

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

The Integration in the Turkic World through Security Community Lenses*

Buğra Sarı**

Abstract

The geopolitical landscape of post-Soviet Eurasia has been shaped by the emergence of independent Turkic states and their evolving regional cooperation mechanisms. The Organization of Turkic States (OTS) has become a central platform for fostering diplomatic, economic, and security collaboration among its members. This study examines the potential of the OTS to develop into a pluralistic security community in Turkic World, where conflicts are addressed through institutionalized dialogue rather than force. Applying Adler and Barnett's analytical framework, the research explores the presence of sustained mutual interests, shared cultural and political identities, and institutionalized communication as fundamental pillars of security community formation. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the organization's role in shaping regional stability and integration. Ultimately, the study argues that the OTS exhibits key characteristics of an emerging pluralistic security community, offering a foundation for deeper regional cooperation and collective responses to shared security challenges in the Turkic World.

Keywords

Identity, integration, security community, Organization of Turkic States, Turkic World.

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Güvenlik Topluluğu Merceğinden Türk Dünyası Entegrasyonu*

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Öz

Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasının ardından Avrasya'nın geopolitik yapısı, bağımsızlıklarını kazanan Türk devletleri ve bunların gelişen bölgesel iş birliği mekanizmaları tarafından şekillendirilmiştir. Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı (TDT), üye devletler arasında diplomatik, ekonomik ve güvenlik iş birliğini güçlendiren merkezi bir platform hâline gelmiştir. Bu çalışma, TDT'nin çoğulcu bir güvenlik topluluğuna dönüşme potansiyelini inceleyerek, çatışmaların kurumsallaşmış diyalog yoluyla çözümlendiği bir yapıya evrilmeye sürecini analiz etmektedir. Araştırma, Adler ve Barnett'in analitik çerçevesini temel alarak, güvenlik topluluğunun oluşumu için gerekli olan sürdürülebilir ortak çıkarlar, paylaşılan kültürel ve politik kimlikler ile kurumsallaşmış iletişim süreçlerini değerlendirmektedir. Bu yaklaşım, teşkilatın bölgesel istikrar ve entegrasyon üzerindeki rolüne dair kapsamlı bir anlayış sunmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, çalışma, TDT'nin çoğulcu bir güvenlik topluluğunun temel niteliklerini giderek daha fazla sergilediğini ve Türk Dünyası'nda ortak güvenlik tehditlerine karşı kolektif yanıt mekanizmalarının güçlenmesine zemin hazırladığını ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Kimlik, entegrasyon, güvenlik topluluğu, Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı, Türk Dünyası.

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Introduction

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Turkic states in Central Asia and the Caucasus—Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—gained their independence, joining Türkiye, a pre-existing sovereign entity, to form what is now collectively referred to as the Turkic World within the contemporary international system. Their shared linguistic, historical, cultural, and geographical affinities facilitated initial cooperative interactions, beginning with the “Summits of Heads of States of Turkic-Speaking Countries” in 1992. These summits laid the groundwork for institutionalized collaboration, culminating in the 2009 Nakhchivan Agreement and the establishment of the “Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States,” widely known as the Turkic Council. In 2021, this body was restructured as the “Organization of Turkic States” (OTS) during its 8th Summit in Istanbul. As of today, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Türkiye, and Uzbekistan serve as full members, while Hungary, Turkmenistan, and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus hold observer status.

The OTS has since emerged as a platform where member states emphasize cooperation, mutual solidarity, and the articulation of coordinated responses to regional and transnational security challenges (OTS 8th Summit Declaration 1 and 3). These dynamics unfold within a post-Cold War international order that has witnessed heightened strategic competition among major powers, particularly in the geopolitically significant and resource-rich region inhabited by the Turkic states. In this context, newly independent Turkic nations have become increasingly exposed to a range of security threats, including border disputes, ethnic tensions, religious radicalism, and transnational organized crime. Against this backdrop, the OTS has articulated a normative commitment to peace, security, and confidence-building among its members (Nakhchivan Agreement Article 2).

This study aims to evaluate whether the Turkic World, under the institutional umbrella of the OTS, is evolving into a pluralistic security community—a regional configuration in which member states come to regard violent conflict as unthinkable and instead pursue peaceful mechanisms for resolving disputes (Deutsch et al. 6). To this end, the study applies the theoretical framework developed by Adler and Barnett (31), who identify three necessary conditions for the formation of a security community: (i) the existence of enduring mutual

interests; (ii) the presence of shared identities, values, and meanings; and (iii) sustained, multidimensional communication and interaction among political units. By doing so, the research contributes theoretically to understanding regional integration in the Turkic World through the conceptual lens of security community theory.

The central research question guiding this study is as follows: To what extent does the Organization of Turkic States exhibit the structural and normative characteristics of a pluralistic security community, as theorized by Adler and Barnett? In addressing this question, the study contributes theoretically to the literature on regional integration and international security by offering an empirical application of security community theory to the evolving dynamics of cooperation among the Turkic states.

Security Communities as a Concept in International Relations

Sovereign states continue to constitute the primary actors in the contemporary international system. From a realist perspective, the foremost priority of sovereign states is the preservation of sovereignty and the provision of security. This concern stems from the enduring presence of uncertainty and fear in inter-state relations. The international system is characterized by an anarchic structure, meaning the absence of a central authority capable of regulating state behaviour (Waltz 103; Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy* 30). In such a system, when states threaten or violate each other's independence, no higher authority exists to prevent such actions (Waltz 103–104; Grieco 497–498; Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy* 30). Consequently, states resort to self-help strategies, generating a security dilemma in which conflict remains a persistent possibility in strategic calculations, reinforcing uncertainty and fear in international politics (Waltz 105, 107; Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy* 30–31).

