

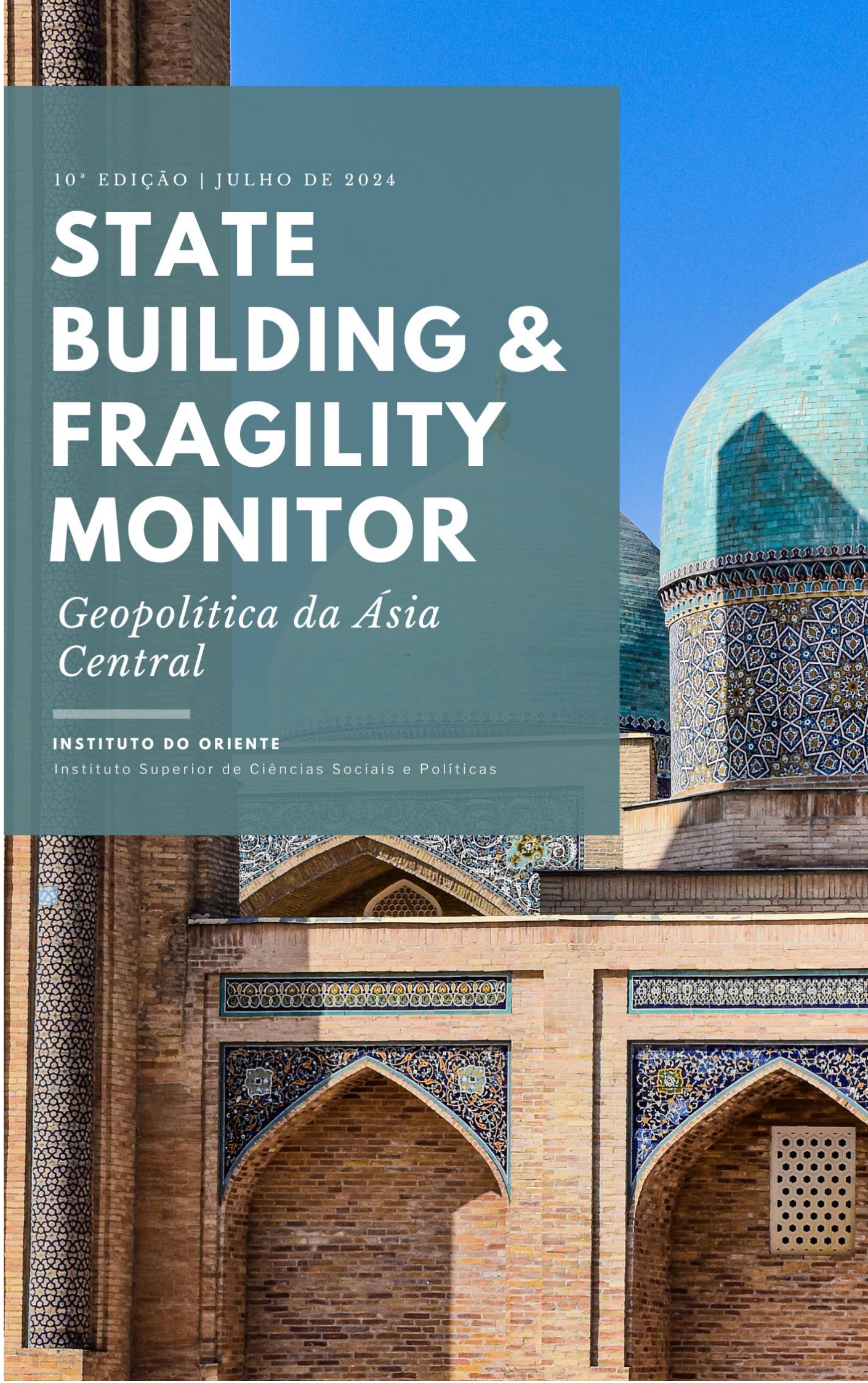
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STATE BUILDING & FRAGILITY MONITOR

*Geopolítica da Ásia
Central*

INSTITUTO DO ORIENTE

Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas



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O *State Building & State Fragility Monitor* apresenta-se como uma ferramenta útil para estudantes, académicos, *policy makers*, assim como todos os interessados em explorar as temáticas abordadas. Este projeto desenvolve uma vasta análise das dinâmicas internacionais e regionais, sobre o ponto de vista da construção ou fragilidade dos Estados, culminando na publicação deste monitor científico e académico.

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EDITORIAL

NUNO CANAS MENDES

Presidente do Instituto do Oriente

Ao ouvir o poema sinfónico “Nas estepes da Ásia Central” do compositor russo Borodin, de 1880, ainda que originariamente inspirado nas caravanas da Mongólia, o nosso imaginário povoa-se de sucessivos quadros que remetem para a tremenda força histórica da Ásia Central, das invasões de Gengis Khan à rota da Seda, passando pelo Great Game oitocentista entre os imperialismos russo e britânico, desembocando na criação das repúblicas ‘istânicas’ e sua separação, e posterior reunião na Organização de Cooperação de Xangai.

O fio da História é complexo, a compreensão das dinâmicas locais, regionais e globais de apreensão demorada: o presente número do *State-building and Fragility Monitor* congrega os contributos de um conjunto de investigadores que têm desenvolvido trabalho sobre a Ásia Central, em temas tão diversificados quanto as culturas política e estratégica do Quirguistão e do Cazaquistão respetivamente, o segundo regime Talibã, os papéis da Rússia e da China ou a conectividade do corredor China-Índia-Paquistão na relação com o Sudeste Asiático, passando pela importância da água e pelo lugar das emoções.

Uma paleta rica de nove textos de autoria da Daniela Barreiros Alves, do Tomé Lopes Figueira, da Adriana Martins, da Matilde São

José, da Olha Kostiuk, do Tiago Botelho dos Santos, do José Chaiça, da Carla Melo e do Diogo Borges, que entusiasticamente estão a aprofundar e reforçar o seu interesse e competências nos Estudos Asiáticos.

A CULTURA
POLÍTICA DO
QUIRGUISTÃO:
UMA ANÁLISE
AO SISTEMA DE
ELITE

DANIELA BARREIROS ALVES

Instituto Superior de Ciências
Sociais e Políticas da
Universidade de Lisboa

A Cultura Política do Quirguistão: Uma análise ao sistema de Elite

DANIELA BARREIROS ALVES

Resumo

A afirmação do conceito de Estado na Ásia Central pós-soviética lançou um conjunto de desafios de caráter político e organizacional aos países emergentes, nomeadamente ao Quirguistão. Explanando as formas de ação política, os padrões de comportamento e o vínculo do nacionalismo nas insurgências populares de 2005, 2010 e 2020, o presente artigo procura analisar a Cultura Política do Quirguistão através da matriz identitária e refletir sobre a localização estratégica das elites política nos centros de decisão da política doméstica.

Palavras-chave: Ação, Cultura Política, Elite, Estratégia, Sistema Político

1. Introdução

A dissolução da União Soviética tornou possível o surgimento de novas expressões de identidade nacional e acarretou um conjunto de novos desafios para reestruturação dos modelos de organização política na Ásia Central pós-soviética, designadamente da incorporação de uma nova cultura política nos regimes políticos. O Quirguistão apresenta uma trajetória distintiva pela forma de afirmação da unidade estatal no cenário internacional e pela configuração do sistema político, ambos os processos são marcados por vincadas contradições (Anderson, 1999) numa condição semelhante aos países com proximidade geopolítica, também emergentes em circunstâncias pós-coloniais. A construção de Estado no Quirguistão não é um processo isento do debate sobre a cultura política resultante da consecutiva alternância do regime político (Schatz, 2010).

No relatório de 2024, a *Freedom House* classificou o Quirguistão como um país não livre, agrupando os critérios de análise metodológica nas categorias de direitos políticos e de liberdades civis com base no desenvolvimento dos acontecimentos recolhidos do ano de 2023 em matérias de diplomacia, negociação política sobre o território fronteiriço do Quirguistão e da cessação de atividade de várias organizações de comunicação social (Freedom House, 2024). Face ao conjunto de divergências culturais, sociais e geoestratégicas que mapearam a afirmação do conceito de Estado no Quirguistão, o

registo das ações de protesto perante a arbitrariedade do poder político e do conflito armado com o Tadjiquistão em 2021, motivado pela disputa territorial, demonstram que a cultura política do Quirguistão sofreu alterações substanciais e abriu margem para a identificação de mutações na atividade estratégica do Estado.

2. Ação Política e Formas de protesto

Em menos de uma década, assistimos a duas tentativas de liberalização do regime político do Quirguistão por intermédio de ações de mobilização massiva¹: a Revolução das Túlipas, em 2005 que ditou a destituição de Askar Akayev e a Segunda Revolução do Quirguistão, em 2010, que tirou Kurmanbek Bakiyev do poder. A emergência cíclica de conflitos na política doméstica do Quirguistão, paralelamente a uma reconhecida vulnerabilidade no que concerne à segurança fronteiriça, está vinculada a uma fragmentação do tecido social pela via geográfica – divisão entre norte e sul -, identitária e étnica (Mello, 2014). Paralelamente à divisão de natureza geo-histórica que se arrebate sobre as formas de interação da sociedade civil do Quirguistão, cumpre destacar a divisão entre a elite política – na sub-divisão da elite governativa – e a população, sendo esta a razão com maior expressão na instabilidade sociopolítica.

Os modelos de liderança nos mandatos conducentes com as revoltas, personificados por Akayev (1991-2005) e Bakiyev (2005-2010), contaram com a existência da regulação informal de acordos entre a elite governativa em exercício e a elite política e económica envolvente em temas relacionados com a gestão dos fundos públicos e a negociação sobre os elementos constituintes do governo (Marat, 2012). As ações de protesto foram desencadeadas por um descontentamento generalizado da sociedade civil, fundamentado no exercício de práticas corruptivas e na fiabilidade no quadro judicial que revelaram uma margem de progresso inalterável (Marat, 2015). Entre os anos de 2005 e 2010, ainda que os protestos do último ano tenham sido menos representativos e com um período de duração reduzido devido à articulação das forças de segurança com o poder político que se materializou no exercício da força e de uma lógica de contenção que não se verificou na Revolução das Túlipas (Cummings et al., 2014).

¹ As ações tiveram início em regiões envolventes de Bishkek através da mobilização de grupos rurais que se identificavam com elementos da oposição (Cummings et al., 2014).

3. Dos Nacionalismos

O nacionalismo do Quirguistão, desde o momento da sua reconstituição em 1991 até ao momento presente, demonstrou ter ramificações suficientes para acompanhar os ciclos políticos. Em Benedict Anderson, identificamos três concepções culturais presentes na origem do nacionalismo: a primeira prende-se com o fator etno-linguístico que potencia o acesso reservado a uma determinada informação e cria identificação entre os elementos; a segunda corresponde a uma organização social assente na estratificação do poder político e da manifesta divisão entre governantes e governados; e a terceira consiste na ligação entre a história, o propósito coletivo e a cosmologia que elabora o conjunto de crenças coletivas (Anderson, 2006).

Com efeito, a perceção da língua como recurso simbólico de uma nação encontra um sentido redobrado no Quirguistão por contribuir para a consolidação de uma hierarquia étnica, sustentada nos ângulos de semelhança com a vertente linguística da Rússia sendo que "(...) Kyrgyz migrants stated that they experience fewer problems with Russians than Uzbeks and Tajiks do due to their assumed ability to speak Russian better" (Baranova & Fedorova, 2020, p. 673).

Numa perspetiva contemporânea, a ligação da matriz histórica à concretização de uma identidade no Quirguistão revela uma expressão do nacionalismo ancorado em motivações étnicas que paradoxalmente têm demonstrado capacidade de adaptação e de acoplação ao *modus operandi* do sistema político, refletido no exemplo da transferência gradual de cidadãos pertencentes a grupos nacionalistas fechados para o Islão Hanafi moderado (Engvall, 2020). A construção de Estado no Quirguistão, semelhantemente à maioria das repúblicas na Ásia Central, é centrada numa soberania étnica originária do nacionalismo pós-soviético (Gullette & Heathershaw, 2015) que Peyrouse nomeia de "(...) maioritária e titular" (2012, pp. 713-714), promovendo o afastamento progressivo das minorias étnicas dos cargos decisórios e reforça a elitização da participação política.

4. Cultura Política: Uma questão de localização estratégica

O decurso das tentativas de democratização do Quirguistão é obstaculizado por um conjunto de práticas políticas características de uma independência tardia e da permanência de tradições sociopolíticas do antigo regime. Em Matveeva, revisitamos uma análise comparada que permite categorizar a cultura política da Ásia Central como

conservadora e sintomática da baixa representação de uma participação política voluntária - em que inserimos as reivindicações por eleições democráticas, meios de comunicação livres e as ações de protesto pacíficas (Matveeva, 2002, pp.34-35).

O estudo dos aspetos culturais revelou-se uma prática imprescindível para o quadro analítico dos sistemas políticos, traduzindo a autonomização do campo de investigação da Cultura Política na adaptação do estruturalismo a uma cultura que a compreensão do “modelo de ação” dos atores políticos perante as situações sociais ocasionais ou constantes (Lichterman & Cefai, 2006, pp. 398-399). De acordo com o Almond e Verba, a cultura política de uma nação constitui:

“(...) the particular distribution of patterns of orientation toward political objects among the members of the nation. Before we can arrive at this at such distributions, we need to have some way of systematically tapping individual orientations toward political objects. In other words, we need to define and specify modes of political orientation and classes of political objects” (1989, pp. 12-13).

A análise da cultura política aplicada ao Quirguistão é passível de ser inserida na distinção entre as práticas políticas em contextos formais e informais, onde destacamos os períodos de crise e de participação política voluntária de várias parcelas constituintes da sociedade civil:

“In this action-focused approach to public-making, political cultures structure the ways people launch claims about what should be public rather than private, what publics should consider unjust rather than unremarkable. Researchers also aim to grasp the emotions intertwined with claims to freedom, dignity, equality, justice, or recognition” (Lichterman & Cefai, 2006, p. 407).

Invariavelmente, assistiu-se a um ritmo de transformação gradual e pontualmente interrompida da forma de regime, contribuindo para a avaliação de uma cultura política flexível e inconstante (Abazov, 2004). Remontando aos acontecimentos mais recentes em torno do processo eleitoral e da participação política massiva no Quirguistão, as eleições parlamentares de outubro de 2020 são demonstrativas de um conjunto de fatores que permitem uma leitura atualizada da cultura política. O caso do movimento social “anti-eleição” (Ayhan et al., 2021) de 2020 resulta de uma reação da contra-elite a um processo eleitoral fraudulento, ditando a renúncia de Sooronbay Jeenbekov e a pressão doméstica para a convocação de novas eleições. O descontentamento popular perante a afirmação

cíclica do que Hale identifica como relações de “regime-elite” que, embora alternado, partilha os códigos de operacionalização e enformou a motivação para os três movimentos de insurgência contra o regime, contribuindo para a nomeação do sistema político como “presidência patrimonial” (Hale, citado em Doolotkeldieva, 2021).

Perante a visualização permanente de grupos de interesse nos círculos de gestão da política doméstica do Quirguistão, o Estado apresenta uma variante do nacionalismo pontificadas na elite política que Engvalle procura simplificar em trilogia: os cargos políticos dos órgãos de decisão do Estado, as posições de liderança das empresas estatais invariavelmente politizadas – sobretudo nos setores da eletricidade, transportes, comunicações ou saúde – ou a integração das instituições de regulação e tributação que conferem os baixos indicadores de confiança no quadro legal da modalidade de Estado que assumiu uma lógica de mercado:

“There are two principal reasons for why representation in the state is seen as the most profitable way to invest and earn. First, there is the privatization of the state, meaning that the state has essentially been transformed into an informal private market. This market, where decision-making policies, regulations, fiscal affairs, and the enforcement of rules have turned into commodities largely at the private disposal of officials, is more profitable than specializing in productive commercial activities or investing in financial markets. Second, acquiring an office is an elite insurance strategy” (Engvalle, 2015, pp-70-71).

Numa perspetiva comparada aos Estados de partido único da Ásia Central e tendo em conta os períodos pós-eleitorais dos anos de 2005, 2010 e 2020 é possível aferir o carácter diferenciador do conjunto de comportamentos materializados nas formas de ação política da sociedade civil do Quirguistão, edificadas por uma consciência partilhada em da perceção popular sobre a ingerência de grupos de interesse no processo político e na ação governativa, que Marat direciona para a manifestação do neopatrimonialismo. O sistema político-partidário do Quirguistão revela ser um ambiente permeável à fixação das elites políticas regionais que procuram prosseguir os objetivos do foro económico privado por intermédio da integração dos espaços de liderança enquanto ativo estratégico, numa lógica de mediação de interesses (2012, p. 329).

Alicerçadas à predominância da corrente do neopatrimonialismo nas várias fases de composição do sistema político-partidário, as mudanças verificadas recentemente com a alteração da constituição – resultante do referendo realizado em abril de 2021 – aprovada

por Japarov, expressam a consolidação de uma forma de governo presidencial e da redução parcial do número de representantes eleitos para o Parlamento. Em termos substantivos, o novo texto constitucional indica uma margem de retrocesso no plano de democratização do Quirguistão e concebe espaço à operacionalização do neotradicionalismo no plano dos direitos civis (Akisheva, 2023).

5. Conclusão

A compreensão da cultura política do Quirguistão invoca, inevitavelmente, a análise das funcionalidades das estruturas político-institucionais em que inserimos os grupos de interesse – neste caso, com particular presença do espectro económico – e os partidos políticos (Almond & Verba, 1989), refletindo a alternância de baixa densidade e a consecutiva identificação dos fatores que subvertem a estabilidade do sistema político, como a corrupção. A marcação de eleições antecipadas para janeiro de 2021, como consequência da manipulação do processo eleitoral que marcou o ano de 2020, e a convergência com a alteração da constituição permitiram a abertura de mais um ciclo de reestruturação da cultura política no Estado.

