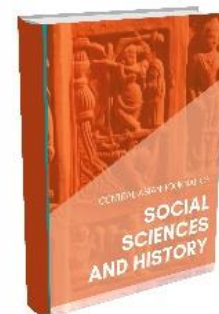




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**CENTRAL ASIAN JOURNAL OF  
SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HISTORY**

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## Foreign Policy of Uzbekistan: An Active and Pragmatic way Built on the Basis of National Interests

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### Abstract:

The article analyzes the new constructive political initiatives put forward by Uzbekistan over the past five years and supported by the world community, as well as the positive trends in the Central Asian region. The article notes that Central Asia is undergoing a process of serious political transformation, in which the principles of openness and constructiveness, mutual trust and respect are becoming stronger. This, according to the author, gives hope that in the near future Central Asia will enter the process of integration in the world as a single place of sustainable development and give it a new quality and content.

### ARTICLE INFO

#### *Article history:*

Received 28 Oct 2021

Received in revised form

29 Nov 2021

Accepted 13 Dec

Available online 14 Dec 2021

**Keywords:** Uzbekistan, Central Asia, foreign policy, national interests, strategy, development, regional cooperation, Consultative Council.

### Introduction

The great Chinese philosopher Confucius, who left his mark on the history of mankind with his political and social views and enlightenment teachings, emphasized an important point two and a half thousand years ago: "There is no need to be afraid of change. They usually happen out of necessity."

Indeed, if we look at the essence of the radical changes taking place in Uzbekistan over the past five years, the sharp turns in the development of our state and society, we see that they are taking place in the interests of today's needs and the interests of our multinational people. Therefore, these reforms are considered to be the beginning of a new era in the history of our country, that is, the stage of growth and development.

In this regard, a completely new domestic and foreign policy, developed on the initiative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev in the framework of the Action Strategy for the five priority areas of development of the Republic of Uzbekistan, aimed at firmly protecting our national interests in 2017-2021.

### **Main part**

First of all, important historical steps have been taken in our country to ensure human rights and freedoms and legitimate interests. A unique system of direct and face-to-face communication with the people, the solution of problems that afflict people on the ground has been created. Great strides have been made in ensuring freedom of speech and religion.

Forced labor, especially child labor, which has become widespread in our society, has been eliminated. Also, a fair system of granting Uzbek citizenship to our compatriots who have been deprived of citizenship for many years has been formed.

The country's economy is experiencing stable growth rates and increasing incomes. Free conversion of our national currency has been established. Large-scale reforms in tax policy have begun.

For the first time in our country, the existence of poverty among the population has been openly recognized, national programs to reduce it have been developed and consistently implemented.

Most importantly, thanks to such large-scale reforms, the authorities have gained confidence in the future and are actively involved in the process of turning human rights and freedoms into real values.

In the elections of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on December 24, 2021, our people freely expressed their will and once again demonstrated in practice their strong support for the path of development chosen five years ago.

The domestic policy pursued on the basis of new views and approaches is reflected in the foreign policy of the country as a logical continuation of it. In this regard, it is important to pursue an open, pragmatic and practical foreign policy, strengthening close ties of friendship and cooperation with countries around the world, especially with neighboring countries, as identified as priorities of our country's foreign policy.

As a result of the practical foreign policy pursued over the past short period, the country's international prestige has increased, and a completely new democratic image has been formed. Mutually beneficial relations have been established with far and near countries of the world. As a result, over the past five years, the leadership of Uzbekistan has made about 80 high-level visits to leading countries of the world (USA, EU, Russia, China, Japan, South Korea, Turkey, Iran, UAE, etc.).

The activities of Uzbekistan in the framework of influential international organizations, including the **United Nations** and its specialized agencies, the **Organization of Islamic Cooperation**, the **Shanghai Cooperation Organization**, the **Commonwealth of Independent States**, are gaining momentum and gaining new meaning.

Relations with the **European Bank for Reconstruction and Development** have been restored. Relations with the world's largest economic, financial and investment organizations, such as the **World Bank**, the **International Monetary Fund**, the **Asian Development Bank**, the **Islamic**

**Development Bank**, are developing steadily. Active economic diplomacy has become a priority of Uzbekistan's renewed foreign policy.