As states seek security through armament, these efforts are often perceived as threatening by others, prompting reciprocal military buildups. This self-reinforcing cycle of insecurity, conceptualized as the security dilemma (see Herz), heightens the risk of conflict and contributes to systemic instability. Within this realist framework, peace is inherently fragile and contingent upon the balance of power rather than durable cooperative arrangements.

However, alternative theoretical approaches contend that the pessimistic implications of realism can be mitigated through international institutions.

While acknowledging the anarchic nature of the international system, these perspectives argue that realism underestimates the institutionalized dimensions of international relations by treating the system as entirely decentralized (Axelrod and Keohane 226). International institutions facilitate cooperation by enabling states to pursue objectives that would be unattainable or prohibitively costly if pursued unilaterally. In this sense, institutions reflect and institutionalize areas of common interest among states.

Over time, these common interest areas have expanded considerably, allowing international institutions to operate across nearly all domains of international relations. Neoliberal institutionalist scholars emphasize that institutions moderate the effects of anarchy by reducing uncertainty, facilitating cooperation, and constraining conflictual behaviour (Keohane, *International* 2). Institutions do not eliminate anarchy but shape state behaviour within it.

One of the central functions of international institutions is their capacity to reduce uncertainty, which often generates mistrust among states. Institutions establish formal and informal platforms for communication, enabling states to exchange information, clarify intentions, and assess capabilities. Through these mechanisms, states can identify actors likely to defect from commitments, while those that violate institutional rules incur reputational costs that discourage non-compliance (Russett 98; Keohane, *After Hegemony* 146–147). For instance, NATO's annual reporting mechanisms enhance transparency regarding member contributions, discouraging free-riding and reinforcing collective responsibility (Russett and Oneal 164).

A second function of international institutions lies in their role as mediators in inter-state disputes. By offering legal and procedural mechanisms—such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) or ad hoc arbitration tribunals— institutions provide alternatives to military conflict. These mechanisms allow states to seek redress at lower cost while enhancing predictability and stability within the international system (Russett and Oneal 162–163; Rousseau and Walker 29).

Thirdly, international institutions act as arenas of socialization. Although states initially engage in institutional cooperation based on rational cost-benefit calculations, repeated interactions often generate socialization effects

over time. Through discursive and persuasive processes, states internalize shared roles and expectations, gradually transforming cooperation from a strategic choice into a socially appropriate norm (Caporaso 627; Russett and Oneal 165; Checkel 808–813). This evolution reduces reliance on coercion and fosters more stable patterns of peaceful interaction.

Empirical studies reinforce these theoretical claims. Held et al. (175) identify the GATT and WTO as key drivers of post-war trade expansion. Cirincione, Wolfsthal, and Rajkumar (383–406) highlight the IAEA's role in restraining nuclear competition between Brazil and Argentina. Russett and Oneal (157), drawing on data from 1885 to 1992, demonstrate that increased shared membership in international institutions significantly reduces the likelihood of armed conflict between states. Taken together, these dynamics suggest that while anarchy persists, its constraining effects on state behaviour can be substantially mitigated through institutionalized cooperation. In such contexts, security is pursued not solely through self-help but through structured interaction, information-sharing, and dispute-resolution mechanisms.

As the effects of anarchy are moderated, trust becomes a more salient factor in shaping inter-state relations. Institutional transparency, mediation, and socialization processes transform interactions from purely strategic calculations into relationships characterized by growing mutual confidence. Yet some scholars argue that trust cannot be fully explained by institutions alone, emphasizing instead the role of shared norms, values, and identities. This shift in analytical focus introduces the concept of security communities.

The concept of security communities seeks to explain how peace can be sustained among states despite the anarchic structure of the international system. Deutsch et al. (6) define a security community as a group of people who believe that common social problems can be resolved peacefully without recourse to physical violence. Peaceful change, in this sense, refers to the resolution of disputes through institutionalized rules and procedures rather than force (Deutsch et al. 5). Institutionalized communication is thus a prerequisite for the emergence of a security community. The expansion of communication through the circulation of people, goods, and knowledge extends these processes beyond state elites to societies, fostering shared values and a collective identity. As this identity deepens, violence becomes increasingly delegitimized as a means of conflict resolution.

At the core of a security community lies a high degree of mutual trust and shared values, enabling members to perceive one another as legitimate partners rather than adversaries. Constructivist approaches emphasize that such outcomes cannot be explained solely by material power but must account for social and ideational structures, including norms, identity, and language (see Wendt, “Anarchy”; Wendt, “Collective” 386; Adler 72).

From a constructivist perspective, state identities are socially constructed through interaction. Wendt’s assertion that “anarchy is what states make of it” (“Anarchy” 395) underscores the malleability of the international system. Shared norms and identities can transform anarchic relations into cooperative ones. The European Union exemplifies this process, where the development of a collective identity has contributed to peace in a historically conflict-prone region (Kirchner et al. 956). Identity formation shapes state interests and security practices, facilitating the emergence of security communities (Cho et al. 301).

Deutsch et al. (5) distinguish between two types of security communities: amalgamated and pluralistic. Amalgamated security communities arise when independent political units merge into a single political entity, relinquishing sovereignty to a common authority. The formation of the United States following the American Revolution illustrates this model, enabling unified responses to security threats (Deutsch et al. 6).

