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<https://orientalstudies.uz/index.php/os>ROSSIYA VA XITOYNING MARKAZIY VA JANUBIY OSIYOGA NISBATAN
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MAQOLA HAQIDA

Kalit soʻzlar: bogʻliqlik, Markaziy Osiyo, Janubiy Osiyo, Xitoy, Rossiya, O'zbekiston, SHHT, transport yoʻlaklari

Annotatsiya: Markaziy va Janubiy Osiyo oʻrtasidagi bogʻliqlik O'zbekiston Respublikasining tashqi siyosati kun tartibida muhim oʻrin tutganligi sababli chuqur ilmiy tadqiqotni talab qiladi. Afg'oniston, Kashmir va bir qator ichki omillardan tashqari, ushbu bogʻliqlikda tashqi ishtirokchilarning, xususan, Rossiya va Xitoy faktorlarining roli ahamiyatlidir. Maqolaning maqsadi Rossiya va Xitoyning Markaziy va Janubiy Osiyo mintaqalari oʻrtasidagi munosabatlarga yondashuvlarini tadqiq etishdir.

Maqolaning birinchi qismida Rossiyaning Markaziy-Janubiy Osiyo dinamikasiga boʻlgan nuqtayi nazari oʻrganilib, Moskva manfaatlarini ushbu kontekstda Markaziy Osiyo mamlakatlari manfaatlariga mos kelishi, shuningdek, Rossiya manfaatlarini neft va gaz mahsulotlarini Janubiy Osiyo bozoriga eksport qilishdan kelib chiqishi xulosa qilingan.

Ikkinchi qismda muallif tomonidan Xitoyning Markaziy-Janubiy Osiyo munosabatlariga boʻlgan munosabati oʻrganilib, Pekin bu assotsiatsiyani Shanxay Hamkorlik Tashkiloti (ShHT), C+C5, Makon va Yoʻl Tashabbusi va Xitoy-Pokiston iqtisodiy koridori (CPEC) kabi platformalar doirasida yondashishi taʼkidlangan.

Qiyosiy metodologiyadan foydalangan holda, muallif Rossiya va Xitoyning mintaqaviy aloqalarga boʻlgan yondashuvlaridagi oʻxshashlik va nomutanosibliklarni aniqlashga harakat qilgan. Muallifning fikr-mulohazalari tashqi siyosiy ilmiy faoliyat bilan shugʻullanuvchi doiralarning tadqiqotlari uchun foydali boʻlishi mumkin.

**STRATEGIC APPROACHES OF RUSSIA AND CHINA
VIS-A-VIS CENTRAL AND SOUTH ASIA****Islomkhon Gafarov***Institute for Advanced International Studies Centre for
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Tashkent, Uzbekistan***ABOUT ARTICLE****Key words:** Connectivity, Central Asia, South Asia, China, Russia, Uzbekistan, SCO, transport corridors.**Abstract:** The nexus between Central and South Asia holds a significant position within the foreign policy agenda of the Republic of Uzbekistan, necessitating a meticulous and scholarly examination. Beyond Afghanistan, Kashmir, and several internal factors, the involvement of external actors plays a crucial role in this connectivity, notably the major powers of the Eurasian continent such as Russia and China. The objective of the article is to scrutinize the approaches of Russia and China toward the relationship between the Central and South Asian regions.

The initial segment of the article delves into the Russian perspective on the Central-South Asia dynamic, concluding that Russian interests largely align with those of the Central Asian countries in this context. Furthermore, it is inferred that Russia's interests stem from the exportation of oil and gas to the South Asian market.

Subsequently, the author examines China's stance on the Central Asia-South Asia relationship, asserting that Beijing perceives this association through frameworks such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), C+C5, Belt and Road Initiative, and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Employing a comparative methodology, the author endeavors to identify similarities and disparities in the approaches of Russia and China toward regional connectivity. The author's insights may prove beneficial to the endeavors of the country's foreign policy academic circles.

**СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКИЕ ПОДХОДЫ РОССИИ И КИТАЯ В ОТНОШЕНИИ
ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ И ЮЖНОЙ АЗИИ****Исломхон Гафаров***Институт перспективных международных исследований Центр
Афганистанских и южноазиатских исследований Старший научный сотрудник
Ташкент, Узбекистан***О СТАТЬЕ****Ключевые слова:** Взаимосвязь, Центральная Азия, Южная Азия, Китай, Россия, Узбекистан, ШОС, **Аннотация:** Взаимосвязь между Центральной и Южной Азией занимает важное место во внешнеполитической повестке Республики Узбекистан, требуя тщательного и научного анализа. Помимо

транспортные коридоры.

Афганистана, Кашмира и внутренних факторов, в этой связи играет решающую роль участие внешних акторов, в частности, крупных держав Евразийского континента, таких как Россия и Китай. Целью статьи является анализ подходов России и Китая к взаимосвязи Центральной и Южной Азией.

В первой части статьи автор анализирует российский подход на динамику Центральной и Южной Азии и приходит к выводу, что интересы России в значительной степени совпадают с интересами стран Центральной Азии в этом контексте. Кроме того, делается вывод, что интересы России исходят из экспорта нефти и газа на южноазиатский рынок.

Во второй части автор анализирует позицию Китая в отношении к Центральной Азией и Южной Азией, утверждая, что Пекин рассматривает эту связь через такие платформы, как Организация Шанхайского Сотрудничества (ШОС), С+С5, Инициатива Пояса и Пути и Китайско-пакистанский экономический коридор (КПЭК).

Используя сравнительную методологию, автор стремится выявить сходства и различия в подходах России и Китая к региональной связности. Выводы автора могут оказаться полезными для деятельности академических кругов в области внешней политики страны.

INTRODUCTION

In the modern foreign policy of the Central Asian states, notably the Republic of Uzbekistan, the South Asian region occupies one of the priority places. Today, the connectivity of the Central and South Asian regions is on the agenda of the foreign policy of many countries. First of all, the countries of the Central and South Asian regions are interested in this. If the Central Asian countries are interested in access to seaports, the South Asian countries are trying to enter the newly growing market of the Central Asian region. Since the regions belong to different civilizations, cultures, ideologies and religions, their connection requires to be based on constructivist aspects. Such approaches were initially promoted by the United States, and today they are being put on the agenda by Uzbekistan, Pakistan and India. The leading countries of Eurasia, Russia and China, also express their constructivist approaches to the Central-South Asia format. The approaches of these countries are an important factor in the implementation of this connectivity.

Russian approach.

After the onset the conflict in Ukraine in 2014, Western sanctions were imposed on the Russian Federation. This led to a change in the country's global foreign policy. Russia began

advancing the strategy of Eurasian unification. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow emphasized the term “post-Soviet space”, taking into account the priority of shared values, history, language, and cultural factors. Consequently, in the context of sanctions, in order to maintain a stable economy, the state has been developed economic cooperation not only with the post-Soviet countries, but also with countries that have an anti-Western or neutral political sentiment.

In its grand strategy, Russia is advancing the concept of “Eurasianism”, proposed by N.Trubetskoy, P.Suvchinsky, G.Florovsky and P.Savitsky, as well as “New Eurasianism”, proposed by L.Gumilyov and A.Dugin, which advocates Eurasian integration as the ultimate goal¹. Today, Western sanctions further propel Russia’s focus towards the South as a new factor in its geopolitical calculus. The economic factor and oil exports become the main reason for this.

The Kremlin’s term “Eurasia” refers only to most of Asia, particularly China, India, Pakistan, Central Asia, the South Caucasus, and the Middle East. According to Moscow’s interpretation, Europe is part of the “Collective West”. The term “Eurasianism” is sometimes used as a synonym for the term “Global South”, which is specific to the South Asian region. According to Russia, the Global South is the countries that are not sympathetic to the West, and therefore Russia is also a Global South country. In addition, nowadays the term “World Majority” is used by the Russian foreign political scientific circles in order to accelerate the integration processes in the Eurasian region². All these efforts are aimed at rapprochement with the two main economic giants in Eurasia: China and India. This is a means to maintain economic stability of Russia in the face of sanctions. It seems that, the modern foreign policy of the Russian Federation towards the South Asian region is formed based on this grand strategy.