A atribuição de uma tipologia de cultura política ao Quirguistão constitui um exercício de dependência da apreensão das características constitucionais, recentemente reformuladas; a composição do sistema político e a importância da representação ideológica; a matriz histórica e a sua localização, um critério particularmente incisivo nas matérias da segurança e defesa nas questões fronteiriças. Com efeito, Almond e Verba concebem um enfoque destacado sobre as estruturas de poder das instituições e as posições no ambiente decisório, alertando, naturalmente, para a importância da percepção da ingerência das propostas das elites políticas no "(...) fluxo ascendente da formulação de políticas" (1989, pp. 16-17).

Na mesma linha, cumpre reforçar a interdependência entre a cultura política e a potencial emergência de uma cultura estratégica, ambas vinculadas aos aspetos comportamentais de forma sistémica. O caso do Quirguistão, por via do conjunto de fatores tangíveis e intangíveis sobre o quais procurámos refletir sobre a consolidação de uma cultura política, demonstra que as suas bases elementares condicionam fortemente a cultura estratégica do Estado, conseqüentemente refletida no âmbito das opções de política externa. A proposta de Johnston em torno das escolhas comportamentais,

aplicáveis ao objeto da cultura política e da cultura estratégica, reconhece que a cultura estratégica pode constituir um instrumento de compreensão do sistema político através de dois eixos, a formulação de uma narrativa de interesse nacional que emana dos interesses políticos e económicos das elites estratégicas ou a limitação do exercício das elites por força da materialização das preferências estratégicas da população (1998, pp. 51-55), que decorrem de uma cultura política em estruturação.

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A ÁSIA CENTRAL E O CONTRATO DE SEGURANÇA PÓS-SOVIÉTICO

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A Ásia Central e o Contrato de Segurança Pós-Soviético

TOMÉ LOPES FIGUEIRA

Resumo:

Devido à sua instabilidade crónica, e apesar de ser a única região do espaço pós-soviético que ainda não testemunhou uma invasão por parte da Federação Russa, a Ásia Central fornece um ambiente de estudo precioso para compreender os desígnios de Moscovo na sua esfera de influência tradicional. Este ensaio pretende demonstrar como a reação russa a situações de instabilidade na sua “vizinhança próxima” depende necessariamente de dois fatores: a existência de uma ameaça à sua posição privilegiada no espaço pós-soviético e a presença de potências externas à região. Esta realidade será exposta como a razão pela qual os estados da Ásia Central, cientes da sua posição frágil, têm tentado combater a sua dependência face à Rússia ao começar um processo de diversificação de relações, particularmente após a invasão a grande escala da Ucrânia.

Palavras-chave: Rússia, Ásia Central, Espaço Pós-Soviético, Contrato de Segurança

1. Introdução

Composta por um remendo desigual de repúblicas ex-soviéticas, a região da Ásia Central sofre de uma certa secundarização face à sua aparente distância tanto dos grandes conflitos como dos grandes centros de poder. Apesar de serem estados frágeis, o Cazaquistão, o Quirguistão, o Tadjiquistão, o Turquemenistão e o Uzbequistão são, na perspetiva de Moscovo, cruciais para a sua segurança, visto que estes países constituem o flanco sul da Rússia e pertencem à sua “vizinhança próxima”, devendo assim ser protegidos de influências externas (Fazendeiro, 2022).

Cada um destes estados é diferente e tem as suas características e agendas próprias. Contudo, todos os regimes da região partilham o facto de possuírem sistemas políticos autoritários de índole personalista. Seguindo a conceptualização de Van Den Bosch (2021), é possível compreender que estes regimes são sustentados por vários pilares essenciais: a repressão política, à qual também se pode associar o estabelecimento de um culto de personalidade; a acumulação de recursos e respetiva distribuição a lealistas do

regime; a redução propositada da eficácia das forças armadas como forma de prevenção de golpes de estado; e, por fim, a manipulação das suas relações externas de modo a evitar ingerências por parte de países terceiros.

As duas últimas características são particularmente relevantes para o âmbito deste ensaio, como demonstrou a intervenção da Organização do Tratado de Segurança Coletiva (CSTO) em solo cazaque a janeiro de 2022. Tendo ocorrido na sequência de sonoros protestos populares que abalaram o regime de Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, a operação é representativa dos problemas associados a estes regimes. Primeiro, demonstrou que, apesar da sua natureza repressiva, os regimes destes estados não são invulneráveis e as suas forças de segurança interna podem não ser suficientes para evitar o seu derrube. Em segundo lugar, a intervenção denunciou que esta vulnerabilidade cria uma dependência externa no domínio da segurança (Hansen, 2022). A intervenção da CSTO será, posteriormente, abordada com maior profundidade. Contudo, tomando o Cazaquistão como caso de análise, é possível desde logo deduzir que a sobrevivência do regime é a principal prioridade dos estados da Ásia Central e que esse desejo tem um papel crucial na definição da política externa do país.

2. A Ásia Central e a Erosão do Poder Russo

É neste contexto de fragilidade que a Federação Russa surge como a tradicional potência estabilizadora da região, pretendendo manter e desenvolver a sua esfera de influência na sua “vizinhança próxima”. Esta relação de “estado protetor” é institucionalizada através das várias organizações regionais encabeçadas por Moscovo e que têm como objetivo a cooperação entre os países do espaço pós-soviético. Para o âmbito desta análise, destacam-se a Comunidade de Estados Independentes (CIS) no domínio da coordenação político-diplomática e a já referida Organização do Tratado de Segurança Coletiva no domínio da cooperação militar (Pezarat Correia, 2022).

Para os países do espaço pós-soviético e, particularmente, para a Ásia Central, a institucionalização de relações de cooperação e segurança deveria ser uma preciosa tábua de salvação para os seus regimes. Contudo, os esforços regionalistas russos têm saído gorados, principalmente pelas ações da própria Rússia. O facto de a Geórgia e a Ucrânia pertencerem à CIS não impediu Moscovo de invadir ambos estes países após estes terem tentado uma aproximação ao Ocidente, descredibilizando a mensagem de cooperação da

organização e demonstrando que o papel da Rússia enquanto garante da estabilidade regional está dependente da existência de um grau de subserviência por parte dos restantes estados pós-soviéticos.

De forma semelhante, também a CSTO tem contribuído para a erosão da confiança na liderança russa deste espaço. Esta aliança tem como membros a Rússia, a Arménia, a Bielorrússia, o Cazaquistão, o Quirguistão e o Tadjiquistão. Sendo possuidora de um mecanismo de defesa coletiva, patente no Artigo 4º do seu Tratado, a organização visa a segurança comum destes países contra ameaças externas (Treaty on Collective Security, 1995). A análise da atuação da Rússia e da CSTO na Ásia Central permite uma compreensão mais profunda desta relação, a partir de onde se infere que a atitude do Kremlin relativamente à estabilidade regional está dependente de dois fatores intrinsecamente ligados aos interesses nacionais de Moscovo: a existência de uma ameaça à sua posição privilegiada no espaço pós-soviético e a presença de potências externas na região.

Em abril de 2010, o Presidente do Quirguistão, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, foi deposto na sequência de um golpe de estado popular. As semanas que antecederam o golpe foram marcadas por uma crise económica e energética, exacerbada por um ataque massivo ao Presidente quirguiz por parte dos media do país, que eram maioritariamente controlados por Moscovo. Uma das razões que levou a esta hostilidade por parte da comunicação social quirguiz terá sido a decisão de Bakiyev de renovar o contrato de arrendamento da base aérea de Manas com os Estados Unidos, que a usavam como ponte logística para as operações militares no Afeganistão desde 2001 apesar dos constantes protestos russos (Marat, 2010). Após o golpe, o governo interino foi rapidamente reconhecido por Dmitri Medvedev, que, enquanto Chefe-de-Estado da Rússia, lembrou a antiga união dos dois países sob a URSS e expressou o desejo que o Quirguistão "formule os objetivos certos para as relações russo-quirguizes" (Kremlin, 2010). Pouco tempo depois, o novo Presidente quirguiz Almazbek Atambayev prometeu cessar o acordo de arrendamento, levando à saída das tropas americanas em 2014 e cumprindo, por fim, os desejos moscovitas (Kucera, 2014).

Poucos meses após o golpe de 2010, tensões étnicas crescentes culminaram no deflagrar de conflitos entre quirguizes e uzbeques no sul do Quirguistão. Os atos de violência causaram centenas de mortos e vários milhares de refugiados, revelando a

fragilidade do país e as clivagens existentes entre as suas diversas camadas sociais. A situação levou Bishkek a fazer um pedido de intervenção da CSTO para restaurar a ordem, mas Medvedev classificou a crise como um assunto interno do Quirguistão e, argumentando que a organização só pode atuar em caso de um ataque externo à aliança, recusou-se a prestar auxílio (Nichol, 2010).

Apesar da justificação de Medvedev para a não-intervenção da CSTO, o facto é que a organização foi mobilizada pela primeira vez na sua história em janeiro de 2022 para, como já foi referido, auxiliar o governo do Cazaquistão a dispersar as violentas manifestações que o país atravessava. Segundo Putin, a intervenção teve como objetivo evitar o despoletar de uma revolução colorida pró-ocidental semelhante às que tiveram lugar na Geórgia e na Ucrânia (CSTO, 2022), demonstrando que o interesse russo tem, assim, um papel crucial a desempenhar na agenda securitária da aliança.

Poucos meses depois da intervenção, em setembro de 2022, escaramuças fronteiriças entre o Quirguistão e o Tadjiquistão tiveram como consequência a morte de quase uma centena de pessoas. Ambos os países são estados-membros da CSTO, mas, com a Rússia virada para a Ucrânia desde fevereiro, nem Moscovo nem a organização fizeram mais que exortar a uma resolução rápida e pacífica do conflito (Zaynetdinov, 2022).

3. O Contrato de Segurança

A análise destes casos demonstra que, apesar de Moscovo se apresentar como o protetor destes estados, a sua vontade de combater situações de instabilidade está inteiramente dependente dos seus próprios interesses na região, podendo recusar-se a resolver conflitos ou até promovê-los ativamente. É possível, então, identificar três reações distintas a perturbações securitárias regionais.

Quando a Rússia percebe que a crise não coloca em causa o seu poder regional, não intervém ativamente na sua resolução e permite que a situação decorra por si, adotando uma reação neutra e limitando-se a ações maioritariamente simbólicas. Tal foi o caso com os conflitos étnicos quirguizes ou os confrontos fronteiriços entre o Quirguistão e o Tadjiquistão, durante os quais a CSTO não interveio.

O golpe de estado quirguiz demonstra, pelo contrário, as condições que favorecem uma reação hostil por parte da Rússia, onde não só houve a percepção que o poder de

Moscovo estava a ser comprometido como estiveram envolvidas potências externas à região, nomeadamente os Estados Unidos devido ao seu arrendamento da base aérea de Manas. Fora da Ásia Central, as invasões da Geórgia e da Ucrânia também se enquadram nesta classificação. Assim, quando a situação de instabilidade envolve uma potência externa, a Rússia toma uma posição disruptiva, incentivando conflitos armados ou mudanças de regime.

Por outro lado, a intervenção da CSTO no Cazaquistão demonstrou que a organização tem uma capacidade eficaz de restabelecimento da ordem, apesar de, como já foi mencionado, o propósito da aliança ser, pelo menos de jure, a proteção contra ameaças externas. O auxílio prestado a Astana quando o regime de Tokayev ameaçava ser derrubado revela que, face a uma situação de crise, a Rússia só intervirá a favor da estabilização quando não houver uma potência externa envolvida e, simultaneamente, considerar que a situação pode ameaçar o seu poder regional.

A relação securitária entre a Rússia e a sua “vizinhança próxima”, particularmente com os estados-membros da CSTO, exprime-se, assim, através de um contrato de segurança mútua que não é incondicional. Existe uma cláusula implícita que dita que a Rússia apenas intervirá se a sua posição privilegiada no espaço pós-soviético se encontrar ameaçada e que, caso algum destes estados se envolva em demasia com uma potência externa, a reação do Kremlin será hostil, podendo levar à substituição de regimes anteriormente aliados (ver Anexo 1). Fora da Ásia Central, as invasões russas da Geórgia e da Ucrânia e o facto da CSTO não ter sido capaz de prevenir o conflito do Nagorno-Karabakh reforçam a existência desta relação (Strgacich, 2022).

A volatilidade destas reações e, notoriamente, a invasão a larga escala da Ucrânia demonstraram aos países do espaço pós-soviético mais dependentes da Rússia que as garantias de segurança do Kremlin não são sólidas (Fernandes & Grantseva, 2023). Esta realidade é particularmente acentuada pelo facto de países como o Cazaquistão possuírem várias características em comum com a Ucrânia, particularmente a experiência histórica do colonialismo moscovita e a presença de uma considerável minoria étnica russa (Fazendeiro, 2022). De facto, a narrativa de Putin que visa negar o estatuto soberano da Ucrânia baseia-se na sua história comum com a Rússia e numa doutrina pan-eslava (Putin, 2021), características que podem perfeitamente ser aplicadas aos estados da Ásia Central,

pelo que é possível compreender a crescente ansiedade destes países para com o seu suposto aliado (Andersen, 2022).

Assim se explica o facto dos países da Ásia Central se terem demarcado da agressão à Ucrânia, não reconhecendo as anexações russas e apelando ao Kremlin que respeite a soberania dos seus estados. A sua dependência estratégica impede uma oposição direta a Moscovo, mas a adoção de posições ambíguas nas Nações Unidas e a procura por novos parceiros, entre os quais a China e a Turquia, evidenciam um crescente desejo centro-asiático de autonomização face a uma Rússia cujo apoio, embora extremamente necessário, é igualmente incerto (Fernandes & Grantseva, 2023).

4. Conclusão

Embora os estados da Ásia Central sejam duramente autoritários, utilizando a repressão para manter as suas elites no poder, estes países têm, simultaneamente, uma estrutura política frágil. Esta realidade deriva da ineficácia generalizada das suas forças de segurança interna e traduz-se numa dependência securitária para com a Rússia, como demonstrou a intervenção da CSTO no Cazaquistão. Contudo, esta relação tem-se revelado uma vulnerabilidade.

Como comprovado pelas suas ações no espaço pós-soviético, a Rússia não é um garante fiável de estabilidade. Consoante os seus interesses, Moscovo pode ignorar conflitos na região, como os confrontos entre o Quirguistão e o Tajiquistão ou, até, promovê-los ativamente, como o golpe de estado quirguiz de 2010. O Kremlin demonstrou assim que o contrato de segurança que estabeleceu com a sua “vizinhança próxima” inclui uma cláusula implícita que exige um alinhamento com a Rússia sob pena de uma reação hostil.

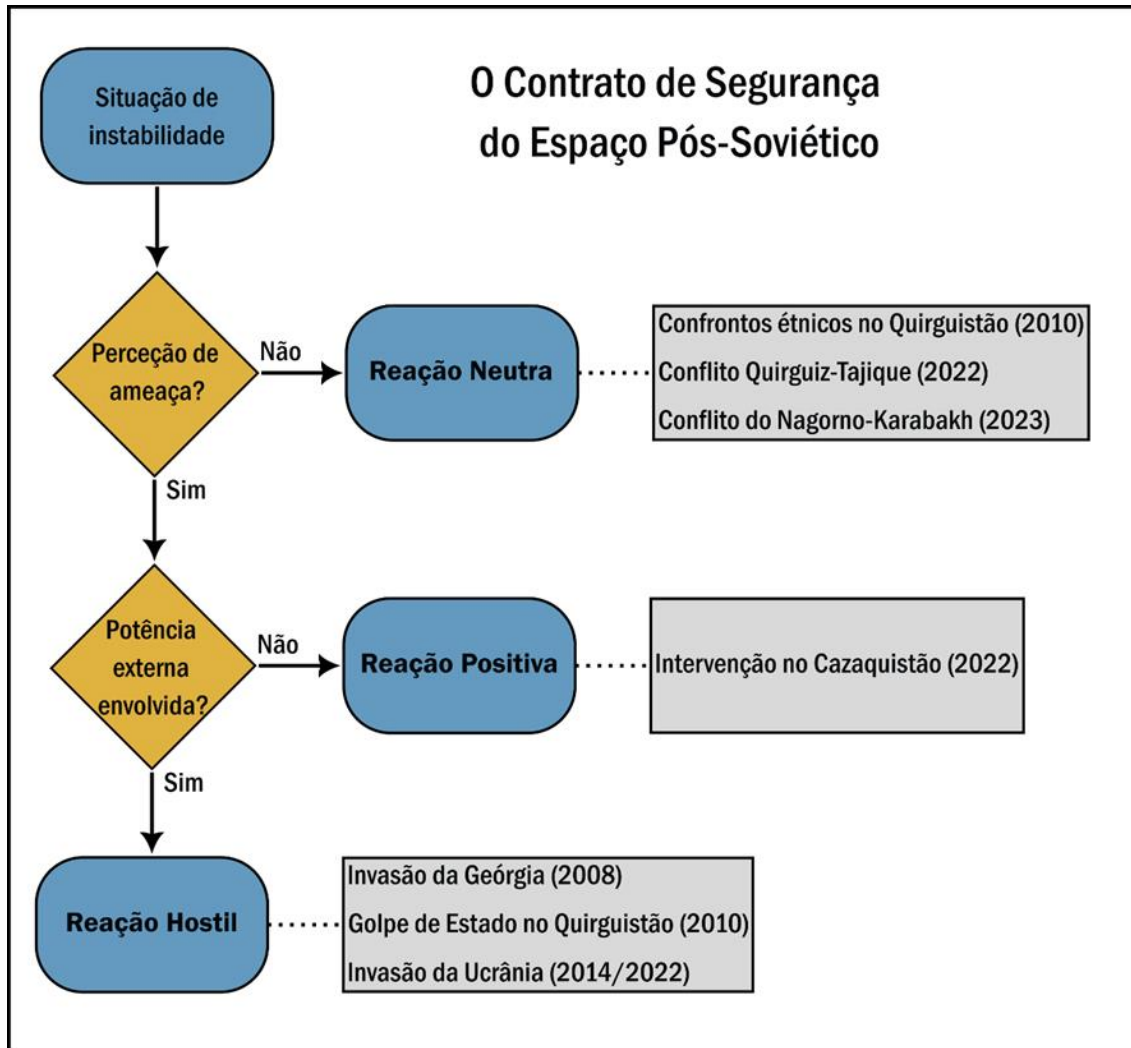
Este comportamento volátil é destacado pela invasão da Ucrânia, cujo percurso histórico, social e político se assemelha ao da Ásia Central. Consequentemente, a assertividade de Moscovo está a levar a uma subtil, mas crescente mudança na política externa dos países da Ásia Central, que, face a uma Rússia cada vez mais agressiva, se veem forçados a diversificar as suas relações externas numa tentativa de contrariar a sua dependência no antigo soberano.

