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Kazakhstan and GCC: Islamic component in joint collaboration

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Abstract

This article is about features of the Islamic factor in collaboration between Kazakhstan and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar). The main focus of our research will be directed to the analysis of Arabic and Kazakh texts with using methods of content-analysis, discourse-analysis and interview. The article compares the significance of the Islamic component for both Kazakhstan and GCC countries. Common points and opposites in the views of Kazakhstan and Arab experts have been revealed. On the basis of which conclusions and recommendations on further improvement of cooperation are provided.

Key words: Kazakhstan, GCC, Islam, collaboration.

Kazajstán y CCG: componente islámico en colaboración conjunta

Resumen

Este artículo trata sobre las características del factor islámico en colaboración entre Kazajstán y los países del Consejo de Cooperación del Golfo (CCG) (Arabia Saudita, Emiratos Árabes Unidos, Bahrein, Kuwait, Omán y Qatar). El enfoque principal de nuestra investigación estará dirigido al análisis de textos en árabe y kazajo mediante el uso de métodos de análisis de contenido, análisis del discurso y entrevistas. El artículo compara la importancia del componente islámico tanto para Kazajstán como para los países del CCG. Puntos comunes y opuestos en opinión de Kazajstán y expertos árabes han sido revelados. Sobre la base de la cual se proporcionan conclusiones y recomendaciones sobre la mejora de la cooperación.

Palabras clave: Kazajstán, GCC, Islam, colaboración.

1. INTRODUCTION

Today Kazakhstan as a key state of the Central Asian region acquires not only economic but also the geopolitical significance for the world economy. Therefore, many states seek to strengthen their positions in the region and in the country. Their interest is due to the fact that Kazakhstan being at the crossroads of Europe and Asia has a transit potential, which makes it possible to expand international trade. Also, the availability of reserves of natural resources gives Kazakhstan a strategic importance of the world level. Being an object of growing

interest of many global and regional players, Kazakhstan for its part seeks to take its place in the new geopolitical configuration that evolves in Eurasia. Thus, Kazakhstan is trying to determine the guidelines for its inclusion in the changing system of international relations. And above all, this desire of Kazakhstan is connected with the search for profitable foreign partners for obtaining foreign financial and technological investments in order to solve their internal economic problems. Such interaction is designed not only to strengthen external positions, but also to ensure diversification of ways and forms of further political and economic integration into the world community and increase the competitiveness of the manufacturing industry (State program of industrial-innovative development, 2014).

In the opinion of the Russian scientist A. Khazanov, the feature of the "big game" around Central Asia is not so much in the dispatch of the armed forces as in investments. "There is a war between investors for access to natural resources, for choosing a route for oil and gas pipelines, for sales markets, for external policy and external economic orientations of the Central Asian states" (Khazanov, 2004: 85). And not only major powers such as the USA, Russia, China, and the European Union are involved in this game, but also the GCC members are including too. In the Post-Cold War era foreign policy interests of GCC countries were directed to intensification of collaboration with the Asian continent. There were established successful partnerships with Japan, South Korea, China, India, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Also, as international observers predicted there were active interests of GCC states to the new five Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan,

Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan). Over the twenty-five years partnership's development has intensified between sides. This study aimed to argue that the strategy of collaboration between Kazakhstan and GCC states based on Islamic component. In this regards, we will use the main points of such theory of IR as Constructivism.

2. METHODOLOGY

Constructivism sees the world, and what we can know about the world, as socially constructed. This view refers to the nature of reality and the nature of knowledge that are also called ontology and epistemology in research language (Добавить ссылку Alexander Wendt. *International Security*. Vol. 20, No. 1 (Summer, 1995), pp. 71-81.). One of central issues to constructivism is identities and interests. Constructivists argue that states can have multiple identities that are socially constructed through interaction with other actors. Identities are representations of an actor's understanding of who they are, which in turn signals their interests. They are important to constructivists as they argue that identities constitute interests and actions. For example, the identity of a small state implies a set of interests that are different from those implied by the identity of a large state. The small state is arguably more focused on its survival, whereas the large state is concerned with dominating global political, economic and military affairs. It should be noted, though, that the actions of a state should be aligned with its identity. A state can thus, not act contrary to its identity because this will call into question the validity of the identity, including its preferences (Добавить ссылку S.Mcglincey,

R.Walters & C.Scheinflug. *International Relations Theory*. Bristol, England 2017). This issue might explain that Kazakhstan's interaction with the GCC countries is a social reality that is neither invariably given nor rationally predetermined. On the contrary, it can and should be viewed as a social construct, an idea that is perceived as natural and obvious by the parties. At the same time, the strategy of Kazakhstan's rapprochement with the GCC countries is, in fact, an "imaginary", invented or artificially created, cultural artefact. On the basis of the theory of constructivism, we will consider the cooperation of the parties as designed by themselves - the Republic of Kazakhstan and the GCC countries on the basis of their sociocultural characteristics and conditionally designated civilizational ties. Constructivists focus on how, with the help of language, people construct the political world in which they are live, and how the constructs they generate affect their political behavior. Therefore, the main focus of our research will be directed to the analysis of Arabic and Kazakh texts with using methods of content-analysis, discourse-analysis and interview.

