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The Organization of Turkic States and Postcolonialism in Central Asia: Possible Contributions, Prospects, and Limitations

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ABSTRACT *This paper explores the Organization of Turkic States' (OTS) support in aiding Central Asian republics to address their historical legacies, focusing on the period following Russian influence from the 18th century. Employing a postcolonial theoretical lens, it examines the post-independence phase of these republics, highlighting the OTS' role in promoting regional cooperation, cultural revitalization, and social unity. The paper discusses the challenges faced by these nations in various sectors such as economics and linguistics, assessing the OTS' capacity to support their development, given its resources and relative position amidst other significant regional entities. Additionally, it delves into broader regional developmental strategies and their implications for the OTS' objectives. The paper underscores the importance of strategic autonomy for Central Asia in the context of evolving regional dynamics. It concludes by recognizing the OTS' potential in contributing to the region's progress, presenting a comprehensive view of the intricate regional landscape and the OTS' part in fostering growth and development in Central Asia.*

Keywords: Organization of Turkic States, Central Asia, Russian Federation, China, Regionalization

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Introduction

The Central Asian republics have aggressively sought to form both bilateral and multi-actor ties in their efforts to develop their nation-states and promote the unification of the Turkic World after attaining independence. The Organization of Turkic States (OTS), first referred to as the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States or Turkic Council, was founded in 2009 to promote cooperation among nations that speak the Turkic languages.

The efforts to regionalize and integrate the Turkic World show significant potential in several areas, including linguistics, trade, health, and policy. The present measurements indicate that the level of collaboration and collaborative initiatives among member states has not completely realized the potential magnitude. These efforts are important attempts to regionalize in the current century. Moreover, its strategic geographical placement positions it as an area expected to become a central hub for global competitiveness in the next decades. One of the key issues is how the Organization may strategically position itself among the growing tension and geopolitical problems amid the “corridor rivalry,”¹ especially considering Russian efforts to strengthen its control over the region. The Organization’s success is widely recognized to be closely linked to the socioeconomic dynamics of the region, which are heavily influenced by the lasting effects of Russian colonialism.

The term “postcolonial” pertains to the era that succeeds the termination of colonial governance. This phrase pertains to the historical interactions between Asian, American, and African populations, who were subjected to colonization by imperialist powers and Western cultures, as well as their subsequent postcolonial contemplations. Postcolonial studies analyze the ongoing repercussions of a dominant culture engaging with another society and question the effects of colonization on identity and culture.²

Postcolonial studies are a field that has not been widely used or has only recently started to be used in post-Soviet countries. The Central Asian states perceive the Tsarist Russian era as colonial, although they do not view the Soviet Union period in the same light. Multiple variables may be relevant. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan possess a substantial Russian demographic, with the option to incorporate Russian-speaking individuals native to the area. Efforts to oppose the Soviet regime could have led to social unrest, inspiring caution among the country’s leaders. The leaders and senior managers of the Central Asian republics all achieved their positions during the Soviet era, which is another contributing factor in not considering Soviet era as colonial. Hence, their previous affiliation with a colonial power is troublesome. Moreover, the ongoing influence of the Russian Federation on the foreign policies

of the five republics in the region contributes to this phenomenon. Central Asian nations, heavily dependent on Russia for geopolitical, economic, and political backing, cannot fully conduct an autonomous foreign policy. State ideology and politics greatly limit the scope of social sciences in the region.

Decolonization in Central Asia has made significant advancements, while it still encounters obstacles. The efficacy of these activities is contingent upon political, economic, and cultural transformations. Regional integration has the potential to assist Central Asian nations in the process of decolonization. Regional integration refers to the process in which neighboring countries establish frameworks to enhance economic, political, and social cooperation. Regional integration in Central Asia can facilitate postcolonial development by leveraging historical connections and addressing common challenges. Collaboration among Central Asian economies might facilitate diversification, thereby lowering dependence on certain industries and mitigating the economic consequences of colonial resource extraction. Regional integration has the potential to foster unity among Central Asian nations, enabling them to address past conflicts and enhance political stability. Enhanced regional security cooperation offers a more effective approach to tackling transnational threats and overcoming border challenges. Regional integration fosters cultural exchange and collaboration, thereby cultivating a sense of unity and identity among the nations of Central Asia. Collaborative endeavors have the potential to safeguard indigenous customs and resist the imposition of colonial cultural practices. Collaborations in education and research have the potential to enhance the intellectual resources, human progress, and exchange of knowledge within a region. Regional integration has the potential to enhance the economies of Central Asian countries and decrease their reliance on external actors by creating access to fresh markets and trade prospects. Regional tariff harmonization and customs simplification can potentially enhance cross-border trade's efficiency and effectiveness.