Pluralistic security communities, by contrast, preserve state sovereignty while fostering dependable expectations of peaceful change. States do not merge but develop a shared “we-feeling” grounded in common values and institutions (Deutsch et al. 5). ASEAN represents a paradigmatic example, as its members emphasize dialogue, consensus, and non-interference while maintaining political independence (see Molthof 2). The ASEAN Regional Forum further institutionalizes these principles by facilitating security dialogue without requiring sovereignty transfer (Heng 4).

Given the study’s focus on the Turkic world, Adler and Barnett’s (31) framework is particularly relevant. They identify three conditions for the formation of pluralistic security communities: shared identities and values, sustained multidimensional interaction, and long-term mutual interests. These conditions collectively foster cooperation and stability.

Shared identities and values constitute an intersubjective social reality constructed through common language and cultural practices. Such identities enable states to perceive one another as legitimate partners, reducing tensions and facilitating peaceful conflict resolution. Continuous and multidimensional interaction reinforces these identities through diplomatic, military, and cultural exchanges. Regular meetings, joint exercises, and information-sharing build trust while enhancing coordination in addressing common challenges. Long-term mutual interests further deepen cooperation by fostering a sense of duty and responsibility among community members. Over time, shared interests generate expectations of mutual support and collective action, particularly in regional security initiatives.

Adler (73) further distinguishes between loosely and tightly coupled pluralistic security communities based on trust levels and institutionalization. Loosely coupled communities consist of sovereign states with dependable expectations of peaceful change but limited institutional integration. Relations are largely informal and guided by shared interests rather than binding structures (Tusicişny 433). The United States–Canada relationship exemplifies this model.

Tightly coupled communities, by contrast, exhibit higher institutionalization and deeper trust. They operate within post-sovereign governance systems that include supranational, transnational, and national institutions, alongside collective security arrangements (Adler 73). The European Union represents the most advanced example, with extensive institutional frameworks and shared security policies, including the Common Security and Defence Policy (Bellamy 117; Tusicişny 433). Ultimately, the depth of trust and degree of institutionalization distinguish loosely from tightly coupled communities. While loosely coupled communities retain flexibility, tightly coupled ones enable more cohesive and coordinated responses to security challenges.

In sum, the security community approach offers a normative framework for understanding how conflict can be prevented and peace sustained. Building on these theoretical foundations, the study at hand argues that the Turkic world constitutes a compelling case for analysis as an emerging pluralistic security community. Shared historical, linguistic, and cultural ties, combined with increasing institutionalized cooperation—most notably

through the Organization of Turkic States—suggest the gradual formation of dependable expectations of peaceful change across the region.

Towards a Pluralistic Security Community in the Turkic World

While the Turkic states remain sovereign and maintain distinct political systems, their growing institutional interactions and deepening economic and strategic partnerships reflect key attributes of pluralistic security communities. This institutionalization fosters dependable expectations of peaceful change and lays the groundwork for a security architecture built on shared values rather than coercive mechanisms.

Moreover, the Turkic states' engagement in multilateral security dialogues and coordinated efforts in regional crisis management aligns with the conditions identified by Adler and Barnett (31) for the formation of a pluralistic security community. The increasing frequency of diplomatic summits, military cooperation agreements, and joint initiatives in many issue areas highlights a commitment to long-term mutual interests. While this integration remains in its early stages, the Turkic world's trajectory indicates a move toward a loosely coupled security community, where states prioritize peaceful dispute resolution, deepen trust, and enhance security cooperation without compromising their sovereignty. Hence, this section analyzes the extent to which the Turkic world aligns with these theoretical frameworks and assesses the prospects for its evolution into a more cohesive security community.

Accordingly, in examining the potential of the Turkic world as an emerging pluralistic security community, this analysis will be structured around the framework proposed by Adler and Barnett (31), which identifies three key conditions essential for the formation of such communities: (i) shared identities, values, and social meanings; (ii) constant and multidimensional communication and interaction; and (iii) long-term mutual interests among the political units involved. By applying this framework, the study will assess the extent to which the Turkic states exhibit the foundational characteristics necessary for the development of a stable and cooperative security community. The analysis will first evaluate the alignment of long-term strategic interests that reinforce the incentive for sustained collaboration, followed by an exploration of the role of shared cultural and historical identities in fostering a collective sense of belonging among Turkic

states. Finally, it will examine the institutionalized communication channels and mechanisms that facilitate diplomatic and security cooperation. This approach will provide a comprehensive assessment of whether the Turkic world is progressing toward a functional and institutionalized security community or remains in an early stage of regional cooperation.

Mutual Strategic Interests in the Turkic World

In the anarchic international system, the states that make up the Turkic world, apart from Türkiye, gained their independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union. These states have security problems that they share in a similar way, due to the anarchic international system after the Cold War and the social, political and economic legacy left by the Soviet Union. These security problems spread to all Turkic states in Central Asia and the Caucasus and affect both their relations and relations with states outside the Turkic world.

Systemic Aspects of the Strategic Interests

One of the primary security challenges in the Turkic world stems from the anarchic nature of the international system. According to Mearsheimer (The Tragedy 41, 84, and 140-141), global hegemony is nearly impossible due to factors such as nuclear deterrence and geographical barriers like vast oceans. Instead, great powers pursue regional hegemony, seeking dominance in specific geographic areas while simultaneously preventing potential rivals from achieving the same in other regions. This dynamic has contributed to increasing strategic competition among major powers in regions of geopolitical significance, including the Turkic world.

