

US INFLUENCE ON IRAN AND THE CENTRAL ASIAN REGION

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Abstract

This article analyzes the influence of the United States on the Islamic Republic of Iran and Central Asia. It also predicts US-Iran and Central Asia relations in the near future through event analysis, content analysis, and cognitive mapping methods.

Keywords: The concept of "Greater Central Asia", periodic-progressive, Carte Blanche, rare metals, Containment of geopolitical competitors, Restoration of economic dominance, Geostrategic position.

Introduction

In today's global political landscape, the influence of the United States is very broad, covering various areas, including the situation, economic, economic, diplomatic and military. The United States exempts itself from international justice and freedom. From this perspective, Washington plays an important role in issues related to Iran and the Central Asian region.

The continuous economic sanctions used by the United States against Iran have led to Tehran's isolation. This isolation has created a need for Iran to develop Asian cooperation and, in particular, to intensify relations with its Central Asian companies. At the same time, the geopolitical influence of the United States has also included the Central Asian countries.

After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the countries of Central Asia gained independence. This strengthened Iran's movement towards its place. Mutual visits and diplomatic relations began to intensify. The countries of the region began to see Iran's geopolitical location as an alternative way to access their stable markets.

As an alternative to the transport routes through Russia, the route through Iran was considered quite attractive. Only instability in Afghanistan limited these alternatives, and the Iranian route remained the most realistic option. However, the diplomatic performance of some in Washington did not allow this to be taken to the next stage.

By the end of the 20th century, the United States had become a relatively absolute hegemon on a global scale. This led to the development of its political, economic and cultural values around the world. The countries of Central Asia were no exception to this process.

Although US policy in Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan was carried out under the slogan of protecting democracy and human rights, in practice this action manifested itself in the form of military expansion and affected global political stability. This is a cooperative signal for countries with experience, that is, it can close the arms of states that do not meet US standards. The rise of the last countries, such as China, Russia and India, is limiting the role of the US as the sole global hegemon. The world, the international system is becoming multipolar, which creates a stable response to the US policy towards Central Asia and Iran.

First of all, it is worth noting that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States sought



to maximize its influence on the global scale with the participation of the United States. For this reason, the Central Asian region has not been a strong geopolitical focus for the US. True, Washington has never been indifferent to someone's life, but it has not been given special strategic attention. over time, this change has occurred¹.

Researchers study US policy in Central Asia by dividing it into stages by period. In particular, the scientist A.B. Beishenaliev distinguishes the following three stages of US policy:

1. **The first stage (1990–2000)** - this period coincides with the formation of independent states in the post-Soviet space. During this period, the region was not a strategic priority for the US. However, Washington had already begun to establish a presence in the region through humanitarian and diplomatic means.

2. **The second stage (2001–2015)** - during this period, the US put forward the concept of "Greater Central Asia". This political doctrine was formed within the framework of the global anti-terrorist campaign that began after the events of September 11, 2001. During this period, the US sought to form the countries of Central Asia as a near-universe.

3. **The third stage (from 2015 to the present)** - this period means the need to deeply understand the political complexities of the region and pursue an individual policy with each state. The United States is trying to build relationships with all entities in the region based on a bilateral approach.

Based on this periodic analysis, it can be said that US policy towards Central Asia is taking on a periodic-progressive character. Our research results show that, in addition to the three stages mentioned above, a possible fourth stage may begin in connection with the return of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States for the second time. At this new stage, US regional policy is likely to take on a more active and aggressive character.

The strategic goals of the fourth stage are expressed as follows:

1. Containing geopolitical competitors - that is, limiting the influence of major political powers such as China, Russia, Iran and India in the region.
2. Restoring economic dominance - strengthening US economic power through access to rare and valuable natural resources in Central Asia.
3. Strengthening geostrategic position - controlling security and political balance in the region, as well as expanding the sphere of military-political influence.

According to Nana Gegelashvili, the Central Asian region has become and will remain a field of competition between the main geopolitical players - China and Russia, as well as external actors - the United States and the European Union. The geopolitical importance of the region and its wealth of natural resources have become even more strategic in recent years, amid fierce competition between powerful states².