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Fonte: elaboração do autor.

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A CULTURA
ESTRATÉGICA DO
CAZAQUISTÃO:
QUADRO DE
POLÍTICA
EXTERNA
MULTIVETORIAL

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A Cultura Estratégica do Cazaquistão: Quadro de Política Externa

Multivetorial

ADRIANA MARTINS

Resumo

O Cazaquistão, enquanto coração do *Heartland* e um *locús* geográfico de crescente interesse nos jogos de poder internacional pelas grandes potências ao longo do decorrer do tempo, obteve a materialização da sua relevância por Mackinder, vigorando assim como Pivot Estratégico crucial na balança de equilíbrio de poder da região, especialmente entre a Rússia e a China. Indutivamente, afere-se que para que seja exequível a gestão de vontades e interesses, o Cazaquistão recorre a um quadro de política externa multivetorial, garantindo o seu estatuto de *player* e segurança nacional, mas também, a sua influência no plano regional e internacional. Desta forma, almeja-se a interpretação da cultura estratégica desta nação para que se entenda o quadro de política externa aplicado, e que se possa aferir o grau de implacabilidade da mesma na agenda política cazaque.

Palavras-chave: Cazaquistão, Cultura Estratégica, Heartland, Pivot Estratégico, Política Externa Multivetorial

1. Introdução

Face a conjuntura globalizada do contemporâneo, a política externa assume um papel crucial na gestão e compreensão das complexas dinâmicas de interação Estatais. Indubitavelmente, é possível aferir um aumento das tensões geopolíticas de diversas naturezas, as demarcadas oscilações económicas e ameaças transfronteiriças, como por exemplo, o terrorismo. Por isto, o seio académico tem demarcado a importância crescente de um quadro de política externa eficaz, pressupondo que este seja uma ferramenta dos Estados para salvaguardarem os seus interesses nacionais, promoverem a cooperação regional e internacional, como também, atender e dirigir diplomaticamente os conflitos

emergentes (Jervis, 2017). Ademais, dado o avanço tecnológico e a proliferação de atores não-estatais, é exigida e indispensável uma política externa estratégica que detenha um nível de estruturação, flexibilidade, mas acima de tudo, que seja tangível de empregar, promovendo a estabilidade e prosperidade (Nye, 2020).

Concomitantemente, a compreensão da política externa e a importância que esta detém no confronto e resolução da instabilidade, solicita que se aprofunde o conhecimento sobre a cultura estratégica do Estado em questão, sendo esta que plasma qual a gênese e a abordagem que os mesmos têm para com as Relações Internacionais. A cultura estratégica abrange a compreensão de como os fatores sociais, culturais, históricos, estratégicos e económicos, bem como a cultura política, afetam o quadro dos “interesses nacionais, ações formais e informais na condução de objetivos críticos do poder” (Romana, 2016, p.14).

Dada a localização geográfica do Cazaquistão, este vigora como um *locús* geográfico crescente nas dinâmicas dos jogos de poder internacional, particularmente pelas potências vizinhas, China e Rússia. Através da lente da geopolítica clássica, sendo que foi a revitalização desta disciplina que permitiu (re)materializar a importância estratégica do Estado cazaque devido ao seu enquadramento geográfico, remonta-se aos séculos XIX e XX, onde Ásia Central figurava como a região cardeal sobre o qual os vetores de expansão das grandes potências pretendiam efetivar o seu poder e influência. Prezada por Mackinder em 1904, a distinção da área recaiu sobre a observação da composição dos processos geopolíticos, onde o domínio do mundo estava submetido à dualidade competitiva entre o poder continental e o poder marítimo, podendo o primeiro prevalecer caso recorresse a três pilares fundamentais (i) integrar e aceder a distintas fontes de recursos; (ii) investir e abraçar a evolução tecnológica e industrial; e (iii) adquirir novos centros de poder económico-financeiros (Mackinder, 1924). Devido a isto, Mackinder identificou a região como *Heartland*, constatando que o domínio mundial assentava no controlo desta região.

Para que este consiga gerir as diferentes influências dos agentes externos na região, com a queda da União Soviética, o Cazaquistão aplica o multi-vetorialismo no seu quadro de política externa, regionalmente e internacionalmente, já que este detém um

estatuto de Estado-tampão, que o expõe às ações de tentativa de alargamento das esferas securitárias das potências contíguas através da aplicação de políticas de naturezas distintas que manipulem a política externa do Cazaquistão para um panorama que lhes seja benigno (Cummings, 2006; Curado & Ribeiro, 2021).

2. Cultura Estratégica do Cazaquistão

No contexto pós Segunda Guerra Mundial, a cultura estratégica associa-se então com a análise e interpretação da “cultura nacional” e “dos processos de tomada de decisão estratégica” aplicados a cenários de segurança e defesa (Romana, 2016, p.14).

Assim, e no que concerne a relação que cada Estado institui com o espaço geográfico que ocupa e gere, é possível identificar tendências geográficas a partir dos quais a moldura da sua política externa propende a desenvolver diretrizes estratégicas orientadores que auxiliam a sua afirmação no palco internacional. Dando enfoque à cultura estratégica do Cazaquistão, de forma geral, verifica-se que a mesma está diretamente e profundamente enraizada com o seu legado histórico, à sua identidade nacional, à sua geografia e aos imperativos geopolíticos. Esta, através de uma abordagem pragmática no que concerne a sua política externa, está fundamentada no legado nómada e no subsequente desenvolvimento sob o domínio da União Soviética, como também, num alinhamento estritamente geopolítico continental.

Primeiramente, segundo Sally Cummings (2006) o seu posicionamento geográfico traduz aquela que é a ponte terrestre de ligação entre o continente europeu e o continente asiático. Ora, este perpetua na cultura geopolítica do Cazaquistão uma auto percepção enquanto elemento mediador e de ligação entre os Estados dos dois continentes, refletindo esta narrativa na sua política externa dando primazia à estabilidade regional e à cooperação maioritariamente na dimensão económica. Nesta linha da *self-image*, é indispensável mencionar a questão identitária, dado que esta influencia a construção da cultura estratégica de uma nação. No caso do Estado cazaque, tendo em conta que este esteve sob o governo e dominância das linhas ideológicas soviéticas, aufere-se que o mesmo perdeu certos fragmentos da sua identidade, obrigando-o a remodelar a sua identidade em 1991, fomentando a sua retórica do quadro de política externa para o que

seria a edificação do novo regime e ideologias associadas (Anceschi, 2014). Denotar que Snyder alega que a gênese do comportamento e do pensamento estratégico soviético está no seio de uma cultura específica, onde a “teoria da escolha racional é insuficiente para explicar o processo de tomada de decisão da liderança russa (Snyder, 1977, p. 8).

Neste contexto, a cultura estratégica do Cazaquistão ascende com a retórica neo-euroasiática, articulando desta forma o legado e relações históricas tanto com os Estados europeus como os Estados asiáticos, manipulando o discurso e ações diplomáticas visando o equilíbrio de poder no domínio regional e internacional (Anceschi, 2014). Para que isto seja possível, este recorre a quadros teóricos sólidos e pragmáticos para a orientação da sua cultura estratégica, e conseqüentemente da sua política externa, numa tentativa de usufruir uma posição favorável e estável, especialmente em questões económicas e securitárias, na configuração geopolítica onde se encontra (Ivanov & Volojov, 2014).

3. Multi- vetorialismo: Quadro de Política Externa Cazaque

No período após a queda da União Soviética, transversalmente nos países centro-asiáticos, existiu um movimento à adesão a fundamentos teóricos para a orientação das respetivas políticas externas, levando a que os mesmos recorressem ao multi-vetorialismo. Porém, esta linha orientadora das suas relações exteriores, demonstra-se singular para cada Estado da Ásia Central, em que cada um “implementou as suas versões próprias do multi-vetorialismo (...) assentes numa base não ideológica e pragmática para obter benefícios económicos e de segurança” (Kurç, 2018, p. 316).

A preeminência do Estado russo na região poderá figurar enquanto obstáculo e dicotómico à adoção do multi-vetorialismo enquanto ferramenta da política externa, no entanto, é fulcral compreender o emprego do conceito na Ásia Central de “security autonomy tradeoff”, ou seja, para que estes Estados consigam ter expressão, recorrem a alianças assimétricas que lhes permitam utilizar “os outros” enquanto plataforma para a obtenção de recursos e oportunidades, tendo de abdicar de um determinado “grau de autodeterminação política” (Kurç, 2019, p.320). Desta forma, definem-se duas linhas orientadoras nas quais o multi-vetorialismo assenta, sendo estas a económica e securitária, traduzindo aquilo que é o seu estatuto perante a comunidade internacional.

Dado o crescimento da ameaça do extremismo religioso na região fronteiriça, o Médio Oriente, e das diversas e transversais revoluções sentidas no domínio interno dos Estados centro-asiáticos, estes demonstram-se dispostos a aceitar a hegemonia da Rússia e a cooperar com a mesma, numa tentativa de contrariar o risco de terrorismo e a difusão da democracia ocidental (Kurç, 2019, p. 321). Isto deve-se às carentes infraestruturas que o Cazaquistão apresenta, traduzindo a fragilidade dos mecanismos de resposta e defesa requeridos para estes eventos, sendo o multi-vetorialismo a sua única solução. Devido ao seu legado soviético, a nação cazaque tenta contrariar a corrente da dependência num só aliado, principalmente em questões de segurança, levando-o assim à diversificação e integração de parcerias e organizações, tais como a *Collective Security Treaty Organization* (CSTO), *United Nations* (UN) e *Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe* (OSCE). Estas parcerias permitem-lhe desenvolver as suas capacidades industriais, armamento e, conseqüentemente, defesa, equipando-o com mecanismos de flexibilidade para atender aos conflitos regionais, terrorismo transnacional e nacional emergentes, e às flutuações derivadas das rivalidades entre potências (Arynov, 2022).

Em matéria económica, é indubitável que a crise pandémica e o conflito russo-ucraniano obrigaram a que os Estados diversificassem as suas cadeias de valor e laços geopolíticos, porém, no caso do Cazaquistão estes foram eventos que vieram apenas reforçar o quadro multi-vetorial que já perpetuavam. Segundo Nargis Kassenova (2022), numa primeira instância, devido à riqueza intrínseca em termos de recursos naturais, o Estado cazaque almejava a sua reestruturação económica através do setor energético numa tentativa de retirar a influência que as elites russas ainda detinham, todavia, esta decisão impactou negativamente o seu PIB, aferindo que não existia espaço para uma economia sustentável e estável baseada numa indústria só. Necessitava assim de investir na edificação de novas rotas e infraestruturas para impulsionar o investimento e o desenvolvimento. A fomentação da relação chino-cazaque demonstrou ser uma plataforma de acesso a variados programas, como o *Belt and Road Initiative* – com a materialização de infraestruturas ferroviárias – e como o *Grande Programa de Desenvolvimento do Oeste e à Estratégia de Xijin* – que visava criar diversos núcleos

industriais conectados às redes ferroviárias, dinamizando a região e alinhando-se com a visão cazaque enquanto ponte intercontinental (Curado & Ribeiro, 2021).

No meio internacional, a aplicação do multi-vetorialismo é legitimado já que este admitiu a capacidade de manter laços cordiais com os determinados vetores, como também, a sua integração e a sua ascensão na ordem regional e internacional. Contudo, nem sempre foi esta a realidade do mesmo, já que o antigo presidente cazaque, Nursultan Nazarbayev promovia um investimento vazio em termos de retorno para a sociedade e prosperidade, tendo sido Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, atual presidente, a reformar o sistema prévio, obtendo o estatuto de “arquiteto e praticante da política externa multi-vetorial” (Kassenova, 2022, p.1). Sucintamente, este tem alcançado os objetivos propostos da sua agenda política, demonstrando empenho com os diversos vetores, com perspectiva de abrir novas parcerias bilaterais e multilaterais na região do Cáucaso do Sul nos domínios energéticos, investimentos e securitários, especialmente com o Irão e a Turquia (Kassenova, 2022).

4. Conclusão

Torna-se claro que tanto a cultura estratégica e a política externa multi-vetorial apresentam uma relação simbiótica, com a dinâmica complexa entre os movimentos de autodeterminação identitária e auto percepção, e o *security autonomy tradeoff*, por necessitarem de recorrer aos diversos acordos e parcerias nas dimensões económicas e securitárias abdicando de certa parte da sua autodeterminação política.

Dada a localização geográfica desta nação, esta necessita de procurar o equilíbrio entre os seus interesses nacionais e as esferas de influência internacionais, figurando numa posição “frágil” dadas as potências vizinhas que este detém. Assim, o quadro de política externa multi-vetorial surge como uma ferramenta pragmática da cultura estratégica, evitando que este recaia num contexto de dependência novamente. Consegue assim refletir a sua agência e autonomia nas parcerias externas, fomentando a sua posição enquanto ator regional e internacional no seio das dinâmicas geopolíticas, gerindo aquilo que tem sido o aumento das ameaças de extremismo de natureza religiosa, desenvolvendo os setores industriais e energéticos.

Em suma, para que o Cazaquistão cumpra a sua agenda política não poderá desvincular a sua cultura estratégica da sua política externa, aferindo que o multivetorialismo é o instrumento que consegue efetivar os interesses nacionais na esfera doméstica, regional e internacional, vigorando este como um Estado significativo na ordem internacional com prospetivas outrora materializadas pelo *Heartland Mackinderiano*.

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THE SECOND
TALIBAN REGIME
OF AFGHANISTAN:
REGIONAL
DYNAMICS IN A
FAILED STATE-
BUILDING
PROJECT

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The Second Taliban Regime of Afghanistan: Regional Dynamics in a Failed State-Building Project

MATILDE SÃO JOSÉ

Abstract

The present article examines the aftermath of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the return of the Taliban to power in August 2021, focusing on the national and regional levels of analysis. It discusses the national consequences of the Taliban's resurgence, including setbacks to democratic progress and human rights, as well as economic challenges leading to a humanitarian crisis. Furthermore, it analyses the regional impact of the Taliban regime, highlighting security threats, geoeconomic interests, and mass migration dynamics. With this two-level approach, the article aims to assess the geopolitical landscape of Central Asia and the Middle East after the events of August 2021 and reflect upon the failure of state-building efforts in Afghanistan and the disregard of regional dynamics.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Taliban, Geopolitics, Regional Actors, State-Building

1. Introduction

In less than one month, Afghanistan suffered a radical shift of power that transformed its political and socioeconomic reality. Between the 6th and 16th of August 2021, US troops withdrew completely from the ground, creating a «power vacuum that the Taliban quickly filled» (Miklaucic, 2022, p.982).

The Taliban emerged in 1994 as a project to put an end to a chaotic and fragmented Afghanistan, provoked by the withdrawal of Soviet troops and the consequent civil war (Ameyaw-Brobbey, 2022). With the strong support of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the group grew stronger and captured Kabul in 1996, becoming the new political power (Verma, 2022a). As Ameyaw-Brobbey (2022) argues, external support was not the only element that allowed the success of the Taliban, popular support was critical and greatly contributed to the latter. Following a fundamentalist approach to Islam, the first Taliban regime (1996-2001) was characterised by harsh

restrictions on public and private life, relying on «punitive measures and moral theology over legal decisions» (Ameyaw-Brobbey, 2022, p.115).

The US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 marked the end of the first Taliban regime and the beginning of a long effort towards building a terrorism-free Afghanistan, lasting until 2021. Despite the evident defeat, the Taliban started to reorganize across the border in Pakistan less than ten years after its expulsion from Afghan soil (Maizland, 2023). With this, the US troop withdrawal on August 6 constituted the perfect opportunity for the Taliban to regain control.

After the re-institution of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the debate around new security threats (Stepanova, 2022; Verma, 2022a; Ameyaw-Brobbey, 2022) and the future of Afghans' human rights (Akbari & True, 2022) emerged. Besides this, with the US assuming a less central role, regional actors gained a new focus (Encarnation & Fair, 2023; Ahmed, 2022; Verma, 2022b; Wu, 2022). The present article aims to give continuity to this regional approach and build a geopolitical analysis of the main regional dynamics that were impacted by the Taliban's rise to power. Moreover, the article intends to reflect upon the relationship between the failure of State-Building in Afghanistan and the role of regional actors. To achieve these goals, the opted methodology was the qualitative analysis of primary (reports from Think Thanks and International Organizations) and secondary sources (articles from academic journals) through a geopolitical lens.

