THEORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF POLITOLOGY & HISTORY

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AS A DETERMINANT IN THE ACTIVITIES OF THE ORGANIZATION OF TURKIC STATES

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Abstract. The Organization of Turkic States (OTS) has emerged as a significant regional actor, shaping geopolitical and economic dynamics in Eurasia. As the organization expands its scope, international security considerations have become a critical determinant in its activities. This study examines how external security threats, including geopolitical tensions in the South Caucasus, Russia's assertive influence over post-Soviet Turkic republics, and China's strategic expansion in Central Asia, impact the security priorities of the OTS. Using a qualitative research methodology that incorporates case study analysis, content analysis, and comparative approaches, this research evaluates the organization's responses to these challenges. Key findings indicate that the OTS has shifted from a primarily cultural and economic cooperation platform to a security-oriented regional organization, prioritizing military collaboration, economic security, and cybersecurity. The Shusha Declaration, joint military exercises, and counterterrorism initiatives demonstrate the OTS's proactive approach to security threats. Furthermore, cybersecurity cooperation and the transition to a common Turkic alphabet illustrate the organization's strategic efforts to counter hybrid warfare and information security risks. The study concludes that the OTS's evolving security framework is essential for maintaining regional stability, enhancing strategic autonomy, and reducing external dependencies. Future trends suggest that the OTS will continue to strengthen its security mechanisms, balancing geopolitical competition while fostering deeper regional integration.

Key words: Organization of Turkic States, regional security, regional integration, military cooperation, cybersecurity.

Introduction. The increasing influence of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) in regional and international affairs underscores the growing significance of international security as a determinant in its activities. As the OTS expands its geopolitical reach and economic integration, it faces complex security challenges that necessitate a strategic approach to safeguarding regional stability (Gündoğdu, 2023). These challenges, including geopolitical tensions in the South Caucasus, Russia's assertive policies in post-Soviet Turkic republics, and China's expanding influence in Central Asia, have compelled the OTS to prioritize international security as a central pillar of its strategic agenda. The organization's evolving role from a platform for cultural and economic cooperation to a significant geopolitical actor reflects its proactive stance in addressing transnational threats such as terrorism, cybersecurity vulnerabilities, and energy security concerns. By enhancing military cooperation, economic resilience, and diplomatic coordination, the OTS not only reinforces the security of its member states but also solidifies its position as a key player in the Eurasian geopolitical landscape. As the international security environment continues to evolve, the OTS's strategic orientation and growing influence will be crucial in shaping the regional order, making its security priorities increasingly relevant on the global stage.

In this regard, the purpose of this research is to analyze how international security dynamics influence the strategic orientation and policy responses of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS). It aims

to explore the interaction between external security challenges and internal security mechanisms, highlighting the organization's evolving role as a regional security actor.

For this reason, the research employs a qualitative methodology, incorporating case study analysis, content analysis, and comparative analysis to examine the security dynamics of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS). By utilizing document analysis, the study evaluates official agreements, policy documents, and strategic declarations such as the Shusha Declaration, the Nakhchivan Agreement, and the Turkic World 2040 Vision Document, allowing for a structured assessment of the organization's evolving security framework. A comparative approach is used to analyze the security policies of OTS member states in response to external geopolitical challenges, particularly in relation to Russia, China, and regional conflicts. Additionally, content analysis of reports from international organizations, academic sources, and security think tanks provides deeper insights into the role of economic security, military cooperation, cybersecurity, and counterterrorism within OTS activities. This methodological framework ensures a comprehensive understanding of how internal and external security factors interact, offering an analytical basis for evaluating the OTS's strategic positioning and future security trajectory.

The academic contribution of this research lies in its comprehensive examination of the OTS's security priorities, providing a nuanced understanding of how geopolitical pressures shape regional integration and security cooperation among Turkic states. By offering a comparative analysis of security strategies within the context of Eurasian geopolitics, this study enhances existing literature on regional security organizations and contributes to the broader discourse on international security and political alliances.

