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JAPANESE FOREIGN POLITICAL STRATEGIC CONCEPTS TOWARDS CENTRAL ASIA

Abstract: *The article focuses on the development stages of Japan's foreign policy strategy towards Central Asia. It highlights the features and components of the strategy. The main goal of Japan's strategy for Central Asia is to achieve two priority interests, specifically the in energy sector and transport corridors.*

Keywords: Strategy, foreign policy, geopolitics, geo-economic interests, transport communications

Since the 1990s, Japan's foreign policy has undergone many changes. Along with internal institutional reforms, these changes are characterized by the emergence of a new era in the system of international relations, the post-bipolar era. For Japan, like all other advanced power centers in the world, new opportunities for regions were created. One such region is Central Asia. The Blue Book, which outlines Japan's foreign policy, lists the country's top priorities, with Central Asia as the fifth [1]. The direction of Japanese foreign policy in Central Asia began to take shape with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of five new independent states.

Thus, since 1993, Japan has established extensive cooperation with all Central Asian countries, and the emphasis is on its own economic interests (energy and transport corridors), as well as many initiatives for the development and prosperity of the region.

The most important feature of Japan's foreign policy vector in Central Asia is Japan's comprehensive approach to the region, which means that despite the recent increase in the number of national programs, multilateral formats and regional programs are still the main focus. To date, Japan has put forward the following initiatives and projects as part of its Central Asia strategy:

1. Central Asia on the basis of Eurasia. In 1997, the initiative of the Prime Minister of Japan Ryutaro Hashimoto, the program "Eurasian Diplomacy" was officially launched. It is based on economic and political cooperation between Japan, Russia and Central Asia. In promoting this initiative, Hashimoto emphasized the role of Eurasia as a unique geostrategic region in world politics. According to this project, for Japan, Eurasia is a collection of regions through which "Great Silk Road" passed: from China, Central Asia, Caspian Sea to Europe [7]. This project consists of three main principles: - political dialogue to deepen mutual trust and cooperation; - economic cooperation for development; - peace in the region through the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones, democratization and stability [3]. The main goal of Japan in promoting this project was to establish cooperation with the Caspian littoral countries in the oil and gas sector and in the field of transport communications with Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

2. Central Asia as a region of the Great Silk Road. In 1998, Japan launched its "Great Silk Road Diplomacy Program". The main goal of this program is to support democratic and economic reforms, to promote the efficient use of natural resources and to rehabilitate transport infrastructure. Japan began to use the term country of the Great Silk Road when referring to Central Asian states and the region officially became one of the priorities of Japan's foreign policy [4, p.129]. At this stage, Japan also took bilateral relations with Central Asian countries to a new level.

3. Transformation of Central Asia into a complex and holistic political vector. In 2004, a new stage in Japan's foreign policy began with the development and implementation of a cooperation initiative within "Central Asia + Japan dialogue". Now

Japan has a format of regular regional meetings with Central Asian countries. Central Asia began to be interpreted not only as an integral part of the Eurasian or Silk Road regions, but also as a separate region. This dialogue consists of 5 aspects of cooperation: 1) political dialogue; 2) development of regional cooperation; 3) business support; 4) intellectual dialogue; 5) cultural ties and exchange programs [2]. It is also wrong to interpret this program only in terms of an official assistance project, because through this dialogue, Japan is actively promoting the construction of oil and gas pipelines from Central Asia to South Asia.

4. Long-term cooperation. In 2006, the Japanese government launched a new program for Central Asia, “Transforming Central Asia into a Corridor of Peace and Stability”, which, unlike its predecessors, is long-term. This program is, in fact, a new approach to cooperation in the field of energy and international communications, the main criterion of which is the transformation of the region into a stable area for future transportation of natural resources [6]. A small remark should be made here, because according to this program, for Japan, Central Asia consists not only of the traditional 5 former Soviet republics, but also includes the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China and Afghanistan [1].

5. Central Asia as a region of international transport communications. In October 2015, the Prime Minister of Japan S. Abe made an official tour of Central Asia. These visits marked the beginning of a new stage in the vector of Central Asia, since Abe launched a new strategic project, Central Asia’s “Partnership for Quality Infrastructure”, and signed agreements to invest actively in the region’s economies. In fact, the program is part of the Great Silk Road Diplomacy Program, and in 2015 alone, Japan signed official documents to invest \$ 17 billion in the economies of Central Asia. These investments will be directed mainly to energy and transport communications. Now, this funding process is coordinated at the national level, not as a whole region. For example, during Abe’s visit, various agreements worth \$ 8.5 billion were signed between Uzbekistan and Japan [5].

In conclusion, the stages of development of Japan's strategic projects in Central Asia have the following characteristics:

- The Central Asian vector of Japanese foreign policy has changed from a sub-regional status to a single regional direction during the stages of formation;
- The Government of Japan considers regional cooperation not only as a multi-format dialogue, but also as a set of national partnerships;
- In addition, Japan's programs in Central Asia have always been based on two geo-economic and geopolitical interests, namely the need for alternative international communications and energy. However, the process of meeting these needs is being carried out by Japan through new complementary projects and programs.

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