2. The US withdrawal and the return of the Taliban: national consequences

Akbari and True (2022) refer to the second Taliban regime in Afghanistan as the Taliban 2.0 and its institution resulted from a negotiation process that started in October 2018, involved US-Taliban dialogue, and produced a peace deal famously known as the "Doha Agreement" (Curtis, 2022). This document established several requirements to be met by both the Taliban and the US, namely the exchange of prisoners and the withdrawal of all US and NATO forces from Afghanistan in 14 months (Verma, 2021). For the Taliban side, there was a commitment towards the containment of Al-Qaeda's activities and other terrorist groups and the beginning of negotiations with the Afghan government (Verma, 2021).

According to Curtis (2022), the way the negotiation between the US and the Taliban was conducted led to the event in August 2021, promoting the empowerment of

the Taliban. Curtis identifies several mistakes made during the negotiation process, namely the exclusion of the Afghan government from it, the lack of attention given to Taliban violence happening during the peace talks, the release of Taliban prisoners «without a commensurate concession from the Taliban» and, finally, the attribution of UN travel waivers to the Taliban plus the refrainment of sanctions (Curtis, 2022, p.115). Furthermore, the Doha Agreement presented a lack of clarity that allowed the Taliban to continue cooperating with other terrorist groups while not violating the latter (Curtis, 2022). Regarding the intra-Afghan negotiations, these had little progress due to the incapacity of the Taliban and the Afghan government in agreeing a cease-fire (Verma, 2021).

With this, Afghanistan entered a new political regime which marked a significant setback into democratic and humanitarian developments that had been built until 2021. Curtis et. al. (2023) identify several measures implemented by the Taliban that connect the Taliban 2.0 with the first regime of 1996-2001, such as «the abolition of democratic institutions (...) and key government ministries and departments charged with protecting human rights». The lack of political consensus between the Taliban, the Afghan government, and civil society can be seen as the «biggest stumbling block to lasting peace» (Verma, 2021, p.178). The Taliban defended, and later implemented, a political transition from a republic to an emirate. In the latter, the state is founded under *Sharia*¹ law and ruled by the Emir who controls «all branches of government» and is chosen by a council of Islamic leaders (Thier, 2020, p.2).

Although the regime change affected all members of the Afghan society, certain groups felt its negative impacts more strongly, with women being the primary case. Afghan women suffered drastic changes in their lives after the events of August 2021 due to the reinstatement of the Taliban's interpretation of *Sharia* law. The Taliban regime has severely limited the basic freedoms of women across various domains such as education, access to public space, employment, political participation, freedom of expression and reproductive healthcare (Akbari & True, 2022). This restriction of women's freedoms represented a major defeat for all the progress regarding women's rights in Afghanistan, with the country ranking last in the 2021/2022 "Women, Peace and Security Index" (see Annex 1).

¹ In Arabic, *Sharia* can be translated as "the correct path" and, according to Muslim beliefs, it represents «the perfect immutable values understood only by God» (Robinson, 2021, n.p.). The legal basis of *Sharia* is the Qur'an and Sunnah ("the way of the Prophet")

In their work, Akbari and True argue how gender roles and the reinstatement of a «strict religious gender order» are structural to the preservation of the Taliban's power and its projection at the international level (2022, p.624). Considering the similarities between the first Taliban regime (1996-2001) and the current one, the authors argue how the restriction of women's rights is a crucial pillar in the identity and stability of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. By adopting a less harsh policy towards women, the Taliban could risk the internal cohesion within the group (disapproval from hardline factions) and the support of the Afghan diaspora to the regime, which could lead to its fragmentation and fragility. As Akbari and True explain:

“(...) decisions are not made through leadership and the Taliban cabinet, rather, they are influenced by the informal networks of hardliners within the rank and file of the Taliban movement.” (Akbari & True, 2022, p.629).

Adding to the deterioration of political institutions and human rights, the new Taliban regime also had negative implications in economic terms. According to the “2021 UN Country Annual Results Report” on Afghanistan, after August 2021, there were significant cuts in international aid from donor countries and international financial institutions which, combined with a high volume of economic sanctions, damaged the already-weak economic situation of the country (United Nations, 2022). The combination of these factors resulted in a high number of Afghan refugees and internal mass displacements, creating a «complex humanitarian catastrophe» (UN Women, 2021, p.3).

3. The regional impacts of the Taliban regime

The end of the US presence and the regime change in Afghanistan represented a new paradigm not only for the country in question but also for the major regional players with geopolitical interests in Afghanistan. In this section, I will analyse how the re-institution of the Taliban regime impacted the geopolitical and geoeconomic dynamics in Central Asia and the Middle East, aggregating the main phenomena into three groups: terrorism and security threats, geoeconomic implications, and mass migration and refugees. Despite being separated into three groups, these phenomena interact and influence each other, building a complex geopolitical landscape.

3.1 Terrorism and security threats

During the first Taliban regime, Afghanistan became a «terrorism hub» (Verma, 2022b, p.264), offering refuge to various terrorist groups, each one with a specific agenda for South and Central Asia and perpetuating a climate of insecurity in the region. Naturally, this recent past appeared as a main concern to the neighbouring States amidst the return to power of the Taliban in 2021. The case of India and Pakistan shows how both countries face the threats of militant groups supported by the Taliban that have their own interests in both countries. Besides this, the historical rivalry between India and Pakistan over the territory of Kashmir is reflected in the context of Afghanistan, with the two States competing for influence through aid for development and the support of different groups present in the territory, acting as proxies (Ahlawat & Izarali, 2022). Ahlawat and Izarali (2022) use the zero-sum game rationality and strategic theory to argue how India and Pakistan strategically monitor each other's actions in Afghanistan to contain the opponent's influence in the region.

In this context, while India and Pakistan fear that the new Taliban regime can provoke a spillover effect and growing levels of insecurity, their strategies in Afghanistan create a hostile environment that enables cooperation towards anti-terrorism initiatives.

Another regional player and close neighbour to Afghanistan that saw its security interests at stake is Iran. Despite the adoption of a cooperative policy towards the Taliban in 2005 (Wu, 2022), Iran still sees the group as a possible disrupter of its foreign policy goals in Central Asia and the Middle East, one of them being the maintenance of «a robust and active political security presence in its neighbourhood to forestall future security problems» (Verma, 2021, p.263). One of the main points of tension between Iran and the Taliban is the anti-Shia position that characterises the group. Considering this and recalling how «terrorist-friendly» the first Taliban regime was, Iranian concerns regarding Afghanistan becoming a «launchpad for anti-Iran activities» (Verma, 2021, p.264) are clear to understand.

3.2 Geoeconomic implications

Besides its role in the security environment of Central Asia and the Middle East, Afghanistan's geographical position and its abundance of natural resources (Encarnation & Fair, 2023) have added a geoeconomic relevance to it. Furthermore, the country is

included in strategies for regional economic integration developed by neighbouring States, such as China (Belt and Road Initiative) and Iran ("Look to the East" strategy). Considering this, the political and economic (in)stability of Afghanistan is an aspect that can impact the success of regional geoeconomic strategies.

By analysing the case of China, it becomes clear how the impact mentioned above interacts with the materialisation of Chinese strategies in Central Asia. As Canyon and Sitaraman (2023, p.1) mention, «the CCP's relationship with Afghanistan appears to be driven primarily by economic and resource interests». These interests can be compacted into the mega project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which aims to give a new dimension to China's neighbouring policy. More specifically, the role that Afghanistan plays in this project is regarding the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). In this context, and after the addition of Afghanistan to the BRI in 2016 (Encarnation & Fair, 2023), Beijing has been engaging with the country to assure its economic and political stability and, consequently, the success of BRI. This engagement has been translated into support of the Taliban since the beginning of Xi Jinping's administration in 2013. Encarnation and Fair (2023) argue for three reasons that explain this cooperation even before the Taliban were in power. Firstly, China saw the Taliban with strong political power, given the support the group received from Pakistan and the fragility of the former Afghan government, second, the relationship between China and the Taliban has a long history, and, lastly, the Taliban have been relatively receptive to Chinese concerns towards Uighur groups². Considering this paradigm, the strengthening of this relationship was no surprise after the Taliban returned to power in August 2021.

Naturally, for the CPEC to be successful, Pakistan's stability also needs to be consolidated. As seen in the previous section, the re-institution of the Taliban regime and Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan through militant groups have been a major concern regarding the spread of violence to the first country. In economic terms, this spill-over effect can «increase the cost of development projects, strain already stretched Pakistani security forces, and decrease companies' investment appetites» (Encarnation & Fair, 2023,

²Uighur groups are present in Xinjiang, an autonomous province in Northern China that shares a border with Afghanistan. The tensions between this ethnic group and the Chinese government (namely because of the oppressive and suppressive policies it has implemented towards the group) have led to a growing militancy and Islamization, creating a new terrorist threat in China (Canyon & Sitaraman, 2020).

p.13). Considering this, besides the support of the Taliban, Beijing has also increased political reconciliation efforts in Pakistan (Encarnation & Fair, 2023).

Although with less involvement than China, Iran shares concerns regarding the political and economic state of Afghanistan as the latter is considered a focal point in the "Look to the East" strategy (Verma, 2022b). This strategy is part of Iran's regional aspirations and aims at «fostering stronger political, economic, and strategic connections with countries in the Eastern hemisphere, particularly in Asia» (Azizi, 2023, p.1). The territory of Afghanistan is essential to achieving this connectivity and promoting Iran's economic influence in Central Asia (Kutty, 2014). Thus, in spite of the tensions regarding the anti-Shia positions, Iran benefits from good relations with the Taliban in geoeconomic terms and has adopted a dual policy of cooperation and restraint (Wu, 2022).

3.3 Geoeconomic implications

The third and last group of regional dynamics related to the re-institution of the Taliban regime focuses on the mass displacement that occurred after August 2021, with Afghan refugees being the largest segment of refugees «from and within Asia» (Ahmed, 2022, p.127).

The migration of the Afghan people to other countries is a phenomenon that has been happening since the arrival of Soviet troops to the country in 1979 (Verma, 2022a). The major destinations of this migration have been Iran and Pakistan due to several factors: «geographical proximity, historical, cultural and linguistic linkages, and flexible labour market» (Verma, 2022a, p.110). However, since 2001 and the growing presence of terrorist groups in Afghanistan, there has been an «increasing securitization of Afghan refugees» (Ahmed, 2022). Consequently, this has led to a deterioration of the living conditions of Afghan refugees, reflected in the October 2023 decision by Pakistan to deport undocumented Afghan refugees (Hussain, 2023). Afghan refugees have pressured the socioeconomic situation, especially in Pakistan, creating an unsustainable humanitarian problem in the region.

It is important to mention another facet of the refugee problem which refers to how both receiving countries have instrumentalized the issue, namely through deportation threats, to achieve foreign policy goals (Verma, 2022a; Ahmed, 2022). Thus, these regional

dynamics become even more complex as Afghan refugees turn into pawns for geopolitical victories.

4. The Failed State-Building of Afghanistan

With the previous two sections, it is possible to argue that the return to power of the Taliban has exacerbated the already existing political, economic, and social challenges at the internal and external levels. However, there is a wider reflection that should be made regarding the events of August 2021, which is the one that looks at them as the culmination of a failed State-Building strategy in Afghanistan.

The discussion around the question of 'what went wrong?' has been largely developed in academia and this section does not intend to cover all the perspectives and explanations that compose it. Considering the theme of this issue – Central Asia – and the phenomena analysed previously, my focus will be on the regional level and how some regional dynamics were undermined when forecasting a post-US Afghanistan.

Stepanova (2022) presents two trends from the early 21st century that explain the weakening of Western presence in Afghanistan. The first is the decline of the West's role in the region and the second relates to the «growing weight and assertiveness of regional powers in Afghanistan, especially Pakistan, Iran, China and India» (Stepanova, 2022, p.139). Although both trends demonstrate the central role regional rivalries play, this concern did not seem to have been present when deciding on the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. What Miklaucic (2023, p.983) calls «the prioritisation of security at all costs», can be seen as one of the US' mistakes in approaching the State-Building strategy for Afghanistan.

Continuing with Miklaucic's work (2023) and his ten State-Building lessons from Afghanistan, the ninth lesson seems particularly relevant to this context:

"9. State-building efforts always occur within a regional context. The stability and behaviour of neighbouring states are critical determinants of success. (...) If a neighbouring state is actively hostile to the state-building effort (...) it will be exceedingly difficult to consolidate stability." (Miklaucic, 2023, p.986).

This lesson is in accordance with what has been discussed in the previous section. From the proxy groups used by India and Pakistan on Afghan soil, Iran's incompatibility with the Taliban regarding anti-Shia positions, and Beijing's open cooperation with the Taliban,

to the growing hostility towards Afghan refugees in neighbouring countries, it becomes clear that there is no common regional effort in bringing stability to Afghanistan. Furthermore, the new developments in Afghanistan have promoted geostrategic competition among regional players (Wu, 2022), making it difficult (if not impossible) to have a unique response from the international community.

5. Conclusion

The present article analyses the period after the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan and the geopolitical scenario that followed this event. The text highlighted the complex interplay between national and regional factors in shaping Afghanistan's post-withdrawal landscape and underscored the challenges of achieving stability and development in the region.

On the national level, the negotiated withdrawal and the subsequent re-establishment of the Taliban regime ("Taliban 2.0") marked a significant setback for democratic and humanitarian progress in the country. In economic terms, cuts in international aid and sanctions exacerbated an already weak economy and led to a humanitarian crisis with mass displacements and refugee flows.

Considering the regional impacts of the Taliban's return, these can be divided into three categories: terrorism and security, geoeconomic implications, and mass migration and refugees. The three dimensions are interrelated and constitute the main concerns of neighbouring countries regarding the new political reality of Afghanistan. States like India, Pakistan, and Iran fear potential terrorist threats emanating from Afghanistan and engage in strategic competition to contain each other's influence. In its turn, China's geoeconomic interests in the Afghan territory have led to a solid engagement with the Taliban, aiming to safeguard its economic strategies, particularly in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative. Lastly, mass migration and refugee flows from Afghanistan have been straining neighbouring countries' resources, leading to complex geopolitical dynamics.

In conclusion, the events of August 2021 can be seen as the culmination of a failed state-building strategy in Afghanistan. An important contributor to this failure was the little importance given to regional dynamics and how they influence Afghanistan's stability. Regional rivalries and lack of cooperation among neighbouring states hindered efforts to

promote state-building in Afghanistan, leading to a fragmented response from the international community.

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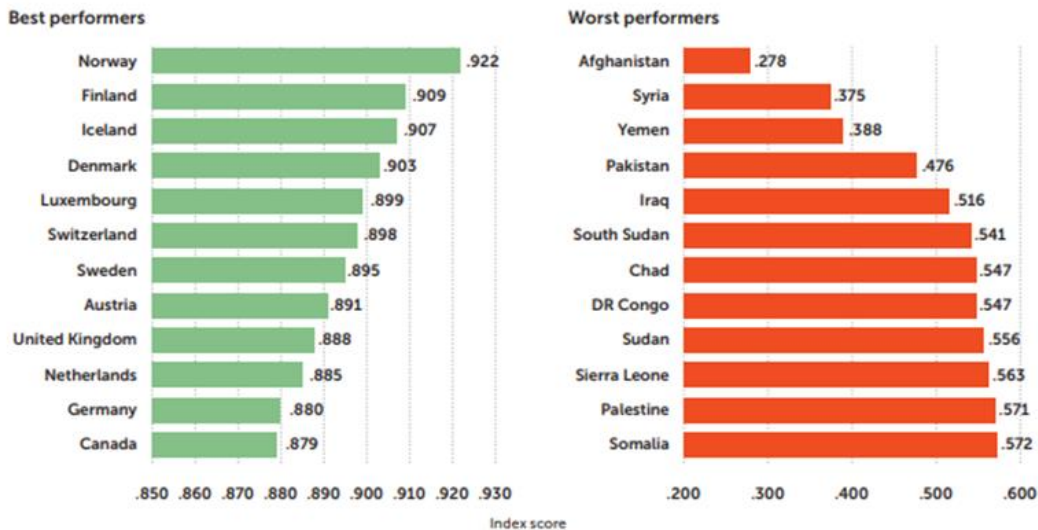
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Annexes

Annex 1: Best and worst performers on the Women Peace and Security Index 2021

FIGURE 2 The dozen best and worst performers on the WPS Index 2021



Note: Possible index scores range from a low of 0 to a high of 1. See statistical table 1 for data sources, detailed scores, and date ranges.
Source: Authors' estimates.



Source: Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security & Peace Research Institute Oslo (2021, p. 2).

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GEOPOLITICAL
DYNAMICS:
UNRAVELLING
THE TAPESTRY
OF CHINA AND
RUSSIA'S
EVOLVING
INFLUENCE IN
CENTRAL ASIA

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Geopolitical Dynamics: Unravelling the Tapestry of China and Russia's Evolving Influence in Central Asia

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Abstract

This article delves into the historical and geopolitical significance of Central Asia as a pivotal region, with a spotlight on the concurrent influences exerted by Russia and China, both distinct global powers. Through an examination of various phases and associated challenges, this article aims to explain the evolving power dynamics within the region. Through comparative analysis, this article evaluates Russia and China's dominance in the region, highlighting the differences and similarities in their approaches. Ultimately, the article aims to uncover the influence's implications on Central Asia's geopolitics.

Key words: Central Asia, Russia, China, geopolitics

1. Introduction

As a crossroads of strategic interests, Central Asia occupies a special place in the global geopolitical landscape. The region is made up of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, each of which has its own history and cultural heritage that shape the identity and dynamics of the region (Hynek, 2020, p. 74).

