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## AVRASYA'NIN KAPI KOMŞUSU AFGANİSTAN AFGHANISTAN: THE NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOR OF EURASIA

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How to Increase  
the Effectiveness  
of Regional  
Organizations?

Kırım Platformu:  
Rusya'nın Kırım'ı İşgal  
ve Yasadışı İlhakına  
Karşı Ukrayna'nın  
Yeni Adımı

Russia's Interests  
in the Arctic:  
From the Past to  
the Present

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Dergimizin bu sayısını gurur verici bir yıldönümünde sunmaktan onur duymaktayız. Bu sayımızla dergimiz yayın hayatında dördüncü yılını doldurmaktadır. Zaman ne çabuk geçiyor. İlk sayımızı hazırladığımız günler adeta dün gibi. Bu vesile ile dört yıl boyunca dergimize gösterdiğiniz yakın ilgi için şükranlarımızı sunuyoruz.

Okurlarımız dergimizin her sayısında Avrasya coğrafyasında yer alan gelişmelere ilaveten özel bir konuya odaklandığımızı bilirler. Bu sayımızda da Afganistan'daki son gelişmeleri özel konumuz olarak belirledik.

Konum, önem ve bölge ile yakından ilişki ve iletişimleri nedeniyle öteden beri İran, Afganistan, Hindistan, Çin ve bazı başka ülkeleri yakından izlediğimiz malumdur. Afganistan'daki son gelişmelerin bir rejim değişikliği ile sonuçlanması yanı sıra, Avrasya hatta dünya siyasi/askeri dengeleri üzerindeki muhtemel etkileri bu tercihimizde rol oynadı.

Gerçekten, bir süredir hep vurguladığımız üzere, dünya siyasi ve ekonomik dengelerinde büyük bir değişim yaşanmakta, ağırlık merkezi Atlantik-Avrupa ekseninden Asya-Pasifik bölgesine kaymaktadır. Son yirmi yıldır Afganistan'daki hâkim güç olan Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nin de bu gelişmeye paralel bir politika izlemeye başladığı görülmekteydi. Nitekim ABD, Afganistan'dan çekilme hamlesini Avrupa'dan sonra Ortadoğu'dan da Asya-Pasifik bölgesine kaydırma konusunda önemli bir adım atmıştır. Yine bu bağlamda, artık dünyanın ikinci büyük ekonomisi haline gelen Çin, bir yandan Asya-Pasifik bölgesine hâkim olma arzusunu askeri güç gösterileri ile ortaya koyarken diğer yandan 140 ülkeyi kapsayan Kuşak-Yol İnisiyatifi ile Avrasya'ya hatta daha ötesine açılma niyetlerini belli etmektedir. Afganistan, işte bütün bu gelişmelerin merkezinde yer almaktadır. Bu sayımızda "Avrasya'nın Kapı Komşusu Afganistan" başlıklı bölümde konularında uzman kalemlerden çıkan dört makale beğeninize sunulmaktadır.

Avrasya Dünyasına göstermekte olduğunuz ilgiye teşekkürlerimizi sunarken, görüş ve katkılarınıza her zaman açık olduğumuzu yineliyor ve iyi okumalar diliyoruz.

Yiğit Alpogan  
Editör

# from the editor

### Dear Readers,

**M**ost sincere greetings to all our readers. We like to express our delight to present the 9th issue of the Eurasian World.

We take pride in completing the fourth year of our journal. It feels like yesterday when we began the preparation of the publication of the first issue of the Eurasian World. We like to take this occasion to express our gratitude for your close interest.

Our readers are by now accustomed to our editorial policy of focusing on a specific topic in each issue, in addition to the current developments in the Eurasian region. The specific topic of this issue is the latest developments in Afghanistan.

Our readers already know that we closely monitor countries like Iran, Afghanistan, India, China and some others for their geographical location, importance and close relations with the Eurasian region. The latest developments in Afghanistan, which are beyond just a regime change, with their possible repercussions on Eurasia and further on the global political/military balances has been the reason of this choice.

As a matter of fact, as we have been stressing for some time, a great transformation has been taking place in the political and economic balances in the world. World's center of gravity is moving from Euro-Atlantic to Asia-Pacific. It has been evident for some time that the United States of America, which has been the prevalent power in Afghanistan, has begun to embrace a new policy in line with this change. By withdrawing from Afghanistan, the US has taken a step to shrink back from the Middle East following Europe, and to concentrate more on Asia-Pacific. In such a context, China that has become the second largest economy in the world, displays its intentions to dominate the Asia-Pacific by show of force. China also manifest its desire to open up to Eurasia and further beyond by its Belt and Road Initiative that covers 140 countries. Afghanistan rests in the center of all these developments. In the section titled "Afghanistan: The Next Door Neighbor of Eurasia," we present four articles penned by specialists.

We, once again, like to thank our readers for their interest in the Eurasian World and again state that we highly value your views and look forward to your inputs. Enjoy the reading.

Yiğit Alpogan  
Editor

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# CENTRAL ASIA FROM DIFFICULTIES ON THE WAY OF RAPPROCHEMENT TO A NEW WAY OF INTEGRATION

The integration process in Central Asia started after signing the “Common Economic Space Agreement” between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan in 1994...This process included all the republics of Central Asia, except Turkmenistan, which declared itself as a neutral state and preferred to establish bilateral relations instead of multilateral ones. A new stage of Central Asian integration began in 2016 after Shavkat Mirziyoyev came to power in Uzbekistan.

## Nosirkhon Qodirov

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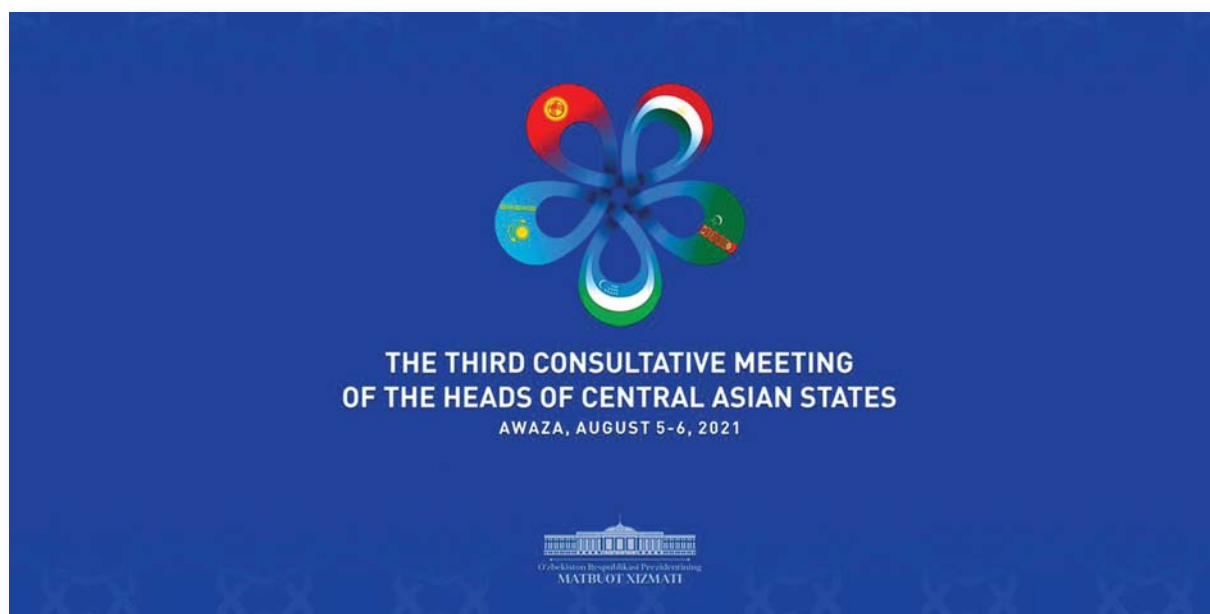
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**A**fter the collapse of the Soviet Union, many former Soviet countries realized that complete separation would not be possible because of the deep intertwinement of their economies during the Soviet period. This was one of the reasons why the leaders of post-Soviet countries proposed to establish a regional organization to replace the Soviet Union. The first President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbaev, in November 1990, proposed to establish the “Confederative Union of Independent States.”<sup>1</sup> All Central Asian countries, and Belarus and Russia agreed to join this new Union. However, the idea of “Confederative Union of Independent States” fell through. In the first years of independence, integration projects under the names of “Central Asian Economic Community” and “Organization of Central Asian Cooperation” were initiated by Central Asian countries, too. These, however, were not proved to be realizable.

The integration process in Central Asia started after signing the “Common Economic Space Agreement” between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan in 1994.<sup>2</sup> Tajikistan joined this treaty in 1998 after the civil war in this country ended. The “Central Asian Economic Community”<sup>3</sup> was established in this year.<sup>4</sup> In 2002, the “Central Asian Economic Community” was transformed into the “Organization of Central Asian Cooperation” (OCAC).<sup>5</sup> The main focus of the OCAC was developing

economic, political, cultural, and humanitarian cooperation. Yet, the OCAC was also tasked with coordination of the joint action of its member states to maintain peace and stability in the region. In 2004, at the summit of the heads of states of the OCAC in Dushanbe (Tajikistan), Russia joined the Organization. After that, Russia acquired a leading role as the main investment donor in Central Asia and the mediator in resolving conflicts among the member states. In 2005, at the Saint Petersburg Summit, it was decided to merge the OCAC with Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC). This decision was made due to Uzbekistan’s joining to the EurAsEC, whereas other members of the OCAC had already been members of the EurAsEC. Officially, the two organizations merged to reduce financial costs as both organizations duplicated each other. After that, no independent, region-specific Central Asian multilateral organization was established until 2018.<sup>6</sup>

The integration process in the region included all the republics of Central Asia, except Turkmenistan, which declared itself as a neutral state and preferred to establish bilateral relations instead of multilateral ones. A new stage of Central Asian integration began in 2016 after Shavkat Mirziyoyev came to power in Uzbekistan. By the initiative of Mirziyoyev, consultative meetings of the heads of states of Central Asian countries began to be organized. Today, more than ten years after the abolition of the OCAC, a



new dynamic in regional integration is emerging in Central Asia. This article explores reasons that prevented the Central Asian states from effectively conducting multilateral format of cooperation in the region in the period of 1991 and 2005 and the reasons behind the changes in the integration process after 2016.

### Central Asian Integration Process

Back in June 1990, the heads of the five Central Asian republics held their first meeting in Almaty (Kazakhstan) and adopted a plan to coordinate their actions in political, economic, and social spheres. In January 1993, Central Asian leaders met in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) and adopted the “Tashkent Protocol” to create a common market between Central Asian states.<sup>7</sup> Central Asian leaders also made commitments to strengthen economic cooperation and coordination of environmental policies, particularly in relation to the Aral Sea. As an outcome of the Tashkent Summit, an agreement on creating a regional newspaper with its headquarters in Almaty and a regional TV channel broadcasting from Tashkent was reached. However, the Tashkent Summit turned out to be rich in rhetoric but poor in practice. The civil war in Tajikistan and the neutrality of Turkmenistan made it difficult to implement the signed documents. Countries of the region developed economic cooperation to a certain extent, but the proposal of creating regional TV and newspaper were not effectuated due to the dispute on the working language of regional mass media. The agreement on the Aral Sea came up dry, too.

On 11 January 1994, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan signed a protocol to establish “Common Economic Space” (CES). Kyrgyzstan joined in on 1 February. As a result, these three countries opened up their customs for free movement of goods, services, and capital between each other and agreed on coordinating budgetary, pricing, and custom, credit and tax policies. At the Almaty Summit on 8 July 1994, the heads of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan decided to create a political body called the “Interstate Council.” “Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs” and “Council of Ministers of Defense” were also created within the framework of the CES. A permanent working body was created with the name “Executive Committee of the Interstate Council” for coordinating CES functions. At the next summit in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) on 5 August 1994, “Central Asian Bank for Cooperation and Development” was founded by the governments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan with an initial capital of 9 million US Dollars.<sup>8</sup> Superpower competition on Central Asia, leadership competition between Central Asian states, unsolved border issues, and water problems, however, halted the integration process.

**Superpower competition on Central Asia, leadership competition between Central Asian states, unsolved border issues, and water problems, however, halted the integration process.**

**In Central Asia, two countries - Kazakhstan with natural resources and a developed economy and Uzbekistan with more than 40% of the Central Asian population and the greatest military potential - race for regional leadership. This results in a competition between these two countries.**

**Conflict of Interest:  
The Beginning of the Great Game**

After 2001, Central Asia gained significance for the external players such as Russia, China, and the United States, because of Afghanistan’s proximity, and region’s strategic location and natural and other resources, that is, Kazakhstan’s and Turkmenistan’s large gas and oil reserves; Uzbekistan’s agricultural production, particularly cotton; and Kyrgyzstan’s and Tajikistan’s hydropower sources. Accordingly, Russia, China, and the United States developed regional integration perspectives in line with their geopolitical objectives.<sup>9</sup>

Currently, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are members of the Russia-led “Eurasian Economic Union” and Uzbekistan has an observer status. China is also one of the main economic partners and creditors of the Central Asian countries. Importantly, all Central Asian states are partners of China’s Belt and Road initiative, which is the main investor country in the region. For the US, Central Asia became more important following the declaration of ‘the war on terror’ as the region became a corridor to Afghanistan. In such a context, the US created the C5+1 (Central Asia and the US) platform for regional cooperation. Japan and South Korea also established some regional formats for cooperation.

Importantly, the aforementioned external actors desire integration by the Central Asian countries only under their supervision. An independent integration process led by the regional countries is not seen as a favorable prospect by these actors since they think that may result in the emergence of a single ‘Turkestan,’ which may be a challenge against their regional objectives.<sup>10</sup>

**Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan: The Leadership Issue**

In Central Asia, two countries - Kazakhstan with natural resources and a developed economy and Uzbekistan with more than 40% of the Central Asian population and the greatest military potential - race for



regional leadership. This results in a competition between these two countries.<sup>11</sup> Kazakhstan has the biggest area in a region bordering China and Russia. Uzbekistan is situated in the heart of Central Asia providing it with strategic significance and advantages. Kazakhstan with its ‘open-door’ foreign policy has developed the close economic and political ties with the West and China. Since its first years of independence, Kazakhstan has been an advocate of multilateral cooperation in the region. Uzbekistan, until 2016, was one of the ‘closed’ countries in the region with an authoritarian regime.

The frosty relations between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan began to thaw away after the election of Shavkat Mirziyoyev as the new president of Uzbekistan. The new President of Uzbekistan has chosen a policy of good neighborly relations and this helped the strengthening of Uzbekistan’s relations with the regional countries. In fact, it was with the initiative of Shavkat Mirziyoyev that the first consultative meeting of the heads of Central Asian states was organized.

**Water and Border problems:  
A Way to Integration or a Cause of conflict?**

The Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers are the main water sources for all of Central Asia. Syr Darya originates

АЗИЯ МАМЛЕКЕТ  
ЧЫЛАРЫНЫҢ  
ИВДИК ЖОЛУГУШУСУ  
(АВАЗА – ТҮРКМӨНСТАН)

Central Asia From Difficulties on the Way of Rapprochement to a New Way of Integration  
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САРОНИ ДАВЛАТҶОИ  
ОСИЁИ МАРКАЗӢ  
(АВАЗА – ТҮРКМАНИСТОН)

MARKAZIY OSIYO MA  
DAVLAT RAHBARL  
MASLAHAT UCHR  
(AWAZA – TURKMA



in Kyrgyzstan and Amu Darya in Tajikistan. Accordingly, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan can regulate the flow of these rivers, which means that they can control the flow of water to the lower reaches, that is, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. In fact, this is one of the reasons of the conflicts in the region.

The absence of consolidated interstate water distribution agreement covering the region has been one of the most acute problems since the collapse of the Soviet Union until today. At the same time, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, demarcation and delimitation of the state borders in Central Asia has become a major issue. The roots of this problem go a century back. In the middle of the 1920s, Moscow carried out an administrative-territorial reform in Central Asia dividing the region into five countries. Unfortunately, Moscow's reforms did not consider some important features of the Central Asian region such as the geographical distribution of ethnic groups. Accordingly, different ethnic groups remained within the borders of different states constituting minorities. Since in the period of the Soviet Union borders between Central Asian states was only a formality, these did not turn into important problems.<sup>12</sup>

After independence, however, disagreements and conflicts arose because of the absence of demarcation and

delimitation in some parts of the borders. Various solutions have been proposed to solve border disagreements such as territorial exchanges, however these proposals did not always result in solutions and conflicts continued. The latest armed clashes on Tajik-Kyrgyz border in April 2021 was bloody because of these unresolved conflicts. Fortunately, the presidents of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan publicly adhere to peaceful rhetoric and call for good neighborly relations. In any case, active multilateral dialogue and cooperation is still needed to solve the water and border problems.

### Central Asian Five: A New Stage of Integration

A new stage of Central Asian integration began in 2016 after Shavkat Mirziyoyev's coming to power in Uzbekistan. Cooperation with all Central Asian countries has become a key priority of Tashkent's foreign policy. In this connection, dialogue with all states of the region was activated again by the initiative of Mirziyoyev. As a result, in March 2018, the first consultative meeting was held with the participation of the heads of all Central Asian states.<sup>13</sup> This event was the first meeting of representatives of all Central Asian countries, which was not initiated by external players after the abolition of the Central Asian Cooperation Organization.



In the first consultative meeting, water and energy problems, security, cultural and humanitarian issues, and cooperation in trade, economy and transportation issues were discussed. The heads of the states noted that cooperation between the Central Asian countries was significantly strengthened over the past years and declared their agreement to hold consultative meetings annually.

The second consultative meeting of the Central Asian leaders was held on 29 November 2019 in Tashkent. At this summit, central Asian leaders stressed the importance of agreeing on a common vision of cooperation in the region. Likewise, the importance of economic and trade relations were highlighted. The president of Uzbekistan proposed establishing “Central Asian Investment Forum” with the headquarters in Tashkent and holding annual meetings of the heads of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry. The importance of security issues in the region, expansion of cooperation in the energy sector, as well as cultural, humanitarian, and tourism potential of Central Asia were especially emphasized during the meeting.<sup>14</sup> Attention was also paid to the transit potential of Central Asia and the improvement of the transport system within the region. Accordingly, formation of the “Council for Transport Communications” was proposed. Significantly, Kazakhstan put forward the idea of concluding a “Treaty on Good-Neighborliness and Cooperation for the Development of Central Asia in the XXI Century,” which would reflect the basic principles of interaction between states of the region. Moreover, it was decided to hold regular meetings of foreign ministers in the form of political consultations and expert meetings annually.

The second consultative meeting showed that the Central Asian countries are ready to keep the course on building up regional cooperation. Now, more than ever, the question of the region’s future and the possible forms of interaction best suited for Central Asian integration has been raised to the top of the regional agenda.

It is also important that today there is a mutual interest and political will of the leaders to promote

**In March 2018, the first consultative meeting was held with the participation of the heads of all Central Asian states. This event was the first meeting of representatives of all Central Asian countries, which was not initiated by external players after the abolition of the Central Asian Cooperation Organization.**

regional cooperation. It should be noted that Tashkent and Nur-Sultan are the driving forces of the development of multilateral cooperation in the region. The other three capitals are likely to follow the initiatives of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.<sup>15</sup> The new open policy of Tashkent and the reforms of Mirziyoyev changed the ‘balance of power’ in the region and revived the integration processes since Uzbekistan is the only country that borders regional countries. In this context, the meetings can be considered as a great personal achievement of the new president of Uzbekistan. Kazakhstan, in turn, has always supported the idea of integration in the region. In fact, in recognition of the personal merits of Nazarbayev in promoting Central Asian integration, the first president of Kazakhstan was elected the honorary chairperson of the Tashkent consultative meeting.

The third consultative meeting of the heads of the states of Central Asian countries was held in Turkmenistan in August 2021 with the participation of the five Central Asian leaders. At this meeting, parties discussed the development of political, trade, economic, cultural, and humanitarian interactions in the regional level. A constructive exchange of views took place on issues of the threats to regional security and regional stability. Central Asian leaders agreed to strengthen foreign policy cooperation by holding regular five-sided meetings between the foreign ministries of the region’s countries. Particular attention was paid to create favorable conditions for partnership in the energy sector and expanding cooperation between the countries of the region in the transport and communication field, in particular, by maintaining the effective functioning of the existing transport corridors and establishing new ones. The leaders exchanged views on the development of trade relations and increasing the volume of export-import operations. Agreements were reached to increase the diversification of mutual trade and industrial cooperation between the regional states.

One of the important components of the third consultative meeting’s agenda was the consolidation of the efforts of the countries of the region to combat the Covid-19 pandemic. In the process of the third consultative meeting, new steps were taken to develop relations between Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, the two countries in the region with thorny relations, so far. Notably, at this meeting, in accordance with the decision taken by the presidents of the Central Asian countries, a Badge of Honor was awarded to the President of the Republic of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon for outstanding services in the development of friendship, good-neighborliness, mutual understanding, and cooperation between the Central Asian states, to strengthen peace and security in the region. As a symbolic gesture, the President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov

presented the Badge of Honor to his Tajik counterpart.<sup>16</sup> After the meeting, relations Tajikistan and Turkmenistan began to show signs of rapid 'normalization.' In such a context, Turkmenistan opened up its territory for the transit to and from Tajikistan, which was closed few years ago.

## Conclusion

Despite the existing intra-regional problems, the prospects of regional integration seems bright. In general, considering the region's current situation one may argue that this trend needs to be sustained for the following reasons.

Firstly, one of the most serious threats to the region's security is the spread of extremism and terrorism. Today, there is no common policy among the Central Asian countries to combat extremism and terrorism. Obviously, coordination of actions in combating terrorism and extremism is a major necessity for all the Central Asian countries.

Secondly, changes in the situation in Afghanistan and its potential impact on Central Asian states should be taken seriously. Today, there are diverse views on

recognizing the Taliban's government in Afghanistan. Tajikistan publicly declared that it will not recognize the Taliban government until all the Afghan population and minority groups, particularly the Tajiks, are represented in the government. Other Central Asian countries are trying to establish communication channels with the Taliban. A coordinated policy in this area is important to ensure the stability and security of the region.

Thirdly, the rational use of water resources and taking into account the concerns of all countries of the region will benefit of the entire region. At the same time, it will reduce not only tensions but also diminish the influence of foreign players.

Fourthly, demarcation and delimitation of the state borders has been a major challenge in the region for decades.<sup>17</sup> Currently, the borders have mostly been demarcated, leaving areas that require far-sighted policies and respect for mutual interests.

In sum, there are still issues to be resolved. Central Asia has been transforming during the last decade. The leaders in the region have begun to understand the importance of the establishment of mechanisms for regional cooperation. Considering the current trends, the future of regional integration looks bright in Central Asia.

## Endnotes

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# UZBEKISTAN IN A NEW ROLE? MIRZIYOYEV'S POLICY OF OPENING TO THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Among the Central Asian republics, besides Kazakhstan, it is probably Uzbekistan that has the best chance of being seen as the regional leader.

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**U**zbekistan with its population of some thirty million is the most populous country and is the strongest military power in post-Soviet Central Asia. We find within its borders the most outstanding ancient cultural centres of the region; Tashkent was the capital of the Turkestan Chief Government in the period of tsarism, as well as in Soviet times; later it developed into the main administrative and logistical hub of Soviet Central Asia. Thus, among the Central Asian republics, besides Kazakhstan, it is probably Uzbekistan that has the best chance of being seen as the regional leader.<sup>1</sup>

However, it seems that in the first 25 years of the country's independence, this potential was mostly untapped, at least under the presidency of Islam Karimov. There is a general consensus among analysts that under President Karimov, Uzbekistan was basically a police state, and his regime is regarded as having been one of the most repressive political dictatorships in the world.<sup>2</sup> In the area of foreign affairs, the Karimov government, seen as draconian even by Central Asian standards, conducted a rather isolationist policy. Similar to Turkmenistan, the country made every effort at keeping its distance from regional integration for perceiving this as a possible threat to its sovereignty; it preferred bilateral interstate relations rather than multilateral cooperation.<sup>3</sup> Uzbekistan is one of the few countries that is not a member of the World Trade Organisation.<sup>4</sup> After long drawn-out negotiations, the country has no more than an observer status in the Eurasian Economic Union.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, in 2012 it withdrew from the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Moreover this happened for the second time, as in 1999 they had suspended membership in the organisation, and re-entered again in 2005.<sup>6</sup>

Although the first president's often repeated 'multi-vectoral' foreign policy had its unquestionable successes, primarily in maintaining the regime's stability, which was Karimov's top priority, by the last years of the late president's rule the country had become rather isolated in the international arena. In addition, Uzbekistan's relations with all its neighbours had been very tense, especially with Kyrgyzstan because of the borderlands and enclaves along the borders,<sup>7</sup> and with Tajikistan primarily because of rivalry in water sharing.<sup>8</sup>

Savkat Mirzijojev, after the death of President Karimov in 2016, was typically seen as a weightless transition figure, or even as a puppet of National Security Service headed by Rustem Inoyatov. Analysts' general assumption was that in his exercise of power, the new head of state would represent continuity with the Karimov regime.<sup>9</sup> It has to be admitted that both hypotheses have proved to be mistaken. Politically, Mirziyoyev has turned out to be a surprisingly autonomous actor ready to innovate. Shortly after assuming power, not only did he successfully consolidate his own personal power, but also began introducing wide-ranging reforms to the Karimov system.

## **Mirziyoyev's Opening: The New Neighbourhood Policy**

Compared to the Karimov regime, the most noticeable paradigm change with President Mirziyoyev is in his Central Asian regional and neighbourhood policy. In his first year in the office, he visited every neighbouring Central Asian republic,<sup>10</sup> including the notoriously

isolated Turkmenistan. In March 2017, in the course of the meeting in Ashgabat between President Mirziyoyev and Turkmen President Berdimuhammedov, the two presidents signed a number of bilateral agreements, primarily concerning energetics, trade and transport. While visiting the northern Turkmen province of Lebap, they inaugurated a new bridge on the Amu Darya, the border river between their countries.<sup>11</sup> In long-term dynamics, the strengthening of Uzbek-Kazakh cooperation seems even more significant than links with Turkmenistan. As noted above, these are the two countries that seem to have the best chance of assuming regional leadership. While Uzbekistan is weightier in terms of its population and military power, Kazakhstan is much larger, and economically it has outperformed Uzbekistan over the past decades. In the early 1990s, according to official statistics, Uzbekistan's GDP per capita was higher but Kazakhstan soon outdid its southern neighbour (by 1997 the latest) because of its impressive economic growth based on exporting raw materials at increasing prices. It should be added that the 2014 drop in oil prices and the trade embargo against Russia hit the national economy of Uzbekistan to a lesser extent than Kazakhstan.<sup>12</sup>

All this would not automatically lead to rivalry between the two countries, although under Karimov's rule relations were reserved at best. Under his presidency Uzbekistan would repeatedly close down its border with Kazakhstan for long periods and their cooperation within regional organisations was also very limited mostly because Uzbekistan's isolationist approach. The only regional organisation that both countries were members of in the Karimov era was the China and Russia dominated Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which Uzbekistan joined in 2001. Thus, Uzbekistan was already a founding member of the SCO but did not attend the meetings of the the 'Shanghai Five' (China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan).<sup>13</sup> Since Mirziyoyev entered office, in addition to the SCO, Uzbekistan has joined the Turkic Council as well.

In March and April 2017, Mirziyoyev paid two visits to Nursultan Nazarbayev, the then president of Kazakhstan. In the course of their first meeting in Astana (the city that has since been renamed Nur-Sultan after the first president), Nazarbayev greeted warmly his "colleague," the president of a country that is a

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"brother," and they signed as many as 92 bilateral agreements, primarily concerning trade between their countries.<sup>14</sup> In April, they decided to reopen a border crossing point in Saryagash, a little town an hour's drive away from Tashkent. The reopening is not so much to facilitate trade as to shorten the route between the Uzbek cities of Tashkent and Samarkand by allowing transit.<sup>15</sup>



**While solutions are being proposed to overcome border disputes between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, demarcating the equally problematic Uzbek-Tajik border poses similar problems. Here it is an added difficulty that the mine fields that Karimov had ordered to be laid have to be cleared.**

Progress in the relations with two other neighbours, namely Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan has been even more considerable, because under the Karimov regime tensions with these countries sometimes went as far as open enmity. The Uzbek minority in the southern provinces of Kyrgyzstan (primarily in Osh and Jalalabad) repeatedly suffered ethnic cleansing, for example, in 1990 and 2005. Karimov saw the two poorer and considerably less stable countries as potential sources of security threats. This view was certainly not unfounded, as we should remember that around 2000 there were armed incursions into the territories of Uzbekistan by the Jihadist Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) coming from the poorly guarded Kyrgyz border sections. In retaliation, the Uzbek air force bombed Kyrgyz areas, and Karimov's characteristic reaction was to lay landmines in the Uzbek-Kyrgyz (and Uzbek-Tajik) border areas.<sup>16</sup>

On top of all these conflicts, Uzbek-Kyrgyz relations were further aggravated by serious disputes over the common border. Because of disagreements over territorial rights, after gaining independence the rightful demarcation of country borders did not happen. The 1300-kilometer long Uzbek-Kyrgyz border had at least 36 contested stretches. The most neuralgic points were the four major exclaves within Kyrgyz territories (Sokh, Shohimardan, Jani-Ayil, and Chon). The exclaves are the products of the delimitations in the Stalin era. Obviously, before the disintegration of the Soviet Union, borders between internal republics were far less significant than after the republics had gained their independence. The exclaves noted here are wedged into the Batken Province of Kyrgyzstan. At the same time, in the easternmost corner of Uzbekistan, near Andijon in the Ferghana region, there is Barak, a relatively bigger Kyrgyz exclave, while two Tajik exclaves are located in Uzbekistan (Sarvan) and Kyrgyzstan (Voruk).<sup>17</sup>

This is exemplified by the case of Sokh, the largest Uzbek exclave: the area has some seventy thousand inhabitants, mostly ethnic Tajiks living in 19 scattered settlements. The road connecting the enclave to the closest Uzbek town of Rishton is usually blocked by the Kyrgyz army. In August 2019, the road was opened, but

within six days the Kyrgyz authorities had it closed again, referring to their border control obligations as members in the Eurasian Union. The frustrations of Sokh inhabitants often lead to armed conflicts with the Kyrgyz inhabitants of neighbouring villages; most recently there were clashes in June 2020 arising out of a dispute on territorial rights. It is reported that this grave conflict may have caused injuries to as many as several hundred people. It required Uzbek Prime Minister Abdulla Aripov to flee the area in order to pacify the locals.<sup>18</sup>

When paying a visit to Bishkek in October 2017, Mirziyoyev agreed with the Kyrgyz head of state Almazbek Atambayev on putting an end to their border disputes. As a result, they managed to demarcate more than 85 per cent of the border, while agreement on another 200 kilometres as well as on the future of the enclaves have still not been reached. However, following the new Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov's visit to Tashkent 25<sup>th</sup> of March, Kyrgyz and Uzbek officials announced that "Issues around the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border have been resolved 100 percent." and the two sides signed a protocol on the final delimitation and demarcation of the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border. Nevertheless similar work remains ahead to realize the agreement in other areas, in particular, the continued Uzbek use of reservoirs in Kyrgyzstan. For example the issue of Orto-Tokoi reservoir, has been at the centre of a heated debate for decades.<sup>19</sup>

While solutions are being proposed to overcome border disputes between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, demarcating the equally problematic Uzbek-Tajik border poses similar problems. Here it is an added difficulty that the mine fields that Karimov had ordered to be laid have to be cleared (along the Kyrgyz border demining was completed by the middle of the 2000s). The actual demining work that had been first announced in 2005 and again in 2008, was started only after Karimov's death. Mirziyoyev's official visit to Dushanbe in March 2017 was reciprocated by President Emomali Rahmon in August of the same year. This was the first time in seventeen years that a Tajik head of state had visited the Uzbek capital. Following the negotiations between the two heads of state October 2018 eventually saw the start of the cleaning of the mine fields. According to the Uzbek announcement, by the end of 2019 demining had been completed. Nevertheless, several open questions have remained in the Uzbek-Tajik relations and the demarcation of borders, such as the case of the Farkhad Dam and the power station on the upper stretch of the Syr Darya (Sirdaryo) River on the Uzbek-Tajik border. The power station is operated by the Uzbek Uzbekenergo state-run company, while the dam that supplies it is located in the Tajik territory.<sup>20</sup>

Talking of water works, it should be noted that relations between the Karimov and the Rahmon regimes were not without conflicts, although Karimov had offered Uzbek military support at the critical stage of the Tajik civil war in 1992-1993. Serious disagreements primarily concerning on how water should be shared overshadowed their cooperation.<sup>21</sup> One example could be Rogun Dam where the tension between the two countries culminated. Construction of the dam system on the River Vakhsh some 110 kilometres off Dushanbe had started in 1976 in the Soviet period as a prestige investment (the dam was originally designed to be 335 meters tall, the then tallest in the world). Tajikistan, a country poor in energy, would need the dam and the related hydroelectric power plant in order to supply energy to the capital, as well to as the Tursunzoda aluminium smelting plant, which is also located along the River Vakhsh. Although this investment is vital for the economy of Tajikistan, its realization has been slow for both financial and technical reasons. Its construction has been repeatedly halted: last time in 2012, and only with the Chinese assistance could it be resumed in 2017. Uzbekistan was against the project because it worried that its supply of drinking and irrigation water would be affected. On several occasions, President Karimov opposed the investment vehemently, in 2012 going as far as threatening Tajikistan with war.<sup>22</sup>

In this light, it was a genuine surprise that following the bilateral meetings between Mirziyoyev and Rahmon, the latter seemed more flexible in the issue of water sharing. Openness was advised by Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov on 5 June 2018. In his statement he made it clear that if the Tajik party was offering suitable [water sharing] guarantees, the Uzbek government would no longer oppose the investment.<sup>23</sup>

Closer Uzbek-Tajik cooperation in future would have a wider scope in one more strategic direction: both states have a strong vested interest in peace in Afghanistan. Relative peace in Afghanistan is vital for Tajikistan, as we should remember that the Tajik civil war in the early 1990s may as well be interpreted as the spillover of the Afghan crisis to Tajik territories. The main supporters of the Tajik Islamist opposition were the Tajik mujaheddin warlords in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan also got involved in the civil war in Afghanistan, admittedly, but not as directly as Tajikistan. Even though the conflict did not spread to the Uzbek state, the Karimov regime was an active supporter of the forces of the ethnically Uzbek General Dostum, one of the main pillars of the opposition to Taliban. Beyond vitally important considerations of security policy, and for Uzbekistan's energy and transport infrastructure it would be ideal to have a more secure and more peaceful Afghanistan than





at present. Two important projects are as follows: the first is helping Afghanistan extend the railway line between the towns of Hairatan and Mazar-e-Sharif at least as far as Herat, thus establishing the shortest overland route from Uzbekistan to a sea port.<sup>24</sup> The second is the construction of the TUTAP (Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan) electric power line, a long-cherished dream of heads of state in Central Asian republics, although its future is very unclear.<sup>25</sup>

In view of these trends, it is hardly surprising that President Mirziyoyev is apparently trying to play a much more active role in Afghanistan than his predecessors. Over the past decades, we have witnessed Uzbek government's efforts in acting as a mediator in the conflict in Afghanistan. On his visit to Doha in March 2019, Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov met not only the then internationally recognized Ghani government,

but also representatives of the Taliban. Prior to this meeting, in June 2018, Taliban diplomats had already been invited to the Afghan peace conference in Tashkent, but eventually no Taliban had attended the event. However, two months later, in August 2018, they paid a visit to the Uzbek capital.<sup>26</sup> Mirziyoyev's diplomacy has been active in Afghanistan also in the context of the Corona virus pandemic. According to an Uzbek state media report Uzbekistan sent a trainload of humanitarian aid to Mazar-e-Sharif, including masks, thermometers and basic foodstuffs.<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper intended to give a brief overview of the aspects of 'Mirziyoyev's opening' that seem to be most important. The foreign political implications of the opening are affecting the entire region, possibly transforming the dynamics of regional cooperation and the rivalry of superpowers. Uzbekistan is the only republic in the region that has common borders with the four other Central Asian post-Soviet states, as well as with Afghanistan. Therefore, partly due to its natural position, Uzbekistan may be the driver of regional integration if it maintains more open and friendlier relations with its neighbours. It is quite possible that global powers will also have to reckon with a more active and more dynamic Uzbekistan in the post-Soviet Central Asia.

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**Therefore, partly due to its natural position, Uzbekistan may be the driver of regional integration if it maintains more open and friendlier relations with its neighbours.**

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# THE REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF TAJIKISTAN AND ITS ROLE IN TURKEY'S CENTRAL ASIAN POLICY

Turkey and Tajikistan established diplomatic relations immediately after the latter's independence. The Turkish Embassy in Dushanbe was opened in 1992 and the Embassy of Tajikistan in Ankara in 1995. Tajikistan has an important but somewhat different place in Turkey's Central Asian policy.

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After the collapse of the Soviet Union, new independent states emerged in Central Asia. The independent Central Asian republics were not in an easy position after independence. Turkey was the first country to recognize all Central Asian countries. Referring to common historical, linguistic, and cultural ties, Turkey pursued an increasingly active policy with the independent countries of Central Asia. Turkey's economic relations with the Central Asian Republics have developed rapidly and significant progress has been made in the areas of trade, transport, and communication and integration processes. Turkey and Tajikistan established diplomatic relations immediately after the latter's independence. The Turkish Embassy in Dushanbe was opened in 1992 and the Embassy of Tajikistan in Ankara in 1995.

Tajikistan has an important but somewhat different place in Turkey's Central Asian policy. This paper outlines Tajikistan's recent history, regional role, and the importance of its relationship with Turkey. It also aims to present the regional significance of Tajikistan and its place in Turkey's Central Asian policy.

## **Decades of Hardship: Independent Tajikistan's Relations with its Neighbors**

The central goal of the newly independent Tajikistan's foreign policy was to develop relations with as many states

as possible.<sup>1</sup> Special diplomatic attention was paid to two groups of countries: other former Soviet republics and Tajikistan's close neighbors, Iran and Afghanistan, which are inhabited by culturally related peoples. At the same time, Tajikistan also had contacts with a number of other countries, including the USA, Turkey, and Pakistan. In 1995, Tajikistan opened its embassy in Turkey, the first embassy outside the former Soviet Union. In the Tajik case, the wish for gaining political support and economic aid was at least as important in shaping Tajikistan's diplomacy as ideological and cultural ties.

## **Russia**

In the mid-1990s, Russia played a role in independent Tajikistan with its military presence in this country. In Dushanbe, Russian advisers served within the post-civil war government. The Russians also held important positions in the Ministry of Defense, which was headed by Aleksandr Shishlyannikov between 1992 and 1995. Yuri Ponosov, for example, became Tajikistan's first deputy prime minister in March 1996.<sup>2</sup> Both of them were ethnic Russian.

