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GEOPOLITICAL INTEREST OF IRAN IN CENTRAL ASIA

The purpose of this study is to carry out the analysis of the external IRI policy in Central Asia in the context of new geopolitical configuration, to study the economic and political aspects of the strengthening of Iran in the region, to identify its features and the most important aspects of bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and Iran as well as the development patterns, to analyze the objective socio-economic situation in the region of Central Asia in the context of formation of a new geopolitical situation after the cancellation of sanctions against Iran. This paper is based on the use of the geo-political importance of this subject and is supported by the papers of Kazakh, Russian and foreign authors. The following general scientific methods and techniques are used in this paper: the new functional analysis, the structural analysis, the scientific abstraction, the qualitative expert estimates, the quantitative estimates, the comparative analysis. The changes in the geopolitical situation in Central Asia after the cancellation of the US sanctions against Iran are studied in this paper. The role of Iran in the region and its importance are defined based on the strengthening of the integration processes and creation of the EAEC. The role of Kazakhstan as one of the leaders in the framework of modern international relations in Central Asia is also studied in this paper. The recommendations on improvement of the influence and, in particular, on foreign policy decisions of the Republic of Kazakhstan are given.

Key words: Geopolitics, regional cooperation, internal cooperation, diplomacy, foreign policy initiatives, the main actors.

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Иранның Орталық Азиядағы геосаяси мүдделері

Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты – жаңа геосаяси конфигурация жағдайында Иранның Орталық Азиядағы сыртқы саясатын талдау, Иранның аймақта нығайтудың экономикалық және саяси аспектілерін зерттеу, оның ерекшеліктері мен Қазақстан мен Иран арасындағы екіжақты қатынастардың маңызды аспектілерін, сондай-ақ даму ерекшеліктерін анықтау, объективті әлеуметтік талдау. – Иранға қарсы санкциялар алынып тасталғаннан кейін жаңа геосаяси жағдайдың қалыптасуы жағдайындағы Орталық Азия аймағындағы экономикалық жағдай. Бұл мақала осы тақырыптың геосаяси маңызын пайдалануға негізделген және қазақ, орыс және шетелдік авторлардың еңбектеріне негізделген. Осы мақалада келесі жалпы ғылыми әдістер мен әдістер қолданылады: жаңа функционалдық талдау, құрылымдық талдау, ғылыми абстракция, сапалы сараптама, сандық бағалау және салыстырмалы талдау. Бұл мақалада АҚШ-тың Иранға қарсы санкциялары жойылғаннан кейін Орталық Азиядағы геосаяси жағдайдағы өзгерістер талқыланады. Иранның аймақтағы рөлі және оның маңыздылығы интеграциялық процестерді күшейту және ЕАЭО құру негізінде анықталады. Осы мақалада Қазақстанның Орталық Азиядағы қазіргі халықаралық қатынастар шеңберіндегі көшбасшылардың бірі ретіндегі рөлі де қарастырылған. Қазақстан Республикасының сыртқы саяси шешімдеріне ықпал етуді жақсарту бойынша ұсыныстар берілген.

Түйін сөздер: геосаясат, аймақтық ынтымақтастық, ішкі ынтымақтастық, дипломатия, сыртқы саяси бастамалар, негізгі қатысушылар.

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Геополитические интересы Ирана в Центральной Азии

Целью данного исследования является проведение анализа внешней политики ИРИ в Центральной Азии в контексте новой геополитической конфигурации, изучение экономических и политических аспектов укрепления Ирана в регионе, выявление его особенностей и наиболее важных аспектов двусторонних отношений между Казахстаном и Ираном. А также раскрываются особенности развития, анализ объективной социально-экономической ситуации в регионе Центральной Азии в контексте формирования новой геополитической ситуации после отмены санкций против Ирана. Данная статья основана на использовании геополитической значимости этого предмета и поддерживается работами казахских, российских и зарубежных ученых. Автором используются следующие общенаучные методы и приемы: новый функциональный анализ, структурный анализ, научная абстракция, качественные экспертные оценки, количественные оценки, сравнительный анализ. В этой статье рассматриваются изменения в геополитической ситуации в Центральной Азии после отмены санкций США против Ирана. Роль Ирана в регионе и его значение определяются на основе усиления интеграционных процессов и создания ЕАЭС. Роль Казахстана как одного из лидеров в рамках современных международных отношений в Центральной Азии также изучается в данной статье. Даны рекомендации по улучшению влияния, и в частности, на внешнеполитические решения Республики Казахстан.