In accordance with the theory of constructivism Social norms are very important. These are generally defined as 'a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity'. States that conform to a certain identity are expected to comply with the norms that are associated with that identity (Добавить ссылку S.McGlinchey, R.Walters & C.Scheinflug. *International Relations Theory*. Bristol, England 2017). This idea comes with an expectation that some kinds of behavior and action are more acceptable than others. This process is also known as 'the logic of appropriateness', where actors behave in certain ways because they believe that this behavior is appropriate. To better understand norms,

we will try to analyze the establishment of common Kazakhstan-GCC interaction (Naumkin, 1995).

3. ANALYZING STRATEGY OF CONVERGENCE BETWEEN KAZAKHSTAN AND GCC

When determining the main parameters of Kazakhstan's entry into the list of 30 most developed countries of the world, which is reflected in the Message of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the dominant thesis is the active foreign policy of Kazakhstan, its pragmatic and balanced and multi-vector character with the aim of ensuring national interests in the international arena. Along with strengthening strategic partnership and mutually beneficial cooperation with Russia, China, the United States and neighboring Central Asian states, Nursultan Nazarbayev noted that Kazakhstan will build partnership relations with the countries of the Muslim world in all spheres of mutual interest (Niblock and Malik, 2013). Kazakhstan-GCC relationship was started from the first official visit of President Nursultan Nazarbayev to Saudi Arabia on June 1992. Then it was completed in September 1994. The intense political exchange of the years in the question was hence not meant to inform the creation of a working bilateral agenda, as it responded directly to the instrumental approach through which Kazakhstan was relating to Saudi Arabia at the time (Enteshami, 1994; *исправить ссылку на Luca Anceschi. Dilemmas of Compatibility: GCC-Kazakhstani Relations. Journal of Arabian Studies: Arabia, the Gulf, and the Red Sea, 4:1, 1-19*). It could be explained by Kazakhstani President Nazarbayev's travel to the holy sites to perform the

Umra. Justifying the strategic importance of the Muslim world in general and the GCC countries in particular, Kazakh analysts emphasize:

Islam has long grown into an independent factor in the system of modern international relations and influences many political processes in world politics and economy. Under these conditions, Kazakhstan stands for the restoration and development of Islam, as the country is part of a vast area of the Islamic world. At the same time, we are against the politicization of Islam. Our country is a secular state where religion separated from politics, and therefore unacceptable in any attempt to manipulate religious issues for political purposes (Wendt, 1995: 106; *исправить ссылку на Sultanov B. Kazakhstan I sovremennyi mir (Kazakhstan and Contemporary World)*). September 15, 2006. <http://www.kisi.kz>).

It should also be noted that, despite the civilizational closeness to the countries of the Persian Gulf, Kazakhstan, like the rest of Central Asian states, becomes their natural competitor. It would seem that this fact could to some extent be regarded as a mutual repulsive factor. However, in filling the spiritual vacuum after the collapse of communist ideology, the factor of religious kinship facilitated the involvement of these countries in the Islamic Ummah. Justifying the prospects of economic interaction with the countries of the Middle East, Kazakhstan experts point out the moment of spiritual closeness of the Kazakh and Arab peoples among factors influencing their mutual interest that in many respects is connected with the role of Islam in the process of searching for the national identity of both Kazakhs and many other peoples inhabiting the country (McGlinchey et al., 2017; *исправить ссылку на Nursha Askar, Chukubayev Yermek. Islam I geopolitica kak impulsy regionalnogo razvitiya Tsentralnoi Azii (Islam And geopolitics as impulses of regional development in Central Asia)* <http://www.kisi.kz/ru/categories/geopolitika-i-mezhdunarodnye-otnosheniya/posts/islam-i-geopolitika-kak-impul-sy-regional-nogo-razvitiy>). The formulation of such a question is positively advancing the