In my point, this grand strategy of Russia and its South Asian vector have constructivist foundations. Moscow is activating the integration processes, going beyond the post-Soviet and CIS regions, which are culturally and spiritually close to it. The artificial acceleration of integration processes by Russia with India, China, Iran, Central Asia, the South Caucasus, and the Middle East, which belong to different civilizations, is a clear example of constructivist foreign policy. Taking this into account, it can be concluded that Russia’s modern foreign policy South Asian vector has constructivist aspects.

Russia widely applies the policy of institutionalization in the implementation of its goals. In the post-Soviet region, platforms such as the CIS, EEU and CSTO are being approached as a means of integration. The SCO, BRICS and RIC formats are being promoted by Moscow in the

¹ Устинкин С., Седаев П., Параничев Д. Теоретические основы евразийства и неоевразийства: является ли ЕАЭС их воплощением? Власть. Апрель, 2022г. – 30-33стр.

² Лукьянов Ф. Глобальное большинство – на перекрестке мировой политики? Проблемы национальной стратегии. 2023г. - 34-41стр.

entire Eurasia, in particular in the South Asian region. In this case, cultural and spiritual differences between the countries are being denied by Russia. The prospect of new economic and social relations is emerging.

From the point of view of international integration organizations, Russia conducts policy in the South Asian region through the SCO. In 2017, the simultaneous accession of both India and Pakistan to the SCO was supported by Russia³. By doing this, Moscow showed its support for the possibility of uniting these countries on a single platform, thereby moving away from the conflicts and stereotypes associated with them.

In terms of countries, the South Asian region for Russia is mainly Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. Ensuring security in the South Asian region is important to Russia's interests. In the context of sanctions, Russia is interested in the Indian energy market. It will be necessary to ensure peace and stability in the region during the supply of large volumes of oil and gas. That is why Moscow is in favor of stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan and Kashmir. India-Pakistan conflict is not in Russia's interests. Consequently, the India-US tandem does not fit Moscow's plans at a time of heightened geopolitical struggle.

On the other hand, China-Pakistan relations, which are increasingly connected, are not facing any resistance from Russia. Pakistani-Chinese cooperation may satisfy Russia, since Islamabad has historically sided with the West and did not side with Moscow. The development of the CPEC project might be in Russia's interests. In short, the Pakistan-China and Russia-India tandem, along with warm Pakistan-India relations and a stable Afghanistan, are Moscow's main geopolitical goals in South Asia.

Central and South Asian countries are seen by Moscow as potential partner states. In the case of Ukraine, the states of these regions did not follow the sanctions applied against Russia, but at the same time did not declare Russia an "aggressor". However, the official statements of them emphasized the protection of international law, the recognition of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, the resolution of the conflict through diplomatic means, and the cessation of hostilities⁴.

The connectivity of Central and South Asia corresponds to the interests of Russia's grand strategy. Central Asian countries and Iran are transit areas for Russia's oil export to the Indian market. Today, it is recognized that the export of Russian oil products to India has equaled 40%⁵.

³ Брагина Е. Индия и Пакистан стали членами ШОС. ИМЭМО РАН. Июнь, 2017г.

<https://www.imemo.ru/news/events/text/indiya-i-pakistan-stali-chlenami-shos?ret=527>

⁴ «Мы не признали Луганскую и Донецкую народные республики» — глава МИД Узбекистана. 17 марта 2022 года. <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2022/03/17/ukraine/>

⁵ Interview with Alexander Novak. Oil supplies to India increased to 40% since Ukraine war: Russia. 27 December. 2023. <https://www.livemint.com/news/world/oil-supplies-to-india-increased-to-40-since-ukraine-war-russia-11703685066575.html>

The total turnover is approaching 60 billion dollars in 2023⁶ Russia and India closely cooperate in the fields of military, energy, natural resources and medicine⁷. Further strengthening of these connections will occur through the acceleration of transport logistics corridors. For this purpose, Russia and India are trying to develop the International “North-South” Transport Corridor (INSTC). In this case, Iran’s Chabahar port will become the main linking point⁸. The release of the Chabahar port from Western sanctions may lead to the economic development of the Russia-Central Asia-Iran-India format on the Eurasian continent.