Türkiye and the OTS have the potential to assist in the process of decolonizing Central Asia. Türkiye and the Turkic-speaking Central Asian states have strong cultural and historical connections, enhancing mutual understanding and cooperation. Trade, investment, and development have the potential to enhance the diversification of the region's economy. Türkiye may assist with educational and cultural exchange programs (such as Mevlana Exchange Programme, Türkiye Scholarships, Orkhun Exchange Programme) aimed at safe-

Collaboration among Central Asian economies might facilitate diversification, thereby lowering dependence on certain industries and mitigating the economic consequences of colonial resource extraction

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guarding Turkic languages and culture. Türkiye can also assist Central Asian nations in expanding their external ties through diplomatic and political engagements. Central Asian nations can gain valuable insights from Türkiye's modernization efforts and soft power approach to enhance their own technology, education, and governance systems. However, it is important for Central Asian countries to carefully manage their relationships with Türkiye, China, Russia, and other regional actors to prevent excessive reliance on any actor. Ensuring the preservation of sovereignty and autonomy when engaging with external partners, notably Türkiye, is of utmost importance. Geopolitical factors and regional power conflicts might impact the effectiveness of Türkiye's engagement. This requires Türkiye to coordinate with other regional actors and organizations to make meaningful contributions. Türkiye and the OTS have the potential to make a constructive impact on the decolonization process in Central Asia by fostering cultural connections, promoting economic collaboration, and engaging in diplomatic efforts. However, it is essential to carefully evaluate issues of sovereignty, balance partnerships, and regional dynamics to ensure effective collaboration. Türkiye's capacities and the OTS' present condition could impact Central Asia's regional dynamics. However, overcoming the influence of Russia's historical presence in the region is a complicated and multifaceted challenge. The historical and cultural connections, economic involvement, diplomatic relationships, and soft power of Türkiye, along with its expertise in modernizing, have the potential to help postcolonization efforts in the Central Asian countries. Within this context, the OTS functions as a medium for collaboration, promoting cultural and educational interchange, and fostering economic integration.

Postcolonialism: Theoretical Framework

The term "postcolonial" refers to the period following the end of colonial rule. This term refers to the historical relations between Asian, American, and African communities, which were colonized by imperialist powers and Western societies, and their postcolonial reflections. Postcolonial studies, which examine the continuous reflections of a superior culture interacting with another society, challenge the identity and cultural impacts of colonization.³ After the Second World War, historians have labeled states "postcolonial" if they have been freed from the grip of colonialism.⁴

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin coined the term postcolonialism to encompass “cultures affected by imperialism, ranging from the time of colonization to the present day.”⁵ According to Stuart Hall, postcolonialism does not indicate the end of colonialism. This concept means the aftermath of a certain period of colonialism, a high level of imperialism, and colonial occupation. It can be said that the “certain period of colonialism” that Hall refers to here is the colonialism that European states started with the geographical discoveries in the 16th century.⁶ Thus, European colonial policies should be included while discussing postcolonialism. Robert Young believed that postcolonialism arose to express a series of critical notions, oppositional political identity, and aspirations based on the political and cultural history of the struggle against colonialism and imperialism that continues now.⁷

Scholars and resistance leaders have exhibited divergent approaches in initiating the process of decolonization. Frantz Fanon explores the psychological impact of colonialism on colonized people, advocating for violent decolonization.⁸ Gandhi and Mandela both advocated for defending cultural identity from Western imperialism, but their tactics differed, with Gandhi viewing violence as morally wrong.⁹

Frantz Fanon explores how race influences colonizer-colonized relations, highlighting how colonizers impose their culture, language, religion, and education, making colonized subjects feel culturally inferior and legitimizing their control. Fanon’s 1952 work, *Black Skin, White Masks*, critiques colonialism by arguing that whites superiorize blacks and that blacks imitate whites despite oppression.¹⁰ Frantz Fanon’s 1961 work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, emphasized the psychological, cultural, and political impacts of colonialism, arguing that decolonization includes violence and bloodshed, as it involves opposing forces conflicting.¹¹ Fanon consistently stresses the importance of violence for colonized peoples’ freedom. European experts call him excessively violent.¹² Fanon claims that white Europeans cannot comprehend colonialism’s violence and oppression because they have not lived it.

In addition to Fanon, Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s subaltern, and Homi Bhabha’s hybridity and mimicry underpin postcolonial studies. All three thinkers aspired to dismantle global narratives about oppressor and oppressed communities and remove the power disparity between the North and South.¹³

Said’s 1978 publication *Orientalism* is crucial to postcolonial theory, presenting a narrative of post-Enlightenment European civilization’s control over the East. Drawing on Marxism, Theodor Adorno’s dialectics, and Michel Foucault’s power analysis, Said’s cultural imperialism has influenced postcolonial theory research and postmodern literary and cultural studies.¹⁴ Said defines



A family photo of the ministers responsible for economy and trade of the OTS after the 12th meeting held in Istanbul on September 14, 2023.

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YAMAN / AA

the Orient as Europe's neighbor, the source of its civilizations and languages, and its cultural rival. Orientalism, a term used in academic institutions, refers to the collective institution dealing with the Orient, dominating it, and establishing authority over it.¹⁵ The West uses binary or dualistic thinking to create an "orient" and associate its people with opposite qualities to the West, portraying them as exotic, emotional, feminine, backward, hedonistic, and non-rational. This Western view of the Eastern world contrasts with Western virtues like logic, masculinity, civilization, and modernity, creating a distorted understanding of the Eastern world.¹⁶ Said's *Orientalism* has become a foundational text in postcolonial studies.

