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# Evolving Global Geopolitical Dynamics and Their Impact on Türkiye's Central Asia Policy

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# **Evolving Global Geopolitical Dynamics and Their Impact on Türkiye's Central Asia Policy**

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Türkiye's approach to Central Asia not only requires an understanding of the bilateral relations with individual countries in the region but also necessitates an understanding of the shifting global geopolitical landscape. The policies of major powers, namely Russia, China, the EU, and the US, are crucial determinants of Türkiye's positioning in Central Asia. In fact, the interplay of cooperation and competition involving these powers and Türkiye significantly influences the success of Türkiye's foreign policy. Furthermore, the dynamics among these great powers have the potential to shape Türkiye's regional strategy. This study explores the likely implications of the Ukraine crisis, regime change in Syria, and the Trump presidency in the United States on Türkiye's Central Asia policy.

Türkiye's post-Cold War policy toward Central Asia exemplifies its historically Western-centric framework. For an extended period, Türkiye was perceived as a "bridge" connecting Western nations with Central Asian states [1]. For many years, Türkiye served as a proponent of Western-centered policy in Central Asia. However, in recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on Türkiye's pursuit of a more "autonomous" foreign policy. Ankara has sought to forge new alliances and explore partnerships with countries such as China and Russia [2]. Türkiye's relations with these countries reflect a complex landscape characterized by both areas of agreement and disagreement. In the light of recent global developments, it is essential to understand that Türkiye's relationships with Central Asia are influenced by these broader dynamics and should not be viewed in isolation [3].

## **Türkiye's Position in the Evolving Geopolitical Landscape**

In the context of Eurasian geopolitics, Russia has emerged as an influential actor in the region, owing to its geographical, historical, and economic connections. For Russia, Central Asia represents a significant area of interest as her "near abroad" [4]. Therefore, Russia's stance with regard to Central Asia policy is of utmost importance for Türkiye.

In recent years, two key issues have emerged in Türkiye-Russia relations: the Ukraine conflict and the Syrian civil war. Regarding the Ukraine situation, Türkiye has refrained from participating in Western sanctions against Russia and has actively sought to



mediate between Russia and Ukraine. At the same time, Türkiye has not recognized Russia's stance on Crimea and has provided military support, notably drones, to the Kyiv government. Since the onset of the crisis, Türkiye has consistently aimed to maintain its ambivalent role by positioning itself as a dialogue partner for both Ukraine and Russia [5].

Secondly, concerning the regime change in Syria, it is evident that, for Russia, whose foreign policy identity is heavily centered on military might, the potential loss of influence following the fall of the Assad regime, with whom it maintained strategic ties, represents a significant and hard-to-recover-from setback. This situation has had a profound impact on President Putin, who has cultivated a strong leader image on the global stage [6]. The successful overthrow of the Syrian regime, which was supported by Russia and Iran, by the Syrian opposition forces in early November, 2024 is likely to have significant implications. The development poses a potential threat to Russia's access to the Mediterranean, thereby impacting its strategic interests in the region [7]. The support of Türkiye for the insurgents in their revolutionary efforts in November 2024, despite having previously sought a solution for Syria alongside Russia and Iran through the Astana process, could potentially harm the trust established between Ankara and Moscow [8]. Indeed, statements made by the prominent Russian strategist, Alexander Dugin, who has directly addressed Türkiye, indicate that there is considerable tension between the two states following the regime change in Syria [9].

The current challenges facing Russia are expected to have major consequences, particularly regarding the dynamics of Türkiye-Russia relations within Central Asia.. The collapse of the regime in Syria, which exacerbates the economic and military challenges already being faced by Russia, having been mired in nearly two years of conflict in Ukraine, will also have repercussions for nearby regions, including Central Asia. It is often emphasized that the war in Ukraine, which has consumed all of Russia's resources, is likely to create power vacuums throughout Eurasia. This presents opportunities that other countries might seize, with China at the forefront [10]. Although the Beijing administration acts together with Russia against the Western bloc, there is an unspoken rivalry between the two countries when it comes to Central Asia, especially due to China's growing economic influence [11].

The Beijing administration seeks to bolster its regional influence by cultivating relationships with various stakeholders. As China establishes its presence in Central Asia, it has also intensified its collaboration with Türkiye under the Belt and Road Initiative, a prime example being the Middle Corridor project, connecting Europe and Asia [12]. Furthermore, Türkiye's accession to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a "dialogue partner" in 2013 underscores the growing momentum in its relations with China [13]. Alongside China, which is increasingly making its power felt in Central Asian geopolitics, the demands of regional countries for more autonomy in terms of policy as well as the organizations they have formed among themselves are reducing Moscow's regional influence [14]. In this context, other countries have emerged that do not pose a threat to the nations of the region unlike Russia which seeks to exert its influence through its geographical proximity and military and political power and China which has emerged as a significant player in the region by waving substantial economic carrots. Türkiye is certainly one of these nations.