Arab countries, among which the special place is given to the states of the Persian Gulf. Representatives of the foreign policy department recognized that "the experience of the Arabian monarchies of the Persian Gulf in the framework of the globalization processes, which are usual for the current stage of civilization, is of undoubted interest for the practice of developing countries, for Kazakhstan as well as" (Katzenstein, 1996: 90; *исправить ссылку на Amreev Bagdat. Araviisskiye monarkhii I ikh mesto vo vneshnepolitichesskikh prioritetakh Kazakhstana (Arabian monarchies and their place in the foreign policy priorities of Kazakhstan). – Astana: Yelorda 2004. p. 16.*). The fact that the Arab countries, creating a modern European-style economy, continues to adhere to the national statehood, preserving the language culture, religious affiliation, is also valuable for Kazakhstan in forming its state identity. The importance of integrating the basis of Islam, embodied in the creation of such regional organizations as the League of Arab States, the Cooperation Council of the Arab States of the Persian Gulf, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, is of great importance in the solution of these economic and political issues by these countries, both internally and externally.

In essence, for Kazakhstan as for other former Soviet republics, a paradoxical situation developed: as Russia inherited everything that was created in the sphere of foreign policy during the Soviet period, Kazakhstan, since gaining independence, faced the need for independent accession to the world community. This problem therefore covered many aspects of the complex and ambiguous process of the gradual formation of Kazakhstan's foreign policy. The same thing happens with the national school of diplomacy, the creation of which began only in the 90s of the last century (*Добавить ссылку Tokayev K. Preodolyeniye (Overcoming).*

– Astana, 2003.). Since there were no direct contacts between Kazakhstan and the Arab world, it was necessary to build a system of relationships on new principles for themselves. The fact is that during the Soviet Union relations developed only with those Arab countries that adhered to socialist orientation. The incompatibility of the ideological principles of atheism and the international communist doctrine of the Soviet Union with the homeland of Islam by Saudi Arabia made the development of relations practically impossible (Добавить ссылку Abdel Aziz, *At Turk Madjid Ben: Saudovsko-rossiiskiye otnosheniyav globalnykh I regionalnykh processakh* (Saudi-Russian relations in global and regional processes) (1926-2004). Moscow, 2005). After the collapse of the USSR, new independent states of Central Asia appeared on the world map, which in many respects were connected with the region of the Muslim community. Central Asian countries were recognized by the Arab countries as Muslims - exclusively in a civilizational sense. This led to the emergence of a new Central Asian vector in the foreign policy of the Arab countries. The development of new approaches to the strategy for recognizing the region and developing relations with it has begun. Among the many opinions of experts who tried to determine / assess the process of relations between Kazakhstan and the Arab world, I would like to mention the statement of Naumkin that "Neither Iran nor Turkey is able to satisfy the technological and investment needs of Central Asia. It could be achieved only by the Persian Gulf states"(March and Johan, 1998: 115; исправить ссылку V.Naumkin. *The Political and Security Linkages between the Gulf and Muslim States of CATR. From the Gulf to Central Asia*, University of Exeter Press, 1995.h.216). At the same time, according to Arab analysts, the importance of these states for the Central Asian region lies in the existence of a balance between Islamic values, market reform, political

pluralism and democracy, which can serve as a development model for new Muslim states. Analyzing the economic potential of the region, the experts emphasized that the new geopolitical situation opens up prospects for the Arab countries to use Kazakhstan as a new market for the sale of goods, and the availability of raw materials and rich natural resources make the country a very profitable area for investment. At the same time, it should be noted an important factor that the Uzbek researcher Z. Munavarov refers to. "The existence in the region of a" Muslim nuclear state "- Kazakhstan and the presence on its territory of the world's largest commodore can be a good basis for the development of outer space, telecommunications and other projects with the countries of the Middle East" (Foreign Policy Concept, 2014: 118; Не верно указана ссылка. Заменить Munavarov Z. Uzbekistan and the Gulf Co-operation Council: Perspectives of Political and Economic Co-operation. From the Gulf, 1994, p.84).).

In this regard, it should be mentioned recognition of the first Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, K. Tokayev that the fact of possession of nuclear weapons was indeed in the sphere of the increased interest of the Arab countries. Describing Kazakhstan's foreign policy in the first years of independence, he wrote that in 1992, "in a precarious situation of tug-of-war between Russia and other de-facto nuclear states on joining the Treaty on the Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms, our President received letters from some countries with a warm climate with a proposal to preserve nuclear weapons" (Добавить ссылку Tokayev K. Vneshnyaya politika. Kazakhstan I mirovoye soobshestvo (Foreign Policy. Kazakhstan and World Community), 1995. #2. p.3). Moreover, according to K.Tokayev's remarks, they suggested to Kazakhstan funding