Since the end of the Cold War, the geopolitical importance of the Turkic world—comprising Central Asia and the Caucasus—has risen considerably. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union functioned as the regional hegemon, exerting near-total control over Turkic states except for Türkiye. However, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, no single power has been able to establish undisputed dominance in the region. This power vacuum, combined with the region's rich natural resources and strategic location at the heart of Eurasia, has made the Turkic world a critical arena of competition for global powers.

The economic significance of the Turkic world is underscored by its vast energy reserves (for a detailed analysis on energy-based regionalization in Turkic world see Ağır and Aksu). As of 2020, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan collectively held approximately 38.2 billion barrels of proven oil reserves, accounting for 2.2% of global reserves. In 2021, these states contributed 3.4% of global oil production. Their natural gas reserves are even more substantial, totaling 19.2 trillion cubic meters, equivalent to 10.1% of global proven reserves. These vast energy resources make the region highly attractive to external powers, further intensifying geopolitical competition (British Petroleum, “Statistical”; British Petroleum, “bp Statistical”).

Beyond its economic resources, the region’s strategic location has long been recognized as pivotal in global power struggles. Brzezinski (30) famously described Eurasia as the “Great Chessboard,” where geopolitical rivalries play out. The collapse of the Soviet Union provided the United States with a rare opportunity to extend its influence into Eurasia, challenging the historical dominance of regional powers such as Russia and China. Consequently, the post-Cold War period has been characterized by an ongoing contest among these three superpowers, each seeking to assert influence over the region while preventing rivals from establishing hegemony.

This geopolitical competition presents security risks for Türkiye and the newly independent Turkic states, including Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Having emerged from Soviet rule, these states prioritized consolidating their sovereignty and nation-building efforts. However, their limited economic, political, and military capacities in the early years of independence constrained their ability to establish robust regional cooperation mechanisms. As a result, while the Turkic states sought to maintain their sovereignty, they also had to navigate opportunities for cooperation with the great powers.

Due to the structural power asymmetries in the international system, the security and cooperation mechanisms established with great powers have largely reflected the strategic interests of those powers. For instance, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), established in 2002 under Russian leadership, offers security and defense cooperation to its members. However, it primarily serves Russia’s strategic objectives. Notably, CSTO activities expanded following increased U.S. and NATO engagement in

Central Asia after the intervention in Afghanistan, reflecting Russia's efforts to counterbalance Western influence that were penetrating the region (see Allison 470; Weinstein; Torun).

Similarly, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), initially founded in 1996 and institutionalized in 2001, was designed to enhance security and stability in the region by combating terrorism, extremism, and transnational crime (SCO Charter Article 1). While the SCO includes some Turkic states, it has also functioned as a strategic tool for Russia and China in countering U.S. influence (Plater-Zyberk and Monaghan 5–6). Like the CSTO, the SCO intensified its activities following the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, further embedding the region within the broader great power rivalry.

Beyond balancing external powers, the SCO also plays a role in managing intra-regional competition between Russia and China. While the two states collaborate in limiting U.S. influence, their interests are not always aligned, particularly regarding China's growing economic and political presence in Central Asia. Some scholars argue that Russia uses the SCO to regulate and limit China's expansion in the region (Kazantsev 1080). This further complicates the security landscape for the Turkic states, which must navigate the competing interests of these two dominant regional powers.

The broader implications of these dynamics align with Mearsheimer's ("The False" 13) assertion that great powers shape and control international institutions to serve their strategic objectives. He describes institutions as "arenas for acting out power relationships," suggesting that organizations such as the CSTO and SCO are not neutral mechanisms for cooperation but rather tools of great power competition (Mearsheimer "The False" 13). This perspective highlights the potential risks for the Turkic states, as their security concerns are often addressed within these institutions only when they align with the interests of the dominant powers (Sari 147; Aydin and Liu 49).

Regional Aspects of the Strategic Interests

In addition to the great powers penetrating the Turkic world and the rivalry between them, there are regional security issues such as border conflicts, ethnic issues, radical movements that exploit religion, and transnational drug smuggling. These issues not only threaten the stability of individual nations but also have broader implications for regional security and

cooperation. Addressing such critical security issues within a framework of trust and cooperation is essential, as persistent uncertainty and rivalry would exacerbate existing threats and render their effective resolution increasingly complex (Sarı 149–150; Topsakal and Zengin).

Border disputes and ethnic issues among the Turkic states are closely related to their shared experience under the Soviet Union. The current borders between the Turkic states were mainly determined by the ‘Establishment of National State Borders’ project implemented by the Soviet administration between 1924 and 1936 (Joldoshov 304). During the determination of borders, the Soviet administration designed the region as a manageable heterogeneous area from their perspective. Communities with a common history and cultural understanding within the region were divided and separated into ethnic republics derived from tribal names. Different ethnic groups were also included in each of these republics through migration, and the aim was to prevent the resurgence of nationalist movements in a local sense (Andican 318). As a result, there are ethnic minorities belonging to neighboring states within Turkic states, especially in border areas. This situation leads to ethnic tensions among Turkic states, and ethnic issues in border areas deepen border disputes (International Crisis Group 1–2).

The Soviet-era borders were also designed to reinforce economic and logistical dependence on the centralized Soviet system (see Erendor and Çitak 12–16). During Soviet rule, the movement of people and goods between Turkic republics was facilitated by centrally managed infrastructure. However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, these borders became significant barriers to internal connectivity and trade. For instance, in some cases, highways and railways require individuals to cross international borders to travel between cities within the same country. This disruption has reinforced economic fragmentation, hindered regional integration, and contributed to border-related tensions among the Turkic states (Karaeve 2).