In addition, the Trans-Afghan Corridor project is also supported by Russia⁹. After the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan in 2021, Russia has been formed a new approach to this country. Moscow is a supporter of stability in Afghanistan. A peaceful and secure Afghanistan is an important link in Russia’s South Asian policy and Eurasianism goals. In addition, peace in Afghanistan is important for Russia’s vital interests in the Central Asian region.

In general, taking into account the historical, geopolitical and current sanctions conditions, Russia tries to become a patron of integration processes in Eurasia. International transport corridors of all formats, such as the BRI promoted by China, “North-South” under the auspices of India, Trans-Afghan Corridor put on the agenda by Uzbekistan and Pakistan, are being strengthened by Moscow. However, Russia does not want to be dependent on international transport corridors sponsored by other countries. In order to Russian experts, Moscow should have its own international projects in Central-South Asia connectivity¹⁰. These projects can most likely be planned within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union. However, the Ukrainian front and economic sanctions may slightly complicate Russian potential in it.

In the development of international transport corridors, the interests of the Central Asian countries and Russia may coincide with each other. The countries of the Central Asian region will also benefit from the development of these transport corridors, as well as Russia. Ultimately, the agenda is the prospect of turning the region into a new economic hub.

Therefore, the Central Asian countries aim to enter the world market by opening seaports through the South Asian region. The ports of Karachi, Gwadar, Chabahar and Bandar Abbas are

⁶ Russia-India Trade Turnover Reaches Record 60 Billion USD. January 23, 2024.

<http://www.namnewsnetwork.org/?p=252289>

⁷ Perna Gandhi. Achievements and Potential of Economic Cooperation Between India and Russia. 10.01.2024.

<https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/achievements-and-potential-of-economic-cooperation/>

⁸ Khasanov U., Gafarov I. Changing specifics of the regional development. UWED: International Affairs, Vol 7-8. 2023. – 33-34pp.

⁹ Зоидов К., Медков А. Экономические интересы России и развитие транспортно-транзитных систем Афганистана и других стран Центральной Азии. Проблемы рыночной экономики. 2021г. – 145стр.

¹⁰ Зоидов К., Медков А., Зоидов З. Развитие и конкуренция транспортно-транзитных систем России, Индии, Китая и Пакистана. Проблемы рыночной экономики, № 2. – 2018г.– 53 стр. <http://www.market-economy.ru/archive/2018-02/2018-02-46-56-zoidov.pdf>

the means of joining this world trade. On the other hand, the South Asian countries, whose industrial and production capacity is increasing, need new markets. The Central Asian region with a population of more than 75 million can be a new consumer market for countries like India and Pakistan. Relations in this format satisfy both parties. But in this point the interests of the Russia may not coincide with the interests of Central and South Asian countries.

Firstly, Russia might not be interested in the excessive economic and political connection of the Central Asian countries with the world community. Russia plans to unify Central Asia and the post-Soviet region within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union. From Moscow's point of view, Russia should be the main economic and political locomotive in this area. The rapprochement of the Central Asian countries with the World Trade Organization and the Western economy may not be in Russia's interests.

Secondly, the entry of Indian and Pakistani products and technologies into the region may worry Moscow. Until 2023, Russia and China were competing in the foreign trade turnover of Central Asian countries, but by 2023, China gained a clear lead. For example, Uzbekistan's trade turnover with Russia was 9.8 billion, while with China, this figure reached 13.7 billion¹¹. The growing economic interdependence of China and Central Asia may worry Moscow, but so far Beijing and Moscow have pursued mutually agreed policies in Central Asia. Russia has introduced more dialogue in the field of security, while China is increasing economic cooperation¹². Based on this, Russia may oppose the entry of new economic players like India and Pakistan into the region.

In short, Russia sees the connectivity of Central and South Asia as a tool for its own interests, i.e. to export its oil and gas products to South Asia. However, the access of the Central Asian countries to the world ports and the entry of South Asian products into Central Asia may not correspond to Russia's interests in some points. Diversification of the Central Asian market may not be among the goals of Russia's Eurasianism policy.

