

EFFORTS OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN AIMED AT THE STABILIZATION OF MILITARY-POLITICAL SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

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Abstract:	Keywords:
The report is devoted to the approaches of the Republic of Uzbekistan to resolving issues related to security and development in Afghanistan. In addition, a retrospective analysis of the efforts of the Republic of Uzbekistan aimed at achieving peace and stability in Afghanistan is carried out.	Afghanistan; Taliban movement; contact reconciliation group "6 + 2"; large-scale work; new dynamics of cooperation; resolution of the Afghan problem; Northern Alliance; Tashkent meeting; South Region.

Introduction

The Republic of Uzbekistan historically has had its own interests in neighboring Afghanistan and at all times closely monitored the situation in this country. The activity of Uzbekistan's participation in the Afghan processes was changing from time to time depending on the security threats to Uzbekistan emanating from the territory of Afghanistan.

At present, the Republic of Uzbekistan remains one of the key countries capable of making a significant contribution to building peace and stability in the neighbouring country. At the same time, Uzbekistan continues to be one of the most constructive neighbours of Afghanistan, extremely interested in establishing peace without making any hegemonic plans in Afghanistan.

Foreign policy concept of Uzbekistan considering Afghanistan since 1990-2019 can be conditionally subdivided into several periods.

1. The first period (1990-1995) was characterized by decisive actions on the part of the leadership of Uzbekistan to radically change the foreign policy line in resolving the Afghan problem, as well as reforming its own national security strategy [1].

In particular, in order to create a reliable national security system, as well as stabilize the situation in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan has done the following:

- the result of the peace-loving international initiatives of Uzbekistan to ensure security in the Central and Southern regions, was the creation in 1994 of a special UN mission for Afghanistan;
- at the Tashkent Conference on Security and Cooperation in Central Asia organized in September 1995, the First President of Uzbekistan I. Karimov gave an objective assessment

of the situation in the region and identified preventive measures, the implementation of which contributed to the process of establishing peace and stability in the country, region and neighboring Afghanistan [2];

- the National Security Council under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan (1995) and the Academy of the Armed Forces (1995), important from the point of view of ensuring the security and defense of the country, were created. In turn, the new structural units formed in the Armed Forces (1992) were in constant readiness to take preemptive actions to prevent attempts to provoke conflicts in the territories bordering Afghanistan and Tajikistan;

- in the course of the formation and adoption of legislative acts, such as the Military Doctrine (1995), the Law "On the Basic Principles of Foreign Policy Activities of the Republic of Uzbekistan" (1996) and the Law "On Approval of the Concept of National Security" (1997), the genesis of the situation in Afghanistan and the security threats emanating from it [3];

- in October 1995, at a meeting of the 50th session of the UN General Assembly, the First President of Uzbekistan I. Karimov put forward an initiative to impose an embargo on arms supplies to Afghanistan. On January 16, 1996, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the Afghan problem, which included most of the proposals put forward by Uzbekistan. In June 1996, the United States announced an arms embargo on Afghanistan.

2. The second period (1996-2000) was characterized by active political, diplomatic and humanitarian work of Uzbekistan to resolve the situation in Afghanistan.

After capture of Kabul by Taliban in October 1996, a meeting of the heads of the Central Asian states and Russia was convened in Almaty. At this meeting, issues of coordination of foreign policy activities and cooperation in the field of security were discussed.

The meeting participants recognized what a significant threat this instability in Afghanistan poses to the still incompletely formed and still fragile security system of Central Asia [4].

In this regard, in 1997, Uzbekistan proposed to create, under the auspices of the UN, a contact and conciliation group "Neighbors and Friends" of Afghanistan in the format of "6 + 2". Six countries directly bordering on Afghanistan were invited to this group - Iran, China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, as well as the USA and Russia. Due to the topicality of the Uzbekistan initiative, in October of 1997 the first meeting of the interested states took place in New York.

On the 19-20th of July in 1999, the Tashkent Summit of the "6+2" group on Afghanistan was held under the auspices of the UN. It was attended by the main warring sides of the intra-Afghan conflict, such as the Northern Alliance and the Taliban including the delegations from the UN, Iran, China, Pakistan, Russia, the USA, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

As a result of the meeting, the Tashkent Declaration was signed on the basic principles of a peaceful settlement of the Afghan conflict. The Declaration fixed the main directions and stages of the negotiation process between the warring parties, as well as the scheme and forms of its realization [5].

The third period (2001-2015) was characterized by the provision of comprehensive assistance from Tashkent at the beginning of the military operation in Afghanistan after the events of

September 11, 2001 in New York. Besides, the so called third period contributed to the formation of infrastructure, development of transport, energy and economic spheres in the new Afghanistan.

