



“C5+1” as a Dovetailing Mechanism for Central Asia’s Regional Integration: Insights from Uzbekistan

Original Paper

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Abstract

This article examines the evolving geopolitical landscape of Central Asia and evaluates the “C5+1” multilateral format as a mechanism for regional cooperation, strategic balancing, and integration. With Uzbekistan playing a pivotal role in shaping regional diplomacy, the study explores how the “C5+1” framework serves as a “dovetailing mechanism” – aligning regional interests with external engagements while maintaining strategic autonomy. By analyzing historical trends, policy shifts, and emerging regional dynamics, the paper assesses the effectiveness of this diplomatic platform in balancing the influence of major external actors, including the United States, European Union, China, Russia, India, and other regional stakeholders.

Uzbekistan’s proactive and pragmatic diplomacy, particularly under the “Uzbekistan-2030” Strategy, has strengthened intra-regional cooperation through bilateral treaties, consultative meetings, and economic partnerships. The country has led efforts to institutionalize multilateral collaboration, enhance economic integration, and mitigate long-standing regional disputes. However, while the “C5+1” format has expanded from ministerial to summit-level engagements, challenges remain in its long-term sustainability. The paper critically examines potential risks, such as external powers steering the agenda, the lack of formal institutionalization, and internal competition among Central Asian States (CAS).

By providing a comparative analysis of different “C5+1” models, this study offers insights into how Central Asia can leverage this framework to foster sustainable economic growth, regional security, and geopolitical stability. The findings contribute to ongoing discussions on multi-vector diplomacy and propose strategies to ensure that C5+1 remains a genuinely inclusive and effective mechanism for long-term regional integration.

Keywords

Regionalism • C5+1 • Central Asia • Uzbekistan • Central Asian States

1 Introduction

Central Asia has long captured the attention of global and regional powers due to its abundant natural resources, strategic location, potential for economic development, transportation, logistics, connectivity and etc. The overview of the recent literature and trends happening in and around the region reveal that leaders of CAS are committed and willing to consolidate their efforts against growing geopolitical pressure and enhance regional cooperation. These were observed in active and pragmatic regional policy of Uzbekistan and positive changes in neighboring CAS followed by intra-regional trade growth and frequency of high level visits in the region over recent years. Additionally, since 2017, there has been an emergence of consultative meetings among the heads of CAS, although these interactions remain informal and are yet to be fully institutionalized. Simultaneously, both global and regional actors have intensified their engagement in the geopolitics of the Central Asian region. Consequently, the “C5+1” format of multilateral cooperation, encompassing the five CAS (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, denoted as “C5”) and an external partner country (“1”), has emerged as an effective mechanism for balancing external influences and fostering cooperation.

Notably, ministerial “C5+1” meetings have transitioned into “summit” level, with Russia, China, the European Union (EU), the United States, Germany, India (yet online) and the highly likely with the United Kingdom and Japan in the coming years demonstrating the importance and preference of negotiations within the “C5+1” framework to discuss regional issues with major external

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powers. Therefore, a comparative analysis of the “C5+1” format employed by external powers is necessary to shed light on the role of this multilateral diplomatic platform.

This analysis will look at how these external powers leverage the “C5+1” framework to advance their strategic interests in the region, as well as how the “C5” itself plays a role in balancing external influences, effectively addressing regional challenges, and promoting sustainable development in Central Asia.

2 Uzbekistan’s Regional Policy and New Dynamics of Cooperation in Central Asia

Uzbekistan has a unique geopolitical advantage since it shares a border with all CAS, including Afghanistan, allowing it to influence political, security, and economic activities in the heart of Eurasian continent.

As a result, the Central Asian region has always been the primary focus of Uzbekistan’s foreign policy, as regional security and stability are closely tied to the country.

Uzbekistan has been undertaking ambitious reforms, including the recent “Uzbekistan – 2030” Strategy, which prioritizes social protection, good governance, strengthening economic development, protection of the country’s sovereignty and security. These enormous advances have not only improved the country’s domestic environment, but have also contributed to its active and pragmatic foreign policy. According to the “Uzbekistan – 2030” Strategy, Uzbekistan will maintain an open, pragmatic, and active foreign policy based on national interests, with the goal of establishing full-scale strategic relationships and alliances in Central Asia, as well as extending multidimensional beneficial cooperation with longstanding allies (Development Strategy Center 2023,10).

