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#### CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES AND THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL: SYNERGY OF STRATEGIC POTENTIALS

Annotation

This research article explores the potential synergy between the potential synergy between the strategic strengths of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and the five Central Asian countries—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. It examines the prospects for a deeper regional partnership by analyzing the political, economic, and social dimensions of their interactions to pinpoint crucial factors that enable robust and enduring cooperation. The study underscores the critical need to bolster political and strategic ties between these regions, highlighting the pivotal role of dialogue and partnership in unlocking transformative opportunities across various domains. Furthermore, the article accentuates the historical and symbolic importance of the GCC-Central Asia summit and the strategic significance of Uzbekistan as a central hub in this dialogue.

**Key words:** Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Central Asian countries: Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, Masdar, ACWA Power, W Solar Investment, TAQA company, Samarkand.

#### MARKAZIY OSIYO MAMLAKATLARI VA FORS KO'RFASI HAMKORLIK KENGASHI: STRATEGIK POTENTIALLAR SINERGIYASI

Annotatsiya

Ushbu tadqiqot maqolasi Ko'rfaz hamkorlik kengashi (GCC) davlatlari va Markaziy Osiyoning beshta davlati - Qozog'iston, Qirg'iziston, Tojikiston, Turkmaniston va O'zbekistonning strategik kuchli tomonlari o'rtasidagi potensial sinergiyani o'rganadi. U mustahkam va mustahkam hamkorlikni ta'minlaydigan muhim omillarni aniqlash uchun ularning o'zaro munosabatlarning siyosiy, iqtisodiy va ijtimoiy jihatlarini tahlil qilish orqali chuqurroq mintaqaviy sheriklik istiqbollari o'rganadi. Tadqiqot ushbu mintaqalar o'rtasidagi siyosiy va strategik aloqalarni mustahkamlash zarurligini ta'kidlab, muloqot va hamkorlikning turli sohalarida transformatsion imkoniyatlarni ochishdagi muhim rolini ta'kidlaydi. Bundan tashqari, maqolada GCC – Markaziy Osiyo sammitining tarixiy va ramziy ahamiyati hamda O'zbekistonning ushbu muloqotda markaziy markaz sifatidagi strategik ahamiyati ta'kidlangan.

**Kalit so'zlar:** Fors ko'rfazi hamkorlik kengashi (GCC), Markaziy Osiyo davlatlari: O'zbekiston, Turkmaniston, Tojikiston, Qirg'iziston va Qozog'iston, Masdar, ACWA Power, W Solar Investment, TAQA kompaniyasi, Samarqand.

#### СТРАНЫ ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ И СОВЕТ СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВА СТРАН ПЕРСИДСКОГО ЗАЛИВА: СИНЕРГИЯ СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКИХ ПОТЕНЦИАЛОВ

Аннотация

В этой исследовательской статье рассматривается потенциальная синергия между стратегическими преимуществами государств Совета сотрудничества стран Персидского залива (ССЗ) и пяти стран Центральной Азии — Казахстана, Кыргызстана, Таджикистана, Туркменистана и Узбекистана. В ней рассматриваются перспективы более глубокого регионального партнерства путем анализа политических, экономических и социальных аспектов их взаимодействия для выявления важнейших факторов, которые обеспечивают прочное и устойчивое сотрудничество. В исследовании подчеркивается острая необходимость укрепления политических и стратегических связей между этими регионами, подчеркивая ключевую роль диалога и партнерства в раскрытии возможностей для преобразований в различных областях. Кроме того, в статье подчеркивается историческое и символическое значение саммита ССЗ-Центральная Азия и стратегическое значение Узбекистана как центрального узла в этом диалоге.

**Ключевые слова:** Совет сотрудничества арабских государств Персидского залива (ССАГПЗ), страны Центральной Азии: Узбекистан, Туркменистан, Таджикистан, Кыргызстан и Казахстан, Masdar, ACWA Power, W Solar Investment, компания TAQA, Самарканд.

For centuries, an intangible connection has linked the Gulf monarchies and Central Asia. The history of bilateral ties between these regions is deep and multifaceted, tracing back to the Silk Road, which facilitated the exchange of goods, ideas, and culture. Central Asia, with its pivotal location at the crossroads of civilizations, has long been a hub where diverse ethnic and religious groups converged and thrived. Today, we are witnessing the resurgence of these once-vibrant ties, grounded in shared cultural heritage and mutual respect, ushering in a new era of cooperation and partnership.

