation with the CA states in developing the economy and ensuring regional security. At present, Pakistan is undergoing relatively rapid economic growth and so the raw material potential of the Central Asian region is of special interest to this country. The most promising aspect is the import of energy resources from hydro-resource-rich Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan through Afghanistan.

In the short term, Islamabad's strategy of cooperation with the Central Asian countries will be aimed as before toward developing energy transportation routes not controlled by India (the Trans-Afghan gas pipeline, the Karakorum highway, and the high-voltage power transmission line from Tajikistan).

In the medium and long term, it is predicted that Islamabad will step up its efforts to gain full-fledged membership in the SCO as a way to ensure its regional security interests (in light of the active steps being taken by the U.S. and India in Southeast Asia).

But internal socioeconomic problems, domestic political instability, the continuing confrontation with India, and the country's involvement in the Afghan conflict are factors hindering Pakistan's full-scale integration into Central Asia's regional processes.

India is also showing an interest in increasing its influence in Central Asia in the medium and long term. At the current stage, India's influence in the region is limited, but there are opportunities for it to increase. The country is interested in gaining a foothold (regardless of how strong) in the Central Asian region for strategic reasons. Its new foreign policy is based on the need to expand its traditional sphere of influence, which encompasses Southeast and South Asia, as well as the water area of the Indian Ocean.

India is also trying to indirectly hamper Pakistan's influence on the region, so we can expect an increase in its interaction with Iran (Pakistan's opponent) in Central Asia.

The main vectors of India's cooperation with the Central Asian countries in ensuring regional security include the joint struggle against Islamic extremism, terrorism, and the drug business, as well as settlement of the situation in Afghanistan. The region's states are a potential source of energy resources for India, as well as a promising sales market for its industrial production.

At the same time, the absence of a developed transportation and energy infrastructure, as well as the crisis situation in Afghanistan and in the north of Pakistan are hindering the development of India's full-fledged multilateral relations with the CA states.

Interaction within the SCO (India has been an observer in this organization since 2005, and at present is striving to become its member) and CICMA (New Delhi is one of its active participants) are promising vectors of institutional cooperation between India and the Central Asian states.

In the long term, India's strategy will most likely be aimed at targeted and gradual integration into the economy of the Central Asian countries with an emphasis on cooperation in the oil and gas, energy, and mining sectors. Achieving a certain concentration of Indian capital in the economy of the Central Asian countries will help to increase New Delhi's influence on the region.

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Such is the variegated geopolitical situation in the region, which is giving rise to the many different foreign policy orientations of the CA countries and the absence of clear rules in the emerging

strategic game for influence. So Central Asia's further development will depend on how the nearby nations and the distant geopolitical players wield their growing might (whether they will act independently or in partnership with other countries, what scenarios will be put forward, and so on).

Russia, which is gradually losing ground in the region, is well aware that the remnants of the Soviet elites are gradually disappearing from Central Asia's political arena. Despite the region's increasingly negative perception of its northern neighbor, Moscow is trying to draw the Central Asian region as much as possible into its integration network. However, its integration projects are not that interesting from the ideological viewpoint, while participation in them mainly depends on tactical pragmatics.

China's rising status is attracting particular attention; its active steps in the region have left the other players far behind.

India's Central Asian strategy is still not entirely clear; it is difficult to predict how China and the Islamic "Messiah" Republic of Iran, which is striving to gain access to the region by means of its ideology and political "product," will respond to India's growing activity.

Pakistan's influence in Central Asia is rising. By manipulating the military-political situation in Afghanistan, this country is trying to put pressure on the U.S., in so doing tying the geopolitical knot even tighter.

The future of the Central Asian region will depend on the nature and degree of interaction between the Central Asian states and the external players. The region could eventually become a target of tough international competition.

Development Scenarios of the Situation in the Region

In the foreseeable future (until 2015), stable development of Central Asia will depend on the following factors:

- (1) the state of the economy throughout the entire region in the context of the global situation;
- (2) the level of consensus or antagonism among the external geopolitical forces;
- (3) the political situation in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and possible changes in the political elites in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan;
- (4) the influence of the situation in Afghanistan;
- (5) the likelihood of the U.S. carrying out any new military operations against Iran;
- (6) the degree of involvement of the new regional forces (India, Iran, and Turkey) in the Central Asian processes.

In the next five years, there may be a shift in vectors of political development in the CA countries. For example, there may be a relative warming trend if a new leadership comes to power in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, but in no way a breakthrough in internal regional relations.