for its content and setting up management systems for these purposes. As Kazakhstan is located in the zone of the traditional spread of Sunni Islam for Central Asia, it was believed that rapprochement should lead to the revival of national spiritual values. But, as Dr. Taha Abdel Alim points out, "there is a huge difference between the understanding of Islam in the Central Asian region and its role in the Muslim world"(Anceschi, 2014: 39). Taking into account this circumstance, Arab political scientists consider it necessary to recognize and support the Islamized consciousness of Muslims in the region, giving them opportunities to study the foundations of Islam. Further, they believe that Saudi Arabia can take on the role of an educator because it is the guardian of the two holy places. These statements once again confirm the strategic importance of the region for the Persian Gulf. In the mid-1990s, Islamic theologians defined their vision for the new Islamic republics in the pages of the Islamic League press in the *Al-Alam al-Islami* newspaper. They supported the proclamation of the independence of the new Islamic republics, stating that: "The collapse of the Soviet Union has brought a new spirit to our Islamic world, members of our Ummah are calling for establishing links with the new republics and supporting them to return the Islamic entity to various spheres of their lives" (Sultanov, 2006: 113). To implement such a responsible mission, the scientific Islamic circles worked out a practical program aimed at legitimizing ties with new subjects of the Islamic Ummah. According to the Saudi theologian, Dr. Mohammed Abdo Yamani should start with:

1. Educating Muslims in these countries through providing literature and teachers. Granting for study in universities of Saudi Arabia. The manifestation of constant concern in the form of

building new schools in their countries. Particular attention should be paid to the education of young people.

2. Establishment of economic contacts with these countries. It is necessary that the Islamic world understand that Muslims in these regions need support in connection with the economic crisis. Ignoring these countries by us can lead to economic pressure on them, hence to cause numerous dangers in the future.

3. Assist in the construction of hospitals, cultural institutions that would compete with non-Muslim institutions.

4. Conduct a special selection of agitators for sending to the region, so that they contribute to the spread of Islam. It is necessary to increase the role and number of mosques.

Following Yamani, the task of the countries of the Persian Gulf is to make the Muslims of Central Asia feel the meaning of the unity of the Ummah, which should warn them against separation (Nursha and Chukubayev, 2007).

Dr. Ahmad Fuad Pasha - noted the achievements of the Islamic culture of the peoples of Central Asia, which in the pre-Soviet period were an indivisible part of the Islamic Ummah and its civilization. As heirs of the great scientists of Islamic civilization, like Ulugbek, al-Bukhari, al-Biruni, Al-Khorezmi, al-Farabi, they need help to return their shaken place within the Islamic community. To this end, the professor points out the need to expand contacts and cooperation with former Soviet republics. This cooperation, according to the professor, should cover various spheres

of life in order to block the path to the enemies of Islam, who use any opportunity to discredit/excommunicate from the faith (Amreev, 2004).

4. CONCLUSION

It is clear that the meaning of these statements points to the special role of Islam, through which the countries of the Persian Gulf, in particular Saudi Arabia, would like to occupy their own niche in the region. Against this background, the declared interest of both sides and the development of interactions suggested that each side had its own vision of their content and future ways of development and the role of Islam in them. The interests that guided the parties in establishing relations were largely different, sometimes even fundamentally opposite. If the Saudi kingdom claimed about the expansion of the Ummah, the zone of its influence both at the regional and global levels, then the Kazakh side, using Islamic rhetoric, was interested in an early resolution of the internal economic problems by consolidating its status as a subject of international relations. In 1992, while developing the concept of the formation and development of Kazakhstan as a sovereign state, President Nazarbayev wrote:

Although Islam is not the only one religion and we are not practicing Islamic fundamentalism, we must take into account the Islamic factor because of its real significance in contemporary international relations. This is important for Muslim believers from the standpoint of spiritual communication, and for all Kazakhstan people regardless of their confessional affiliation - in terms of the potential benefits from ties with the rich countries of the Islamic world. The international communication with them will be used for mutually beneficial cooperation in all spheres, especially in the rise of the economy and the standard of living of the entire population of Kazakhstan (Tokayev, 2003: 120; 120 [исправить ссылку Kazakhstanskaya Pravda. May 16, 1992](#)).

In other words, in fact, from the first year of independence, Islam began to be used by the Kazakh leadership in developing a foreign policy strategy.

Due to geographical, economic and geopolitical factors between Kazakhstan and the Persian Gulf countries, there is mutual interest in building up trade and political relations. At the same time, one should take into account the arguments of Kazakhstani analysts Nursha and Chukubayev. They emphasize that:

Being part of the Muslim world, Kazakhstan does not belong to a single Muslim political space. The intensification of the development of relations in this direction is intended to ensure the diversification of foreign policy and compensate for the West, Russia, China, as well as meet the cultural and religious needs of the predominant Muslim population (Abdel, 2005: 202).

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