

UZBEKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN IN THE CONTEXT OF ENSURING REGIONAL SECURITY.

Akhmadaliev Azamjon

2nd year student of the Master's Degree in International Relations: European and Asian Studies

Annotation

The security dynamics between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan play a crucial role in maintaining stability in Central Asia. This essay explores Uzbekistan's evolving foreign policy toward Afghanistan, particularly in the aftermath of the Taliban's return to power. The analysis highlights Uzbekistan's diplomatic initiatives, economic engagements, and security strategies aimed at fostering regional stability. Special attention is given to key infrastructure projects, such as the Mazar-i-Sharif–Kabul–Peshawar railway, which strengthens economic ties while promoting peace. Additionally, the essay examines the security challenges posed by terrorism, drug trafficking, and border instability, emphasizing the need for multilateral cooperation among Central Asian states. By integrating economic and diplomatic efforts, Uzbekistan seeks to position itself as a mediator in Afghanistan's stabilization process, underscoring the broader implications for regional and global security.

Uzbekistan and Afghanistan in the context of ensuring regional security.

This analytical note is intended to analyze Uzbekistan's approach to Afghanistan in terms of security and good neighborliness. Due to the restrictions of the Taliban, access to information and analytical materials on Afghanistan remain scarce.

Uzbekistan's strategy emphasizes integrating Afghanistan into regional economic frameworks, advocating for its inclusion in Central Asian economic processes. At international forums, including the United Nations General Assembly and summits of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Uzbekistan has consistently highlighted the importance of supporting Afghanistan. Proposed initiatives include establishing a permanent U.N. commission on Afghanistan, creating a Humanitarian Support Fund, and setting up a logistics hub in Termez to facilitate humanitarian aid.

Diplomatic relations that were established after Uzbekistan gained independence in 1991, after the capture of Kabul by the Taliban in 2021, are a bit "remote". Looking back in the 1990s, Uzbekistan also faced problems of radicalism and violent extremism, which intensified due to the civil war in Tajikistan (1992-1997) and the emergence of the Taliban movement. The Uzbek Government was concerned about the spread of terrorism across the border and therefore closed the Friendship Bridge in 1997, which was reopened only in 2002. The events of September 9-11 and the subsequent war on terrorism were a major breakthrough in regional dynamics. At that time, Uzbekistan provided the United States with an air base in Karshi Khanabad and a base for a German unit in the border town of Termez. However, the American base was closed in 2005 after disagreements between Uzbekistan and the United States over the Andijan incident. One of the supply lines of the Northern Distribution Network ran from Uzbekistan through the Friendship Bridge, which transported almost 70 percent of the oil used for NATO operations. During the presidency of Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani, relations improved, but still remained unreliable. Over the past couple of years, before the Taliban

THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

VOLUME-5, ISSUE-2

came to power, Uzbek-Afghan relations improved, due to cooperation in trade, transport, electricity, etc.¹

After the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan, unrest began in the region, because there were expectations that the radicalists might still try some kind of terrorist acts against Uzbekistan. There are several reasons for this too.

According to Professor Anvar Yuldashev, there are currently more than 20 terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan. The largest of them, ISIS Khorasan, was established in 2015 and has about 6,000 fighters. According to him, the leaders of another group in Afghanistan, Tawhid and Jihad, are also mostly Uzbeks. Although the Taliban have controlled the entire territory of Afghanistan since August 15, 2021, claiming that they will not allow the country to become a hotbed of terrorism again, the Khorasan branch of ISIS remains a serious threat.²

ISIS Khorasan was founded in Afghanistan in 2015. There are other groups within the group. This includes groups such as Imam al-Bukhari, consisting of Uzbeks, Jabhat al-Nusra and the Ilam Movement of East Turkestan. They are part of ISIS Khorasan. In addition, the Tawhid and Jihad group, which originated in Idlib, Syria, in 2014, has more than 3,000 fighters, the leaders are mostly considered to be Uzbeks.

According to the latest information, the "Khorasan branch" of ISIS continues to operate in Afghanistan, according to the UN and Afghan states.³ There is no guarantee that this organization, which organizes various terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, will not affect or endanger the countries of the neighboring region. In particular, between 2022 and 2023, this terrorist group attacked the embassies of Pakistan and Russia in Afghanistan, as well as a hotel where Chinese investors were staying.

Kamaliddin Rabbimov, a political analyst, believes that the Khorasan branch of ISIS, although it is the largest terrorist group in Afghanistan, has much more limited resources and opportunities to claim real power. In his opinion, the main force in Afghanistan today is the Taliban, which also has several rivals inside, and the Khorasan division of ISIS remains one of the strongest. Sometimes they commit terrorist acts to demonstrate their opposition to the Taliban. However, this group has extremely limited resources and capabilities, so it operates while hiding in society. If the Taliban find out about the location of their camp, they will definitely attack it. Despite this, this group cannot be considered strong enough to pose a threat to the States of the region.⁴

The Taliban themselves, after all, does not seek to worsen relations with Uzbekistan. But there are many disagreements and concerns. For example, the "hijacked" planes and helicopters that the pilots fled in 2021, and these military equipment, as part of the army, must be returned to the Taliban. But the United States said that these vehicles were its own and, by agreement, sold about 50 military vehicles to Uzbekistan.⁵

Another concern is that earlier a video prepared by Taliban propagandists spread on social networks, which depicts a map of the future of the "Islamic empire", which includes Uzbekistan. The video

¹ Dr Rashmini Koparkar. Commentary- Uzbekistan and Afghanistan Enhance Cooperation. VIF. 2018.