Ключевые слова: геополитика, региональное сотрудничество, внутреннее сотрудничество, дипломатия, внешнеполитические инициативы, основные участники.

Introduction

Central Asia and the Caucasus are the sensitive areas for the next conflict in the world. They occupy the minds of many researchers and students in research centers. The Central Asian region comprises five main countries: Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. As for the Caucasus region is a mountainous region between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, where Muslims represent the majority of the population there, accounting for (93.4%) of the population (Mohammad.E, 2015).

The Central Asian countries with a Muslim majority have an important geographical location and large mineral and oil wealth. They attract the world's major countries, attract foreign investments to finance projects that invest their vast underground resources and control one of the most important ways of exporting petroleum sources to Europe and Eastern Asia. Strategic role in the Central Asian region after the collapse of the Soviet Union many countries played an active role in this vital region of the world, prompting a number of analysts to talk about what can be called «the new big game». This is the conflict between the contenders for the extension of control and Influence on the region, especially after the discovery of its enormous oil reserves. External

ambitions have begun to unfold around the countries of the Central Asian region, which have been part of many conflicts between the international parties seeking to attract the region's attention and access to natural resources. In this paper, a study entitled «Between Conflict and Cooperation: International Competitiveness in Central Asia», published by the Arab Center for Studies and Research, examines the policies of the major powers to control Central Asia to achieve their interests at the international and regional levels.

The strategic vacuum in Central Asia after the collapse of the Soviet Union enabled many countries, including Iran, to play an active role in this vital region of the world, prompting a number of analysts to talk about what could be called the «New Great Game between the contenders for the extension of control and influence in the region. This role was emphasized after the discovery of its huge oil reserves since 1994. This competition for the Central Asian region can be attributed to the economic and strategic importance of the region. The six Islamic republics in the Commonwealth occupy about 18% of the former Soviet Union, with an area of 31,994,400 km², comprising about 20% of its population. While the share of national wealth is 9.2%. These countries represent federal Muslim republics, that is, the majority of its population is

Muslim, but this does not mean the absence of other religions and ethnicities within these republics.

Relevance of the study

Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia and the post-Soviet space is of particular scientific and practical interest. Due to the peculiarities of the historical, cultural and socio-economic development of Central Asia, which is heterogeneous in structure and has a «conflictogenic» region, there is no single leader in it, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan invariably claim this role. The political situation in Central Asia is characterized by considerable mobility, a multi-level nature and a low degree of predictability of the development of further events. The integration processes of both regional and trans-regional cooperation are becoming increasingly stronger. Nevertheless, even in those countries where the domestic political situation seemed relatively stable, deep socioeconomic and ethno-confessional contradictions were brewing, which could lead to new confrontations, to imbalance of the established regional structure.

The increasing role of Iran in Central Asia is manifested both in the internal structure and characteristics of the political system of some countries of the region, and in their behavior in the international arena. Crisis phenomena are aggravated by the serious fragmentation of the Islamic world according to confessional (Shiite Sunnis, Salafis, Wahhabists, etc.), national and political grounds. In recent years, the role and ambitions of Iran, based on its «nuclear program» and the sympathy of the Muslim street, have greatly increased. At the same time, the leader in the Central Asian region is energetically striving to become both the Russian Federation and the PRC.

The relevance of the research topic is due to the importance of bilateral relations for stability in the Central Asian region.

Today, serious transformational processes are taking place in the post-Soviet space, which have a direct impact on the situation in the field of regional security. The accumulation of crisis potential in connection with the Ukrainian events, to increasingly strengthen the role and build up the Russian influence on the integration processes of Central Asia, increase the foreign policy steps of the Russian Federation in this direction, requires the most complete and coherent understanding of the system of international relations in the Central Asian region. (Dorraj, 2013) In this regard, the analysis of the Central Asian direction of Iran's foreign policy

and its historical experience in establishing ties with the Muslim countries of Central Asia is of particular importance.