Protecting the Russian minority in the contentious Tajikistan was a stated aim of the Russian government. Russia's concerns were somewhat alleviated by the conclusion of a dual citizenship agreement between the



two countries in 1995.<sup>3</sup> Under this agreement, all individuals are treated as Russian citizens regardless of whether they have citizenship of a foreign country. Thereby an exception was made for the citizens of Tajikistan, the only country that has a relevant treaty with Russia. Taking into account recent events Russia also justified its active involvement in Tajik affairs by ensuring the protection of the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border and thus protecting the CIS countries from Islamic extremism, as well as drug trafficking.<sup>4</sup>

Russia has long considered Central Asia a key area of influence. Therefore, the ongoing military build-up in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan can be seen in the broader context of active preparations for the projection of active military power into Central Asia. This was possible by strengthening the region's existing military bases and other related facilities, which have been ongoing since 2012 and strengthened after 2014. Russia is not only developing its foreign military bases in the region, but also supporting armies of Central Asian states with arms sales and joint military exercises to training and assistance programs, in the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).<sup>5</sup>

There is a stable trend in the development of Tajik-Russian relations and it is gradually expanding to today's

reality. There is a mutual desire for closer and multidimensional cooperation in line with their needs, interests, and positions on regional and global policy issues. Very significant areas of cooperation cover the spheres of education, science, culture, and technology innovation.<sup>6</sup>

### **Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan**

Independent Tajikistan had several conflicts with the two neighboring former Soviet republics, namely, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, which began long before independence. In the 1980s, the dispute over two scarce resources in Central Asia, water and arable land, damaged relations between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. In June 1989, the situation culminated in spontaneous, bottom-up violence over the demand for a small piece of land. In addition, tensions were heightened in 1992 because of Kyrgyzstan's worries about possible spread of the Tajik population to its territories.<sup>7</sup> Despite tense relations between the two republics, Kyrgyzstan tried to play a role to end Tajikistan's civil war and sent medicine and other aid to its neighbor. After the civil war, Kyrgyzstan sent troops to Tajikistan as part of a joint CIS peacekeeping mission.<sup>8</sup>

**Leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan repeatedly emphasized the need for regional economic and environmental cooperation in the early 1990s. In reality, however, there has been only limited progress towards such cooperation.**

Tajikistan's relations with Uzbekistan are contradictory. Tajik intellectuals and at times the Dushanbe government have criticized Uzbekistan for discrimination against the Tajik minority. In response, Uzbekistan closed its Tajik-language schools in mid-1992, citing fears of Islamic radicalism. Due to the civil war, Uzbekistan closed its border with Tajikistan in the fall of 1992 to prevent Tajik opposition refugees from fleeing to Uzbekistan. After the civil war, Uzbekistan's relationship with Tajikistan became increasingly ambivalent.<sup>9</sup>

Leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan repeatedly emphasized the need for regional economic and environmental cooperation in the early 1990s.<sup>10</sup> In reality, however, there has been only limited progress towards such cooperation. Oil and gas producers in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have cut off fuel supplies to Tajikistan hoping<sup>11</sup> that they can improve the terms of purchase agreements under the Soviet system.

Furthermore, it is important to point out that in Tajikistan, consumer goods are generally scarce, so the country has taken measures to prevent citizens of neighboring republics from buying such products from Tajik stocks. Tajikistan is also wary of regional water use plans that could increase Uzbekistan's and Turkmenistan's share in water resources from Tajikistan.<sup>12</sup>

## Iran

When Tajikistan declared its independence, Iran was one of the first countries to extend diplomatic recognition and was the first to establish an embassy in Dushanbe. In 1992, Iran trained a group of Tajik diplomats. After 1991, bilateral relations in media and sports increased significantly, and Iran supported the construction of several new mosques in Tajikistan.<sup>13</sup> In the early 1990s, Tajikistan's most important relations with Iran were of a cultural nature. For example, an Iranian film festival and an Iranian art exhibition were held in Tajikistan. Likewise, Dushanbe was the host for international conferences on Persian culture and the Tajik language.<sup>14</sup> Iranian books and magazines became increasingly available in Tajikistan, and

television channels in Dushanbe received programs from Iran.<sup>15</sup> The main obstacle to these cultural contacts is the fact that only a very small part of the population of Tajikistan can read the Arabic alphabet. Despite the obvious ideological differences between the Islamic regime in Iran and the newly independent secular communist regime in Tajikistan, Rahmon Nabiyev (the second President of Tajikistan 1991-1992) actively nurtured his relations with Iran.<sup>16</sup>

Leading personalities of the Islamic Awakening movement in Tajikistan have firmly advocated an Islamic regime in Tajikistan. Since the 1970s, a worldwide Islamic revival has emerged, owing in large part to popular disappointment with the secular nation states and Westernized ruling elites, which had dominated the Muslim world during the preceding decades, and which were increasingly seen as authoritarian, ineffective and lacking cultural authenticity.<sup>17</sup> In Tajikistan the development of political Islam took a different course. Like in Uzbekistan the origins of the movement lay in the Islamic parallel society of the Soviet era. It consisted of a network of young mullahs and their students and stood, as in Uzbekistan, in sharp opposition to both the communist cadres and the Hanafite establishment of the Spiritual Administration.<sup>18</sup> Yet, significantly, they did not choose Iran as a model to follow. One reason for this is that Iran is predominantly Shiite Muslim, while Tajikistan is chiefly Sunni, and this difference has important implications on the organization of the religious leadership and its relationship with the state. Equally important is the fact that the social structures of Tajikistan and Iran are considered too different, therefore Tajik Islamists did not accept the Iranian model of state-religion relationship.<sup>19</sup>

Iran and Tajikistan have a motivation to work together, but the other three countries - Russia, China and Turkey - have their own reasons for worrying about this cooperation. Russia opposes any external involvement in the former Soviet space, especially in the security area. And while it may welcome Iran's opposing Turkish influence in Central Asia, it is likely to be concerned that Iran's cooperation with Tajikistan could actually exacerbate Turkish-friendly feelings elsewhere. Furthermore, Russia may be concerned about the cooperation with Iran.<sup>20</sup>

## China

The main source of tension between China and Tajikistan is China's demand for the Gorno-Badakhshan region in eastern Tajikistan. Even after sixteen rounds of negotiations between 1992 and 1995, no agreement was reached on this border dispute. After the Tajikistan civil war, governments of China and Tajikistan are often hostile to reformist political movements, especially those that

profess Islamic fundamentalist principles. By the mid-1990s, this common understanding had become the basis for the working relationship between the two governments.<sup>21</sup>

Tajikistan has been a key strategic partner for China, particularly in terms of its development plans within the framework of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This is due to two vital factors. First, Tajikistan will become a central gateway for China's natural gas imports from Turkmenistan. Although Tajikistan does not have its own gas supply, shorter and easier routes are available for gas transportation. Beijing has offered this opportunity to Tajikistan in good faith, to gain stronger political influence.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, Tajikistan, as part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (2001), is a vital geostrategic partner for China for forestalling the threats of terrorism, separatism and religious extremism.<sup>23</sup> As China has already established (since 2017) a military base in the Badakhshan Autonomous Province of Tajikistan,<sup>24</sup> which aims to monitor the strategically important Afghan Wakhan Corridor, Tajikistan is likely to be seen as a key ally in China's counter-terrorism strategy; a point that has become more prominent due to Tajikistan's geographical proximity to Xinjiang.<sup>25</sup>

In 2011, China acquired more than 1100 square kilometers of the disputed land between Tajikistan and itself. This land located in the remote Pamir mountain range. As Dushanbe was unable to repay Beijing's outstanding former loans, an agreement was reached between the two governments; land was offered as an alternative payment in exchange for a write-off of the Eurasian country's growing debt. Some analysts have seen it as a textbook example of 'debt trap diplomacy,' and the episode only serves to revive the debate about the significance of this practice in China's foreign investment and engagement activities.<sup>26</sup>

## Afghanistan

Relations between Tajikistan and Afghanistan have developed dramatically since the fall of the Soviet Union. The two countries have a common border of more than 1,200 kilometers, as well as a similar climate and common hydropower resources that were not used in either pre-Soviet or Soviet times. Trade and economic relations between Tajikistan as a separate administrative-territorial area and Afghanistan did not develop in Soviet times. Trade relations have been maintained as part of the political and economic relations between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan. However, the situation changed significantly after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Both countries underwent tremendous changes in the post-Soviet period. These changes were evident during the

Tajik Civil War (1992-1997) and the Northern Alliance's war of liberation with the Taliban regime (1996-2001). The Northern Alliance was a military alliance of groups that operated between 1996 to 2001. The Northern Alliance fought a defensive war against the Taliban regime. Initially it included mostly Tajiks but by 2000, leaders of other ethnic groups joined the Northern Alliance. In both conflicts, governments of Tajikistan and Afghanistan provided support to each other. During the Tajik Civil War, Afghanistan became a refuge for thousands of Tajik citizens who received accommodation and livelihoods from the Afghan government, as well as various groups in Afghan society. The Afghan government, led by President Burhanuddin Rabbani and Defense Minister Ahmad Shah Massoud, leader of the Northern Alliance, has significantly contributed to the establishment of friendly relations with Tajikistan. In the years of armed conflict with the Taliban, Tajikistan had been a support base of the Northern Alliance. The Tajik Government had not only strongly supported Afghanistan in the diplomatic and political arenas, but also launched massive lobbying campaign in Russia, Kazakhstan, China, the United States and European countries for financial, humanitarian, and military assistance.<sup>27</sup>

The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in 2021 was decisive in the future relationship between the two countries. Dushanbe made an open statement about his preferences in Afghanistan, namely forming a government that is not monopolized by the Taliban and that represents the Afghan Tajik population. On August 25, Rahmon said he rejects the Afghan government, which was "formed with humiliation and ignores the interests of the entire people of Afghanistan, including ethnic minorities such as the Tajik, Uzbek and others".<sup>28</sup>

## Turkey's Strategic Goals in Central Asia

Central Asia is strategically important for the security and stability of Turkey and the other western powers. Its energy sources are vital to global energy security and it is a major hub for gas and oil pipelines and trade corridors.<sup>29</sup>

The twenty-first century has witnessed tremendous changes in global politics. The international system has changed from bipolarity to multipolarity. The transition in the international structure has also affected Turkey's

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power relations with other states, especially the United States. Strategically, Turkey was seen as an important ally of NATO in suppressing communism. However, with the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, Turkey's privileged strategic position seemed to have lost its relevance for the NATO. Thus, Turkey had to look for a new strategic position outside the Western world, and fortunately the emergence of the Central Asian republics provided it with the much-needed strategic relevance. In addition, Turkey has been driven by Western powers to increase its influence in the region and minimize the Iranian influence. The Central Asian republics also considered Turkey the most important ally, which could help them integrate into the international community.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, Turkish foreign policy officials did not pursue hegemonic plans in Central Asia due to Turkey's own economic crisis, domestic political instability in the mid-1990s, and Russian dominance in the region.<sup>31</sup> Turkey tried to pursue a great strategy based on a 'pan-Turkish ideology' to establish cordial relations with its sister Turkic states. However, Turkey could not fulfill this role and has not become a model and bridge country.<sup>32</sup>

Turkey's dependence on Russian oil and natural gas did not allow it to run counter to Russian interests in the

region.<sup>33</sup> Finally, the Central Asian elite also feared Russian power and did not want to break away from the Russian sphere of influence. The Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002 and has shifted its foreign policy in a pragmatic direction. It continued its 'zero problem with neighbors' policy, which has also helped Central Asian states, for example, in the field of integration processes or in the development of bilateral and multilateral relations. Turkey envisioned its position as a strategic bridge between Eurasia and the Central Asian Republics and promised these 'sister states' access to the world market.<sup>34</sup>

Turkey's relations with Central Asia are multidimensional. In addition to economic and cultural achievements, strategic and defense relations have also become increasingly important in recent decades. With regard to Turkey's foreign policy in Central Asia, four key objectives should be mentioned:

- contributing to the state-building process in the Central Asian states,
- supporting economic and political reforms,
- supporting their integration into the world community, and



- developing bilateral and multilateral relations based on mutual interests and sovereign equality.<sup>35</sup>

To achieve these goals, Turkey's energy policy was based on four objectives:

- improving the political independence of these countries,
- encouraging membership of Western institutions,
- building regional cooperation,
- revitalizing the East-West energy corridor.<sup>36</sup>

These points can help us to understand Turkey's regional policy and also partly explain the essence of Turkish-Tajik relations.

### The Main Aspects of the Turkish-Tajik Relationship

Tajikistan is trying to strengthen its relations with Turkey on several levels. Cooperation between the two countries is influenced by several factors. It should be recalled that Tajikistan had remained under Russian rule for more than 70 years, and then the Tajik civil war between 1992 and 1997 also posed many difficulties for Tajikistan. Not to mention that Turkey also went through several crises in the 1990s that affected the effectiveness of the two countries' foreign relations. A small country with little economic capacity does not necessarily mean that it has no foreign policy option and many times we need a new approach to understand each country's foreign policy instruments.<sup>37</sup>

Süleyman Demirel was the first Turkish president to pay an official visit to Tajikistan in the post-independence period. During his visit in 1995,<sup>38</sup> Demirel highlighted the cultural and historical ties between the two countries and stated that Tajikistan should not feel like an outsider in the region. After this first visit, with the establishment of the Turkish embassy, Turkish-Tajik relations began to advance.

Strengthening good relations with the independent Turkic republics in the political, economic, cultural, and integration fields is a priority in Turkey's Central Asian policy. A significant part of the population of Tajikistan belongs to ethnic groups of Persian origin. Contemporary Tajiks are the descendants of ancient Eastern Iranian inhabitants of Central Asia, in particular the Soghdians and the Bactrians, and possibly other groups, with an admixture of western Iranian Persians and non-Iranian peoples, Mongols, and Turkic peoples. So this aspect may also be partly decisive in the relations between the two

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countries and may show different traits from other Central Asian countries.

Relations between Turkey and Tajikistan were negatively affected by the Tajikistan civil war between 1992 and 1997. In order to strengthen cultural and historical ties between Tajikistan and Turkey, a Turkey Information Center has been established at the Russian Slavic University in Tajikistan with the support of Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA). Cooperation in the economy, trade and transport, as well as the existing relationship between the two countries, are expected to further improve in the future. The official visit of Tajik President Emomali Rahmon to Turkey in January 2006 gave a new impetus to Tajik-Turkish relations, during which an agreement was reached on friendly relations between Tajikistan and Turkey.<sup>39</sup> The seventh joint conference between the two countries was held in April 2009 and Turkish Minister of State Said Yazıcıoğlu had talks with President Emomali Rahmon, Parliament Speaker Mehmedsaid Ubaydullaev, Prime Minister Oqil Oqilov, and Turkish businessmen in Tajikistan.<sup>40</sup>

The following years have resulted in a number of high-level meetings between Turkey and Tajikistan. The Tajikistan visit of President Ahmet Necdet Sezer in 2001 and Prime Minister Erdoğan's in 2003 were important milestones in the development of bilateral relations. President Abdullah Gül's trip to Tajikistan in 2009 and his talks with Tajik President Emomali Rahmon created a number of opportunities to the benefit of both countries. During President Gül's visit, which was mainly for commercial purposes with the participation of Turkish businessmen, the determination of both sides to accelerate the improvement of relations between the two countries was remarkable.<sup>41</sup>

In December 2010, during the Rahmon and Gül meeting at the ECO Summit, both sides raised and successfully addressed a number of socio-economic issues that ultimately yielded effective and efficient results. The parties agreed that Turkey will assist Tajikistan in the establishment of free economic zones (FEZ), joint ventures in hydropower construction, agro-processing, infrastructure development and tourism.<sup>42</sup> In August 2011, issues of trade and economic cooperation to promote trade between

the two countries and the revitalization of the Turkish-Tajik Business Council were discussed at a meeting in Istanbul chaired by Ambassador Farrukh Sharipov and President of the Tajik-Turkish Business Unit.<sup>43</sup>

During his visit to Turkey on 18 December 2012, the President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon, announced “a joint declaration on the establishment of a Cooperation Council between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Tajikistan” in order to provide an institutional framework for relations between the two countries.<sup>44</sup> On 21 October 2016, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu paid an official visit to Dushanbe.<sup>45</sup> On this occasion, a cooperation plan for the two ministries of foreign affairs for the years 2017-2020 was signed.<sup>46</sup> Tajikistan’s Prime Minister Qohir Rasulzoda attended the Al-Quds Extraordinary Islamic Summit in Istanbul on 13 December 2017.<sup>47</sup> Sirojiddin Muhriddin, Foreign Minister of Tajikistan, attended the Extraordinary Islamic Summit held in Istanbul on 18 May 2018. He paid also an official visit to Ankara on 22-23 April 2019.<sup>48</sup> President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan paid an official visit to Tajikistan at the CICA Summit on 15 June 2019.<sup>49</sup>

Ankara has implemented a number of development and aid programs in the region, from which Tajikistan has also benefited significantly. The most important of these is the development aid to Tajikistan. Turkey started providing development aid to the region in 1992 and has been pursuing this policy continuously since 1997.<sup>50</sup> Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Central Asian countries was spread unevenly in the 1991-2018 period. The largest recipient of ODA in the region is Kyrgyzstan, which received around US \$8.1 bn. since independence. Tajikistan is the second largest recipient of ODA – \$5.9 bn., followed closely by Uzbekistan – \$5.8 bn.<sup>51</sup> Between 1992 and 2008, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan were the largest recipients of Turkish development aid. Most of the Turkish aid came to Tajikistan in the 1990s and early 2000s. Aid to Tajikistan peaked at \$648 million in 2004 and then by 2008 dropped dramatically to about \$5 million a year.<sup>52</sup> Tajikistan was not on the list of the ten most Turkish aid receiving countries in 2009, 2010 or 2011.<sup>53</sup>

**An important precondition for a greater economic cooperation in Central Asia is the establishment of strong links between regional markets and also with other key markets such as China, India, Russia, and Turkey. As a transit country, Tajikistan can make a significant contribution to this end.**

Aside from the targets of Turkish aid, it is important to discuss how aid money is spent. Following 2003, Turkey started to come into prominence in Central Asia with projects based in five sectors: social infrastructure; economic infrastructure; production sectors; multisector or crosscutting projects; and emergency response and cultural activities.<sup>54</sup>

Over the years, economic relations have also become more effective. Especially after 2003, trade between the two countries increased significantly. The trade turnover was \$86 million in 2003 and increased to \$93.8 million in 2005.<sup>55</sup> In 2008, the total trade turnover was \$324 million, and in 2010 that amount increased to \$347 million. Turkey’s trade volume with the countries of the region was about 8,5 billion USD in 2019 and almost 4000 Turkish companies have been operating there.<sup>56</sup> The main products imported by Turkey from the countries of the region are aluminum and cotton.<sup>57</sup> Turkey can cooperate with Tajikistan in a number of other areas. Investments and projects can take place in areas such as energy, technology, hydropower, construction, agriculture, and metallurgy. Ankara, with the intention of developing these opportunities in a more secure and stable atmosphere, pursues a number of policies in order to further integrate Dushanbe into the international arena.

Given Turkey’s main initiatives in Afghanistan and its significant role in the country, it is clear that Ankara is an important partner that can contribute to the socio-economic development and political stability of Dushanbe. However, Tajik statements on Turkey’s economic and political support are not enough. As the main dynamics determining the country’s stability are linked to the country’s desire for a more stable structure, Turkey’s role in Tajikistan’s political and economic development remains limited.<sup>58</sup>

### **Tajikistan’s Economic Relations - What are the Possibilities?**

An important precondition for a greater economic cooperation in Central Asia is the establishment of strong links between regional markets and also with other key markets such as China, India, Russia, and Turkey. As a transit country, Tajikistan can make a significant contribution to this end. This will require investment and the modernization of transit corridors. The routes of the Central Asian regional corridors need to be reviewed to strengthen their role as a major integrating factor capable of enhancing direct and transit trade between Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and China (especially Xinjiang). Infrastructure modernization needs to be pursued through improved policies and agreements to facilitate trade and transit at border crossings.<sup>59</sup>

Exports of cotton and aluminum continue to generate about half of gross domestic product (GDP), two-thirds of annual foreign exchange earnings and a quarter of tax revenues, and the asymmetry between the country's imports and exports has recently increased.<sup>60</sup> Tajikistan's key exports include raw materials (primarily aluminum and cotton fiber) to countries that are both end-users for example Turkey and China and non-end users for example Netherlands and Switzerland. Having structural stability in foreign trade with these countries, Tajikistan's economy is extremely sensitive to external price shocks. In addition, the dominant share of the global aluminum markets is concentrated in ten multinational companies. Tajikistan's production is a small fraction of this market. Even if Tajikistan were to increase its aluminum production to reach its long-term development goal (630,000 tons), its world's share of aluminum production would be less than 5%.<sup>61</sup> Over the past decade, Tajikistan has intensified trade with countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkey.<sup>62</sup>

### **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) - A Good Chance for Tajikistan?**

BRI is an ambitious, multi-year Chinese effort to improve international transport infrastructure and enhance economic integration. An important objective of the initiative is to create better transport links and greater economic integration by developing transport infrastructure. China wants to achieve all this through better policy coordination between the BRI countries and a greater flow of foreign direct investment (FDI) from Chinese private and state-owned enterprises. As well as promoting the orderly and free flow of economic factors, the highly efficient allocation of resources and the deep integration of markets are also key considerations.<sup>63</sup>

Tajikistan can benefit from the integration opportunities of the BRI if it implements policies that complement BRI achievements in transport. Decreasing delivery times increase FDI, trade, and GDP. The influx of Chinese FDI into mining and agriculture has already increased, but in order to fully exploit the opportunities for BRI integration, the Government of Tajikistan must continue to implement additional policies that reduce border crossing times, liberalize investment and trade restrictions, remove sectoral barriers, improve sectoral barriers, human capital, and facilitate worker mobility. In order to minimize the fiscal risks associated with expanding infrastructure investments and to maintain the benefits, it will also be important to apply better fiscal and debt management practices.

Chinese infrastructure financing has benefited the country through the BRI. China also motivated Tajikistan's neighbors to invest more in their own

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transportation and the donors to fund more. One of the six mainland BRI corridors passes through Afghanistan via Tajikistan. Tajikistan also has access to other routes as it has recently invested in the domestic road and rail network, as well as through investments in the Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan.<sup>64</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Although Tajikistan is one of the lesser-known countries in the Central Asian region, it is clear to us that it is an important player in the region in several respects. The geopolitical significance of Tajikistan is unquestionable and looks set to be increasingly important. It is located in a geopolitical environment where Russia, China, Iran and Turkey also want to be key players. Each great power has its own interests and a special system of relations with Tajikistan. From this varied scale, the focus is primarily on the specifics of Turkish foreign policy.

Ankara's foreign policy is in many respects increasingly dominant in the region, which has also significantly affected Tajikistan. Tajikistan's relationship with Turkey is extremely complex. All this can be felt both in the diversity of diplomatic relations and in the growing economic and cultural relations. For Ankara, Tajikistan is an important strategic partner, with significant economic and developmental and cultural ties. Cooperation between the two countries is likely to intensify in the future, as Tajikistan is in a strategically important area and over time may become an increasingly important player in Turkey's Central Asian policy. Thirty years of relationship seem forward looking.

Although Tajikistan has been involved in several regional conflicts since independence, it is important to stabilize its relations with its neighbors. It is important for the great powers in the region (Russia, China, Turkey, Iran) to continue to develop their fruitful relations with a stable country. Whether Tajikistan can take advantage of the opportunities offered and thus achieve its economic and social development in the coming years is a huge question.



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# CHINA'S POSTURE TOWARDS CENTRAL ASIA BEFORE AND AFTER THE TALIBAN'S ADVANCES IN AFGHANISTAN

Chinese foreign policy has put forward more assertive policies by highlighting great power competition. As a result, China's regional foreign policy has expanded and gained a global dimension. This opening in the foreign policy has developed in parallel with China's growing economic power.

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This article aims to provide an analytical assessment on China's foreign policy towards Central Asia, especially after Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan. The main question that will be tackled with is whether there has been a change in China's foreign policy in the region with Taliban's advance. Therefore, China's regional policies before and after the advance of the Taliban will be examined in a comparative perspective. In general, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan are named as the five Central Asian states. This study, however, regards Afghanistan also as a Central Asian state in reference to the definition of the UNESCO History of the Civilizations of Central Asia that was published in 1992. To avoid confusion, these five nations are referred to as 'post-Soviet Central Asian states.' This article consists of four parts. In the first part, China's relations with the Central Asian nations are discussed. Then, China's policies towards Afghanistan and especially the former Taliban administration are examined. This is followed by the scrutiny of China's relations with Afghanistan after the Taliban's advance. Lastly, the past and the present relations are compared and some forecasts for the future are presented.

## **Chinese Foreign Policy on Central Asia**

Chinese foreign policy is determined by the Chinese Communist Party and its General Secretary Xi Jinping.

Therefore, before mentioning China's policies on Central Asia, it would be appropriate to briefly introduce the changes that have taken place in Chinese foreign policy in recent years, especially with Xi's era. Chinese foreign policy has put forward more assertive policies by highlighting great power competition. As a result, China's regional foreign policy has expanded and gained a global dimension. This opening in the foreign policy has developed in parallel with China's growing economic power. The rise of China has become even more prominent when President Xi Jinping promoted the concept of the China Dream, which refers to the developmental goals of China that are expected to be realized by 2049 – the centennial of the republic.

While examining Chinese foreign policy, special emphasis should be put on Xi Jinping era because of his reforms and new attempts, inasmuch as he is considered as China's most influential leader after Mao. The goals of China under the China Dream, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the rapid economic development of the country, as well as the expansion of China's socio-cultural influence over the regions also other than the Asia-Pacific, all came into prominence with Xi's presidency. In 2017, "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" – commonly abbreviated as "Xi Jinping Thought" that encompasses President Xi's ideas, policies, and conceptualizations, was officially added to



the constitution.<sup>1</sup> The fact that “Xi Jinping Thought” was added to the constitution actually reveals the influence and dominance of Xi. Likewise, the course called “Xi Jinping Thought” was added into the national curriculum.<sup>2</sup> From this, it can be concluded that Xi is not limited to his own era, but also wants to influence future periods. The fact that he wants to raise future generations with the opinions he has turned into an ‘ideology’ under his own name can be interpreted as the desire to be remembered as an unforgettable leader.

The Chinese government, together with Xi, began paying more attention to the development of bilateral and multilateral relations with the principle of utilitarianism in its foreign policy and increased cross-regional diplomacy. With these developments, the country launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, which has become a centerpiece of China’s foreign policy.<sup>3</sup>

Because of the routes of the BRI passes through Central Asia, the BRI increased the geopolitical importance of the Central Asia for China’s global strategy. This led China

to strengthen its relations with these states and it can be cited as the first reason for China to convergence to the region. Secondly, the fact that the Central Asian countries are energy suppliers for China, whose energy needs increase significantly as its economy grows, China’s stakes in the region increases. In such a context, China’s approach to Central Asia has become more pragmatic, whereas economic and security interests has become more decisive in the course of relations with Central Asian countries.<sup>4</sup> An example of this is China’s trade data with post-Soviet Central Asian countries. The trade volume of China with the regional states, which was 527 million dollars in 1992, dramatically increased to 40 billion dollars in 2011.<sup>5</sup>

**Security concerns of China regarding the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) should be mentioned in order to understand China’s reasons to contact closely with the region.**

**China, at that time, proposed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) for the solution of the Afghan problem. Although Afghanistan was not a member of the SCO, the intense instability it left in the region was one of the reasons for the establishment of the SCO.**

On the other hand, economic relations between Afghanistan and China also improved during these years. The trade volume between Afghanistan and China increased from \$19.99 million to \$715.70 million between 2002 and 2010.<sup>6</sup> In addition, Afghanistan is very attractive in terms of rare elements found in its territory. Afghanistan has an estimated 1.4 million tons of rare earth elements (REEs) and great potential for minerals important for renewable energy. This makes Afghanistan the main investment destination for China, the current leader of global REEs supply network.<sup>7</sup>

Thirdly, security concerns of China regarding the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) should be mentioned in order to understand China's reasons to contact closely with the region. Uyghurs and the XUAR issue have been a bone of contention about China's domestic and foreign policy for decades. When considering the Uyghur issue in the context of Central Asia, it is useful to underline that while Uyghurs meet with Afghanistan on the denominator of religion; they meet with the post-Soviet Central Asian states on a cultural and ethnic denominator in addition to religion. At this point, it is important to remember the Turkestan region in history in order to better understand the bond between the post-Soviet Central Asian nations and the Uyghurs. The historical Turkestan is the region that is mostly inhabited by Turkic peoples, covering parts of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Russia, Mongolia and China. The people of this region, thus, have similar socio-cultural and religious characteristics due to historical ties. It is even possible to say that they speak with the same words enough to understand each other at a basic level.

The 'Uyghur issue' converted into the 'Uyghur mobilization' and gained an organizational structure actually took place in the Central Asian states for the first time, not in the XUAR. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan host a considerable number of Uyghur people, as they border the XUAR of China. In the early years of the People's Republic of China, Mao Zedong's policies plunged the country into a great famine, resulting in the migration of large numbers of Uyghurs living in the

XUAR to the Soviet Union and its surroundings. Since then, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan have been the countries with the highest Uyghur populations in the region. The fact that Uyghur immigrants met with their coreligionists in the region increased the awareness of the peoples. It is known that there are Uyghur-based organizations and political formations that aim to make the voices of the Uyghurs heard in the Central Asian nations.<sup>8</sup> For example, the group formerly known as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan initially aimed to overthrow Karimov's government and establish an Islamic State in Uzbekistan. However, it later changed its name to the Islamic Party of Turkestan, adding the entire Turkestan region to its scope.<sup>9</sup> Also the Turkestan Islamic Party has operated in Afghanistan since 2006.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, it is possible to say that China does not have a good memory of the Taliban regarding the Uyghur issue. On July 5, 2009, the largest Uyghur uprising that the People's Republic of China has experienced since its foundation took place in Urumqi, the capital of the XUAR. This revolt corresponds to the years when the Taliban was effective in Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup> Since this major uprising coincided with the Taliban's great influence in Afghanistan, it can be inferred from that the Sunni Muslim-majority Uyghurs were emboldened by the Taliban – a radical Sunni organization, and their power. Since this great uprising has happened, the Uyghur issue has not yet been stabilized for China.

### **China's Relations with the Former Taliban Administration and Afghanistan**

China's policies towards Afghanistan and what is happening there have always been outside her interest. Thus, instead of coming to a decision on the Taliban related issues in Afghanistan on its own, China has always been on the side of the international community. China followed a policy that prioritized its own interests and did not interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. China established reasonably well balanced relations with the Afghan government and even supported the country with regular economic aid. China always stayed away from military intervention and remained silent about the US intervention in Afghanistan.

Despite its equilibrium policies towards the Afghan government, China has always been skeptical to the Taliban and clearly expressed its antipathy for this organization. China supported the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1373 in 2001 that approved military intervention against al-Qaeda and the Taliban.<sup>12</sup> However, China has been cautious at the same that this decision never turns into a full-fledged confrontation with the Taliban. Although China mentioned its dislike of the

Taliban in its statements, the country also avoided making radical anti-Taliban statements on the subject. Moreover, China was a part of the “Six plus Two Group on Afghanistan,”<sup>13</sup> a model suggested by the United Nations in 1999 to rebuild Afghanistan and maintain peace. The reason why China took a role in this policy was its desire to act in parallel with the decisions of the international community mainly because of the security of the XUAR. Afghanistan, under Taliban rule between 1996 and 2001, had become a base for the East Turkestan Islamic Party (ETIP), the organization of the Uyghur movement, which China labels as a terrorist organization. It was known that the Taliban provided weapons for the ETIP and served as a shelter for the Uyghurs fleeing from China.<sup>14</sup> China argued that also the Afghan Al-Qaeda provided military support to the ETIP. Therefore, it can be said that the security of the XUAR is at the top of China's priorities to determine its policies about Afghanistan and the Taliban. China was afraid of any separatist movements that would boost the instability in the XUAR; so, it followed a cautious policy by following the majority in its policies and wanted to minimize its responsibility.

China, at that time, proposed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) for the solution of the Afghan problem. Although Afghanistan was not a member of the

SCO, the intense instability it left in the region was one of the reasons for the establishment of the SCO. On 7 January 2002, the SCO issued a statement identifying the Taliban as an organization that supports terrorism. While the fall of the Taliban with the US intervention was ratified, it was announced that the SCO recognized the new interim Afghan government. After this statement, the SCO took an active role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan by conducting a dialogue between the new Afghan government and its neighbors.

### The Relations after the Taliban's Advance in 2021

After twenty years of military presence, the US withdrew from Afghanistan by 31 August 2021. This decision was met with intense criticism. The biggest was the US' abandonment of Afghanistan to its fate while another was that the problems in the country could not be resolved peacefully despite the existence of the US for 20 years. Ultimately, on 15 August 2021, the Taliban seized the Afghan capital, Kabul. On 8 September 2021, the Taliban announced the interim government.

Negotiations between China and the Taliban begun before the capture of Kabul. In late July, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi hosted Taliban representatives in Tianjin, China. This meeting was important as the Taliban



tried to convince China that they posed no threat to its interests. It was reported that in this meeting Taliban representatives stated that: “The Afghan Taliban will never allow any force to use the Afghan territory to engage in acts detrimental to China. (...) The Afghan Taliban believes that Afghanistan should develop friendly relations with neighboring countries and the international community.”<sup>15</sup> After this meeting, the dialogue between the two continued and Chinese authorities voiced positive statements about the Taliban. For instance, Hua Chunying, a spokeswoman for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated that nothing in the world remains stable, everything changes, and that China will only consider the current actions of the Taliban, not their past. She said: “...Some repeatedly stress distrust of the Taliban, but what I want to say is nothing in the world can stand still. I prefer to look at things dialectically, to see its past and present, and its words as well as actions... You won't be able to draw practical conclusions if you don't keep pace with the times and only keep a conservative and fixed mindset and ignore the development of the situation.”<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, the Taliban spokesperson Suhail Shaheen participated in the China Global Television Network (CGTN), a state-led and English spoken TV channel of China, for an interview. When the relations with Beijing was asked to him, Shaheen openly invited China to take a role in rebuilding Afghanistan saying that “China is a big country with a huge economy and capacity - I think they can play a very big role in the rebuilding, rehabilitation, reconstruction of Afghanistan.”<sup>17</sup> This open invitation from the Taliban indicates that the Taliban also have interests toward China. It is clear that the Taliban will need economic aid to establish a functioning order in Afghanistan. China, as the second largest economy in the world, is a perfect ally in this respect. At the same time, what the Taliban government needs is international legitimacy. In addition to being one of the five UNSC member countries, China is a powerful actor in the international arena as it can position itself against the US. It is certain that gaining recognition by China will increase the Taliban's legitimacy in the international arena.

**With the advance of the Taliban, terrorism-related security concerns of China have escalated, which can be counted as the second dimension of the relations after the Taliban's advance and as the fifth reason that determines China's policies in the region.**

Although the rapprochement between China and the Taliban is pragmatically plausible, it was met with surprise in the world. Inasmuch as, in the past, China accused the Taliban of having organic ties to the ETIM in the XUAR and voted against the Taliban in the aforementioned UNSC Resolution voting. However, today, China-Afghanistan (Taliban) bilateral relations are developing day by day. It is estimated that in the near future, China will be one of the first countries to recognize the new Afghan Taliban government.

**Then, what are the reasons for this change in China's stance towards the Taliban? The answer lies in China's interests in the region. As mentioned above, three of these were categorized in the previous section as geopolitical importance, possession of rich energy resources, and security concerns due to China's XUAR. Yet, after Taliban's advance, two new were added to China's three main regional interests. First one is the security of the BRI and the related investments. China attaches great importance to its economy and never compromises on the safety of its economic initiatives.** Ensuring their safety, together with the XUAR, has always been a top priority in negotiations with the Taliban. Since this is a new concern after the advance of the Taliban, it can be counted as a fourth reason that China has developed its policies towards the region.

**With the advance of the Taliban, terrorism-related security concerns of China have escalated, which can be counted as the second dimension of the relations after the Taliban's advance and as the fifth reason that determines China's policies in the region.** According to experts working on China,<sup>18</sup> there are three main groups – the ‘three evils’ in other words that are considered China's nightmare: terrorists, extremists and separatists. Mentioning about terrorism is inevitable when it comes to the Taliban, because the United Nations still recognizes the Taliban as a terrorist organization. In particular, with the attack that took place in Kabul on August 26, 2021, security concerns regarding terrorism in neighboring countries dramatically grew. More than 150 people lost their lives in the explosions while more than 170 people were injured.<sup>19</sup> The Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISIS-K), a branch of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), claimed the responsibility for the attacks. The regional countries are now more concerned about the terrorist organizations that have separated from the Taliban and became their own like the ISIS-K, rather than the Taliban itself. As a result, most post-Soviet Central Asian countries increased their military deployment on their border with Afghanistan with the advance of the Taliban. Besides, major powers such as China and Russia are concerned about the awakening of ‘sleeping cells’ which refer to minority groups with the potential to radicalize within their own borders, particularly Muslims in this case. In the sim-



plest example, it is known that there are Uyghurs, Huis, Uzbeks, Tajiks and Kyrgyz among the ISIS-K militants.<sup>20</sup>

For these five interests, China is determined to get along well with all the countries in the region. The fall of the government in Afghanistan and the formation of a new government, even if this is a Taliban government, are not enough for China to dissuade its pragmatic foreign policy.

### Conclusion

Central Asia region appears in the literature with many different descriptions and scopes. The definition of Central Asia in this article has been expanded a little, with the addition of Afghanistan to the five post-Soviet Central Asian countries. The reasons for the convergence in the regional policies of China, one of the biggest neighbors of these six Central Asian countries, were examined with a special emphasis on the Taliban. Turning back to the starting question of this article, whether there has been a change in China's foreign policy regarding Central Asia with the advancement of the Taliban has been answered: Yes, while China's stance to the Taliban made a 180 degree turn, two more reasons have been added to the three main

reasons that currently affect its tendency towards the region.

**With respect to China's interests in Central Asia in the light of the developments in its foreign policy in recent years, three main topics were identified as pushing factors for China's interest in the region. First**, the Central Asian countries increased their value in the eyes of China, especially because they are located on the routes of the trade projects and they are the stations on China's access to Europe as its western neighbors. **The second** is that they are the closest and one of the few energy-rich countries in the world to meet the increasing energy needs of China. **Third**, Central Asian states have linkages to one of China's most sensitive subjects, the Uyghur issue.

**With the advance of the Taliban, China has changed its stance towards the Taliban almost completely, and two more reasons have appeared why China is eager to maintain relations with the Central Asian states.** The security of the BRI routes **—as the fourth reason**, was China's another interest for rapprochement with the region. **The fifth reason** is related to terrorism caused by the advance of the Taliban. **These two additional concerns enhanced China's current convergence policies towards Central Asia.** Compared to the past, China is far more interested



in Central Asia and the region will most probably keep its priority in Chinese foreign policy for a while.

China will likely recognize officially the Afghan Taliban government soon and take an active role in rebuilding Afghanistan compared to the previous passive stance.<sup>21</sup> The fact that playing a role in rebuilding Afghanistan under the Taliban rule can be interpreted as China's desire to establish a control mechanism over the Taliban so that its interests in the region are not harmed. For this reason, China not only does it want to keep friendly relations with the regional countries, it tries also to increase its influence on them due to its desire for con-

trol. It is also one of the expected results that China will call for the SCO to play an active role in the new Afghanistan in the near future.

Central Asian countries and Afghanistan will seem to be on the world agenda for a long time. The Taliban announced the new Afghan government recently, so the greater regional powers will be heavily influenced from this as well. The advance of Taliban will also fuel the conflict for India and Pakistan, especially over Kashmir. Therefore, the resurgence of Taliban Afghanistan and its effects on these countries may be the subject of future studies in order to provide a greater regional analysis.

## Endnotes

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# HOW TO INCREASE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS?

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Istanbul, 24 June 2021

I had the honor to participate in the prestigious Antalya Diplomacy Forum (ADF) as a speaker in a panel entitled “How to increase the effectiveness of Regional Organizations?”

