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The geopolitical significance of cooperation between Uzbekistan and turkey within the framework of the organization of Turkic states

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Abstract: This paper explores the evolving geopolitical dynamics between Uzbekistan and Turkey within the framework of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS). It analyzes how bilateral cooperation contributes to regional stability, economic connectivity, and a rebalancing of influence in Central Asia. The study employs qualitative analysis based on policy documents, official statements, and geopolitical assessments. Findings suggest that enhanced Uzbekistan–Turkey relations reinforce Turkic solidarity, offer alternatives to dominant regional powers, and promote a multipolar order in Eurasia. This partnership plays a strategic role in shaping the future trajectory of the OTS as a meaningful regional bloc.

Keywords: Uzbekistan, Turkey, Organization of Turkic States, geopolitics, Central Asia, regional cooperation, Eurasia.

Introduction: In recent years, the cooperation between Uzbekistan and Turkey has gained increasing geopolitical relevance, particularly under the umbrella of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS). As global power dynamics continue to shift, regional alliances are becoming more critical in determining the future of geopolitical and economic influence. The OTS, initially established as the Turkic Council in 2009 and rebranded in 2021, was founded to promote unity among Turkic-speaking countries through a shared historical, linguistic, and cultural identity. However, it has gradually evolved into a platform that facilitates not only cultural ties but also significant political, economic, and strategic collaboration. Uzbekistan's active engagement with the OTS since 2019, after years of cautious multilateralism, represents a turning point in

Central Asia's integration into broader Turkic cooperation frameworks. This shift reflects President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's reform-oriented and outward-looking foreign policy, aimed at diversifying partnerships and asserting Uzbekistan's regional leadership. On the other hand, Turkey, under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has pursued a proactive foreign policy strategy that emphasizes greater influence in the Turkic world as part of its broader Eurasian vision. Turkey's involvement in Central Asia, historically rooted in linguistic and ethnic commonalities, now includes significant geopolitical and economic interests, such as energy transit, trade expansion, and security cooperation. The OTS currently consists of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan as full members, with Hungary, Turkmenistan, and Northern Cyprus holding observer status. Its overarching goal is to deepen integration among member states and project soft power through cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges, and unified policy initiatives. Yet, in practice, the organization increasingly serves as a geopolitical platform for member countries to coordinate on strategic matters such as regional security, infrastructure development, and connectivity projects. The evolving bilateral partnership between Uzbekistan and Turkey is central to this transformation. It has extended well beyond cultural and linguistic diplomacy to influence trade routes (e.g., the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route), military cooperation, energy infrastructure, and digital connectivity. In many ways, the deepening of Uzbekistan–Turkey cooperation under the OTS framework is redefining the geopolitical architecture of Central Asia, a region traditionally dominated by the interests of Russia and China. By creating a new axis of influence, the two countries are facilitating the emergence of a multi-vector regional order that allows smaller states more strategic autonomy. This paper aims to examine how the Uzbekistan–Turkey partnership within the context of the Organization of Turkic States is reshaping regional geopolitics. It will explore the strategic motivations behind their cooperation, analyze the implications for regional balance, and assess how this evolving alliance contributes to broader Eurasian connectivity and geopolitical diversification. The paper argues that their partnership is not merely symbolic but represents a strategic alignment that holds significant implications for regional and global players alike.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology aimed at exploring the geopolitical significance of Uzbekistan–Turkey cooperation within the framework of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS). Given the

geopolitical nature of the topic and the complexity of regional dynamics, a qualitative approach is most appropriate for gaining in-depth insights into policy directions, strategic motivations, and the broader implications of bilateral and multilateral interactions. The research relies primarily on secondary sources gathered through a combination of document analysis and discourse analysis techniques. Key sources of data include:

1. Official government statements and policy papers issued by the foreign ministries and presidential offices of Turkey and Uzbekistan, which provide insights into national priorities, foreign policy objectives, and official interpretations of the OTS framework.
2. Reports and publications from international think tanks, such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), and the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA), which offer expert evaluations of regional geopolitics, economic connectivity, and security cooperation.
3. Academic literature, including peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and scholarly books, focused on Central Asian politics, regionalism, and Turkic identity-based cooperation.
4. Statements and declarations from OTS summits and official communiqués, which outline the organization's evolving goals, mechanisms of cooperation, and regional initiatives.