Regional Security Issues Affecting the Organization of Turkic States

The Organization of Turkic States (OTS) operates within a complex geopolitical environment shaped by various regional security dynamics. As an entity that fosters cooperation among Turkic-speaking nations, the OTS faces significant security challenges stemming from broader geopolitical tensions and regional conflicts. These security issues are deeply interconnected, shaping the strategic orientation and policy responses of member states. The evolving nature of regional security concerns necessitates a comprehensive understanding of how factors such as the stability of the South Caucasus, Russia's policies toward post-Soviet Turkic republics, Central Asian security dynamics, China's growing influence, and the ramifications of the Russia-Ukraine war collectively impact the organization. In this context, security concerns not only affect individual member states but also influence the cohesion, strategic priorities, and long-term objectives of the OTS as a whole.

One of the primary security issues confronting the OTS is the stability of the South Caucasus, particularly the geopolitical tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The Second Karabakh War in 2020 and the subsequent developments have altered the regional security landscape, necessitating greater engagement from OTS member states, particularly Turkey, in regional security affairs. While Azerbaijan has restored sovereignty over its territories, unresolved diplomatic tensions and potential destabilizing factors persist (Cabarov, 2021: 127). The role of external actors, such as Russia and Iran, in shaping the security dynamics of the region further complicates the situation. As Azerbaijan is a key member of the OTS, developments in the South Caucasus directly influence the security framework of the organization, particularly regarding the transportation corridors, energy security, and broader regional stability (Gök, 2022).

Russia's stance toward post-Soviet Turkic republics remains another critical security challenge. Despite the formal independence of these states, Russia continues to exert significant political, military, and economic influence over many of them, particularly in Central Asia. Moscow's approach oscillates between cooperation and coercion, with mechanisms such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) serving as instruments of influence. The OTS operates within this complex environment, where its members must balance relations with

Russia while simultaneously pursuing greater regional integration. Russia's policies toward Turkic states, particularly its response to Kazakhstan's handling of internal unrest in 2022 and its military involvement in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan's border tensions, reflect the challenges OTS states face in asserting their independent security policies without provoking geopolitical retaliation from Moscow.

The security landscape of Central Asia, particularly in Kazakhstan, presents another layer of complexity for the OTS. Kazakhstan, as the largest and most economically significant Central Asian state, plays a crucial role in regional stability. However, internal security threats, including political unrest, border tensions, and the risk of external influence, pose challenges to its long-term stability. The 2022 protests in Kazakhstan, triggered by economic grievances but ultimately evolving into a broader political crisis, highlighted vulnerabilities within the region (Kudaibergenova, & Laruelle, 2022). The involvement of the CSTO, at Kazakhstan's request, demonstrated Russia's continued capacity to intervene in the internal affairs of its post-Soviet neighbors. Given that Kazakhstan is a core member of the OTS, its security and political stability directly impact the organization's ability to strengthen regional cooperation without external interference.

China's rise as a global power has introduced new security considerations for Central Asia and the OTS as a whole. Through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has significantly expanded its economic and infrastructural footprint in Central Asia, fostering deep interdependencies with regional states (Jahangirli & Jabarov, 2024). However, while economic engagement with China brings investment and development opportunities, it also raises concerns over political influence, debt dependency, and security ramifications. The increasing securitization of China's approach to Central Asia, including its growing military cooperation with regional states and concerns over Uyghur populations, further complicates the security calculations of OTS members (Gökçelik, 2021). The challenge for the OTS lies in navigating China's rising presence while maintaining strategic autonomy and preventing excessive dependency on Beijing's economic and security policies.

The ongoing Russia-Ukraine war has fundamentally reshaped regional security calculations, affecting the OTS in multiple ways. Firstly, the war has weakened Russia's geopolitical standing, creating new opportunities for OTS member states to assert greater independence from Moscow's influence. However, it has also heightened regional security risks, particularly in terms of energy security, economic disruptions, and the risk of regional instability spilling over into Central Asia and the Caucasus. The war has accelerated the reconfiguration of alliances, with OTS members needing to carefully balance their foreign policy approaches to avoid entanglement in the broader geopolitical confrontation. Moreover, the war has demonstrated the vulnerabilities of post-Soviet states to external aggression, reinforcing the urgency of security cooperation among Turkic states while simultaneously raising concerns over Russia's future behavior toward its neighboring regions.