I herewith wish to share some of the background thoughts which helped formulate my brief intervention during this event; these thoughts do not necessarily refer to the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and its Permanent International Secretariat (BSEC PERMIS), the Secretary General of which I had the pleasure and honor to be for the last six years. More than that, these thoughts are the result of the valuable experience I gained by liaising and cooperating with the heads and members of various regional and international organizations, in an effort to better coordinate and adapt our efforts while pursuing common objectives.

One could initially ask if we actually need regional organizations nowadays, if they really offer any concrete and fathomable services. I believe that as the foremost vehicles for implementing regional cooperation, the existence and activity of similar entities is imperative.

It is another issue, of course, that today we have perhaps too many regional organizations, sometimes with overlapping and repetitive activities, creating confusion, opacity, duplication of efforts and wasting time and resources.

But why is regional cooperation so important, especially today? I believe for 3 main reasons: a) As the Covid pandemic proved beyond any doubt - and despite the initial introvert and “selfish” behavior of most States – in order to address issues of similar proportions effectively, regional cooperation is a *sine qua non* condition; b) Innovation and globalization – whatever the latter term means – have radically changed the importance of two significant factors: time and distance, thus rendering regional cooperation an easier, faster and more comprehensive form of development and progress;

c) The global issues of today, like climate change, environmental pollution, etc. do not recognize or respect national borders, they ‘oblige’ states to tackle them jointly, if they wish to be efficient.

So, if regional cooperation is imperative, how could we improve the performance and relevancy of regional organizations in charge of and responsible for this cooperation? I believe that in this context some of the main factors we should be paying greater attention to are the following:

1. **Political will and commitment:** this means that member states of a regional organization should not only verbally express their commitment, but also get actively involved and contribute to the organization’s activity. This is a major factor, because on many occasions states tend to participate in an organization just “for the sake of participation”,





mostly because an “x” or “y” neighbor is - or is not - a member of the entity in question. Any international or regional organization can only be as effective as its member states will it to be.

2. **Sense of ownership:** members of a regional organization should believe in the aims and objectives of the latter, offer the necessary means for achieving them and have trust in the potential of the organization to actually do so.
3. **Readiness to adapt to the new challenges:** regional organizations should be flexible and ready to adapt to the ever-faster change that occurs on the international scene, especially in the confusing and confused times of today. The geopolitical reality that we faced yesterday is completely different than the one they will be called to face tomorrow; lack of readiness to adapt to the so-called “new normal” will most probably render irrelevant an organization that proves unable or unwilling to do so.
4. **Acceptance and endorsement of innovation:** the way people and states live and do business in today’s world depends increasingly on networks, communications and IT applications. ICT and AI became a vital dimension of the economic development, providing new opportunities to strengthen governance, financial management, or

delivery of goods and services; the introduction of the above innovation has immense effects on cost reduction, improved transparency and increased efficiency on the public and private sector. It is obvious that regional organizations cannot continue ignoring the above facts, especially when the evolutionary process of innovation gains in pace almost every day.

5. **The human factor:** regional cooperation should be entrusted to prepared and qualified experts willing and able to concretely promote the implementation of the organization’s aims and objectives. Representatives of member states should focus on the essentials and not get carried away or distracted by personal or other expediencies.
6. **Avoidance of double talk, of double standards:** promoting regional cooperation means engaging in a sincere and trustworthy dialogue; I have the impression that many times this sincerity is painfully missing and that, instead, a “dialogue among deaf” is dominating discussions during meetings; words seem to have lost their meaning and their “weight”, unable to serve change.
7. **A strong and capable Secretariat:** today the activity of every successful regional or other international organization is managed by a well-staffed and qualified Secretariat, which leads the way and en-

courages member states to contribute and get involved in projects and initiatives reflecting the policies and plans of action endorsed by the members of the organization. The efficiency and effectiveness of a regional entity directly depend on a strong, competent and responsible Secretariat.

The above factors I enumerated are of course not new, just like the ways and means for addressing most of the pressing issues our small world faces today: we know them very well, they are being spelled out almost in every relevant conference or meeting – many of them were also repeated by the distinguished participants of the recent Antalya Diplomacy Forum.

So why are we unable or unwilling to start applying the concrete solutions already known that could serve as the remedy to today's urgent and serious global issues?

In my personal view, for three very distinct reasons:

- (a) **The persistent inequalities among states:** we hear so often about them, especially during events dedicated to the development of Africa or other neglected regions of our globe; we usually denounce them vehemently, yet we “forget” to redress the situation; on the contrary, the finite resources of our planet continue to be used - or abused - by the few powerful, while single companies or individuals manage or possess properties and fortunes that are far greater than the annual GDP of many countries recognized by the UN. State or individual “philanthropy” towards the weaker and less privileged cannot hide the pressing and urgent need for the fair re-distribution of the above-mentioned finite resources of our planet.
- (b) **The lack of inspired leadership:** the unruly and unpredictable “new reality” period we have gone through during the last years can be mainly attributed to the lack of inspired leaders and pragmatic leadership; true, the challenges have been immense and, to a certain degree, novel, yet this cannot obfuscate the fact that the reaction by world leaders has been painfully short of what the circumstances demand. The complexity of today's international scene calls for leaders able and willing to grasp the true, global dimension of issues and take the right decisions, however painful politically they sometimes might be; after all, the overestimation of the “political cost” has never been the right advisor for sound and comprehensive decisions and policies.
- (c) **The double talk and double standards** prevailing on the international scene today: I have briefly elaborated above on the regional dimension of this

serious issue that afflicts cooperation and understanding, we only have to shift the whole problematic to the broader, global context; the main difference is that, on this level, the stakes are far greater and more serious for all concerned.

I wish to close this brief description of personal thoughts with a reference to the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation.

The BSEC Organization was founded in the distant 1992 as a platform for dialogue and exchange of views on the highest level: a stroke of genius, given the particular circumstances and the prevailing, at that time, enthusiasm and optimism for a better World with less division and conflicts. This initial confidence led in 1999 to the transformation of BSEC into a full-fledged international organization in the region, with HQs of its *Permanent International Secretariat* (BSEC PERMIS) instituted in hospitable Istanbul.

With time this initial platform for dialogue, in a region of geostrategic importance, slowly matured into a concrete, dynamic vehicle for the promotion of economic cooperation among its Members and beyond. In fact, it evolved into a family of entities: apart from the inter-governmental branch (the BSEC Organization), the Parliamentary Assembly (PABSEC) was established, as well as the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB), the BSEC Business Council (BSEC BC) and its think-tank, the International Center for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS).

What is perhaps more important is that this precious vehicle for dialogue and continuous, institutionalized cooperation and exchange of views on almost all sectors of governmental activity, gave also birth to a whole series of other, state or private, entities, thus involving in the broader picture professional associations or other unions; the latter's positive impact on the overall picture in the Black Sea region cannot be praised enough.

Yet, the initial enthusiasm and optimism of the early '90ties eventually faded away; today, especially in the broader Black Sea region, the overall picture is unfortunately very distant from the vision that inspired BSEC's founding fathers. The various political / territorial differences among some of the Organization's Member States undoubtedly cast their shadow on the effectiveness and performance of BSEC and one has the impression that the Black Sea region is becoming the focal point of new divisions and tension.

Of course, in today's complex and multipolar world, with so much unpredictability, uncertainty and instability, many of the issues facing the BSEC organization are problems afflicting other international entities as well.



One typical example of the lack of trust by member states in the capabilities of an organization, in this case of the BSEC organization, occurred when the covid pandemic hit global Tourism so hard, with devastating results for the people involved in the sector and for the overall economies of the BSEC member states.

The BSEC international secretariat tried immediately to promote, with the expert support of the UNWTO, a road map for discussing, formulating and endorsing a set of health and safety measures among the interested member states, so that they could allow even in limited numbers the flow of tourists among them, all neighboring to each other countries. BSEC PERMIS is still engaged in these talks that advance with a very slow pace; at the same time many member states preferred to embark on a campaign of ensuring similar agreements on a bilateral basis, forgetting the obvious advantages of the multilateral approach promoted by the BSEC Secretariat.

Of course, the above cannot obfuscate the tremendous work and concrete achievements of the BSEC organization which will commemorate its 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary next year: apart from establishing a culture of dialogue and understanding in a difficult environment, apart from serving as an institutionalized platform of continuous contact among governments and state or private institutions, apart from implementing projects of regional im-

portance and promoting the collective picture of its Member States, the BSEC organization has also served as a precious, first-level confidence-building mechanism – not a minor feat, indeed, given the instability and lack of security in the wider Black Sea region.

It is today widely acknowledged that BSEC functions and performs as a regional entity promoting in a tangible way economic cooperation among its Member States and beyond; it is also dynamically active, present and, mainly, it is appreciated for its role on the international scene. BSEC is formulating or participating in real projects which produce tangible deliverables to its Member States and the region. Entities like various UN Agencies, the EU or the World Bank have sought the BSEC PERMIS as their partner or implementing agency for concrete projects in the Black Sea region. Today many projects of the EU for the region are formulated and/or implemented with the active participation of BSEC Member States and PERMIS, while the latter takes part as lead partner in EU projects worth millions of Euros. The first ever Meeting between Ministers of Foreign Affairs of BSEC and EU States took place in Brussels in 2019.

In conclusion I cannot escape the temptation to repeat the *cliché* phrase: if the BSEC organization did not exist in this geostrategic region of our small globe, then we should have invented it.

# AFGHANISTAN UNDER TALIBAN RULE, THE UNCERTAIN FUTURE AHEAD

The ensuing events following the quick upsurge of Taliban in recent months leading to the collapse of the internationally recognized government at Kabul are of mixed nature.

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The recent dramatic developments in Afghanistan and the quick rise of Taliban to power in the war-ravaged country once again brought into debate the volatile nature of Afghan politics and the need to carefully examine different aspects of the chronic conflict with special attention to the often neglected realities. The first Taliban-established 'Islamic Emirate' which lasted from 1996 to 2001 was unable to win the hearts and minds of the nation and lacked responsible and effective governance. Systematic ill-treatment of the citizens coupled with strict enforcement of uniquely interpreted orthodox Islam has left an unpleasant legacy very well alive even with the lapse of two long decades. The insurgent group offered safe heaven to international terrorism and thus was largely devoid of international recognition. Despite all its efforts, Taliban was unable to fully subdue the resisting forces and parts of the country continued to defy the Emirate's authority right until it was overthrown following the events of 11 September 2001.

The ensuing events following the quick upsurge of Taliban in recent months leading to the collapse of the internationally recognized government at Kabul are of mixed nature. Notwithstanding the scattered low-level armed resistances of the opposition forces, the country as a whole is in a guarded state of calm and tranquility that

could otherwise offer the group the required justification for much tougher pacification efforts coupled with unspeakable levels of turmoil and bloodshed. So far the group has largely remained committed to its declared undertaking to exercise tolerance towards opposing political and tribal leaders. It appears that apart from some untoward treatment of the people emanating from lack of coordination or loose chain of command, no major concerted ill-conduct blessed with the consent of Taliban leadership has occurred. However the general sense of security in the country is mostly driven either by quick and stern punishment awarded to criminals and outlaws, and also could be attributed to the termination of terror or bombing campaigns spearheaded by Taliban movement itself. In many instances and in a bid to offer a sigh of relief to the inhabitants of some non-Pashtun captured areas, Taliban has appointed senior officials from amongst the natives of the same locality but with proven loyalty to the cause of the Islamic Emirate. Some regular police and security personnel in the service of the Ashraf Ghani administration are gradually reporting back to duty upon calls of assurances of non-retribution by the Taliban. A number of former Afghan warlords, tribal chiefs, and religious and political leaders with no reliable military might at their disposal to resist Taliban rule are increasingly inclined to reconcile with the emerging situation.



With no other option in sight, they choose to engage positively with Taliban in the hope of securing a guaranteed security and safety for their subjects as well as realizing appropriate share of power rather than entering into premature and dead-ended armed conflicts with the new ruling entity.

People especially those living in Kabul and other major cities are still in a state of shock trying to come along with the realities of the day and to try to piece together their shattered livelihood for the very uncertain future ahead. Sections of the Afghan society fearful of the grim prospect for a tolerable political, social and economic condition brought about by Taliban's return to power tend to embark on journeys of refuge to the neighboring countries and beyond. Civil society is the most hard-hit and many of its renowned activists and known personalities are on the run or in hiding as Taliban's orthodox ideology and strict standards run counter to most modern social values and practices. The shaky gender equality on foot until recently is doomed to vanish and women's semi-active role in the conservative Afghan society might be largely undermined. Personal life liberties, social freedoms, political participation, freedom of expression, and independent media and their authorized tolerable ceilings are yet to be defined and enforced.

The unexpectedly rapid political and military melt-down of the Ashraf Ghani administration that came as a surprise even to Taliban leadership left the group unprepared to readily form the new administration capable of driving the country back to the track of normalcy. Taliban's hasty initiative to set up a governing body did not progress smoothly as was evident from the 8 September 2021 announcement of formation of an interim government composed entirely of hard-line Pashtun old faces and war veterans with no woman included. As expected, and in the absence of a charismatic and dominant leader acceptable to all factions within the group, disagreement on the formation of the caretaker government quickly surfaced. Unconfirmed reports are indicative of hot debates among the ruling circle on allotment of cabinet portfolios along the dividing lines of political and tribal orientations. Meanwhile serious differences on the supremacy issue between the Doha political office high-ups, the Quetta and Peshawar-stationed leaders and the commanding figures conducting insurgency operations inside the country remain high on the agenda. This very open disagreement and the power struggle has left its mark on the overall structure of the interim administration with the lion's share of the ministerial positions allotted to the hardliners, and the less conservative political stalwarts of the movement kept at bay. Despite all restorative expres-

sions of Taliban high-ups with regards to the cohesion of the group's leadership cell and absence of any sort of power struggle at the top, signs of disagreement and clashes of interests have already come into light. Senior members forming the political office in Doha assume credit for their vigorous endeavor to reach out to the world community and to have secured the much-needed recognition at the backdrop of the unpleasant legacy associated with the name 'Taliban.' They also claim glory for their skillful and effective negotiations with the United States that removed the hurdle of NATO presence in Afghanistan and eventually opened the gates of Kabul to the insurgent group. On the other end, the group's fighting forces composed of factions commanded by different leaders are of the strong opinion that the conclusion of Doha Agreement and the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan were the product of their long years of armed struggle and sacrifices that forced the coalition to concede failure and to seek a face-saving departure. The outcome of the first round of tussle over the factional share of the interim setup proved the predominance of the hardliners with the notable figures of the political leadership sidelined. Should there be any real threat to the stability of the establishment as a whole in the foreseeable future, it is most likely to emanate from the factional and tribal division within Taliban itself and the

**A number of former Afghan warlords, tribal chiefs, and religious and political leaders with no reliable military might at their disposal to resist Taliban rule are increasingly inclined to reconcile with the emerging situation.**

involvement of Pakistani military intelligence to favor Pashtun groups closer to its overall policy on Afghanistan.

So far Taliban's endeavor to communicate an encouraging signal of continued commitment to forming a broad based government has not been appealing to the international community. To counter the widespread criticisms of the non-inclusive interim cabinet and questionable appointments of figures with long records of engagement in terrorist activities to sensitive ministerial positions, the group came up with the repeated assurances of a broad - based government to include representing figures from all corners of the country in due course. In response to the global demand of establishing a broad-based and inclusive government in Afghanistan, a spokesperson for Taliban on 6 September 2021 asserted that after the





formation of the government, the constitution of the country will be re-written or amended. Later, another spokesman of Taliban political office in Doha, while replying to a question on the likelihood of holding elections in Afghanistan did not rule out the possibility of the exercise and said the issue would be determined by the future constitution. These encouraging remarks mainly spelled out by the spokespersons affiliated with the political wing of Taliban is in sharp contrast with opinion expressed by some influential hardliners who insist on the irrelevance of the modern day dictates of governance such as constitution, elections, women's rights and freedom of expression.

Though Taliban has little difficulty in further consolidating its grip on power and its authority is less likely to be challenged from within the country or from across the borders in the near future, it remains to be extremely vulnerable to the tough economic challenges and has to quickly and effectively focus on the fast deteriorating economic situation of the state. Afghanistan has been heavily reliant on external financial support and continued flow of aid for the past two decades. Almost 80 per-

cent of the Afghan government's spending, the entire military hardware requirements and the fund to support the Afghan national army have been provided by the United States and its allies. Numerous United Nations Agencies and international non-governmental organizations tasked with implementing different externally funded development projects in the country were also contributing considerably to the national economy. In the absence of the extensive direct foreign assistance and suspension of the activities of non-governmental institutions, the new Islamic Emirate is faced with the reality of the day and the colossal task of managing the worsening economic situation of the country. Sensing the gravity of the state of economic affairs and the urgent need for the continued support from outside, Taliban leadership has repeatedly reiterated the group's desire to maintain normal and friendly relations with the international community. To this end, the movement is struggling to portray and relay an image much different from that of its previous harsh rule of 1996 to 2001. However, the pledges of social leniency and assurances of formation of inclusive government initially spelled out by the spokespersons of the group are gradually altered in order to either expose the pre-decided direction of the Emirate or to accommodate the will and say of the dominant factions fast at rise. In this direction, the infamous Haqqani Network considered the most lethal and sophisticated insurgent group affiliated with Taliban and allegedly favored and supported by the Inter Service Intelligence of

**So far Taliban's endeavor to communicate an encouraging signal of continued commitment to forming a broad based government has not been appealing to the international community.**



Pakistan (ISI) quickly gained the upper hand in the newly formed interim administration and bagged the highly sensitive and important security portfolios. These obstructive developments are by no means appealing to the global community and might be seen as prelude to possible reversion of Taliban to extremism and alliance with international terrorism.

Alongside the power sharing argument, the most pressing issue before Taliban leadership is the fast failing economy with no prospect for a quick remedy in sight. Afghanistan under Taliban could not expect to benefit fully from the foreign financial and development assistance that for the past couple of decades have helped the country, at least to some extent, to modernize and to rebuild infrastructures. With the suspended outside help and support, and non-existence of substitute local resources, the new establishment is left with the limited option of turning to the international community and to try to lure-in aid and support either by winning sympathy or through employing coercive tactics. Known to Taliban is the sensitivity of the world with regards to the possibility of return of Al-Qaeda and ISIS to Afghanistan, substantiated by recent reports of deadly clashes of their operatives with Taliban in south-eastern Afghanistan.

The chain of events subsequent to abandoning Afghanistan after the withdrawal of Soviet forces in the 1990's and the strong possibility of recurrence of similar eventualities in the absence of sufficient global attention to Afghanistan might necessitate some sort of international engagement with the Islamic Emirate regardless of its domestic conducts. Considering the likelihood of association and covert dealings of terrorist groups with the extremist factions of Taliban such as the Haqqani network, possible collective and calculated initiative of drawing the attention of the global community to the gravity of situation in the hope of inducing revised external approaches beneficial to Taliban, including a degree of diplomatic recognition, restoration of economical support and provision of military assistance in line with counter-terrorism dictates and efforts may not be ruled out.

Taliban is hopeful that for the near future no major political opposition, civil unrest or rights-seeking movement is strong enough to challenge its central authority. Impartiality and restraint exercised by most neighboring countries vis-à-vis the internal developments of Afghanistan and also Taliban's effective control over all border areas that blocks possible support and supply routes for potential armed resistances offer a relative sense of relief for the Islamic Emirate. However the fact remains that the highly politicized and multi-ethnic Afghan society has in many ways resisted moves to subdue it. Having in mind the long history of failed attempts of monopolized rule by a certain ethnic group in Afghanistan,

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to keep the non-Pashtun section of the population neglected and denied of their share of power may not prove to be a viable venture in the long term. It is well proven that insurgency even in its limited proportions is capable of imposing serious challenges on regular security forces and very able to cause great deal of instability and unrest. Now that the Taliban has to abandon its insurgent nature in favor of assuming the responsibilities of an official ruling authority, and in the situation where the opposition is left with no alternative but to resort to armed struggle, Taliban soon could find itself in the same defensive situation as the previous administration of Kabul, but with grim prospects of benefiting from outside support and sympathy.

Afghanistan has suffered many decades of intense instability, internal strife, foreign intervention, poor governance and poverty. The country has largely exhausted its riches and human resources, and the nation's hope for a better future is at its lowest. Non-compliance of Taliban with the most fundamental principles of good governance and its continued ignorance of human values shall further alienate a large section of population and could send the country into yet another phase of turmoil and instability with far-reaching regional and international consequences. The new prevailing authority in Kabul, under any name or banner it chooses to be, has to give the entire Afghan society confidence through respecting the fundamental rights of citizens and formation of an all-inclusive and broad based national government, should it wishes to open a new chapter of goodwill and benevolence in its otherwise dark history of existence. Also the international community in general and the neighboring countries in particular have to adopt a unified stance and policy of calculated engagement with the Taliban administration aimed at persuading the group to act as a normal and responsible member of the global community detached from any affiliation with terrorist groups and committed essentially to the well-being and prosperity of its citizens.

# AFGHANISTAN: THE RESULTS OF AMERICAN INTERVENTION AND PROSPECTS OF TALIBAN RULE

A certain 'conventionality' of the Taliban regime, which provided an asylum for international terrorists, made it possible for the US to gain tangible successes by using the American military force. The achieved victory was used to calm the American public and to send a signal to allies and geopolitical opponents that terrorist attacks have not shaken the US' status as the leader of the unipolar world.

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**C**urrent events in Afghanistan open a new era in the history of both this state and the whole Central Asia. The end of the Afghan campaign of the US army and the withdrawal of the American military contingent indicates the weakening of the West's position in the region. A certain power and security vacuum opens up opportunities for other geopolitical players – while at the same time creating new challenges for them. The collapse of the central government in Kabul and the rise of the Taliban threaten to rollback even the minimal gains in modernizing Afghan society that have been made with the support of the United States and its allies over the past twenty years.

This article offers an analysis of the events that led to the current situation, as well as the prospects for the development of Afghanistan in the near future. The paper characterizes the goals and objectives that the US military carried out in the region; assesses their successes and failures; determines the factors that provoked the end of the operation. The article examines the reasons for the rapid defeat of the Afghan National Army under the conditions of the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan; assesses the efforts of the United States and its allies to re-

spond quickly to the defeat of the central government; analyzes the prospects that open up for China and Russia in the post-American Afghanistan. Also, the article proposes considerations on the internal situation in this state after the Taliban victory, which is characterized by the end of all modernization processes and a return to a tough Islamist fundamentalist regime.

### **Objectives of the US Mission in Afghanistan: Successful Counter-Terror Operation and Impossible 'Mentorship'**

The war in Afghanistan is the longest military campaign in the history of America. The invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 was carried out as a part of the American 'War on Terrorism.' It was a swift response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Washington viewed Afghanistan as a priority target for the first counterstrike in retaliation for the al-Qaeda actions. American society desperately needed a quick, convincing, and, most importantly, visible victory in the war against the 'enemy'. A certain 'conventionality' of the Taliban regime, which provided an



asylum for international terrorists, made it possible for the US to gain tangible successes by using the American military force. The achieved victory was used to calm the American public and to send a signal to allies and geopolitical opponents that terrorist attacks have not shaken the US' status as the leader of the unipolar world.

In general, the main objectives of the US operation in Afghanistan were as follows:

- achieving rapid military success to calm down American society shocked by the 9/11 attacks;
- proving the resilience of US global leadership to the world;
- destroying an international terror base created under the patronage of the Taliban regime;
- improving the security climate in the region through the creation of a loyal (controlled) government in Kabul;
- restraining the spread of Islamic terrorism in Central Asia.<sup>1</sup>

From a military point of view, the US has achieved its goals in Afghanistan. With a quick operation in October-December 2001, the Taliban regime was overthrown.

Over the next few years, Americans and their allies cleared out terrorist bases set up in hard-to-reach regions of the country. As a result, Afghanistan lost its status of a 'safe haven' for international terrorism. In the information context, Washington also achieved some success – at least, for the first years. It demonstrated its strength to the world, as well as its readiness and ability to punish enemies who threaten the security of the United States.

From a political point of view, however, the success of the Americans was much more modest. There are different opinions on the reasons behind US attempts to modernize Afghanistan. Some think that Washington was guided by the rational idea to stabilize a dangerous source of regional confrontation in order to create better conditions for American global hegemony. Others believe that its policy was based on the morally oriented messianic idea of bringing democratic values to the Afghan people. In any case, Washington failed to ensure the transformation of Afghanistan from a 'failed' into an effective state. Despite the billions of dollars invested in this project,<sup>2</sup> changes were only cosmetic. Several reasons of this failure are the following:

- erroneous goal-setting that determined an unattainable task of a radical transformation of the tribal-feudal state via foreign intervention;

**Washington failed to ensure the transformation of Afghanistan from a 'failed' into an effective state. Despite the billions of dollars invested in this project, changes were only cosmetic.**

- lack of attention to the local specifics of Afghanistan such as the total lag of development of the Afghan society, fragmentation of the state based on the ethnic cleavages, and the dominance of traditional conservative views;
- ineffectiveness and weakness of the new system of public administration that was created with the support of the United States and its allies, corruption of the leaders, isolation of technocratic specialists with Western education from local realities;
- some important regional actors' - such as Pakistan and the Russian Federation - interests and the cross-border criminal groups in slowing down the modernization of Afghanistan.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the active efforts of the United States and its NATO partners did not lead to forecasted qualitative improvements. At the same time, the inefficiency of the system of public administration created with their support undermined the potential of Afghan state in fighting against security threats. While state resources and international financial assistance were wasted due to corruption, Afghanistan remained decentralized, and most of the population continued to live according to tribal laws. The Taliban managed to reorganize in the late 2000s and started a full-scale guerrilla-sabotage war.

### **The End of the American Operation: A Painful but Necessary Retreat**

The fight against the resurgent Taliban has become a new challenge for the United States. During the first years of operation US and allied troops took full responsibility for the security of Afghanistan. But it was a temporary measure – in order to buy time and to train effective Afghan national security forces. It is logical to assume that security of the sovereign state should be protected by local army, not foreign interventionists – otherwise there would be doubts about its vitality. Americans came to Afghanistan and created preconditions for its development by means of overthrowing Taliban. But they could not protect it endlessly – especially when threat came not from foreign forces, but from the internal opposition. This was not the task that brought Americans to the re-



gion. After all, the elimination of international terrorists (the key victory in this area was the killing of Osama bin Laden in 2011 in Pakistan) and countering the Taliban's attempts to regain power in Afghanistan are two different challenges.

The idea of punishing people who were responsible for 9/11 attacks found support in American society. But the need to take full responsibility for the protection of a foreign state from internal threat was not very popular. This contributed to the growing negative perception of the operation in Afghanistan among Americans. The increase in spending, as well as the combat losses of the American troops (its peak was in 2010<sup>4</sup>), reinforced this trend. The situation could be corrected by a clear understanding of the goals of the operation and the deadlines for its implementation. However, it was difficult to do this because of the controversial situation at hand in view of the low degree of effectiveness of the Afghan state and



its security sector. On the one hand, the quantitative indicators of the Afghan army, as well as the number of resources spent on its training, suggested that it could cope with its duties. On the other hand, a rational assessment of the combat effectiveness of the Afghan army showed that its potential to counter the militants without American assistance remained extremely doubtful. The real solution to the problem could have been the transformation of the United States operation in Afghanistan into a permanent one. But this was completely out of question from the point of view of the interests and obligations of the United States.

As a result, during the presidency of Barack Obama, the US began to actively consider the issue of reducing and reformatting its presence in Central Asia. The crucial period in this process was the period of 2013-2014. It was at that time when control and responsibility over the security of the Afghanistan was transferred to the Afghan

forces and foreign presence was significantly reduced.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the real withdrawal of the foreign contingents was carried out at this time. Only a symbolic force remained in Afghanistan, demonstrating their presence and support for the government in Kabul. Also, in 2012 Afghanistan received a diplomatic 'compensation' – the status of the major non-NATO ally of the US.

However, the limited US military presence could not change the situation in Afghanistan for the better. It only preserved an unstable balance of power, continuing to squander American resources. The goals of the presence of the US troops in Afghanistan following the force reduction have not been clearly formulated. Rather, more questions appeared as to why the American soldiers remained in Afghanistan. As a result, Obama's successors – Donald Trump and Joe Biden – continued the course towards the completion of the operation. First, in February 2020, Trump signed up an agreement with the Taliban

on the withdrawal of troops by May 2021. Then Biden confirmed this decision, only slightly adjusting the terms. In this case, American politicians followed the wishes of their own electorate after a rational assessment of the situation. According to Biden, “an endless American presence in the middle of another country’s civil conflict was not acceptable.”<sup>6</sup>

The reasons for ending the American operation in Afghanistan now are as follows:

- Washington’s reassessment of existing security threats, as well as its own resources in the face of the escalation of global confrontation with China;
- the unpopularity of the Afghanistan operation in American society;
- the lack of clear goals to justify the presence of US troops in Afghanistan (victory criteria).<sup>7</sup>

The official argument for ending the longest war in US history can be found in an interview by the Secretary of State Antony Blinken. He stressed that the United States “went to Afghanistan 20 years ago with one mission in mind, and that was to deal with the people who attacked us on 9/11. And that mission has been successful”.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, President Biden announced that the United States “did not go to Afghanistan to nation-build. And it’s the right and the responsibility of the Afghan people alone to decide their future and how they want to run their country.”<sup>9</sup> He stressed that for the last twenty years “America... invested nearly \$1 trillion dollars, trained over 300,000 Afghan soldiers and police, equipped them with state-of-the-art military equipment, and maintained their air force.”<sup>10</sup> This should have been enough to protect the government in Kabul after the withdrawal of American troops.

### **The Collapse of the Afghan National Army and the Reasons for the Success of the Taliban**

The numerical indicators of the armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan gave every reason to believe in their strength in the fighting against Taliban. On paper, the Afghan army looked solid. Officially, the Afghan security forces in 2020 numbered more than 275 thousand people (171,500 in the army; 7,300 in aviation; 99,000 in police units). They were trained and armed by Western actors. Among other things, they had more than 1,000 armored personnel carriers, 775 artillery systems and mortars, 34 combat - capable aircraft at their disposal.<sup>11</sup>

However, in practice, the situation was completely different. The Taliban launched its offensive in May 2021.

By early August, it controlled the majority of the territory of Afghanistan, including strategically important check-points on the border. Large cities remained under the control of the government and there was hope that Kabul would be able to concentrate forces around these strongholds. However, starting on August 6<sup>th</sup>, when the Taliban first captured the center of an Afghan province, the city of Zaranj, the events unfolded like an avalanche. Over the next week, all key cities in Afghanistan came under the control of the militants. Moreover, in most cases they were captured practically without a fight due to agreements with local elites and promises of amnesty to soldiers of government troops. Such events create an impression that the Afghan army trained by Western specialists was simply not ready and did not want to fight.

Analysts are trying to understand why such a catastrophe occurred. Some experts believe that the reason for the defeat of the Afghan army should be found in the fundamentals of its training. The United States created it in its own image. However, the strategy and tactics which bring success to the US troops didn’t work for the Afghan allies. Without adequate provision of air support, intelligence and assistance in maintaining modern weapons, the armed forces of Afghanistan turned out to be incapable of combat.<sup>12</sup>

But it is not correct to put the responsibility for the defeats solely on military reasons. They are caused by wider problems of Afghan statehood. The major part of the army was subjected to all the destructive tendencies which became characteristic of the Afghan society and the system of governance. Inefficiency and corruption remained a problem for the Afghan government. The government paved way to criminal practices, when commanders were forced to pay bribes in order to receive supplies and artillery support. At the same time, soldiers often did not receive their salaries. Clannishness and nepotism led to the promotion of incompetent officers with political connections to command posts.<sup>13</sup>

Even the official quantitative indicators of the Afghan army are doubtful. BBC sources report that in reality, the Afghan army personnel numbered only 50,000 while the American funds allocated for the maintenance of the remaining “ghost soldiers” were simply plundered<sup>14</sup>. It is not surprising that in such conditions people were not loyal to high-ranking officials and also were not ready to sacrifice their lives for their superiors. Only special force units were well trained, equipped and motivated to fight the Taliban. However, they were not enough to counter the militants in all directions.

It is worth mentioning the weakness of the system of governance in Afghanistan. The government in Kabul had little control over the situation in the provinces. There

the power belonged to the local elites and its balance was based on the centuries-old tribal relations. When Washington announced its decision to withdraw the American troops completely, local leaders quickly assessed the risks and redefined their positions. They rationally assumed that in the long term, cooperation with the Taliban in exchange for guarantees is a more profitable strategy than fighting the militants without American support.

It is also worth noting that a significant part of the Afghan population supports the Taliban and adheres to its fundamentalist ideas. This is especially noticeable in rural areas, in which even the cosmetic modernization was not implemented. Besides, according to some sections of the population, Taliban is a national force fighting against foreign invaders. These complex set of reasons led to the defeat of the government and the flight of President Ashraf Ghani. The Taliban offensive finally ended with success on August 15, when their units took Kabul.

### **Evacuation from Kabul: Practical and Image Aspects**

The rapid fall of Kabul came as an unpleasant surprise for the West. Of course, Western authorities assumed that the government in Kabul would have a hard time after the withdrawal of the foreign contingents. That is why the United States tried to initiate a peace dialogue between the parties to the conflict. However, the speed with which the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan came as a surprise.

American intelligence made huge mistakes in forecasting the situation in Afghanistan. Apparently, it was initially assumed that the forces of the Afghan National Army would be sufficient to hold back the Taliban even after the withdrawal of the American contingent. At the end of June, when Taliban's offensive was in progress, the forecasts were adjusted. The intelligence analysts expressed fears that the central government of Afghanistan could fall within six months after the withdrawal of the Western military forces.<sup>15</sup> In early August, amid the Taliban seizure of provincial centers, there were fears that Kabul could fall in the next 1-3 months.<sup>16</sup> However, this forecast turned out to be overly optimistic – the capital of Afghanistan came under the control of the Taliban in a few days.

The key problem in these conditions was the threat to the security of foreign citizens and Afghans who collaborated with the coalition forces. Despite the relatively pacifying rhetoric of the Taliban, reports from Afghanistan indicated that these people were in grave danger. Also, many Afghan citizens did not want to stay in a country that is returning to the Emirate and sharia

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laws. Thus, for tens of thousands of people, emigration was the only way out. Organizing their evacuation has become a task for the West.

In fact, the US and its allies have done a tremendous amount of work in this area. Having recovered from the first shock, Washington launched a large-scale evacuation operation. Additional US and British military forces were deployed to Kabul airport to provide security. They joined the foreign units that were already stationed there such as the Turkish contingent, which included Azerbaijani servicemen. American evacuation operation "Allies Refuge" involved about 200 planes, including mobilized aircraft that are part of the Civil Reserve Air Fleet. According to commander of the United States Transportation Command General Stephen R. Lyons, "the idea is to keep those planes moving all the time – either by extending the working hours of the crew or preferably by swapping crews and keeping the iron in motion."<sup>17</sup> Also, Lyons noted that the military "never want to leave Kabul airport on an empty plane or even a partially full plane... We're filling the aircraft to about 400-450 passengers in the floor load configuration... We are pushing the limits to do everything we can to get every single evacuee out of Kabul."<sup>18</sup> This approach brought positive results. As of August 26, the Americans have evacuated more than 100 thousand people from Afghanistan.<sup>19</sup> Amid the overcrowding of the refugee detention center in Qatar after a week of operation, new locations for destination established such as Germany. Planes were also redirected to the UAE and Bahrain.<sup>20</sup> The US partners also contributed to the evacuation process. For example, Germany evacuated more than 5 thousand people (including 3.6 thousand Afghans).<sup>21</sup> Not only NATO members, but also partners of the Alliance participated in the joint efforts. Ukraine evacuated several hundred people including a group of Afghan citizens who worked for the Canadian press and armed forces. The process of their rescue deserves a special mention. Ukrainian Special Forces servicemen went outside the guarded perimeter of the airport, found buses full with people and escorted them to a safe place. They have done the work that representatives of other states could not do before - Americans and Canadians expected that the Afghans would get to the airport gates on their own but that turned out to be impossible.<sup>22</sup>



President Biden stated “we’re going to do everything we can to provide safe evacuation for our Afghan allies, partners and Afghans who might be targeted because of their association with the United States.”<sup>23</sup> However, time remained a big problem in organizing the operation. The Taliban did not interfere with the process and even in some way provided an outer protective perimeter around the airport. However, they stressed that they would tolerate foreign military presence in Afghan territory only until August 31, the deadline for the withdrawal of contingents. The growing security threats to the operation due to the activation of ISIS is also worth noting. Terrorists took advantage of the existing vacuum of security in Afghanistan for their own purposes. The terrorist attacks on August 26 at the entrance to the airport, which took the lives of dozens of Afghans and 13 American servicemen<sup>24</sup>, once again clearly demonstrated the difficult conditions in which the evacuation took place.

At the same time, all the efforts of the United States and its allies could not change the general perception of the events in Afghanistan. Miscalculations in forecasting the pace of the Taliban offensive led to a certain disorganization in the early days of the evacuation, which had significant negative consequences for the image of the West. The whole world saw the video footage from the Kabul airport, in which local residents tried by any means to hang on to the departing American plane. All of this was very reminiscent of the fall of Saigon in 1975 and became a very striking symbol of American mistakes in Afghanistan. Undoubtedly, Washington’s geopolitical opponents are actively using this case to undermine the image of the United States.

### **The Position of China and the Russian Federation on the Situation in Afghanistan**

China and the Russian Federation are actively using the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan for their own purposes. In the information space, they are

**Political modernization of Afghanistan did not succeed, once again proving the indisputable thesis that it is impossible to overcome the laws of history and to radically transform society through artificial efforts from the outside, especially if the implementation of such a policy lacks understanding of local traditions and particularities.**

promoting a narrative about the defeat of the United States. The footage from the Kabul airport in the early days of the evacuation is employed to confirm the thesis of the failure of American policy in the region. The situation in Afghanistan is called evidence of the collapse of American claims to global leadership.

The attempts are also being made to project it onto other regions. The fall of the central government in Kabul is used to put additional pressure on other US allies as an illustration of Washington’s inability to protect them. China’s efforts are directed towards Taiwan;<sup>25</sup> Russia will try to influence Ukraine, convincing Kyiv of the failure of hopes for American aid.

At the same time, Beijing and Moscow are forced to face a new reality in their areas of interest. Central Asia is extremely important for both states. Russia views it as a natural element of the post-Soviet space, in which it seeks to maintain its dominant position. It is linked by allied relations with many states of the region including Tajikistan that traditionally had a very hostile approach to the Taliban.<sup>26</sup> For China, the region is important in the context of its transit potential, which is necessary for the successful implementation of the New Silk Road project. For Beijing, the territory of Afghanistan remains an important element of the route to the Middle East and Africa. According to various sources, China is ready to invest \$ 62 billion in this state.<sup>27</sup>

The departure of the Americans leaves a certain geopolitical vacuum in Central Asia. At the same time, the successes of the Taliban create conditions for the destabilization of the region. Some experts believe that in this case the situation is not in favor of China and Russia.<sup>28</sup> In fact, for many years the West protected them from Islamists practically free of charge. Now they will have to make efforts to ensure the security of the region and protect their interests by themselves. In theory, this will require a distraction of attention and diversion of resources from aggressive policies in other directions. However, such assumptions are not exactly true. In the end, both Moscow and Beijing do not have a moral, value-based barrier against cooperation with the Taliban. They take quite a rational approach on the issue.