With the support of diplomatic missions of our country, about **1,000** investment projects and trade agreements **worth more than \$ 30 billion** have been developed. The number of countries investing in Uzbekistan has exceeded 50. According to UNCTAD, our country has become a leader in Central Asia in terms of growth of investment flows.

During this short period, Uzbekistan became a member of the **Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States** and received observer status in the **Eurasian Economic Union**. For the first time in its history, our country was elected a member of the **UN Human Rights Council**. He successfully chaired the **Commonwealth of Independent States**.

New political initiatives in a consistent and constructive spirit were supported by the world community. This is confirmed by the fact that on the initiative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev 4 important resolutions of the UN General Assembly were adopted. In this regard, it should be noted that in May 2021, a special UN resolution was adopted declaring the **Aral Sea region a zone of environmental innovation and technology**.

It is also noteworthy that on the initiative of the leadership of Uzbekistan, a multilateral trust **fund for human security in the Aral Sea region** was established in cooperation with the United Nations, aimed at mitigating the effects of environmental disasters caused by the Aral Sea disaster.

Thanks to the initiatives and practical efforts of Uzbekistan to address global problems, the spirit of political confidence in the New Uzbekistan has risen to a high level, and the desire for strategic cooperation with our country is growing.

It is especially important that today the cooperation with the Central Asian states, which have always been brothers and sisters, has reached a qualitatively new level. Undoubtedly, the fact that the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev at the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly emphasized the importance of the Central Asian region as an important priority of the country's foreign policy and put forward an initiative to adopt a special resolution on Central Asia further contributed to this process. On this basis, in 2018, the UN General Assembly for the first time adopted a resolution **"Strengthening regional and international cooperation to ensure peace, stability and sustainable development in the Central Asian region."** The adoption of this document is noteworthy in that it confirms the readiness of the Central Asian countries to take full responsibility for the fate of the region.

Natalia German, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Central Asia, said: ***"This resolution, adopted at the initiative of Uzbekistan, as an important historical document, has laid a solid foundation for strengthening mutual trust and good neighborliness between Central Asian states. It demonstrated the strong political will of the leaders of the region for sustainable development in the region."***

Another important step in the new stage of regional relations was the international conference **"Central Asia: common history and common future, cooperation for sustainable development and progress "** held in Samarkand in 2017 under the auspices of the leadership of Uzbekistan.

Another important manifestation of the important initiative put forward by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan was the **holding of the Consultative Council of Central Asian Heads of State**. Recognized as a great achievement of Uzbek diplomacy, this format was highly appreciated by its participants and international observers.

Issues such as further development of transport and communication opportunities in the region, rational use of water and energy resources, strengthening cultural and humanitarian ties, ensuring regional security and stability, which are important aspects of mutually beneficial cooperation, are being discussed at the meetings of the Council. As a result, current issues such as cross-border, use of water resources, delimitation and demarcation of borders, crossing border points, which have accumulated for many years between neighboring countries, have been resolved. Borders have been opened and mutual relations between our peoples have been restored. A new impetus was given to the development of trade, economic, cultural and humanitarian ties.

*“The leadership of Uzbekistan has taken decisive steps to strengthen political and economic cooperation in Central Asia. These efforts have created a completely new environment in the region. The European Union fully supports the positive developments in the region, including in Uzbekistan, as well as the strategy we have chosen for sustainable economic development,”* said Edward Stiprays, Head of the EU Delegation to Uzbekistan.

It is known that historically, Central Asia, located at the crossroads of world civilizations, is an important strategic region in terms of its geographical location. Also, rich natural and energy resources, scientific and technological potential are an important factor in determining the place and role of the region in the modern system of international relations.

The total area is 4 million sq. km. This region is of great geoeconomic and geopolitical importance to the world community, forming a historically, culturally, religiously-enlightened and economically unified system.