Thus, the Organization of Turkic States operates in a highly complex and evolving security environment. The interplay between the South Caucasus conflicts, Russia's regional policies, internal and external threats in Central Asia, China's growing influence, and the repercussions of the Russia-Ukraine war collectively shape the organization's strategic landscape. These factors necessitate a nuanced and adaptive security approach, where OTS members must carefully navigate geopolitical pressures while fostering greater regional integration. Addressing these security challenges requires a combination of diplomatic engagement, strategic balancing, and institutional strengthening to ensure that the OTS remains a relevant and cohesive force in an increasingly multipolar and competitive international order.

Internal Security Determinants of the Organization of Turkic States

The internal security dynamics of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) are shaped by a complex interplay of historical, political, and economic factors that have driven member states toward deeper cooperation. This cooperation, while largely aimed at strengthening cultural, economic, and diplomatic ties, has evolved in response to external security pressures (Korkmaz, 2023: 162).

The foundational principles of OTS have gradually expanded to encompass defense and security concerns as a reaction to regional instabilities and geopolitical challenges. From its inception with the Nakhchivan Agreement in 2009, the organization has progressively developed mechanisms for addressing internal security through institutional frameworks, military agreements, counterterrorism efforts, and economic strategies (Akçapa, 2023). The gradual transformation of OTS into a platform that not only fosters cooperation but also ensures collective security reflects the broader need for regional resilience against external threats.

A crucial milestone in this security trajectory was the Almaty Summit in 2011, where economic cooperation was formally recognized as a key pillar of stability. Economic security forms the bedrock of internal security, as financial vulnerabilities often translate into broader security risks. The summit emphasized trade partnerships, energy security, and economic integration among Turkic states, laying the foundation for future strategic alignments (İbrahimov, 2022). Over time, economic security concerns became inseparable from political and defense-related priorities, particularly in light of energy dependencies, supply chain disruptions, and external geopolitical influences. This economic cooperation has not only enhanced internal stability but also provided a buffer against external economic coercion from global powers (Korkmaz & Soğukoğlu, 2024).

As security concerns intensified, military and defense collaborations emerged as an indispensable aspect of OTS cooperation. The 2019 Military Cooperation Agreement between Turkey and Kazakhstan exemplifies this shift, marking a commitment to joint defense capabilities and military-industrial collaboration. Similarly, the 2020 Joint Military Exercises between Turkey and Azerbaijan underscored the necessity of defense coordination in light of regional conflicts, particularly in the South Caucasus. These agreements reflect the increasing awareness among OTS members that internal security cannot be separated from broader defense strategies, especially in a region where external threats and conflicts frequently disrupt stability. The Shusha Declaration of 2021 further reinforced this trajectory, cementing the military and strategic alliance between Turkey and Azerbaijan while setting a precedent for deeper security cooperation among other OTS members (Özsoy, 2023).

Beyond military alliances, cybersecurity has become a vital component of internal security strategies within the OTS framework. The establishment of the Cybersecurity Working Group in 2019 signaled a recognition of digital vulnerabilities as national security threats. With increasing cyberattacks on government institutions and critical infrastructure, OTS members have sought to develop joint responses to safeguard their digital ecosystems. The cooperation between Turkey and Azerbaijan in cyber defense, including intelligence-sharing and joint training programs, highlights the organization's efforts to preemptively counter digital threats (Erkiner & Eray, 2022). Strengthening cyber resilience is crucial not only for national security but also for protecting economic infrastructures and ensuring political stability in an era where cyber warfare has become a primary instrument of geopolitical competition.

