

NEW APPROACHES TO THE FOREIGN POLICY ACTIVITIES OF UZBEKISTAN IN THE CENTRAL ASIAN REGION

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Abstract: The article discusses new approaches in the foreign policy position of Uzbekistan in relation to the accumulated problems in Central Asia. The role of Uzbekistan is substantiated as a key state with a predominant geopolitical position in the region, which occupies an important place in the political and socio-economic transformation of all of Central Asia. The article describes the initiatives put forward by the leadership of modern Uzbekistan aimed at fundamentally changing the situation in the region. It is also substantiated that based on the principle “The main priority of the foreign policy of Uzbekistan is Central Asia”, the situation in the region has changed dramatically. A completely new political atmosphere has been established in the region, the relationship between the states of the region, based on trust and good neighborliness, has strengthened. Such a radically new approach in the interaction of the states of Central Asia influenced the prompt solution with a positive outcome of the accumulated problems that have remained controversial for many years.

The article substantiates the pragmatic foreign policy of Uzbekistan and its initiatives to resolve the Afghan crisis. It substantiates the fact that without ensuring stability in the neighboring country - Afghanistan, it is not possible to guarantee security in the entire Central Asian region. The initiative of Uzbekistan to provide the necessary humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan in the context of a change of power in the country after the withdrawal of the US military counterpart is revealed.

Key words: Afghanistan, security, external, culture, world, politics, pragmatic, regional, reform, cooperation, social, stable, strategy, Central Asia, economy.

Introduction

In today's rapidly changing world, humanity has entered a new stage of its development. Its main feature is the process of globalization with a rapidly changing situation in the political, socio-economic, environmental, cultural and spiritual life of society. This, in turn, puts on the agenda issues related to the need for a radical review of the positions and approaches to modern challenges on the part of each subject of the world community. One of these challenges by right is the formation of a new structure of relations between states in the name of ensuring mutual understanding, strengthening trust and developing mutually beneficial cooperation.

Against the backdrop of changes taking place in the world, Uzbekistan has entered a new stage of its development. At the same time, it should rightfully be noted that the process of updating all spheres of the country's life is directly related to the change in the political leadership of the country in December 2016. The new leadership of Uzbekistan, headed by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, set a course for cardinal transformations of the entire political, socio-economic,

cultural and spiritual life of society. They concerned not only the issues of internal renewal of the country, but also foreign policy activities. Moreover, all issues related to the renewal course are reflected in the Action Strategy for five priority areas of development of the Republic of Uzbekistan scheduled for 2017-2021. This document has become a program guide at the stage of renovation reforms in the country, where the main tasks in the foreign policy of Uzbekistan are clearly defined in the fifth direction.

The logical continuation of state activity for the future was that the main contours of the country's foreign policy strategy began to be developed in accordance with the conditions for building a new Uzbekistan. They were reflected in the Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan, calculated for 2022-2026. Moreover, in all the above-mentioned documents, special attention was focused on the Central Asian vector of the country's foreign policy. They indicate the need for a radical change in approaches towards the nearest neighbors in the Central Asia region, the activation of further multifaceted cooperation with them, as well as the promotion of global efforts to resolve the Afghan problem, and others. This position of Uzbekistan is explained by the following factors:

Firstly, Uzbekistan sees the need to pursue in foreign policy a course towards strengthening and developing in a wide format comprehensive ties with neighboring states of the Central Asian region that are close in spirit, culture and traditions, which have common historical roots. This will radically change the entire political, socio-economic, cultural and spiritual image of the entire region.

Secondly, from a geostrategic point of view, Central Asia has huge reserves of natural resources and, in addition, a unique cultural and civilizational potential is concentrated here, which has a decisive influence on the development of many countries and entire regions.

Thirdly, Central Asia is practically located in the center of the Eurasian space, where the interests of world powers intersect and, moreover, it is adjacent to the hotbeds of instability and conflicts. These factors, in themselves, put on the agenda the need to preserve the historical identity of the peoples of Central Asia, to create conditions for the formation of a new architecture of relations and mutual understanding between the states of this region. At the same time, all this is coupled with the requirement to provide an atmosphere of security and stability for the further prosperity of the entire Central Asian region.

So, the consistent implementation of the principle "The main priority of Uzbekistan's foreign policy is Central Asia" has made it possible in recent years to create a completely new political atmosphere in the region, to strengthen relationships based on trust and good neighborhood. The pragmatic position in this vector of the foreign policy of the leadership of Uzbekistan contributed to the solution of a number of important issues related to water use, borders, renewal and expansion of transport communications.