Development of the region's countries will largely depend on the economic problems, as well as on the threats to political stability created by the increase in extremism.

Keeping in mind the worsening situation in the region and the growing significance of natural-resource potential, it can be asserted that Central Asia is increasingly becoming the arena for a geopolitical game, the new rules of which will be drawn up in the foreseeable future.

Russia and the U.S., whose relations have warmed up somewhat, will most likely retain the status quo and continue to engage in “soft” competition. Such relations are advantageous to both states, since Russia needs American investments and innovations, and the U.S. wants to ensure its military presence in Central Asia for as long as possible.

China will continue to take active steps aimed at increasing its economic presence in the region. In the long run, this will help Beijing to step up its political influence on Central Asia.

The increase in religious extremism and aggravation of the situation in XUAR could force China to shift from observer to active military interference in the Afghan conflict (in order to weaken the Taliban).

Turkey, which is gaining a stronger foothold on the international arena, will also become more active in Central Asia. Ankara is trying to augment its presence in the region and form a Turkic-speaking world in Eurasia.

Turkey still has its sights set on retaining a strong economic position in the region, taking active part in oil and gas routes from CA (the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline and Nabucco), and developing its transit-transportation infrastructure.

The Central Asian region is of particular geopolitical importance to *Iran* due to the U.S. military facilities deployed in the former’s territory capable of becoming a springboard for launching a military strike.

Isolated by the West, Iran will augment its economic presence in the region. As it increases its participation in the regional processes, Tehran might try to put pressure on some of the region’s countries (Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan).

In counterbalance to China’s stronger position and the growing export of radical Islamism from *Pakistan*, *India*’s activity will noticeably grow, which has already been attempting to institutionally enforce its presence in the region, including military (for example, in Tajikistan). It should be noted that the Indian economy’s acute energy hunger is the second most important factor (after containing Pakistan) prompting the country’s increased activity in Central Asia.

A long-term analysis identifies four main groups of global factors that will determine the situation in the Central Eurasian expanse until 2030:

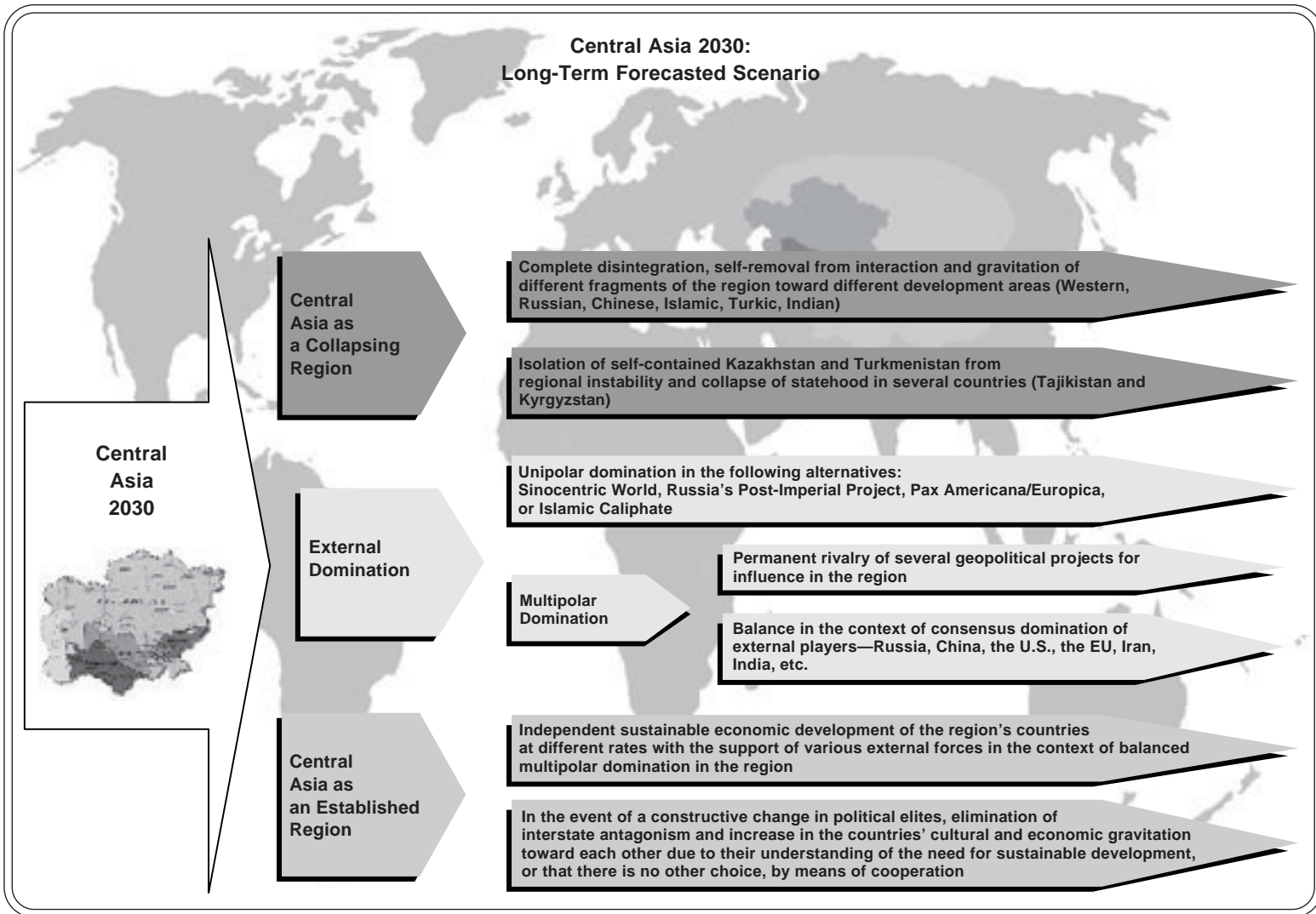
- (1) a shift in economic vectors of development and scientific-technological breakthrough (shift in energy priorities);
- (2) radical changes in the correlation between the dimensions of the economies and the general balance of forces between Western and non-Western countries;
- (3) a demographic slump in the old industrial countries (“the global North”) and a sharp increase in population in the developing countries (“the global South”);
- (4) global competition between the new and old world nations and uncertain world order.