Gayatri Spivak, an Indian literary critic and theorist, expanded on Antonio Gramsci's concept of the subaltern by referring to marginalized groups in third-world nations that had experienced colonization. Spivak argued that poverty, oppression, and victimization prevent these groups from speaking up and attempting to save them from colonial rule.¹⁷ Spivak says the subalterns cannot speak up because they are divided by gender, class, caste, area, and religion. Spivak highlights the argument that Europeans legitimized colonialism with Eurocentric ideas. Spivak argues that scholars such as Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, both prominent European academics, developed theories that are centered around Western perspectives, ultimately serving to bolster Western economic interests.¹⁸ Spivak argues that knowledge is often favored by its producers, aiding Western imperialism and promoting European ideals to indigenous peoples. She argues that colonial oppression lim-

its subalterns' ability to express themselves independently.

Bhabha introduced concepts such as hybridity and mimicry to the field of postcolonial studies. Bhabha's work, titled *The Location of Culture*, published in 1994, is one of the most important contributions to postcolonial theory.¹⁹

The conflicts experienced by the Central Asian republics after gaining independence can be viewed as a form of postcolonial resistance

In colonial and postcolonial studies literature, the concept of mimicry is used to describe individuals who adopt Western culture, ideology, and lifestyle. Colonized people aspire to emulate Western colonizers' language, attire, and culture. These imitative behaviors distance colonial people from their culture. In the end, the individual who imitates the colonizer will always be the colonizer's imitator.²⁰ In colonialism, mimicry is opportunistic because the mimicker constantly seeks power like the ruling class by replicating its conduct. The colonized must suppress their culture while doing this. Mimickers in colonial civilization are those who move to the West and think they've changed by adopting the Western culture and returning as new people.

Bhabha disputes the idea that mimicry can also harm the colonizer. The colonizer can benefit from imitation, but it can also be dangerous, according to Bhabha.²¹ An imitator who accepts Western values like justice, freedom, human rights, and the rule of law is harmful to the colonizer because these ideas spread in colonial culture and started independence struggles. Some anti-colonial nationalism movements in Asia and Africa began as Western political imitations. According to Indian historian Partha Chatterjee, Indian nationalism is a Western replica adapted to Indian culture.²² Western ideas like justice, democracy, and equality were adopted by locals and used against Westerners. Gandhi exemplifies this. Gandhi, who studied in London and became familiar with Western culture, combined socialism and nationalism with Indian culture to inspire locals to rebel against the colonialists.²³ Thus, Indian nationalism, which emerged as an imitation of the nationalism developed in the West, became a uniquely Indian nationalism, thanks to Gandhi. As can be seen, the colonized society imitating the West can be dangerous enough to put an end to the authority of the colonizer when it exceeds the boundaries drawn by the colonizer. For this reason, the colonialist instills the method of imitation in the form of "almost like me, but not quite the same" for the natives living in the lands it colonizes.²⁴ However, according to Bhabha, even partial imitation like this can reveal the weakness of colonial authority. In conclusion, Bhabha suggests that it would not be wrong to consider imitation as a way of escaping colonial rule.

Another idea Bhabha proposed to postcolonial studies was "hybridity," a blend of Western and Eastern cultures. In colonial and postcolonial literature, this

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period of time, the oppressed will also psychologically affect the oppressor.²⁶ Bhabha, in his article “Signs Taken for Wonders,” describes hybridity as a tool used by colonized people to challenge colonial oppression.²⁷ Bhabha says no culture is uniform. All cultural identities are developed in the “Third Space” where cultures mix. Bhabha defines hybridity as cultural identity creation in colonial ambiguity and inequality. Bhabha believes colonial authority shapes colonized identity. This process must succeed or the hybrid identity challenges power. Combining colonizer and colonized identities creates a hybrid identity. The colonial structure is ambivalent, according to Bhabha. Bhabha made colonial and postcolonial studies ambiguous. In postcolonial studies, Bhabha uses it to explain the colonizer’s conflicts with the colonized. A colonial government wants a calm society that adopts its cultural norms and customs to rule more smoothly, but it is concerned that people may demand freedom and equal rights and become like itself. Bhabha believes colonialism’s ambivalence will weaken imperial authority and undermine the institution.²⁸

term refers to colonized peoples who balanced Eastern and Western civilizations. One of the most problematic concepts in postcolonial thought is hybridity, which is utilized in horticulture to create a third species by grafting or cross-pollinating two species. Linguistic, cultural, political, and racial hybridity exist. Many postcolonial writers saw colonial culture’s hybridity as a positive.²⁵ It is argued that colonialism is not only a one-sided process in which the oppressor tries to destroy the oppressed, but after a certain pe-

riod of time, the oppressed will also psychologically affect the oppressor.²⁶

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Central Asia: Colonization Process and Decolonization Efforts

Postcolonial studies is a discipline that has been underutilized or has only recently commenced to be applied in post-Soviet nations. The Central Asian states consider the Tsarist Russian period colonial but not the Soviet Union period. Several factors may apply. First, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have a large Russian population. You can also include Russian-speaking locals. Anti-Soviet initiatives could have caused social friction, therefore the country’s rulers were concerned. The Central Asian republics’ leaders and senior managers all rose in the Soviet era, another reason. Thus, their past association with a colonialist nation is problematic.²⁹ Furthermore, the continued impact of the Russian Federation on the foreign policies of the five republics in the region contributes to this phenomenon. Central Asian nations, which rely on Russia

for geopolitical, economic, and political support, are unable to pursue an entirely independent foreign policy. This shows that state ideology and politics severely constrain social sciences in the region.