Central Asia has become a focal point of global attention once again, with Russia and China as key players influencing its political, economic, and security landscapes (Egorycheva, 2019, p.732). To understand the power dynamics within the region, it is crucial to comprehend the influences of these two global powers.

This article aims to explore the geopolitical significance of Central Asia as a crucial region, with a particular focus on the two global powers, Russia, and China. Through comparative analysis, it will evaluate the dominance of Russia and China in the region, highlighting the differences and similarities in their approaches.

2. Central Asia

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Central Asia has become a focal point of geopolitical debates. This has led to the revival of various theories, including Mackinder's concept of Heartland, which emphasizes the strategic importance of Central Asia as a potential powerhouse with vast resources (Patnaik, 2016, p. 8).

According to Halford Mackinder, a prominent author in the field of geopolitics, the geography of Central Asia is the most crucial location in the world, making it the pivotal region of global politics. He argued that controlling the Heartland would result in global governance (Hynek, 2020, p. 75). Recent events, such as the US intervention in Afghanistan, have increased the relevance of Central Asian countries as pivotal players on the global stage, particularly in the Eurasian context.

There are many interpretations of Mackinder's ideas in the complex geopolitical landscape of Central Asia. Kazakh scholars advocate for regional integration with structures such as the Commonwealth of Independent States to counterbalance Western influence. Uzbek scholars, as the most populous and militarily powerful country in Central Asia, assert their sovereignty as a basis for regional leadership (Patnaik, 2016, p. 8-9).

Situated between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, Central Asia has served as a bridge connecting these diverse regions and shaping geopolitical dynamics for centuries. The region has become a focal point for energy competition and investment due to its abundance of natural resources, including oil, natural gas and minerals. This has attracted global powers seeking to secure access to these valuable resources (Hynek, 2020, p. 75-79). Central Asia possesses oil and gas reserves, but lacks the capital and technology required for independent production. As a result, foreign countries are involved in production. The fall of the Soviet Union resulted in intense competition for control of the vast natural resources of the vulnerable newly independent Central Asian states (Zhou, He, & Yang, 2020, p. 1872).

Central Asia's geopolitical significance is also emphasized by its role in regional security dynamics, particularly in relation to terrorism. The region is vulnerable to threats, which pose challenges not only to its own stability but also to neighbouring countries and the broader international community. The region has become a focal point for international efforts to combat terrorism and promote stability, with regional security

initiatives, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), playing a crucial role (Chung, 2004).

Central Asia's geopolitical importance is multifaceted and far-reaching, driven by its strategic location, abundant resources, and complex historical dynamics. As major powers compete for influence and access to the region's resources, Central Asia remains a critical arena for geopolitical competition and cooperation, with implications that extend beyond its borders to shape the broader contours of global politics and security.

3. Russia and China's Strategic Interests

Russia has deep historical ties with Central Asia dating back to the nineteenth century. During the Soviet Union, Moscow exercised considerable political, economic, and military control over the region. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia maintained its influence in Central Asia through various means, as a "coloniser-colonised relationship" (Laruelle, 2009, p. 4).

In recent decades, Russia's approach can be divided into distinct phases. The first phase stretches from the collapse of the Soviet Union until the 1990s and was marked by an absence of a Central Asia policy. In the second half of the 1990s, a shift in Russian interests marked a change in Russian foreign policy. The abrupt switch can be attributed to the creation of the 'Primakov doctrine', which marked a change in Russia's international status and its shift to becoming a centre of influence in Central Asia (Oliphant, 2013, p. 3).

The third phase is related to Vladimir Putin's rise to power in 2000, which resulted in an evolution of Russia's involvement in Central Asia. Throughout this phase, Russia managed to maintain its position as the primary partner of Central Asian states. Russian influence on Central Asian policymaking has become more direct during this phase, as opposed to Western or Chinese influence (Laruelle, 2009, p. 4-5).

For geopolitical reasons, Russian interests in Central Asia are intricately linked to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The main focus of Russian interest is the control of the region's natural gas resources, more specifically the energy sector, a dominance that dates back to the Soviet Union (Naumkin, Zvyagelskaya, & Voiko, 2013). Russian companies established infrastructure and technology, giving them a favourable position over other competitors. Consequently, Gazprom controls the Central Asian pipeline network, which reinforces Russia's regional position and counters the efforts of the European Union to diversify gas

imports. This strategy aligns with Mackinder's geopolitical theories, as Russia leverages its control over natural resources to assert dominance in the region (Hynek, 2020, p. 81).

Russia is consolidating its influence in Central Asia, securing a stable position in regional geopolitics, and maintaining a stronghold in the critical energy sector through the use of technology, financial resources, and strategic infrastructure plans (Hynek, 2020).

The rise of China as a new global power has significantly altered the geopolitical landscape of Central Asia. China has quickly become one of the top global energy consumers, but it faces a challenge due to limited domestic supply of oil and gas. To address this issue, China is seeking to establish new providers and economic relations with neighbouring regions that are rich in oil and gas resources (Zhou, He, & Yang, 2020, p. 1873).

China's interest in Central Asia's resources has developed into a complex and deep-rooted cooperation. China has invested in several Central Asian projects as it seeks to diversify its supply channels amid growing energy security concerns over its dependence on Middle Eastern oil. Kazakhstan currently plays a significant role in the pipeline agreements and China's energy security (Niquet, 2006, p. 6). Turkmenistan is an important natural gas supplier to China, while Kazakhstan plays a significant role in oil imports (Zhou, He, & Yang, 2020, p. 1877).

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a vast infrastructure project that aims to strengthen the relationship between China and Central Asian countries. (Kazantsev, Medvedeva, & Safranchuk, 2021, p. 58) Through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China aims to expand its influence in Central Asia by deepening its exploration, development, and production of oil and gas (Zhou, He, & Yang, 2020, p. 1882).

One of the other reasons for China's engagement in Central Asia is security concerns. China aims to foster economic ties with Central Asia while breaking cultural and ethnic ties between Xinjiang and the region. This commitment to regional stability and cooperation is highlighted by projects such as the Shanghai Group and strategic partnerships with Central Asian nations (Niquet, 2006, p. 1).

Although Russia and China both have strategic interests in Central Asia, their approaches to the region are not aligned, leading to competition rather than cooperation between the two powers (Egorycheva, 2019, p. 736).

Russia and China have different approaches to their involvement in Central Asia. Russia has historical ties to the region and focuses on controlling energy infrastructure and cultural legacy. Russian companies have invested in key sectors, such as oil and gas. One example is the Central Asia-Center gas pipeline network, which links the region to Russia. Moscow prioritises bilateral trade agreements and economic partnerships with Central Asian states. It often leverages its energy resources and market access as bargaining chips (Oliphant, 2013, p. 6).

Russia provides military education and training for local officers, as well as a strong military presence through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) (DUBNOV, 2018, p. 3). Russia's military presence is key to maintaining its influence in the region. China, on the other hand, uses economic incentives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) instead of military tools. Both countries aim to stabilize Central Asian countries, but through different means. China's goal is to secure external markets for its companies, especially in infrastructure development. Beijing advocates for non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries and emphasises regional security mechanisms, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Hynek, 2020, p. 85).

Despite their competing interests, Russia and China cooperate in Central Asia, particularly in areas such as security, counterterrorism, and regional stability. Both countries are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a regional security alliance that aims to address common security challenges in Central Asia and promote cooperation among its members (Niquet, 2006).

4. Implications for Central Asia's Geopolitics

Central Asian states are currently balancing their relations with Russia and China, two major powers with interests in the region. To maximize benefits while mitigating risks, these countries must carefully navigate their relationships with both powers. It is important to maintain objectivity and avoid biased language when discussing these relationships (Indeo, 2010, p. 276).

Central Asian states pursue 'multivector' policies to balance the influence of Russia and China. These policies extend beyond China and Russia, as these states are also strengthening their relationships with Western countries to ensure a third option in the

growing conflicts between Russia and the West, and between China and the United States (Kazantsev, Medvedeva, & Safranchuk, 2021, p. 58).

Central Asia's geopolitical dynamics have led to regional integration efforts and multilateral cooperation initiatives aimed at promoting stability, economic development, mutual prosperity, trade, and infrastructure development. The Central Asian states are members of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), partnerships created to better navigate external pressures and assert their interests on the global stage (Kazantsev, Medvedeva, & Safranchuk, 2021, p. 58).

5. Conclusion

The influence of Russia and China in Central Asia has changed over time, influenced by geopolitical dynamics and the interests of regional and global actors. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Central Asia has undergone several phases of influence, each with its own challenges and opportunities (Laruelle, 2009, p.4).

At first, Russia maintained its dominance in the region, using its historical ties and military presence to assert control over Central Asian states. However, China's emergence as an economic powerhouse has challenged Russia's position in Central Asia. Beijing has become a key player in the region's development, turning Central Asia into a battleground for influence between Russia and China.

Competing interests and alliances are shaping the region's geopolitical landscape. Despite tensions, Russia and China cooperate in Central Asia, recognizing the importance of stability and security for their shared interests in the region. The evolving power dynamics in Central Asia reflect the complex interplay of historical legacies, economic interests, and geopolitical rivalries that define the contemporary geopolitical landscape of the region (Laruelle & Peyrouse, "China as a Neighbor: Central Asian Perspectives and Strategies", 2009, p. 18).

In the current global context, no Central Asian state can afford to adopt overtly anti-Russian policies, and anti-Chinese policies even less so. The regimes and their societies have no other choice but to deal with their two neighbours and seek to benefit as much as possible from the alliance between Moscow and Beijing, as well as their growing rivalry

(Laruelle & Peyrouse, "China as a Neighbor: Central Asian Perspectives and Strategies", 2009, p.13).

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CHINA-CENTRAL
ASIA
COOPERATION
FOR REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT:
CHINA ROLE ON
KYRGYZSTAN'S
ROAD TO
"DEFRAGILIZATION"

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China-Central Asia Cooperation for Regional Development: China Role on Kyrgyzstan's Road to "Defragilization"

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Abstract

In the past, China established cooperation with Central Asia with the main objective of safeguarding its border from cross-border terrorism. This was during a time when the Central Asian countries were initiating their process of state-building and were still very fragile. To achieve this, China recognised that promoting economic development in Central Asia and ensuring regional connectivity were crucial. Kyrgyzstan is one of the five Central Asian states and shares a border with China. It has been considered one of the most fragile states in the region due to its weak economy and lack of state legitimacy, and the presence of terrorist groups. In the last fifteen years, China has increased its investment in Kyrgyzstan to promote economic growth and assist in the state-building process, aiming for securitization. This paper aims to explore China's efforts towards "defragilization" in Kyrgyzstan and the potential future of cooperation between the two nations.

Key words: Kyrgyzstan, China, State-Building, Defragilization, Central Asia

1. Introduction

In a broad sense, state-building can be seen as a series of processes, from the creation of a state to the present, of institutional consolidation, socio-political stabilization, and sustainable development, that are influenced by geostrategic, economic, social, and ethno-cultural factors (Henning, 2017). Following the collapse of the USSR, Kyrgyzstan, as one of the newly formed Central Asian Republics (CARs)¹, began the process of state-building by implementing political and economic reforms to adjust to the new global reality. However, the early years were marked by economic and social poverty, increasing corruption and political authoritarianism (Azizian, 2006, pp. 93–94). This resulted in national fragilization and posed security challenges for China.

¹ Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

The Chinese strategy for Kyrgyzstan has always aimed to understand national needs and promote development to achieve security near its borders. Prior to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China's involvement in meeting Kyrgyzstan's needs was mainly through regional projects such as the New Eurasian Land Bridge (NELB), the Central Asian Republics Economic Cooperation (CAREC) programme, the Quadrilateral Traffic in Transit Agreement (QTTA), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Although these initiatives aimed to achieve regional development, the main projects were developed with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan as the regional centre in mind. This meant that lower investment was directed towards the other CARs. For Kyrgyzstan, an economy dependent on transport infrastructure, such low levels of investment in diversifying trade routes led to an economic decline that allowed dissident groups to proliferate.

Because of this, in 2008, the country was placed within the first 25% of most fragile countries in the world, according to the Fragile States Index (FSI) (FSI, 2023). For China, this meant that a new strategy should be adopted in order to develop the Kyrgyz economy and promote national stability. In 2013, China made the biggest investment ever in development plans for Kyrgyzstan and, in 2016, it became the Kyrgyz largest investor. In this sense, this paper aims to understand how China has sought to “defragilize” Kyrgyzstan in order to secure its borders and it examines how China has contributed to the development of the Central Asian country, how Kyrgyzstan has benefited from the regional initiatives created by China, and what the future path of cooperation between the two might be like.

2. How China-Central Asia Cooperation Began: An Overlook

As noted above, the newly formed CARs began the process of state-building after the collapse of the USSR, but the early years of these countries were marked by economic and social poverty, increasing corruption and political authoritarianism. The combination of these factors resulted in a general regional fragilization that posed security challenges for China, including the proliferation of terrorist groups such as the East Turkestan Islamic

Movement (ETIM)², in Xinjiang, where the process of forced Hanification fuelled the separatist sentiment among the Islamic Uyghurs communities (Xu et al., 2014).

Because of this, China started to build a development plan for Central Asia that aimed to address its regional connectivity problems, aiming to reduce regional economic fragility and promote interconnectivity. Even though some of the CARs were energy-rich, such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, all five countries were highly dependent on connectivity to achieve market diversification and regional interconnectivity. To address this issue, originally China presented the NELB, which was a railway project with the main objective of connecting China and the CARs to Europe and the Middle East via a web of multiple railways (China SCIO, 2020; Otsuka, 2001, pp. 43–47). However, due to the CAR's lack of logistical and economic capacity, the initiative failed to produce the desired results, perpetuating slow regional economic growth, and allowing groups such as ETIM to proliferate.

To meet this challenge, in the late 1990s, China decided to launch a new connectivity project called CAREC, which aimed to provide Central Asia with interconnectivity and access to the sea via Pakistan in a future corridor. Between the CARs, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were the ones that benefited the most from this approach. Since both countries weren't energy-rich, they were highly dependent on transport infrastructure development and foreign investment and the CAREC fitted perfectly in their national interests (Butt & Butt, 2015, p. 34). In the specific case of Kyrgyzstan, China also promoted the QTTA signed with Pakistan and Kazakhstan in 1995, which established an Almaty-Bishkek-Kashgar-Karachi route through the Khunjab Pass, providing the Kyrgyz access to sea (Shoaib, 2015). At the same time, with the crescendo of cross-border terrorism, the 9/11 incident and the proliferation of the ETIM in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, China also proposed an initiative of security cooperation to the CARs through the SCO.

All of these projects created a relationship of interdependence between China and the CARs, being at the same time crucial for the development of Central Asia and for the region securitization. On one side, Central Asia benefited from investment in interregional connectivity, in regional energy and transport infrastructure, and the promise of access to

² These groups, particularly ETIM, would exploit social discontent with poverty and corruption among Central Asia's Islamic populations to recruit members and thereby pose a greater threat to China.

sea. On the other side, China benefited from cross-border security cooperation, simplified and cheaper access to energy resources and quicker access to Europe and the Middle East. However, despite the benefits gained by both sides through these initial initiatives, in the specific case of Kyrgyzstan, it didn't grow as expected and continued to suffer from a fragile economy that provoked national instability and the proliferation of extremist groups. However, China chose to tackle the problem of the Kyrgyz case directly, as will be seen in the next section.

3. Promoting Stability and Development in Kyrgyzstan through Regional Initiatives

According to the FSI, Kyrgyzstan ranks 69th making it the most fragile of the CARs (FSI, 2023). By analysing the past FSI results, it can be perceived that patterns for Kyrgyz fragility are centred around weak state cohesion, resulting in low government legitimacy, and slow economic growth (ADB, 2020; FSI, 2023). However, while this may sound alarming, Kyrgyzstan has steadily improved over the past decade, showing good signs of development.

As already mentioned, unlike the other CARs, Kyrgyzstan is not rich in energy resources, making it, as a result, highly dependent on transport connectivity and foreign investment to improve economically. It could be argued that China attempted to address the transport connectivity issue in the past through regional connectivity projects such as the NELB and CAREC. Yet, the slow pace of these initiatives failed to produce the desired results in a timely manner. Also, it was not until 2010 that China finished the development of the CAREC lines 5 and 6 that granted the CARs access to the Indian Ocean through Pakistan (ADB, 2010). For Kyrgyzstan, this slow pace hindered market growth and economic development. By 2012, this led the country to the 41st position within the FSI due to social poverty and the consequent proliferation of terrorist groups such as ETIM. This was alarming for China since it meant that Xinjiang Uyghurs were still receiving support from ETIM and that the latter was developing near Chinese borders.

Although Kyrgyzstan contributed to the suppression of these groups through the framework of the SCO, China understood that it needed to improve both Xinjiang's and Kyrgyzstan's economic growth to improve the social enrichment and discourage local population from joining such groups (ICG, 2013, pp. 11–12). Prior to the BRI, China's primary strategy was focused on ensuring Kyrgyzstan's connection to international transport routes

and developing its energy sector to address its energy crisis. To accomplish this goal, China invested 898.4 million USD between 2008 and 2012 in three main projects: rehabilitating the Osh-Sarytash-Irkeshtam and Bishkek-Naryn-Torugart CAREC roads, modernizing national electricity transmission lines, and constructing a 500kV electricity substation in Datka that would become vital for the Kyrgyz achievement of energy independence, in 2015, and for the Kyrgyz integration in the CASA-1000 project, in 2016 (IPIG, 2023; Mogilevskii, 2019, p. 7). These projects not only developed Kyrgyz connectivity, but also created jobs and contributed to the reduction of social poverty³. Around the same time, China began investing in Kyrgyzstan's mining industry⁴, which caused social unrest due to its environmental impact (Sheraliev, 2021). However, according to the FSI, figures on social disruption have improved since then.