In the contemporary era, the Arab monarchies are undergoing a significant transformation, moving away from traditional, conservative policies that are characterized by strict restrictions and radical interpretations of Islam. Instead, they are embracing a path of religious moderation, societal liberalization, and economic modernization. This transition represents a significant qualitative shift, moving from economies reliant on oil to modern, dynamic, and high-tech states oriented towards the future, while maintaining a strong connection to national traditions and a commitment to Islam. Furthermore, these nations are actively working to enhance their global image, pursue more assertive foreign policies, expand their regional strategies, and diversify international relations on the global stage. In this regard, the Arab monarchies are showing great interest in deepening their relations in the Central Asian region. Both regions are of strategic importance due to their location and resources, which are

of mutual benefit. Further expansion and deepening of the existing ties between the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and Central Asia could open up enormous opportunities for both regions in the very near future.

At the same time, the five Central Asian republics are increasingly eager to deepen their engagement with regional powers like the GCC, recognizing this as a strategic approach to safeguarding their national security. In the face of balancing the influence of major powers such as Russia and China, these nations view strengthened ties with the Gulf as an essential counterbalance. Central Asia has positioned itself as a viable alternative trading partner for the Gulf countries, emphasizing the potential for a more balanced and equitable economic partnership. By proactively fostering stronger connections with external actors like the GCC, the Central Asian republics aim not only to enhance their economic prospects but also to significantly bolster their security and long-term stability in an increasingly competitive geopolitical landscape. In this context, the GCC+C5 format provides a unique opportunity for both regions to strengthen existing co-operation frameworks.

The summit, which was held in Jeddah on July 19, 2023, reaffirmed the importance of strengthening political and strategic relations between the GCC countries and Central Asia, opening a new era of interregional cooperation between two geographically and geopolitically pivotal regions of the world. This summit opens new

opportunities for collaboration aimed at developing and strengthening bilateral ties. Given their shared interests and challenges, including security, economic development, counterterrorism, and climate change, these regions hold substantial potential for cooperation across various domains. Based on this, the following key factors can be highlighted:

1. One of the significant aspects of financial cooperation is the advancement of partnership-based financial services, such as Islamic banking and insurance. These areas are of growing interest to many countries. Notably, in 2021, Uzbekistan hosted the annual summit of the Islamic Development Bank, which, based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, invested approximately \$2 billion in the country. Additionally, shared Islamic values further promote economic collaboration through the development of Islamic finance.

2. The benefits of cooperation with Central Asia, which, due to its geographical location, borders major Asian and Eurasian powers such as Russia and China, and where its countries participate in alliances such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Therefore, the joint nature of this summit, represents an advanced model of political engagement conducted by the Gulf Cooperation Council. The Trans-Afghan Railway project is also a strategically vital initiative designed to establish the shortest and most efficient connection between the Gulf states and Central Asia.

3. Another significant aspect concerns Central Asia's transit status and its role in transportation and logistics corridors from China to Europe. Notably, the promising "North-South" corridor, which is expected to connect India with Russia via Iran, is of particular interest. Given that this route will traverse the Caspian Sea, neighboring Central Asian countries are keenly interested in this project, as they aim to maximize their benefits from its successful implementation. Advancing the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), commonly referred to as the Middle Corridor, can facilitate the seamless movement of goods between Central Asia, Europe, and the Gulf region.

4. The trade and economic synergy between the Gulf regional bloc and Central Asia could also be, as noted by some experts, one of the driving factors for the development of mutually beneficial trade and economic partnerships. The Gulf's prominent position in the global energy supply chain is complemented by Central Asia's rich natural resources, including oil and other minerals. This synergy extends to investment opportunities in agriculture, driven by the need for food security amid the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, as well as the republics have a surplus of personnel and labor force that could be in demand in the Gulf.

Notably, the trade volume between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and Central Asian countries reached \$3.1 billion in 2021, accounting for approximately 0.27% of the total trade volume of the GCC countries, which is around \$1,146.5 billion.

The Gulf countries and Central Asian nations place significant emphasis on energy, including renewable energy sources, in their growing relations. Masdar and ACWA Power, two leading state enterprises in the clean energy sector, exemplify the UAE's and Saudi Arabia's ambitions to expand their capabilities and market share in the international renewable energy sector. ACWA Power has secured a \$1.5 billion wind energy project in Kazakhstan, State-owned renewable energy company Masdar set to build a wind farm in Kazakhstan, also Masdar intends to build more than 2 GW of solar projects in Uzbekistan. It should be noted that last April, Masdar reached financial close on three solar projects in Jizzakh, Samarkand and Sherabad, which have a combined capacity of around 900mws. Once fully operational, the projects will generate electricity to power over one million homes and displace one million tonnes of carbon dioxide annually. Earlier in 2023 Acwa Power unveiled \$2.5 billion deals with the National Electric Grid of Uzbekistan and Uzbekistan's Ministry of Investment, Industry and Trade to include three solar projects. Acwa Power CEO Marco Arcelli, said Central Asia represents the company's second largest market in terms of investment. Masdar and Abu Dhabi-based W Solar Investment are also exploring hydropower projects in Tajikistan. Besides clean energy, Central Asian countries represent promising markets for gas and power, which is attracting investment from Gulf countries in the development of both new and existing power plants. For example, Qatar will participate in \$12bn worth of investment projects in Uzbekistan, including gas and chemicals, agriculture, infrastructure, logistics, tourism and other sectors. And UAE-based utility TAQA announced planned investments of \$3 billion in Uzbekistan's energy