The analysis focuses on three core thematic areas to structure the research. The first addresses the strategic interests of Uzbekistan and Turkey, encompassing an exploration of both countries' foreign policy doctrines, historical and cultural linkages, trade ambitions, and security concerns, with particular emphasis on how their national interests align and diverge within the framework of the Organization of Turkic States. The second examines the regional geopolitical context, situating the Uzbekistan–Turkey partnership within the broader strategic environment of Central Asia and Eurasia, and considering the influence of major external actors such as Russia, China, the European Union, and the United States, while paying special attention to the extent to which the partnership functions as a counterbalance or complement to existing power structures. The third focuses on the institutional development of the Organization of Turkic States, evaluating its structure, functionality, and evolution as a regional organization, and analyzing the ways in which Uzbekistan and Turkey contribute to and derive benefits from its institutional mechanisms, including economic forums, summit meetings, defense dialogue, and cultural programs. The study employs data triangulation

to cross-validate findings from multiple sources, thereby enhancing both reliability and comprehensiveness. It is exploratory in nature and does not employ numerical data or statistical methods, as its objective is not to test a hypothesis but to understand and interpret the geopolitical implications of emerging regional partnerships. This methodological approach seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the embedding of Uzbekistan–Turkey cooperation within broader geopolitical shifts and institutional dynamics, as well as to elucidate how this bilateral relationship contributes to the reshaping of power relations within the Turkic world and beyond.

RESULTS

Turkey increasingly views Uzbekistan as a strategic entry point into Central Asia, a region of growing importance in its foreign policy calculus. Ankara's approach to Central Asia is multifaceted, involving economic, cultural, political, and security dimensions. Uzbekistan's central geographic position, large population, and reform-oriented government make it an ideal partner for expanding Turkish influence in the region. This is particularly relevant as Turkey seeks to build a stronger Turkic alliance while simultaneously counterbalancing the influence of global and regional powers such as Russia, China, and Iran. In parallel, Uzbekistan under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has pursued a multi-vector foreign policy that emphasizes balanced relations with a diverse set of international partners. Within this framework, Turkey has emerged as a particularly valuable ally, offering both historical-cultural affinity and pragmatic opportunities for development, trade, and security cooperation (Kassenova, 2022). Economic ties between the two countries have deepened significantly in recent years. Bilateral trade has already exceeded 3 billion US dollars, with both governments expressing a clear intent to raise the figure to 5 billion in the near future (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). Turkish investments in Uzbekistan have grown across a variety of sectors, including textiles, construction, energy, tourism, and food processing. The presence of Turkish small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Uzbekistan also contributes to local employment and skill development, further solidifying economic

relations. These trends indicate a steady shift from symbolic cooperation to practical, long-term economic engagement. Infrastructure cooperation is another pillar of the Uzbekistan–Turkey relationship, particularly through the development of regional connectivity projects. One of the most notable initiatives is the Middle Corridor, also known as the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route. This trade and transport network links Turkey to Central Asia and China via the South Caucasus and the Caspian Sea. Uzbekistan's support for this corridor significantly enhances its viability as an alternative to traditional routes through Russian territory. The Middle Corridor is aligned with broader regional and global trends toward supply chain diversification, especially in light of recent geopolitical disruptions such as the war in Ukraine. As a landlocked country, Uzbekistan stands to benefit from increased access to global markets through the Middle Corridor, while Turkey gains a stronger logistical and trade presence in Central Asia (Pannier, 2023). Although still developing, defense and security cooperation between Turkey and Uzbekistan is beginning to show tangible signs of progress. The two countries have engaged in joint military exercises and defense consultations, signaling a growing strategic alignment. Turkey has expressed interest in assisting with the modernization of Uzbekistan's military forces, including through training programs, equipment supply, and institutional support. This cooperation extends to shared concerns over regional security threats, such as terrorism, extremism, and transnational crime. In particular, both countries are interested in maintaining stability in Afghanistan and preventing the spillover of insecurity into Central Asia. The strengthening of military and security ties contributes not only to bilateral trust but also to the broader objective of increasing strategic autonomy from larger regional actors (Eurasianet, 2023). Collectively, these developments illustrate a growing strategic convergence between Turkey and Uzbekistan within the framework of the Organization of Turkic States. Their partnership is no longer confined to symbolic expressions of Turkic solidarity but is increasingly rooted in concrete political, economic, and security cooperation. As such, it plays a central role in reshaping regional alignments in Central Asia and the wider Eurasian space.