China factor.

The People's Republic of China has approached the Central and South Asian regions in separate formats. While Central Asia is considered a border region to the western provinces of China, the South Asian region, particularly India and Pakistan, is considered China's main economic partner and political rival in the South. Initially, China approached the countries of Central Asia in terms of border issues and initiated dialogue within the framework of the SCO. China and Central Asian countries have strengthened ties in the fight against separatism,

¹¹ O'zbekiston Respublikasi tashqi savdo aylanmasi (2023- yil yanvar-dekabr oylari uchun dastlabki ma'lumot). O'zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidenti huzuridagi Statistika agentligi. 2024y. – 3b.

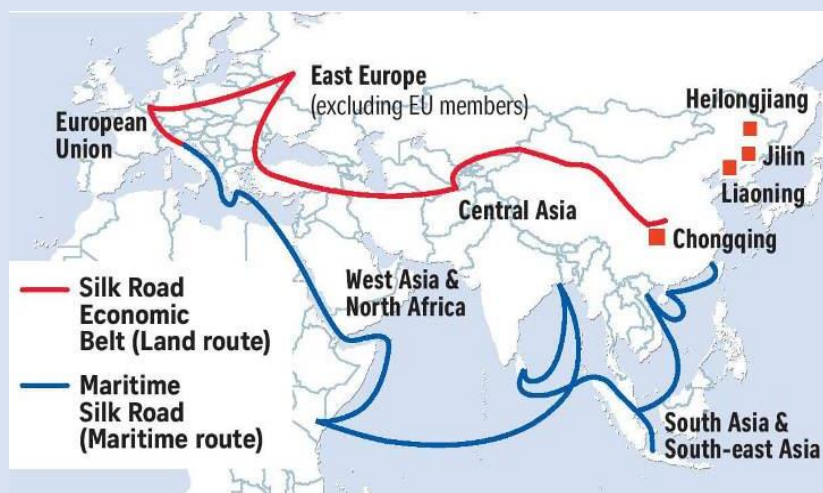
¹² Jardine B., Lemon E. In Russia's Shadow: China's Rising Security Presence in Central Asia. 2020. 1-2pp. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/KI_200519_cable%2052_v1.pdf

terrorism and extremism¹³. After India and Pakistan joined the SCO in 2017¹⁴, China's approach to Central and South Asian relations within the framework of a single organization was formed.

In short, from point of institutionalization, China approaches to the Central and South Asian connectivity through the SCO platform. Nevertheless, India's entry into the organization changed Beijing perspectives within the SCO. This has necessitated China's increased focus on regional connectivity within other platforms and projects.

Since the 2010s, the factor of China's rise has begun to increase its position and influence in the international arena. Therefore, China is not an irregularly developing power, but a country that is growing step by step and has its own clear strategy. The historical period brought him to show his competence. In a speech in Astana in 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the giant "One Belt, One Road" project, demonstrating China's global ambitions. The project has three main directions, which are planned to pass through the regions of Central, South and Southeast Asia¹⁵.

The development of this project became a new direction in the Chinese vision of Central and South Asian connectivity. Today, China sees economic connectivity of regions precisely through this big project. In the other words, China has failed to achieve its ambitious goals within the framework of the SCO. The creation of a counterbalance by Russia and India required China to develop a single-led project. Based on this, China began to approach Central and South Asia and their connectivity through the prism of Belt and Road Initiative project.



The main directions of the "One Belt, One Road" project.

¹³ Xiaoxing D. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization's remarkable achievements in the past 20 years. Institute for Eurasian Studies (CICIR). July-August, 2021. – 23p.

<http://www.cicir.ac.cn/UpFiles/file/20211101/6377138156649336557034237.pdf>

¹⁴ Yamei Xue, Benjamin Makengo. Twenty years of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: achievements, challenges and prospects. Scientific Research. October 2021.