Iran's foreign policy as a whole is noteworthy. The analysis of this issue is important for the formation of objective ideas about Iran's foreign policy strategy, which has both theoretical and practical significance. The study of the «Central Asian» vector of Iran's foreign policy as an example of its relations with Kazakhstan is also of significant applied value, in particular, for conducting situational analysis and practical research on a whole range of problems.

In addition, we can underline interesting overviews at the articles of these following authors: Barbara Ann Rieffer-Flanagan. «Evolving Iran.» (Barbara Ann Rieffer-Flanagan, 2013), Edward Wastnidge, «Pragmatic Politics: Iran, Central Asia and Cultural Foreign Policy,» (Wastnidge, 2013), «Central Asia in the Iranian geopolitical imagination. Cambridge Journal of Eurasian Studies.» (Wastnidge, 2017), Dorraj «Iran's Northern Exposure: Foreign Policy Challenges in Eurasia.» (Dorraj, 2013), Koolae «Iran-Kazakhstan relations: Geopolitical analysis.» (Koolae, 2010), Evyazov «Iran's security interests and geopolitical activity in Central Eurasia.» (Evyazov, 2009), Kazemzadeh «The Overview of Iran & Caucasus Ties.» (Kazemzadeh, 2013).

Research Methodology

This research paper relies mainly on the qualitative method of data analysis in identifying the different variables of the study from the related literature review. The same method was also used in the data collection, where the descriptive method has been utilized mainly in order to describe the variables of the study, while holding a comparison between such variables. The qualitative method functions mainly as means of analyzing the different information that are represented in the literature review, while highlighting the researcher's personal opinion to the topic of interest.

The Central Asian region is of a vital nature because it possesses many resources, including its possession of oil and gas and its location as a result of the conflicts of multiple dimensions, especially in the Western countries, Western countries developed strategies to seize them and enjoy their benefits and achieve their national goals, the conflict on the Central Asian country is increasing as the phenomenon of international conflict of the nests affecting the security and stability of the state there

is a dispute Permanent among the Western countries on the Central Asian state .

Central Asia and the Caucasus? It is open to the Gulf region and the East in general, and those who control it can overlook the east. This is because of the geopolitical and strategic importance of this region. It has rich sources of oil and natural gas, which reach 13 billion tons of oil and 3 billion tons of gas, making the region the second and third largest oil and natural gas exporter in the world. The presence of other mineral resources such as gold, iron and uranium is also a factor that doubles this importance. Twenty-five percent of the world's uranium reserves have been discovered in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Uzbekistan alone produces 4,000 tons of gold, the eighth country in the world in its production. Tajikistan is ranked fourth in the world in cotton production, and Kyrgyzstan has a distinct international position in grain production. On the other hand, it is an open market for other countries (Bichsel, 2009). Its population of more than 60 million. In addition, Kazakhstan's possession of space technology capabilities, close to 1,400 nuclear warheads, 140 intercontinental ballistic missile launchers, 2 Russian military positions in Semipalatinsk in northeastern of Kazakhstan and the presence of nuclear specialists have all led to the regional and international importance of this region. (Gencer & Gerni, 2012)

The advantages of the Iranian strategy

Iran was not far from the international competition for Central Asia. It was among many countries, including United States of America, Russia, Turkey, Israel, India, China and Pakistan, 5 that sought a foothold in the Central Asian region, drawing on several strategic advantages to play a vital role in the region, can be summarized in:

Geographic convergence: The Caspian Sea is located on the northern border of Iran, and thus Iran shares with Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan in its territory, as well as common borders with Turkmenistan. This geographic proximity provides an important advantage for Iran in its relations with the Central Asian republics, in terms of their willingness to serve as the link between these republics and the outside world by establishing a set of land transport networks, whether on roads or railways. (Gladman, 2006)

Cultural links: The peoples of Tajikistan and Azerbaijan speak the Persian language, as well as the ethnic extensions of some of these countries in

Iran, such as the Azeri and Turkmen minority in Iran. (Hohmann, Mouradian, Serrano, & Thorez, 2014)