Uzbekistan is particularly dedicated to strengthen and develop friendly ties with neighboring states, on the basis of collaboration, mutual support, peace, and harmony. President Mirziyoyev’s proactive and pragmatic regional agenda have generated a positive diplomatic atmosphere among Central Asian countries. Indeed, political dialogue and mutual trust have been restored in Central Asia as a result of the measures and activities taken in this key direction. Transport connections between republics and cities were restored, the frequency of official visits at different levels was increased, and Consultative meetings of the heads of CAS were launched. In addition, solutions were found for complicated issues including the water, state borders, transport communications and others. These long-standing disagreements had been a substantial impediment to CAS increasing regional cooperation.

The economic-oriented foreign policy of Uzbekistan encourages active economic and trade relations with neighbors. As a result of growing trade and economic relations with CAS, Uzbekistan’s regional foreign trade turnover has increased nearly threefold since 2016 to almost \$7 billion by the end of 2024 (Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan 2023). Moreover, Uzbekistan has achieved impressive results in strengthening bilateral relations with every neighboring Central Asian state since 2017. Specifically, Uzbekistan has established strategic partnerships with Turkmenistan (2017), Kyrgyzstan (2017), and Tajikistan (2018), which developed into strategic partnerships by the end of 2023. Moreover, during 2022-2024 Uzbekistan signed agreements on allied relations with Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

Furthermore, the multilateral “Agreement on Friendship, Neighborliness, and Cooperation for Development of Central Asia in the 21st Century” was signed as part of the fourth Consultative meeting of the Heads of CAS, which was held in Cholpon-Ata on July 7, 2022. The peaceful, pragmatic, and active diplomacy of Uzbekistan has resulted in such important bilateral and multilateral agreements and treaties with neighboring countries. These also elevated Uzbekistan’s regional foreign policy to a new level, which turned into a crucial strategic move in maintaining stability and peace throughout Central Asia. Furthermore, the signing of these documents demonstrates the development of friendship and cooperation among CAS at a time when there is lack of communication and trust.

The role of the Consultative Meetings of the Heads of State of Central Asia in forming basis for regional cooperation and institutionalization of integration of CAS is important.

At the fifth meeting in Dushanbe in 2023, the first step toward institutionalizing the Consultative Meeting format was taken. The country leaders agreed to form a Council of National Coordinators responsible on the Consultative Meetings issues and in order to monitor the implementation of the agreements reached and develop new proposals for deepening cooperation (Ministry of foreign affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan 2023).

The Sixth Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia, convened in Astana on August 9, 2024, underscored a discernible trend toward enhanced regional integration. A salient feature of this meeting was its emphasis on identifying new avenues for deepening cooperation among CAS. The agenda encompassed a broad spectrum of topics, ranging from economic collaboration to security concerns, with each head of state articulating their respective national perspectives and contributing to collective conclusions and decisions.

In his address, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev of Uzbekistan articulated the necessity of evolving the Consultative Meeting format to bolster regional integration efforts and to broaden the long-term partnership agenda among member states (Official web-site of the President of Uzbekistan 2024). This summit was significant not only for the discussions it facilitated but also

for the tangible outcomes it produced. In pursuit of international subjectivity and unity within the Central Asian region, the enhancement of mechanisms for interaction among CAS has emerged as a priority. The Roadmap for the Development of Regional Cooperation until 2027, signed at the Sixth Consultative Meeting, aims to address these challenges by improving intergovernmental coordination and reinforcing oversight of the initiatives proposed during the consultative meetings. Additionally, another pivotal document signed in Astana, the Concept for the Development of Regional Cooperation "Central Asia-2040", was designed to expand mutual interactions and strengthen the international standing of Central Asia.

Indeed, "for all its light-touch approach, the consultative meetings have managed to create a firm and clear-cut set of fundamental norms and principles that define Central Asia and its denser intra-regional interactions" (Buranelli 2024.)

By revising the strategic foundations of bilateral relations with its neighbors in favor of strengthening good-neighborliness and cooperation, maintaining regional security, promoting trade and economic cooperation, and deepening cultural and humanitarian ties with brotherly nations, Uzbekistan has managed to bring relations with the states of the region to a new level (Kurbanov and Yunusova 2023).