According to authoritative foreign experts, transformations in Uzbekistan are the driver of the processes taking place in the region. Comparative analysis of the country's foreign policy position with the previous period gives every reason to come to this opinion. After all, many were eyewitnesses of how in the recent past relations between the states of Central Asia were of a complex nature. There was tension in interstate relations, different claims of countries were put

forward to each other. To date, the situation has changed dramatically due to the new policy pursued by the leadership of Uzbekistan.

Positive transformations in the relationship between the states of Central Asia are recognized by the experts of the world community. For example, Alexander Rahr, a well-known German expert, director of the Russia-Eurasia Center of the Council for Foreign Policy of the Federal Republic of Germany and a member of the Valdai Club, assesses the current situation in Central Asia as calm and looks to its future with great optimism. "It seems to me that the most important thing," he notes, "is that Central Asia does not lose its perspective as a region in the process of establishing a multi-polar world. This, in turn, is the art of the foreign policy of Uzbekistan, as well as diplomats who implement this policy." Another expert, head of the Spanish Center for the Study of Eurasia and Russia Fernando Moragon, assessing the foreign policy pursued by Uzbekistan on a regional scale, notes: "Shavkat Mirziyoyev is a pragmatic leader who skillfully and vigorously promotes the national interests of the country. As a key foreign policy priority, he identified, first of all, Central Asia and the development of partnerships with neighboring countries".

Director of the expert platform of the Baku Center for International Politics and Security "Baku Network" Gulnara Mammadzade expressed her point of view on the consistent strengthening of the role of Uzbekistan in the Central Asia region. "Domestic political liberalization, the reformist course of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and the efforts he initiates to improve relations with neighboring states form a positive intra-regional climate," she says. – The diplomatic strategy of the President of Uzbekistan is already capable in the medium term of transforming the country into one of the key states of a vast region where the interests of Russia and China meet, USA, EU, Turkey. Now Uzbekistan is starting to use its geostrategic potential on a full scale, including through the prism of the new Silk Road."

As you can see, international experts highly appreciate the pragmatic foreign policy course of the head of Uzbekistan, aimed at developing strategic partnership and international cooperation between the countries of Central Asia. They come to this conclusion on the basis of the fact that in recent years the role of Uzbekistan in matters of regional cooperation has increased dramatically. The reasons for this are the following factors:

First, in recent years, Uzbekistan has taken the initiative into its own hands and openly demonstrates its responsibility for the security and prosperity of Central Asia.

Secondly, the active regional diplomacy of Uzbekistan is a reflection of its historical and cultural role in the region.

Thirdly, Uzbekistan seeks to bring international efforts to resolve the Afghan problem to a fundamentally new level, taking into account the high dependence of long-term and strategic stability in the region on the situation in Afghanistan.

The real results of the new course in foreign policy taken by the leadership of the renewing Uzbekistan were not long in coming. One of the first steps can rightfully be considered organized on the initiative of Uzbekistan and held under the auspices of the UN on November 10-11, 2017 in Samarkand, the international conference "Central Asia: one past and a common future, cooperation for sustainable development and mutual prosperity". At this event, the President of

Uzbekistan announced plans for regional policy, which was fully supported by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the countries of Central Asia and a document was signed that reflected their desire for cooperation. A vivid proof of this was the fact that relations between Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan began to develop actively on a completely new plane. And this is not accidental, since from the first days of coming to power, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev stated that the policy in relation to the neighboring states of the region is especially important for him. In this regard, he began foreign policy negotiations with the countries of Central Asia.

The leader of Uzbekistan paid state visits to each country of the Central Asian region and during official meetings at the highest level, joint pragmatic and win-win solutions to existing problems were found. In particular, 90 percent of the border issues between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan were settled. Between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, 25 border points have been opened. Moreover, countries began to join forces in search of ways of rational and joint use of transboundary water resources, which for many years remained a cause for disputes. In addition, through the joint efforts of the countries of the region, trade and transport routes through Central Asia to China began to be created as part of the One Belt, One Road initiative.

Cardinal changes in the foreign policy position and openness of Uzbekistan in relation to the countries of Central Asia are increasingly being analyzed in the media of foreign countries. For example, the English-language newspaper Iran News Daily writes: "The successive reforms observed in recent years are also clearly manifested in the foreign policy of Uzbekistan. One of the main tasks of foreign policy activity is the formation of a belt of peace, stability and security around the country. In this regard, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev outlined the development and strengthening of friendly and mutually beneficial ties with neighbors as the main priority of the foreign policy direction.

These words are confirmed by the fact that the 94th goal of the Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022-2026 clearly defines the need to bring multifaceted cooperation in Central Asia to a qualitatively new level. It means:

- organizing and conducting a dialogue at the highest level, as well as in the format of intergovernmental and inter-parliamentary commissions;
- annual holding of consultative meetings of the heads of states of Central Asia;
- to begin work on the development of a regional strategy for cooperation between the countries of Central Asia;
- bring to the level of cooperation on the prevention of ecology, the environment and the protection of nature in Central Asia, and others.