The inauguration of Donald Trump as US President and the prioritization of business interests in Washington's policy may serve to increase the importance of Central Asia for the United States. In particular, there is potential for US cooperation with the countries of the region in the areas of security, energy, transport, high technology, and extraction of important mineral

¹ Ш. Д. Асрори. Этапы политики США в странах Центральной Азии

² Нана Гегелашвили. Политика новой администрации Д. Трампа в Центральной Азии.



resources. This increases the likelihood of significant changes in Washington's policy towards Central Asia³.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia retained its dominant influence in the region. However, by the 21st century, China began to actively advance its interests in the region through its Belt and Road Initiative, military-technical cooperation, and strategies aimed at ensuring regional security⁴.

China's military equipment deliveries to Central Asian countries have increased significantly in recent years. This process is carried out in conjunction with joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, and military training programs. In 2024, China reportedly delivered drones to Kazakhstan and anti-aircraft missile systems to Uzbekistan. The issue of including Chinese JF-17 fighter jets in the Central Asian air security system is also being considered⁵.

The strengthening of military cooperation between China and Central Asia may affect the balance of power in the region. This increases the likelihood of new geopolitical tensions and changes in the regional policy of other geostrategic players, such as Russia and the United States. It is worth noting that China is actively promoting initiatives not only in the economic sphere, but also in the military sphere. These initiatives are seen, among other things, as part of a strategy aimed at weakening or completely eliminating the historical influence of the United States in Central Asia.

As noted above, in the fourth stage, which began with the inauguration of Donald Trump as US President, Washington has three main strategic goals in relation to the Central Asian region. These goals are closely related to each other and are based on the rebalancing of the new balance of power that is emerging in the world, as well as the political and philosophical approach put forward by Trump under the slogan "Make America Great Again".

The main goal of the Trump administration was to restore the global geopolitical and economic power of the United States. China has been seen as the main obstacle in this path. Washington has developed a strategy to bring political entities that are tied to China in terms of energy, resources, and supplies into its sphere of influence to limit Beijing's global economic expansion. Regions that were once relatively off the U.S. political radar—especially China's close allies—have become a threat to the Trump administration. Previous administrations have failed to adequately assess China's growing influence. As a result, the United States has lost time in many ways. In particular, China's close ties with Central Asian countries and Iran are becoming a new geopolitical bloc that threatens U.S. strategic interests.

The Middle East has traditionally been a priority for US foreign policy. The reason for this priority is oil and energy resources, which are of strategic importance for the global economy. Therefore, the United States has consistently maintained its presence in the Middle East. Central Asia has long been a relatively secondary focus, with the exception of the C5+1 initiative in 2015.

The C5+1 initiative was intended to strengthen regional stability, economic development, and security. However, in practice, this initiative has been poorly implemented. Despite this, the US has promoted a policy of "soft power" in the region: expanding social influence by promoting

³ <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/politika-novoy-administratsii-d-trampa-v-tsentrallyy-azii/>

⁴ Кыдырбек Фарангис Алматбекқызы. РОЛЬ КИТАЯ В ОБЕСПЕЧЕНИИ БЕЗОПАСНОСТИ

⁵ ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ. <https://qra-centre.kz/ru/mnenie/rol-kitaya-v-obespechenii-bezopasnosti-centralnoj-azii>



democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. More than \$10 billion has been invested for this purpose. The sharp increase in demand for English language learning is an indication of the impact of this policy.

US influence in the region is also directly related to Iran. The main factor that has limited the ability of regional states to get closer to Tehran is the sanctions imposed by Washington on Iran. These sanctions have created a danger for regional states to openly cooperate with Tehran: if they deepen their ties with Iran, they themselves will face sanctions.

In addition, the United States has expressed concern that Iran's theocratic political system could be exported to the region. Therefore, Washington has tried to limit the cooperation of regional states with Iran. This situation has become a significant factor of pressure, especially for post-Soviet states that have recently gained independence.

As a result, the relatively indifferent approach of the United States towards the region and the policy aimed at isolating Tehran have been ineffective from a long-term strategic perspective. This approach has turned regional states into economic partners and suppliers of resources for China.

The US plan to achieve absolute global dominance has not been realized. It is difficult to maintain global influence without controlling the territories necessary for geopolitical dominance - Eurasia and Iran. This idea was already put forward by the English geopolitician Sir Halford Mackinder: whoever controls Eurasia controls the world.

Mackinder's theory is relevant not only from a political but also from an economic point of view. Because the rare earth metal resources necessary for modern technologies — the so-called “vitamin nutrients” — are located mainly in Iran and Eurasia. Therefore, control of these territories remains one of the strategic tasks for the United States.