sector. These opportunities include new and existing power plants and associated energy infrastructure.

Another significant area of focus is the study of ecology and climate change. The President of the Republic of Uzbekistan proposed the establishment of an international program for joint research at the recently inaugurated University for Environmental and Climate Change Studies in Central Asia, situated in Tashkent.

Finally, it is important to highlight the consistent mutual interest in cooperation with the Arab world expressed by Central Asian states. This interest is driven by their desire to leverage significant Arab investments to stimulate and support their own socio-economic development, especially in challenging circumstances.

On 15 April, a meeting of foreign ministers of the Central Asia-Gulf Cooperation Council Strategic Dialogue was held in Tashkent. Its participants - delegations from the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf: Bahrain, Kuwait, UAE, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and from Central Asian countries discussed the implementation of agreements reached within the framework of the first summit of the Heads of State of Central Asia and the Gulf Cooperation Council, which was held in July 2023 in Jeddah. They also considered the development of co-operation in the fields of politics, economy, investment, transport, culture, security and environmental protection.

It should be noted that holding this meeting in Tashkent is of strategic significance, reflecting Uzbekistan's particularly important position in the region. Uzbekistan is the largest and most influential country in Central Asia with significant economic and geopolitical weight. Uzbekistan plays a key role in ensuring stability and cooperation in the region, as well as serving as a platform for dialogue and alignment of interests among various actors. Tashkent is the center of diplomatic activity in Central Asia and has a well-developed infrastructure for such international meetings. In addition, Uzbekistan is actively seeking to deepen co-operation with the Arab Gulf States in various fields, including economy, trade, investment, transport and cultural ties. Therefore, the choice of Tashkent as the venue of the meeting underscores the importance of Uzbekistan's regional leadership and its desire to strengthen cooperation and dialogue with its Arab partners. Regarding tourism prospects, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan proposed the creation of a unified visa-free tourism zone, "Gulf – Central Asia", the development of modern tourism clusters and joint products, and the organization of a forum for leading tour operators in Khiva, which has been designated the Tourist Capital of the Islamic World for 2024.

During the ministerial meeting special attention was paid to the issues of thorough preparation for the upcoming events, including the second summit of the Central Asia-Gulf Cooperation Council dialogue in 2025. It was decided to hold the next summit next year in the city of Samarkand in Uzbekistan. As is known, the connection between the Arab world and Samarkand goes back centuries. The origins of cultural ties between the Uzbek and Arab peoples date back to the middle of the 7th century. Strong ties were established between the peoples of Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia by outstanding scholars of Maverannahr Imam al-Bukhari, Abu Mansur al-Maturidi, Burhanuddin al-Marginani, Mahmud Zamakhshari, who made a huge contribution to the development of universal and Muslim civilizations. When the famous Arab geographer and writer of the 10th century Ibn Haukal visited Samarkand, he wrote in 977 AD: «Wherever you look in the city, you see beautiful places and feel pleasant». The selection of Samarkand as the host city has historical and symbolic significance. Samarkand, as one of the key cities on the historic Silk Road, symbolizes the rich heritage of Central Asia and its potential for future development.

**Conclusion.** In view of recent internal political developments and the modernization process actively promoted by Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan can use Saudi and other Arab states' investments to support the country's economic development, as well as to ensure security and stability in Central Asia in the context of balancing more powerful states such as Russia and China.

The Gulf-Central Asia Summit holds significant importance in several respects. It represents the Arab Gulf's Pivot to Asia and marks a pivotal moment in the economic and geopolitical dynamics of both regions. Their strategic importance is underlined by their location and resources, which offer mutual benefits. However, further practical steps are necessary to advance and strengthen this relationship. This will enable both sides to maximize the opportunities created by this development, taking into account the changing geographical, political and economic context against the backdrop of international competition. With the right approach now, relations between the Gulf

and Central Asian countries can further develop and flourish in the future. Central Asian countries have the potential to grow and thrive in the future.

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