The legacy of Soviet-imposed borders is particularly evident in the ongoing territorial disputes in the region. One of the most prominent conflicts involves Azerbaijan and Armenia over the Nagorno-Karabakh region. The dispute, which escalated into multiple wars, highlights how arbitrary Soviet-era border decisions continue to shape geopolitical realities (Görgülü 50). Azerbaijan has sought to counterbalance Armenia’s territorial claims

by strengthening its ties with other Turkic states, particularly Türkiye, emphasizing Turkic solidarity as a key component of its foreign policy (Guliev 9). Similar tensions persist in Central Asia, where unresolved border disputes between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, though involving a non-Turkic state, still significantly impact the security of the Turkic world (s-see Toktomushev 29; Emtseva; Erendor and Çitak 16–19).

Radical religious movements pose another major security challenge for the Turkic states, particularly in Central Asia. Historically, cities like Bukhara and Samarkand were renowned centers of Islamic scholarship and culture. However, Soviet policies aimed at suppressing religious practices drastically reduced the number of religious institutions and clerics (Swanström et al. 11). This suppression forced religious practices underground, creating an ideological vacuum that, following the Soviet collapse, allowed radical movements to gain influence. Nazarbayev (61) comments that the post-Soviet era saw a rapid politicization of religious beliefs, leading to divisions rather than unity within the religious landscape. In this respect, groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) exploited this situation, advocating extremist ideologies and undermining regional stability (Roy 216–217). The rise of these radical movements has created a security risk that threatens the stability of Turkic states, especially given the proximity of Afghanistan, which provides a haven for such groups.

Beyond Central Asia, the Fethullahist Terrorist Organization (FETO) represents another security threat within the Turkic world. This organization, which attempted a coup in Türkiye in 2016, has sought to expand its influence in other Turkic states by infiltrating strategic institutions, particularly in education, business, and media. FETO's activities are distinct from conventional terrorist organizations, as it prioritizes covert infiltration over direct militant action. The group's ability to manipulate state resources for its own objectives makes it a long-term security concern for the broader Turkic world, necessitating coordinated responses among Turkic states (Turkish National Police Academy).

The interconnection between radical movements and organized crime further complicates the security landscape of the Turkic world. Groups like the IMU have engaged in drug trafficking as a primary means of financing their operations (Chandra 75). Given that the Turkic states serve as a

key transit route for narcotics moving from Afghanistan to Europe, drug trafficking has become a critical security challenge. The illicit drug trade not only funds terrorism but also fosters corruption, weakens state institutions, and contributes to rising crime rates, exacerbating regional instability (see Walker). The intertwining of drug trafficking with other forms of organized crime, such as human trafficking and arms smuggling poses significant challenges for law enforcement agencies.

In addition to serving as a transit corridor, the Turkic states are also facing a growing internal drug consumption problem. Socio-economic challenges such as unemployment and poverty have contributed to an increase in drug use, leading to public health crises, including a rise in HIV/AIDS cases (United Nations; Beyerer et al. 572). Many states in the region struggle to implement effective harm reduction programs due to inadequate healthcare infrastructure and social stigmatization. The link between drug trafficking, organized crime, and social instability highlights the complex nature of the security threats facing the Turkic world (Beyerer et al. 573).

A critical geopolitical challenge for the Turkic world is its landlocked position. Except for Türkiye, none of the Turkic states have direct access to the sea, limiting their ability to engage in global trade independently. While neighboring great powers such as Russia and China provide potential trade routes, excessive dependence on these powers risks reinforcing existing economic and political asymmetries. This geographical constraint makes external connectivity a security concern, as the ability of Turkic states to sustain economic growth and stability is contingent upon access to global markets.

Russia and China option is also valuable, as they constitute a market. However, excessive dependence on this option in terms of opening up to the outside world carries the risk of deepening the power asymmetry that Turkic states already have to face in their relations with Russia and China. Therefore, the value of the geopolitical belt that the Turkic World has on the historical Silk Road is defining. In fact, it is important that the Central Asian and Caucasian Turkic states reach the Mediterranean and the Western hemisphere of the world through Türkiye, which is also a Turkic state. Thus, the geopolitical lock faced by the Turkic states becomes an element that reveals mutual strategic interests in the Turkic World.

The Collective Sense of Belonging among Turkic States

The shared common history, language, culture, and geography among the Turkic states make the Turkic world a collective identity and a set of values rather than just a community based on common interests. In this respect, the Turkic world exhibits a rich tapestry of shared cultural and historical identities, which serve as foundational elements fostering a collective sense of belonging among the Turkic states. The recognition of shared historical experiences among Turkic states amplifies their collective identity. The Turkic peoples have long shared a narrative of migration, survival, and adaptation across varied landscapes from Eastern Europe to Siberia and the Middle East (Golden 176). This migratory and historical complexity has carved unique yet overlapping cultural identities distinctly embedded within their respective national narratives.

Defined broadly, these identities derive from common historical narratives, linguistic ties, cultural expressions, and geographical interconnections that have evolved over centuries. The notion of collective identity in the Turkic world has deep roots, with the idea of a unified community based on these shared attributes gaining momentum since the 19th century (see İpek and Güler). This shared identity is not merely a historical artifact but a vital precursor to contemporary efforts at political and cultural integration among the Turkic states, particularly following the establishment of the OTS. Hence, the evolution towards a shared political framework, represented through the Turkic Council and later the OTS, exemplifies how this historical unity underpins political and cultural collaboration today (Mustofaev 106; Koçak 15; Minasyan 25).