In 2013, China chose Central Asia to announce the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB), the land corridor of the BRI, to the world as an interregional game-changer (Xinhua Staff, 2016). The choice of Central Asia was no coincidence since China was focused into taking advantage of the energy-rich CARs in order to diminish its energy dependence, essential for the fast-growing Chinese economy, and in turning the landlocked Central Asia in a major international transit hub by making it the centre of land interregional connectivity in order to promote regional development and border securitization (Melnikovová, 2020, pp. 239–241). Before the BRI, the Chinese investment was low in terms of capital, however, it directly met Kyrgyzstan's needs in their most fragile energy and transport sectors. Also, this investment through the BRI acted as a regional game-changer, providing Kyrgyzstan with a vital source of foreign investment and an increase in bilateral trade that allowed for socio-economic improvement and, consequently, national securitisation.

Through the BRI, China bolstered its investment in Kyrgyzstan and, in 2013 alone, Kyrgyzstan received a sum of 1.99 billion USD for development projects, mainly on the construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan Gas Pipeline (Mogilevskii, 2019, pp. 7–8). Although this initial BRI investment was low when compared to other CARs, for Kyrgyzstan it was a

³ This was particularly the case after the Melon Revolution of 2010, when the authoritarian government was deposed and the level of Chinese investment increased, helping to stabilise Kyrgyzstan's corruption-ridden economy at the time.

⁴ The mining industry, together with agriculture, is the biggest national industry in Kyrgyzstan, being the main export gold.

significant step towards achieving economic development and regional integration. Chinese direct investment in Kyrgyzstan also increased after 2013, and in 2016 China became the largest investor in the country, mainly in the transport infrastructure development, through railway and road projects, and in the energy sector (Changzhi et al., 2024). In 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, China had already invested 4.34 billion USD in Kyrgyzstan (Taliga, 2021, p. 13). As a result of the consistent investment in transport infrastructure and in the energy sector, the Kyrgyz economy grew significantly, lowering the rates of social poverty and social disrupt, and the country reached its highest ranking within the FSI, placing 73rd.

Despite the economic slowdown during the pandemic years, Kyrgyzstan was able to stabilise its economy through development projects and Chinese investment, and to improve its internal securitisation within the SCO framework (Xinhua Staff, 2023b). This has resulted in increased social stability, greater state cohesion, and a reduction in the proliferation of terrorist groups. During this time, the country's lowest ranking was 66th in the FSI. However, the available indicators suggest that the country has improved significantly, which has led to its current ranking of 69th. In 2022, Chinese investment resumed to the pre-COVID levels with the reinvestment on three game-changer projects for Kyrgyzstan: The China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway (CKU), the Central Asia-China pipeline (CAC) Line D development, and the North-South Alternative Road (NSAR).

While the CKU will allow Kyrgyzstan to become an essential part of the southern route for the China-Europe freight railway, the CAC Line D, or Turkmenistan-China pipeline, will allow Kyrgyzstan to develop a greater role in energy security issues in Central Asia (Aminjonov & Dovgalyuk, 2023; Donnellon-May, 2023; Imamova, 2023; MTRKR, 2019). The NSAR project is promising as it combines a parallel Jalal-Abad–Balykchy road to the Bishkek-Osh highway and the Arpu-Balikchi section of the CKU (China SCIO, 2023; LC Staff, 2020; MTRKR, 2019; Muratbekova, 2020). This Kazakhstan-Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan route can serve in the future as a regional interconnection between the future China-Central West Asia Economic Corridor (CCWAEC) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), mainly after Pakistan announced the opening of the Khunjab Pass year-round, greatly improving the old QTTA framework (Changzhi et al., 2024; IRU Staff, 2023; Xinhua Staff, 2023a). Although the specific costs of most of the new projects are still unknown, it is estimated that China will spend a total of 12.06 billion USD between the CAC

Line D (6.7 billion USD), of which a small portion will be invested in the Kyrgyz line, the CKU (4.5 billion USD), where Kyrgyzstan is expected to take the bulk of the investment, and the NSAR (860 million USD) (Aminjonov & Dovgalyuk, 2023; Donnellon-May, 2023; Kabar Staff, 2022).



Figure 2 – The CKU Project (Source: TTP)

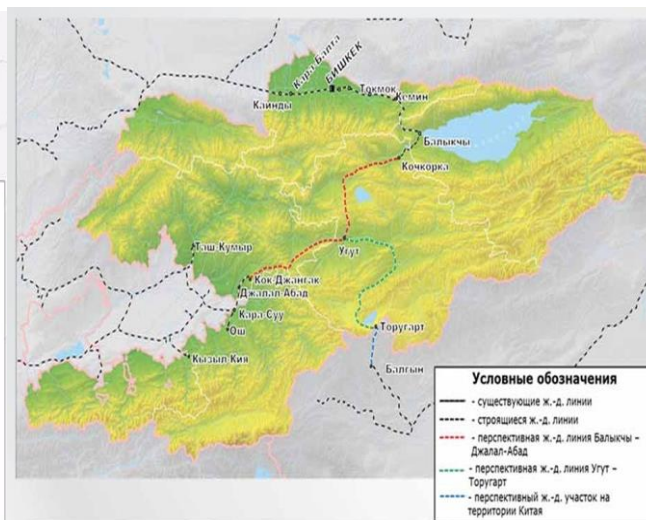


Figure 1 – The NSAR project (Source: MTRKR)

In this sense, some authors argue that Chinese investment in Kyrgyzstan, especially since its entry into the BRI, when added to Kyrgyzstan's debt to China, could possibly mean that Kyrgyzstan could become an example of a “debt-trap” in the near future, which would provoke economic decline and state fragility (Akmoldoev, 2022, p. 9; Jaborov, 2018, pp. 34–35; Karimov & Kurbonmuratov, 2023). In a nutshell, the idea of “debt-trap” requires, on the one hand, that the investor state wants to create a relationship of dependency and, on the other hand, that the recipient state accepts the investment without considering its ability to repay the amount invested. However, when discussing the Sino-Kyrgyz case, it’s not correct to consider the situation as a debt-trap for the following reasons.

First, although Kyrgyzstan initially responded assertively to China's call for regional projects, it is now taking a more selective approach to meet its own needs and interests (Changzhi et al., 2024). This is evident in the recent CKU, NSAR, and CAC Line D projects, which are directly connected to Kyrgyzstan's national interests in energy independence and transport infrastructure development. Second, Chinese-backed development always had the main objective of allowing Kyrgyzstan's economy to grow in order to reduce the possibility of instability causing cross-border terrorism. Because of this, it would be counterproductive for China, after all these years developing the Kyrgyz economy to

stabilize the country and secure borders, to provoke a situation of economic instability that could disrupt this stability and strengthen groups like ETIM. Lastly, the Kyrgyz debt management strategy for 2022-2024 outlines that Kyrgyzstan expects to repay the bulk of its debt to Chinese stakeholders between 2025-2027, with subsequent repayments until 2035, protecting the national economy through an assertive approach (Muratalieva, 2023). All of this underscores the idea that the "debt trap" references to Sino-Kyrgyz relations are more a form of "China-threat" propaganda than an actual reality.

As a concluding remark, it is worth noting that last year saw the inaugural China-Central Asia Summit (CCAS) and the issuance of the Xi'an Declaration. The participating countries agreed to enhance regional and sub-national cooperation in various areas, including fossil fuels, renewable energy, education, science, tourism, healthcare, and transport infrastructure (CGTN Staff, 2023; Changzhi et al., 2024). Another outcome agreed between all the members was the strengthening in agricultural cooperation, with China agreeing in increasing its investment and imports of agricultural products from Central Asia (CGTN Staff, 2023). Specially for Kyrgyzstan, a country highly dependent on transport infrastructure development and where one of the two main internal economic sectors is agriculture, it could mean a significant economic boost, mainly on the diversification of exports. This outcome also contributes to the refutation of the 'debt-trap' argument and highlights China's commitment to enhancing Kyrgyzstan's internal stability and contributing significantly to the Kyrgyz "defragilization".

4. Conclusion

Kyrgyzstan, despite being the most fragile state in Central Asia, has successfully undergone a process of "defragilization". This article argues that China played a significant role in this process by responding to Kyrgyz needs through increased investment in transport infrastructure, energy, and mining after 2008. Over the last decade, Kyrgyzstan has made significant progress in terms of social stability, state legitimacy, and economic growth, setting a positive example for state-building. Despite being the most fragile state in the CARs, Kyrgyzstan's notable improvements demonstrate the overall progress being made in Central Asia. In 2024, Kyrgyzstan is expected to experience further economic growth due to the entry into force of the Xi'an Declaration and cooperation in key sectors of the CARs' economies, particularly agriculture and green energy. This growth is likely to result in an

increased cooperation within the SCO and more Chinese investment, strongly contributing to the Kyrgyz state-building.

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A DIPLOMACIA
DA ÁGUA NA
ÁSIA CENTRAL –
ENTRE A
COOPERAÇÃO, O
COMPROMISSO E
O CONFLITO

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A Diplomacia da Água na Ásia Central – entre a Cooperação, o Compromisso e o Conflito.

JOSÉ CHAÍÇA

Resumo

A disputa por recursos, na Ásia Central, não se encontra apenas delimitada aos habituais recursos minerais ou energéticos. A água, escassa na região, tem representado ao longo dos tempos focos de tensão e de conflito pelo seu controlo, entre os povos daquela região. Com uma distribuição geográfica assimétrica, este recurso foi, recorrentemente, objeto de tentativas de entendimentos e políticas regionais quanto à sua utilização, numa tentativa de colmatar os desequilíbrios. Esses acordos revelaram-se insatisfatórios, ineficazes e até mesmo com consequências desastrosas, particularmente no século passado. Como forma de ultrapassar esses impasses, têm sido estabelecidos ao longo dos últimos anos, novos compromissos e mecanismos de cooperação entre os países da região. Apesar de promissores, estes avanços têm sido marcados por avanços e recuos, colocando a questão sobre o futuro da distribuição e utilização da água na Ásia Central, que se pretende equitativa e racional, ainda em aberto.

Palavras-chaves: Diplomacia da Água, Ásia Central, Água, Recurso hídrico

1. Introdução

A Ásia Central é caracterizada por um relevo que varia entre montanhas com glaciares, planícies férteis e até mesmo alguns desertos. O clima varia entre o semiárido a árido, com uma distribuição de precipitação irregular, o que acaba por ter um grande impacto na disponibilidade da água, como recurso (Hakala, E., Mustasilta, K., Hadi, M., 2023). Existem cinco grandes rios na região e correspondentes bacias hidrográficas, que fazem parte da designada bacia do mar de Aral, que atravessam grandes extensões de cinco países da região, nomeadamente o Cazaquistão, o Quirguistão, o Tajiquistão, o Turquemenistão e o Uzbequistão, mas com distribuição desigual entre estes (Russell, 2018). Existem também aquíferos partilhados, assim como alguns lagos e reservatórios naturais, mas são os rios Amu Darya e o Syr Darya, ao ocuparem 33% do território desta região, considerados os

maiores e mais importantes fornecedores de água para a mesma. Ambos nascem em cadeias montanhosas onde ocorrem volumes significativos de precipitação, sendo o Amu Darya originário do Tajiquistão e o Syr Darya do Quirguistão. Cerca de 80% dos habitantes da Ásia Central vivem nestas bacias e os dois rios, entre eles, fornecem cerca de 90% da água à região (FAO, 2012).

Apesar de ter um papel predominante nas economias da Ásia Central, a água é um recurso escasso (Mosello, 2008). Se nos montanhosos Quirguistão e Tajiquistão, a montante dos grandes rios, predomina a produção de eletricidade, a jusante, no Turquemenistão e no Uzbequistão predomina a agricultura. É precisamente esta atividade, com os seus grandes consumos, que promove um stress hídrico em toda a região (Russell, 2018). Torna-se assim evidente tentar encontrar um equilíbrio, entre as necessidades de uns e as de outros pela cooperação, apesar de surgirem por vezes tensões entre os interesses dos países a montante, e dos que se encontram a jusante (FAO, 2012). Além disso, a utilização intensiva da água tem deixado marcas no meio ambiente. Na era soviética, ao divergirem as águas dos dois maiores rios para a consecução de enormes projetos de engenharia ambiental, largas extensões de solos desertificados foram transformadas em terras férteis, à custa do caudal que desaguava no mar de Aral. O mar, com os caudais dos afluentes substancialmente reduzidos, encolheu gradualmente, até ficar reduzido a uma pequena fração do seu volume (Russell, 2018). De notar ainda que, pela utilização maciça de água para irrigação, criou-se outro problema que foi o do aumento da salinidade, por evaporação da água, nos solos (FAO, 2012).

A irrigação tem assim um papel central nas economias da Ásia Central (FAO, 2012). Mas as infraestruturas de irrigação são antiquadas e necessitam de manutenção, estando permanentemente sujeitas a perdas e que em conjunto com políticas agrícolas pouco sustentáveis, criaram uma necessidade de enormes fornecimentos de água (Russell, 2018). Procura-se, atualmente e para o futuro, uma melhor cooperação entre os países, num quadro de escassez de recursos e fazendo face a dois desafios, nomeadamente, o do crescimento populacional e o das alterações climáticas.

2. A utilização da água para produção – o dilema agricultura vs. energia

Sendo a principal atividade destes países a agricultura, em culturas intensivas como a do algodão, por exemplo, não é assim de estranhar que a maior parte da água seja gasta nesta

atividade. Com precipitação escassa e mal distribuída, estes países dependem da irrigação para cobrir os cerca de 100.000 Km² cultivados. Isto coloca a agricultura como o maior utilizador deste recurso, contribuindo para uma elevada utilização per capita, maior do que em muitos países ocidentais (Russell, 2018). Como já referenciado, existe uma assimetria na distribuição natural dos recursos energéticos. Por um lado, o Quirguistão e o Tajiquistão são países com grande potencial hidroelétrico, conseguindo garantir, em grande parte, as suas autonomias energéticas. Apesar de neles estarem estabelecidas as duas maiores instalações de produção hidroelétrica da região, uma por país, e por as alternativas a este recurso energético serem quase inexistentes, estes procuram desenvolver ainda mais estas capacidades (FAO, 2012). Já os outros países são dotados de reservas significativas de energia fóssil, conseguindo dessa forma, não só abastecer os seus mercados internos, como fornecer o mercado externo (Duzdaban, 2020).

O fluxo de água das barragens, a montante, acaba por afetar a agricultura, a jusante, pela sua irregularidade. Os países a jusante, que dependem da agricultura, privilegiam uma libertação de água durante a época das colheitas (primavera e verão), acabando por coincidir com uma maior capacidade armazenada (por chuvas e degelos) nas barragens. Mas os países a montante preferem libertar a água nos meses de inverno, para produzir mais eletricidade, para suprimir necessidades internas. Além disso, a construção de novas barragens, a montante, esbarra na necessidade de efetivar o seu enchimento e esse processo pode levar algum tempo (nalguns casos, anos), afetando ainda mais o fluxo de água disponível para libertação nos rios, durante esse período.

3. A utilização da água para utilização doméstica

Apesar das melhorias no abastecimento doméstico ocorridas ao longo das últimas décadas, ainda existe uma parte da população sem acesso a uma fonte de água limpa, particularmente no Tajiquistão. Este é um problema que afeta transversalmente todos os países, nas zonas rurais, mas ao qual as zonas urbanas não estão imunes, onde ocorrem algumas limitações (FAO, 2012). A justificação para esta situação está relacionada com a limitação de fundos disponíveis, quer para construção, quer para manutenção, dos sistemas de distribuição de água (Russell, 2018).

4. Um histórico de escassez de água – entre a cooperação, o compromisso e o conflito

Por ser uma necessidade absoluta, a busca por entendimentos tem sido constante entre estes cinco países, durante as últimas décadas. A elaboração de acordos, de resoluções, de comissões de estudo e de análise, de criação de organizações transnacionais e de programas específicos, todos eles focados na melhor forma de gerir as águas transnacionais, têm sido o retrato dessa preocupação (FAO, 2012).

No tempo da União Soviética, todos os países desta região eram administrados e geridos como se de um único país se tratassem, com pouca contemplação entre as diferentes necessidades de cada país. A título de exemplo, foram construídas estruturas de irrigação com pouca consideração pelas fronteiras administrativas, que entrecruzavam as mesmas, repetidamente, consoante as necessidades. Foi dada prioridade à irrigação das culturas de algodão durante o verão, no Uzbequistão, relegando para segundo plano as necessidades dos restantes países como, por exemplo, as do Quirguistão por eletricidade, no inverno. O planeamento centralizado suprimia as falhas através de auxílio económico, o que no caso do Quirguistão correspondia a receber compensações, sob a forma de combustível e eletricidade para aquecimento e de financiamento para a manutenção das barragens (Russell, 2018).

Após o final da era soviética, em 1992, procurou abordar-se e melhorar a cooperação entre estes países, com a assinatura do acordo de Almaty, exclusivamente para a gestão e conservação dos recursos aquáticos transnacionais (Duzdaban, 2020). Seguiu-se o estabelecimento de uma série de acordos e organizações multilaterais entre eles, sempre com a preocupação de garantir as necessidades de cada um dos intervenientes, pela cooperação. São exemplos destes esforços o estabelecimento da comissão interestadual para a coordenação da água na Ásia Central (ICWC), da comissão interestadual para o desenvolvimento sustentável (ICSD), do conselho interestadual para a bacia do mar de Aral (ICAB) e do fundo internacional para preservar o mar de Aral (IFAS) (Mosello, 2008).