<https://www.scirp.org/journal/paperinformation?paperid=112637>

¹⁵ McBride J., Berman N., Chatzky A. China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative. Council on Foreign Relations. February 2, 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>

In addition, since 2016, China and Pakistan have been developing an economic corridor called CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor). This ensures that Chinese products reach the Indian Ocean. CPEC is an integral part of China's "One Belt, One Road" project¹⁶, which is in present the main Chinese approach to South Asia. In this regard, Pakistan is Beijing's major partner and ally in the region.

From 2020, the "C+C5" format (China & Central Asia) was launched at the level of foreign ministers. In 2023, the first meeting of the heads of state within this format was held in Xi'an¹⁷. It can be seen that China, like the United States, approaches the region as a holistic concept. In addition, this format shows Beijing's desire to communicate with the region on a platform with its own participation, apart from the Russian-influenced SCO. In other words, institutionally, Beijing today is approaching Central Asia within the framework of "Belt and Road" and "C+C5" projects.

Beijing supports the construction of the Trans-Afghan corridor (the Termez-Mazari-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway), which is considered the main link in the connectivity of the Central and South Asian regions. Ultimately, China is pursuing the prospect of integrating this railway with the CPEC project¹⁸. In addition, China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway construction is underway in Central Asia¹⁹. The connection of this railway with the Trans-Afghan Corridor and the CPEC will create a major arc-shaped project and lead to the development of China's Belt and Road Initiative²⁰. In a word, the Central and South Asian connectivity for China is a part of "One Belt, One Road" initiative, which includes China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan, Termez-Mazari-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar and CPEC railways.

Therefore, unlike Russia, China does not support all projects related to the connectivity of Central and South Asia. It should be recognized that China has its own strategy regarding this relationship, while Russia has not been developed in this regard. China does not approve of INSTC and Chabahar project, which is being promoted by India. On the other hand, India does

¹⁶ Muhammad Zahid Ullah Khan, Minhas Majeed Khan. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Opportunities and Challenges. Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad. 2019. – 68-73pp. https://www.issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/5-SS_Muhammad_Zahid_Ullah_Khan_and_Minhas_Majeed_Khan_No-2_2019.pdf

¹⁷ Иброхимзода У. Китайский формат C+C5. Cabar.Asia. Май, 2023г. <https://cabar.asia/ru/kitajskij-format-s-s5-vzglyad-iz-dushanbe>

¹⁸ Iftikhar A. Khan. CPEC will be extended to Afghanistan as trilateral cooperation set to deepen. DAWN. May, 2023. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1751728/cpec-will-be-extended-to-afghanistan-as-trilateral-cooperation-set-to-deepen>

¹⁹ Транспорт вазирлари «Хитой – Қирғизистон – Ўзбекистон» темир йўли қурилишини муҳокама этишди. Халқ сўзи. 28 Январь 2023 йил. <https://xs.uz/uzkr/post/transport-vazirlari-khitoy-qirgiziston-ozbekiston-temir-joli-qurilishini-muhokama-etishdi>

²⁰ Khasanov U., Gafarov I. Changing specifics of the regional development. UWED: International Affairs, Vol 7-8. 2023. – 39p.

not support China's Belt and Road Initiative. For this reason, INSTC and BRI projects are considered contradictory to each other²¹.

If India sees regional connectivity through Iran, China approaches it through Pakistan. The confrontation between India and Pakistan and the India-China rivalry are causing their interests to collide in this regard. In turn, the countries of Central Asia are interested in both projects and have been supporting them equally²².



International North-South Transport corridor project.

If we analyze China's political approaches to Central-South Asian connectivity, it seems, that Beijing supports the Central Asia-Afghanistan-Pakistan format. India is not taken into account in this context. That is why Beijing is not interested in the prospect of positive relations between India and Pakistan. A positive relationship between India and Pakistan may not be in China's interests, but the emergence of a conflict between them also worries China. It is taken into account that these countries have nuclear weapons and are adjacent to China's southern borders. Beijing is satisfied with mutually neutral relations between India and Pakistan. In this case, Pakistan will continue to cooperate with China, and India will have to keep its attention on Pakistan's vector.