Adeeb Khalid, an expert on Asian studies and history, noted that most Russian historians do not consider Central Asian issues in postcolonial terms. Khalid says Russian historiography emphasizes annexation (willing participation) rather than occupation. This Stalin-era vision calls Tsarist Russia “an empire without colonies.” The bulk of modern Russian historians agree. Tsarist Russia was initially called a colonial empire, but that changed under Stalin.³⁰

Leading Russian historian Svetlana Gorshenina claims that Tsarist Russia’s Turkestan policies were colonial. The author says Kaufman, the Turkestan governor general, prepared the “Turkestanskiy Albom,” which served the colonial administration’s goals. These paintings often suggest that Russians brought advanced culture and modernism to the region. According to Gorshenina in this work Central Asians are frequently seen as “less developed and uncivilized” compared to “progressive and European” Russians. After reviewing the files in Tsarist Russia’s colonial archives, Gorshenina concluded that European colonial practices and those of the Russian Tsar in Turkestan were comparable. Gorshenina asserts that Tsarist Russia invaded Central Asia and portrayed them as an “undeveloped other” in line with imperialism. It aimed to equate itself with European colonial powers in world politics.³¹ Postcolonial theory might evaluate Central Asia’s time in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, Gorshenina said. In colonial discourse, the Soviet Union’s identity and cultural policies in Central Asia resemble Western European imperial regimes. To explain their colonial operations, imperialist nations constantly claim to deliver “advanced civilization and modernization” to colonized societies, according to Chatterjee and Benedict Anderson.³²

Adrienne Edgar said the Soviet Union’s 1920s and 1930s “civilizing” programs in Central Asia were similar to those of England and France.³³ Georgy Safarov also labeled Soviet Central Asian policies in the 1920s “colonial.” Safarov is a prominent revolutionary figure who significantly contributed to the consolidation of the Bolsheviks’ influence in Central Asia. In his book titled *Colonial Revolution: The Turkestan Experience*, Safarov characterizes the Bolshevik Party’s rise to power in the Yedisu and Turkestan regions as a colonial revolution. According to Safarov, the Bolsheviks took power in Central Asia in three revolutions, not two (February and October) as in Russia. The one in February overturned Tsarist control, and the one in October overthrew the transitional government. According to Safarov, the Third Bolshevik Revolution destroyed Central Asian national movements, and he referred to this third revolution as the colonial revolution.³⁴ This Central Asian colonial revolution was carried out by Safarov, who was killed for being a Trotskyist under Stalin’s rule.

David Chioni Moore, in his article titled “Is the ‘Post-’ in ‘Postcolonial’ the ‘Post-’ in ‘Post-Soviet’? Towards a Global Postcolonial Critique” draws a parallel between the newly established republics that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the countries that were colonized by Western European powers such as England and France. Moore argued that these countries had similar colonial pasts and that post-Soviet field studies and postcolonial studies ignored these commonalities. Therefore, he criticized postcolonial scholars for ignoring former Soviet geography.³⁵ Deniz Kandiyoti also found similarities and variations in Central Asian and Middle Eastern colonial strategies by comparing materials on colonialism and modernization. The inclusion of former Soviet geography in postcolonial theory will extend postcolonial studies, according to Kandiyoti, because the Soviet Union’s colonization and modernization model differed from European colonial nations. These characteristics prompted him to propose a new postcolonial studies definition.³⁶

Russian imperial expansion and colonialism in Central Asia lasted from the 18th until the late 20th century. Russia believed it could secure its international status by adopting European policies. Russia now views non-Russian neighbors differently after adopting the Western European paradigm for modernization and prosperity. Russia has aimed to colonize surrounding peoples to consolidate its political and economic supremacy, despite its obvious transformation. Europe employed the rationale of “civilizing barbarian societies” to justify colonialism, while Russians similarly sought to “civilize” their neighboring societies. Since the mid-18th century, Russian colonial plans have been patterned after those of Europe. Hence, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alexander Gorchakov, dispatched a circular to European nations, with a particular emphasis on England, elucidating Russia’s policy regarding Central Asia. Furthermore, this circular sought to validate Russia’s colonial practices with the general population:

Russia’s situation in Central Asia is the same as that of all civilized and educated states that do not have a solid social structure and are in contact with semi-wild and nomadic peoples. In such cases, the more civilized state has always had to protect its border security and commercial relations from wild and aggressive societies... The people under control calm down, but this time they begin to be attacked by groups further away. Therefore, the state is obliged to protect the people under its control and must punish the groups that create these unrests.... Asian people generally respect only brute force. In this case, there are two options to make... This is a problem that all states in a similar situation will face. The USA faced similar problems in America, France in Africa, the Netherlands in its colonies, and England in India. All of these states have chosen the path of progress.³⁷

This circular states that the Russian Tsar occupied Central Asia to increase his influence, secure the locals, and bring prosperity, education, and civiliza-

tion to the semi-wild society. Russia colonized Central Asia using Western notions like “civilizing” and “bringing education.”³⁸

Russian sources say Central Asia was “voluntarily” incorporated into Tsarist Russia. Russian and Soviet historiography portrays Tsarist Russia’s expansion into Central Asia as a blessing to “barbarian” nations or at the choice of the people. This process is represented as the conquest of economically and socially undeveloped peoples by a highly developed European state, the triumph of capitalism over feudalism, or the triumph of a centralist state over fragmented societies in classical Soviet history. Soviet sources stress class. It notes that regional rulers accepted Russian protection to maintain their power.³⁹ Some historical facts support this claim. However, Russian growth in the region was not “voluntary.” All this research supports calling the Soviet Union a colonial state and the independent Turkic Republics in former Soviet geography postcolonial states.

From a scholarly perspective, one may posit that the conflicts experienced by the Central Asian republics after gaining independence can be viewed as a form of postcolonial resistance. This argument is substantiated by the evidence. In consideration of this matter, the next section will examine the potential impact of regionalization, including the specific case of the OTS, on postcolonial endeavors. Additionally, it will explore the reciprocal relationship between regional and global rivalries and their influence on regionalization.

Regionalization Efforts in the “Turkic World”: The Historical Background and Process-Tracing

The Central Asian republics have actively pursued the establishment of bilateral and multi-actor relationships as they strive to develop their nation-states and foster the unification of the Turkic World subsequent to gaining independence. In 1992, Turgut Özal, then president of Türkiye, organized and presided over the inaugural Summit of Heads of State of Turkic Speaking States in Ankara. The Ankara Declaration, which was adopted during the conference, included a commitment to align customs laws to facilitate unrestricted trade. The objectives were to establish mutually agreed upon trade agreements and facilitate unrestricted movement of individuals, commodities, and services. The investment and development program emphasized enhancing railway, road, air, and telecommunications infrastructure, as well as facilitating the

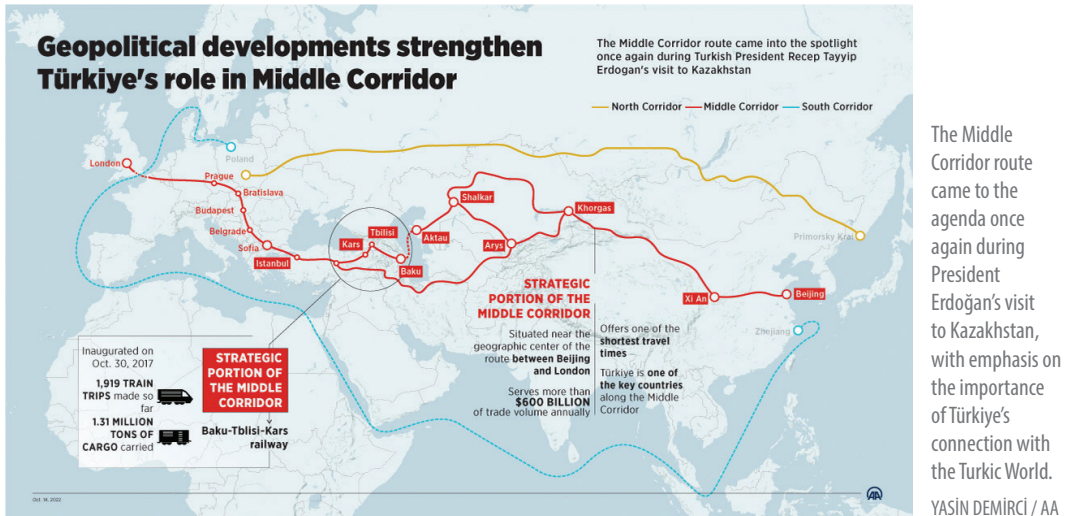
The political and economic landscape of Central Asia was subject to the dominance of the Russian Empire, resulting in the establishment of a system characterized by significant disparities