Iran has the potential to produce the consumer goods needed by these countries, the experience of Iran and its reasonable capabilities in the production and refining of oil and gas, which are of great importance to the independent republics, especially Turkmenistan. Moreover, this also includes the proximity of Tehran from energy consuming countries such as Turkey, Armenia, India and Pakistan, European Union countries. This has been demonstrated by the successful export of Turkmen gas to Turkey and Europe through Iran in the shortest, best and least expensive way. The length of this line from Turkmenistan to Turkey via Iran is about 1470 km, 140 km inside Turkoman and 1030 km inside Iranian territory. The pipeline costs \$ 700 million less than the Caspian Sea gas pipeline. However, this line faces strong opposition from the United States, which is doing its utmost to prevent Russia or Iran from controlling their energy sources by building pipelines that avoid traffic Even though they are at a higher cost or face many security risks. Iran has taken advantage of these advantages in its relations with Central Asia to achieve a set of objectives: (Ishnazarov, 2015)

Exiting the international isolation imposed on it since the Islamic Revolution, which increased with the disclosure of its nuclear activities in late 2002, as well as countering the growing American influence in the region. (Gencer & Gerni, 2012)

The development of the Shiite cultural tide in that region.

Strengthening economic relations with Central Asian countries.

The independence of the republics of Central Asia created a new strategic space that enabled Iran to face the US campaign against it against its nuclear program, especially after the US siege on it after the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, where the American military presence became a reality on its borders (Hohmann, Mouradian, Serrano, & Thorez, 2014). That is why Iran has not hesitated to use this opportunity to break out of the US siege and expand its influence. Tehran has emerged from a strategic vision that it has become the natural force to play a leading role in the Central Asian region. It is also bordering Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan geographically. Tehran is the natural land port of both states to the Arabian Gulf and has cultural and cultural ties with Tajikistan. (Kantarci, Uysal, & Magnini, 2014)

In addition, China is one of the first countries to recognize the Central Asian countries after independence from the former Soviet Union, established strong diplomatic relations and exchanges of official visits. The new Chinese policy towards this region appeared in 1969 when Beijing moved to find a formal framework linking it with the region. The idea of the SCO came in cooperation with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which Uzbekistan joined in 2001. It was clear that Beijing was using Russia's influence to move to Central Asia, while Moscow was looking for a strong ally in Asia to stop the European motherland is moving toward its areas of influence. With China increasingly in need of energy and rising oil and gas prices, Beijing had to look for cheaper and safer alternatives to meet its needs. The energy resources in Central Asia, which are close to it, have come to realize this dream, but more trade-offs are needed with Russia, which fears that China is contending to control the oil and gas transmission lines. At the same time, Central Asia is a major consumer market for Chinese goods. Most of China's imports from Central Asia are the raw materials China lacks. China exports consumer goods to these countries (Bichsel, 2009).

Meanwhile, Iran's geopolitics is characterized by its northern border reaching the Caspian Sea, the best oil crossing to the Arabian Gulf to the south, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence of three Asian Caspian Sea countries. There was demanding territorial waters in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. The era of the Soviet Union, where limited Iranian benefits from the sea on fishing and the wealth of caviar, which led to the profits of Iran, in addition to the oil wealth that came to view, the strategic importance of the region increased. It moved the aspirations of Iran to play a key role, and in particular, Iran has relatively advanced oil facilities. Iran's current strategic ambitions are to become the main carrier of Caspian oil through its territory to the Persian Gulf (MacFarlane, 1999).

Results

In order to deepen its role in Central Asia, Iran sought to formulate a gradual pragmatic approach of not focusing on exporting Iran's revolutionary Islamic model and providing a practical Persian model. Tehran did not seek to spread the idea of the Iranian Revolution in Central Asia, and the realization that the ruling elites in those countries

have lied to secular values, making them more inclined not to accept the Iranian revolutionary thought on the other (MacFarlane, 1999). The most prominent example of this Iranian pragmatism is Iran's position on the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Karabakh region, where Iran supported Armenia against Azerbaijan (in which Shiites make up about 93.4% of the population) «Iran claims to defend Islam while arming Armenia, the Christian state against the Muslim Shiite Muslim people of Azerbaijan.» Tehran has succeeded in persuading the Central Asian countries that they are not a threat to their political systems, which helped them establish a network of strategic interests with those countries. This has served to reassure political elites in Central Asia against Iranian intentions. Central Asia in accepting cooperation with Iran, as happened with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, whose leaders have expressed their lack of conviction that Iran is a threat and have expressed their willingness to cooperate with it. (Oliker, Szayna, Pace, & Wilson, 2003)