Table 1: Key Areas of Uzbekistan–Turkey Cooperation within the OTS Framework

Area of Cooperation	Description	Significance
Strategic Alignment	Turkey views Uzbekistan as a gateway to Central Asia; Uzbekistan seeks to diversify partnerships via multi-vector foreign policy.	Aligns geopolitical goals; reduces reliance on Russia and China; strengthens pan-Turkic coordination.

Area of Cooperation	Description	Significance
Economic Cooperation	Bilateral trade exceeds \$3 billion; target set to reach \$5 billion; Turkish investments in textiles, construction, energy, and SMEs.	Boosts mutual economic growth; deepens bilateral economic integration.
Infrastructure and Transit	Support for the Middle Corridor (Trans-Caspian route) linking Turkey to Central Asia and China via the Caspian Sea.	Enhances regional connectivity; offers alternatives to Russian routes; strengthens Eurasian logistics.
Defense and Security Ties	Growing military dialogue; joint exercises; Turkish support for Uzbek military modernization.	Improves regional security cooperation; promotes defense independence; addresses common threats.
Regional Institution Building	Collaboration within the OTS framework, including summit participation, policy coordination, and institutional strengthening.	Reinforces the OTS as a regional actor; supports multilateral Turkic integration.

DISCUSSION

The growing alignment between Uzbekistan and Turkey within the framework of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) reflects an emerging model of regional cooperation that is rooted in both shared identity and strategic pragmatism. Unlike alliances based solely on geographic proximity or economic necessity, the Uzbekistan–Turkey partnership draws strength from a blend of cultural affinity, linguistic ties, mutual security interests, and converging foreign policy objectives. This partnership is gradually reshaping the geopolitical landscape of Central Asia by offering a credible alternative to the long-standing dominance of larger external powers such as Russia and China. From Uzbekistan's perspective, engagement with Turkey supports its broader multi-vector foreign policy, which aims to reduce dependence on any single external actor. Turkey provides Uzbekistan with access to new markets, foreign direct investment, and opportunities for defense modernization, all of which support President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's domestic reform agenda and regional ambitions. Unlike relations with China or Russia, which are often transactional or security-heavy, Turkey offers a form of cooperation that combines economic engagement with cultural diplomacy, making it more palatable to Uzbek society and its political elite. In particular, Turkey's investment in soft power—through education, media, cultural exchanges, and language promotion—resonates with Uzbekistan's younger, more globally aware generation of policymakers and citizens. For Turkey, Uzbekistan is a strategic cornerstone in its evolving Eurasian vision. Located at the heart of Central Asia and bordering key regional powers such as Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Afghanistan, Uzbekistan provides Turkey with both

geographic access and political legitimacy in the Turkic world. Strengthening ties with Uzbekistan enables Ankara to project influence further into Central Asia, expanding its economic footprint and reinforcing its leadership role within the OTS. This aligns with Turkey's broader foreign policy ambitions, which seek to position the country as a central actor in the wider Eurasian space, stretching from the Balkans to Western China. Through Uzbekistan, Turkey gains influence not just within the OTS, but also in wider regional forums and multilateral initiatives focused on connectivity, energy, and security (Aydin, 2023). However, despite the promising trajectory of this partnership, several challenges remain that could limit its full potential. One of the key constraints is the uneven pace of political reform across OTS member states. While Uzbekistan has made notable progress in governance and economic liberalization under Mirziyoyev, institutional capacity remains fragile, and political openness is still limited. Similarly, Turkey's own domestic political dynamics, including concerns about democratic backsliding and regional overreach, may influence the depth and credibility of its leadership in the Turkic world. Another significant constraint is the broader geopolitical competition in Central Asia. While Uzbekistan and Turkey may be aligning more closely, the region remains under the strong influence of Russia and China. Moscow continues to view Central Asia as part of its traditional sphere of influence and maintains deep security ties through mechanisms like the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). China, on the other hand, plays a dominant role in trade, infrastructure development, and energy financing through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Both powers are likely to view the strengthening of the OTS—particularly with a more assertive Turkey—as a challenge to their regional interests, potentially