Until the early 1990s, the United States was the leader in the production of rare earth metals, the main source of which was the “Mountain Pass” mine in California. At the same time, China began to actively modernize its mining industry, and in this process received large-scale technological and financial assistance from the United States. One of the main directions of this modernization was the extraction of rare earth elements.

The discovery of one of the largest deposits in the world, located in the Bayn-Obo region, strengthened China's dominance in this area. By the end of the 20th century, China had acquired a near-monopoly position, accounting for about 95% of the world's production of these resources. True, today this figure has decreased to 60 percent, but China still maintains its leadership.

The question arises: how do these facts relate to the influence of the United States in the Central Asian and Iranian regions? The answer is as follows: the foreign policy pursued under the slogan of "Making America Great Again" during the Trump era was aimed at limiting China's global influence. To achieve this goal, Washington developed a strategy to bring countries that are considered a source of power for Beijing - including the countries of Central Asia and Iran - into its sphere of influence.

Over the years, the United States and the entire world economy have become increasingly dependent on China. The possibility that the full implementation of Beijing's "One Belt, One Road" initiative could provide 30 percent of global GDP only heightens this concern. Therefore, Washington is trying to strengthen its ties with competitive forces in the region in order to slow



down, or even stop, this process.

The United States seeks to achieve its goals through two main means: soft power and, when necessary, military force. Of course, the United States uses soft power first; military force is kept in strategic reserve as a "Carte blanche". However, in today's global political environment, direct US military intervention has become much more complicated.

According to neorealist theory, multipolarity and globalization further deepen the structures that lead to war. Therefore, it is unlikely that China, Russia, and Iran will respond without resistance to US attempts to seize Central Asian or Iranian resources through military force. Having realized this situation, the Trump administration has prioritized a policy of bluff and diplomatic pressure.

Nevertheless, in the coming years, the Central Asian region may become an arena of strategic competition for global political powers - the United States, China, and the European Union. These forces intend to exert political and economic influence on the region, to seize natural resources, and are likely to turn it into a potential "springboard".

To avoid such scenarios, the countries of Central Asia need to strengthen their integration and refrain from internal conflicts. Otherwise, the region may become a pretext and gateway for international military alliances, in particular NATO forces. The fact that the United States has previously successfully implemented such schemes in Iraq, Lebanon and other regions is evidence of this.

One of the most pressing problems of the Central Asian region today is the increasing water shortage. The Taliban government is making a special contribution to the aggravation of this issue. The problem of water resources, which is already on the verge of complications and conflicts, is becoming even more complicated with the construction of the Taliban's "Qoshkupir" canal.

If a positive and diplomatic solution to this problem is not found, the situation may lead to armed conflicts. It is extremely difficult to reach a compromise with the Taliban government on this issue, because this movement has made war a way of life. It is natural for the United States to be present in Afghanistan for years and to offer military assistance in such situations. However, the need for US military forces in Central Asia is now decreasing⁶.

The main reason for this is the activation of the activities of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Although it was initially organized in economic and humanitarian directions, today's reality shows that the fight against terrorism, extremism and separatism is being raised as one of the main issues at the meetings of the heads of the SCO member states. In particular, measures aimed at strengthening the functions of the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), coordinating intelligence activities, and ensuring security are gaining urgent importance.

Analyst Alexander Mikhailov noted that all SCO member states are interested in forming a center of power. In his opinion, the unipolar world model remains a real threat to them. The United States, Great Britain and other Western countries are not based on any obligations or principles - they continue to replace the leadership of independent states through military or intrigue. This is pushing the countries of the region to create a military bloc against Western aggression.

⁶ Юрий Паниев. ШОС возьмется за борьбу против "трех мировых зол". https://www.ng.ru/world/2016-06-15/1_shos.html



In general, although the likelihood of the US re-entering Central Asia militarily is not very high, the countries of the region need to seriously think about strengthening their weak and conflict points. Historical experience shows that wars in the system of international relations often begin with unexpected, even minor "trigger" factors. The European Union is also putting forward its candidacy in the struggle for resources in the Central Asian region. European countries, which have initiated the currently widespread "green economy" trend, are not fully provided with the necessary resources for the consistent implementation of this policy. We are talking, first of all, about rare and rare metals.