Estes entendimentos foram mais difíceis de implementar do que o previsto, e os acordos e organismos revelaram-se ineficazes para fomentar a cooperação necessária, pois os mesmos tinham como pano de fundo limitações estruturais políticas, sociais e económicas. As primeiras derivavam da pouca experiência de governação das lideranças destes países, todas recém-independentes. As segundas, prendiam-se com um aumento

populacional constante e o reemergir de tensões étnicas. As terceiras estavam relacionadas com o pouco dinamismo revelado pelas economias destes países e pelas tensões existentes entre os setores de produção agrícola e hidroelétrica. Além disso, as organizações multilaterais mostravam-se fragilizadas e com dificuldades de financiamento, revelando limitações sérias e falta de capacidade de ação (Mosello, 2008). Na sequência destes constrangimentos, começaram a surgir tensões, que por vezes descambavam em escaramuças entre populações, nas regiões fronteiriças. A situação manteve-se tensa durante alguns anos, chegando a ocorrer o encerramento de fronteiras, a interrupção do fornecimento de eletricidade e água, a ocorrência de conflitos étnicos e até mesmo suspeitas, nunca confirmadas, de pequenas incursões militares (Mosello, 2018). Na sequência, muitos dos acordos multilaterais ficaram suspensos e as interdependências geradoras de tensões mantiveram-se por resolver, acabando por afetar a estabilidade regional. A herança soviética, com as suas políticas e opções estratégicas, revelava-se pesada ou difícil de transpor e não muitas vezes, incompatível com os interesses antagónicos dos intervenientes (Duzdaban, 2020).

Apesar destes primeiros anos pós-independência conturbados, os países nunca deixaram de procurar a cooperação, nomeadamente através das instituições criadas entre eles. Apesar dos avanços alcançados e mesmo registando uma melhoria nas relações governamentais entre eles, houve obstáculos que persistiram. Apesar da regulação criada, continuava a persistir dificuldades em garantir um fluxo estável das águas, assim como da operação de um sistema integrado de energia para a região. Houve também falta de visão aquando da firmação dos acordos, pois estes destinavam-se a resolver questões imediatas e não permitiam uma adaptação dos mesmos, para acordos de médio e longo prazo. Os regimes de compensações monetárias, apesar de instituídos, revelaram falhas, assim como as obrigações mútuas de financiamento, essenciais para a construção, manutenção e operação de infraestruturas hidráulicas de exploração conjunta (Ziganshina, D. R., Sorokim, A. G., Muminov, Sh. Kh., Shamsiev, Kh. A., 2023). Apesar disto, os países souberam reconhecer as suas falhas e foram, gradualmente, alcançados novos níveis de compreensão e cooperação, ao nível da distribuição de recursos. A título de exemplo, o Uzbequistão que durante muitos anos se opôs à construção de novas barragens a montante, deixou de levantar objeções à construção das mesmas, no Quirguistão e no Tadjiquistão (Russell, 2018).

5. Conclusão

A resposta aos problemas, não sendo simples, não são de todo impossíveis e não serão alcançados de uma forma unificada ou por uma única organização. Essas respostas virão por aprendizagem com os erros e baseadas em princípios de compromisso, coordenação, solidariedade e responsabilização conjunta, formuladas por um conjunto de propostas ao nível técnico, legal e por implementação de medidas, quer institucionais, quer económico-financeiras (Ziganshina, D. R., Sorokim, A. G., Muminov, Sh. Kh., Shamsiev, Kh. A, 2023).

Assim, devem os Estados melhorar as organizações existentes, por reformulação das mesmas e aproveitando a experiência adquirida, criando melhores mecanismos de gestão e de coordenação. A participação de atores não estatais na administração e gestão, como apoio e suporte às decisões e políticas criadas, deverá ser uma prioridade, assim como a melhoria dos mecanismos de interação e entreajuda, nomeadamente, financeiros ou económicos.

Sobre este último ponto, existe a necessidade de melhorar os acordos multilaterais, relacionados com os preços ou compensações pela venda ou utilização de energia hidroelétrica, da água ou de outros recursos energéticos. Deverão ser revistos, também, os custos inerentes à regularização dos fluxos de água e de operação de infraestruturas hidráulicas, procurando fixá-los em acordos de longa duração. Por último, procurar chegar a um acordo para desenvolvimento de um mercado energético comum (Ziganshina, D. R., Sorokim, A. G., Muminov, Sh. Kh., Shamsiev, Kh. A, 2023).

Um exemplo destas medidas foi a promoção de uma alteração do tipo de culturas, na agricultura. O algodão continua a ter importância, mas têm-se procurado introduzir culturas mais eficientes, quanto à utilização da água. Outro exemplo passa também pela manutenção programada de estruturas hidráulicas, para promover a poupança da água por redução das fugas existentes. A redução destas, acaba por ter um efeito secundário benéfico que é o de contribuir para uma redução da salinidade nos solos. Há também necessidade de implementar melhorias ao nível da gestão da água, pois esta continua a ser subsidiada e a ser adquirida, pelos agricultores, a preços baixos, situação que fomenta o desperdício. Um preço mais próximo do real criará uma maior consciencialização para o valor da água e contribuirá para uma melhor manutenção da rede de distribuição.

Quanto à cooperação, esta tem registado avanços, através de uma consciencialização das necessidades de cada país. Exemplo disso, e após anos de

interrupção, o Uzbequistão voltou a adquirir energia hidroelétrica ao Tadjiquistão e ao Quirguistão e há também iniciativas para recuperar projetos antigos, como a rede transfronteiriça de distribuição de energia, que funcionou até 2009. Existem ainda projetos de produção e distribuição de energia hidroelétrica excedentária, pelo Tadjiquistão e Quirguistão, para promover uma maior rentabilização da água. Assim, a água libertada para a rega no Uzbequistão e no Turquemenistão, durante o verão, poderá ser convertida em eletricidade e fornecida a outros países fora da região (Russell, 2018).

O ritmo do progresso na cooperação, para uma melhor gestão dos recursos aquáticos transfronteiriços é visível, assim como os esforços para alcançar os objetivos de desenvolvimento sustentável (SDG) definidos pelas Nações Unidas (Ziganshina, D. R., Sorokim, A. G., Muminov, Sh. Kh., Shamsiev, Kh. A, 2023). No entanto, a pressão sobre os recursos aquáticos, é expectável que continue a aumentar. As alterações climáticas terão uma grande influência, ao afetar e reduzirem os glaciares, que fornecem água aos principais rios. Esta redução, combinada com um aumento populacional, contribuirá para menos disponibilidade de água, tanto para rega, como para consumo humano, havendo estimativas que apontam para uma perda de 50 a 75%, durante o próximo século (Russell, 2018). Se estas questões não forem atendidas, a instabilidade entre os países tenderá a ressurgir e uma melhor eficiência e mais cooperação, tornar-se-ão, assim, cruciais para a região.

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Anexos

Anexo 1: Principais rios da Ásia Central

Rio	Área da bacia (em Km ²)	Ocupação de território, na Ásia Central (em %)	Países	Área ocupada por país	Ocupação de território, por país (em %)
Syr Darya	531650	11	Cazaquistão	345.000	12,7
			Quirguistão	110.570	55,3
			Tajiquistão	15.680	11,0
			Uzbequistão	60.400	13,5
Amu Darya	1023610	22	Quirguistão	7.800	3,9
			Tajiquistão	125.450	88,0
			Turquemenistão	359.730	73,7
			Uzbequistão	364.630	81,5
			Afeganistão	166.000	25,4

Fonte: FAO – Aquastat 2013



Anexo 2: Bacia do Mar de Aral e principais afluentes



Fonte: FAO – Aquastat 2013

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THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS IN CENTRAL ASIA

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The Role of Emotions in Central Asia

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Abstract

Exploring the weight of memory and history in Central Asia can lead to a rich and complex understanding of the region's cultural, social, and political dynamics. If we look at the historical legacy, Central Asia has a rich and diverse history, with civilizations such as the Persian, Turkic, Mongol, and Soviet periods leaving significant imprints on the region. Thus, by focusing on the Soviet and post-Soviet Era, the author wishes to analyze the role of emotions, as a new field of study in International Relations (IR), in Central Asia politics – both domestic and external ones.

Key words: Central Asia, Russia, China, Emotions, International Relations

1. Conceptualization of Emotions in International Relations

The study of emotion in International Relations has been around since the 1970s but as come a long way to be perceived as a relevant topic of study within International Relations (Clément, Sangar, 2018,4 & Hutchison, 2018). It seems that during the last decades of the 20th century, the study of emotion happened a bit of 'out of blue' and was not fully accepted as scientific or important, at least by the mainstream rationalist authors of the time. Then, on the 2000s, the few authors that were defending this topic as fundamental, focused more on explaining why emotion was relevant and needed to be theoretically addressed (Crawford, 2000). Nowadays, the study of emotion in International Relations has been linked to violent conflict, the rise of populism, identity construction, norms, and governmentality. According to Hutchison and Bleiker (2017, 507):

Few realms are more emotional than that of world politics. Politicians intuitively know how to tap into the emotions of their electorates. Fear drives and surrounds war, terrorism and the construction of strategy and security. Diplomatic negotiation could not be pursued without a basic level of trust. Empathy is central to successful peacebuilding processes

Such statement does provide us with an emotional baggage to carefully unpack. Fear, empathy, and trust are some of the emotions, states of feeling and/or being

mentioned, and they can be easily traced to specific theories of international relations. Fear is quasi equivalent to the realist school of thought, as it represents the driven force for realists to seek power, to protect themselves and to rationalize the nation state on its integrity. On his massive critique of classical realism, Ross declares that IR emotional scholars do not need to create another theory based on emotion because “under our noses lies a theoretical tradition – political realism – whose long-standing concern for evil, fear, and tragedy indicates a potential bountiful source for thinking about human emotion and its role in international politics” (Ross, 2013, 275). Ross analyses the works of Aristotle, Morgenthau, and other classical realists to convey the message that rationality and emotion are not as dichotomous as they seem. Rather, they represent a sentiment of togetherness within the political scene. He says that “both realists [classical and neorealists] combine general statements on human psychology with more specific reflections on the role of love, pride, and other emotions in phenomena ranging from diplomacy and nationalism to communism and liberal internationalism” (Ross, 2013:294).

When it comes to Liberalism, trust might be the defining emotion to consider. Liberalism argues that the world can perfectly work together if all states cooperate with each other to pursue better (mostly economic) results for each and all involved. Ariffin cites Smith (1776) to clarify that liberalists consider that human nature is motivated by the “desire for bettering our condition” (Ariffin et al, 2016, 2), and so the purposive behavior thus prompted is the institution of the well-known marketplace that, according to Ariffin “is to tame jealousy (or the fear of losing a possession) and envy (or the resentment caused by another enjoying a possession that one does have) by turning these emotions into emulation (or the desire to attain economic equality with, or superiority over others”. (Ariffin et at, 2016, 2). When thinking carefully about the utilitarian proposals of liberalism, one can easily conclude that emotion plays a huge role in the way liberalism was structured and then, practiced.

For some scholars the antagonist to Liberalism, Marxism is, according to Ariffin rooted in lust as this desire for wealth was what drove to the dominance of upper and richer classes to the lower and poorest ones. Thus, “couched in rational terms, greed (or the desire for excess) of the dominant classes becomes ‘appropriation or surplus value,’ and wrath of the expropriated classes becomes ‘class consciousness’ (Ariffin et al, 2016, 2). The author of the essay considers that Marxism is a good example of how emotion is positively

perceived and used but then, falls back into the rationalist fallacy that tries, very hard, to generalize and to compartmentalize emotion, by choosing one major emotion that comes from this specific cause for a specific consequence and that entails certain behaviors and actions. By focusing so much on class separation, Marxism makes it to believe that group shares the same identity and, thus, the same emotions which is not as linear and certain as that.

Constructivism is also relevant for this discussion. Some might wrongfully believe that constructivism is the basis for the study of emotion. It might make sense that constructivism, worried about empathy and more connected to how each actor – individual or collective – perceives the world, were the one to put forward a first empirically method on emotions. If we think of Neta Crawford, this perception might become a reality, as she was one of the first to really come forward with some theory-building ideas on emotion, but some argue that even constructivists like Crawford ended up creating a more complicated stance on emotion in IR than the realists did. As Lebow mentions in the Foreword of the book *Emotions in International Relations: Beyond Mainstream International Relations*, “the most that realists, liberal institutionalists, social capital and “thin” constructivist theories and models can do is identify conditions likely to facilitate cooperation (e.g. coordination, leadership, institutions, trust), in situations where actors are already predisposed to cooperate” (Lebow in Ariffin et al, 2016, 13). So, if we start to think about an international political world order that is lacking empathy and consideration to each other, how can emotion help modify a hostile reality to a more constructivist one? In her definition of emotion, Crawford states that “emotions are the inner states that individuals describe to others as feelings, and their feelings may be associated with biological, cognitive, and behavioral states and changes” (Crawford, 2000, 126), meaning that empathy can be felt amongst states and or political actors if governments and/or individuals are feeling empathetic. And to feeling empathetic is to (i) understand the concept of empathy and (ii) be in a position and environment where empathy can be perceived and, thus, felt.

Therefore, how can IR emotional scholars perceive the emotions of both individual actors and collective groups? How can they pinpoint the specific emotions that each group feels? Even a harder question, how can they point out the specific emotion(s) that each member of the group is feeling at a given moment? Those are few of the questions raised

by several IR emotional scholars (Sasley, 2013 & Crawford, 2000 & Mattern, 2018), and one can see it as a methodological challenge or as a lack of a model for clearly studying and assessing emotions in IR. However, as there are still no final questions to such methodological questions, one can only try to prove the importance of emotion by applying it to the reality and thus, below, Central Asia will be the case study to demonstrate yet another dimension of the study of emotions in IR.

2. Central Asia and its Emotions towards Russia

By focusing our attention at the Soviet Era and its presence in Central Asia – namely in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan – it is easy to state that it has had a profound impact on the region, with forced industrialization, collectivization, and cultural repression leaving lasting scars on the region. Soviet policies, mostly the ones conducted by Stalin, were used to delimit new borders, new states with soviet-like approaches to different ethnic groups living in the region. According to Farkhod Tolipov, there was an artificial division of the region by Stalin to fulfill his idea of what a Russian/Soviet control must look like (Tolipov, 2001, 184) that obviously shaped how those states view themselves and their neighbors.

The Soviet authorities sought to suppress religious and cultural practices that were perceived as incompatible with Marxist ideology. Mosques were closed, religious leaders were persecuted, and traditional customs were discouraged or banned. Although Soviet Union, in the mid-1990s, started to gain conscience about the importance of *historical memory* as “a crucial element in forging new collective identities” (Gorshenina; Tolz, 2016, 112) and tried to adopt what European empires have been doing to unify their colonies, soon enough, such ideological construction became “a recognized propaganda tool of the soviet regime and a site of intense struggles between different actors” (*idem*, 83).

Since gaining independence in the early 1990s, Central Asian countries have been grappling with the challenges of nation-building and transition to market economies. Here it is important to point out that *nationalism*, when applied to this region, has a *dual character*: not only it promotes a past-present connection – that shifts according to the government’s goal(s) at a certain time – but also a dynamic view of the state as a being, able to change throughout the time. As Tolipov mentioned “nationalists can ‘build-up’ the nation from different materials and feed it from different sources” (Tolipov, 2001, 184), which lead us

to understand that, in the case of Central Asia, nationalism occurs in a *top-down* fashion where the political elites are the fully responsible to create nationalistic narratives in favor, or against, the Soviet. Different countries, then, have different perceptions on the Soviet Union and, by using museums, exhibitions and political discourse, their governments promote an emotional narrative to be accepted and followed by the population. Sergei Abashin wrote an interesting chapter on this topic where it was mentioned that “each country of Central Asia has been shaping its own memory strategy during the last quarter century with regard to internal and external developments, resource availability, its relations with Russia and perception of advantages and disadvantages of the Soviet period” (Abashin, 2018, 304).

Overall, the Soviet Union's impact on Central Asia in terms of identity and politics of memory cannot be overstated. The legacy of Soviet rule continues to shape the cultural, social, and political landscape of the region, influencing everything from national identities to interethnic relations as well as foreign policy strategies of the countries of that region.

3. The Use of Emotion in Central Asia

As mentioned above, the use of *emotion and memory* are usually connected to a nationalistic agenda that, in the case of Central Asia, was necessary to pursue, as the countries – and its governments – needed to unsure a sense of belonging among their populations after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Nationalism became a policy tool used by the government's elite to create a narrative to be accepted by the population. Still, and as Abashin noted, there are different perceptions of the historical events on different countries: “the official language of memory politics in Central Asia does not use the concept of ‘genocide’, which denotes the most extreme disapproval of the old political regime” (Abashin, 2018, 310). On their museums and exhibitions, different countries distinguish between the *Russian Empire* and the *Soviet Period*. Regarding the first one, words such as *colonialism* and *occupation* are discreetly used – as there is this sense of belonging to the Russian Empire that the political elites still have –, whilst the latter is usually described as a *totalitarianism* and *repression*, representing – once again – the view of the political elites about the wrongdoings of Stalin and his strategy to the region.

The use of emotion is, thus, a political choice, applied in a *top-down* nature that does not have in consideration, at least until now, the feelings and *collective memory* of the people itself. As Abashin stated "certain countries emphasize repression, placing them at the center of their ideologies; other countries try to camouflage the subject in different ways, although not denying it; still other countries don't even bring up this topic." (Abashin, 2018, 309).

Political elites are the ones that choose how to portray the past and they tend to do it while looking at the future: their future power, their future relations with Russia and the continuation of their wealth.