Because the Central Asian republics are geographically locked countries, where there is no open seas, the issue of the transfer of huge oil reserves enjoyed by these countries is a great challenge, especially in light of the fierce competition between numbers of neighboring countries to transport this oil (Ishnazarov, 2015). Each state has a pipeline that passes through its territory, while it can be called a «pipeline war.» In this sense, Iran has tried to win this competition, which will give it considerable economic gains, strategic influence and overcome US efforts to prevent the transit of oil pipelines through Iran by supporting the Baku-Azerbaijan (Tebilisi) – Ceyhan (Turkey), which opened in May 2005. In its effort to persuade other neighboring countries to pass oil pipelines through its territory, Iran has argued that the most economically viable route to transport Central Asian oil to Europe passes through its territory. Tehran has several advantages: (Bichsel, 2009)

Iran has great potential both in the field of human resources trained to work in the oil field, or in the field of land and air transport and oil refineries. (Hohmann, Mouradian, Serrano, & Thorez, 2014)

The potential of its ports to transport oil and gas, and the existence of oil and gas pipelines already, which provide great technical and logistical concessions, and the possibility of connecting the proposed lines with pipelines and export outlets already located in the Arabian Gulf. (Kantarci, Uysal, & Magnini, 2014)

Iran enjoys relative stability compared to other countries; there are no separatist movements or civil wars that could affect oil pipelines.

In addition to the above, Iran developed its cultural relations with these countries. In February 1992, it established the Persian Language Organization, which in addition includes Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Tehran provided assistance to develop Persian elements in the cultures of these Turkic-speaking countries by teaching Persian in schools and universities and studying the Persian period in their history. Tehran has also established a research center within the framework of the Institute of Political and International Studies of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which focuses on the study of Central Asia and the Caucasus, holds an annual conference to discuss the issues of that region and publishes a quarterly magazine entitled *Central Asia and the Caucasus*. On the economic side, economic motives were one aspect of Iran's rapprochement with the Central Asian Republics. This is evident in the volume of trade exchange between Iran and these countries. The volume of trade between Iran and the Central Asian countries in 2004 reached about 1.7 billion dollars (2.1% of Iran's total foreign trade of \$ 79.2 billion), compared to only \$ 884 million in 1994, i.e., the volume of trade increased by 93.8% during that period. (Oliker, Szayna, Pace, & Wilson, 2003)

On the other hand, Iran's fears of Russian influence in the Central Asian region cannot be ignored. Some have argued that current international developments are what Iranian ships desire. While Tehran has maintained its alliance with Moscow, On the other hand, by maintaining a common hair with Europe and America, which largely hold the keys to solving the Iranian nuclear file. (Bichsel, 2009) The Iranians are well aware that Russia can postpone or

oppose imposing new sanctions on Tehran by using the veto in the Security Council, but it is unable to remove the nuclear file from the dark tunnel it is. Iranian crisis of the Caucasus carries messages implicit in support of Russia, at the same time does not arouse the other party, which is trying hard to put Tehran in the face of a new confrontation with the UN Security Council. (Gencer & Gerni, 2012)

Conclusion

In brief, Central Asia appears to be the point of interest in the Iranian strategy contributing to that the valuable resources including oil that these countries has. Iran is attempting to exploit the resources of the central Asian countries in order to achieve its objectives, whereas the region functions as the appropriate arena through which Iran could impose its influence and strengthen its foreign trade. Iran is aware of its capabilities and availability of resources; thus, the government is taking advantage of the several privileges that central Asian region provide it with in order to increase its influence and in the same time increase its profit. Tehran did not seek to spread the idea of the Iranian Revolution in Central Asia, and the realization that the ruling elites in those countries have lied to secular values, making them more inclined not to accept the Iranian revolutionary thought on the other. Iran has the potential to produce the consumer goods needed by these countries, the experience of Iran and its reasonable capabilities in the production and refining of oil and gas, which are of great importance to the independent republics, especially Turkmenistan. Moreover, this also includes the proximity of Tehran from energy consuming countries such as Turkey, Armenia, India and Pakistan, European Union countries.

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