The Taliban remain a banned organization in Russia. However, judging from the rhetoric in the Russian press, the Kremlin is ready to interact with the militants. The speeches of the Russian Ambassador to Afghanistan Dmitriy Zhirnov only confirm these assumptions.<sup>29</sup> Russia is now seeking to position itself as the main guarantor of regional stability in Central Asia. According to Ukrainian expert Yuriy Poita, Moscow does not consider the Taliban threat to be critical for its interests.<sup>30</sup>

China also holds talks with the Taliban. High-level contacts with the Taliban took place at the end of July, when Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with a Taliban delegation. Clearly, Beijing is not interested in the democratic transformation of Afghanistan. Rather, it is quite ready to cooperate with the militants if they guarantee stability near Chinese borders and support for Chinese projects in the development of a transport corridor and mining.<sup>31</sup>

The key moment determining the Taliban's relations with China and the Russian Federation is the militants' policy towards neighbor states. Expansionism and attempts to export Islamic fundamentalism are unacceptable for Beijing and Moscow. However, today Taliban denies the existence of such plans. They promise not to threaten neighboring Central Asian states and not to support Uyghur groups in China. From a rational point of view, expansionism is not really beneficial for the Taliban. At least for the near future, it would be more logical for them to concentrate efforts on building an Islamic Emirate within the borders of Afghanistan.

### **Taliban 2.0: What will Life be Like in Afghanistan under the New Regime?**

Working for their image, the Taliban is concerned not only with foreign policy problems. It is trying to pacify the world community by convincing it that they have become more tolerant and moderate. Thus, the Taliban is trying to present itself as a constructive partner for dia-

logue, the only force in Afghanistan that can bring stability to the country, and at the same time, a negotiable actor in the international domain. By doing so, the Taliban seeks international legitimization.

The public rhetoric of the Taliban is aimed at supporting this position. In their statements, representatives of the Taliban not only declare the need to normalize relations with other states. They try to convince the public that Taliban is ready for certain compromises concerning internal policy that will not be built on an excessively tough management regime. So, after the seizure of Kabul, an official spokesman of the Taliban, Zabiullah Mujahid held a press conference. He promised amnesty to citizens who collaborated with foreign military personnel, as well as to Afghan army personnel and civil servants. He urged technical experts not to leave Afghanistan, to stay in the country and to work under the new regime. The Taliban also verbally guaranteed certain rights for work and education of women, as well as freedom of the press – of course only if this will be consistent with Islamic laws and regulations.<sup>32</sup>

Some experts are convinced by this rhetoric. According to Columbia University professor Hamid Dabashi, the Taliban has indeed changed under the influence of circumstances in recent decades. The expert points out that today “its leaders want to be part of regional and global politics. It seems, during the Doha conferences, they realized that their assumption of power in Afghanistan now requires international recognition – they realised that to survive, they must rule, not terrorise.”<sup>33</sup>



In practice, the situation remains uncertain. On the one hand, in public, in the presence of foreign journalists, the Taliban militants try not to show excessive cruelty. They also call on the United States to stop encouraging Afghan experts to leave the country, which is allegedly taking place under the guise of evacuation. So, they are trying to prevent the loss of valuable personnel necessary for governance and social welfare of the state's population.

However, according to the information from Afghanistan, the situation is escalating. Even during the period of the militants' offensive, there were reports about the return of the old violent order. After the fall of Kabul, Afghan women have already faced job restrictions. According to representatives of the Taliban, the ban is temporary, that is, until the proper security system in the state would be established.<sup>34</sup> However, there is every reason to believe that this prohibition may last for a long time and eventually become permanent. Militants also banned public performance of music in Afghanistan as they consider it as contradictory to Islamic principles.<sup>35</sup> There are signals of executions of government soldiers like the former chief of police forces in Badghis province general, Haji Mullah Achakzai.<sup>36</sup>

In many cases situation depends on the position of specific militant leaders. According to reports from provinces controlled by the Taliban, local Taliban commanders' interpretations of the new context may differ. Some of them are ready to negotiations and compromises. Others take a tough approach and are ready to build a governance system on the model, which was already tested in the late 1990s.

In general, no matter what the Taliban promises, one should expect a rollback of even those few positive changes in human rights and freedoms that were initiated with the help of the West in Afghanistan. According to executive director of the Ukrainian Center for Middle Eastern Studies Igor Semyvolos, the Taliban has not really changed. What we see is only a cunning diplomatic move, which may be welcomed by some in the West solely to justify negotiations and agreements with the militants.<sup>37</sup>

Of course, the current situation poses an exceptional threat to Afghanistan, pushing its development efforts back for many years, if not centuries. Active Afghan women such as mayor of the Maidan Shahr Zarifa Ghafari or filmmaker and director Sahraa Karimi suffer the most. They are forced to flee Afghanistan, having no future under the new regime. Commenting on the situation, Ms. Karimi speaks on behalf of many Afghan women: "We are not a generation of burqa, we do not want to hide our faces, no. We do not want to be invisible. We want to be part of society... We just started build-

ing our country... We had cafes, libraries, fashion houses, we had a film festival, a music festival, we had everything, we began to feel like a part of the world. And now it all... just closed."<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, nothing can be done about it at the moment and Afghan citizens who have truly accepted Western values remain the main victims in this situation.

For now, they neither can rely neither on the foreign help nor on the anti-Taliban movement in Afghanistan. Of course, not all Afghans have come to terms with the situation. Since the fall of Kabul, forces who were not ready to accept Taliban rule concentrated in the Panjshir province – a natural fortress famous for its mountainous relief and warlike population. The symbol of the newly created National Resistance Front became the son of the famous field commander, national hero of Afghanistan Ahmad Shah Massoud (the famous "Lion of Panjshir" who was killed by al-Qaeda in 2001) – Ahmad Massoud Jr. The resistance was given legitimacy by the Amrullah Saleh, a former first vice president who proclaimed himself acting head of state after Ashraf Ghani fled the country. Together they promised to fight against Taliban.

But their efforts were not quite successful when Taliban launched an attack on the rebel province at the beginning of September. After some days of heavy fighting its representatives claimed they have full control of the valley. Such statements are somewhat overoptimistic – after all, some Resistance troops retreated to the mountains, from where they can continue fighting. But this guerilla warfare can only be a minor complication for Taliban – it cannot threaten their rule over Afghanistan. And it is obvious that without assistance from abroad National Resistance Front could not achieve victories.

Supporting it logistically is challenging as Panjshir has no access to the borders of Afghanistan, and was cut off from potential supply routes during Taliban offensive in summer. Moreover, foreign actors are not willing to be involved in a new round of conflict in this state. Only India has real geopolitical reasons to help the Resistance in order to restrain regional ambitions of Pakistan. But its capabilities are also limited. So, it seems that the World must adapt to the new balance of power in Central Asia – with Taliban in full control over Afghanistan.

## Conclusion

The withdrawal of American troops opens a new page in the history of Afghanistan. However, it looks suspiciously similar to a return to the situation which was formed twenty years ago. This gives ground to put forward the thesis about the defeat of the United States in the Afghan campaign. However, an assessment of the ob-

jectives of the operation shows that it was successful militarily. It undermined the potential of international terrorism in Afghanistan. At the same time, political modernization of Afghanistan did not succeed, once again proving the indisputable thesis that it is impossible to overcome the laws of history and to radically transform society through artificial efforts from the outside, especially if the implementation of such a policy lacks understanding of local traditions and particularities.

The Taliban victory in the face of the withdrawal of American troops did not come as a surprise – only the speed with which it was achieved was surprising. US efforts to organize evacuation of Afghan citizens deserve positive assessment. However, in terms of image, Washington suffered a clear defeat. Its geopolitical opponents, i.e., Russia and China, which have their own interests in Central Asia, are actively trying to take advantage of this.

In this context, Turkey could play a positive role in the region. Due to the religious factor, Ankara is better suited to solve the Afghan problems than other members of the Euro-Atlantic community. The deepening partner-

ship with Islamabad that has ties with the Taliban also speaks in favor of Turkey. However, despite its interest in the Afghan problem, the status of Turkey's relations with the new regime in Kabul remains controversial and preliminary negotiations with the Taliban (on the practical issue of servicing the Kabul airport) have not yielded results.

The future of Afghanistan is uncertain. Despite the Taliban's claims that the movement has changed, in practice there is every reason to believe that the country will face a total rollback to a violent system of governance based on sharia laws and local traditions. The concept of the rights and freedoms of citizens is becoming ephemeral. The anti-Taliban forces remaining in the country are limited in capacity and support. In these conditions, the most probable vector of Afghanistan's development in the coming years is the return of the Islamic Emirate that will suppress all modernization tendencies. The main losers in this case are Afghan citizens who are forced to live in the Middle Ages and do not have the prospect of a dignified and prosperous future in their home country.

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# CHINA AND AFGHANISTAN IN THE NEW ERA

The US withdrawal from Afghanistan creates a geopolitical vacuum, which will be fraught with vast security consequences for the region around. The ensuing dilemma is multidimensional, which means that each country in the region has specific interests in Afghanistan's future. Here China holds a special role.

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China fears repercussions from US' hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan; rise of extremism may threaten Beijing's hold on Xinjiang and undermine Chinese general security in Central Asia. But US' exit also brings benefits. Chinese peacebuilding agenda would mean intensified cooperation with Iran, Pakistan, and Russia to build an order of exclusion to side-line the collective West.

The US withdrawal from Afghanistan creates a geopolitical vacuum, which will be fraught with vast security consequences for the region around. The ensuing dilemma is multidimensional, which means that each country in the region has specific interests in Afghanistan's future. Here China holds a special role. Its interests in Afghanistan with which it has more than 80 km long border have grown complex in the last decade. For Beijing Afghanistan serves both as a geographic corridor and fertile ground where potential security threats could emerge and threaten China's hold over its restive Xinjiang province and Central Asia – both critical to China's massive Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

China has benefited from American presence in the region for it served as a bulwark against Islamist extremism while allowing Beijing to cement its position in Xinjiang. Second, the presence of US and NATO forces in

Afghanistan allowed Beijing to spread the BRI to Pakistan's southwestern Balochistan province and Central Asia. This might no longer be the case. Finally, the US presence in Afghanistan did not expose China directly to the jihadist threat; jihadist threat to China has often been rhetorical. With the US exit from Afghanistan, this dynamic is likely to change.

No wonder then, if nearly 20 years ago China was lukewarm about the US invasion, now Beijing is worried about the swift American withdrawal; if the exit will not immediately resuscitate the Taliban's self-styled theocratic rule, it will definitely usher in the 'three evil forces' of separatism, religious extremism and terrorism that Beijing has been fighting.<sup>1</sup> It should also be noted that China also fears the US' withdrawal from the Middle East and Afghanistan might pull China into the Afghan conundrum thus serving a major American goal, that is, distracting China from other regions, most notably, the South and East China seas.

From a long-term perspective US's exit signals a shift in Washington's foreign policy away from the Middle East and South Central Asia to the Indo-Pacific region. Essentially America is minding the limits of its military potential. The US sees that outcompeting China in the heart



of Eurasia is a self-defeating geopolitical goal. What the US managed to accomplish so far has been exceptional for a sea power. It penetrated deep into Eurasia, into hostile lands which rarely, if ever, were tamed even by continental powers both in antiquity or middle ages. American expansion into Afghanistan thus represented a historical anomaly. It could not continue for long without expanded cooperation with the neighboring states, which was not the case.

In a way, with its withdrawal, the US is freeing the space for China, Russia and other Eurasian powers to fill in the gap and to spend resources. The US withdrawal deviates these powers' attention from other critical theaters where the US faces stiff resistance. Beijing is worried about American withdrawal for security reasons. A longer term perspective too disturbs the minds in Chinese political leadership. America that is barely able to contain China in the South China Sea, frees a space for Beijing to dedicate its energy and resources to. Afghanistan could be such a distraction. Indeed, it was the US, its allies in the Pacific region and the competition which they offered that drove China to seek alternative trade routes. Thence the Belt and Road Initiative was established. In Chinese minds, the American exit could be a similar ploy to draw Chinese resources and attention from other regions.

The emerging power vacuum in Afghanistan would allow China to become more active in the region. As argued, America's withdrawal can be a clever geopolitical move to entice China since as history shows no sole power was ever able to control the space from China to the Mediterranean for a long period of time. Even the Mongols, who managed to unify this expanse, quickly saw their empire divided into four warring parts and eventually fading away. Why would the Chinese be able to succeed? Beijing has larger resources than any other power in Eurasia. It has better chances to triumph, but it would be facing a myriad of problems from terrorism to nationalism and to competition from other powers. In the end, its fate is likely to follow the path of previous similar unsuccessful attempts to influence and effectively control the depths of Eurasia from one center.

If the withdrawal from Afghanistan is a ploy used by the US, it is very similar to what sea powers do when it comes to preventing continental powers from dominating entire continents. For instance, Great Britain stopped Napoleon's France by essentially cutting the country from the sea and pushing it into the depths of the European continent. How this ended is all well known. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the US managed to stop the Soviet Union by navigating Soviet expansionism to tricky places such as Afghanistan.

## Benefits of Withdrawal

The US withdrawal presents China with certain opportunities, as well. Though cooperation with Afghanistan lagged behind what Beijing envisioned (by the end of 2017 Beijing had only \$400 million of investments), the geopolitical vacuum in the country may provide a necessary momentum to China for expanding its economic presence through the BRI projects. This would allow Beijing to create an overland connection to another element of the BRI, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor which links a strategic port on the Arabian Sea to highways that lead north across the Himalayas<sup>2</sup>.

Afghanistan's economic lure is hard to ignore; its mineral riches are valued by \$1 to \$3 trillion. Furthermore, China may set sight on the unexplored Afghan oil reserves, standing at approximately 1,596 million barrels, and natural gas reserves of nearly 15,687 trillion cubic feet<sup>3</sup>.

Another advantage of America's exit is China's likely use of Afghanistan as a testing ground for the promotion of alternative peacebuilding and security measures to settle the conflict. Western military presence as well as security and peace initiatives will likely be replaced by China's order of exclusion, where non-regional, mostly Western liberal states, will be side-lined from participating in peacebuilding and security provision along China's borders. Chinese version of peacebuilding would also likely involve an agreement with Eurasia's like-minded states such as Iran, Pakistan, Russia, and Central Asian states as junior partners. They are now forming the illiberal movement where the Westphalian concept of primacy and inviolability of the state borders and internal governance model are feverishly upheld. This sentiment was echoed in the initial reaction to the US announcement by China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi who argued that Beijing supports the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan and is ready to help promote future 'stability and development.'

## Putting Boots on the Ground – Unlikely

As the US withdrew, the main question posited by the analysts was whether Beijing would look into transforming its fledgling security presence in the north of Afghanistan into a wider military operation, i.e. peace-keeping mission. Much will depend on the level non-state security threats emanating from Afghanistan, but the most probable security path Beijing would take is to merge efforts with other regional states to contain and, when necessary, wipe out terrorist and extremist cells in Afghanistan. Russia, Pakistan, Iran would gladly agree to work with China as it would increase their geopolitical

importance. Chinese analysts already opined<sup>4</sup> the cooperation between the regional states would provide a more effective security umbrella.

The China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran quartet could forswear efforts of banning the Taliban from governing the country, but these four Eurasian powers would nevertheless work on containing where necessary, remaking and influencing the Taliban's behavior so that it befits the security patterns of China, Russia, Pakistan and Iran. Thus China, Russia, Pakistan, and Iran would likely abstain from putting boots on the ground in Afghanistan. They will nevertheless cooperate to heighten their strategic competition with the US. The quartet could make the Taliban cooperate, but increasingly along the lines of China's and other potential quartet powers' economic and security interests.

The quartet's driving force is the high pace of bilateralism. For instance, China and Iran recently signed a whopping \$400-billion investment agreement. China and Russia have developed a comprehensive partnership which goes beyond purely military and economic cooperation. Pakistan and China enjoy partnership within the framework of the BRI. The four are also cooperating in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Iran as an observer) and indeed what China could push forward is the use of its Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to take a more active security role in Afghanistan. This would serve as a model for similar future activities by SCO which so far has not got an opportunity to prove its own mettle.

Thus, in Beijing's view, the US presence in Afghanistan war has long deviated from its original goal of combatting terrorism and has since turned into a geopolitical project for preventing growth of China's power in the region. True, after US forces leave Afghanistan China faces a dilemma of potential security blowback in Central Asia and Xinjiang. But it also sees long-term benefits as there is a potential to set-up an alternative mechanism for providing a longer-term solution to the Afghan problem. China can be more innovative

**The most probable security path Beijing would take is to merge efforts with other regional states to contain and, when necessary, wipe out terrorist and extremist cells in Afghanistan. Russia, Pakistan, Iran would gladly agree to work with China as it would increase their geopolitical importance.**



and based on its close and near strategic ties with Russia, Pakistan and Iran, could create a quartet – effectively an order of exclusion against the collective West.

### Limits of the US Influence in Central Asia

Following its withdrawal from Afghanistan, the US has allegedly tried to re-establish its military presence in Central Asia similar to what it did in early 2000s. Though some level of cooperation is possible with Russia within the framework of great power relations, much is still depending on Moscow's goodwill. There is, however, another player, that is, China, which is against America's military or security expansion near the restive Xinjiang province.

As argued above, the US' exit from Afghanistan creates a power vacuum. The quartet of China, Russia, Pakistan and Iran are the powers which would benefit the most from the American withdrawal. The least benefits are slated for Central Asia, whose five states and Afghanistan geographically represent one continuous

space. Separation one from another would be geopolitically harmful as security spillover from Afghanistan has a direct impact on the bordering Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan because of their long border.

Surprisingly the US withdrawal could also serve as a basis for potential improvement of bilateral ties with Russia. When Russian and American presidents met in June in Geneva, Switzerland, the media was aflush with various details of the summit. Since both leaders have not touched upon the question of Afghanistan at their separate press-conferences, world attention was drawn to other issues of the bilateral relations. Now it is increasingly clear that Afghanistan was a top issue. The Russian daily, *Kommersant*, reported on July 17<sup>th</sup> that Putin in June offered Biden the use of Russian military bases in Central Asia for information gathering from Afghanistan. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan host a collection of Russia's military bases and other installations with some of them close to the Afghan border. This followed recent high-profile meetings in Washington between US and Central Asian diplomats about letting in the at-risk Afghan citizens. For the moment, it seems, potential cooperation would in-



volve the exchange of information gathered through the use of drones.

There have been reports that the US is allegedly trying to establish military bases in Central Asia. Twenty years ago it was possible because of Russia's agreement back then, as well as Moscow's willingness to build an anti-terrorism momentum. It is unlikely that the US will be allowed in Central Asia this time around. Compared to the period when America established military presence in Central Asia following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, nowadays geopolitical configuration is strikingly different both in the region and more broadly in Eurasia. Conditions are not as conducive as before. And it is not only because Central Asian states themselves are better prepared militarily to withstand the Taliban threat. Russia too strengthened its military presence in the region and will be unwilling to allow external powers especially in the "age of exclusion" Moscow is trying to create.

While Russia's approval for stationing military bases still matters, there is yet another player – China – which will be strongly opposed to any kind of American presence. In early 2000s concern about Taliban support for Xinjiang-based separatist and extremist groups pushed China to view the US efforts as fitting its wider security interests. Since then, however, China-US ties sharply deteriorated and Beijing has started to see the US presence in Afghanistan deviating from initial anti-terrorism operations to a policy more focused on containing China's regional ambitions. The latter will therefore will be a staunch opponent of America's military expansion to Central Asia – critical region for Beijing's westerward push. Moreover, China would not be happy with western presence in Central Asia also because the latter borders on the restive Xinjiang province. China, too, has been expansive militarily and security-wise in Central Asia. It has opened a military base in Tajikistan and over the past several years has increased the number of military

exercises with Central Asia states<sup>5</sup>. An external competitor risks disturbing the regional balance of power China has been carefully building.

The diplomacy around the Afghan conundrum also means that Russia and the US, despite being in tense competition over vast swathes of Eurasian lands, can at times cooperate too. Russia's alleged decision to allow the US military to use Russian facilities in Central Asia fits into the great power model Moscow has been upholding. In this type of relations cooperation and competition co-exist. But if in early 2000s Russia supported America's offensive against terrorism in Afghanistan, Moscow's thinking has evolved since then. Potential American presence is now viewed in negative context. Moreover, increasingly it is also not only about Russia in Central Asia. The US now has to heed Chinese concerns too, which will be extremely difficult to realize. China-US global competition does leave much room for improvement. Beijing would rather work closely with Moscow. Both share similar concerns and both oppose Western military presence. But Russia could be bent on cooperating with the US by showing to China that it is still Moscow which is in charge in the region and can decide on whether to allow or prevent military presence of non-regional powers in Central Asia.

The geopolitical vacuum around Afghanistan is thus a multidimensional issue. No sole power will be able to dominate the war-torn country. History also shows that without the cooperation from Pakistan, Iran and others a heavy military involvement cannot serve as a guarantor for pacification of Afghanistan. A clever Chinese policy would be to base future bilateral relations with Kabul on the Westphalian principles of non-interference into Afghanistan's internal affairs in exchange for the Taliban's pledge to contain potential terrorist cells from metastasizing into a regional threat.

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# 'NEO-TALIBAN' RULE IN AFGHANISTAN: IMPLICATIONS FOR TURKEY IN THE CONTEXT OF EURASIA

Today's Taliban has been described as "very tech and media-savvy," as having acquired the skills to negotiate with major powers and a global perspective after having travelled the world, and having "a sharper awareness of each country's interests and how to – at least rhetorically – pander to them."

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**O**n 15 August 2021, amidst a hasty pullout by the United States from Afghanistan, the Pashtun dominated militant and religious extremist group Taliban (meaning 'students' in Pashto) took control of the capital Kabul. By that point, almost all the country had already been overrun by Taliban. As Kabul fell under Taliban control, primarily Western backed Afghan government of President Ashraf Ghani quickly collapsed. With Taliban claiming complete control over Afghanistan and changing its official designation from a 'Republic' to an 'Emirate,' many countries pulled out their diplomatic representations from the country. This was especially true for Western countries - most notably the US - who had poured at least a trillion dollars into Afghanistan since the ousting of Taliban from power in 2001 to boost the country's development and solidify the Afghan government.<sup>1</sup> Among the countries that did not pull out its diplomatic representation has been Turkey.

Turkey's presence in Afghanistan amidst the Taliban takeover constitutes a curious case. From the perspective of Taliban, Turkey has been a part of the NATO forces that 'occupied' the country since 2001. However, Turkish forces only served in non-combatant support roles in the

NATO-led missions in Afghanistan<sup>2</sup> and did not engage in armed hostilities against Taliban, while Taliban employed terrorism against both the Afghan government and Turkey's NATO allies. Additionally, Turkey has deep historical and cultural ties with Afghanistan and no history of imperialist ambitions against the country. This has prevented Taliban, which adopts an extremist interpretation of Islam, from branding Turkey, a Muslim majority country, as an 'enemy' unlike Turkey's NATO allies. In fact, as can be gathered from statements by Taliban officials, the above-mentioned factors help explain why Turkey has been one of the countries that Taliban has prioritized cultivating cordial ties with.<sup>3</sup>

Whether cordial ties can be established between Turkey and an Afghanistan run by Taliban will depend on Turkey's expectations from Taliban, Taliban's expectations from Turkey and its conduct towards the Afghan people and the world. Before proceeding with this analysis, this study will first answer the question of what the term 'neo-Taliban' that is a part of the title of this article means.

## What Does 'Neo-Taliban' Mean?

The first Taliban rule of Afghanistan between 1996-2001 was marked by an Afghanistan ruled under an extremely strict and distorted interpretation of Islam (from the perspective the global Islamic community), systemic persecution of minorities, severe curtailment of cultural activities, misogynistic policies that included barring women from receiving education, cruel and archaic forms of punishment, and close contacts with international terror groups.

While the world was stunned by the Taliban's rapid takeover of Afghanistan, news outlets and commentators began to argue that today's Taliban was no longer the Taliban of the 1990s. These arguments were bolstered by the Taliban's own statements and actions. Today's Taliban has been described as "very tech and media-savvy," as having acquired the skills to negotiate with major powers and a global perspective after having travelled the world, and having "a sharper awareness of each country's interests and how to — at least rhetorically — pander to them."<sup>4</sup>

Taliban has sought to give the impression that, while still adhering to their extremist interpretation of Islam, this time they will be more pragmatic and inclusive and that they want every Afghan to have a stake in the future of the country. In line with this, they have declared full amnesty for Afghans who worked for the collapsed government and NATO countries who operated in Afghanistan. They have also declared that they would allow women to receive education, take part in the workforce, and engage in public life within "the bounds of Sharia."<sup>5</sup> Taliban also argue they will be more pragmatic in pursuing Afghanistan's foreign policy, including cultivating good relations with the US, and pledge to prevent the country from turning into a haven for terrorist groups that could threaten the region and beyond. Lastly, Taliban officials have stated that they would allow the use of modern devices such as television and mobile phones "because this is the necessity of the people, and we are serious about it."<sup>6</sup>

For all these reasons, news outlets and commentators have begun to refer to today's Taliban as the 'neo-Taliban' or 'Taliban 2.0,' signifying that Taliban of 2021 is a supposedly improved or updated version of Taliban of the 1990s.

There is an undeniable need for Taliban to behave more pragmatically, because Afghanistan needs massive amounts of financial and humanitarian aid to continue its functions as a state and foreign investment for the development of its weak infrastructure. Even before the political and economic turmoil triggered by Taliban's takeover of the country, foreign aid already accounted for

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nearly half of Afghanistan's economy.<sup>7</sup> To pull in the necessary aid and investment, Taliban will need to demonstrate to the international community, most of which is reluctant to engage with the group, that it can run Afghanistan in a responsible manner.<sup>8</sup> To ascertain the veracity of the claims of an improved or updated Taliban, this study will consider some of the developments that have taken place since Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan.

## Has Taliban Truly Changed?

Various developments in Afghanistan point out that the assurances made by Taliban since their takeover of the country is meant to create a facade to calm an alarmed international community and thus do not reflect a genuine change within Taliban. For this reason, it can be stated that, as of this moment, 'neo-Taliban' should be approached with caution.

Several examples can be given for this pessimistic assessment:

90 percent of the 33-member Afghan interim government initially set up by the Taliban on 7 September were Pashtun, despite Pashtuns comprising no more than 50 percent of the total population of Afghanistan.<sup>9</sup> The remaining members included 2 Tajiks and one Uzbek, while Hazaras, who make up 10 percent of the country's population, were not given any positions. All members of the interim government announced on 7 September were male. No positions were given to any of the officials from the previous Afghan government. Many of the members of the interim government also served in the notorious first Taliban government of the 1990s.

The interim government was expanded on 22 September to 53 members.<sup>10</sup> Though still dominated by Pashtuns, the current composition is slightly more inclusive and now includes four Tajiks, two Uzbeks, one Turkmen, one Hazara, and two others from other ethnicities. The new additions to the interim government include people who are not connected to the Taliban, but who are still sympathetic to them. Women and officials from the previous Afghan government continue to be barred from the interim government, though the inclusion of



women remains a possibility according to Taliban's statement. Rather than a response to the calls made from the international community about more inclusivity, the additions to the interim government reportedly reflect Taliban's attempt to distribute governmental positions to satisfy various factions within the group who felt left out by the initial composition of the interim government.<sup>11</sup> The inclusion of women and officials from the previous Afghan government is reportedly being met with resistance from Taliban leadership<sup>12</sup> out of fear that it may trigger backlash amongst Taliban ranks interpreting this as a "betrayal of Taliban's ideals" and bolster anti-Taliban rhetoric of the Afghanistan branch of Daesh/ISIS (known as Daesh-Khorasan Province of Daesh-K). In sum, although Taliban is asking for patience and promising more inclusivity in the future, as of now, the Afghan interim government formed by Taliban is still exclusionary in its composition.

Strict gender segregation has been imposed throughout the education system of Afghanistan. While women have been allowed to pursue higher education, this has been restricted receiving courses from only female academic staff. Women will also be required to wear 'Islamic dresses,' a nebulous concept that Taliban can interpret arbitrarily.<sup>13</sup> Due to universities' resource constraints for operating separate courses for both genders and the low

number of female academic staff, women will face considerable difficulty in pursuing higher education. While the continuation of primary education has been announced for both girls and boys, the continuation of secondary education has only been announced for boys.<sup>14</sup> Taliban has argued that the absence of secondary education for girls is only temporary, and secondary education for girls will be announced once 'the necessary arrangements' are made. Critics argue that these are classic Taliban tactics that indirectly bar women and girls from pursuing proper education.

Women have been strongly encouraged to stay at home until "the security situation" improves, according to Taliban, and have been effectively discouraged from participating in the workforce. Even in high profile positions such as the Kabul city government, women "have been told to stay home, with work only allowed for those who cannot be replaced by men."<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, the Ministry of Women's Affairs has been shut down and replaced with the Ministry of Encouragement, Instruction to Virtue, and Prevention from Vice,<sup>16</sup> the 1990s version of which was known for enforcing Taliban's extremist interpretation of Islam.

Showcasing Taliban's intolerance for dissent, people protesting the Taliban rule have been dispersed using live ammunition and beatings in cities such as Kabul, Herat,

Jalalabad, and Asadabad,<sup>17</sup> reportedly resulting in several casualties.

While Taliban has not outright banned music throughout the country, venues and artists playing any kind of music have been actively discouraged by the violence and intimidation perpetrated by Taliban officers and guards.<sup>18</sup> It is not known whether such violence and intimidation is sanctioned by Taliban command or is the result of the unruliness amongst Taliban ranks. As for a specific example, Department of Virtue and Vice of Helmand Province has prohibited shaving beards and playing music in barbershops and public baths, with no right for complaint if faced with punishment for the violation of the prohibition.<sup>19</sup>

Reminiscent of the cruel and archaic forms of punishment of the Taliban rule of the 1990s, the bodies of four alleged kidnappers of a merchant and his son killed by Taliban security forces were publicly hanged in different locations around the city of Herat.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, Nooruddin Turabi, the Taliban official in charge of Afghanistan's prisons, has stated that amputations as a form of punishment are "necessary for security and deterrence", but added that Taliban is deliberating whether to carry out punishments in public or in private.<sup>21</sup> Responding to international criticisms about such manner of punishments, the official argued that Taliban never commented on other country's laws and forms of punishment, and added; "No one will tell us what our laws should be. We will follow Islam and we will make our laws on the Qur'an."<sup>22</sup>

Although Taliban has repeatedly assured the international community that they will not allow the presence of international terror groups within Afghanistan, several reports have reported that the Taliban has been unable or unwilling to fulfill this promise. CIA, the foreign intelligence service of the US, has stated that members of al Qaeda potentially moving back into Afghanistan.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, Tajik officials have stated that they received reports that extremist groups affiliated with the Taliban are planning to cross into Tajikistan.<sup>24</sup> The statements by Tajik officials should be seen in the wider context of tensions between Tajikistan and the Taliban. Tajikistan, unlike Afghanistan's other neighbors, has outright rejected interacting with Taliban, fearing its extremism could have a spill-over effect into Tajikistan angry at the Pashtun dominated group's historical poor treatment of Tajiks. Tajikistan is reportedly becoming a base for Afghan actors resisting Taliban rule.<sup>25</sup> For this reason, Taliban has accused Tajikistan of interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs.<sup>26</sup>

These developments, putting considerable doubt on the 'neo-Taliban' discourse, can alternatively be viewed as

Taliban's difficult transition from being a reactionary Afghan group solely focused on waging a jihad to rid Afghanistan of 'foreign/imperialist occupation' into a government responsible for running a highly diverse and unruly country of 35 million people. In the words of one commentator, this process can be summarized as "an uncertain transition from militancy to government."<sup>27</sup>

The negative developments listed above could be interpreted as Taliban's current inability to properly adjust to the realities of modern domestic and international politics. A brief examination of Afghanistan's history gives clues as to why Taliban is suffering from such an inability. Throughout Afghanistan's history, Islam has been a unifying force for the Afghan people and rallying cry for those seeking to combat foreign forces seeking to dominate Afghanistan.<sup>28</sup> Taliban rose to prominence in the 1990s amidst the lawlessness and chaos of an Afghanistan embroiled in a civil war. Rallying destitute and disillusioned people under its archaic understanding of Islam, it brought an unpleasant but functional security and order to wherever it controlled and thus won popular support.<sup>29</sup> It may take time for Taliban let go of this past steeped in war and extremism and embrace an outlook that will carry Afghanistan into the future.

Perhaps to deflect international attention away from its shortcomings, Taliban has directed blame at both the United States (and its NATO allies) and the previous Afghan government of Ashraf Ghani. Concerning the United States, Taliban has stated that 20 years of wars has greatly harmed the country:<sup>30</sup>

[...] All our infrastructure such as in agriculture, economy, and industry has fallen into ruin. The reconstruction of [such] sectors [...] is a moral obligation of Western countries. The West should collaborate with [the Afghan state headed by Taliban] to ensure recovery in healthcare, education, and other areas. Their freezing of Afghanistan's monetary assets instead of supporting developments in these areas is damaging the Afghan people.

[...] Thousands of women have been widowed and hundreds of thousands of children have been orphaned. One of the worst consequences of the US occupation of Afghanistan has been the turning of 6 million Afghans into drug addicts. About 1 million of these are women and children. [...]

As for the government of Ashraf Ghani, Taliban and its supporters have often depicted it as a corrupt and incompetent Western puppet regime that was more interested in serving its own interests rather than of the Afghan people. Ghani's abrupt departure from Kabul as Taliban

entered Kabul on 15 August and the rapid collapse of the government has been widely used to justify Taliban's rhetoric against the previous government. In response to allegations of a "cowardly" departure from Kabul and that he stole state money during his departure, Ghani issued a statement<sup>31</sup> that contains the following parts:

[...] I left at the urging of the palace security who advised me that to remain risked setting off the same horrific street-to-street fighting [Kabul] had suffered during the Civil War of the 1990s. Leaving Kabul was the most difficult decision of my life, but I believed it was the only way to keep the guns silent and save Kabul and her 6 million citizens.

[The charges of stolen money] are completely and categorically false. Corruption is a plague that has crippled our country for decades and fighting corruption has been a central focus of my efforts as president. I inherited a monster that could not easily or quickly be defeated.

Considering that Afghanistan suffered tremendous damage during the civil war of the 1990s, Ghani's statement makes a valid argument for preserving the Afghanistan's infrastructure so that it can be utilized for building a better future no matter who is in charge of the country.

### What Are 'Neo-Taliban's' Expectations from Turkey?

Taliban's expectations from Turkey are similar to its expectations from the international community, but with a special emphasis on Turkey's status as a 'brotherly' country. These expectations include:

- The recognition of the government set up by Taliban as the legitimate ruler of Afghanistan.

**These developments, putting considerable doubt on the 'neo-Taliban' discourse, can alternatively be viewed as Taliban's difficult transition from being a reactionary Afghan group solely focused on waging a jihad to rid Afghanistan of 'foreign/imperialist occupation' into a government responsible for running a highly diverse and unruly country of 35 million people.**

- Respectful bilateral relations and non-interference in the domestic affairs of Afghanistan, which includes abstaining from criticisms against Taliban for the way it approaches social issues (such as women's rights) and maintenance of law and order (such as forms of punishment).
- Humanitarian aid to alleviate the social and economic turmoil caused by the hasty departure of the US and the subsequent collapse of the previous Afghan government.
- Infrastructure investment to develop Afghanistan's impoverished economy and ensure the country becomes a part of regional connectivity projects.

The following statement<sup>32</sup> by Zabihullah Mujahid, Taliban spokesperson and Acting Deputy Minister of Information and Culture, touches upon important points on how the Taliban views Turkey:

Turkey is a friendly and brotherly country, [...] We are striving to preserve our relations with Turkey in their best form, [...]. We would like to utilize Turkey's experience in statecraft and governmental management, as well its experience in Islamic and other trade and investment areas. Turkey should strive to maintain good relations with us as well, and our intentions towards each other should be clear and sincere.

In a more recent statement,<sup>33</sup> another Taliban official, Second Acting Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Salam Hanafi, again touched upon the theme of "brotherly nations" by expressing gratitude for Turkish state and people's support to the Afghan people during the Soviet Union's occupation of Afghanistan (1979-1989) and added:

Our expectation from the Turkish people is that institutions and people who engage in humanitarian aid and charity work should help the Afghan people in various issues. We expect them to help the people of Afghanistan in education, health, and all areas where people are needed. Our expectation from Turkey is for it to be the first country to recognize the new state in Afghanistan. We would like Turkey to help us in the economy and other areas, let us engage in cooperation and consultation, [...]

### What Are Turkey's Expectations from Afghanistan under 'Neo-Taliban'?

As pointed by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkey's traditional foreign policy towards Afghanistan has been based on the following objectives:<sup>34</sup>



- Maintenance of unity and integrity of Afghanistan,
- Providing security and stability in the country,
- Strengthening of broad-based political structure in which popular participation is a priority,
- Restoration of peace and prosperity by eliminating terrorism and extremism,
- Making comprehensive contributions to Afghanistan both on bilateral level and through the efforts of the UN and NATO,
- Contributing to enhancing Afghanistan's relations with its neighbor.

Based on what Turkish officials have so far stated, Turkey's policy towards Afghanistan despite the Taliban takeover remains mostly the same. However, ensuring the stability of Afghanistan and eliminating terrorism and extremism is receiving special attention.

The primary motivation behind Turkey's emphasis on stability in Afghanistan is Turkey's status as the world's largest host of refugees and asylum seekers who number around 4-5 million.<sup>35</sup> Many of these are from Syria due the civil war that erupted there in 2011. The influx of Syrians to Turkey, hoping to either stay there or pass through to European Union countries, has put enormous strain on Turkey's economy and has caused considerable

tensions between the Syrians and the locals of places where the Syrians have settled. Besides the Syrians, according to official statements, there are already around 300,000 Afghans refugees in Turkey, with many more who are seeking ways to come to Turkey after fleeing Afghanistan out of fear of Taliban's ways or seeking for a better life in Turkey and beyond due to having no hope that Taliban will ensure the development of Afghanistan. Due to difficulties faced by the Turkish economy and the social tension caused by a huge refugee population, Turkish officials at the highest level have made it clear that Turkey can no longer accept any more refugee influx. In response to EU plans to convince Turkey to host even more refugees, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has argued that the EU "cannot stay out of (the refugee) problem by harshly sealing its borders to protect the safety and well-being of its citizens," and reminded the EU that "Turkey has no duty, responsibility or obligation to be Europe's refugee warehouse."<sup>36</sup>

It is for this reason that Turkey, beyond its historically benign approach to Afghanistan, needs Afghanistan under Taliban rule to be as stable and prosperous as possible to prevent Syrian Civil War-like refugee influx overburdening Turkey. This is one of the reasons why Turkey has strived to ensure contacts with Taliban while the other Western countries quickly pulled out of the country after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan.

The other pressing issue, eliminating terrorism and extremism, is highly relevant because of Turkey's historic



struggle against the terrorism of the likes of PKK, Justice Commandos and ASALA, and the rise of DAESH in Syria and Iraq and PKK's US-backed branches in Syria. As stated earlier, reports are already being made of Al Qaeda moving back to Afghanistan. It should be reminded that it was Al Qaeda's terrorist attacks against the US that started a chain reaction leading to the invasion of Afghanistan and then Iraq, causing tremendous instability in Afghanistan and the Middle East.