Clear evidence of a fundamental change in the situation in the interactions of the countries of Central Asia, initiated by Uzbekistan, was the formation of a new format of interaction with the leading key players in the region's inner circle. This is confirmed by the online summit "States of Central Asia - China" held in January 2022 in the format of a videoconference, as well as the first summit "India - Central Asia". Taking part in each of them, Uzbekistan put forward a number of initiatives aimed at strengthening integration between the countries of Central Asia, China and

India. The very fact of holding such prestigious high-level meetings with the participation of heads of state testifies to the increased role and place of Central Asia in recent years as a politically stable, and in socio-economic terms, a prosperous region in the Eurasian space.

Geographically, it so happened that the Central Asian region directly borders on Afghanistan. In this regard, the leadership of the new Uzbekistan in the regional foreign policy strategy considers the situation in Afghanistan as an indivisible problem for the entire Central Asian region.

Diplomatic relations established between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan back in October 1992 have received a new breath in modern conditions. The new dynamics of relations between the two countries began to gain momentum since the current President of the Republic of Uzbekistan radically changed the country's policy towards Afghanistan. It was on his initiative that the Afghan vector in the foreign policy of Uzbekistan became one of the priorities. At the same time, much attention has been paid to comprehensive rapprochement and the speedy settlement of the political and socio-economic situation in this country.

A historic event in the rapprochement of mutual relations between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan was the high-level International Conference on Afghanistan “Peace process, security cooperation and regional cooperation” held in March 2018 in Tashkent”. As a result of the conference, a corresponding declaration was adopted, which notes that peace and security in Afghanistan are essential for ensuring stability and prosperity in the region and ending the long-term violence and suffering of the Afghan people.

Particularly noteworthy is the fact that it was after the Tashkent conference that international steps in this direction noticeably intensified. The Afghan problem was once again at the center of attention of the UN Security Council. The activities of many other interstate formats on Afghanistan, such as the Kabul Process, the Istanbul Heart of Asia Process, the Moscow Format, and the International Contact Group, have gained new momentum. and “Contact group “SCO-Afghanistan””. It should be noted that the actions of the Uzbek leadership to resolve the situation in Afghanistan as soon as possible led to the fact that Uzbekistan became an integral part of the political process to launch direct intra-Afghan negotiations.

Against the background of the Afghan vector of Uzbekistan's foreign policy, Uzbek-Afghan cooperation began to develop successfully. In November 2017, after a 30-year break, direct flights were resumed on the Kabul-Tashkent-Kabul route. The most important event in the modern history of bilateral relations was the first visit in July 2019 to Afghanistan by the Prime Minister of Uzbekistan. It contributed to the discovery of new promising directions for further expansion of trade and economic mutual cooperation. The consequence of such a policy aimed at rapprochement of bilateral cooperation relations was that today more than 300 enterprises operate on the territory of Uzbekistan with the participation of Afghan capital, including 20 with 100% foreign capital. In addition, the Termez Cargo Center logistics terminal was opened in Termez, and trade houses of Uzbekistan were created in the Afghan cities of Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif.

Even in the difficult intra-Afghan political situation that developed after the withdrawal of the American military contingent from Afghanistan in August 2021, Uzbekistan remained committed to its foreign policy positions. Uzbekistan was among the first to come out and continues to come

out as a supporter of a peaceful settlement of the political crisis in Afghanistan. Given the catastrophic socio-economic situation, he was among the first to extend a helping hand to the Afghan people. Humanitarian aid is transported to Afghanistan through the border town of Termez. It should also be noted that in January 2022, at a meeting of the UN Security Council on the situation in Afghanistan, the representative of Uzbekistan to the UN informed about the efforts made by Tashkent to provide comprehensive assistance to the Afghan people. In addition, Uzbekistan, remaining true to its strategic course, intends to continue developing multilateral cooperation and assisting the socio-economic reconstruction of Afghanistan. A vivid proof of this is the readiness of Uzbekistan, together with the Afghan side, to implement two major projects. This is the construction of the Surkhan-Puli-Khumri power transmission line and the Termez-Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway.

Conclusion

Thus, Uzbekistan, which has entered a new stage of its development, pursuing a pragmatic foreign policy course, gives priority to issues of interaction and cooperation, both with all the countries of Central Asia and with its southern neighbor, which is Afghanistan. The general well-being and further progress along the path of progress of the entire Central Asian region depend on the conditions of security, political stability and socio-economic prosperity in each of these countries. And this is one of the main strategic guidelines for the foreign policy of the new Uzbekistan for the future.

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