The 17 elements of the periodic table — scandium, yttrium, lanthanum, cerium, praseodymium, neodymium, promethium, samarium, europium, gadolinium, terbium, dysprosium, holmium, erbium, thulium, ytterbium, and others — are of incomparable importance in the green economy. They play an important role in the production of many modern electronic devices, in particular, electric cars, solar panels, and wind turbines. These elements are often called "industrial vitamins," since even their minimal addition to materials significantly improves their physical and chemical properties.

However, the use of rare earth metals is associated with complex problems. Their extraction and enrichment is a technologically complex and economically expensive process. They are rarely found in pure form in the earth's crust and are mainly found in ores. In particular, they have a high reactivity with oxygen, easily forming dense, refractory oxides. This makes their separation and purification from impurities a labor-intensive process.

If the US or the EU sign agreements with countries in the region to mine rare metals, it is likely that processing plants will also be established. Although this may pose significant technological and environmental challenges, the technological capabilities of Europe and the US allow them to do so. They are not limited to processing raw materials, but also aim to establish factories producing finished products in the region, thereby increasing export potential.

If this process is successful, two main consequences may arise:

Positive consequence: unlike Chinese organizations, enterprises established by Western countries provide jobs for the local population, which will increase large-scale employment and internal social stability. In addition, the region will be provided with large-scale investment, which will create the basis for economic development and reduce dependence on China.

Negative consequence: The processes of mining and processing rare metals can cause significant environmental damage. Water and air pollution, and improper waste disposal threaten the ecological stability of the region.

Based on the above information, an important question naturally arises: if the US and the European Union establish factories and corporations in the Central Asian region that will include the extraction, processing and production of modern technologies from rare metals, what will be the role of Iran?

This question is relevant and meaningful. In this case, Iran's role will be important and multifaceted. First of all, the entry of finished products manufactured in the region into the world market through Iran will be very convenient. This can become a significant source of income for the Islamic Republic. In addition, it is possible that such factories will also be opened in Iran (of course, under different conditions). In addition, Iran can participate as a source of additional natural resource components for the countries of the region. This will strengthen economic and



political ties between the countries of Central Asia and Iran and the Middle East⁷.

At the same time, the probability of these processes happening is not high, since it largely depends on the agreement between the United States and Iran. Even if these two countries cannot reach a compromise, it is possible that the European Union will start negotiations with Iran, bypassing America. However, China is not interested in Iran opening up to the world. The reason is that this situation will be a blow to Beijing's monopoly position. The price of oil and other natural resources will increase - this is absolutely not acceptable for China. Therefore, China is afraid of losing Iran and the Central Asian states - this is tantamount to losing its main energy sources. In addition, the Jewish lobbies in the United States and Israel will prevent Washington from reaching an agreement with Tehran. Israel's most serious rival in the Middle East is Iran, and if it weakens, Israel will gain complete geopolitical dominance in the region. For this reason, Israel will take all measures to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons⁸.

On May 11, 2024, the fourth round of indirect talks between Iran and the United States was held in Muscat, Oman. After the talks, the Iranian Foreign Ministry announced that the positions of the parties were approaching each other. Nevertheless, Iran has firmly stated that it will not give up its nuclear achievements. President Masoud Pezeshkian, declaring his commitment to maintaining the country's military and scientific potential, stressed that it will not give up these achievements under any circumstances.

Iran's possession of nuclear weapons is causing concern in the international community. However, American analyst Kenneth Waltes states that these fears are unfounded, that these are radical and propaganda-based assumptions, and that Iran seeks to maintain international balance. The religious leadership, led by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, puts the interests of the nation first. Iran will never be the first to use nuclear weapons - because the consequences could be catastrophic.

Therefore, Israel will continue to oppose Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons, as well as its agreement with the United States. In this, we are not a supporter of a pessimistic or aggressive approach, but history shows that the emergence of a new system in the world order is accompanied by wars. Even Henry Kissinger believes that a war between Iran and Israel cannot be avoided.

If this war occurs, its impact will also reach Central Asia. In particular, the flow of refugees will create major social and security problems for the region. Also, major geopolitical players will not remain indifferent to this process. Therefore, the Central Asian countries, sensing these risks, need to develop strategic measures in advance.

⁷ Алексей Почтарук. В Иране заявили, что не откажутся от атомной программы ради диалога с США. <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2025/05/17/25808000.shtml>

⁸ Алексей Почтарук. В Иране заявили, что не откажутся от атомной программы ради диалога с США. <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2025/05/17/25808000.shtml>