In this respect, the “Turkic World Vision – 2040” underscores the centrality of shared cultural and historical identities in fostering a collective sense of belonging among the member states of the OTS. The document highlights how a common linguistic, cultural, and historical heritage serves as the foundation for deeper cooperation among the Turkic states. This shared identity not only strengthens political, economic, and social ties but also creates a favorable environment for the development of a security community, where security concerns are managed collectively rather than through individual self-help strategies.

The OTS builds its cooperative framework on the recognition of the historical, linguistic, and cultural commonalities that bind its member states together. The 2040 Vision (1) states that the organization's strength derives from "the commonalities in language, culture, and shared past of our peoples," emphasizing that these factors provide a stable basis for institutionalized cooperation. This assertion aligns with constructivist theories in international relations, which argue that a shared identity fosters trust and predictability in inter-state relations, reducing the likelihood of conflict and enhancing cooperation (see Wendt "Anarchy"). Moreover, one of the key principles outlined in the 2040 Vision (3) is the promotion of a "common Turkic identity" as a unifying force that brings member states closer together. The document (3) explicitly states: "Promote common Turkic identity as a source of cultural richness in bringing the peoples of the Member States closer to each other and interacting with others." This emphasis on shared identity seeks to reinforce solidarity among Turkic nations while simultaneously promoting their distinct cultural and civilizational contributions on a global scale. By institutionalizing a common cultural and historical consciousness, the OTS aims to develop a framework where its members see each other as partners with shared destinies rather than as separate nation-states merely engaged in transactional cooperation.

The institutionalization of a Turkic collective identity is reinforced through cultural initiatives outlined in the 2040 Vision. The document prioritizes: (i) the harmonization of cultural, educational, and youth policies among member states; (ii) the promotion of common Turkic heritage, traditions, and art through coordinated efforts; (iii) the establishment of a common Turkic alphabet and terminology to enhance linguistic unity and cross-border communication; (iv) increased educational cooperation, including exchange programs and research collaborations among Turkic universities. By fostering intergenerational awareness of Turkic identity, these policies aim to consolidate a sense of belonging among both political elites and societies, making cooperation more sustainable over the long term. Such institutionalization enhances the sense of belonging among Turkic states by reinforcing shared norms, historical narratives, and cooperative behavior.

Alongside OTS, the sense of belonging among Turkic states has been significantly reinforced through other institutional mechanisms that promote

cultural collaboration, historical preservation, and linguistic unity. Among the key organizations that have played a pivotal role in fostering this collective consciousness are TÜRKSOY (International Organization of Turkic Culture), the Turkic Academy, and the Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation. These institutions have not only strengthened cultural ties but also contributed to the emergence of a unified Turkic identity within the OTS.

Established in 1993, TÜRKSOY has been at the forefront of efforts to preserve, study, and promote the cultural heritage of Turkic-speaking peoples. As an international organization dedicated to cultural exchange, TÜRKSOY organizes numerous events, exhibitions, and educational programs that highlight the richness of Turkic traditions. Through these activities, member states engage in cultural diplomacy, fostering a sense of unity among Turkic nations. The organization's emphasis on folklore, literature, and traditional arts not only preserves the historical legacy of the Turkic world but also strengthens the emotional and cultural bonds among its people (TÜRKSOY). TÜRKSOY's initiatives create a platform where shared values and traditions are celebrated, allowing for an increased sense of belonging among Turkic communities.

The Turkic Academy, founded in 2012 by Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Türkiye, serves as a hub for scientific research and scholarly exchange in the fields of language, literature, culture, and history. By fostering academic collaboration, the academy deepens the understanding of shared Turkic heritage among scholars, researchers, and students. This institution plays a crucial role in institutionalizing knowledge production about the Turkic world, ensuring that historical narratives, linguistic studies, and cultural traditions are preserved and promoted in an academic setting (Turkic Academy). The Turkic Academy's efforts to compile historical records and linguistic studies reinforce the interconnectedness of Turkic states, further embedding a collective identity rooted in historical continuity.

Another significant institution contributing to the consolidation of a shared Turkic identity is the Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation. Established in 2012 with the support of multiple member states, this foundation endorses activities related to culture, education, science, human rights, and tourism. By funding and supporting projects that promote cultural awareness, the foundation enhances the visibility of Turkic traditions on the international stage.

Through cultural programs, festivals, and exhibitions, it provides opportunities for Turkic nations to collectively engage in preserving and celebrating their heritage (Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation). This collaborative approach not only enriches the cultural experiences of the Turkic peoples but also solidifies their sense of belonging to a broader Turkic community.

The sense of belonging in the Turkic world is actively nurtured through the efforts of institutional mechanisms such as TÜRKSOY, the Turkic Academy, and the Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation. These institutions, along with linguistic unification efforts, have played a crucial role in reinforcing a collective identity that transcends national boundaries. By preserving cultural heritage, promoting academic exchange, and fostering linguistic cohesion, the Turkic world continues to strengthen its sense of unity and shared destiny. As these institutional mechanisms evolve, they will further solidify the bonds among Turkic states, ensuring a resilient and interconnected Turkic identity for future generations.