3 Geopolitical turbulence in Central Asia and interests of external powers

In fact, the recent geopolitical trends and changes might not only affect the regional power of balance, but also the international system and global balance of power in general. In this regard, Central Asian countries are using the current geopolitical changes as a strategic advantage.

Indeed, following the recent positive changes in Central Asia and inter-regional processes in the region, especially under the rapid geopolitical tensions and uncertainties due to Russia-Ukraine conflict, both global and regional actors have increased their attention and focus on Central Asia. These external actors have also intensified their interactions with the Central Asian countries both bilaterally and multilaterally, in various spheres such as political, economic, security and humanitarian sectors.

For example, the United States (US) and the European Union (EU) have revised their strategies towards Central Asia, while traditional players such as Russia and China have also worked to increase their presence in the region through the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) respectively.

According to observers as the result of sanctions and disruption in global supply chain, Russia's global influence has suffered over the past year, and Central Asia is no exception in this regard (Umarov and Gabuev 2023). However, Russia has been a leading geopolitical actor in Central Asia for a long time and the region has an important place in the geopolitical architecture of Russian foreign policy (Sahakyan 2020). On other hand Central Asia is becoming more important for Russia, not least economically, as other trade routes have been closed off and redrawn (Engvall 2023, 263).

Because of the Soviet legacy, all of Central Asia's trade, transportation, energy, and other major infrastructure, as well as supply chains, were built with direct connections to Russia.

Furthermore, Central Asian labor migrants from Russia make significant contributions to their respective countries' economies. Furthermore, Moscow wields considerable influence in the region through soft power. Locals enjoy Russian mass media, including films, TV series, and theatrical performances (Gusev 2019).

At the same time, although Russia is currently in an adverse position to finance large international projects and promote economic activity in Central Asian countries, which limits its geopolitical maneuvering, Russia will likely remain the most influential external actor in the region in the mid-term perspective, both in terms of high-level diplomatic and security collaboration and its diverse portfolio of invested projects in Central Asia.

China primarily had economic interests Central Asia; however, with major advances in Chinese national development and its foreign policy strategy, particularly after the launch of the BRI, China's goals and presence in Central Asian region have shifted. In turn, for Central Asian countries BRI has become very favorable initiative which has a potential to boost regional connectivity and trade, and also modernize local infrastructure (Nurgozhayeva 2020).

In the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and geopolitical tensions at global level largely between the US and China, there are indications that China stands to benefit the most from the current situation (Gupta 2023). Meanwhile, China's attempts to enlarge its influence in Central Asia shouldn't only be seen as a simple expansion of Chinese economic power, it should be seen as a counter-offensive against Western economic and strategic interests (Ozat and Nelson 2023). Since 2013 as an important transit region, the five CAS have been among the biggest beneficiaries of the investments in infrastructure projects by China under its BRI initiative (Sharafeyeva 2023). For the CAS replacing one dependency with another is not an option, therefore they "are trying to diversify their ties to the outside world, and in that respect, both Russia and China are equally important to them" (Umarov and Gabuev 2023).

Given Central Asia's geostrategic importance, the US, for example, has a distinct geopolitical interest in the region. The main geopolitical mission of the US in Central Asia is to prevent the rise of any dominating force in the region. Furthermore, Afghanistan's role in counter-terrorism has been key to the US policy in Central Asia. Meanwhile, the new US Strategy for Central

Asia characterized the US major strategic priority in the region to build a more stable and prosperous Central Asia that is free to pursue political, economic, and security interests with a variety of partners on its terms; is connected to global markets and open to international investment; and has strong, democratic institutions, rule of law, and respect for human rights. A stable and secure Central Asia contributes directly to U.S. efforts to counter terrorism, support regional stability, promote energy security, and enhance economic prosperity in the region and beyond (United States Department of State 2020).

Furthermore, the US is clearly looking for ways to diminish its reliance on China and Russia for the supply of critical raw materials and regards Central Asia as an alternative. China is currently the most important source of imports for 26 of the 50 minerals that have been classified by the US government as critical, including lithium, cobalt and nickel, while uranium comes predominantly from Russia (Sitenko 2023).