The process of institutionalization has played a significant role in fostering the integration of Turkic communities over the course of history

transportation of regional natural resources to Europe via Türkiye.⁴⁰

The OTS was established in 2009 with the objective of fostering collaboration among Turkic nations. The foundation documents of the Organization, namely the Nakhchivan Agreement dated October 3, 2009, and the İstanbul Declaration dated September 16, 2010, explicitly affirm the commitment of its members to uphold the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter and other relevant norms of international law. The partnership within the Turkic Council

is grounded in international ideals that promote peace, security, and friendly relations. According to Article 2 of the Nakhchivan Agreement, the primary objectives and responsibilities of the Organization encompass the enhancement of mutual confidence, the maintenance of peace within the region and beyond, the establishment of unified foreign policy stances, the facilitation of collaborative efforts against international terrorism, separatism, extremism, and transnational criminal activities, as well as the promotion of efficient regional and bilateral cooperation in areas pertaining to shared objectives. The establishment of the Organization was undertaken by Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Türkiye. Uzbekistan became a full member at the 7th Summit held in Baku in October 2019. Observer status was granted to Hungary in September 2018, Turkmenistan in November 2021, and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in Samarkand during the 9th Summit. In the interim, notable endeavors toward institutionalization were undertaken. The İstanbul Declaration of 2010 outlined the Organization's aims and action plan. Following the establishment of the Turkic Council, the summits underwent a transformation, now referred to as Turkic Council Summits, with the term "Turkic Kenesh" replacing the previous nomenclature. The Turkic Speaking States Summits Process is ongoing in collaboration with the Turkic Council Secretariat. The inaugural summit held in Almaty, Kazakhstan in 2011 was mostly centered around matters pertaining to the economy and business. Subsequent annual conferences held in other urban centers have incorporated a wide range of topics, including scientific advancements, cultural affairs, transit systems, tourism practices, and media-related matters. The town of Cholpan Ata in Kyrgyzstan engaged in a discourse over the involvement of young individuals in sports throughout the year 2018. Conversely, the 7th Summit held in Baku, Azerbaijan in 2019 placed its emphasis on providing support and aid to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). During the summit, the Nakhchivan Agreement was ratified, granting Uzbekistan membership in the OTS. The meeting held on April 10, 2020, focused on the global challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. A conference on April 31, 2021, titled "Turkistan: One of the Spiritual Capitals of the Turkic World," declared Turkistan a spiritual capital. The Turkic Council



became the “Organization of Turkic States” at the 8th Summit in İstanbul in late 2021, indicating its increased influence on the global order. Azerbaijan’s Homeland War triumph in 2020 against Armenia was acknowledged in a 121-item closing declaration that stressed cooperation and Turkic unity.⁴¹

The official long-term development strategy, the “Turkic World Vision – 2040” with political, strategic, and economic goals, was presented at the 8th Summit. It emphasizes trust, solidarity, shared interests, and fraternity among member states. The Vision document calls for more political and security cooperation, economic growth programs, infrastructure projects, research, trade, transit, health, education, and space collaboration. It promotes humanitarian relief and international cooperation. Member nations want to coordinate ICT (Information and Communication Technology) policies, organize e-government and e-services, and foster scientific cooperation.

The OTS has a Council of Heads of State, a Council of Foreign Ministers, a Council of Aksakals, a Senior Civil Servants Committee, and a Secretariat. The alphabetically ordered Council of Heads of State, chaired by the Term Presidency, makes major decisions. While Kazakhstan holds the Term Presidency, the İstanbul Secretariat oversees and supports organizational activities. Additionally, the Organization includes the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TÜRKSOY) in Ankara as the “UNESCO of the Turkic World,” the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic Speaking Countries (TURKPA) in Baku for legal cooperation and communication between parliaments and peoples of Turkic-speaking member states, and International Turkic Academy in Astana for joint scientific efforts in language, literature, culture, and history with Azerbaijan.⁴²

Hence, upon initial examination, the regionalization and integration endeavors within the Turkic World exhibit considerable potential in various domains such as linguistics, trade, health, and policy. However, the extent of cooperation and collective initiatives among member states has yet to fully realize the magnitude of this potential, as indicated by current metrics. Consequently, these efforts emerge as significant regionalization endeavors of the present century. Additionally, its strategic location positions it as a region that will likely emerge as a primary focal point for global competitiveness in the forthcoming decades. Analyzing the major question of how the Organization would strategically position itself among the increasing tension and geopolitical concerns in the period of “corridor rivalry,” particularly in light of Russian endeavors to solidify its grip over the region, it is commonly acknowledged that the success of the Organization is intricately connected to the prevailing socioeconomic dynamics of the region, which continue to be significantly shaped by the enduring impact of Russian colonialism.

Possible Contributions and Limitations of Turkic World Integration Efforts in the Post-Independence Decolonization Process

The phenomenon of Russian imperialism manifested in the colonization of Central Asia throughout the period spanning from the 18th to the 20th century. This expansionist endeavor aimed to establish control over territorial domains, secure trade routes, and assert dominance in the realm of geopolitics. In addition to the economic exploitation, the Russian language, administration, and education systems were employed as tools to assimilate the Central Asian nations into the framework of Russian imperialism. The political and economic landscape of Central Asia was subject to the dominance of the Russian Empire, resulting in the establishment of a system characterized by significant disparities.