Security Cooperation through Institutionalized Mechanisms

Turkic states have come together since 1992 with the principle of sovereign equality and a shared sense of destiny through the Summits of the Heads of States of Turkic Speaking Countries. The Summit Process obtained legal status with the Nakhchivan Agreement in 2009 and the Istanbul Declaration in 2010. Thus, an international organization called the ‘Turkic Council’ (Türk Keneşi – Turkic Cooperation Council) was established for the purpose of “maintaining peace, strengthening security and confidence” (Nakhchivan Agreement Article 2) in the Turkic World region. In 2021, the Turkic Council was renamed as the OTS during the 8th Summit Meeting held in Istanbul. Based on these institutional evolution, Purtas (116) argues that the initially culture-based cooperation among the Turkic states is progressively transforming into a form of integration characterized by growing political, institutional, and strategic depth.

Based on the institutional expansion and deepening of OTC since 1992, it can be said that Turkic world is in the process towards a security community, blended with common identity and values of the Turkic world (see Akilli, 16-18). The process of the Turkic World Summits has now gained an institutional identity, and solutions to the problems faced by Turkic states

are being sought through institutional rules, driven by a special solidarity stemming from the common history, language, culture, and geography of the Turkic world (Demir 45). Within this framework, Turkic states have started to find solutions to the problems they face through the special solidarity motivation arising from their common history, language, culture, and geography, using institutional rules, as the Turkic World Summit Process has now gained an institutional identity. Turkic states are now in the process of eliminating violence as a solution in their relations with each other. Even this situation alone shows that security and safety are strengthened in the Turkic World. The uncertainty and fear generated by the anarchic international system have been replaced by friendly and predictable cooperation in relations among the Turkic states.

This transformation is clearly reflected in the Turkic World 2040 Vision (1) adopted by the member states of OTS at the Istanbul Summit in 2021:

...despite lessons of the past, international peace, security and prosperity are still precarious...

Since its establishment in 2009, the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, shortly known as the Turkic Council, has taken its strength from the commonalities in language, culture and shared past of our peoples. This has provided a favorable basis for the gradual institutionalization of cooperation among its Member States to evolve into a regional organization. The course taken by the Turkic Council is now duly reflected in its new name, Organization of Turkic States. Over the last several years, the Turkic Council had begun to widen and deepen its cooperative work across a range of fields. Relying on the political will of its independent and sovereign Member States, the Organization now represents an increasingly effective platform for collaboration that promises to generate greater mutual support and solidarity in line with the needs of its members.

Hence, the Turkic World 2040 Vision presents a strategic framework for institutionalizing security cooperation to build a sustainable pluralistic security community. In this respect, one of the most significant advancements in security cooperation among Turkic states has been the institutionalization of multilateral mechanisms that enhance diplomatic and security dialogue.

The OTS, through its summits and policy initiatives, has facilitated formal agreements that allow for structured security discussions among its members. Accordingly, throughout the progression from the Summit Declaration to the most recent one, a significant focus has been placed on the necessity of consultative efforts on enhancing security of the Turkic World. The Summit Declarations, in this regard, have consistently been on addressing terrorism and extremism, as they recognize the collective dangers these issues pose to the member states.

Regarding practices in the realm of security collaboration, the OTS employs two key mechanisms to strengthen the evolving security framework within the Turkic world (Mustofaev 112–113). The first mechanism involves the issuance of official statements by the organization or its Secretary-General concerning security matters that affect its member states. A significant example of this approach was the statement issued by the Turkic Council Secretary-General on September 28, 2020, which explicitly supported Azerbaijan's position against Armenia during the 44-Day War. In this declaration, the Council called for the “immediate, unconditional, and full” withdrawal of Armenian armed forces from Azerbaijani territories (Turkic Council, “Statement of the Secretary”). This statement not only underscored the organization’s commitment to Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity but also reinforced the diplomatic legitimacy of Azerbaijan’s military operations in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The unified stance of the OTS further strengthened Azerbaijan’s position in international forums, emphasizing that the resolution of the conflict should align with international law and the sovereignty of Azerbaijan.

Through these official declarations, the OTS plays a strategic diplomatic role in shaping regional security dynamics. These statements not only express political support for member states but also serve as a means of diplomatic signaling to external actors, encouraging negotiations, peacebuilding initiatives, and adherence to international legal frameworks. By consistently articulating its stance on regional and global security issues, the OTS enhances its credibility as a multilateral institution and reinforces the collective security interests of the Turkic world.

The second mechanism employed by the OTS to address security concerns involves convening the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in response to

critical security challenges. This framework enables member states to adopt a coordinated and effective approach to emerging threats, ensuring a unified diplomatic and strategic response to regional crises. Such meetings serve as high-level platforms for consultation, policy formulation, and the implementation of joint measures that reinforce stability and security within the Turkic world.

A prominent instance of this mechanism in practice was Türkiye's call for an urgent meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs following the escalating security crisis in Afghanistan in 2021 (Turkic Council, "Statement of the Council"). As the Taliban swiftly regained control over the country after the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces, concerns emerged regarding the implications for regional stability, particularly in terms of increased terrorism risks, illegal drug trafficking, and refugee movements. In response, the OTS convened to closely monitor the unfolding developments and coordinate necessary measures. The discussions emphasized counterterrorism strategies, intelligence-sharing, and reinforcing border security, particularly for OTS members such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, which share geographic proximity and historical ties with Afghanistan.

Beyond Afghanistan, this mechanism has also been activated in other instances of regional instability. For example, following the 2022 unrest in Kazakhstan, where mass protests against fuel price hikes escalated into violent clashes and political turmoil, the OTS played a diplomatic role in supporting the Kazakh government's stabilization efforts (Aydoğan). The emergency assembly of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs provided a forum to express political solidarity with Kazakhstan while also discussing potential security risks associated with internal instability, such as transnational organized crime and the exploitation of unrest by extremist groups.