Even during the expansion of the SCO, Beijing supported only Pakistan's membership, but under the influence of Russia, Uzbekistan and other members, it was achieved that India joined the organization²³. It can also be seen that China may favor Pakistan and see India as a

²¹ Jagannath P. Panda. Revitalizing INSTC: Analyzing Geopolitical Realignment and the China Factor. Institute for security and development policy. February, 2023. <https://www.isdp.eu/publication/revitalizing-instc-analyzing-geopolitical-realignment-and-the-china-factor/>

²² Khasanov U., Gafarov I. Changing specifics of the regional development. UWED: International Affairs, Vol 7-8. 2023. – 34p.

²³ Grossman D. China Will Regret India's Entry into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. RAND. July 24, 2017. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2017/07/china-will-regret-indias-entry-into-the-shanghai-cooperation.html>

competitor. In a word, unlike the U.S., Russia and Central Asian countries, China does not support Pakistan-India friendship, Beijing is interested in neutral relations in the region.

Afghanistan is an important link in the connectivity of Central and South Asia for China. That is why China is interested in friendly relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. In this direction, China is pursuing a pragmatic and constructivist policy. China has been able to establish close friendly relations with Pakistan, which belongs to another civilization. Beijing has been able to quickly establish positive relations with the Taliban government, which came to power in Afghanistan. The fact that the Taliban ambassador presented his credentials to Chinese President Xi Jinping in February 2024 is a sign that Beijing is eschewing the narrative of recognizing the newly formed state and pursuing policies along the Afghan vector according to its own standards²⁴. Developing friendly relations with Pakistan and Afghanistan and maintaining stability between them is one of the priority issues in South Asia for Beijing. In short, the Central Asia-Afghanistan-Pakistan friendship format is one of China's main political goals in these regions.

China is closely monitoring developments in Afghanistan, Kashmir and the tribal areas of Pakistan. Starting in 2021, a Chinese military base began to operate in Tajikistan. This base is located near the Wakhan corridor, in close proximity to the Afghan-Chinese border²⁵. Most likely, this base will help Beijing control the problem hotbeds in the Central and South Asian regions. The development of the Belt and Road Initiative, the security issues in the southwest border regions and Xinjiang region, which is important for China, may have been the reason for the establishment of this base.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above, the following conclusions can be drawn regarding Russian approaches to the connectivity of Central and South Asian regions:

1. Russia's policy in Eurasia, particularly Central-South Asia, has constructivist aspects. The ideas of "Eurasianism" and belonging to the "Global South" promoted by Moscow are aimed at overcoming the barriers between civilizations and creating a new format of integration platforms. Organizations such as BRICS, SCO, CIS are the means of this;

2. Russia supports the development of most regional projects: "One Belt, One Road", "North-South", Trans-Afghan and CPEC corridors. This will help Moscow in the implementation of the "Eurasianism" megaproject. In addition, through these routes, it will increase its exports of oil and gas products to India;

²⁴ Boltaev H. China – Taliban: diplomatic rapprochement. Institute for Advanced International Studies (UWED). February, 2024. <https://iais.uz/en/outputnew/kitay-taliban-diplomaticheskoe-sblizhenie>

²⁵ Umarov T. Why Russia Sees Little Threat in China's Growing Involvement in Tajikistan. Carnegie endowment for international peace. December, 2021. <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/86103>

3. Consequently, Russia's lack of a personal project related to the connectivity of regions weakens its positions in this regard. In addition, Moscow approaches this connectivity only in its own interests, i.e to increase the export of oil and gas to South Asia.

The following Chinese factors can be seen in relation to the Central and South Asian regions:

1. China approaches this relationship from a constructivist point of view. Institutionally Beijing sees this connectivity through the prism of the "C+C5" format and SCO; based on pragmatic economic goals through the BRI project and its links, such as China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan, Termez-Mazari-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railways and CPEC;

2. These corridors are land trade corridors that provide an alternative to maritime trade routes for China and will ultimately lead to diversification of trade routes;

3. The connectivity between Central and South Asia means for Beijing the format of Central Asia-Afghanistan-Pakistan. India is not part of China's plans in this regard;

4. On the Afghan vector, Beijing is establishing an active dialogue and developing its own new narratives..

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