The rise of Daesh, the world's most notorious and violent terrorist organization, has had considerable influence in world politics in recent times such as chronic instability and war in Iraq and Syria and the rise of the Far Right and Islamophobia in Western countries, all of which have impacted Turkey. The rise of Daesh-K spells trouble not only for Afghanistan under Taliban rule, but also for the Central Asian countries with whom Turkey has close cultural ties and who function as Turkey's economic connection to East and South-East Asia. It is for such reasons that Turkey expects Taliban to stamp out the extremism and terrorism of groups such as Daesh-K in Afghanistan and prevent their potentially de-stabilizing spillover effects in Central Asia.

Turkey has not responded positively to Taliban's request for official recognition but maintains its embassy in Kabul and continues to engage in dialogue with Taliban at the ambassadorial level.<sup>37</sup> Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu has stated that current discussions focus on delivering humanitarian aid to Afghanistan and that the Turkish Red Crescent is already operating in the country:

We are talking about the humanitarian aid, such as food, medicine and other necessities before winter comes. [...] There is no official request [from Taliban about humanitarian aid]; it is verbal. It's something the whole world already knows. We are currently advising everyone in this direction. In other words, the country should not collapse; its economy should not collapse.<sup>38</sup>

In line with Minister Çavuşoğlu's statements, Turkey's Ambassador to Kabul, Cihad Erginay, met with both Afghanistan's Second Acting Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Salam Hanafi and Acting Minister of Commerce and Industry Nooruddin Azizi, affirming commitments to further bolster bilateral relations and discussing ways to boost bilateral trade volume and increasing industrial output.<sup>39</sup>

However, during a recent interview,<sup>40</sup> Turkish President Erdoğan clearly expressed dissatisfaction at the current trajectory of Afghanistan, indicating that the improvement of ties between Turkey and Afghanistan under the rule of Taliban is dependent on the group ful-

filling its pledges to the Afghan people and the international community. President Erdoğan also highlighted that, unlike what was previously reported by several news outlets, Turkey is only present in Afghanistan through its diplomatic mission in Kabul and currently has no personnel (civilian or military) at the Kabul airport. Other important points of President Erdoğan's assessments are as follows:

- Turkey and Taliban currently have no agreement or consensus on any issue,
- Turkey has historic relations with Afghanistan and has shown "unprecedented" support to the country,
- Turkey has been involved in "major investments" in Afghanistan's economy and will continue to do so in the future,
- Whether Turkey will help operate Kabul airport will depend on "possible agreements and caution, because here, [Turkey and Taliban] can reach a reciprocal understanding",
- The current composition of the interim government in Afghanistan is not inclusive, nor does it embrace the different factions in the country. So long as this is the case, Turkey will not "be present in Afghanistan",
- Turkey expects "all women to be involved in every aspect of life in Afghanistan in a very active way". If there is need, Turkey will provide support to Afghan women in terms of healthcare, security, and education.

### **The Implications of the Taliban Takeover of Afghanistan in the Context of Eurasia**

Just like Turkey, Afghanistan occupies a highly strategic location within the heart of Eurasia, which is a giant landmass stretching from the European Union to China with Turkey in the middle.<sup>41</sup> Although a landlocked country, it has borders and thus access to multiple countries: China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Because of this, Afghanistan sits in the middle of many of the regional connectivity projects taking shape in Eurasia. China's Belt and Road Initiative is at the forefront in this regard, and, for example, entails billions of dollars in trade revenue for China, Afghanistan, and the countries of the region with projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.<sup>42</sup>

Besides its potential for serving as a key component for regional connectivity projects, Afghanistan sits on top

of natural resources that may be worth 1 to 3 trillion dollars.<sup>43</sup> The country possesses huge mineral deposits of iron, copper, cobalt, gold and more. More importantly, its deposits of lithium are estimated to be among the world's largest, leading the US Department of Defense to label Afghanistan as the "Saudi Arabia of Lithium."<sup>44</sup> Lithium's value will continue to rise as it is a key component of the batteries of modern electronic equipment. More importantly, it is a key component of the battery of electric vehicles. With China, the US, and EU countries rapidly transitioning from fossil fuel-powered vehicles to battery-powered vehicles due to the latter's superior performance and lower environmental impact, Afghanistan stands to gain enormous amount of revenue from the production of batteries needed for these vehicles. Up until now, the chronic instability caused by the fighting between the previous Afghan government and Taliban meant that companies faced considerable difficulties and risks in extracting and transporting valuable minerals from Afghanistan. With Taliban having basically won the war for the control of Afghanistan, the difficulties and risks associated with mineral extraction can now be remedied. If true stability is attained in Afghanistan, mineral extraction can even lead to its processing and utilization for the domestic industry in the country.

The future of the viability of connectivity projects involving Afghanistan and the utilization of the wealth of its natural resources will largely depend on Taliban's ability to form cohesion and stability in Afghanistan through an inclusive government, enforce law and order in the country, stamp out international terrorist organizations such as Daesh-K, and attract foreign investment for the construction of the infrastructure necessary to extract, transport or perhaps process the mineral deposits of Afghanistan.

In terms of foreign investment, around 76 Turkish companies were already in operation in Afghanistan before Taliban's takeover.<sup>45</sup> Considering that most of these companies are in the construction sector and the globally recognized competitive nature of Turkish construction companies, Turkey is set to play a key role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan if the necessary domestic conditions are met in the country.

A recent statement<sup>46</sup> issued by the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States/Turkic Council<sup>47</sup> (of which Turkey is a member) on the situation in Afghanistan is important in terms of how regional countries approach Afghanistan's future. The key points of the statement are as follows:

- Respect for the "sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity" of Afghanistan (a point frequently brought up by Taliban),

**Besides its potential for serving as a key component for regional connectivity projects, Afghanistan sits on top natural resources that may be worth 1 to 3 trillion dollars. The country possesses huge mineral deposits of iron, copper, cobalt, gold and more. More importantly, its deposits of lithium are estimated to be among the world's largest, leading the US Department of Defense to label Afghanistan as the "Saudi Arabia of Lithium."**

- Emphasis on the right of all Afghan people to live in "safety, security and with dignity",
- Emphasis on ensuring "the safety and security of diplomatic missions, staff and their families",
- Calls for an "inclusive and participatory governance" in Afghanistan,
- Calls for "preventing and combating terrorism in Afghanistan to ensure that its territory will not be used to threaten or attack any country by any terrorist organization",
- Concern about the "current dire state of the Afghan economy and particularly the risk posed to Afghan people's livelihoods due to the sharp decrease in economic activity",
- Calls for sustained efforts for and unhindered access to "humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan through effective, transparent and accountable mechanisms,"
- Commitment to contributing "to all efforts to assist the Afghan people in their endeavor to achieve lasting peace, national reconciliation, stability and development,"
- Commitment to maintaining consultation and coordination amongst Turkic Council "regarding the various aspects and repercussions of developments in Afghanistan".

Considering that Turkey adopted a fresh Eurasian perspective with its Asia Anew policy in 2019<sup>48</sup> and the points outlined above, it would be appropriate to state that Turkey will view Afghanistan not only from the lens

of its bilateral relations with the country but also from the lens of Afghanistan's place within Eurasia.

## Conclusion

Although the international community was concerned about Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan with the departure of the military forces of the United States and its allies, the speed with which it happened was shocking to many. This has forced the international community to rapidly react to the events unfolding in Afghanistan, including shutting down their diplomatic representations.

Amidst this rush, Turkey has been one of the few countries to adopt a "wait and see" approach and has thus maintained its diplomatic representation in the country. However, this has not yet resulted in Turkey issuing formal recognition to Taliban as the government of Afghanistan. Instead, Turkey has actively engaged with Taliban at the ambassadorial level to search for ways help

stabilize Afghanistan and help its struggling people. This approach is based not only on Turkey's historic friendly relations with Afghanistan, but also on Turkey's regional economic and security concerns.

Meanwhile, Taliban is keen to gain international recognition to solidify its control and legitimacy in Afghanistan. With Afghanistan already receiving humanitarian aid from Turkey, Taliban wants this relationship to develop into formal ties between Turkey and Afghanistan under Taliban. This will depend on Taliban delivering on its promises of inclusive governance that reflect Afghanistan's multi-ethnic composition, ensuring a dignified life for the Afghan people, respect for women's rights, and effective fight against extremism and terrorism.

Turkey will be closely monitoring the difficult days ahead for the Afghan people as Taliban attempts to "transition from militancy to government".

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# KIRIM PLATFORMU: RUSYA'NIN KIRIM'I İŞGAL VE YASADIŞI İLHAKINA KARŞI UKRAYNA'NIN YENİ ADIMI

Ukrayna'nın liderlik ettiği ve ev sahipliği yaptığı bu zirve, geniş katılım ve yüksek protokol açısından değerlendirildiğinde, Ukrayna tarihinin en önemli diplomatik olaylarından biridir.

## Fethi Kurtiy Şahin

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Ukrayna Devleti'nin Mayıs 2020'de duyurduğu ve uluslararası arenadaki tüm muhataplarını destek vermeye davet ettiği Kırım Platformu'nun açılış zirvesi, 23 Ağustos 2021 tarihinde gerçekleştirilmiştir. 44'ten<sup>1</sup> fazla devlet ve uluslararası kuruluşun katılarak destek verdiği bu platform, Kırım'ın işgaline karşı Ukrayna'nın verdiği mücadeleyi bölgesel ve küresel güvenlik bağlamına yeni bir bakış açısıyla oturtmak amacı gütmektedir. Ukrayna'nın liderlik ettiği ve ev sahipliği yaptığı bu zirve, geniş katılım ve yüksek protokol açısından değerlendirildiğinde, Ukrayna tarihinin en önemli diplomatik olaylarından biridir.

Ukraynalı makamlar, 23 Ağustos 2021 tarihinde gerçekleştirilen zirve ile açılış yapılan Kırım Platformu'nun, geniş Karadeniz bölgesindeki aktif uluslararası teşkilatları destekleyecek bir iş birliği ve yardımlaşma sistemi oluşturmayı amaçladığını ifade etmektedir. Toplantı sırasında ve sonrasında verilen resmî mesajlara bakıldığında, bu şekilde oluşturulacak iş birliği sisteminden güç alarak Kırım'daki Rus işgalinin sonlandırılması, Ukrayna'nın toprak bütünlüğünün yeniden sağlanması, Kırım'ın yerli halkı (İng. *indigenous people*) Kırım Tatarlarının haklarının korunması ve güvence altına alınmasının platformun temel amaçları olarak belirlendiği anlaşılmaktadır.

Kırım'ın statüsü ve Kırım Tatarlarının hakları üzerine uluslararası bir toplantı organize edilmesi fikri yeni değildir. Kırım Tatar Millî Meclisi'nin (KTMM) ortaya attığı 'uluslararası forum' fikri, 2014 öncesinde tartışılmıştır. Ukrayna devlet makamları o dönemde bu fikre sıcak bakmamıştır. Ukrayna'nın ayak diremesine rağmen, KTMM bu forum fikrine uluslararası bir destek sağlamak adına

çalışmalar yürütmüştür. Kırım'ın işgali ve sonrasında bölgede gelişen şartlar sebebiyle bu fikir geri planda kalmıştır. 23 Ağustos tarihinde açılış zirvesi yapılan Kırım Platformu bu 'uluslararası forum' fikrinin doğrudan devamı değildir. Ancak, Kırım'daki sorunların çözümü için uluslararası bir toplantı organize etmek fikrinin temellerinin KTMM'nin teklifiyle atıldığı söylenebilir.

Bu makale erişime açık çevrimiçi kaynaklara ve özel olarak yapılan dört yarı-yapılandırılmış mülakattan<sup>2</sup> elde edilen verilere dayanılarak hazırlanmıştır. Metnin ilerleyen kısımlarında mülakat verileri kullanılarak KTMM'nin uluslararası toplantı teklifi, Kırım Platformu fikrinin gelişimi ve Kırım Platformu Açılış Zirvesi değerlendirilmiştir. Kırım Platformu'nun ilan edilen amaçları ve sonuçları tartışılmıştır. Zirve toplantısında verilen mesajlar ve kullanılan semboller de ayrıca analiz edilmiştir. Son olarak, zirve toplantısının sonuç beyannamesinde öne çıkan noktalar değerlendirilmiş ve okuyucunun dikkatine sunulmuştur.

## Kırım İçin Uluslararası Bir Toplantı Fikrinin Öncesi ve Platform Fikrinin Gelişmesi

Kırım Tatar halkının haklarının uluslararası bir mekanizma ile garanti altına alınması ve Kırım'daki muhtemel ayrılıkçılık hareketlerinin önüne geçilmesi fikrini ilk ortaya atan taraf Kırım Tatar Millî Meclisi'dir (KTMM). KTMM, Kırım Tatar halkının öz yönetim organı olan ve demokratik usullerle seçilen Kırım Tatar Millî Kurultayı'nın (Kurultay) icra organıdır. Kurultay kendini, Kı-



rım'da ve tüm dünyada yaşayan Kırım Tatarları ve Kırım Tatar sivil toplum kuruluşlarını temsil eden en yüksek meşru karar alma organı olarak nitelemektedir. Kırım Tatar halkının örgütlü kesimleri de çoğunlukla Kurultay'ı bu şekilde kabul etmektedir. Kırım Tatar Millî Hareketi'nin Sovyetler Birliği içinde sürdürdüğü insan haklarına saygı mücadelesi sayesinde 1991 sonrasında hem KTMM hem de Kurultay'ın uluslararası tanınırlık ve kabul gördüğü iddia edilebilir. KTMM'nin 1991 sonrasında, Kırım'da ve Ukrayna siyasetinde aktif bir siyasi aktör haline geldiği de belirtilmelidir.

2008 Ağustos ayında yaşanan Rus-Gürcü Savaşı, Soğuk Savaş sonrasında Geniş Karadeniz bölgesini en çok etkileyen uluslararası krizlerden biridir. Bu savaş sonrasında Rusya'nın Abhazya ve Kuzey Osetya'yı zor kullanarak Gürcistan'dan fiilen koparması, yanı başındaki Ukrayna'da ve Ukrayna'ya bağlı Kırım Özerk Cumhuriyeti'nde büyük yankı uyandırmıştır. Böylece KTMM, çoğunluğu etnik Rus olan Kırım'da da benzer bir senaryonun gerçekleşmemesi ve her durumda Kırım Tatar halkının haklarının korunmasını temin etmek için bazı çözüm önerileri üzerinde çalışmaya başlamıştır. KTMM Başkanı Refat Çubar bu çalışmaları şu şekilde açıklamıştır:

2008 Ağustos'ta Rus-Gürcü Savaşı başlamıştı. Bu şartlarda, Kırım'a karşı bir harekât yapılırsa kendimizi nasıl koruruz sorusu ortaya çıktı...Ukrayna devletine yardım ve Kırım Tatarlarının geleceğini garanti altına almak gibi fikirleri öne çıkardık. Kurultay da [bu yönde çalışmaları] görüşüp karara bağlamıştı.<sup>3</sup>

Bu kapsamda, Kurultay'ın kararına istinaden KTMM yüksek seviyeli uluslararası bir toplantı organize etmek için çalışmalara başlamıştır. Yapılacak çalışmalarda Rusya'yı veya başka bir devleti doğrudan hedef göstererek Ukrayna'nın uluslararası alanda zor durumda bırakılmaması için temel argümanlar Ukrayna'ya yardım ve Kırım Tatar halkının geleceğinin garanti altına alınması çerçevesinde şekillendirilmiştir. KTMM Başkanı, Başkan Yardımcıları ve temsilcileri çok yönlü çalışmalar başlatmışlardır. Pek çok hükümetle, uluslararası örgüt yöneticileri ve uzmanlarla görüşmeler organize edilmiştir. Bu görüşmeler kapsamında Kırım Tatar halkının sorunları anlatılmış ve Kırım'daki meselelerin çözülebilmesi için uluslararası desteğin önemi vurgulanmıştır. Uluslararası desteğin, organize edilecek uluslararası bir forum tarafından ortaya konmasının önemi ifade edilmiş ve Kırım Tatar halkının ihtiyaçlarının çözümü için somut adımların bu uluslararası forumun desteği ile atılması gerektiği fikirleri anlatılmıştır.<sup>4</sup> KTMM, 2013 senesine kadar yapılan çalışmalarda önemli ilerleme kaydetmiştir. Bu sayede, pek çok devletin ve uluslararası kuruluşun bu yönde çalışmalara destek vermeye hazır olduğu KTMM yöneti-

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**Ukrayna Devleti açısından bakıldığında da Kırım'ın yerli halkı Kırım Tatarlarının Ukrayna yanlısı tutumu, Rusya'nın sözde bir referandum ile fiilen kendisine bağladığı Kırım'ı tekrar kazanmak için yürütülen mücadelede stratejik bir avantaj sağlamaktadır. Böylelikle Ukrayna Devleti'nin de Kırım Tatarları ile ilişkisi değişme eğilimi göstermiş, onları sahiplenilen bir tutum benimsemeye başlamıştır.**

cileri tarafından ilan edilmiştir. Ancak, Rusya yanlısı Viktor Yanukoviç'in iktidarı sırasında bu forumun gerçekleştirilmesi mümkün olmamış ve Ukrayna tarafından devlet desteği sağlanmamıştır. Kırım Tatar halkının lideri Mustafa Cemilev,<sup>5</sup> Ukrayna'nın özellikle KTMM'yi tanımak istememesi sebebiyle işlerin sürekli yokuşa sürüldüğünü farklı toplantılarda pek çok defa dile getirmiştir.<sup>6</sup> Refat Çubar bu süreci şu şekilde ifade etmektedir:

2013 senesinde geldiğimizde pek çok muhababımız fikirlerimizi destekliyordu. [Aynı yılın] Eylül ayında Avrupa Konseyi ve AGİT liderleri bu fikre razı olmuşlardı. ABD, Türkiye, pek çok AB üyesi Ukrayna'nın kabul etmesi durumunda [teklif ettiğimiz] foruma katılacaklarını bize ifade etmişlerdi. ... 2013 senesinde AB komiseri Kırım'a bir ziyaret gerçekleştirmişti. Dönemin Kırım Özerk Cumhuriyeti Başbakanı Mogilev, Mustafa Cemilev, ben [Refat Çubar] ve dönemin Ukrayna Dışişleri Bakanı'nın [Leonid Kojava] katıldığı özel bir toplantı gerçekleştirildi. Dışişleri Bakanı Ukrayna'ya maddi destek için yapılacak bir forumu destekleyeceklerini ama Kırım'ın statüsü ve Kırım Tatarlarının haklarının korunmasının Ukrayna'nın iç meselesi olduğu için buna karşı olduklarını belirtti. Bizim tekliflerimize tamamen karşı çıkmıştı.<sup>7</sup>

Ukrayna'nın karşı tutumu sebebiyle forum organize edilememiştir. Teklif edilen bu forumun gerçekleşmesi durumunda Kırım'ın işgalinin mümkün olamayacağını savunan Çubarov, "... günümüzde organize edilen bu platforma gerek kalmayabilirdi" diyerek önemli bir fırsatın kaçırıldığının altını çizmiştir.<sup>8</sup>

Kırım'ın işgali ve Ukrayna'nın doğusunda başlayan ayrılıkçı hareketler Ukrayna toplumunu derinden etkilemiştir. 2014 öncesinde muhtemel ayrılıkçı bir 'azınlık' olarak değerlendirilen Kırım Tatarlarının ekseriyetinin Kırım'daki ve diasporalarındaki kurumlarıyla Ukrayna'nın toprak bütünlüğünü desteklemeleri ve Kırım'ın işgaline karşı direnmeleri Ukrayna'da büyük yankı uyandırmıştır.

Ukrayna toplumunda var olan, Kırım Tatarlarını 'hain' ve 'faşist' olarak gösteren Sovyetik ve neo-Stalinist yaftalar kırılmaya başlanmıştır. Ukrayna Devleti açısından bakıldığında da Kırım'ın yerli halkı Kırım Tatarlarının Ukrayna yanlısı tutumu, Rusya'nın sözde bir referandum ile fiilen kendisine bağladığı Kırım'ı tekrar kazanmak için yürütülen mücadelede stratejik bir avantaj sağlamaktadır. Böylelikle Ukrayna Devleti'nin de Kırım Tatarları ile ilişkisi değişme eğilimi göstermiş, onları sahiplenilen bir tutum benimsemeye başlamıştır. Bu şartlar altında Kırım Tatarlarının haklarının korunması, Kırım Özerk Cumhuriyeti'nin statüsünün Kırım Tatarlarının yerli halk statüsü ile ilişkilendirilmesi ve Kırım Tatar halkının rehabilite edilmesi (saygınlıklarının geri verilmesi ve tanınması) gibi konular Ukrayna'da ön plana çıkmaya başlamıştır. Oluşmaya başlayan bu olumlu koşullar altında KTMM, Kırım'ın 'kurtarılması' çalışmalarını desteklemek için bir uluslararası toplantı organize edilmesi fikrini tekrar istişare etmeye başlamıştır. Cumhurbaşkanı Petro Poroşenko döneminde de böyle bir toplantının gerekliliği yüksek sesle olmasa bile konuşulmaya başlanmıştır.<sup>9</sup>

Volodimir Zelenski'nin Ukrayna Cumhurbaşkanı olarak seçilmesinden sonra da bu tartışmalar devam etmiştir. Zelenski'nin Kırım'ın kurtarılması amacıyla uluslararası bir platform kurulması fikrini desteklemesi ve hatta sahiplenmesi ile bu yönde çalışmalar gelişmeye başlamıştır. Ukrayna Dışişleri Bakanı Birinci Yardımcısı, Kırım Tatarı, Emine Ceppar'ın da bu konuyla özel olarak ilgilenmesi sonucunda çalışmalar ilerlemiştir. Ukrayna Geçici Olarak İşgal Altında Bulunan Bölgeler Bakanlığı'nın Mayıs 2020'de yaptığı açıklama ile bir platform organize edileceği ilk defa ilan edilmiştir.<sup>10</sup> 23 Eylül 2020 tarihinde Cumhurbaşkanı Zelenski, Birleşmiş Milletler (BM) Genel Kurulu'nda yaptığı konuşmada, Kırım'ın işgalini sonlandırmak için bir platform organize edileceğini ve tüm ülkeleri buna davet ettiklerini en yüksek ağızdan ifade etmiştir.<sup>11</sup> 17 Kasım 2020 tarihinde de Emine Ceppar, Avrupa Birliği ülkeleri büyükelçilerine yaptığı sunumda 'Kırım Platformu Girişimi'ni anlatmış ve AB ile ortak çalışma yollarını tartışmıştır.<sup>12</sup> Cumhurbaşkanı Zelenski'nin Türkiye ziyareti sırasında, 10 Nisan 2021 tarihinde, Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan ile beraber yaptığı basın açıklamasında Kırım Platformu da gündeme gelmiştir. Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan Türkiye'nin bu girişimi desteklediğini dile getirmiştir.<sup>13</sup> Platform fikrinin nasıl oluştuğunu Dr. Yevgeniya Gaber şu şekilde özetlemiştir:

Kırım Platformu işgale karşı verilen bir yanıt olarak gelişti. Daha önce farklı formatlar da söz konusuydü. Bu platformu ise Rusya'ya bir yanıt olarak düşünmek lazım. ... 1 yıl içinde, bir fikirden yola çıkarak geliştirildi. Cumhurbaşkanı Zelenski'nin teklifi ve [Ukrayna] Dışişleri Bakanlığı'nın yönetiminde yapıldı.<sup>14</sup>

Tablo 1: Kırım Platformu Katılımcıları<sup>15</sup>

Kırım Platformu Katılımcıları		
	Devlet	Delegasyon Başkanı
1	Ukrayna	Cumhurbaşkanı / Devlet Başkanı
2	Letonya	Cumhurbaşkanı / Devlet Başkanı
3	Litvanya	Cumhurbaşkanı / Devlet Başkanı
4	Estonya	Cumhurbaşkanı / Devlet Başkanı
5	Polonya	Cumhurbaşkanı / Devlet Başkanı
6	Macaristan	Cumhurbaşkanı / Devlet Başkanı
7	Moldova	Cumhurbaşkanı / Devlet Başkanı
8	Slovenya	Cumhurbaşkanı / Devlet Başkanı
9	Finlandiya	Cumhurbaşkanı / Devlet Başkanı
10	Slovakya	Başbakan
11	Romanya	Başbakan
12	Gürcistan	Başbakan
13	Hırvatistan	Başbakan
14	İsveç	Başbakan
15	İsviçre	Parlamento Başkanı
16	Çekya	Parlamento Başkanı
17	Türkiye	Dışişleri Bakanı
18	Avusturya	Dışişleri Bakanı
19	Lüksemburg	Dışişleri Bakanı
20	İrlanda	Dışişleri Bakanı
21	Bulgaristan	Dışişleri Bakanı
22	Karadağ	Dışişleri Bakanı
23	Kuzey Makedonya	Dışişleri Bakanı
24	Birleşik Krallık	Avrupa ve Amerika'dan Sorumlu Devlet Bakanı
25	Portekiz	Savunma Bakanı
26	ABD	Enerji Bakanı
27	Almanya	Ekonomi ve Enerji Bakanı
28	Fransa	Dış Ticaret ve Yatırım Bakanı
29	Hollanda	Ticaret ve Kalkınma Bakanı
30	Arnavutluk	Parlamentoyla İlişkiler Devlet Bakanı
31	İtalya	Dışişleri Bakanı Yardımcısı
32	Norveç	Dışişleri Bakanlığı Müsteşarı
33	İspanya	Avrupa Birliği ile İlişkiler Müsteşarı
34	Belçika	Büyükelçi
35	Danimarka	Büyükelçi
36	Yeni Zelanda	Büyükelçi
37	Malta	Büyükelçi
38	Japonya	Büyükelçi
39	Avustralya	Büyükelçi
40	Kıbrıs	Büyükelçi
41	Kanada	Büyükelçi
42	Yunanistan	Büyükelçi
43	İzlanda	Büyükelçi
44	AB-Avrupa Devlet ve Hükûmet Başkanları Konseyi	Başkan
	AB-Avrupa Komisyonu	Başkan Yardımcısı
45	NATO	Genel Sekreter Yardımcısı
46	Avrupa Konseyi	Genel Sekreter
47	GUAM	Genel Sekreter



**Katılımcı listesi incelendiğinde G7 üyesi ülkelerin tümü, NATO müttefikleri ülkelerin tümü, İrlanda hariç tüm Avrupa Birliği üyelerinin platforma destek verdiği görülmektedir. En geniş tanımıyla 'Batı ittifakı' tamamen Ukrayna'nın yanında yer aldığını açıkça ortaya koymuştur.**

### **Kırım Platformu Kuruluş Zirvesi ve Verilen Mesajlar**

Kırım Platformu Kuruluş Zirvesi 23 Ağustos 2021 tarihinde Kiyiv'de gerçekleştirilmiştir. Tabloda da görüleceği üzere, zirve toplantısına katılan devletleri temsilen, Ukrayna delegasyonu hariç; 8 cumhurbaşkanı, 5 başbakan, 2 parlamento başkanı, 7 dışişleri bakanı, 7 bakan, 1 dışişleri bakanı yardımcısı, 2 müsteşar, 10 büyükelçi katılmıştır. Katılan uluslararası teşkilatlar ise, 1 başkan, 1 başkan yardımcısı, 2 genel sekreter ve 1 genel sekreter yardımcısıyla temsil edilmiştir.

Katılımcı listesi incelendiğinde G7 üyesi ülkelerin tümü, NATO müttefikleri ülkelerin tümü, İrlanda hariç tüm Avrupa Birliği üyelerinin platforma destek verdiği görülmektedir. En geniş tanımıyla 'Batı ittifakı' tamamen Ukrayna'nın yanında yer aldığını açıkça ortaya koymuştur. Rusya'nın özellikle bu bölgede sergilediği saldırgan

tutumdan rahatsız olduklarını farklı platformlarda dile getirmekte olan bu ülkelerin bu platformda bir araya gelmeleri ve Kırım'daki işgalin sona ermesi gerektiği yönünde ortak irade beyan etmiş olmaları ilk defa gerçekleşmiştir.

Toplantıya BM'nin bir temsilci göndermemiş olması dikkate değerdir. BM'nin, BM Güvenlik Konseyi'nin daimî bir üyesini açıkça hedefine koyan bir toplantıya temsilci göndermemiş olması anlaşılabilir bir durumdur. Ancak, Rusya'nın Kırım'ı işgali ile doğrudan BM Şartı'nı ihlal ettiği ve bu şart ile oluşturulmuş uluslararası sistem temellerine dinamit koyduğu unutulmamalıdır. Güney Amerika ülkelerinin, Müslüman ülkelerin ve Orta Asya ülkelerinin bu toplantıya katılmaması da bir eksiklik olarak dile getirilebilir. Özellikle Kırım Tatarlarının, Türk ve Müslüman bir halk olarak baskı görüyor olmasına karşın, Türk ve Müslüman ülkelerin toplantıya ilgi göstermemiş olmaları çok önemli bir husustur. Ukrayna diplomasisinin bu ülkelere gerekli mesajları iletmediği ve Rusya'nın karşı söylemini bu ülkeler bağlamında yenemediği Ukrayna tarafının yapması gereken bir özleştirmedir. Dr. Yevgeniya Gaber bu konu hakkındaki düşüncesini şu şekilde dile getirmiştir:

Platformun başarısını sonuçlarıyla göreceğiz. Amacı, işgalin tamamen sonlandırılması. O zaman göreceğiz...

Değerlendirmeler genel olarak olumlu. Olumsuz yorum olarak, 46 katılımcı ülke-teşkilat az diyorlar. Bütün NATO, AB ve G7 destek verdi. Kendi



dış politikamızın da eksiklerini gördük. Örneğin, Latin Amerika, Orta Asya ve Orta Doğu'dan katılım zayıf oldu. Bu konuya odaklanacağız. [Türk ve Müslüman ülkeleri kastederek] Türkiye'nin rolü bu noktada bizim için önemli, Türkiye bize aktif destek verebilir. ...

BM katılmadı. Bu ilginç. Yalta Konferansı ile kurulan bu örgütün kurulduğu şehir işgal altındayken, örgüt bu toplantıya katılmadı.

Bence zirve başarılıydı. ... Yüzde yüz bir başarı değil tabii ama var olan kaynaklarla yapılan çok iyiydi.<sup>16</sup>

Toplantı Kırım Tatar sanatçı ve 2016 Eurovision şarkı yarışması galibi Jamala'nın, meşhur Kırım Tatar şarkısı "Ey Güzel Kırım"ın sözlerinden esinlenerek hazırladığı ve ona galibiyeti getiren eserini icra ettiği canlı performansla başlamıştır. Kırım Tatarları Rusya işgali altında baskı ve hak ihlalleri ile karşı karşıyayken, bu seviyede bir etkinliğin Kırım Tatarca sözler içeren ve bir Kırım Tatarı tarafından icra edilen bir eser ile başlaması önemli bir vurgudur. Arkasından gösterilen özel videoda, Kırım'ın sahip olduğu kültürel miras anlatılmış ve Rusya'nın Kırım'ı işgali hatırlanmıştır. Bu videonun sonunda ve aslında zirve toplantısı başlamadan hemen önce dile getirilen mesaj ve içindeki vurgular önemlidir:

Kırım bir askeri üs değildir, orası bir hapisane değildir. Kırım, Ukrayna'dır! Kırım Platformu girişimini dünyayı ortak misyonumuzda birleştirmek, küresel düzeni ve güvenliği yeniden sağlamak için başlattık. Sizleri davet ettik, çünkü artık harekete geçme zamanı!<sup>17</sup>

Bu mesajda Rusya'nın Kırım'da yürüttüğü silahlanma politikası eleştirilirken, Kırım'ın işgalinin en önemli sonucu olarak Rusya'nın Ukrayna topraklarını işgal edip o bölgeleri birer askeri üsse çevirmesi olduğu vurgulanmıştır. Ukrayna toplantısının açılışından hemen önce katılımcıları Kırım'ın işgalden kurtarılması için çalışmaya değil, 'küresel düzeni ve güvenliği' yeniden sağlama misyonu etrafında toplanmaya davet etmiştir. Bu şekilde Kırım meselesini Ukrayna, daha genel bir uluslararası tartışma konusu içinde ele almış ve bu şekilde daha çok ülkenin çıkarlarına hitap etme amacı gütmüştür.

Zirvenin açılış konuşması Cumhurbaşkanı Zelenski tarafından yapılmıştır. Zelenski, Ukrayna'nın bir komşusu ve Ukrayna güvenliğinin garantörü durumundaki bir BM Güvenlik Konseyi üyesi tarafından işgal edildiğinin altını çizmiştir. Dünyaca meşhur bir tatil beldesi olan Kırım'ın bölgedeki Rus askeri yığınakları sebebiyle günümüzde bir "barut fıçısı"na döndüğünü belirten Cumhurbaşkanı, işgal neticesinde uluslararası sisteme güvenin derinden sarsıldığını, bu durumda kimsenin benzer bir durumun başına gelmeyeceğinden emin olamayacağını ifade etmiştir. Kı-

rım'ın Ukrayna'ya geri dönmesi ve Ukrayna ile birlikte Avrupa'nın bir parçası olması için elinden gelen her şeyi yapacağını belirten Zelenski, Kremlin'e uluslararası baskının artması gerektiğini belirtmiştir. Zelenski, ancak bu şekilde Kırım'daki insan hakları ihlallerinin sona ereceğini, yükselen güvenlik tehditlerinin azaltılabileceğini ve Kırım'ın Ukrayna'ya barışçıl yollarla dönebileceğini ifade etmiştir.<sup>18</sup> Bu şekilde cumhurbaşkanı toplantının başında verilen mesajla paralel bir konuşma yapmıştır. Kırım'ın işgali neticesinde artan güvenlik tehditlerinin altını çizmiş ve küresel güvenlik kaygısının arttığını belirterek giriş videosunda verilen mesajları bir kere daha tekrar etmiştir. Toplantının geri kalanında söz alan temsilciler, Kırım'ın işgalini tanımadıklarını ifade etmiş, Ukrayna'ya olan desteklerini belirtmişlerdir.<sup>19</sup> Tüm konuşmacılardan sonra son söz Kırım Tatar halkının lideri Mustafa Cemilev'e (Kırımoglu) verilmiştir. Cemilev, platformun Kırım'ın işgalden kurtarılması için bir ümit ışığı olduğunu vurgulamıştır. Ayrıca, Cumhurbaşkanı Zelenski'nin de verdiği mesajlarla paralel olarak 2014 senesinde BM Şartı'nın ve pek çok uluslararası anlaşmanın ihlâl edilmesine rağmen Rusya'ya karşı yeterli tepki verilmemesinin çok önemli sonuçları olduğunu şu şekilde dile getirmiştir: "Tabii ki, her ülke ilk önce kendi güvenliğini düşünür, ama bir ülke, 'ben daha güçlüyüm' diyerek başka devletlerin topraklarını işgal edebiliyorsa ve bunun hiçbir cezası olmayacaksa o zaman hiçbir devlet kendisini güvende hissedemez."<sup>20</sup>

Bu zirve toplantısı sayesinde Kırım'ın işgali ve Rusya'nın bölgedeki silahlanma çalışmaları neticesinde anlaşmalarla kurulmuş uluslararası güvenlik sisteminin derin bir yara aldığı tekrarlanmıştır. Ukraynalı siyaset yapıcılar, Kırım'daki işgalin sadece Kırım ve Karadeniz ile ilgili yerel bir mesele olmadığını, aksine tüm dünyayı ilgilendiren bir mesele olduğunu anlatmak istemiştir. Kırım'da yaşanan işgal ve takip eden uygulamalar, uzun vadede tüm dünyayı tehdit edebilecek muhtemel saldırganlıklar döngüsünün başlangıcı olarak irdelenmiştir. Bu şekilde oluşturulan söylem ile Ukraynalı siyaset yapıcılar, Rusya'ya karşı uygulanmasını talep ettikleri sert yaptırımların tüm dünya tarafından neden desteklenmesini istediklerini kendi pencerelerinden ortaya koymuşlardır. Bu Ukrayna'nın platform toplantısı boyunca takip ettiği ve büyük ihtimalle gelecekte de bu konu etrafında argümanlarını üzerine kuracağı söylemin temelidir.

## Kırım Platformu'nun Yapısı ve Çalışma Prensipleri

Kırım Platformu'nun nasıl bir yapıya sahip olduğunu ve hangi sahalara odaklanarak çalışacağını anlamak bu oluşumun analizini yapmak için gereklidir. Kırım Platformu; devletler, parlamentolar ve uzmanlar olmak üzere üç ayrı seviyede çalışacak olan ve kendisine öncelikli beş çalışma alanı belirlemiş bir mekanizmadır. Sonuç beyannamesinde de altları çizilen çalışma alanları şunlardır:

1. Kırım'ın işgalini tanımama siyasetinin güçlendirilmesi;
2. Yaptırımların verimliliğinin sağlanması, atlatma yöntemlerine karşı bu yaptırımların verimliliklerinin ve güçlerinin artırılması;
3. İnsan haklarının ve uluslararası hukukun korunması;
4. Geniş Karadeniz ve Azak Denizi bölgesinin güvenliğinin sağlanması ve seyrüsefer serbestisinin müdafası;
5. Kırım'ın işgalinin bölgedeki olumsuz ekonomik ve çevre etkilerinin üstesinden gelinmesi.<sup>21</sup>

Bu alanlara odaklanacağını ilan eden platform, Emine Ceppar'ın ifadesiyle, Ukrayna'nın işgalden bu yana sürdürdüğü, mevcut uluslararası mekanizmalar içinde yürütülen ve sınırlı bir etkiye sahip olan çalışmaları bir adım daha ileriye taşımak; uzun vadede takip edilecek bir stratejik vizyon oluşturmak amacıyla planlanmıştır.<sup>22</sup> Platformda vurgulanan temalara ve önerilen çalışma sistemine bakıldığında, 'güvenlik' kaygılarını ön plana çıkarmanın Ukrayna için önemli bir 'araç' haline geldiği görülebilir. Ayrıca, geleneksel diplomatik mekanizmalarına ek olarak hem liderliğini yapacağı hem de etkin bir rol oynayacağı 'yeni' ve 'alternatif' diplomatik araçlar oluşturmak Ukrayna'nın stratejisinin önemli bir parçası olacak gibi görünmektedir.