Another key internal security determinant is the fight against terrorism, which remains a pressing concern for Turkic states. The 2016 Security Cooperation Agreement between Turkey and Azerbaijan and the 2021 Security Cooperation Agreement between Turkey and Kyrgyzstan exemplify joint efforts to counter terrorism, insurgency, and transnational threats. These agreements have facilitated intelligence-sharing, border security enhancements, and counterterrorism operations (Tekir, 2023). The creation of the OTS Counterterrorism Task Force in 2018 further institutionalized cooperation in this field, fostering regional mechanisms to combat radicalization and illicit cross-border activities. This collaborative approach underscores the understanding that terrorism, if left unchecked, poses not only an external threat but also a destabilizing force within OTS member states, eroding internal security and social cohesion (Mustofaev, 2022).

Linguistic and cultural unity has also been leveraged as a tool for internal security. The decision to transition to a common Turkic alphabet represents a significant step toward strengthening unity

among Turkic nations, facilitating easier communication, and reinforcing collective identity. While primarily a cultural and educational initiative, this linguistic transition also carries strategic implications for internal cohesion and resilience (Akın & Polat, 2024). By fostering a shared sense of belonging, the OTS mitigates risks associated with foreign influence and ideological fragmentation. A unified linguistic policy reduces external manipulation and strengthens information security, which is essential in an era where hybrid warfare and disinformation campaigns pose increasing threats to national sovereignty.

The culmination of these internal security efforts was the adoption of the Turkic World 2040 Vision Document during the 2021 OTS Summit, which institutionalized the long-term strategic objectives of the organization. This document formalized the principles of political, economic, and security cooperation, ensuring a coherent framework for addressing future security challenges (Ural, 2024). By emphasizing multilateral cooperation, diplomatic engagement, and defense coordination, the OTS positioned itself as a regional actor capable of safeguarding its members from external destabilization. The organization's evolving security paradigm highlights how internal security dynamics have increasingly become a proactive response to external geopolitical uncertainties, reinforcing the notion that regional resilience is built upon collective action and shared strategic vision.

Research Findings

The research findings reveal that international security dynamics significantly shape the strategic orientation and policy decisions of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS). The study highlights how external geopolitical pressures, particularly from Russia and China, influence internal security priorities and regional integration efforts. Additionally, the findings underscore the OTS's adaptive security strategies, which emphasize military cooperation, economic resilience, and cybersecurity to navigate complex regional challenges. In this regard, the interaction between external security problems affecting the organization's activities and its internal security dynamics can be seen in the table below (Table 1).

Table 1

**Interaction Between External and Internal Security Dynamics
of the Organization of Turkic States**

External Security Factors Affecting the Organization	Internal Security Responses of the Organization
South Caucasus conflicts (Azerbaijan-Armenia tensions)	Military cooperation (Turkey-Azerbaijan joint exercises, Shusha Declaration)
Russia's influence over post-Soviet Turkic republics	Balancing relations with Russia while strengthening regional integration
Central Asia security threats (Kazakhstan unrest, border tensions)	Economic security measures (trade, energy projects, infrastructure)
China's geopolitical expansion in Central Asia	Maintaining strategic autonomy while engaging in selective cooperation with China
Impacts of the Russia-Ukraine war (economic, energy, security)	Strengthening multilateral security frameworks, diversifying energy partnerships
Cybersecurity threats and digital vulnerabilities	Cybersecurity collaborations (OTS Cybersecurity Working Group, Turkey-Azerbaijan initiatives)
Terrorism and transnational security threats	Counterterrorism cooperation (OTS Counterterrorism Task Force, bilateral security agreements)

The table illustrates the intricate relationship between external security challenges and the internal security responses of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS). The regional security landscape, shaped by conflicts in the South Caucasus, Russia's influence over post-Soviet Turkic republics,

and security threats in Central Asia, has necessitated a strategic recalibration within the OTS. In response to the Azerbaijan-Armenia tensions, the organization has strengthened military cooperation, particularly through the Turkey-Azerbaijan joint exercises and the Shusha Declaration, which underscore a commitment to collective security. Similarly, Russia's persistent geopolitical leverage over Central Asia has compelled OTS member states to seek a balanced approach—maintaining ties with Moscow while simultaneously enhancing regional integration. This dynamic is evident in the economic initiatives aimed at reducing external dependencies and fostering self-reliance among member states. Central Asia's internal unrest, particularly in Kazakhstan, has further reinforced the need for economic stability measures, with trade partnerships and infrastructure development playing a critical role in mitigating security vulnerabilities.