Accordingly, the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs serves as a proactive and adaptive institutional instrument within the OTS, allowing for swift, collective decision-making in response to regional and international security developments. By fostering dialogue, intelligence cooperation, and joint countermeasures, this mechanism significantly contributes to the resilience and strategic alignment of the Turkic world in the face of evolving security challenges.

Furthermore, the Turkic states have progressed beyond high level consultations and have undertaken a decisive action by integrating a novel aspect into their security partnership. They have supported a more intensive collaboration in the defense industry and military capacity building, which clearly signifies their determination to reinforce their alliance (OTS 9th Summit Declaration 4). Looking closer to defense industry cooperation, Türkiye's defense industry has made significant strides in recent years, and one of its most notable achievements has been the production and export of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). The success of Turkish drones, particularly after the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War (often referred to as the 44-Day War), has sparked interest among various nations, including the Turkic republics of Central Asia. As a result, countries such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan have purchased Turkish drones, while Uzbekistan has opted for other Turkish military equipment include firearms, armored vehicles, and other defense systems produced by Turkish companies such as ASELSAN, Roketsan, and Otokar (Ozat; Kun.uz). Additionally, Türkiye has taken a more strategic step by initiating drone production in Kazakhstan, signaling a broader effort to strengthen military cooperation within the Turkic world (Bekdil). This move represents a strategic shift from simple arms sales to long-term industrial cooperation. Localizing production not only strengthens Kazakhstan's defense industry but also reduces dependence on foreign suppliers. This growing military relationship aligns with Türkiye's broader strategy of deepening ties within the Turkic world through organizations such as the OTS.

The pledges undertaken by Turkic states to combat terrorism and strengthen military collaboration within the framework of the OTS signify an evolving security dynamic that could pave the way for a pluralistic security community within the Turkic world (Sarı 150). As the concept of a pluralistic security community describes a regional or international grouping of states that share common security interests, cooperate on defense matters, and resolve conflicts through institutionalized mechanisms rather than through military confrontation, the Turkic world—comprising Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and observer states like Turkmenistan and Hungary—is progressively aligning toward a more integrated security framework, with the potential to evolve into a pluralistic security community in the long term.

Conclusion

Cooperative initiatives within the Turkic World, initiated through summit diplomacy in 1992, have progressively evolved into an institutionalized structure with international legal recognition under the framework of the OTS. Serving as a pivotal platform, the OTS facilitates dialogue and coordination among member states across political, security, economic, and cultural spheres. Among these domains, security collaboration emerges prominently as essential for regional stability and for securing the Turkic World's strategic positioning within the international system. Consequently, the OTS presents significant potential to mitigate security vulnerabilities arising from the anarchic nature of global politics. Through enhanced communication and consistent interaction fostered by the OTS, uncertainty and distrust among Turkic states are notably diminished, enabling clearer mutual understandings and enhancing collective problem-solving capabilities concerning shared threats, including ethnic tensions, territorial disputes, terrorism, separatism, extremism, and illicit drug trafficking.

In this context, a pluralistic security community is taking shape within the Turkic World, minimizing incentives for states to pursue military escalation or factional alignments against one another. Instead, member states are increasingly inclined toward cooperative strategies that address mutual security challenges, collectively shaping a unified stance on regional and global issues pertinent to their interest. Addressing such critical security matters through an atmosphere of trust and cooperation is indispensable, as lingering uncertainty and rivalry would intensify existing threats, complicating their resolution.

Furthermore, recognizing the systemic security challenges in an environment dominated by great power rivalry involving the US, Russia, and China, characterizing Turkic states as adversaries or competitors could marginalize their geopolitical influence. Hence, collective action and resource-sharing within the OTS framework become essential, enabling Turkic states to advance cohesive, independent, and proactive policies toward global powers. Echoing this perspective, Duran suggests that despite risks inherent in superpower rivalries, Turkic states possess sufficient capacity to create a coherent platform that addresses internal challenges and promotes regional integration amidst escalating geopolitical tensions.

On another note, the OTS fundamentally relies on shared linguistic heritage, cultural identity, historical connections, and geographic proximity.

Therefore, its relevance transcends mere conflict resolution; it actively nurtures a collective identity and fosters a cooperative mentality, effectively excluding violence as a feasible policy option. From Wendt's social constructivist viewpoint, such dynamics indicate considerable potential for transforming the interstate anarchic culture within the Turkic World. Enhanced security cooperation, underpinned by commonalities in identity and values, increasingly renders the uncertainty and insecurity characteristic of Waltzian anarchy obsolete. Turkic states thus move beyond traditional self-help strategies and balance-of-power mechanisms toward cooperative frameworks emphasizing mutual benefit and shared aspirations.

Analyzed through Adler and Barnett theoretical lens—which underscores shared identities and values, sustained multidimensional communication, and enduring mutual interests as foundational conditions for security community formation—the OTS-led security collaboration among Turkic states shows strong potential to evolve into a tightly coupled pluralistic security community characterized by clearly defined institutional mechanisms, governance structures built upon shared experiences, historical ties, and a commitment to common values. Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev articulates this vision by emphasizing that open dialogue, political resolve, and regular leadership interactions are cultivating an atmosphere of mutual trust and stability in the region. Similarly, former Kyrgyz President Sooronbay Jeenbekov highlights the emerging security community's role, asserting that cooperation within the OTS framework significantly contributes to enhancing friendship, trust, and neighborly relations amid broader global tensions and conflicts.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of this study.

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