Türkiye has expanded its foreign policy focus to include Africa, Latin America amongst others and now aims to strengthen its (already) existing ties with Central Asian countries. In this respect, investing in energy, enhancing bilateral trade, and fostering education and cultural cooperation are significant examples. Additionally, a crucial aspect of Türkiye's recent foreign policy towards the region has been the export of advanced weapon technologies. Following impressive performances in various conflict zones, Türkiye's unmanned aerial vehicles have garnered considerable attention from numerous nations. As a result, Türkiye has established itself as a prominent arms exporter in Central Asia [15]. In addition to its bilateral relations, Türkiye seeks to enhance its regional influence through established multilateral partnerships. One such structure is the Organization of Turkic States, which Türkiye supports vigorously. This organization is poised to play an increasingly significant role in regional integration, particularly in terms of trade and energy, in the near future [16].

### **Potential Developments in Central Asia Following the U.S. Elections**

A key development with the potential to influence global politics was the US presidential elections held on November 5, 2024 and the second coming of Trump. The resulting shift in US policy highlights a significant rift within the Atlantic alliance that has been steadfast since the end of World War II. A schism between the EU and the US became glaringly evident during the recent Munich Security Conference [17]. Trump's "America First" slogan, his disregard for the institutions that hold the Western world together, and the traditional partnerships of the United States indicate that the international order as we know it is going to change. The transition from a U.S.-led model of global order, founded on alliances and institutions, to a foreign policy centered on unilateral coercion is likely to have significant ramifications [18]. The antipathy towards Ukraine in opposition to Russia sends a sobering message to the international community, particularly neighboring countries, regarding the inadequacy of measures in place to curtail Moscow's actions. These circumstances have the potential to contribute to increased global instability [19].

Trump's emphasis on curbing China could lead to an extension of its influence in Central Asia, potentially elevating the United States's role in regional politics in the future. However, the danger of other nations, including Iran and Russia, stepping in the space that would be left by China necessitates a careful approach from Washington [20]. For Washington, the primary focus in Central Asia, as part of its balancing strategy with China, will be on economic relations, particularly with regard to energy. Trump's emphasis on energy resources and key critical minerals is likely to transform Central Asia into a competitive arena for US companies and China, following the establishment of the necessary legal frameworks [21].

Furthermore, Trump's shocking remarks after the election regarding the conclusion of the war in Ukraine could compel the European Union to respond. This may prompt the EU to adopt a more proactive defense and security policy aimed at establishing a credible military capability. In fact, the EU's initiative to formulate legal frameworks to boost defense spending can be seen as an initial, albeit modest, step in this direction [22]. It is worth considering how the European Union's approach to diplomacy, which has hitherto



focused on economic cooperation and soft power, may evolve moving forward. Ukraine is poised to be a litmus test for the EU in the near future. During this period, Türkiye with its substantial population, technological capabilities and military strength may unexpectedly gain greater significance for the European Union. President Erdogan of the Republic of Türkiye has emphasized the significant role that Türkiye can play in the current context of the European Union and has conveyed a vital message that Türkiye's involvement is essential during this critical period [23].

## **Conclusion**

The geopolitical developments unfolding as a result of the Ukraine conflict have created opportunities for Türkiye to strengthen its relationships with several nations in Central Asia [24]. However, the fragmentation of the Western bloc and the shift in U.S. policy under Trump, in which the threat posed by Russia has taken a backseat to a perceived larger threat posed by China, may enable Moscow to regroup to some extent. In the upcoming period, Trump's policies could also create opportunities for an isolated European Union to strengthen its relations with Türkiye. Such collaboration might facilitate the initiation of joint projects across different regions, including Central Asia. If Türkiye is unable to obtain the concessions it seeks from the EU through this cooperative framework, it may turn to regional rivalries to establish transactional partnerships based on pragmatism in line with the current global zeitgeist. These partnerships could involve various international and regional powers, including the United States and China. Thus, it can be posited that Türkiye's foreign policy towards Central Asia may evolve into a phase that is determined by a variety of divergent scenarios.

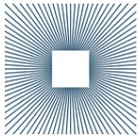


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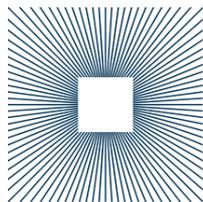
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