

Revitalizing the Organization of Turkic States Amid Global Unrest¹

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The Organization of Turkic States (OTS) has gained renewed significance amid global geopolitical unrest and economic uncertainty. As regional tensions rise, member states are leveraging shared linguistic, cultural, and historical ties to foster closer economic, political, and security cooperation. The OTS aims to enhance intra-regional trade, energy collaboration, and collective resilience, positioning itself as a key player in stabilizing and advancing the interests of the Turkic world in an increasingly volatile global landscape.

The recent regional events and the geopolitical consequences of the Russo-Ukrainian war have had a profound impact on the dynamics among Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and the Central Asian Turkic states (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan). This shifting geopolitical landscape has been the catalyst of collaboration and integration for these countries under the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), an intergovernmental organization that aims to foster cooperation among Turkic-speaking nations. Being established in 2009, this emerging bloc has pursued a relatively low-profile policy on geopolitical issues in the past decade. However, after years of relatively little activity, things have started to change drastically due to the global situation that is being shaped by wider geopolitical factors. The organization is fostering multilateral partnerships to forge economic integration among the OTS-involved actors and flexibly deliver strategic solutions to respond to geopolitical developments through institutionalized cooperation. Noticeably, the OTS's efforts toward playing a pivotal role in regional politics and critical areas have increased in the wake of the ongoing Russo-Ukraine conflict.

The high-level meetings accelerated the development of a more robust institutional framework and laid the foundation for setting strategic goals to envision the long-term objectives within the OTS.

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In this context, the latest summit of the OTS held in Astana, Kazakhstan on 3rd November, 2023 demonstrated commitment and prior strategies to greater cooperation amid geopolitical fragmentation through joint action. The pivotal resolutions, which addressed recent regional and international developments, were adopted by the leaders in Astana. These joint decisions involve collaborative projects, joint ventures, and unified stances on international issues affecting the Turkic World.

The OTS's Samarkand Summit (the 9th Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Organization of Turkic States), hosted in Samarkand, Uzbekistan on November 11, 2022, was another significant evidence of the Turkic states' willingness and readiness toward regional interconnectivity and economic cooperation through the diversification of multilateral relations and strengthening of close interstate relations in order to ensure regional stability and sustainable economic development and strengthen transport and communication ties. During this summit, the leaders underlined the importance of common action concerning pressing topics in the international arena. As a result of the Samarkand Declaration, member countries unveiled plans to take their mutual relations forward in various fields, ranging from military, and defense industry technologies to energy, tourism, transportation, and economic and humanitarian relations.

Prior to recent geopolitical developments, the OTS has been steadily becoming a significant force and an active political entity in regional politics in the last three to four years. In this regard, the Eighth Summit of the Organization of Turkic States, held on October 14, 2021, in Istanbul, Türkiye, demonstrated the commitment of member states to deepening their cooperation in various areas, including economic, cultural, and political spheres. The summit was significant in terms of advancing the goals of the OTS, which include promoting economic integration, enhancing cultural and social links, and fostering political cooperation among member states. The summit provided an opportunity for member and observer states to assess progress made in achieving these goals and chart a course for future cooperation.

In general, the primary focus of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) is to promote political and economic cooperation, enhance regional security, and support the development of the Turkic language and culture. The organization aims to strengthen ties among its member states while

simultaneously establishing long-term partnerships and encouraging robust collaboration with other regional and international organizations, such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the European Union (EU). To this end, it is also worth highlighting that the member states of the OTS have their own individual relationships with other countries and regions, and these relationships are not necessarily impacted by their membership in the organization.

Turkic integration is gaining momentum in today's rapidly evolving global landscape. Geopolitical dynamics play a crucial role in shaping the future of the organization. The OTS's emergence signifies a positive trajectory for regional cooperation among Turkic states, potentially impacting broader geopolitical and economic trends. As this new geopolitical structure evolves, OTS's experience provides a compelling model for other regional organizations seeking to enhance their relevance and effectiveness in a turbulent world. Despite recent regional upheavals, the regional cooperation among the leading actors of the region will only intensify to overcome the challenging economic state the region finds itself in.

From a strategic point of view, facilitating stronger diplomatic and practical commercial bonds among these key regional states is becoming essentially important for all sides, paving the way for greater cooperation and sustainable connectivity across a broader Eurasian region while creating a counterbalance against heavyweight neighbors in the region. Looking ahead, the newly signed interstate deals are expected to create a smoother operational environment and favorable business conditions along the transit corridors and trade channels, opening new transit and logistics possibilities for the parties involved.

Meanwhile, the Organization of Turkic States took tangible steps to obtain a more active role amid a broad range of geopolitical and socio-economic uncertainties and pursued a range of initiatives to promote functional cooperation among its member states, including the establishment of a joint investment fund, the promotion of cooperation in transportation and energy, and the strengthening of social and cultural ties. From a broader perspective, through national governments' regional and

economic strategies, these initiatives have facilitated economic growth and development, as well as deeper political and social cooperation both regionally and in a broader sense. Of course, the success of these efforts will depend on their ability to manage internal conflicts, balance external influences, and maintain a cooperative regional environment.