Birinci seviyeyi teşkil eden ve devletler ve hükümetler arasında sürdürülmesi planlanan yüksek siyasi diyalog mekanizması, partner devletlerin üst düzeyde iş birliğini koordine edecektir. 23 Ağustos 2021'de gerçekleştirilen zirve bu diyalogun ilk somut adımıdır ve toplantı sonunda tüm katılımcıların imzaladığı ortak beyanname da bu açıdan bakıldığında ilk somut sonuç olarak değerlendirilebilir. Partner devletlerin Kırım ve Karadeniz konularıyla alakalı olarak dışişleri bakanlıklarına mensup sorumlu temsilciler ataması ve bu temsilcilerin ortak iletişim ağı içinde çalışması istenmektedir. Bu şekilde sürdürülecek olan iletişim mekanizmasının Kırım'la ilgili olarak ortaya çıkan diplomatik ve siyasi krizlerde faaliyet göstermesi istenmektedir. Uzun vadede platform içinde iletişimin sağlıklı yürütülmesi için bu mekanizma önem arz etmektedir.<sup>23</sup> Bununla beraber partner ülkelerin dışişleri bakanlarının New York, Cenevre, Viyana gibi merkezlerdeki uluslararası etkinlikler dahil olmak üzere düzenli olarak bir araya gelmeleri planlanmaktadır. Kırım Platformu ile eklemli olarak, yıllık "Azak Denizi, Karadeniz ve Doğu Akdeniz Güvenlik Forumu" organize edilmesi amaçlanmaktadır.<sup>24</sup>

Oluşturulmak istenen parlamentolar arası iş birliği mekanizmaları ise ikinci seviyeyi teşkil etmektedir. Bir-

leşmiş Milletler, Avrupa Güvenlik ve İşbirliği Teşkilatı, Parlamenteler Asambleleri gibi kuruluşlarla çalışmalar bu seviyede değerlendirilmektedir. Partner ülke parlamentolarında Kırım dostluk grupları oluşturulması hedeflenmektedir. Var olan ikili ilişkiler ve uluslararası örgütlerle ilişkiler güçlendirilmeye çalışılacaktır. Dr. Yevgeniya Gaber, KTMM'nin bu alanda çalışmalarına önem verileceğini vurgulamıştır.<sup>25</sup>

Üçüncü seviye ise uzmanlar arasında oluşturulacak olan 'uluslararası uzman ağı'dır. Bu ağın çalışmaları için iki önemli görev tanımlanmıştır:

1. Pek çok veriyi işleyerek ve inceleyerek herkes için erişilebilir hale getirmek ve karar alıcılar için tavsiyeler oluşturmak;
2. Siyasi seviyedeki toplantılar için karar taslakları hazırlamak ve küresel seviyede bir 'uzmanlar diplomasisi' yürütmek.<sup>26</sup>

Bu çalışmalar yapılırken odaklanılacak ve platformun hedefine koyduğu beş noktayı da içeren alanlar ise şunlardır:

1. Güvenlik ve seyrüsefer serbestisi;
2. Yaptırımlar ve tanımama siyaseti;
3. İnsan hakları ihlalleri ve uluslararası insani hukuk;
4. Çevreye ve ekonomiye tehditler;
5. Kültürel mirasın korunması;
6. İnsani siyaset ve yerli halkların haklarının restorasyonu.<sup>27</sup>

Platformun bu uzman mekanizması kullanılarak gerçekleştirilebilecek teklifler üretmesi ve önemli bir veri tabanı oluşturulması hedeflenmektedir.<sup>28</sup> Ortaya çıkan bu üç basamaklı genel yapıyı Dr. Yevgeniya Gaber şu şekilde özetlemektedir:

Bir yıl içinde, bir fikirden doğan bu etkinliği ben esprili bir şekilde 'PPP' (İng. Public-Private Partnership, Tr. Kamu-Özel Sektör Ortaklığı) gibi değerlendiriyorum. İçinde devlet var, sivil toplum var, insan hakları savunucuları, eksperler, akademisyenler, Meclis [KTMM], siyasetçiler... Uluslararası bir platform olmakla birlikte, Ukrayna'nın içinde çok faydalı bir format. Birbirini tamamlayıcı şekilde devlet ve sivil toplumu bir araya getiren bir şemsiye...<sup>29</sup>

Kırım Platformu'nun, kaçıllara gibi çalışacak özel bir ofisi oluşturulmaya başlanmış durumdadır.<sup>30</sup> Bunun ya-



Refat Çubar ve Mustafa Cemilev (Kırımoğlu)

nında, Ukrayna Cumhurbaşkanlığı İdaresi'ne bağlı, bu platformu koordine etmeye yönelik bir mekanizma oluşturulması da üzerinde çalışılan düşünceler arasında yer almaktadır.<sup>31</sup> Oluşan bu kapsamlı yapının esnek karakterini sürdürmesine bu aşamada önem verilmektedir. Farklı mekanizmalarla desteklenecek olan ve yakın zamanda sekreteryaasının oluşturulması beklenen bu platformun hâlihazırda çalışan bölgesel ve küresel uluslararası kuruluşları taklit etmesinin doğru olmayacağı düşünülmektedir.<sup>32</sup>

Sonuç olarak, Kırım Platformu'nun geleneksel anlamıyla bir uluslararası örgüt olmadığı söylenebilir. Bunun yerine hali hazırda var olan uluslararası örgütlerin eksikliklerini gidermeye yönelik projeler geliştiren; bu örgütlerin ve partner devletlerin iş birliğini güçlendirip çalışmaların verimli bir şekilde ilerlemesi için çalışmalar yürüten; uygulanmakta olan her türlü icraatı inceleyen ve geliştirilmesi için teklifler hazırlayan bir uluslararası mekanizma olarak tanımlanmalıdır.<sup>33</sup> Bunlarla birlikte Kırım Platformu, Kırım'ın işgalini her yönüyle inceleyecek ve dünyanın ilgisini bu noktaya toplayacak çalışmalar yapacaktır. Kırım'ın işgali, soğuk savaş sonrasında uluslararası sistemde yaşanmış önemli bir örnektir. Rusya'nın bu süreç zarfında kullandığı hibrit yöntemler ve dezenformasyon politikası uluslararası sisteme yeni sınamalar teşkil etmiştir. Bunların bir toplamı durumundaki 'Kırım Tecrübesi'ni Kırım Platformu üzerinden

**Kırım Platformu Açılış Zirvesi'nin en önemli sonucu zirve sonunda kabul edilen beynamedir. Zirveye katılan tüm devletler, Rusya'yı açıkça 'işgalci' (İng. *occupier*) olarak tanımlayan bu beynameye imza atmışlardır.**

paylaşmak, Ukrayna için önemli bir dış politika aracı haline gelmiştir.<sup>34</sup>

### **Kırım Platformu Zirve Toplantısı Sonuç Beynamesi ve Toplantı Sonrasındaki Gelişmeler**

Kırım Platformu Açılış Zirvesi'nin en önemli sonucu zirve sonunda kabul edilen beynamedir. Zirveye katılan tüm devletler, Rusya'yı açıkça 'işgalci' (İng. *occupier*) olarak tanımlayan bu beynameye imza atmışlardır.<sup>35</sup> Zirve başlangıcındaki videoda ve Cumhurbaşkanı Zelenski'nin konuşmasında vurgulanan temalar da beynamede yer bulmuştur. Beynamede Rusya şu sözlerle işgalci olarak tanımlanmıştır:

**Kırım Tatar halkının demokratik usullerle seçilmiş temsil organının bir yöneticisine yöneltilen bu ağır suçlamalar ve Kırım'daki işgalci sözde güvenlik güçlerinin uygulamalarına karşı Kırım Platformu bir açıklama yapmamıştır. Son derece kapsamlı bir yol haritası ilan eden ve büyük iddialar ortaya atan bu platform mekanizmasının daha ilk sınamada etkisiz ve sessiz kalması dikkate değerdir.**

... Uluslararası Kırım Platformu katılımcıları, tüm devletlerin egemenliklerini, birliklerini ve toprak bütünlüklerini koruyan uluslararası hukuk düzenini vahim bir şekilde tehdit eden ve uluslararası güvenliğe karşı sınama teşkil eden Kırım'ın geçici işgalini ve yasadışı ilhakını tanımamaktadırlar ve kinamaya devam etmektedirler...

Uluslararası Kırım Platformu Katılımcıları, Uluslararası Kırım Platformu'nu Rusya Federasyonu'nun, Kırım Özerk Cumhuriyeti ve Sivastopol şehrindeki geçici işgalini barışçıl bir şekilde sonlandırmak için bir danışma ve koordinasyon formatı olarak kurmaya karar vermiştir. ...<sup>36</sup>

'İşgalci' tanımı uluslararası hukuk açısından Rusya'ya, işgal ettiği bölgelerdeki insanların haklarını korumak ve bölgedeki ihtiyaçları karşılamak gibi sorumluluklar yüklemektedir. Bu sorumlulukların yerine getirilmesi sonuç beyannamesinde şu şekilde talep edilmiştir:

Uluslararası Kırım Platformu Katılımcıları,

Rusya Federasyonu'nu işgalci bir güç olarak uluslararası insani hukuk ve diğer geçerli uluslararası hukuktan kaynaklanan yükümlülüklerini yerine getirmesi için uyarıya,

Rusya Federasyonu'nu Kırım sakinlerine karşı uygulanan insan hakları ihlallerine ve istismarına derhal son vermek yönünde uyarıya; ... karar vermiştir.<sup>37</sup>

Bu uyarılara ek olarak Kırım'da Kırım Tatarlarına ve etnik Ukrayınlara karşı yapılan baskılara özel olarak değinilmiştir. Bu halkların eğitim haklarının, kültürlerinin ve kimliklerinin büyük tehdit altında olduğu vurgulanmış ve uluslararası insan hakları standartlarına uygun olarak bu alanlarda özgürce çalışmalar yürütebilmeleri istenmiştir.<sup>38</sup> Bu beyanname imzaya hala açıktır ve zirveye katıl-

mamış ülkelerin bu metne dışardan destek vermesi mümkündür. Ukrayna zirve için davet edilen 100'den fazla ülke ve teşkilatın zamanla bu beyannameye imza atacağını ummaktadır.

Gerçekleştirilen zirveye karşı Rusya'nın verdiği yanıt ise, toplantıya katılan KTMM Başkanı Birinci Yardımcısı Nariman Celal'i ve diğer dört Kırım Tatar aktivisti 4 Eylül 2021 sabahı Kırım'da evlerine yaptığı baskınlarla göz altına almak olmuştur.<sup>39</sup> Gözaltına alınan bu kişilere destek vermek için yapılan gösterileri de sert bir şekilde bastıran Rusya, bu makalenin hazırlandığı sırada Nariman Celal'i terörizm suçlamasıyla 15 yıla kadar hapis cezasıyla yargılamaktadır.<sup>40</sup> Ancak, Kırım Tatar halkının demokratik usullerle seçilmiş temsil organının bir yöneticisine yöneltilen bu ağır suçlamalar ve Kırım'daki işgalci sözde güvenlik güçlerinin uygulamalarına karşı Kırım Platformu bir açıklama yapmamıştır.

Son derece kapsamlı bir yol haritası ilan eden ve büyük iddialar ortaya atan bu platform mekanizmasının daha ilk sınamada etkisiz ve sessiz kalması dikkate değerdir. Bununla alakalı olarak, KTMM Başkanı Refat Çubarov, Kırım Platformu'nun yeni kurulan bir yapı olduğunu vurgulamıştır ve oluşan yeni mekanizmaların daha beraber çalışmaya alışkın olmadığını ifade etmiştir. Ayrıca, platforma katılan ülkelerin bu gibi ani gelişen olaylarda platformun nasıl çalışacağı konusunda Ukrayna ile aynı fikirde olmadıkları anlaşılmaktadır. Çubarov konuyu şu şekilde açıklamıştır:

Çalışmaları hızlandırmak gerektiğini konuşuyoruz aramızda. Şimdi Platform vaatlerini yerine getirebilmek için mekanizmalar arıyor. Hali hazırda var olan teşkilatların işlerini tekrar etmemeli. Bu teşkilatların çalışmalarına destek vermek ve ortak çalışmalar için yeni mekanizmalar teklif etmek gerek. O teşkilatlar bir sürü bildirimler kabul ediyorlar ama çözüm yönünde çalışma az. ...

Ukrayna, bu sorumluluğu taşımaya mecbur. Bu şartlarda sözlerini tutamazsa her şey berbat olabilir. ...

(Nariman Celal hakkında ki soruya karşılık olarak) [Platform] bir tepki vermeye daha hazır değildi. Bu konuda bazı girişimler oldu. Ancak, partner ülkelerin bazıları ortak beyannameye imza attıklarını ama bu gibi düzenli bildirimler hazırlayacak mekanizmalar için görüşülmediğini belirttiler. Bu sebeple böyle bir düzende çalışmaya hazır olmadıklarını ifade ettiler. Sonuçta bu gibi [hızlı gelişen] durumlarda ayrı ayrı konuşmak başka, ortak bir blok olarak pozisyon almak başka ...<sup>41</sup>

Kırım Platformu Açılış Zirvesi'nin ve kabul ettiği beyannamenin Kırım'da bulunan Kırım Tatarları tarafından

nasıl değerlendirildiği de çok önemlidir. Kırım Platformu, üzerinden yedi yıldan uzun bir süre geçmiş olan Kırım işgalini uluslararası toplumun gündemine tekrar getirmeyi amaçlamıştır. Soğumaya yüz tutmuş ve unutulmaya başlanan Kırım meselesini tekrardan gündeme getirmesi açısından da önemli bir iş başarıldığı söylenebilir. Bu toplantı ve yapılan açıklamalar, özellikle Kırım'da Rusya tarafından hedef alınan aktivistlere büyük bir moral kaynağı olmuştur. KTMM eski üyesi Zevcet Kurtumer bu konuyu şu şekilde açıklamıştır:

Bu platformun toplanması bize Kırım'da umut ve dayanma gücü verdi. İşgal sonrasında baskı başlamıştı. Meclisi yasaklamaya çalıştılar ama bize tesiri olmadı. Milli Meclis (KTMM) üyeleri ve aktivistler aynı şekilde çalışmaya devam ettik. Bu (Platform) olunca meselemizin dünyada bilindiğini gördük. Bu şekilde, Platform'da Kırım'ın sesi duyuldu. 23 Ağustos'ta dikkatle olanı biteni takip ettik. Platformun neticesi bizim için iyi olacak. Bizim isteğimiz Vatanımızın özgür olması, hapsedilen evlatlarımızın ailelerine kavuşması. Evet, Ukrayna'nın bize çok borcu var. Ukrayna da biliyor bunu. Ukrayna'nın [Kırım Tatarları hakkında] kabul ettiği kanunlar ve düzenlemeler çok önemli. Platformun bu yönde bize yol açmasını bekliyoruz.<sup>42</sup>

Zevcet Kurtumer'in Ukrayna'nın kabul ettiği kanunlar ve düzenlemeler konusuna yaptığı vurgu dikkate değerdir. Kırım Tatar aktivistlerin Ukrayna'nın toprak bütünlüğünü desteklemeye ve yerli halk olmaktan kaynaklanan haklarını talep etmeye devam etmeleri Ukrayna'ya kullanılacak siyasi ve diplomatik araçlar sunmaktadır. Bu şekilde Kırım Tatarları ve Ukrayna arasındaki ilişkileri de yeniden şekillendirmekte ve geliştirmektedir. Bu açıdan bakıldığında Kırım Platformu'nun başarısı sadece Kırım'ın işgalden kurtarılması yönünde atılan/atılacak adımlarla değil, aynı zamanda Kırım Tatar halkının haklarını ne ölçüde elde edebildiği ile de ölçülecektir.

### Sonuç

Kırım meselesinin çözümü hedefi ile oluşturulan Kırım Platformu'nda Ukrayna, Kırım'daki kriz üzerine inşa ettiği söylemi ile bölgesel ve küresel ilişkilerini yeni bir bağlam üzerine oturtmaktadır. Barışı önceleyen ve çok taraflı diplomasiyi destekleyen bu girişimci yaklaşım ile Ukrayna kendi güvenliğini yeniden ele almaktadır. Bu kapsamda Ukrayna tek başına çözemediği sorunlarına somut çözümler bulabilmek adına yeni bir söylem oluşturmaktadır. Bu söylemin üzerinde yükselen diplomatik mekanizma ise Kırım Platformu'dur. Bu söylem Kırım'da



Emine Ceppar

yaşanan işgalin yerel bir 'çekişme' olmadığını, aksine böyle bir saldırının uluslararası sistemde herkesin başına gelebilecek bir 'tehdit' olduğunu anlatmaktadır. Ukrayna'nın dış politikasının ana direğinin özellikle kısa ve orta vadede bu söylem ile şekilleneceği söylenebilir. Böylelikle Ukrayna herkesin çıkarlarını bir şekilde ilgilendiren bir mesaj kullanarak mümkün olduğunca çok müttefik kazanacağını düşünmektedir. Ukrayna müttefiklerine 'Kırım Tecrübesi'ni, yani herkesi ilgilendiren bir tehdide karşı verdiği mücadelesini, anlatarak hem kendisini ahlaki açıdan yüksek bir yere konumlandırmak hem de Kırım meselesini herkesin merak edeceği bir anlatının merkezine yerleştirmek istemektedir.

Kırım Platformu Açılış Zirvesi'nin Ukrayna devleti açısından bir başarı olduğu söylenebilir. Ancak, Kırım'da aniden gelişen ve hızlı bir şekilde önemli sonuçlar doğuran olaylara karşı aynı süratle cevap verebilecek mekanizmaların oluşmadığı da ortaya çıkmıştır. Buradaki en önemli mesele, bu mekanizmaların 'henüz' kurulmamış veya 'şu sırada' kuruluyor olmaları değildir. Bu mekanizmaların ilerleyen dönemde düzenli ve verimli olarak çalışıp çalışmayacaklarıdır. Zirve toplantısı bir başarı olsa bile, kurulan platform mekanizmasının başarısını değerlendirmemize yardım edecek en önemli kistas devamlı ve ve-

rimli bir şekilde çalışan bir mekanizmanın varlığıdır. Ayrıca, günümüzde Ukraynalı siyaset yapıcılarının en son ihtiyacı olan şey, verilen büyük sözlerin arkasının boş kalması ve son derece sınırlı kaynaklarla gerçekleştirilen faaliyetler sonrasında hayal kırıklıklarına sebebiyet verilmesidir. Bu durum hem bir 'kurtuluş mücadelesi' verdiğini söyleyen Ukrayna devleti için hem de ona bağlılık hisseden tüm vatandaşları için moral açısından ciddi bir yıkıma sebebiyet verebilir.

Oluşan bu olumlu havaya rağmen kurulan platform ve etrafında kurgulanan mekanizmanın 'sihirli bir çözüm' getirmeyeceğini unutmamak gereklidir. Çok taraflı ve yoğun bir tempoda sürdürülecek olan bu Kırım Platformu girişimini sadece işler kılmak bile Ukrayna diplomasisi için başlı başına bir zorunluluktur. İlerlemeye çalıştıkları tüm yolları bir şekilde tıkayan Rusya'ya karşı bu girişimle Ukraynalı siyaset yapıcılarını, yeni yollar inşa etmekte ve bu yolları kullanarak zafere ulaşabileceklerini düşünmektedirler. Kırım Platformu'nun bir zafer getirip getiremeyeceğini bizlere tarih gösterecek olsa da şurası açıktır ki Ukrayna, Kırım'ı geri kazanmak için yeni bir yöntem denemekte ve mücadelesine devam etmektedir.

## Sonnotlar

- 1 Platformun ve Ukrayna Dışişleri Bakanlığı'nın resmi sitelerinde bu yazının hazırlandığı sırada resmi bir katılımcı listesi ilan edilmiştir. 19 Ağustos 2021 tarihinde Ukrayna Dışişleri Bakanı Dımitro Kuleba, etkinliğe 44 ülkenin ve uluslararası teşkilatın (14 devlet ve hükümet başkanı, 2 parlamento başkanı, 14 dışişleri bakanı, 2 savunma bakanı, 1 devlet başkanı özel temsilcisi ve ulaştırma bakanı, 1 dışişleri bakanlığı müsteşarı, 7 büyükelçi) katılımının kesinleştiğini ilan etmiştir, bkz: "Kuleba announced the full list of participants of the Crimea Platform summit," UATV, erişim tarihi: 29.09.2021, <https://uatv.ua/en/kuleba-announced-the-full-list-of-participants-of-the-crimean-platform-summit/>. 23 Ağustos 2021 tarihinde BBC Ukraynca servisinin verdiği haberde 45 delegasyonun etkinliğe katıldığı belirtilmiştir, bkz: "У Києві пройшов саміт "Кримська платформа". Яка його мета?" BBC News Україна, erişim tarihi: 29.09.2021, <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/news-58304552>. Yine 23 Ağustos 2021 tarihinde Deutsche Welle Ukraynca servisinin verdiği haberde ise 46 ülkenin katıldığı ifade edilmiştir, bkz: "Саміт "Кримської платформи": 46 країн нагадали Москві, що питання Криму не закрите," DW, erişim tarihi: 29.09.2021, <https://www.dw.com/uk/samit-krymskoi-platfomy-46-krain-nahadaly-moskvi-shcho-pytannia-krymu-ne-zakryte/a-58959040>. Bu yazı için yapılan görüşmeler ve araştırma sırasında Wikipedia internet sitesinde verilen bilgilerin Ukrayna Dışişleri Bakanlığı tarafından düzenli olarak güncellendiği bilgisine ulaşılmıştır. Üye olan herkesin bilgi girişi yapabildiği bu siteye referans vermek doğru olmasa bile, bu sitede platforma 30.09.2021 tarihi itibarıyla 47 delegasyonun katıldığı ifade edilmektedir, bkz: [https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Кримська\\_платформа](https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Кримська_платформа). Ukrayna Cumhurbaşkanı'nın açılış konuşmasının tam metninin sunulduğu Cumhurbaşkanlığı resmi internet sitesinde ise katılım sayısı 46 olarak verilmiştir ama bir liste sunulmamıştır, bkz: "President of Ukraine opened the inaugural summit of the Crimean Platform," President of Ukraine, erişim tarihi: 29.09.2021, <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/prezident-ukrayini-vidkryv-inavguracijnij-samit-krimskoyi-pl-70269>. Bu kadar önemli bir toplantı arkasından yaşanan bu durum, talihsiz bir iletişim kazası olarak değerlendirilebilir.
- 2 Bu makale için yapılan çalışma çerçevesinde KTMM Başkanı Refat Çubarov; KTMM eski üyesi ve KTMM Toprak Komisyonu eski başkanı Zevcet Kurtumer; KTMM Başkanı eski danışmanı, Kırım Haber Ajansı'nın kurucusu ve eski sahibi İsmet Yüksel ve son olarak Ukrayna Henadii Udovenko Diplomasi Akademisi eski başkan yardımcısı, Ukrayna Başbakanı dış politika danışmanı Dr. Yevgeniya Gaber ile yarı yapılandırılmış mülakatlar yapılmıştır. Mülakatlar çevrimiçi programlar kullanılarak yapılmıştır ve en az 40 en fazla 70 dakika sürmüştür. Mülakat verenlerin isimleri kendi rızaları ile kullanılmaktadır.
- 3 Mülakat, Refat Çubarov, 28.09.2021.
- 4 "Kırımöğlü İsviçre'nin Kiev Büyükelçisiyle görüştü," QHA, erişim tarihi: 03.10.2021, <http://old.qha.com.ua/tr/siyaset/kirimoglu-isvircen-nin-kiev-buyukelcisiyle-gorustu/129481/>; "Kırımöğlü, yardım için Avrupa Parlamentosuna başvurdu," QHA, erişim tarihi: 03.10.2021, <http://old.qha.com.ua/tr/siyaset/kirimoglu-yardim-icin-avrupa-parlamentosuna-basurdu/128663/>; "Kırımöğlü, Litvanya Parlamento Başkanı Gedvilas ile görüştü," QHA, erişim tarihi: 03.10.2021, <http://old.qha.com.ua/tr/siyaset/kirimoglu-litvanya-parlamento-baskani-gedvilas-ile-gorustu/127990/>; "KTMM, yabancı diplomatlarla Kırım Tatar sorununu görüştü," QHA, erişim tarihi: 03.10.2021, <http://old.qha.com.ua/tr/siyaset/ktmm-yabancidiplomatlarla-kirim-tatar-sorununu-gorustu/130035/>; "Refat Çubarov: Uluslararası forum 18 Mayıs öncesi yapılmalı," QHA, erişim tarihi: 03.10.2021, <http://old.qha.com.ua/tr/siyaset/refatcubarov-uluslararasi-forum-18-mayis-oncesi-yapilmali/130138/>.

- 5 Mustafa Cemilev, Türkiye'de tanındığı adıyla Mustafa Abdülcemil Kırımoglu, Sovyetler Birliği içinde ortaya çıkan Kırım Tatar Millî Hareketi'nin en önemli liderlerinden birisidir. Kullandığı söylemler ve öne çıkardığı yöntemler ile karizmatik bir lider olarak ön plana çıkmıştır. Sovyetler Birliği yıkılmadan önce sadece Kırım Tatarları arasında değil, diğer pek çok insan hakları savunucusu tarafından da saygıyla anılan bir aktivist ve lider olmuştur. Sovyetler Birliği yıkıldıktan sonra ve Kırım Tatarları Kırım'da öz yönetim organlarını oluştururken, onun liderlik ettiği Kırım Tatar Millî Hareketi Teşkilatı önemli çalışmalar gerçekleştirmiştir. 1991'de toplanan Kurultay'da KTMM Başkanı olarak seçilmiştir. Dünyada Kırım Tatar teşkilatlarının ekseriyeti karizmatik liderliğini bugün dahi kabul etmektedir. Günümüzde Ukrayna siyaseti içinde de önemli bir akıl insan olarak saygı görmektedir. Pek çok yabancı diplomat ve devlet adamı tarafından önemli bir siyasi lider olarak kabul edilmektedir.
- 6 "Kırımoglu: Uluslararası forum için sadece Ukrayna ayak diretiyor," QHA, erişim tarihi: 03.10.2021, <http://old.qha.com.ua/tr/siyaset/kirimoglu-uluslararasi-forum-icin-sadece-ukrayna-ayak-diretiyor/125544/>; "Kırımoglu: "Forum hazırlıkları Dışişleri'nin hoşuna gitmedi", QHA, erişim tarihi: 03.10.2021, <http://old.qha.com.ua/tr/video/kirimoglu-forum-hazirlıkları-disisleri-nin-hosuna-gitmedi/1819/>; "Ukrayna, Kırım Tatar forumu konusunda kararsız," QHA, erişim tarihi: 03.10.2021, <http://old.qha.com.ua/tr/siyaset/ukrayna-kirim-tatar-forumu-konusunda-kararsiz/129183/>.
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- 8 Mülakat, Refat Çubarov, 28.09.2021.
- 9 Mülakat, İsmet Yüksel, 27.09.2021.
- 10 "Резніков про міжнародний майданчик для переговорів щодо Криму: «Все в процесі», Крым.Реалии, erişim tarihi: 29.09.2021, <https://ua.krymr.com/a/novyny-krymu-reznikov-pro-maidanchyk-dlia-perehovoriv-shchodo-krymu/30615698.html>.
- 11 "Президент Зеленський в ООН закликав взяти участь у створенні міжнародної платформи з деокупації Криму," Крым.Реалии, erişim tarihi: 29.09.2021, <https://ua.krymr.com/a/novyny-krymu-zelenskyi-oon-doeokupatsiia-krymu/30854590.html>.
- 12 "Еміне Джaparова презентувала послам країн-членів ЄС ініціативу «Кримська платформа» і обговорила практичні аспекти залучення Євросоюзу до її діяльності," Україна Дішišleri Bakanlığı, erişim tarihi: 29.09.2021, <https://mfa.gov.ua/news/emine-dzhaparova-prezentuvava-poslam-krayin-chleniv-yes-incipiativu-krimaska-platforma-i-obgovorila-praktichni-aspekti-zaluchennya-yevrosoyuzu-do-yiyi-diyalnosti>.
- 13 "Erdoğan Ukrayna Devlet Başkanı Zelensky ile görüşti: "İşbirliğimiz üçüncü ülkelere karşı bir girişim değildir", BBC News Türkçe, erişim tarihi 29.09.2021, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-56701148>.
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- 22 "Interview With the First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Emine Dzhaparova," UA: Ukraine Analytica, March 16, 2021, erişim tarihi 29.09.2021, <https://ukraine-analytica.org/the-crimea-platform-will-become-a-foreign-policy-instrument-of-the-de-occupation-strategy/>.
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- 31 Mülakat, Refat Çubar, 28.09.2021.
- 32 Mülakat, Refat Çubar, 28.09.2021; Mülakat, Dr. Yevgeniya Gaber, 27.09.2021.
- 33 Mülakat, Refat Çubar, 28.09.2021; Mülakat, Dr. Yevgeniya Gaber, 27.09.2021.
- 34 Mülakat, Dr. Yevgeniya Gaber, 27.09.2021.
- 35 "Joint Declaration of the International Crimea Platform Participants," Crimea Platform, erişim tarihi 29.09.2021, <https://crimea-platform.org/en/samit/deklaraciya>.
- 36 "Joint Declaration of the International Crimea Platform Participants," Ukrayna Dışişleri Bakanlığı, erişim tarihi 03.10.2021, <https://mfa.gov.ua/en/news/joint-declaration-international-crimea-platform-participants>.
- 37 "Joint Declaration of the International Crimea Platform Participants"
- 38 "Joint Declaration of the International Crimea Platform Participants"
- 39 Ayyıldız Huri Kaptan, "Rus işgalcilerden KTMM Başkan Yardımcısı Nariman Celal'in evine baskın! Celal, FSB'ye ait bir araçla götürüldü...", QHA, erişim tarihi: 29.09.2021, <https://qha.com.tr/haberler/rus-ısgalciler-ktmm-baskan-yardimcisi-nariman-celal-in-evine-baskin-duzenledi/339745/>.
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# RUSSIA'S INTERESTS IN THE ARCTIC: FROM THE PAST TO THE PRESENT

In the last two decades, the Arctic is attracting more and more attention from regional as well as non-regional countries. This is primarily due to the fact that with the global warming, the natural resources and transport routes of the region become more and more accessible.

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In the last two decades, the Arctic is attracting more and more attention from regional as well as non-regional countries. This is primarily due to the fact that with the global warming, the natural resources and transport routes of the region become more and more accessible. Besides, in the Russian history, the North has always played a significant role in the cultural, economic, social and military spheres. Starting with the history of exploration and development of the Arctic region by the Russian state, this article is devoted to understand Russia's interests and policy towards the region, as well as the main challenges that the Russian Federation has been facing.

### **The History of Russia in the Arctic Region**

The North Pole has always attracted the attention of travellers and explorers from different countries. Since ancient times, despite the incredible difficulties, these people have explored the cold Arctic and completed the world map with new discoveries. The Russian explorers and scientists played a significant role in the study and development of the Arctic. In order to understand Russia's current interests in the region, it is important to briefly look through the past.

The North has always played a special role in the Russian history. Six main periods in the exploration of Arctic by the Russian state can be distinguished. Although little known, the first attempts to reach the coast of the Arctic Ocean were made by Russian sailors back in the 11th century. The Nikon Chronicle<sup>1</sup> contains a record that the Novgorod mayor (Ru. *posadnik*) Uleb made a sea

voyage from the Northern Dvina to the "Iron Gate," though it is unknown whether it was the Strait of Kara Gates located between the islands of Vaygach and Novaya Zemlya or the Strait of Yugorsky Shar, which separates the island of Vaygach from the mainland. Later, in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Pomors, who are a sub-ethnos of the Russian people in the White Sea in the North of present-day Russia, mastered the territory of Vaygach Island and Novaya Zemlya, and at the end of the 15th century - the islands of the Spitsbergen archipelago and the Bear Island in the Barents Sea. In 1499, the first Russian polar city of Pustozersk was founded,<sup>2</sup> and later in 1584 the city Arkhangelsk, which was the main Russian Northern port until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was founded by the decree of Ivan the Terrible. The name of the city comes from the nearby Archangel Michael Monastery, the history of which goes back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. While on the subject, it should also be pointed out that the North played an important spiritual role in the Russian history, thus in 1429 the famous Solovetsky Monastery was founded and in 1533 the Pechenega Monastery was built.

The second period of the development of the Arctic was the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, when Russian merchants and the Cossacks mastered the Mangazeya sea route - from the Northern Dvina to Ob - which is a section of the modern Northern Sea Route. In 1601, by the Tsarist decree, the city of Mangazeya, which was a trade and military outpost of the Russian state in the Arctic, was built on the Taz River. At the same time, artisanal oil production began in coastal pits and on the surface of the water.

The third period, 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, can be marked as a time of important historic discoveries. In 1648, the



Cossack Ataman Semen Dezhnev undertook a voyage along the coast of Chukotka, during which he discovered the strait between Asia and America. Later in 1728, during the First Kamchatka Expedition (1728-1729) organized by the decree of Emperor Peter I, Vitus Bering, an officer of the Russian fleet confirmed the presence of a strait dividing Chukotka and Alaska. In 1733-1743, the Russian Arctic was explored by the Great Northern Expedition of Vitus Bering, brothers Dmitry and Khariton Laptev, Stepan Malygin, Semyon Chelyuskin and others. Its participants, during sea and land voyage mapped almost the entire Russian coast of the Arctic Ocean, as well as the shores of the Okhotsk and Bering seas.<sup>3</sup> In 1765, according to the plan developed by the Russian scientist Mikhail Lomonosov, the Arctic expedition of Vasily Chichagov was organized. The purpose of the voyage was to find a sea passage from Spitsbergen to Kamchatka through the waters close to the North Pole. Despite the failure, related documents of the expedition significantly enriched national science.

19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century can be highlighted as the fourth period in the exploration of Arctic by the Russian state. In 1820-1824, an expedition led by Ferdinand Wrangel and Fyodor Matyushkin surveyed the coast of the Arctic Ocean from the mouth of the Kolyma River to the Kolyuchinskaya Bay in Chukotka. In the same years, the polar explorer Fyodor Litke made a map of the Novaya Zemlya archipelago and described the shores of the White Sea. In 1826, Litke set off on the

“Senyavin” sloop on a voyage around the world that lasted three years. This expedition turned out to be one of the most successful in the 19th century, since a number of new islands were discovered, and the shores of Kamchatka were explored and described. In this period, other countries that had access to the northern seas were also active in an effort to explore and develop the North, which alarmed the Russian government. As a result, from the end of the 19th century, not only the programs for the scientific development of the North and the Arctic, but also for the resettlement of a larger number of residents there began. At the same time, important steps were taken to build up the military presence in the Arctic. In 1898, the first military port of Aleksandrovskiy was established in the Kola Bay of the Barents Sea, which today is the largest base for the Northern Fleet of Russia. In 1916, the city of Romanov-on-Murman was founded, which is now called Murmansk - the largest city in the world, located above the Arctic Circle.<sup>4</sup> In 1900-1902, the Imperial Academy of Sciences organized the Russian Polar Expedition led by Baron Eduard Toll and Fleet Lieutenant Alexander Kolchak, during which a study of the New Siberian Islands was carried out. As a result, about two hundred new geographical names were put on the Arctic map. In 1913-1915, Boris Vilkitzky led a hydrographic expedition, where he discovered the Severnaya Zemlya archipelago, and then made the first ever voyage by the Northern Sea Route from Vladivostok to Arkhangelsk. On 25 April 25 1919, the government of Admiral Alexander Kolchak established the Committee for the

**After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the economic situation forced Russia to stop all activities in the Arctic region. From 1991 to 2001, there was not a single functioning Russian drifting station in the Arctic (the Soviet station North Pole 31 was closed in July 1991) and not a single expedition was made. There were no scientific research, either.**

Northern Sea Route - the first state institution created to organize sea transportation in the Arctic.

During the Soviet period, there had been an active institutionalization of the research and development of the Far North. On 15 April 1926, a resolution was adopted by the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR, according to which all lands and islands located in the Arctic Ocean north of the coast of the USSR and up to the North Pole belonged to USSR. This resolution was considered as a response to Canada's claim to the territory between its mainland and the North Pole made in 1925.<sup>5</sup>

In fact until 1982 the entire Arctic was divided between only five states - the USSR, Norway, Denmark, the United States and Canada - into sectors, the peaks of which were the North Pole, the bases were the northern borders of these states facing the pole, and the lateral sides were the geographical longitudes. After demarcating and legitimizing its territory in the Arctic, the USSR began rapidly populating and industrializing the region. By 1925, the Research Institute for the Study of the North was established, the task of which was to coordinate all research work in the Arctic. Later in 1958, the Institute was transformed into the Research Institute for the Study of the Arctic and Antarctic. In 1932, under the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR, the Main Directorate of the Northern Sea Route was created with the mandate of not only the economic development of the Arctic and ensuring navigation along the Northern Sea Route from the White Sea to the Bering Strait, but also of carrying out geological work and exploring useful fossils in the Arctic.

It is important to note that the Northern Sea Route played a special role during the World War II. It was a kind of 'road of life' for the Soviet Union, which received coal, non-ferrous metals, shells, transport, and food from the allies through the northern routes. In the post-war period, the government of the Soviet Union continued to

develop this region and its transport arteries, allocating significant financial and human resources. This was largely facilitated by the construction of a new generation of icebreakers powered by atomic energy. The first voyage of the nuclear submarine *Leninsky Komsomol* and the nuclear icebreaker *Arktika* were implemented in 1962 and 1977 respectively.<sup>6</sup>

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the economic situation forced Russia to stop all activities in the Arctic region. From 1991 to 2001, there was not a single functioning Russian drifting station in the Arctic (the Soviet station North Pole 31 was closed in July 1991) and not a single expedition was made. There were no scientific research, either. In the 1990s, funding for the Arctic regions was significantly reduced, many infrastructure facilities were abandoned, and the number of settlements decreased by almost a third. The annual traffic volumes along the Northern Sea Route have decreased four times: from 6.58 million tons in 1987 to 1.5-2.0 million tons in 1996.<sup>7</sup>

New period of Russian Arctic policy began in 1997 with the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982, according to which the territory of the state includes only the shelf, while the offshore zone is declared international. Article 76 of the Convention automatically sets the shelf boundaries at 200 nautical miles, but gives the state the right to claim a shelf extending beyond this boundary.<sup>8</sup> With the advent of the new government in 2000, the revival of the Russian Arctic policy began. The work of drifting stations was resumed and the problems of the Arctic zone began to be actively discussed. New polar expeditions with the participation of international partners began to be carried out. Large research institutes were re-established, new roads, modern settlements, and meteorological stations were built.

In December 2001, Russia was the first country to apply to the UN Commission to expand the outer border of its Arctic shelf. The Russian Federation claimed that the underwater Mendeleev and Lomonosov ridges, located in the central part of the Arctic Ocean, are an integral part of the Eurasian continental platform, i.e. Russian. However, the UN Commission stated that, firstly, the map of the relief was drawn up insufficiently accurately and in detail, and secondly, that the Russia's substantiation of the continental nature of the ridges and, accordingly, their belonging to the Siberian shelf was not entirely convincing, for these reasons it rejected the application.

If the ridges are proven to be an extension of the mainland, then Russia would be able to own almost half of the Arctic Ocean, including the North Pole, which means 1.2 million square km of hydrocarbon-rich marine

sediments, the reserves of which are estimated at five billion tons of fuel equivalent.<sup>9</sup>

However, the rejection of the Russian application by the UN Commission did not lessen the attention to the Arctic and its problems, on the opposite the “Marine Doctrine of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2020” was approved by the President of the Russian Federation in July 2001, where the Arctic regional direction is singled out as one of the main regional directions of the Russian maritime policy. It is worth noting that in 2015 Russia applied to the UN Commission one more time but again could not obtain the desirable results.

### **Why Arctic Becomes Even More Important for the Russian Federation?**

Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Arctic, with its economic, geopolitical and geostrategic potential, has become a region of interests not only for the Arctic, but also for non-Arctic countries. The expiration in 2020 of a number of documents including the regulatory framework for the development of the Russian Arctic, launched a new wave of strategic planning. The plan for the development of the infrastructure of the Northern Sea Route for the period until 2035 was approved at the end of 2019. This was followed, in March 2020, by the approval of the –“Fundamentals of Public Policy of Russia in Arctic” for the period up to 2035. In October 2020, strategy for the development of the Arctic zone of the

Russian Federation and ensuring national security for the period up to 2035 was adopted. One of the main tasks outlined in these documents are “ensuring sovereignty and territorial integrity,” “preserving the Arctic as a territory of peace, stable and mutually beneficial cooperation,”<sup>10</sup> development and modernization of the armed forces and its infrastructure, creation of new and modernization of existing industrial production, and the development of science-intensive and high-tech industries.<sup>11</sup>

So, what are the reasons of the importance of the Arctic region for Russia? Arguably, there are two main reasons, the first one is economic and the second one is military-strategic. It is well known that by reserves of the natural resources the Arctic is one of the richest regions in the world. The US Geological Survey reveals that the Arctic region contains at least 13% of the world's oil reserves, at least 30% of natural gas, as well as deposits of gold, diamonds, copper, nickel, coal and a long list of other resources, including scarce rare earth elements,<sup>12</sup> approximately half of which is on the Russian territory. Thus, the Arctic produces 80% of all natural gas and 17% of Russian oil, 90% of Russian nickel and cobalt, 60% of copper and almost 100% diamonds, rare and rare earth metals. The region accounts for about 10% of Russian GDP and 20% of total exports country,<sup>13</sup> though only 1.95 million people live here - about 1.4% of the population of the entire country. As it was mentioned above since 2001 Russia has been trying to convince the UN Commission that Lomonosov and Mendeleev Ridges are



the continuation of the mainland, the reason of this struggle lays in the fact that the 1.2 million square kilometres area is rich in hydrocarbon. For a country, economy of which is highly dependent on the export of natural resources, primarily hydrocarbons, the fight for this territory is highly understandable.