Thus, Uzbekistan was among the first countries to express full support for the international coalition in the fight against manifestations of international terrorism on the Afghan territory. In addition, Uzbekistan has made a great contribution providing support to the Afghan economy. For instance, in December of 2001 the Government of Uzbekistan and the UNO signed the Protocol on the facilitation of humanitarian aid from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan [6].

Uzbekistan has done a lot of work to restore the war-torn infrastructure of Afghanistan. Thus, an important part of the Northern Route, intended for the delivery of non-military goods to the forces of the international coalition, passed across Uzbekistan. Construction Uzbek companies built 11 bridges along the Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul route. In early 2011, the construction and launch of the Hairatan - Mazar-i-Sharif railway (75 km) were completed [7]. In 2008, I. Karimov the First President of Uzbekistan put forward a new initiative to restore the existing contact group "6 + 2" on Afghanistan, re-form it into "6 + 3" format, taking into account new existing realities. Thus, along with the states neighbours, "6+3" group included Russia, the U.S. and NATO.

4. The fourth period (since 2016) is characterized by a fundamentally new dynamics of bilateral cooperation between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan in all areas of interaction.

In particular, after the election of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat M. Mirziyoyev in 2016, we can observe a special dynamics of relations between the two countries. Afghanistan and Uzbekistan started enhancing cooperation. They jointly regulate security and stabilization issues in the region.

Actually, it should be especially emphasized that thanks to Sh. Mirziyoyev policy, the concept of views on Afghanistan has changed. To date, Afghanistan is not considered as a source of regional problems, threats and challenges, but as a country of economic and transport capabilities of the entire Euro-Asian region.

In September of 2017 in his speech at the joint Oliy Majlis meeting of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev pointed out: "Uzbekistan will traditionally pursue a good-neighborly and friendly policy towards Afghanistan" [8].

In January of 2017, Uzbek governmental delegation paid an official visit to Afghanistan. That visit occupied a very special place among all the contacts, due to the fact that the two presidents and other government figures met in Kabul and fruitfully negotiated with each other. As a result of the visit, a number of bilateral documents were signed. Among them there was the Action Plan so called ("Roadmap") for the further development of full-scale cooperation between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan for 2017. The document provides a number of measures and steps for interaction in the political, trade and economic, transport and transition areas, as well as intensification of cooperation in the fields of energy, mining, oil and gas industry, agriculture, public healthcare and pharmaceuticals.

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With regard to all the above mentioned events, it is worth mentioning “Memorandum of Understanding”, signed by the two countries Ministries of Foreign Affairs. Both sides have agreed to conduct on the regular basis political consultations on the bilateral, regional and international matters representing of mutual interest. Besides, both sides have agreed to cooperate in the fight against illegal drugs and psychotropic substances traffic.

One more peculiarity of the Afghanistan-Uzbekistan foreign policy is the gradual enhancement of their joint participation in multilateral formats related to the settlement of the Afghan conflict. As an example, we can mention participation of Uzbekistan in the International Conference on Afghanistan in October of 2016 in Brussels, work in multilateral consultations on Afghanistan in April of 2017 in Moscow, as well as in the international meeting "Kabul Process" in the capital of Afghanistan in June of 2017.

And without any doubt, the international conferences on Afghanistan held in Tashkent in 2017 and 2022, deserve the most serious attention. In fact, the conferences seriously proved logical continuation of the practical efforts made by the international community to ensure peace and stability in Afghanistan. The forums were attended by the Foreign Ministers of 21 countries of the world, as well as high-ranking representatives from the UN, EU, NATO, SCO and CSTO.

Appointment of Mr. Ismatullo Irgashev in May of 2017 to the post of the Special Representative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Afghanistan, can also be considered as a symbol of proximity and further growth of cooperation between the two countries [9].

The 1st sitting of the Uzbekistan-Afghanistan joint commission on security issues was held in Tashkent on February 10, 2018. That sitting also received a new stimulus for both countries.

The Republic of Uzbekistan considers that simultaneously apart from the intensification of the political dialogue between the two countries, bilateral and multilateral commercial, economic, cultural and humanitarian cooperation with Afghanistan is the most efficient factor in peaceful settlement of the situation in Afghanistan. Economic prosperity and security in Afghanistan is an absolute imperative for Uzbekistan today.