² Anvar Yuldashev. Wilayati Khorasan is the largest terrorist group in Afghanistan. Kunduz. 2024

³ A. Yashlavsky, ISIL's Khorasan Project in Afghanistan: new challenges and threats. IMEMO, 2022

⁴ K. Rabbimov. "ISIS Khorasan." Is it possible to expect something. Kunduz. 2024

⁵ Military aircraft and helicopters that have passed Afghanistan will remain in Uzbekistan. Gazeta.uz

THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

VOLUME-5, ISSUE-2

shows the "Islamic empire", which by 2070 was already part of Central Asia, India, Pakistan, China, the Muslim countries of the Middle East, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, some African countries and even some territories of Russia. For your information, the Taliban always strive to create an Islamic emirate, operating under the rule of a fully Islamic and independent regime in Afghanistan. Since coming to power, they have been trying to establish good relations with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and other Islamic States.

Nevertheless, Afghanistan continues to be a safe haven for radical Islamist groups. After the withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan, the number of Al-Qaeda and regional Islamic State militants in the country doubled. There is also an increase in terrorist activity in Afghanistan, partly due to the plight of the Afghan people. According to the United Nations Development Program, about 85 percent of Afghanistan's population lives below the poverty line.

Aware of the potential threats to security and stability, the Central Asian countries are striving to develop a common and coordinated strategy regarding the situation in Afghanistan. And Uzbekistan sees itself as a key participant in this process. Today, Uzbekistan pursues a pragmatic policy towards Afghanistan based on the principles of close friendship and good neighborliness.

After the Taliban movement came to power, Uzbekistan became the first country to enter into an open dialogue with the new – and as yet unrecognized – government of Afghanistan. This approach has allowed Uzbekistan to maintain and even strengthen the dynamics of bilateral cooperation.

The last few years have been marked by a rapid growth in mutual trade; by the end of 2023, the volume of trade turnover exceeded \$ 860 million. Joint infrastructure projects are being implemented, including the construction of the Mazar-I-Sharif-Kabul–Peshawar railway, which will provide access to Pakistani ports in the Indian Ocean. Tashkent and Kabul are actively developing investment partnerships in such important sectors as mining, energy and agriculture. The construction of a new madrasah in Mazar-i-Sharif has begun. Today, the leadership of Uzbekistan advocates the deep integration of Afghanistan into regional economic processes. At the same time, Uzbekistan uses its "soft power" in Afghanistan. And this is also one of the defenses in the future or there will be a deterrent force in the area.⁶

Uzbekistan consistently puts the Afghan issue on the agenda of major international events, such as sessions of the UN General Assembly, consultative meetings of the heads of State of Central Asia, summits of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Organization of Turkic-speaking States and other regional associations. Tashkent called on the international community, as well as political and financial institutions, not to isolate Afghanistan. Uzbekistan's main focus is on providing broad humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people, as well as combating terrorist activities.

All this, of course, causes serious concern among the Central Asian countries, which are deeply aware of the need for consolidation to solve the Afghan problem. In this regard, it seems relevant to develop and adopt a regional strategy for Afghanistan that takes into account the national interests of all Central Asian republics.

It would be useful to strengthen cooperation between law enforcement agencies and defense agencies in Central Asia. This will make it possible to quickly identify and neutralize external threats that pose a threat to the region. In addition, it is necessary to combine the efforts of the special services of the Central Asian countries and involve Afghan colleagues in conducting joint counter-terrorism

⁶ Sukhrob Burkhanov. "Keep your friends closer to you, your enemies closer." Gift.uz

THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

VOLUME-5, ISSUE-2

operations. This will make it possible to effectively identify and eliminate terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan.

But you can also note that the Taliban is also not the same as the first time they came to power, they want to stay in power for a long time and they also show themselves to be a more dignified government, they are fighting drug trafficking, terrorists and radicalists, they declare there will be no attacks in Central Asia.

Nevertheless, the Afghan Taliban's accession to trade and economic integration with its neighbors and the development of relations will certainly require the Taliban to do security work and encourage the Taliban to ensure the security of the region. But there is still a lot to be done, and a start has already been made.

List of used literature

1. Dr Rashmini Koparkar. Commentary - Uzbekistan and Afghanistan Enhance Cooperation. VIF. 2018.
2. A. Yashlavsky, ISIL's Khorasan Project in Afghanistan: new challenges and threats. IMEMO, 2022
3. Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh. Central Asia and Afghanistan: Insulation on the Silk Road, Between Eurasia and the Heart of Asia." prio.org. (2012).
4. Barnett R. Rubin, Ashraf Ghani, William Maley, Ahmed Rashid, and Olivier Roy. "Afghanistan: Reconstruction and Peacebuilding in a Regional Framework." gsdr.org (2001).
5. Otabek Omonkulov. "Uzbekistan's Mediator Role in the Afghan Peace Process as a Neighboring and Small State." (2021).
6. Sergey A. Pritchkin. "Transformation of Uzbekistan's Approaches to Afghanistan after 2016." Vestnik RUDN. (2020).