Beyond traditional military and economic concerns, the OTS has also had to adapt to evolving non-traditional security threats such as cyber warfare and terrorism. The increasing cybersecurity threats have led to the establishment of joint cybersecurity initiatives, notably through the OTS Cybersecurity Working Group and bilateral partnerships between Turkey and Azerbaijan. This proactive stance aims to protect critical digital infrastructure, ensuring that state institutions remain resilient to cyberattacks. Similarly, the transnational nature of terrorism has necessitated a coordinated counterterrorism strategy, exemplified by the OTS Counterterrorism Task Force and bilateral security agreements that facilitate intelligence-sharing and operational cooperation. The overarching trend revealed in the table is that external security crises serve as catalysts for internal security consolidation within the OTS, pushing the organization toward greater institutionalization and strategic autonomy. This pattern underscores the necessity of a dynamic security framework that adapts to regional shifts while fostering a sense of collective resilience among member states.

So, it is possible to analyze the security priorities of the organization more effectively through a heatmap visualization.
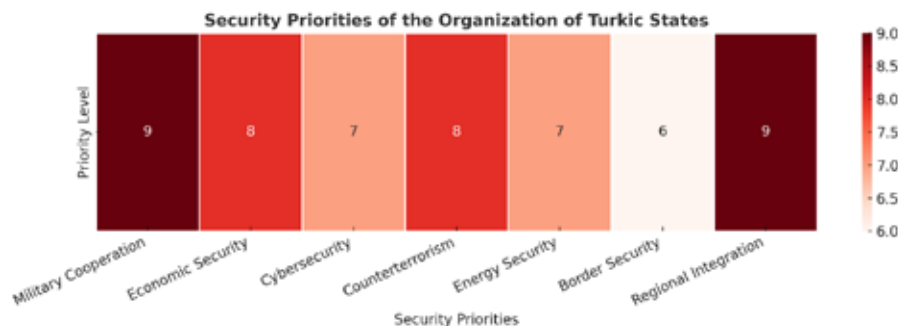

Figure 1. Security Priorities of the Organization of Turkic States

The security priorities of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) are assessed based on key determinants such as geopolitical threats, economic stability, military cooperation, cyber vulnerabilities, and counterterrorism efforts. These priorities are shaped by both external and internal security challenges, compelling the organization to develop strategic responses in multiple domains. The 9-point scale used in the heatmap reflects the relative intensity of these security concerns, with higher values assigned to areas that demand immediate attention and sustained collaboration among member states. The 9-point scale was chosen to balance granularity and simplicity in evaluating security priorities. A 10-point scale could imply an absolute maximum that might be unnecessary for comparative analysis, while an 8-point scale might limit differentiation between closely ranked priorities. The 9-point scale allows for a more refined classification without overcomplicating the assessment, ensuring that each priority is weighted appropriately within a structured and proportional

framework. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how OTS allocates its resources and formulates its security strategies, ensuring that the most pressing threats are addressed through collective action. By prioritizing issues such as military coordination, regional integration, and economic security, the OTS underscores its commitment to maintaining stability in a rapidly evolving security landscape.

In this regard, the heatmap reveals that military cooperation and regional integration hold the highest priority, scoring 9 out of 9, highlighting the organization's focus on defense partnerships and geopolitical cohesion. The emphasis on military alliances, as seen in the Shusha Declaration and Turkey-Azerbaijan joint exercises, reflects the necessity of maintaining a strong deterrence posture, particularly in response to conflicts in the South Caucasus. Regional integration is equally critical, as enhanced cooperation among Turkic states strengthens their collective geopolitical positioning and reduces external dependencies. Economic security and counterterrorism, both scoring 8, signify the recognition that financial stability and the fight against terrorism are fundamental to maintaining internal security. Economic vulnerabilities can be exploited by external powers, making trade, energy cooperation, and infrastructure development essential components of OTS's resilience strategy. Counterterrorism remains a crucial area of cooperation, as seen in the establishment of the OTS Counterterrorism Task Force, which facilitates intelligence-sharing and joint operations to combat transnational threats.