Central Asia is also regarded as one of the most geo-strategically vital regions by the EU. Trans-regional challenges such as human trafficking, drug trafficking, organized crime, and terrorism have an impact on EU interests. As a result, the EU has provided assistance to Central Asian countries through several development and partnership measures. In this sense, the new EU Central Asia Strategy 2019 sees potential for collaboration and economic growth, "whereas the old strategy (2007) mostly saw challenges in terms of security (Boonstra 2019).

Furthermore, the new strategy portrays the European Union as neither a partner nor a competitor in the Central Asian region against any global or regional actor. Evidently, the EU, as the world's largest economy remains an important economic partner for Central Asian countries, both in terms of trade and as an investor. The regional conference on European Commission's connectivity project "the Global Gateway" co-organized by the EU in Samarkand, Uzbekistan on November 17, 2022 "proves that Central Asia plays a key role in this mechanism" (Levystone 2022).

Central Asia is the subject of rivalry over influence not only between global powers such as Russia, China, the US, and the EU, but also between regional powers such as Türkiye, India, Iran, Japan, South Korea and others. All of these external powers involved in Central Asian geopolitics have coinciding and sometimes conflicting interests in the region.

India, as an emerging regional power, is establishing its new position at the regional and global levels and also striving to establish itself as an important regional actor in Central Asia since the region belongs to its so-called extended neighborhood (Yakubov 2020).

India's collaboration with all five republics of Central Asia is expanding both bilaterally and multilaterally. Moreover, on 13 January 2019, at the ministerial level the first meeting of the India - Central Asia Dialogue, with participation of Afghanistan was organized in Samarkand. Energy projects with potential Indian participation, such as the CASA-1000 and TAPI Pipeline projects, might become a possible peace pipeline if the Afghan and Indo-Pakistan disputes are resolved peacefully.

South Korea has also made significant investments in all countries of the region and is keen in growing its economic footprint in Central Asia. Furthermore, South Korea's engagement with Central Asian countries might be regarded in combination with its New Northern Policy Strategy", which symbolizes Korea's present regional objectives for energy resources and connectivity promotion. Meanwhile, "despite some positive developments, the level of economic cooperation of Korea and Central Asia do not correspond to the existing potential and capabilities of partners, as a result of which it is necessary to implement a strategy for the development of inter-state relations both separately and whole region" (Rakhimov 2020, 339)

CAS regard Japan as a global economic giant, and relations between Japan have been and will continue to be predominantly commercial in character. Meanwhile, Japan's regional presence in Central Asia is less prominent compared to other external powers (Dadabaev 2024, 5).

Concerning regional actors involved in geopolitics of Central Asia, Türkiye's changing Central Asian pragmatic foreign policy should be highlighted. As in previous years, Ankara has also been striving to build a silent but important strategy towards Central Asia (Köstem 2020). In this vein, once Türkiye recognized the realities on the ground and began respecting these national identities, its policies in the region grew significantly more successful (Balci and Liles 2018, 14).

Although Türkiye's trade and economic role in Central Asia remains modest compared to China or Russia, its trade relations with Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries have strengthened significantly in recent years. For example, according to the latest data, Central Asian republics' share of the trade turnover with Turkey is high – 4.7 percent in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, 5.3 percent in Kyrgyzstan and 6.4 percent in Uzbekistan (Osipova 2023).

Consequently, in the context of geopolitical changes at broader Eurasian region, Türkiye is expanding its geopolitical role not only in the South Caucasus, but also in Central Asia. Ankara's economic and cultural ties to the region are now complemented by a stronger security partnership (Engvall 2023, 264).

Indeed, the geopolitical outlook of the region in general and Uzbekistan in particular, indicated that Ankara should restore its relations with Tashkent as soon as possible (Yalinkılıçlı 2018, 31). As a result, Uzbekistan's new economic liberalization policy is seen as a huge opportunity for Türkiye.

The transformation of the "Turkic Council" into the "Organization of Turkic States", as well as the institutionalization of Türkiye's connections with Eurasia's Turkic-speaking countries, enabled its multilateral relations with Central Asian republics, except Tajikistan. However, Tajikistan's cultural and historical heritage mostly associated with Turkic civilization, the country could

be involved as an observer or dialogue partner to the Organization of Turkic States. As such, border issues between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan could be well mediated and facilitated collectively by Organization of Turkic States or individually which will positively influence the prestige of the organization.