The inception of postcolonial Central Asia may be traced back to 1991, when the region achieved freedom from the Soviet Union. The contemporary period grapples with the cultural and linguistic ramifications of Russian colonization. The revitalization of indigenous languages and traditions is now underway. Central Asian nations are currently facing new geopolitical challenges as a result of the actions taken by Russia and other major global powers. The postcolonial era is characterized by the pursuit of sovereignty, the control of resources, and the advancement of economic development. The evaluation of decolonization efforts in Central Asia is a multifaceted task that necessitates consideration of various factors, including political, cultural, economic, and social dimensions. The process of institutionalization has played a significant role in fostering the integration of Turkic communities over the course of history. In addition to the aforementioned cultural, linguistic, and historical connec-

tions, the focal points of emphasis include defense collaboration, economic integration, and joint efforts in technological advancement. Undoubtedly, a significant inquiry regarding these endeavors pertains to their potential to rival other entities operating in the same domain. Of utmost importance to the primary research inquiry of this study is the potential of facilitating postcolonial transformation in Central Asia.

The inquiry at hand posits that the prosperity and trajectory of the region are contingent upon its colonial heritage. The acknowledgment of this tradition is important to attain any noteworthy accomplishment. The enduring nature of colonial influence, particularly in the realms of linguistics, economic links, demography, and foreign policy choices, poses persistent challenges for post-colonized nations. Addressing these challenges necessitates concerted local and regional endeavors. While acknowledging the importance of this aspect and acknowledging the interactions with other significant actors, it appears that a steady and cautious endeavor to enhance regionalization processes and integration endeavors is crucial for attaining the objectives outlined in various organizational papers throughout the years.

Russia still has a significant footprint on the ground, but China is an ambitious newcomer aiming to increase its presence, which will force the two sides into a regional contest. Recognizing the key rivalry in the region between the two, with one having an upper hand based on its colonization in the past with continuing impacts in the present and a quite institutionalized setting and the other with its comparatively huge economic potential, the OTS would need to carefully analyze its capabilities, limitations, and maneuverability spaces, as well as whether all parties would want and use them.

Compared to the organization's trade structure, which includes fuel, manufactured goods, food, ores, and metals, OTS trade relations' geographical component is undiversified, reflecting the region's colonized past. Since several member and observer states were once Soviet, they have strong trade links with Russia, making Russia an OTS trading partner. Most OTS members and observer states list Russia among their top five trade partners. Energy sector coordination between member and observer governments is similarly limited. The three members are big oil and gas producers, although Europe and China are their main export destinations. Russia has better extraction and refining capabilities. Despite considerable advances in energy sector cooperation among OTS members, it remains minor compared to member states rich in

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oil and gas. Russia dominates energy exports, bringing Europe its oil and gas reserves. The Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union and its Oil and Gas Advisory Committee also matter. Central Asian nations were once part of the Soviet Union, therefore Soviet military infrastructure and weapons remain. This historical connection helps these countries sustain and upgrade their military using Russian equip-

ment. Russian military equipment is compatible with Soviet-era systems in Central Asian countries, promoting interoperability and integration. Russia offers competitive rates and favorable financing for arms transactions to retain its dominance. It provides security assistance and military cooperation agreements with Central Asian states to boost their defense capabilities through training, joint exercises, and military gear.

Central Asian countries still struggle economically due to colonial resource extraction and economic exploitation. Increasing economic diversification and sector independence are continuous issues. Politics also reflects postcolonial transformation. Russia and other world powers are part of geopolitics. Maintaining diplomatic and commercial relations while balancing national interests is difficult. Central Asian nations continue to strengthen sovereignty, preserve culture, and promote economic growth. These efforts are constantly affected by internal and external variables.

Conclusion

Central Asian decolonization has progressed but faces hurdles. The effectiveness of these endeavors depends on political, economic, and cultural changes. Regional integration may help Central Asian nations decolonize. Regional integration is when adjacent countries develop structures to improve economic, political, and social interaction. Regional integration can aid postcolonial development in Central Asia due to historical linkages and shared challenges. Central Asian economies can diversify through collaboration, reducing dependence on certain industries and the economic legacy of colonial resource extraction. Regional integration can bring Central Asian nations together to resolve historical grievances and promote political stability. Transnational dangers and border difficulties can be addressed better through regional security cooperation. Regional integration promotes cultural interchange and cooperation, creating Central Asian solidarity and identity. Collaborative efforts

can preserve indigenous traditions and oppose colonial cultural impositions. Education and research collaborations can boost regional intellectual capital, human development, and knowledge exchange. Regional integration can boost Central Asian economies and reduce dependence on outside actors by opening new markets and trade opportunities. Regional tariff harmonization and customs simplification can improve cross-border trade.

Russia-led regionalization efforts in Central Asia, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), also pose decolonization challenges. These projects aim to promote regional cooperation, economic integration, and security collaboration, but some question whether they are tools to consolidate Russian dominance and soft power or perpetuate historical patterns of influence. The EAEU promotes economic integration, free movement of products, services, and labor, and a common economic space.⁴³

China, on the other hand, can also help Central Asian countries decolonize in various ways. Economic development fostered by Chinese investment and infrastructure projects like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) can create jobs and increase connectivity. Trade with China can expand markets and reduce economic dependence on one partner. China's diplomatic efforts can help Central Asian nations achieve peace and security. China's interests can be served by counterterrorism cooperation. The history between China and Central Asia can be used to create cultural interchange, respect, and partnership. Education, research, and technology transfer can boost regional growth. Concerns regarding Chinese infrastructure loan debt and environmental implications remain. Central Asian nations must carefully balance their relations with China and Russia to benefit them without losing sovereignty or becoming unduly dependent on either.