At the same time, Tashkent intends to enter the Afghan market with such products as inexpensive appliances, automotive and chemical products. In this connection, in May of 2019, the Termez-Cargo International Logistics Center with a customs terminal was opened in Termez. This centre is designed to facilitate export-import and transit cargo flows between the two countries with access to the markets of Europe and Asia. In addition, according to the signed agreements, Uzbekistan will annually export to Afghanistan up to 300,000 tons of mineral fertilizers, 2,000 units of agricultural machinery, up to 250,000 tons of food, wheat and other products in demand in Afghanistan.

The information mentioned above proves that Uzbekistan and Afghanistan want to activate their commercial-economic relations. The “Uzbekistan Trade House” and the “UzTrade Showroom” opened in Kabul are the vivid confirmation of the commitment to the reliable economic ties. Such a commercial structure coordinates the supply of products from various

industries of Uzbekistan to the Afghan market. Today, "UzTrade" has signed contracts with Afghan partners worth more than \$29 million. In addition, as a result of the support provided by Uzbekistan, in October of 2019, Afghanistan was granted the status of an authorized member of the framework cooperation between the United States and the countries of Central Asia on trade and investment.

Enumerating the spheres of cooperation, we also need to discuss ongoing humanitarian projects. In January of 2018 establishment of the Educational Centre to train Afghan citizens in Termez. The main task of the center is to train qualified personnel in educational programs of higher education (in 17 specialties), secondary specialized and vocational education (in 16 specialties), plus advanced training of specialists in various fields.

Currently, the Center has about 110 students. The duration of the course is 2 years, after which a bachelor's degree is awarded. The training of specialists in the field of railway transport and service has been identified as the most promising area of the Center's activity. 50% of the student's fee is paid by Afghanistan, the rest is covered by the company "Uzbekiston temir yullari" ("Railways of Uzbekistan") [10].

Transport and logistics cooperation is an equally significant area of cooperation between the two countries.

At this point we must speak about the Agreement on the construction of the railway line Mazar-i-Sharif - Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif - Kabul - Peshawar. The first line will be a continuation of the Hairaton-Mazar-i-Sharif railway line, and the second one will be a part of a transport corridor that will link the European Union, Russia, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and further the countries of Southeast Asia.

In addition, the project will allow Kabul to receive an annual profit from transit in the amount of 400 -500 million dollars. Moreover, the railway will increase trade turnover by 50%. It is also worth mentioning that the project will provide great opportunity for the countries of Central Asia to enter promising markets in almost all directions. Upon completion of the construction of this project, the planned volume of cargo transit in the first year of operation will be about 5.3 million tons, in the future it will increase to 15 million tons per year. With the implementation of the second project, about 30 thousand Afghans will also be provided with jobs, and Kabul will annually receive a profit of \$ 500 million from transit.

In addition, it is also planned to build a power transmission line (TL) **Surkhan - Pulikhumri - Doshi - Surabay - Jalalabad - Peshawar** along the railway (the power line length is 260 km, including 45 km on the territory of Uzbekistan), which will allow electrifying the new highway. This transmission line will increase the supply of electricity from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan by 70% - up to 6 billion kWh per year. In addition, the transmission line may become an integral part of the CASA-1000 project. The cost of the project is \$150 million, of which \$118 million are invested by Afghanistan and \$32 million by Uzbekistan.

Speaking about cooperation in the energy sector, there is one more important fact in this sphere. It is obligatory to note that the scope of energy delivery to Afghanistan in comparison

with 2002 has increased by 30 times. At the same time, since January 2018, Uzbekistan has reduced the price of electricity supplied to Afghanistan by 35% (from 7 to 5 cents per kW).

As a result of the analysis, it should be noted that the role of Uzbekistan in ensuring peace and stability in Afghanistan is determined by the following main factors:

1. Stabilization of the military conflict in Afghanistan is an integral part of the overall strategy pursued by Uzbekistan to ensure national security.
2. Uzbekistan is committed to the principle of the security indivisibility. Security of Afghanistan is seen as security of Uzbekistan.
3. Nations and nationalities of Uzbekistan and Afghanistan have a common historical and civilizational basis promoting mutually beneficial and constructive cooperation. The 2 nations' common heritage creates the prospect for active and fruitful interaction in all spheres of the future social and economic life.
4. Economic stability and prosperity of Uzbekistan directly depends on the emerging military-political situation in Afghanistan.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that from the moment of gaining independence and up to the present day, the foreign policy of Uzbekistan towards Afghanistan has been aimed at ensuring security and stability in Afghanistan, as well as the development of the transport, energy, socio-economic and humanitarian spheres of the country. Uzbekistan is desperately interested in creating Afghanistan as a stable, developing state with authorities capable of taking control of the situation in the country. Only in this case, it is possible to ensure security of the Central and South Asia regions, which will undoubtedly serve the sustainable development and prosperity of Uzbekistan.

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