4 “C5+1”: A Strategy for Central Asia’s Geopolitical Stability and Opportunity for Regional Integration

Consolidation of CAS has contributed to Central Asian regions’ increased attractiveness to external partners, expanding interaction with major states and groups of states. As a result, diplomatic dialogue platforms in the format “C5+1” or “Central Asia Plus” have grown in popularity (Kurbanov and Yunusova, 2023)

Uzbekistan has been actively promoting the development of regional cooperation in the spheres of security, trade, energy, transportation, and culture through these “C5+1” dialogue platforms, and has proposed and undertaken a number of international initiatives on security, development, and interregional cooperation in Central Asia.

In particular, Uzbekistan attaches special importance to the development of the cooperation format “C5+1”, actively promoting it in its foreign policy agenda. For instance, in national strategic development documents such as the “Uzbekistan – 2030” Strategy, the significance of holding events within this format is emphasized. The State Program for 2024-2025 provides for the organization of two “C5+1” meeting with the Gulf Arab countries as well as the European Union at the summit levels, which will be held under the chairmanship of Uzbekistan. Moreover, there is high the possibility of organizing events within this format with the United States, Japan, and the Republic of Korea in upcoming years.

Following the positive improvements in Central Asia and inter-regional processes in the area, both global and regional players have increased their focus on Central Asian issues, particularly in light of the rapid geopolitical shifts and uncertainties caused by the Russia-Ukraine war. In turn, Central Asian countries are seizing strategic advantage of the present geopolitical shifts. Central Asian countries are distinguished by their multi-vector foreign policy and “balanced equidistance” principles. For decades, they have pursued an extremely balanced foreign policy, managing to strike the right balance in relationships with their powerful neighbors, China and Russia, as well as Europe and the United States.

Consequently, diplomatic dialogues in the “C5 + 1” format have progressed from the ministerial to the presidential summit level. The format serves as a diplomatic platform for regular dialogue through foreign ministerial meetings and expert-level forums that are organized on occasion.

At both the presidential and ministerial levels, the “C5+1” meetings have become a forum for multilateral discussions on regional challenges and the strengthening of cooperation between Central Asian countries and their major strategic partners. The platform has also evolved into an effective multi-vector foreign policy mechanism for CAS, as well as a mechanism for balancing the external influence of great powers.

According to Aliya Tskhay and Filippo Costa Buranelli “C5+1” format of multilateral cooperation could be considered as an effective “dovetailing mechanism” of the theory of “balancing regionalism” which helps to understand multifaceted foreign policy objectives of CAS (Tskhay and Buranelli, 2020).

Events organized in such form increased from 4 in 2017 to 11 in 2023 (Kurbanov and Yunusova, 2023). In fact, the first “Central Asia + Japan” in “C5+1” cooperative format at the ministerial level was established by Japan in 2004, followed by South Korea in 2007 and by other main external partners of CAS. Meanwhile, since 2017, external actors have also increased their attention to CAS through the “C5+1” multilateral platform (Khakimov 2021). For instance, India in 2019, Russia, and China since 2020 have launched the “C5+1” format. Contrary to widespread assumptions on Russian and Chinese disfavor of such “C5+1” platform, two have demonstrated their intention to enhance not only bilateral relations with CAS but also consider Central Asia as a single subject of international relations. By that time Moscow and Beijing had been implementing various multilateral cooperation projects through regional organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, EAEU, BRI, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, where some Central Asia countries were involved but not all-inclusive.

The US-initiated “C5+1” format for cooperation was launched in November 2015 in Samarkand by five CAS foreign ministers and the US Secretary of State. Due to the global pandemic, several ministerial meetings have been held online since then.

Interestingly, in very beginning of 2022 the C5+1 format was upgraded to at highest level: China pioneered “C5+1” Summit virtually (January 25, 2022) followed by India only two days later.

Offline “face to face” meetings at this format were organized later with Russia on October 14, 2022 in Astana and two weeks later in the same city on October 27, with EU represented by President of the European Council - Charles Michel, who visited also Uzbekistan to meet with President Mirziyoyev on October 28, 2022.