Several Chinese-led or participated institutional actions could help Central Asian nations decolonize. These programs emphasize infrastructure, economic development, and regional cooperation. China and participating countries want to improve commercial and infrastructural connections through the BRI. In Central Asia, BRI projects construct transport infrastructure, energy projects, and trade corridors to boost economic growth and regional integration. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) finances Central Asian infrastructure development. AIIB funding can help develop infrastructure projects, boosting regional economic growth and connectivity. China and several Central Asian nations are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which addresses security and economic challenges. Security discussion and economic collaboration through the SCO support regional stability and growth. China and Central Asian nations discuss and cooperate at the China-Central Asia Cooperation Forum (CCACF). Focusing on economic and

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cultural cooperation, the meeting fosters understanding and collaboration. Digital infrastructure development is the focus of the BRI's Digital Silk Road (DSR). Digital connectivity projects can boost Central Asian communication, e-commerce, and technology transfer, boosting the economy and society.⁴⁴

Türkiye and the OTS may help decolonize Central Asia. Türkiye and Central Asian Turkic-speaking states share cultural and historical ties, boosting understanding and cooperation. Trade, investment, and development can help diversify the region's economy. Türkiye may support educational and cultural exchange initiatives to preserve Turkic languages and culture. Türkiye can help Central Asian nations broaden their foreign alliances through diplomatic and political relations. Central Asian states can learn from Türkiye's modernization and soft power to advance technology, education, and governance.

Considerations include the need for Central Asian countries to balance relationships with Türkiye, China, Russia, and other regional actors to avoid over-dependency. Maintaining sovereignty and autonomy in dealings with external partners, including Türkiye, is a priority. Geopolitical dynamics and regional power struggles may influence the effectiveness of Türkiye's role, necessitating coordination with other regional actors and organizations for meaningful contributions. In summary, Türkiye and the OTS can contribute positively to the decolonization process in Central Asia through cultural ties, economic cooperation, and diplomatic engagement. However, careful considerations regarding sovereignty, balancing partnerships, and regional dynamics are crucial for effective collaboration. Türkiye's capabilities and the current state of the OTS have the potential to contribute to regional dynamics in Central Asia, but challenging the Russian legacy in the region is a complex and multifaceted issue. Türkiye's historical and cultural ties, economic engagement, diplomatic relations, and soft power, including its modernization experience, can influence Central Asian nations. The OTS serves as a platform for cooperation, facilitating cultural and educational exchange, as well as economic integration.

Gaining a comprehensive comprehension of the problems linked to regional integration is of paramount significance. These issues manifest in various ways, including divergent national priorities, political complexities, and historical tensions. A comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand is necessary, even the potentially significant benefits that may arise. To achieve the objective of long-term regional integration in Central Asia, it is imperative to establish a set of fundamental elements. The important components encompass a stead-

fast and resolute dedication, robust institutional structures, and a strategic approach that prioritizes collaborative initiatives. To achieve the objective of enduring regional integration in Central Asia, it is imperative to establish the fundamental components. ■

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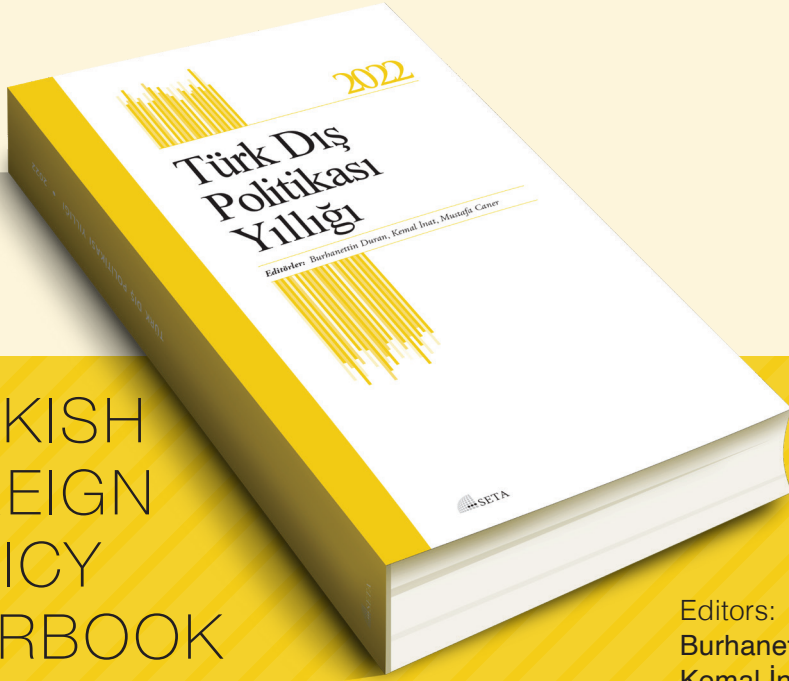
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