Cybersecurity, energy security, and border security, while slightly lower in ranking, remain essential components of OTS's security framework. Cybersecurity (7 points) has gained prominence due to the increasing frequency of cyberattacks targeting state institutions and economic infrastructures, leading to the creation of the OTS Cybersecurity Working Group. Energy security (7 points) is another key focus, particularly due to the region's role as an energy corridor and the need to ensure stable energy supplies amid global disruptions. Finally, border security (6 points) is closely tied to issues such as migration, smuggling, and regional conflicts, particularly in Central Asia. Although it ranks slightly lower, ongoing cooperation in border protection—especially between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan—demonstrates that it remains an area of strategic concern. Overall, the heatmap underscores how OTS security priorities are interconnected, with military, economic, and cybersecurity concerns reinforcing one another to ensure a comprehensive security framework that enhances the organization's regional stability.

Conclusion. As a conclusion, the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) navigates a complex security environment marked by regional conflicts, geopolitical rivalries, and emerging non-traditional security threats. As demonstrated throughout the analysis, the security dynamics of the OTS are shaped by both external pressures and internal strategic realignments. A key finding is that the OTS has strategically adapted its security priorities to address external threats while simultaneously enhancing internal cohesion. This adaptability underscores the organization's evolution from a cultural and economic cooperation platform to a more comprehensive security actor in the Eurasian geopolitical landscape. The ability of the OTS to balance military cooperation, economic security, cybersecurity, and counterterrorism initiatives highlights its strategic pragmatism in responding to a rapidly changing security context. By integrating security measures across multiple domains, the OTS demonstrates a holistic approach to safeguarding the stability and sovereignty of its member states.

The analysis reveals that military cooperation and regional integration are the cornerstone of OTS security strategy, driven by geopolitical tensions in the South Caucasus and Russia's influence over post-Soviet Turkic republics. These external pressures have catalyzed a shift towards more robust defense collaborations, as seen in the Shusha Declaration and joint military exercises. However, the growing emphasis on military alliances presents a dual challenge: while it strengthens the OTS's collective defense posture, it also risks escalating regional tensions, particularly with neighboring powers like Russia and Iran. To mitigate this, the OTS must pursue a balanced military strategy that emphasizes deterrence without provoking unnecessary confrontations. This requires a sophisticated

geopolitical balancing act, maintaining strategic autonomy while fostering constructive engagement with neighboring powers.

Economic security and cybersecurity emerge as vital pillars of internal stability for the OTS, reflecting the interdependence between economic resilience and national security. The organization's focus on trade partnerships, infrastructure development, and energy security not only reinforces economic stability but also reduces vulnerabilities to external economic coercion. In parallel, the prioritization of cybersecurity initiatives underscores the recognition that digital vulnerabilities pose significant risks to national sovereignty and political stability. By proactively addressing cyber threats through joint defense mechanisms and intelligence-sharing, the OTS enhances its resilience against hybrid warfare tactics, particularly in an era of escalating cyber espionage and digital disinformation campaigns. This comprehensive approach to economic and cybersecurity reinforces the OTS's commitment to safeguarding its digital and economic sovereignty.

The strategic focus on counterterrorism cooperation highlights the OTS's recognition of transnational security threats that transcend national borders. As terrorism and extremism continue to pose significant challenges, the OTS has institutionalized its counterterrorism efforts through the establishment of the Counterterrorism Task Force and bilateral security agreements. This collaborative framework enables coordinated intelligence-sharing, border security enhancements, and joint counterterrorism operations, thereby reducing the risks of radicalization and illicit cross-border activities. However, the complexity of terrorism dynamics in the region necessitates a more integrated approach that addresses the root causes of extremism, including social, political, and economic disparities. Moving forward, the OTS must expand its counterterrorism strategy to include preventive measures such as educational initiatives, community engagement, and socio-economic development programs that counteract extremist narratives.

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