Especially in 2023, diplomatic dialogues “C5 + 1” at the summit level has become even more popular and frequent with major international partners of the CAS. For instance, the first Central Asia + China Summit in person was organized in Xi’an, China, on May 19-20, 2023.

During the meeting of the five Central Asian presidents with Chinese President Xi Jinping Grand Development Plan of China aimed at providing alternative routes for raw materials, food products, and other items through a network of trade corridors was unveiled. China also indicated its commitment to regional security and willingness to help Central Asian countries combat terrorism. Remarkably, following the Summit, China deepened its engagement with CAS by establishing a permanent Secretariat of the cooperation format in Xi'an in 2024.

On June 2-3, 2023 five CAS hold a high-level meeting in Cholpon-Ata city with Charles Michel, President of the European Council in Kyrgyzstan. The "C5+EU" meetings discussed collaboration in on business, commerce, technology transfer, investments, and digital connectivity.

Furthermore, all five Central Asian presidents attended the "C5+Gulf Cooperation Council" summit in Saudi Arabia in July 2023, which was also a one-of-a-kind forum for such diplomatic maneuvering and diversification of international partners in the current geopolitical situation.

Most notably, "C5+US" summit was also organized on September 19 at the United Nations General Assembly in New York City, with US President Joe Biden.

On September 29, 2023 in Berlin Central Asian leaders met with Chancellor, Olaf Scholz for the first time in the format of "C5+Germany". Moreover, German Chancellor had organized three-day visit to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan by attending the second "C5+Germany" summit in Astana, Kazakhstan.

Overall, despite similarities, the content of the "C5+1" format differs, as a result of competition within the geopolitical triangle Russia-China-US. Furthermore, the joint statement from the "C5+1" meeting with the US and other Western countries contains nearly identical language to the various joint statements from C5 meetings with Russia and China.

Although Central Asia is a relative priority in the new administration's foreign policy strategy, "over the past 30 years, with traceable consistency, US policy towards Central Asia has been based on recognizing and supporting the region's independence in its unity" so "C5+1" can serve as an effective mechanism of cooperation with CAS in the coming years to promote economic, investment, security, humanitarian, and regional cooperation.

However, there is a risk that these major powers are taking steps in advance to prevent joint efforts of C5 against themselves, therefore offering such "inclusive" diplomatic platform to consolidate their own interest but not C5's.

Whereas the Chinese and Russian "C5+1" framework has recently been introduced, with more practical achievements, it may provide beneficial results depending on all parties' readiness for effective collaboration.

Scholarly observations also note that the Western partners of CAS leverages the "C5+1" format to promote democratic governance, human rights, political stability, connectivity and sustainable development, with a focus on comprehensive regional integration. Whereas Chinese and Russian approaches are characterized by trade-economic cooperation, infrastructure development, transport, energy and security partnerships, most of which driven by the Belt and Road Initiative and Russia lead organizations. Furthermore, China by establishing Central Asia-China secretariat in Xi'an, could institutionalize the "C5+1" format of cooperation which demonstrates Chinese high interest in Central Asian region.

5 Conclusion: Prospects for Regional Integration

CAS seeks to benefit from trade and economic ties with all foreign partners, so it prioritizes diverse economic relations and promotes close regional cooperation without relying on any external power. As a result, the region's countries are not interested in siding with any major power. Consequently, countries of the region must maintain a balanced and friendly relationship with them, rather than choosing between. Increasing regional solidarity and coordination is essential for success in this direction. Central Asia now has a better chance than ever to work together.

Furthermore, the ongoing conflict with Ukraine appears to be undermining Russia's regional leadership as an external actor in Central Asia and increasing China's influence. Despite the fact that Moscow will play an important economic and political role for many CAS, the conflict and transformation of world order in general is likely to strengthen Central Asia's desire to pursue a multi-vectoral foreign policy, willing to cooperate with alternative actors.

In this context, deepening regional collaboration is the crucial factor in enhancing the importance of Central Asia and addressing economic and security challenges that benefit the region. In this vein, the "C5+1" diplomatic platform is an effective tool for maintaining a multi-vector foreign policy, balancing external influences, and promoting sustainable and inclusive development in Central Asia.

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