Moreover, in the case of further ice melting, Russia can derive considerable economic benefits from the development and operation of the Northern Sea Route (NSR). According to the experts, by 2030 the waterways of the NSR will be free of ice for six months of the year. In the more distant future, between 2035 and 2050, the NSR will be fully navigable most of the year or even all year round without the compulsory accompaniment of icebreakers.<sup>14</sup> The growth in the cargo volume can already be taken note of, thus in 2013 the traffic consisted of 2.8 million tons<sup>15</sup>, whereas in 2020 it was 33 million tons.<sup>16</sup> Thus, in the future, the NSR will be able not only to ensure the functioning of the transport infrastructure of the Russian state connecting the European and Far Eastern parts of the country, but also become an alternative for the delivery of goods from Europe to the Asia-Pacific region in a much shorter route compared to traditional ones through the Suez Canal.

The next reason for Russia's increased interest in the region is the military-strategic importance of the Arctic region for the country's defence capability, which is determined by the fact that it is the shortest air route between North America and the strategic regions of Central Russia. In case of a confrontation between the West and Russia, the Arctic zone may become one of the main theatres of military operations. The declaration of the Arctic Ocean as neutral international waters, even taking into account the 200-mile exclusive economic zone, actually opens the Russian northern coastline for strikes by cruise and hypersonic missiles from ships and submarines of the NATO countries. It should be noted that over the past 10 years there has been a significant strengthening of the military presence of the Russian Federation in the Arctic. Thus, an important institutional measure in matters of providing military security of the Russian Federation in the Arctic was the creation of the united strategic command *Sever* (North) in 2014 based on the existing Northern Fleet. The purpose of the new command, which includes units of the naval and ground forces, naval aviation, as well as air defence forces, is to ensure the safety of the Russian Arctic. Moreover, the goal of its establishment was to create military camps and build airfields in strategically important areas of the Russian Arctic, namely, the Island Wrangel, Alexandra Land (part of the Franz Josef Land archipelago), Severnaya Zemlya, as well as Novaya Zemlya. In addition to establishing a new military infrastructure and modernizing the existing one, there is the creation of Arctic troops numbering in 10-12

thousand servicemen, the core of which will be the regiment of the naval infantry in Murmansk and a motorized infantry brigade in Pechenga. Together with the border units already deployed in the Arctic, number of which is 6.000 people, as well as 45-50.000 military personnel of Northern Fleet, the aggregate military potential will be a powerful argument in the event of a crisis in the region.<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting that the increase in the military presence in the Arctic is considered by Russia not only as a tool to ensure the defence of its mainland from the possible attacks but also as a means to protect its dominance in the region in terms of extracting natural resources.

### The Challenges for Russia in the Arctic Region?

It cannot be ignored that the Arctic region has the same importance for other Arctic countries, as well. In the context of the increasing geopolitical status of the Arctic, there has been a dangerous tendency towards the militarization of the region. This is manifested in the strengthening of the military presence of individual Arctic states, thus, for example, Norway is systematically increasing its military presence in the northern regions of the country, which includes the regrouping of individual units, and also an increase in tracking operations by submarine forces.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, in the last three years the United States published three military strategies, in which the Arctic region has been declared as one of the most preferential theatres for building up the American military presence. This confrontation is quite challenging, since Russia needs to protect its Arctic territories in order not only to ensure its national security, but also in order to be able to defend its rights on territories rich in natural resources.

Secondly, with the ice melting, the region has already started attracting the non-Arctic countries that want not only to participate in economic and transport projects, but also to have a right to control and manage the region. Thus, for promotion of common interests in ensuring access to the resources of the Arctic, as well as the right to free use of the Northern Sea Route, the Asian Polar Research Forum with the participation of China, Japan, South Korea, Thailand and Malaysia was founded in 2004. China that has already been creating its own icebreaker fleet has fixed its eyes on the resources of the Arctic. The confrontation between the US, NATO, Russia and China seems to be a possibility in the new region.

Thirdly, deepening interests and involvement of non-Arctic countries in the region jeopardizes the status of the Northern Sea Route, which is currently fully regulated by Russia. Russia uses Article 234 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982, which allows the coastal states to establish national laws and regulations for navigation



in ice-covered areas within its exclusive economic zone to prevent or control environmental pollution. However, most foreign states are in favour of giving the NSR international status, i.e., removing it from the national jurisdiction of Russia and opening it to free navigation.

Fourthly, the unsettled nature of the Arctic maritime borders continues to be a serious source of international conflicts in this region and an obstacle to cooperation between different countries. All Arctic countries try to extract as much benefit as it can in terms of delimitations of the region leading to confrontation between the countries rather than facilitating cooperation. For example, the United States is trying to benefit from the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which it did not ratify while Norway and Denmark use this Convention to extend their maritime borders.

Finally, until 2014 Russian energy companies actively cooperated with Western companies for the joint development of energy resources in the Russian North. However, sanctions, which were introduced by the Western countries as a response to the Russia's annexation of Crimea and destabilization of the situation in Ukraine, forced foreign companies to leave joint projects with Russia. This created a number of serious technological prob-

**In a world where limited resources are the most important factor in ensuring the economic development of the states, with the melting of ice, the Arctic region became a subject for new disputes and confrontations between the main geopolitical actors.**

lems that affect not only the country's technological independence, but also the economic security of Russia. These are the main and the most important challenges, which Russia faces. It is also worth noting that the realization of the objectives in the region is inhibited by shrinking population in the Russian Arctic Zone, lagging quality of life, high occupational risk, low transport infrastructure and so on.

### Conclusion

For centuries Russia has been playing an important role in the development and exploration of the Arctic region and now, in some cases, try to preserve its unique status in the region. In a world where limited resources

are the most important factor in ensuring the economic development of the states, with the melting of ice, the Arctic region became a subject for new disputes and confrontations between the main geopolitical actors. Especially, this region rich with natural resources has significant importance for countries, economies of which are dominantly dependent on these resources. Despite the fact that the official representatives claim that Russian economy is getting off the 'oil needle,' the economic development of the Russian Federation is still determined by gas and oil exports and their prices.

With its increasing importance, militarization of the region is also happening at a rapid pace. For Russia, the Arctic has military-strategic significance, as well. As it was

mentioned above, it is the shortest distance from the USA to the strategic political and economic regions of Central Russia. Thus, to be able to confront any possible attack and to ensure its sovereignty, Russia is interested in the development of its military forces and infrastructure in the North.

Due to the economic and military-defense importance of the region, Russia will continue its presence in the Arctic, despite all challenges it is facing with. Due to its capabilities it seems that soon the Arctic region can become a dominant factor in the policies of different countries, which will make Russia even more assertive in its actions in the region.

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# SOVYET SONRASI DÖNEMDE ÖZBEKİSTAN'DA DİN TEMELLİ MUHALEFET VE 2005 YILI ANDİCAN OLAYLARI

Soğuk Savaş sonrası bağımsızlığını kazanan Orta Asya cumhuriyetlerinde din ve İslam unsurunun hangi özelliklerle algılanmaya başladığı ve ne gibi gelişmeleri beraberinde getirdiği esasen daha geniş çalışmalarda araştırılmaya devam eden kaydadeğer bir konu başlığıdır.

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**A**vrasya ve Orta Asya bölgesi dengeleri içerisinde önemli bir konuma sahip olan Özbekistan, Sovyetler Birliği'nin (SSCB) yıkılışını takiben, bu Birliğin ardılı olan ülke yönetimlerinde hâkim olan elit-temelli katı idare anlayışına muhalif ve aynı zamanda dinsel öğelerden de güç alan direnç merkezlerinden biri olmuştur. Soğuk Savaş sonrası bağımsızlığını kazanan Orta Asya cumhuriyetlerinde din ve İslam unsurunun hangi özelliklerle algılanmaya başladığı ve ne gibi gelişmeleri beraberinde getirdiği esasen daha geniş çalışmalarda araştırılmaya devam eden kaydadeğer bir konu başlığıdır.<sup>1</sup> Bu makalede ise, Orta Asya'da genel çerçevede İslam'a ve özellikle bir tehdit olarak algılanan radikal unsurların araçsallaştırdığı İslam'a karşı benimsenen politikalara değinilecek, daha detaylı olarak ise tarihi arka plana da sahip Özbekistan üzerinde durulacaktır. Bu kapsamda, 2016 yılında hayatını kaybeden ancak güçlü ve merkezîyetçi iktidar tarzının etkileri hala hissedilen İslam Kerimov idaresindeki devletin sahip olduğu yönetim felsefesi ve bu dönemden miras kalan sonuçlar ortaya konulmaya çalışılacaktır. Bu manada, Mayıs 2005'te kimilerine göre 'Yeşil Devrim' provası olarak adlandırılan bir ayaklanmanın merkezi olan Özbekistan'da, aynı dönemde Gürcistan (2003 Gül Devrimi) ve Ukrayna'da (2004 Turuncu Devrim) gerçekleşen ve çoğu Batı kaynaklarında 'demokratik karakterli' olarak addedilen devrim uygulamalarından farklılaşan din motifli bir ayaklanmanın neden vuku bulunduğu sorusu yanıtlanmaya çalışılacaktır.

## **1990 Sonrası Dönem ve Orta Asya Genelinde Din (İslam) Unsuru**

Sovyet dönemi sonrasında bağımsız olan beş Orta Asya devletinde, yani Kazakistan, Kırgızistan, Özbekistan, Tacikistan ve Türkmenistan'da, din unsuru, özellikle politik yapılanmaya nasıl etkilerde bulunacağı ve devletlerin karakterlerini hangi boyutlarda etkileyeceği hususlarında kafaları karıştıran bir unsur olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. İlk etapta, anılan yeni devletleri "Sovyetlerden dağılan" veya "yeni Müslüman devletler" olarak tanımlamak arasında bazı farklılıklar doğmaya başlamıştır.<sup>2</sup> Bu tartışmanın temelinde, bir kesimin SSCB'den kopan devletler arasında özellikle Orta Asya'daki yeni oluşumları, üst yönetimlerinde görevli eski Komünist Parti görevlileri, reform karşıtı olabilecek merkezîyetçilikleri ve geçmiş dönemden kalan sosyo-ekonomik sorunlarıyla beraber anmaya devam etmeleri;<sup>3</sup> diğer bir kesimin ise, 1990'larla başlayan yeni dönemi, uzun yıllar Moskova yönetiminin himayesinde, din ve İslam unsurunun baskı altında olduğu Orta Asya halklarının özerkliği anlamında ele almaları yatmaktadır. Geline durumda ise denilebilir ki, özellikle bağımsızlıkların elde edildiği süreç içerisinde Orta Asya Müslüman halklarının önemli bir çoğunluğu 'Sovyet katı merkezîyetçiliğinden' miras kalan siyasal elit temelli ve muhalefetin aşgari düzeyde tutulduğu bir yönetim yapısı altında gelişim çizgisi izlemişler ve esasen bu durumun da etkisiyle, dünyanın benzeri bölgelerindeki din kaynaklı, yüksek yoğunluklu ve uzun süreli kargaşa





Özbekistan Cumhurbaşkanı Kerimov, Rusya Federasyonu (RF) Devlet Başkanı Putin'le  
Kaynak: <https://tr.sputniknews.com>. / Erişim: 12 Eylül 2021

ortamlarına girmeyerek, kendilerini 'Müslüman olarak tanımlama' sürecine imkânlar dâhilinde barış içinde devam etmişlerdir.

Öte yandan, Avrasya bölgesi ve özelinde Orta Asya, komşu İran, Pakistan, Afganistan gibi ülkelerin iç gelişmeleri ve Sovyet sonrası dönemde hız kesmeyen Amerikan-Rus hegemonya mücadelelerinden olumsuz etkilenmiş, bu surette değişen politik ve sosyal denklemlerde, İslam'ın daha uç anlamlarda, başka bir deyişle radikal odakların aracı olarak değerlendirilmesi sorunsalıyla karşı karşıya kalabilmiştir. Kimi yorumculara göre ise birçok Orta Asya ülkesinde kendini açıkça 'dindar' tanımlamaya başlayan kitlelerin her şeye rağmen "radikal gruplara yoğun bir sosyal taban sağlamamaları" da belirginleşen diğer bir olgu olmuştur.<sup>4</sup> Bu noktada tabiatıyla istisnai örnekler mevcuttur ki, Orta Asya devletlerine göre özellikle dini yapılanmalar ve bunlara yönelik toplumsal destek hususunda daha güçlü bir zemini olan Tacikistan, bağımsızlığın kazanılması ile hızlı bir sosyal buhran dönemine sürüklenmiştir. Diğer devletlere de örnek olabilecek bir vaka haline gelen Tacikistan, dini grupların iktidara yönelik olarak arz ettiği tehlikeyi de göstermiş, iç savaş olarak kayda giren şiddet ortamı 1992-1997 yılları arasında

ülkeye hâkim olmuştur.<sup>5</sup> Ancak bu örneği göz önüne alan aralarında Özbekistan'ın da olduğu diğer Orta Asya liderleri için de radikal din unsuruna dayalı muhalefet ve bunun olası vahim sonuçlarının halklarına anlatılması konusu ilerleyen yıllarda liderlerin ellerindeki önemli bir politik araç haline gelmiştir.

Bu bağlamda, 'köktenci' ya da 'radikal' olarak ifade edilen bir İslam olgusunun hızla tırmanışa geçmesi, Orta Asya devletleri için bağımsızlıkları sonrasında temelde kaygı verici bir noktadır. Günümüzde tekrar popüler bir tartışma konusu haline gelen ancak esasen 1996 yılından bu yana Afganistan'da güç kazanmaya devam eden Taliban örgütlenmesi, bu anlamda Orta Asya'daki benzeri köktenci grupları da harekete geçirecek veya motive edecek bir tehlike olarak görülmüştür.<sup>6</sup> 2000li yılların başına kadarki zor dönemleri atlattırmaya çalışan ve İslam'ın algılandığındaki sorunları büyük oranda aşmaya başlayan toplumsal gruplar için, bölgenin Sovyet dönemi sonrası zayıf ve sorunlu ekonomik yapılanmasının da etkisiyle din unsuru önemli bir çıkış noktası olarak görülebilmisti. Bu minvalde, Orta Asya devletlerinde Sovyet sonrası yönetimlerin bağımsızlık sonrası ilk bocalamaları ve anti-demokratik uygulamaların varlığı düşünülürse, 'etki-tepki'

olğusundan, İslam unsurunun neden belli radikal gruplarca kullanılmasına hız verildiğini anlamak da zor olmayacaktır. Aslında, Orta Asya devletlerinin arasında veya dış ilişkilerinde en önemli role sahip olmayan din/İslam unsurunu anlamak için, halkın kendini hangi terimlerle karakterize edeceği ve özel olarak, ağır sosyo-ekonomik çerçeve içinde din unsuruna bahşedeceği önem üzerinde de durulmalıdır.

Yukarıdaki genel tablo ışığında halkın, 'gelenekleşme-siyle' paralel radikal din unsuruna artan surette meyledebilmesiyle ilintili olarak, Orta Asya bölge liderlerinin bağımsızlıklarından bu yana izledikleri politika, kurdukları işbirliği mekanizmaları ve yönetim felsefeleri şüphesiz önem kazanmaktadır. Söz konusu yönetim felsefesinde, sorunları ve bu sorunları dile getiren muhalif unsurları asgari seviyede tutmak adına Sovyet tarzı baskı anlayışını idarelerinin temel dayanağı haline getirmekten çekinmeyen kimi bölge ülkeleri, arzu edilen toplumsal gelişim seviyesinden, özellikle 1990'lar ve 2000'lerin ilk dönemi boyunca oldukça uzak görünmekteydi.

Bu makalenin geri kalan kısmında Özbekistan örneğinin incelenmesi, özel olarak din kaynaklı muhalefetin belli gruplar elinde Orta Asya'da kazandığı radikal biçimler, bunu değiştirmek için ortaya konan devlet şiddeti ve

**'Köktenci' ya da 'radikal' olarak ifade edilen bir İslam olgusunun hızla tırmanışa geçmesi, Orta Asya devletleri için bağımsızlıkları sonrası temelde kaygı verici bir noktadır.**

bütün bu sorunsalın altındaki temel nedenleri anlamaya yardımcı olacaktır.

### **Katı Bir İktidar ve Bağımsızlık Sonrası Özbekistan**

Özbekistan'ın kısa tarihine göz attığımızda, bu devletin, SSCB'den ayrılma süreci ile beraber diğer Orta Asya Cumhuriyetleri gibi siyasal ve toplumsal surette hızlı bir değişim sürecine girdiğini söylemeliyiz. Halen yaklaşık 35 milyonluk nüfusu ile bu cumhuriyetlerin en kalabalık ve etkinlerinden olan Özbekistan'da nüfusun %80'lik kısmını Özbek, geri kalanını ise Rus, Tacik ve Kazak gruplar oluşturmaktadır.<sup>7</sup> Ekonomik açıdan, Orta Asya ve Kafkaslar'daki diğer bazı devletler gibi Özbekistan da petrol ve doğal gaz kaynakları ile dikkatleri üzerine çekmektedir.



SSCB sonrası demokratik ortamda yapıldığı ifade edilen seçimlere karşılık, başta Batı'dan olmak üzere, birçok kaynaktan yöneltilen ve Özbekistan'ın demokratikliğini sorgulayan yorum ve değerlendirmelere sıklıkla rastlanmaktadır. Anılan eleştiriler çoğunlukla yönetimdeki tek isim olan İslam Kerimov'u hedef almış olmakla beraber aslında Orta Asya ülkelerinin genelinde bağımsızlık sonrası, demokratik görünümü otokratik devlet oluşumunu konu edinmiştir. 2016 yılındaki vefatına kadar İslam Kerimov yönetimindeki Özbekistan örneği de bu grup ülkelerin üst sıralarında tutulmaktadır.<sup>8</sup>

Geçmişe kısaca dönülüp bakıldığında, 29 Aralık 1991'de yapılan ilk serbest seçimler dikkat çekmektedir. Özbekistan Halk Demokratik Partisi adıyla eski Komünist Parti başkanı İslam Kerimov oyların %86'sını almış ve cumhurbaşkanı olmuştur. Kerimov, merkeziyetçi siyaset tarzına 2000 yılındaki seçimlerde aldığı %91'lik ezici galibiyetle hız vermiş, ülkede devam eden örgütlü muhalefet eksikliği ise ağırlıklı olarak Özbekistan'ın temel sorunu olarak görülmeye devam etmiştir. Bununla birlikte, demokratik yaşamdaki anılan eksiklerin yeni bağımsız tüm Orta Asya ülkeleri için geçerli olduğunu gözden çıkarmamak gerekir.

Kerimov'un baskıcı olarak nitelenen yönetim anlayışında da aslında kendisi için ileriki dönemlerde ortaya çıkacak sorunlara gebe uygulamaların oluştuğunu görmek şaşırtıcı değildir. Örnek olarak, 1992 yılında ülkedeki tüm muhalif güçler, yani büyük oranda radikal dinci ve milliyetçi gruplar, yasaklanmıştır. Ülkede az sayıda kalan etkin muhalefet yapılanmalarına bakıldığında ise Erk Partisi ve Politik Birlik Partisi ülkenin önde gelen iktidar dışı yapıları olarak belirlemiştir. Bunlardan Erk Partisi, 1989 yılında aşırı milliyetçi olarak nitelendirilen ve daha sonra kapatılan Birlik Partisi içinden kopan bazı aydınların 1989 yılında oluşturduğu bir oluşumdur. 1992'de yasaklansa da, 2003 yılında yeniden yasal faaliyetlerine başlamıştır. Aynı zamanda 1991 yılında Kerimov'a karşı seçimlere katılan

**Kerimov yönetimi, bağımsızlık sonrası oluşan toplumsal dengeler bağlamında seküler bir yönetim anlayışını benimser görünürken, laik yapılanmayı otoritesini pekiştirme aracı olarak kullanmaktan da çekinmemiştir. Bu anlamda, devlet işleri ile din işlerini ayırmak yerine oluşacak toplumsal altyapıyı baştan baskılamak adına devletin din üzerindeki kontrolünü arttırmak Özbekistan politik hayatında dikkati çeken önemli bir husus olmuştur.**

ve oylardan resmi rakamlara göre %12'sine yakın - kimi yorumculara göre %30 hatta %50'nin üstünde - bir pay almayı başaran da yine Erk Partisi olmuştur.<sup>9</sup>

Yukarıda ana hatları ile sunulan yönetim özellikleri ile Özbekistan içerisinde din unsurunu ve İslam'ın rolünü incelediğimizde ilgi çekici sonuçlara rastlamak mümkündür. Örnek olarak, tarihi altyapıda 7. yüzyılın sonlarından itibaren şu anki Özbekistan topraklarında İslam'ın rolü ve öneminin benimsenmeye başladığını söylemek gerekir. Kerimov dönemi Özbekistan resmi tarih yazıcılığında da dikkat çeken şey, Emir Timur (1336-1405) ve onun döneminde yaşanan sosyal ve siyasal atılımlardan bu yana, Orta Asya İslam'ının Özbekistan merkezli daha 'ılımlı' bir tonda gelişme göstermesidir.<sup>10</sup> Sovyet dönemi sonrasında ise insanların kendilerini bulduğu ve bireysel özelliklerini örtüstürmeye başladıkları bir İslam anlayışından bahsetmek mümkündür. Konunun bu boyutunda Özbekistan, zengin bir tarihi arka plandan da güç alarak, İslam'ın "en ateşli ve canlı" olarak yaşandığı bölge olarak telaffuz edilmektedir.<sup>11</sup>

Kerimov yönetimi, bağımsızlık sonrası oluşan toplumsal dengeler bağlamında seküler bir yönetim anlayışını benimser görünürken, laik yapılanmayı otoritesini pekiştirme aracı olarak kullanmaktan da çekinmemiştir. Bu anlamda, devlet işleri ile din işlerini ayırmak yerine oluşacak toplumsal altyapıyı baştan baskılamak adına devletin din üzerindeki kontrolünü arttırmak Özbekistan politik hayatında dikkati çeken önemli bir husus olmuştur. İslam için, özellikle benimsenen politikalar dâhilinde, yasaklamalar önemli bir yer tutmaktadır. Aslında pek çok çevreye göre özellikle Orta Asya'da radikal din temelli muhalefetin önüne geçmede ve bu surette devlet yönetimini güçlendirmede önemli bir isim olarak görülen Kerimov'un bu politikalarının arka yüzünde ise çoğu kademelerde yönetimine gittikçe yabancılaşan bir halk kitlesinin oluştuğunu söylemek yanlış olmayacaktır.

Bununla birlikte, Kerimov döneminde, radikal din unsuruna karşı benimsenmiş olan Sovyet tarzını anımsatan ağır baskı politikasına alternatif olarak daha ılımlı gelişmeler de yaşanabilmiştir. İç politikada, Kerimov'un kendi eliyle İslami konulara ağırlık veren bir televizyon kanalı açması veya İslam öğretilerine yer veren bir üniversiteye izin vermesi toplumsal açıdan daha barışçıl anlayışın yerleşmesinde halkı teşvik edici gelişmeler olarak tarif edilebilmektedir.<sup>12</sup> İkinci önemli alan olan dış politikada ise özellikle gündemi yakından etkileyen Şangay İşbirliği Örgütü oluşumu gibi ortaklıklar dikkati çeker. Bu tür bir oluşumda yer alan Özbekistan için işbirliği kurulan diğer devletler Çin, Rusya Federasyonu (RF), Kırgızistan, Tacikistan ve Kazakistan olmuştur. Bu ülkeleri yakın planda incelediğimizde Orta Asya'da yükselebilecek muhtemel bir İslami dalgaya karşı ortak bir inisiyatif kurma düşüncesi önemli bir arka planı işaret etmektedir. Özbekistan,

Şangay Beşlisi olarak bilinen bu inisiyatife Haziran 2001'de dâhil olarak, farklı yorumlara göre din temelli örgütlere karşı mücadelesinde yeni bir adım atmış olmakta, ancak tek taraflı katı politikalarını da, çok taraflılık prensibiyle bir nebze de olsa hafifletmektedir.<sup>13</sup>

### Özbekistan'da Bağımsızlık Sonrası Din Temelli İlk Yapılanmalar ve Faaliyet Alanları

Özbekistan gibi farklı tarihi süreçlerden geçen, bağımsızlıklarını geç elde etseler de, köklü toplumsal ve siyasal hafızaları olan ülkelerde, devletin otoriter yapısına paralel olarak beliren farklı sosyal örgütlenmeleri ve bunlar arasında özellikle din temelli yapılanmaların oluşma sürecini iyi değerlendirmek gerekir.<sup>14</sup> Bu gibi grupların rejimden rahatsız olanları yanlarına çekme çabaları ve halk kitlelerine olan yaklaşımları, Kerimov hükümeti ile İslam sentezli emellerini gizlemeyen örgütler arasındaki tansiyonu gündemden güne arttırmıştır. Bu çerçevede, Özbekistan İslami Hareketi (ÖİH) ve Orta Asya'da geniş yapısıyla Hizb-ut Tahrir al İslami'nin faaliyetleri yeni gelişmelere zemin hazırlamıştır.<sup>15</sup> Bu örgütlerin özellikle düşünce dünyalarını eyleme dökmeye daha istekli genç insanları saflarına çekip, onları maddi bakımdan da destekleyerek bölgede kullanmaları, 1990'ların ikinci yarısından itibaren iktidar tarafından ülke içindeki istikrara yönelik en önemli tehdit olarak algılanmaya başlamıştır.

Özbekistan'da dini grupların içinde olduğu bazı şiddet eylemlerinin geçmişi incelediğimizde, özellikle 1996 yılından itibaren Afganistan'da Taliban rejiminin güçlenmesine paralel bir şekilde somut şiddet olaylarında bir artış görüldüğü tespit edilmektedir.<sup>16</sup> Başkent Taşkent'teki 1999 yılında yaşanan patlamalar, asıl olarak İslam Kerimov'a yönelik bir faaliyet olarak köktenci örgütlenmelerin hanesine yazılmıştır. 2000 yılı ise bu eylemlerin daha geniş bir sahada değerlendirilmesi gerekliliğini göstermekteydi. Hizb-ut Tahrir ve ÖİH'in ortak olarak Surhanderya bölgesindeki saldırıları<sup>17</sup> hem İslami tehdit anlamında tepkileri yoğunlaştırmış, hem de Özbek hükümetince Tacikistan'a karşı belli suçlamaların yöneltildiği gergin bir ortama işaret etmiştir. Bu suçlamaların en önemlisi radikal militanların Tacik topraklarından Özbekistan'a sızdığı vurgusuydu.<sup>18</sup>

ÖİH için yapılan ilk yorumlara bakıldığında, siyasi gücünü belli silahlı gruplar aracılığı ile sağladığı genel kabul gören bir görüştür. Örgüt, Özbekistan'ın etnik ve sosyal çeşitlilik anlamında takip eden bölümde göreceğimiz şekilde 'sorunlu' alanı olarak nitelenen Fergana Vadisi'nde merkezileşmiştir. Bahsekonu coğrafi alanda yerleşik belli halk kitleleri için, SSCB sonrası elde edilen hızlı bağımsızlığın ve dini özgürlüklerin de etkisiyle, İslam'ın temel motivasyon olarak kullanıldığı şiddet içerikli eylemler bir seçenek haline gelmiştir. Nitekim ÖİH gibi

örgütlenmeler bu surette daha yoğun taraftar toplamaya devam etmişlerdir. Ayrıca, 1992'de Tacikistan'da başlayan iç savaş da, Özbekistan ve ülke içindeki İslami unsurlar üzerinde önemli etkiler doğurmuştur. Bununla birlikte, anılan iç savaşa dinsel emellerle hareket eden insanların karışması savına dayanarak, Kerimov kendi iç rejiminde doğabilecek tehlikeleri, iç politikada bir baskı unsuru olarak kullanmaya daha meşru bir zeminde başlayabilmiştir.

Mevzubahis gelişmelerle beraber din temelli muhalefet üzerindeki yoğun baskı sürecini iyi irdelemek gerekir. Bu dönemden sonra pek çok Özbek vatandaşının Özbekistan dışına kaçmak zorunda olduğu bilinmektedir.<sup>19</sup> ÖİH için diğer yapılan bir yorumda ise finansal olarak belli dış grupların desteğinde olduğu yargısı vardır. Usame Bin Ladin, bu anlamda beliren önemli bir isim olmuştur. Bu bölümde ele alınan iki önemli örgüt olan Hizb-ut Tahrir ve ÖİH'in olası bir ittifakını destekleyen farklı fikirler de aynı dönemde ortaya çıkmış, ancak bu iki oluşumun temel hedeflerindeki farklılıklar gelişmelerde belirleyici olmuştur. Nitekim ÖİH ilk önce Kerimov rejiminin yıkılmasını ve kimi yorumculara göre "militan İslam" anlayışıyla Özbekistan'da din temelli bir devletin kurulmasını,<sup>20</sup> Hizb-ut Tahrir ise genel olarak tüm Orta Asya'da bir İslam devletinin ve ilan edilecek halifelikğin oluşturulmasını öncelikli amaçları olarak belirlemişlerdir. Bu iki oluşumun öncelikleri farklı olsa da, 1999'dan sonra Özbekistan'da ortak hareket etmeye çalıştıkları ayrıca belirtilmektedir.<sup>21</sup>

### Fergana Vadisi

Din temelli toplumsal örgütlenmeler ve bu anlamda Özbek politikasının korumacı ve merkezîyetçi reflexlerle sertleşmesi çerçevesinde, belli coğrafi bölgeler daha yakın planda incelenmelidir. Fergana Vadisi, bu bölgelerin başında gelir.<sup>22</sup> Bölgenin sorunlu bir alan olarak nitelendirilmesinde demografik olarak nüfus dengesizliklerini belirtmek gerekir. Özbekistan, Kırgızistan ve Tacikistan arasında yer alan bu bölgede çok çeşitli insan toplulukları yer almaktadır. Oş Bölgesi olarak bilinen verimli arazinin de burada olduğu göz önüne alındığında anılan coğrafyada çıkan anlaşmazlıkların neden daha ciddi boyutlar kazandığı anlaşılabilir.

Öte yandan, Kırgızistan ve Özbekistan'ın bu bölgedeki varlıkları önemlidir. Sovyet döneminde çok dikkatli ve Moskova yönetiminin hegemonyasını daim kılacak şekilde çizilen iki ülke arasındaki sınıra göre bugünkü Kırgızistan'ın kuzeybatısı ile güneybatısı arasında yolculuk ancak Özbekistan sınırları içerisinde kalan Fergana Vadisi'nden geçmekle mümkün olmaktadır. Bu duruma Fergana Vadisi'nde, tarihi Hokand Hanlığı'na uzanan 'Özbek-Kırgız çekişmesi de eklenince günümüzde halen sorunların farklı boyutlarda sürmesi daha net kavranabilir.



“Fergana Vadisi.” Kaynak: www.stratfor.com / Erişim: 12 Eylül 2021

Birçok bölge uzmanına göre “Orta Asya’nın merkezi” olarak kabul edilebilecek Fergana Vadisi’ndeki “karışık dil ve millî kimlik ilişkisi” 20. yüzyılın başlarına geldiğinde en güzel şu şekilde ifade ediliyordu: “Bu çok dilli vadinin köylerinde [insanlar] evde Özbekçe, camide Tacikçe ve eşinin ailesiyle Kırgızca konuşmaktayken, dil temelinde kendi kimliklerini seçmelerinin gereğini anlamıyorlardı. Bunların hangi birini seçeceklerdi? Fergana Vadisi’nin köylüsü için hepsi eşit derecede önemliydi.”<sup>23</sup>

15 milyona yakın nüfusu ile Vadi’de toplumsal huzursuzluklar ve terör olayları, uyuşturucu madde kaçakçılığı gibi derin meseleler, ekonomik sıkıntılar ve işsizlik ile birlikte şiddetini arttırmaktadır. Özellikle uyuşturucu kaçakçılığı anlamında bölgenin Afganistan kaynaklı uyuşturucu trafiğinin birleşme noktası olması ile durum vahametini korumaktadır. Kerimov hükümetinin atmış olduğu adımlarla, esasen ülkenin daha erken yıllarda baş göstererek uzun yıllara yayılabilecek olası iç savaşlardan korunduğu söylenebilir. Bu anlamda köktenci oluşumlara aşırı güç kullanımı ile çözüm getirme prensibi devam etmiş, ancak sorunların ekonomik boyutu gibi temelde yatan gerçekler görmezden gelinmiştir.

Fergana Vadisi’nin tarihine bakıldığında ise, 1930’lu yıllarda Sovyet rejimine karşı silahlı mücadele yürüten Basmacı hareketine de ev sahipliği yaptığı ve uzun süre Basmacıların kontrolünde kaldığı öncelikle belirtilmelidir.<sup>24</sup> Sovyetler Birliği’nin son dönemlerinde de bölge radikal din temelli grupların etkinliklerinin güçlü olduğu bir yer haline gelmiştir. Sovyetlerin dağılması ve Afganistan’da yaşanan savaşlar ile kontrolün zayıfladığı bölgede gittikçe yoğun köktenci etki hissedilir olmuştur.<sup>25</sup>

Özbekistan’da kendine, güçlü ve otoriter yönetim karşısında taraftar toplamayı amaçlayan belli İslami kesimlerin Fergana Vadisi’nde önemli örgütlenmelerde bulunduğu bilinmektedir. Yukarıda değinilen bu örgütlenmelerden Hizb-ut Tahrir örgütü özellikle 2000’li yıllarda faaliyet alanlarını etkinleştirmiştir. ÖİH bu dönemde gerek Özbekistan gerek Tacikistan ile çeşitli çatışmalara girişirken Hizb-ut Tahrir özellikle Fergana Vadisi’nin karmaşık yapılanmasında merkezileşerek bu bölgedeki halkın sempatisini kazanma çalışmalarına devam etmiştir. Vadi’de çeşitli el ilanları dağıtımı benzeri aktiviteler bu dönemde yoğun olarak gözlemlenmiştir. Bu ilanlar ile örgüt amacının şeriat kuralları ile yönetilecek bir devlet kurma olduğunu herkese duyurmak istemiştir.<sup>26</sup>

1999 yılında İran’daki bir radyoda Özbek yönetimine karşı cihat ilan eden ÖİH, şiddet eylemlerinden sonra sık sık Afganistan’a çekilip güçlerini toparlama stratejisi yürütmüş, Afganistan’a yönelik operasyonların devamında büyük yara alan bu hareketin birçok üyesi için yeni yerleşim yeri ise Tacikistan içinde bazı bölgeler olmuştur.<sup>27</sup> Bu tür gelişmeler esasen zorlu bir bölgede yer alan Özbekistan’ın çevrelediği ülkeler arasında iç istikrarını korumak adına verdiği ve bu esnada Batı tarzı demokratik değerlerin oldukça ötelendiği mücadeleyi de özetler niteliktedir.

## 11 Eylül sonrası ABD Politikaları ve Özbekistan

11 Eylül terör saldırıları sonrasında Amerika Birleşik Devletleri (ABD) ile Özbekistan arasında önemli bir ilişkiler ağının oluştuğunu söylemek mümkündür. Aslında

pek çok kaynağa göre son derece oportünist bir anlayışa sahip olan Kerimov'un tek yanlı ABD politikası düşük bir ihtimaldir, fakat gerçek olan Orta Asya dengeleri içinde Özbekistan'ın ABD etkisi için önemli merkezlerden biri olduğu hususudur.<sup>28</sup> Bu durum Soğuk Savaş sonrası yeni dengelerde ve aynı zamanda 11 Eylül sonrası değişen atmosferde de kendini göstermiştir. Rusya Federasyonu (RF) karşısında bağımsızlığını güçlendirmek isteyen Özbekistan, Gürcistan, Ukrayna, Azerbaycan ve Moldova'nın 1997'de meydana getirdiği ve 'Demokrasi ve Ekonomik Kalkınma Örgütü' olarak nitelenen GUAM örgütüne 1999 yılında dâhil olmuş<sup>29</sup>, birliğin kısıltması GUAM haline gelmiş ve Özbekistan bu esnada Bağımsız Devletler Topluluğu ile bağlarını keserek NATO'ya göz kırpmaya başlamıştır.<sup>30</sup> 11 Eylül sonrasında Afganistan'a yapılacak müdahaleleri için ABD'nin en kilit Orta Asya ülkesi olma görevini üstlenen Özbek hükümeti, Hanabad üstünü ABD hizmetine sunmuştur.

Bu dönemde ABD ile ikili ilişkiler önemli bir boyutta seyredirken Kerimov, radikal İslam'a karşı mücadelesinde ve iktidarının kuvvetlenmesi çabasında önemli kazanımlar elde etme yarışına girmiştir. Bu durum esasen Kerimov hakkında yapılan 'oportünist' olduğuna dair yorumların geçerliliğini de kanıtlayan gelişmelere sebebiyet verebilmiştir. Örnek olarak, Avrasya denkleminde kaydedeğer bir yeri olan ve 1999 yılında oluşturulan RF-Çin eksenli Şangay İşbirliği Örgütü'nün (ŞİÖ) önemli bir amacının Orta Asya bölgesine özellikle Batı etkisini sokmamak olduğu açıkça telaffuz edilmiştir.<sup>31</sup> Yürüttüğü politikalar gereği salt Batı karşılığında duyulan çekince ile Özbekistan ise ŞİÖ'nün kuruluşunda birliğe dâhil olmamıştır. Bununla birlikte, din temelli muhalefetin gittikçe güçlenmesi tehlikesine karşı izole olmaktan sakınan Kerimov yönetimi, 2001 yılında birliğe üye olmuştur.<sup>32</sup> Bu bağlamda, din merkezli tehlikelerden duyulan kaygılar temelinde olsa da Kerimov dönemindeki ani karar değişimleri gözden kaçırılmamalıdır.<sup>33</sup>

Sonraki gelişmelere dönüp bakıldığında, Özbekistan'ın dış ilişkilerinin süreç içinde ulaştığı nokta daha iyi anlaşılacaktır. Özbekistan'ın, ABD'nin de yakından desteklediği GUAM'dan bu defa 2002'de ayrılacağını deklare etmesi ve 5 Mayıs 2005 itibarı ile bu kararını resmen açıklaması, Kerimov için yeni politik açılımlarını ifade etmektedir. Özellikle bu birliğin 'GU' kısmını oluşturan Gürcistan ve Ukrayna'daki Batı ve özellikle ABD destekli devrimler, eski SSCB coğrafyasında demokratik yönetim anlayışının yerleşmesinin Batı'nın temel amacı olmaya başladığını göstermektedir. Bu anlamda demokratik manada eksikliklerinin farkında olan Kerimov, bu tür bir devrim beklentisinden uzak durmak için GUAAM'dan ayrılmak ve diğer iki güç odağı olan RF ve Çin'e yakınlaşmak amacını gütmeye başlamış, bu da Özbekistan için pragmatik ve yeni bir açılımı ifade etmiştir.<sup>34</sup> Bu durum, aynı zamanda radikal İslam'a karşı oluşturulacak inisiya-

tiflerde de Özbekistan'ın, RF ve Çin önderliğinde oluşturulan yeni güç dengeleri tarafından yalnız bırakılmayacağına bir işaret olarak da değerlendirilmiştir.