By that time, Central Asia will be a regional formation with uneven political, economic, social, demographic, and cultural development capabilities.

The following scenarios might emerge based on the macro-regional correlation of geopolitical forces throughout Central Eurasia (see Figure on p. 34).

The “Central Asia as a Collapsing Region” scenario presumes progressive disintegration due to the increase in civilizational differences, self-removal from interaction and gravitation of different fragments of the region toward different development areas (Western, Russian, Chinese, Islamic, Turkic, Indian).

Another alternative is possible: isolation of self-contained Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan from regional instability and collapse of statehood in several countries (Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan).



“External Domination.” Depending on the geopolitical breakdown on a macroeconomic scale in the region, different models of unipolar domination could be built: a Sinocentric World, Russia’s Post-Imperial Project, Pax Americana/Europica, or an Islamic Caliphate. Within the framework of the system of multipolar domination, another two scenarios are possible: one of them presumes a balance in the context of consensus domination of external players, and the other permanent rivalry of several geopolitical projects (the region’s energy-resource and transit potential will be the main factors, as well as the need to control the seat of instability in AfPak).

There are two versions of *the “Central Asia as an Established Region” scenario*:

1. Constructive change in political elites, elimination of interstate antagonism and an increase in the countries’ cultural and economic gravitation toward each other due to their understanding of the need for sustainable development, or that there is no other choice, by means of co-operation.
2. Independent sustainable economic development of the region’s countries at different rates with the support of various external forces in the context of balanced multipolar domination in the region.

The direction Central Asia will take in its development far from only depends on the region’s countries themselves; the global breakdown, Eurasian trends, and situation developing in Asia also have an effect on its positioning and stability.

But during the years of independent development, not all the countries have realized that coordinated joint and non-conflict movement in the same direction (not necessarily within the framework of an integration union) will make it possible for Central Asia to grow stronger and be ready for future changes.

* * *

When Central Asia first appeared on the world map it was all the rage to perceive the processes going on there as destructive and predict the collapse of the states belonging to it and the blowup of the entire region as such.

Of course, the region cannot be called calm, since it is frequently the scene of recurring destructive phenomena (political instability, terrorism, religious extremism, drug trafficking, illegal migration, and so on). However, during the 20 years of their development, the CA countries, despite the antagonism among them, have in one way or another managed to find ways to jointly combat these threats.

Despite the current opinion that the situation in Central Asia is extremely unstable and explosive, the region’s countries, thanks to the effective security mechanisms, have never entered into direct military conflict with each other.

At present, Central Asia is undergoing a transition; the likelihood of a disruption in the balance of power is prompting the need to establish a regional dialog, develop institutions of cooperation, and create positive scenarios of a joint future.

We should not wait until Asia becomes an axis of global geopolitical transformation; the existing situation has everything required at present for the Central Asian countries to find ways to move toward sustainable development.