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THE ONGOING
CPEC-CIPEC
CONNECTIVITY
AND THE
PROMOTION OF
CENTRAL ASIA AS
A HUB FOR
SOUTHEAST ASIA

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The Ongoing CPEC-CIPEC Connectivity and the Promotion of Central Asia as a Hub for Southeast Asia

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in Chinese-led connectivity projects within the Belt and Road Initiative between South-Central Asia and Southeast Asia, which have directly or indirectly linked the two regions. In the heartland of Asia, the Central Asian Republics (CARs) are the primary beneficiaries of this connectivity, mainly due to their geographical location and due to the fact that the region is landlocked and, therefore, dependent on transport connectivity. Among the CARs, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are the main recipients of BRI-led investment in transport infrastructure and the connectivity it provides. As such, this paper aims to demonstrate that China has been promoting interregional continental connectivity as a viable alternative to maritime routes. This strategy benefits the state-building process in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan by fostering their economic growth, which allows for social stability and state cohesion.

Key words: CPEC, CIPEC, Kazakhstan, China, Uzbekistan

1. Introduction

The Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) was launched in Central Asia in 2013 as the continental part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). During his speech at the Nazarbayev University, in Kazakhstan, Xi Jinping announced six economic corridors aimed at interconnecting Asia: The China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor (CMREC), the New Eurasian Land Bridge (NELB), the China-Central West-Asia Economic Corridor (CCWAEC), the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor (CIPEC) and the former Bangladesh-China-Indian Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC) which is now the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) (China SCIO, 2020, 2023; Millar, 2023).

The choice of Central Asia for this announcement was no coincidence, as Central Asia lies at the heart of the continent and is the primary beneficiary of the SREB. The Central Asian Republics are landlocked and as history has shown have slow economies that rely on national resources, foreign investment and transport interconnectivity projects with

regional partners (Butt & Butt, 2015, pp. 33–34 and 43). Between the CARs, the primary beneficiaries of Chinese-led initiatives through the BRI are Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, which are at the centre of the CCWAEC project and have direct connectivity to the CPEC. These two countries will be the focus of our analysis. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, both economies were steadily growing, but the lockdown, which also affected the international economic system, also contributed to an economic decline that fragilised these countries. Recently, China has been conducting new projects in Central-South Asia to serve as a CPEC-CIPEC connection, such as the Trans-Himalayan Economic Corridor (THEC) in Nepal. In the post-pandemic economic recovery, this would contribute significantly to the endurance of both the Uzbek and Kazakh economies since it would allow them not only to access the sea via Gwadar by the CPEC but also to guarantee connectivity to the Southeast Asian continental ports through the CIPEC.

In a broad sense, state-building can be seen as a series of processes of institutional consolidation, socio-political stabilisation, and sustainable development influenced by geostrategic, economic, social, and ethnocultural factors (Henning, 2017). Therefore, we argue that the economic sphere plays a crucial role in the state-building process by directly and indirectly affecting the other spheres mentioned, as a state's economic health often determines other conditions, such as social stability or group grievance. In this paper, we will use the cases of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to understand how this CPEC-CIPEC connectivity will affect the economic growth in Central Asia and, thus, ongoing regional stabilisation.

2. What is the meaning of CPEC-CIPEC connectivity for Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan?

In recent years, the international system has observed various geopolitical and geoeconomic changes that have contributed to the growth of power competition between China and the US. Because of this, China has been preparing itself for a hegemonic confrontation with its rival by addressing regional security challenges. The main challenge that China faces is directly connected to its energy security, mainly because almost 60 to 70 per cent of Chinese energy imports come directly through the Malacca Strait, posing a significant threat to Chinese security in case of a US-led blockade (Paszak, 2021). This led China to seek corridor diversification by investing in the continental connections between Singapore and Gwadar in Pakistan through the Kunming-Shigatse-Kashgar connectivity.

In this scenario, Central Asia could work as a main hub to ensure this connectivity could benefit all parties. On the one hand, Central Asia allows China and the Southeast Asian countries to achieve energy market diversification by shortening the distance and costs of transportation, mainly offering access to the Middle East and the possibility of resource exploration within the CARs. This greatly benefits China and the continental Southeast Asian countries since the latter have been showing, in recent years, signs of energy insecurity mainly due to the growing demand of these countries to fuel regional BRI projects (EU-ASEAN Business Council, 2023; IEA, 2022; Nangoy & Christina, 2022). Between the CARs, both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are among the top energy exporters of fossil fuels (Rasoulinezhad et al., 2022, pp. 441–442). This makes them strategic regional stakeholders that can solve the issues mentioned above.

On the other hand, the landlocked CARs can significantly benefit from this connectivity by achieving interregional connectivity, market diversification and access to the South China Sea. After the COVID-19 outbreak, countries worldwide struggled, leading to the global economy facing a decline (Yu, 2024, p. 169). Central Asia was among the most affected regions, mainly because the CARs are landlocked countries dependent on their neighbours to access sea connectivity and need market diversification to thrive (UNCTAD, 2020). This led to a regional economic decline that destabilised the CARs, mainly affecting their weak economies. In the cases of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, both market-oriented economies, this led to internal social instability and the necessity of promoting market and seaport access diversification, hindering the process of state-building (Rangsimaporn, 2020b, pp. 126–127, 2022, pp. 3–5). Therefore, the benefits of achieving connectivity with Southeast Asian countries could help promote state-building efforts within the CARs.

To achieve this type of interregional connectivity that could benefit all sides and promote economic growth and stability within the CARs, namely Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, China has been working closely with all sides to develop regional projects. The Kazakh and Uzbek sides have been deeply connected to the Chinese initiatives for interregional connectivity from the very beginning and benefited tremendously from them. The first project of this kind was the Central Asian Republics Economic Cooperation (CAREC) project, which aimed to achieve regional interconnectivity between Central and South Asia and China. The CAREC directly addressed the necessities of the landlocked

fragile CARs that aimed at the time to achieve sea connectivity, boosting their initial state-building process.

Nowadays, the current Chinese projects that aim to connect Gwadar to Singapore also considered the existent CAREC projects, which provide the CARs with a pivotal role in this connectivity model. One of the areas where this connectivity can be observed is related to energy infrastructure and the main Chinese pipeline projects, namely the Central Asia-China (CAC) Gas Pipeline that has Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan as hubs and is connected to the Chinese coastal and southern areas (Figures 1 and 2), therefore allowing the Southeast Asian countries to access the CARs energy markets (Aminjonov & Dovgalyuk, 2023).

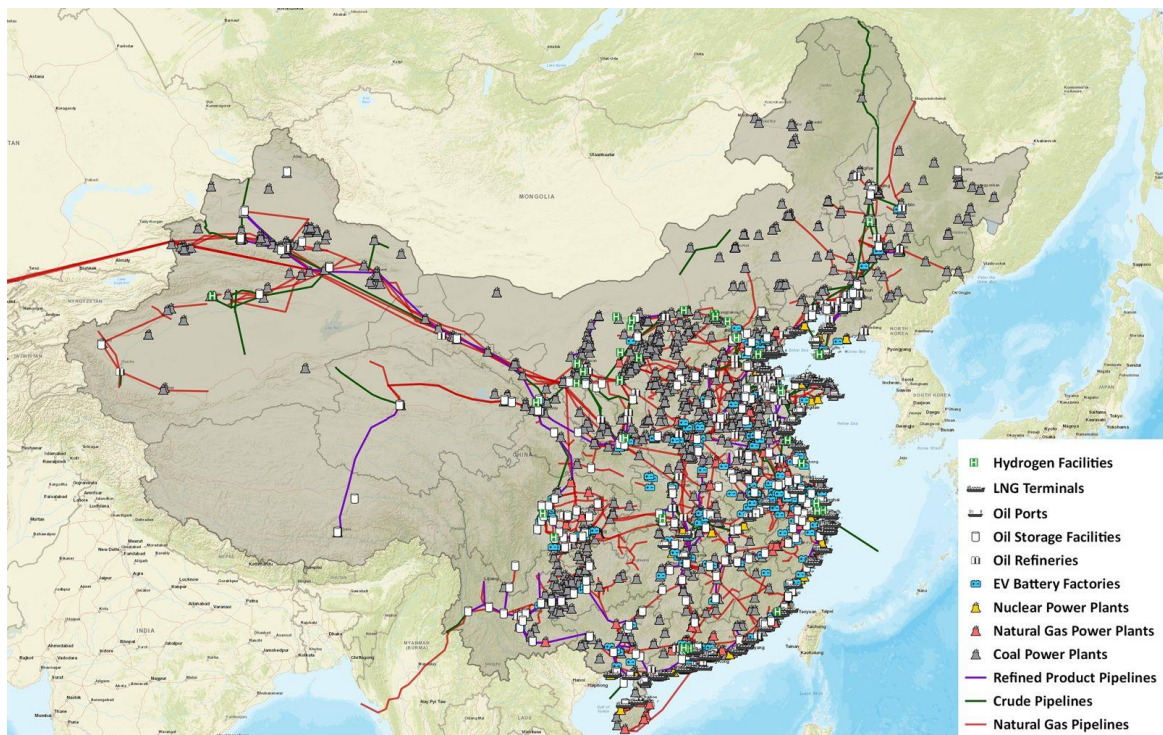


Figure 1 – Pipeline network in China (Source: Baker Institute, 2023)

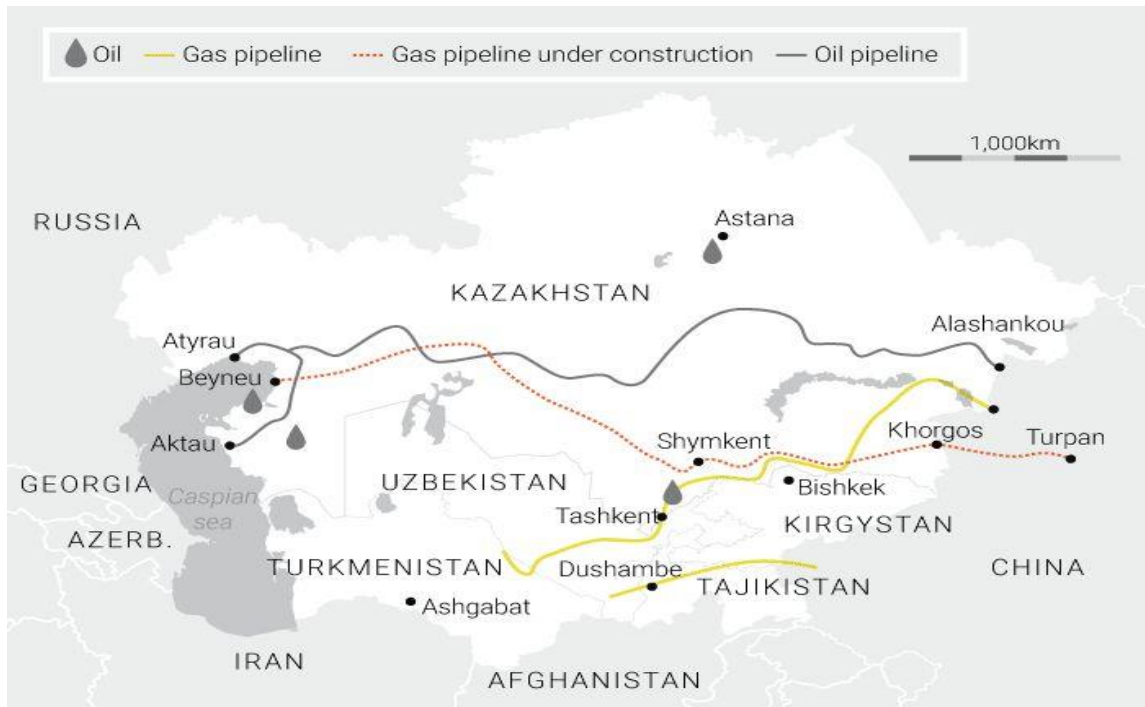


Figure 2 – CAC project in Central Asia (Source: South China Morning Post, 2023)

Also, several connectivity projects have been developed at the transport infrastructure level in recent years, mainly within China’s leading economic corridors, CPEC and CIPEC. In 2013, China announced that one of its goals was to create a mega economic corridor linking Central Asia to Southeast Asia (Contessi, 2016, pp. 3–4; Rangsimaporn, 2020b, pp. 134–135). In order to achieve this CPEC-CIPEC connectivity, that is Gwadar-Singapore land connectivity, China has been investing in multidimensional connectivity projects such as the THEC, a Nepal-oriented project comprised of a West-East corridor aiming for Kunming-Kashgar connectivity (Vater, 2020, p. 2). Bearing in mind this road connectivity, the CAREC projects that focus on both Kazakh and Uzbek infrastructure development and the new transport infrastructure projects that are under development in Uzbekistan - such as the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Road and Railway (CKU) and the Pakistan-Uzbekistan-Afghanistan Railway Project (PAURP) - show the CARs will maintain their role as connectivity hubs, providing them the investment needed for infrastructure and economic development (Karimov& Kurbonmuratov, 2023; Rabbani, 2022).

As it we can see, it becomes more apparent that the CPEC-CIPEC connectivity will benefit the Kazakh and Uzbek economies, enhancing their role as energy providers and interconnectivity hubs. Even so, this connectivity project will bring more particular benefits for both economies that could enhance their economic stability and promote social

stability and state cohesion. Between these benefits, we outline the possibility of a continued crescendo of foreign investment from Southeast Asian countries in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, observed since 2017, and the expansion and diversification of market access for both sides. In the next section, we will analyse how this investment has been made.

Starting from the Uzbek case, in 2017, Singapore invested in around 20 Uzbek companies, mainly related to the fields of electrical engineering, construction industry and trade, followed by another significant investment in another 20 projects focused on the oil and gas industry, which is one of the top national export industries (Rangsimaporn, 2022, pp. 7–8). In 2020, Malaysia followed the Singaporean example by investing in 31 projects related to the fields of finance and oil and gas industries (Rangsimaporn, 2022, pp. 7–8). In 2023, Uzbekistan and Singapore signed an additional 23 agreements focused on issues such as trade, finance, construction, education, and energy (Daryo Staff, 2023; Media Staff, 2023). Earlier this year, Malaysia and Uzbekistan signed a joint deal to expand their respective automobile industries, with Malaysia setting a goal of boosting its investment in the Uzbek internal development plans (KUN Staff, 2024a). In March, the chambers of commerce of Uzbekistan and Vietnam founded the Uzbekistan-Vietnam Joint Trading House, whose goal is to deepen economic ties by facilitating trade, investment and cooperation (Daryo Staff, 2024; KUN Staff, 2024b). All these investments in trade, energy and transport infrastructure show that there is a crescendo of interest from Southeast Asian countries to establish a prominent position within Central Asia. For Uzbekistan, this investment also means a strong source of foreign investment that will enable economic growth and development, making the Uzbek economy more attractive and helping to solve other national problems related to the social environment and state cohesion.

Continuing to the Kazakh case, between 2018 and 2019, Thailand's foremost energy company, the PTT Public Company Limited, invested in the Dunga oil field project and the KazStroyService, one of the prominent Kazakh companies in the energy sector, invested in the construction of gas pipelines in Thailand (DKN Staff, 2019; Rangsimaporn, 2020a, pp. 12–13). For Kazakhstan-Southeast Asia cooperation, 2023 was a strategic year. In August, Vietnam and Kazakhstan signed 12 agreements to bolster trade, investment, technology and agricultural cooperation (Abbasova, 2023). This was swiftly followed by a compromise, settled in November of that same year, between the SOVICO group, the

leading Vietnamese investment company, and Kazakhstan to develop the Kazakh logistics and airlines (Sakenova, 2023). In May, Singapore and Kazakhstan signed four agreements on market access facilitation for investors and expanded collaboration in logistics, energy and trade (Enterprise Singapore Staff, 2023). These agreements were remarkable in that Singapore offered to train officials throughout Central Asia in the designated areas and public administration, contributing to the Kazakh state-building. In the current year, Thailand joined this surge of investment agreements by signing a MoU with Kazakhstan to promote trade and investment (Thailand MOFA, 2024).

Lastly, Malaysia sought to expand its constructive role in the Kazakh economic landscape by strengthening bilateral cooperation (Abdullah, 2024). Like Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan has benefited from Southeast Asian investment in trade, energy and transport infrastructure. Although Kazakhstan has a closer and more dependent economic relationship with Russia, this foreign investment is helping the country to diversify its market and achieve connectivity with other regional partners. This market diversification contributes to Kazakhstan's economic development and is an important part of its state-building process.

Considering everything previously mentioned in this paper, we argue that Central Asia has been a centre of investment for Southeast Asian countries mainly because of the CPEC-CIPEC connectivity plans that China is pushing forward and the market opportunities it provides. Analysing the investments made in both Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, Southeast Asia's investment focus on the energy and infrastructure sector can be seen as an attempt to find a solution for the possible energy crisis it is facing and to achieve market diversification. This investment focus is aligned with the Chinese connectivity plans already mentioned to connect Southeast Asia with Central and South Asia. Although these investments are not mirrored in a significant crescendo in bilateral trade between Southeast Asian countries and the CARs, it shows there is a boost in cooperation and that both sides will be more economically connected in the future. Also, as mentioned, it is noteworthy that these investments are great contributors to the Uzbek and Kazakh state-building process and directly help accomplish their national development plans.

3. Conclusion

China has spearheaded the promotion of continental connectivity between Southeast, Central and South Asia in recent years. This initiative helps Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan become more relevant regional hubs and promotes economic growth and social stability, thus contributing significantly to their state-building process. Among the most significant outcomes of this connectivity project, it is evident that the initiation of THEC by China, which allowed for CPEC-CIPEC connectivity, has led to increased investment by Southeast Asian nations in Central Asia and country-to-country development projects. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are particularly relevant to this study as they have been the focus of Southeast Asian investment within the CARs. We argue that if all parties remain focused on achieving this type of interregional connectivity, the benefits for the economies of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan could exceed current expectations, mainly because it allows them access to the South China Sea, gives them a more pivotal role in regional trade, and significantly improves their role as logistic hubs for Asian trade.

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