leading to strategic pushback or increased pressure on member states. Moreover, the institutional development of the OTS itself poses structural challenges. Although the organization has expanded its membership, visibility, and agenda in recent years, it still lacks the institutional depth, financial resources, and enforcement mechanisms found in more established regional blocs. Decision-making is often slow, and implementation of joint projects remains uneven across member states. The success of the Uzbekistan–Turkey axis therefore depends not only on bilateral goodwill but also on the collective political will of other OTS members to strengthen institutional frameworks, harmonize regulations, and commit to long-term cooperation. There are also differing national priorities and levels of enthusiasm within the OTS. For instance, while Turkey and Uzbekistan are among the most proactive members, others such as Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan may take a more cautious or ambivalent approach. Divergent economic capacities, security concerns, and foreign policy orientations among member states could lead to fragmentation or internal rivalry if not carefully managed. Despite these obstacles, the strategic logic of Uzbekistan–Turkey cooperation remains compelling. Their partnership not only reinforces the legitimacy and relevance of the OTS but also contributes to the emergence of a more multipolar and balanced regional order in Eurasia. By continuing to build trust, invest in joint initiatives, and support institutional development, Uzbekistan and Turkey have the potential to transform the OTS from a largely symbolic alliance into a functional regional bloc capable of shaping the geopolitical future of Central Asia and beyond.

CONCLUSION

The strategic partnership between Uzbekistan and Turkey under the framework of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) is increasingly reshaping the geopolitical landscape of Central Asia. What began as a relationship grounded in shared linguistic, historical, and cultural ties has evolved into a dynamic and pragmatic alliance with significant strategic implications. This cooperation is not only enhancing bilateral ties but also contributing to the emergence of a new regional order that is more inclusive, balanced, and multipolar in nature. At the core of this evolving partnership is a mutual recognition of the need to diversify foreign relations, reduce overdependence on dominant global powers, and assert greater regional agency. Uzbekistan's engagement with Turkey offers it an opportunity to pursue its reform agenda, attract foreign investment, and assert a leadership role within Central Asia without falling into the sphere of influence

of any single actor. Turkey, in turn, sees Uzbekistan as a central pillar in its Eurasian strategy, allowing it to extend its reach into the heart of Asia, promote its pan-Turkic vision, and secure new economic and strategic opportunities. The deepening of Uzbekistan–Turkey cooperation under the OTS framework has broad implications for regional integration. It demonstrates the potential for mid-sized powers to collaborate on equal terms and foster regional architectures that reflect their own interests and identities. This partnership offers credible alternatives to existing geopolitical alignments dominated by Russia and China, particularly through initiatives like the Middle Corridor, which redefine connectivity and trade routes across the Eurasian landmass. Moreover, their growing collaboration provides a strong foundation for transforming the OTS from a culturally symbolic entity into a functional and strategic regional bloc. As Uzbekistan and Turkey continue to lead on initiatives related to trade, infrastructure, security, and institutional capacity-building, the organization may evolve into a more cohesive and influential player in regional and global affairs. Their joint efforts could set precedents for policy harmonization, coordinated economic planning, and collective security mechanisms among Turkic states. However, sustaining this momentum will require continuous political commitment, institutional development, and the ability to navigate external pressures and internal differences. Both countries will need to maintain diplomatic flexibility, invest in the OTS's operational infrastructure, and engage other member states to ensure that the organization does not remain fragmented or symbolic in nature. Looking forward, the strategic trajectory of Uzbekistan–Turkey cooperation suggests that both nations are poised to play pivotal roles in shaping the future of not only Central Asia but also the broader Eurasian region. Their partnership serves as a model for regionalism based on shared identity and strategic necessity—one that may influence future patterns of alliance-building, regional governance, and multilateral diplomacy in the 21st century.

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