### Mayıs 2005 Andıcan Ayaklanmasına Giden Süreç

Yukarıda bahsedildiği üzere Fergana Vadisi, üç ülkeyle sınırı olan ve bölgedeki radikal din temelli grupların merkezi durumunda yer alan bir konumdur. Yaklaşık 400 bin nüfuslu Andıcan kenti Fergana Vadisi'nde yer alır. Kent ve içinde bulunduğu bölge, merkezi yönetimlere ve güçlü iktidarlara din temelli muhalefet anlamında tarihi bir arka plana da sahiptir. 1898 yılında tüm Türkistan'ın hâkimi konumuna gelen Rus İmparatorluğu'na karşı Nakşibendî şeyhi Dükçü İşan önderliğinde gerçekleşen halk ayaklanması günümüz Orta Asya tarihi için önemini korumaktadır.<sup>35</sup>

Kerimov rejiminin devam eden sert yönetimi altında, 2004 yılı Temmuz ayına gelindiğinde, resmi makamlarca Hizb-ut Tahrir örgütüne bağlı olduğu kaydedilen 23 yerel işadama 'anayasal düzeni zorla değiştirme ve yerine İslami bir devlet kurma' amacını taşıdıkları gerekçesi ile tutuklanmıştır. Ancak, Ekremiler<sup>36</sup> adı altında örgütlendiği düşünülen ve suçlanan bu gruba halktan destek gelmiş, sonuçta bölgedeki hareketlilik artmıştır.<sup>37</sup> Olaylar, zirve noktasına ulaştığı 13 Mayıs 2005 günü yüzlerce kişinin ölmesi ve yaralanmasıyla sonuçlanan şiddet sarmalına dönüşmüştür.<sup>38</sup>

Olayların başlangıç sürecinde İslami grupların faaliyetleri, bu tip ciddi bir ayaklanmanın 'Yeşil Devrim' provası olarak tanımlanması sonucunu doğurmuştur. Bu yorumlarda, ayaklanmanın yaşandığı bölgenin tarihsel ve sosyo-politik arka planı ve isyancıların genel olarak radikal din temelli gruplar olması hususları dikkate alınmış ve isyancı kesimlerin temel isteklerinin demokratik seçimlerden ziyade, Hizb-ut Tahrir örgütünün görüşleri doğrultusunda ülkede İslami bir yönetimin kurulması olduğu vurgulanmıştır. Ancak, kimi yazarlara göre, Kerimov'un otoriter ve merkezîyetçi yönetim tarzı ile Özbekistan ordusunun bölgenin en güçlü ordusu olması gibi gerçekler Özbekistan'da muhtemel bir devrim hareketi için zamanın "erken" olduğu tezini güçlendirmiştir.<sup>39</sup> Ayrıca, Ukrayna ve Gürcistan'da 2000'li yılların ilk döneminde vuku bulan benzeri 'devrim' hareketlerinden farklı

**Olaylardan uzun yıllar sonra Kerimov sonrası Özbekistanı'na gelindiğinde ise, resmi ağızlardan yaşananlara dair çarpıcı açıklamaların yapıldığı ve hataların itiraf edildiği göze çarpmaktadır.**



“Andican’da yaşanan kayıplar”. Kaynak: Kırım Haber Ajansı, <https://qha.com.tr/>. Erişim: 12 Eylül 2021

olarak, Özbekistan’da örgütlü bir muhalefet yapısına sahip olmayan, demokratik seçimlerin yapılması ve iktidara bu yolla gelmesi gibi bir iddia içinde bulunmayan Fergana’daki ayaklanmacıların, bu çerçevede başta Batıdan ve Dünya ülkelerinden destek almalarının kolay olmadığı da bilinen bir gerçektir.

Öte yandan, din temelli de olsa, yaşanan protesto ve bunun demokratik hak olduğu felsefesine dayanan görüş, Andican’daki gelişmelerde, ayaklanmayı bastırmak için Kerimov’un sert tepkilerinin uluslararası medya tarafından fazlaca dile getirilmesine zemin hazırlamıştır. Resmi açıklamalar 137 rakamını belirtse de medyada çıkan haberler olaylarda 500’den fazla ölü olduğunu göstermiştir. Bazı kaynaklara göre ise bu rakam binlerle ifade edilmektedir.<sup>40</sup> Göstericilerin üzerine ateş açmaktan kaçınılması, yüzlerce Özbeğin Kırgız sınırına kaçması gibi gelişmeler bu ayaklanmadan kalan başlıca satır başları olmuştur. Aslında olaylarda ortaya konabilecek en temel çıkarım ise, Kerimov hükümetinin muhalefete ve özellikle de din temelinin kullanıldığı muhalefete karşı çok sert ve acımasız olduğu hususudur.

Bu tür bir ayaklanmada Özbekistan’da ve genel olarak Orta Asya’da İslam’ın ve özellikle de radikal İslam’ın örgütlü yapısının rolüne ilişkin yorumlar oldukça ilgi çekicidir. Örnek olarak, bölgede bir ‘Yeşil Devrim’ anlayışının

belli dini-politik gruplar aracılığıyla Orta Doğu’da Hamas veya Hizbullah benzeri bir organizasyonel yapıya doğru evrileceğine inanılmıştır. Ancak Hizb-ut Tahrir veya ÖİH benzeri örgütlerin oldukça marjinal ve halk desteğinden yoksun organizasyonlar olması bu gibi çıkarımları zayıflatmaktadır. Bu meyanda, Fergana Vadisi gibi sosyal tarihi zengin bölgelerde, halk kitlelerinin zaman zaman aşırı dindarlığı ve bunu protesto hareketlerinde göstermeleri şiddet içerikli eylemlere destek anlamında nitelendirilmemelidir. Bu bakımdan 2005 yılı Andican olaylarını toplumdaki sosyo-ekonomik sorunların bir tezahürü olarak görenler, Kerimov rejiminin olayları sert bir şekilde bastırmasını siyasi yönetimini güçlendirmek amaçlı ‘bilinçli bir hata’ veya yönetiminin öngörüsüzlüğü olarak değerlendirmektedir.

Olaylardan uzun yıllar sonra Kerimov sonrası Özbekistan’na geldiğinde ise, resmi ağzılardan yaşananlara dair çarpıcı açıklamaların yapıldığı ve hataların itiraf edildiği göze çarpmaktadır. 2020 yılında Özbek Haber Ajansı’na bir demeç veren ve 2005’te Andican’daki olayları soruşturan ekipte bulunduğunu belirten Başsavcı Yardımcısı Svetlana Artukova Andican şehrinde “masum insanların da öldürüldüğünü” belirtmiş, olaylara müdahale eden askerlerin “emirleri uygun bir şekilde yerine getirmediklerini,” sorumsuz personelin tutuklandığını ancak daha sonrasında “serbest bırakılarak normal hayatlarına

devam ettiklerini” açıklamıştır. Adıgeçen, “neden bu bilgileri şimdi (2020) açıklıyorsunuz? şeklindeki soruya ise o zamanlar (Kerimov zamanı) Özbekistan kapalı bir ülkedydi. Şimdi yeni bir Özbekistan var. Yeni bir siyaset tarzı var” cevabını vermekten çekinmemiştir.<sup>41</sup>

## Sonuç

Çalışmanın bütününde, Orta Asya ve özelde Özbekistan için bağımsızlık yıllarından 2005 Andıcan olaylarına kadar, din temelli muhalefetin değerlendirilmesi amaçlanmıştır. Bu şekilde radikal toplumsal anlayışların hangi tür ortamda güçlendiği ve bunun nedenleri üzerinde durulmaya çalışılmıştır. Elde ettiğimiz sonuçların en önemli boyutu halen Orta Asya genelinde ve Özbekistan özelinde demokratik uygulamalarda görülebilen eksiklerdir. 2016 yılında hayatını kaybeden Kerimov sonrası yönetimi devralan Şevket Mirziyoyev, pek çok alanda reform ve açılım döneminin başladığının işaretlerini vermiştir.<sup>42</sup> Ekonomiden siyasete, dış politikaya kadar farklı bir Özbekistan pek çok bölge uzmanının analizlerine konu olmaya başlamıştır. Sözkonusu analizlerde temel olarak Mirziyoyev iktidarının “kısa ve uzun vadede belirgin sonuçlar doğuracağına açık” olduğu vurgulanmaktadır.<sup>43</sup>

Öte yandan, Kerimov dönemindeki sosyo-ekonomik sorunların tamamıyla çözüldüğünü söylemek zordur. Ülke zenginliklerinin sınırlı bir elit kitle tarafından paylaşılması, ekonomik dengesizlikler bileşeni ile beraber yönetim tarzının Kerimov sonrasında da gerçek bir muhalefetin çıkmasına geçit vermemesi temel sorun-sallar olarak görünmektedir. Kerimov döneminde laik ya da İslamcı her türden muhalif oluşum şiddetle bastırıldığına ve en temel insan hakları kısıtlandığına seküler

muhalef hareketler iyiden iyiye kabuğuna çekilmiş ve baskı politikaları sonucu ayakta duramamıştır. Bu şekilde politik sahne, büyük oranda radikal ve dini akımlardan beslenen ve daha cüretkâr seslere kalmıştır.

Bu çerçevede, Orta Asya’da uygun sosyo-tarihsel altyapıda dini düşüncelerin radikalleşmesi olgusunda belirtilmesi gereken, bazı hallerde merkezîyetçiliğine ve bir adım ötede otoriterliğine kılıf arayan Kerimov benzeri SSCB sonrası yönetimlerin, devam eden toplumsal huzursuzluklardan ve buna bağlı olumsuz gidişattan güçlenmediğidir. Makalenin başında da vurgulandığı üzere, umut verici olan şey ise, Orta Asya’da, Orta Doğu örneğinden farklı biçimde halkın, kendi İslam anlayışından ayrı ve topluma yabancı ideolojik gruplara geniş destek vermemesidir. Fakat bu husus, 16 yıl önce Andıcan olayında görüldüğü üzere birtakım grupların sosyo-ekonomik koşulların da etkisiyle radikalize olması ve terör eylemlerine yönelerek bölge güvenliğine tehdit oluşturması gerçeğini de değiştirmemektedir. Özellikle Afganistan’da Taliban’ın da tekrar yükselişe geçtiği bu dönemde gelişmelerin, Orta Asya ve bölge ülkeleri özelinde tekrar gözden geçirilmesinin gerekli olduğu söylenebilir.

Tüm bunlar ışığında ortaya çıkan husus, demokratik gelişim ve geniş toplumsal istişare süreçlerinin önemidir. Özbekistan örneği göstermektedir ki, köktenci dini yönelimler, halkın kendini ifade edecek muhalefet kanalları açılmazsa ve sosyo-ekonomik koşullar iyileştirilmezse tekrar su yüzüne çıkabilir. Bu tarz yönelimlerle sadece güç ile baş edilebileceğini ummak bir hayalden öteye gidememektedir. Böyle bir durumda, hem mevcut yönetimler hem de halkın kendisi kaybeden taraflar olmaya devam edecektir.



“Kerimov sonrası reformlara hız veren Özbekistan Cumhurbaşkanı Şevket Mirziyoyev”  
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# GÖÇEBELİĞİN UZAK BİR YANSIMASI OLAN SEMBOİK GÖÇEBELİK KAVRAMININ KAZAKİSTAN'DA GELİŞİM SÜRECİ

Yerleşik uygarlıkların bölgede kurduğu bu hâkimiyet, göçebe toplumların yapısını değiştirmiş ve geçtiğimiz yüzyılda göçebeliğin varlığı yok denecek seviyeye kadar inmiştir. Bu değişim sonucunda oluşan eski göçebe, yeni yerleşik Orta Asya Türk toplumlarının yakın çağdaki göçebelik algısını ve göçebelik üzerine geliştirdikleri yeni tarihsel hafızayı anlatmakta, Kazak-Rus ilişkileri oldukça önemli bir yere sahiptir.

## Alparslan Özkan

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**U**ygurlüğün oluşum sürecini avcılık-toplayıcılık, göçebelik ve yerleşiklik gibi belirli bir sıraya koymak ve bu sıralama üzerinden toplumların gelişmişlik düzeyini tahlil etmek tartışmaya açık bir konudur. Çünkü maddi kültür birikimi, belirli bir uygarlığı anlama ya da uygarlaşma kavramını açıklama konusunda eksik kalır. İnsanlığın; doğadan korkmak, doğayı anlamak, ona saygı duymak ve en sonunda ona zarar vermemek şeklinde sıralayabileceğimiz kadim düşünce birikimi de, uygarlık seviyesini belirlemek hususunda en az maddi kültür kadar değerlidir.

Bu kadim birikimin değeri, insan merkezci düşünce ve aydınlanmacılıkla yükselen maddi kültür uygarlığı sahasında da anlaşılmaya başlanmıştır. Yeni çevreci ekoller

ve siyasi hareketlerle birlikte uygarlığın büyüklüğü, artık yalnızca zamana karşı yarışan insanlığın geliştirdiği büyük araçlarla ölçülmemekte, bu araçların doğaya verdiği tahribatı önlemek için üretilen çözümler üzerinden de değerlendirilmektedir. Oysa, yerleşik toplumların uygarlık sahasındaki bu yeni gerçeği, birçok göçebe toplumun kadim gerçeğidir. Bu nedenle, göçebe ve yerleşik toplumlar arasındaki çatışma, bir uygar olan ve olmayan kavgası şeklinde değerlendirilmemelidir. Bu iki farklı toplumsal yapı, tarihin birçok döneminde aynı anda var olmuş komşu uygarlıklardır. Ancak siyasi, ekonomik, sosyal ve kültürel farklılıklar, bu uygarlıklar arasında çoğunlukla çatışmacı olarak görülen bir ilişkiler ağının kurulmasına yol açmıştır.



**Kazakların göçebe yapısındaki asıl büyük kırılma, Sovyetler Birliği dönemine denk gelmektedir. Sovyetler Birliği döneminde gelişen üstün teknoloji ve hedeflenen yeni ideolojik parola, özellikle Stalin döneminde göçebeler ve yerleşikler arasındaki dengeyi yerleşik düzen lehine çevirmiş ve birçok yazara göre bir insanlık felaketi olarak anılan 20 yıllık olaylar silsilesi, Türkistan topraklarında kendi özgün yapısıyla varlığını sürdüren Türk göçebe yapısını neredeyse yok etmiştir.**

Bu çatışmacı ilişkinin izleri, göçebe ve yerleşik toplumların birbirlerine karşı geliştirdikleri çeşitli ön yargılarda görülmektedir. Örneğin birçok yerleşik uygarlık algısına göre, göçebeler geri kalmış toplumlardır. Hatta bazı kaynaklarda bu inanış, göçebelerin tam olarak bir insan olup olmadığını sorgulamakta ve onları “ruh yerine bir buğuya sahip kişiler”<sup>1</sup> şeklinde tanımlamaktadır. Anlaşılacağı üzere yerleşiklere göre göçebeler, uygarlaştırılması gereken eksik varlıklardır. Yerleşik uygarlıkların kendi kendilerine yükledikleri bu görev, onlara göçebe uygarlıklara diledikleri gibi müdahale etme ve davranma hakkını da beraberinde getirmiştir.

Diğer yandan, göçebelerin yerleşiklik algısında da benzer ön yargıların olduğu söylemek mümkündür. Göçebelere göre tarım toplumlarının yaşam biçimi köleliğe benzemektedir.<sup>2</sup> Bu algının temel nedeni, bu iki toplumun toprak üzerinde geliştirmiş oldukları farklı mülkiyet anlayışları ile ilgilidir. Yerleşik toplumların aksine, göçebelere toprak üzerindeki özel mülkiyet hakkı sınırlı bir düzeydedir. Göçebelere genellikle ortak kullanıma açık olan topraklar, tarım toplumlarında özel mülkiyet anlayışıyla birlikte bölünmüş ve şahsi kullanıma sunulmuştur. İşte bu noktada; tarım toplumlarının koruyamadıkları, özel mülke ait bir toprak parçasına olan anlamsız bağlılığı<sup>3</sup> göçebelere kölelik olarak yorumlanmıştır.

Bu olumsuz bakış açıları ve toplumsal farklılıklar, iki yaşam biçimi arasında kurulan ilişkiler ağında çeşitli siyasi önlemlerin alınması sonucunu doğurmuştur. Yerleşik toplumlar ve onların kurduğu devletler açısından bu politikaların en dikkat çekenini, göçebelerin kontrol edilemezliği üzerinedir. Kontrol edilemezlik gerekçesiyle yerleşikler, baskın güç oldukları devirlerde göçebe toplumlara iskân etmeye çalışmışlar ve hatta uygulamış oldukları çeşitli kültür politikalarıyla göçebelerin toplum yapısını bozmaya, diğer deyişle yerleşik hayata uygun duruma getirmeye ça-

lışmışlardır. Bu politikalar, göçebeliliğin tarihsel devinimini uyandırmış, iki toplum arasında set koyan “Biz ve Onlar” ayrımı,<sup>4</sup> göçebe birliği ve düzenini sağlamak amacıyla toplum içinde hâkim düşünce hâlini almıştır.

“Biz ve Onlar” kavramı, göçebe toplumun yerleşik uygarlıklarla arasına çizmiş olduğu keskin bir hattır. Bu hat; genellikle göçebe ileri gelenlerin telkin gücüyle toplumsal birliği sağlamış, göçebe-yerleşik ayrımını güçlendirmiş ve göçebe toplumun dış dünyayla ilişkilerde daha korumacı ve yalıtık bir yol izlemesine aracı olmuştur. Ancak bu dışı kapalı toplum yapısı tarihin birçok döneminde ortadan kalkmış, güçler dengesinin değişmesiyle bu iki toplum arasındaki birbirine üstün gelme yarışı göçebelik-yerleşiklik çatışmasını artırmıştır.

Avrasya özelinde; atın evcilleştirilmesi, at biniciliği, atlı okçuluk gibi maddi kültür değerleri, tarihin birçok döneminde göçebelerin komşu yerleşik uygarlıklara hükmetmesini sağlamıştır. Ancak yerleşik uygarlıkların maddi kültür sahasına getirdiği sürekli yenilikler, uzmanlaşma ve iş bölümü gibi öğretiler, bu dengeyi zaman içinde değiştirmiş ve sonuçta uzmanlaşmaya kapalı ve çoğunlukla hayvancılığın temel geçim kaynağı olduğu göçebe toplumları hükmedilir konuma düşürmüştür. Yerleşik uygarlıkların bölgede kurduğu bu hâkimiyet, göçebe toplumların yapısını değiştirmiş ve geçtiğimiz yüzyılda göçebeliliğin varlığı yok denecek seviyeye kadar inmiştir. Bu değişim sonucunda oluşan eski göçebe, yeni yerleşik Orta Asya Türk toplumlarının yakın çağdaki göçebelik algısını ve göçebelik üzerine geliştirdikleri yeni tarihsel hafızayı anlatmakta, Kazak-Rus ilişkileri oldukça önemli bir yere sahiptir.

### **Göçebelik-Yerleşiklik Çatışmasında Kazak Örneği ve Rus Devletleriyle İlişkiler**

18. yüzyılın başlarında Kazak toprakları, Rusların Türkistan ve Hindistan’a yayılma siyaseti için kilit nokta olarak görülmüştür. I. Petro’ya göre, doğuyla ilişkileri geliştirmek yolunda bu bölgenin fethi anahtar roledir.<sup>5</sup> Bu doğrultuda, 18. yüzyılın ortalarına kadar bölgede ellinin üzerinde askeri üs inşa edilmiş,<sup>6</sup> 1748 yılından itibaren Kozaklara bölgeye çiftlikler kurmaları için geçiş kolaylığı sağlanmıştır.<sup>7</sup> Rusların Kazak topraklarının sınırında izlemiş olduğu bu erken dönem politikaların temel amacı, bölgeyi kontrol altında tutmaktır. Ancak zaman içinde Moskova merkezli bu politikalar, Kazak toplumunun iç yapısına da sirayet etmiş ve II. Katerina döneminde, Çarlık Rusyası’na bağlılığını açıklayan Kazak ileri gelenlerine geniş topraklar verileceği vad edilmiştir.<sup>8</sup> Genel anlamda göçebelerin yukarıda açıklanan toprak mülkiyeti anlayışına aykırı olan bu politikanın, Kazakların toplum yapısını bozma amacını taşıdığı açıktır. Rus devlet yöneticileri tarafından çok daha uygar bir yaşam biçimi olarak görü-

len yerleşik hayat, bu gibi yöntemlerle bölgede hâkim kılinmaya çalışılmıştır.<sup>9</sup>

Uygulanan benzeri ekonomik politikaları, 19. yüzyılda Rus kültür politikaları takip etmiş, yine II. Katerina döneminde Kazaklar arasında İslam'ın yaygınlaşması için uğraşmıştır. 19. yüzyılın erken döneminde Kazak bozkırlarında hâkim inanç durumunda olmayan İslam'ın,<sup>10</sup> bölgede yayılarak Kazakları yerleşik hayata alıştırmak için uygulanmaya çalışıldığını söylemek doğru olur. Çünkü diğer semavi dinlerde olduğu gibi İslam da, cami ve diğer birçok mimari ve sosyal yapıyla maddi kültüre uygun bir yerleşik hayat düzenini muhafaza etmektedir.<sup>11</sup> Yerleşikleşen Kazak toplumunun daha kolay yönetilebileceği sanısıyla uygulanan bu politika, Kazakların şüpheli yaklaşımını sonucunda başarıya ulaşmamıştır.

Çarlık yönetiminin Kazaklar üzerindeki din politikalarının, 19. yüzyılın başlangıcından sonuna kadar sürdüğünü söylemek mümkündür. İslamlaştırma politikalarından sonuç alamayan Çarlık Rusyası, bu yüzyılın sonlarında çeşitli Rus merkezli dizgelerle Hristiyanlığı Kazaklar ve diğer Türk halklarına aşlamak için uğraşmış ve böylece Rus bilincinin ve Ortodoksluğun bölgede baskın güç olmasını amaçlamıştır.<sup>12</sup> Türk halklarının rızasını gözetmeden gerçekleştirilen Hristiyanlaştırma politikası da, zaman içinde kendi rızasıyla İslamlaşan Kazaklar tarafından kabul görmemiş ve yukarıda anılan politikaya benzer bir şekilde başarısızlıkla sonuçlanmıştır.

Çarlık Rusyası döneminde Kazak-Rus ilişkileriyle ilgili bir değerlendirme yapacak olursak, Kazakların göçebe toplum yapısını genel olarak kaybetmediklerini görürüz. Göç yolları üzerinde oluşturulan tahribat ve benzeri göçebelilik karşıtı siyasetler, Kazakların toplum yapısını değiştirmemiş ve bu dönemde temel geçim kaynağı olan hayvancılık sürdürülmüştür. Aynı zamanda, Türk göçebe toplumlarının doğal lideri olarak görülen aksakallar, Ruslarla olan ilişkilerde çekimser kalmış ve hatta Rus devletleriyle oluşturulması planlanan yakın ilişki düzenine karşı Kazak hanlarına başkaldırmıştır.<sup>13</sup> Kazak toplumunun iç yapısında oluşan bütün bu gelişmelerde, göçebe toplumların korumacı ve dış dünyaya karşı yalıtık yapısının sürdürdüğünü görmek mümkündür. 1916 Türkistan İsyanı'nda da göçebe liderler benzer bir direncin oluşmasında önemli görevler üstlenmiş ve Kazaklar ilkel silahlarla Çarlık Rusyası'na karşı mücadele etmiştir.<sup>14</sup>

Kazakların göçebe yapısındaki asıl büyük kırılma, Sovyetler Birliği dönemine denk gelmektedir. Sovyetler Birliği döneminde gelişen üstün teknoloji ve hedeflenen yeni ideolojik parola, özellikle Stalin döneminde göçebeliler ve yerleşikler arasındaki dengiyi yerleşik düzen lehine çevirmiş ve birçok yazara göre bir insanlık felaketi olarak anılan 20 yıllık olaylar silsilesi, Türkistan topraklarında kendi özgün yapısıyla varlığını sürdüren Türk göçebe yapısını neredeyse yok etmiştir.

Aslında tarihin birçok döneminde görüldüğü üzere, Sovyet yönetiminin göçebe toplumlara bakışı, Çarlık Rusyası'ninkinden farklı değildir. Göçebe toplum bu dönemde, tümdengelimci bir düşünceyle batı tipi feodal yapıyla kıyaslanmış ve sosyalist düşünceye karşı bir tehdit olarak algılanmıştır. Yine Marksizm'in Asya Tipi Üretim modellemesi üzerinden tümdengelimci bir şekilde yorumlanan göçebe ekonomide, göçebe varlıkların ve liderlerin Kazak toplumu ve benzeri toplumlar üzerinde keyfi bir yönetime sahip olduğu algısı yaratılmaya çalışılmış ve Sovyetlerin bu geri kalmış toplumların kötü kaderini sosyalizmle sağaltacağı vurgusu sıklıkla yapılmıştır.

Aslında batıya özgü bir tarih değerlendirmesinin Kazak ve diğer Türk göçebe toplumlar üzerinde yanlış yorumlandığı, birçok akademisyen tarafından somut tarihsel verilerle dile getirilmektedir. Bu noktada değerlendirilen ilk konu, göçebe toplumlarda da derebeyliklerde olduğu gibi bir vasallık ilişkisi<sup>15</sup> olup olmadığıdır. Bu noktada, yöneten ve yönetilen göçebe boylar arasında böyle bir ilişki olmadığı sıklıkla belirtilmekte ve hatta toprak mülkiyeti konusunda belirli ayrıcalıklara sahip olan göçebe kağanların bu ayrıcalıkları savaş döneminde orduyu doyurmak için kullandığı vurgulanmaktadır.<sup>16</sup> Tarihte, göçebe toplumlarda pek de keskin olmayan yönetici-yönetilen ayrımı ve görece eşitlikçi bu sosyal düzen, Kazaklar arasında 20. yüzyılda da varlığını sürdürmüş ve Sovyetler Birliği'nin Kazak ileri gelenlerini hedef alan politikalarına karşı halkın çoğunluğu ortak hareket etmiştir.<sup>17</sup>

Ancak birçok Türkistanlı yazar tarafından dile getirilen sistematik açlık siyaseti,<sup>18</sup> elverişsiz topraklar üzerinde uygulanmaya çalışılan iskân politikası ve kanlı çatışmalar; Kazakların göçebe yapısını yerleşik uygarlığın yeni bir inanç ve idealle kurguladığı Sovyet dünyasında eritmiş ve göçebe Kazakların neredeyse tümü, 1930'lu yılların sonunda yerleşik hayata geçmek zorunda kalmıştır.

Türkistan'da kitlesel göçebe geleneğini sona erdiren bu süreç, Kazaklar ve diğer Türk halkları açısından tarihin acı vesikalarıyla doludur. Bu duruma neden olan en geniş kapsamlı Sovyet siyaseti, Stalin'in 1929 yılında uygulamaya koyduğu kolektifleştirme sürecinde görülmüştür.

Genel anlamda kolektifleştirme; Sovyet rejiminin hayvanlar, topraklar ve diğer ekonomik araçlar üzerinde özel mülkiyeti ortadan kaldırmak düşüncesiyle ürettiği ve bu yolla sanayinin yoğun olduğu şehirlere yeterli gıdayı sağlamayı amaçlayan bir sistemdir. Kazak örneğindeyse bu sistem, zorunlu yerleşikleştirme politikalarıyla birlikte uygulanmıştır. Yerleşikleştirme ve kolektifleştirme politikalarına karşı direnç gösteren Kazakların büyük bir kısmı, elverişli yaşam koşullarına sahip olmayan kolektif çiftliklere gitmeyi reddetmiş, bu alanlara gidenlerin büyük bir bölümüyle tarım ve hayvancılığa elverişsiz doğa şartları



ve yeterli gıda stokunun bulunmaması gibi sebeplerden ötürü, ellerinde hiçbir hayvan olmadan göç etmek zorunda kalmıştır. Özbekistan, Türkmenistan ve Doğu Türkistan gibi çeşitli bölgelere giden Kazaklar, bu göç yollarında hayatlarını kaybetmiştir.<sup>19</sup> Bugün dile getirilen rakamlara göre, hayatını kaybeden Kazakların sayısı neredeyse beş milyondur.

### **Yaşadığımız Yüzyılda Göçebeliliğin Uzak Bir Yansıması Olarak Sembolik Göçebelilik Kavramı ve Kazakistan**

Yetmiş yıllık Sovyetler Birliği deneyiminin en önemli sonuçlarından biri, yukarıda tarihsel süreci aktarılan kitlesel göçebeliliğin sonudur. Kazakların benzer halklarla birlikte gönülsüzce değiştirmek zorunda kaldığı binlerce yıllık toplum düzeni, Türkistan topraklarında derin ekonomik ve toplumsal sarsıntılara yol açmış ve bu sorunlar

yerleşik hayata geçişten sonra da devam etmiştir. Örneğin, Kruşçev'in uyguladığı "Bakir Topraklar Projesi" ile binlerce yıldır hayvancılık için kullanılan geniş Kazak bozkırlarının tarıma açılması ve böylece kısa bir zaman diliminde bölgede birkaç defa değişen Sovyet ekonomi politikaları, Kazakları birçok ekonomik sıkıntıyla karşı karşıya bırakmıştır. Diğer yandan, ortak bir amaç doğrultusunda yaratılmaya çalışılan Sovyet insanı projesinin 20. yüzyılın ilk yarısında baskın bir ortak kimlik olarak karşımıza çıkan Türklük ve yerel kimliklerle olan savaşımları, Türkistanlı aydınlara yönelen kanlı müdahalelerle sonuçlanmıştır. Böylece, Türkistan'daki kitlesel nüfus kayıplarını binlerce aydınının idam edilişi, göçebe toplum düzenindeki büyük bozgunu ise düşünce özgürlüğüne getirilen katı kısıtlamalar izlemiştir.

Peki, yetmiş yıllık Sovyet deneyimi sonrasında bağımsızlığına kavuşan Kazakistan'da göçebelilik, bugün toplum olma duygusunun neresindedir? Göçebeliliğe ve ulus kim-



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kadar geniş bir alanı konu edinen yakın geçmiş ve geleceğin göçebe kalıtlar bütünüdür. Bu bütün, ulus kimliğinin oluşumunda önemli bir yer edinmiştir.

Verilen bu önemi, 1991 yılı sonrasında başlayan bağımsız Kazakistan'ın ulus inşası sürecinde, göçebe geçmişin birçok açıdan temel alınmasında görmekteyiz. Bu doğrultuda, devleti temsil eden resmi amblemler ve bayrak, göçebe geçmiş esas alınarak oluşturulmuştur. Ulusal semboldeki at figürü ve Kazak bayrağındaki kartal, göçebe geçmişe yapılan bu atıflara iyi birer örnektir.<sup>21</sup> Böylece, atın evcilleştirilmesi ve biniciliğin keşfiyle<sup>22</sup> tarihte büyük bir devrim yaratan Türk halklarının göçebe geçmişi, modern Kazakistan'ın ulusal sembolünde kendine yer edinmiştir. Aynı zamanda, insandan daha iyi bir görüş açısına sahip olduğu için puslu hava şartlarında Kazak ve Kırgızlar tarafından avcılıkta kullanılan kartalın göçebelikle olan yüzlerce yıllık yol arkadaşlığı,<sup>23</sup> Kazak bayrağında varlığını sürdürmektedir. Alıcı kuşlar aracılığıyla yapılan bu avcılık geleneğinin, Kazakistan, Kırgızistan, Türkiye ve benzeri göçebe geçmişe sahip birçok ülkede, günümüzde de devam ettiğini söylemek gerekir.

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Bu sorunun yanıtı kesin bir hayırdır. Çünkü kendine özgü göç yolları, ekonomi ve toplum düzeniyle kitlesel göçebelik Kazakistan'da yitirilmiş olsa da; binlerce yıllık büyük göçebe uygarlığın hatırası ve gelenekleri, hem Kazakistan devletini kuranların hafızasında hem de toplumun birçok kesiminde varlığını sürdürmüş ve yeni kurulan devletin ulus inşasında bu hatıralar ve geleneklerden destek alınmıştır. Ortak geçmiş ve hatıraları canlı tutarak belirlenen bu yeni devletin yol haritası, Kazaklığı güçlendirmek amacıyla doğrudan doğruya göçebe geçmişe birçok atıfta bulunmuştur. Bu nedenle göçebeliliğin Kazakistan'da sembolik olarak yaşatıldığını söylemek doğru olur. Sembolik göçebelik<sup>20</sup> kavramı da bu bağlamda ortaya çıkar. Sembolik göçebelik; devlet sembollerinden mimari eserlere, siyasi söylemlerden toplumsal düşünceye

Göçebeliliğin Kazakistan'ın ulus inşasında edindiği yer, resmi devlet simgelerinin yanı sıra, mimari eserlerde de görülmektedir. Kazakistan'ın bağımsızlığının 15. yıl dönümünde, bir Türk savaşçısını temsil eden anıt heykel, dönemin Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanı'nın katılımıyla Almatı'da açılmıştır.<sup>24</sup> Bu açılış, yalnızca göçebe geçmişe yapılan bir atıf değil, aynı zamanda bu geçmişin Kazak, Kırgız, Oğuz ve diğer birçok Türk halkının ortak geçmişine yapılmış törensel bir vurgudur. Benzeri mimari eserler Kazakistan'ın birçok şehrinin genel dokusunu oluşturmaktadır, bugünkü adıyla Nur-Sultan kentinde bulunan dev bir çadır yapısı, Bayterek Kulesi ve Kazak Eli anıtı gibi sanat eserleri,<sup>25</sup> Kazak göçebeliliğinin kültürel değerlerini günümüze taşımaktadır.

Göçebe geçmiş, Kazakistan'da mimari yapılar, sanat eserleri ve devlet sembollerinde kendini gösterdiği kadar, siyasi söylemlerde de sıklıkla başvurulan bir kaynaktır. Bu bakımdan siyasi söylemler ve kültür politikaları, sembolik göçebelik kavramının incelenmesinde gerekli olan diğer

bir konudur. Kazakistan'ın resmi internet sitesi, Kazak Hanlığı ve Kazakistan tarihini, kadim Türk göçbelerinin kurduğu devletler bağlamında değerlendirmektedir.<sup>26</sup> Aynı zamanda Kazakistan'ın devlet adamları, ülkenin demokratikleşme sürecini eski dönemlerdeki kağan seçimlerinden örneklerle açıklamakta, Kazak topraklarındaki demokrasi geleneğinin sürekliliğinin göçebe geçmişle ilişkisinde ısrar etmektedir.<sup>27</sup>

Yukarıda sayılan özellikler dikkate alındığında göçebe geçmişin, bu geçmişe sahip olan Kazakistan tarafından ulus inşasında sıklıkla kullanıldığı görülür. Ancak bu, sembolik göçebeliliğin yalnızca bir yüzüdür. Çünkü göçebe geçmiş, yalnızca devletin uyguladığı politikalarla yeniden yapılandırılan bir tarihsel hafıza değil, aynı zamanda Kazak halkı tarafından sevgiyle anılan ve birçok geleneğe yaşatılmaya çalışılan ortak istencin ürünüdür.

Bu noktada, göçebeliliğin bir modern dönem yansıması olan sembolik göçebelilik kavramının oluşumunda Kazak halkının etkisi nedir diye sorulduğunda, göçebe Kazakların yüzyıllarca sürdürdüğü 'yedi ata' geleneğinin, Kazakistan'da yeniden canlanan toplumsal pratikleri karşımıza

çıkıyor. Bu geleneğe göre her Kazak, yedi atasını bilmek zorundaydı. Bir evliliğin gerçekleşme ihtimaliyse, kadın ve erkeğin yedi kuşak atası arasında hiçbir ortak ata olmasına bağlıydı. Farklı akraba grupları arasında gerçekleşen, yedi ata geleneğinin temel alındığı bu evlilik biçimi, birbirine yabancı olan Kazaklar arasındaki akrabalık bağlarının sıklaşmasını sağlamakta, böylece dış dünyayla ilişkilerde kapalı bir kimliğe sahip göçebe Kazakların toplum içi ilişkiler ağı genişlemekteydi.<sup>28</sup>

Akrabalık ve soybağlarının kentli toplumlara göre çok daha önemli olduğu göçebe toplum yapısı dikkate alındığında bu geleneğin, göçebe toplum sisteminin soya dayanan bütün niteliklerinin bir özeti olduğu görülür. Sovyetler Birliği döneminde unutulmaya yüz tutmuş bu gelenek, bağımsızlık sonrası Kazakistan'da, ücretsiz dağıtılan ve içerisinde soy haritalarını barındıran kitapçıklarla yeniden diriltilmeye çalışılmış ve halk bu politikaya sahip çıkmıştır.<sup>29</sup> Bu durum, bir yandan devletin göçebe gelenekleri uyandırmaya çalıştığını, diğer yandan ise bu duruma gönüllü olan Kazakların göçebe geçmişlerine verdikleri önemi kanıtlar niteliktedir. Sembolik göçebelilik, işte bu iki istencin ortak paydasıdır.



## Sonuç

Marx'ın ifadesiyle "katılaştıran her şeyin buharlaşması," modernitenin ve modernleşmenin özüdür.<sup>30</sup> Bu ifade; resmi kurumlardan geleneksel örgütlere, din kurallarından kadim öğretilere kadar toplumun bütün sınıf ve katmanlarına yerleşmiş yapı ve normların sönükleşeceği ve değişeceğine dair bir kanının ürünüdür. Gerçekten de birçok katı norm ve yapı değişmekte ve çağımızda bu değişim, maddenin fazları arasındaki kuralızsız bir başkalaşım ile sürekli hâle gelmektedir. Sovyetler Birliği'nin sosyalist ve Çarlık Rusyası'nın uygarlaştırma adı altında oluşturdukları 300 yıllık göçebe karşıtı politikalar bu açıdan değerlendirildiğinde; göçebeliliğin katılaştıran atları, okları, göç yolları ve bütün özgün ekonomi yapısıyla Türkistan'dan

buharlaştığını görebiliriz. Peki, semboller ve çeşitli kültür öğeleriyle ilgili de aynı şeyi söyleyebilir miyiz?

İşte bu noktada, sembolik göçebelik kavramı karşımıza çıkar. Göçebe geçmişe karşı duyulan büyük saygı, geleneklerin canlandırılması için üretilen kültür politikaları ve inşa edilen taştan yapılar; buharlaşan göçebeliliğin kıymetli izlerini hiç olmazsa yoğunlaştırmış ve modern Kazakistan'ın yeni devlet ve ulus geleneğiyle bütünleştirmiştir. Bu bağlamda, göçebe öğelerin ve simgelerin Kazakistan'da hâlihazırdaki varlığını sembolik göçebelik kavramıyla tanımlamak mümkündür. 300 yıllık yıldırı politikalarına rağmen göçebelik, bugün Kazakistan'da varlığını hâlâ sembolik olarak sürdürmektedir.

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