In determining the overall situation of each region, first of all, its geopolitical factors are taken into account. "Geopolitics" is one of the most basic concepts in the theory of international relations and is a set of political knowledge that is studied on the basis of the territorial location of the state in a particular historical context. This means that geographical factors are inextricably linked with public policy. From this point of view, geopolitical theories emphasize that each state should determine its policy based on its geographical location and available opportunities, otherwise it will face a number of serious problems.

As mentioned above, Central Asia is a very important region in connecting the North and South, East and West with transport and communication routes. One hundred years ago, trade caravans traveled along the Great Silk Road from Europe to China and India, but today a number of practical measures are being taken to restore these routes. In recent years, the number of countries interested in the implementation of this idea is growing, and the construction of a new Great Silk Road is becoming more and more real.

With the construction of transnational railways, highways and transport communications, the issue is becoming more urgent with the expansion of access to the south through the territory of Afghanistan.

The international conference **“Central and South Asia: Regional Connectivity: Threats and Opportunities”** held in Tashkent in June 2021 at the initiative of the President of Uzbekistan was a clear practical manifestation of this. The new proposals and initiatives put forward by our country at the conference have aroused great interest not only in the countries of these vast regions, but also in the world community. In particular, the construction of new transport routes connecting Central Asia with the Indian Ocean was widely discussed.

In the future, the reconstruction of the section of the Great Silk Road connecting China and South Asia will provide a great opportunity to increase the importance of regional transport routes, expand their transit capacity, create a solid foundation for attracting investment. At the same time, it will help intensify interstate trade, economic and cultural ties.

It is known that the region is rich in reserves of oil and gas, gold, uranium and non-ferrous metals. According to the data, the oil reserves of the Central Asian region range from 17 billion barrels to 33 billion barrels, or 7.2% of the total oil reserves in the world. Its natural gas reserves are estimated at 230 to 360 trillion cubic feet, or 5 percent of the world's total gas reserves. As for uranium reserves, 19.7 to 30 percent of the world's uranium deposits are located in this region.

In the future, it is natural that the discovery of large hydrocarbon reserves in the region will be of interest to developed countries. Because the energy resources of Central Asia and the Caspian region play an important role in the world economy, the way in which oil and gas pipelines are transported to world markets, through which countries, is one of the most pressing issues for powerful strategic forces.

Another aspect of the issue is that despite the fact that the countries of the region occupy a huge geopolitical area, they are far from maritime communications. There are also many challenges that need to be addressed in order to achieve full peace and stability in Afghanistan. Threats and dangers such as international terrorism, religious and political extremism, drug trafficking, separatism, and organized crime still persist in the region. At the same time, there is no denying that there are a number of socio-economic, demographic and environmental problems that can destabilize the situation, both within and outside the region.

In this regard, it is significant that over the past five years, the President of Uzbekistan has held meetings and talks with the leaders of the region at more than 60 high-level and various regional and international events, and achieved a number of positive results.

In particular, it should be noted that a strategic partnership has been established with the **Republic of Turkmenistan**, road and rail bridges across the Amudarya have been commissioned between the two countries, and bilateral relations have been strengthened. It is also an important step to restore the ecosystem of the Aral Sea, to reach a number of agreements on the rational use of transboundary rivers.

A number of important documents, economic agreements, trade, economic and investment agreements aimed at further strengthening the strategic partnership with the **Republic of Kazakhstan** have been signed, and interregional ties have been strengthened. The operation of border checkpoints has been resumed. The Tashkent-Almaty railway has been launched.

An agreement on the State Border with the **Kyrgyz Republic**, an agreement on confidence-building measures in the border area and a declaration on strategic partnership were signed. A number of checkpoints on the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border have been opened.

After a long break, in March 2018, on the initiative of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the Uzbek delegation paid its first state visit to the **Republic of Tajikistan**. In the same year, the President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon visited our country. Today, the relations between the two countries are developing rapidly and trade and economic ties are strengthening. Flights between Tashkent and Dushanbe have been launched, and **17 checkpoints** have been opened on the state border.

As a result of the removal of barriers at border checkpoints, relations between citizens of Uzbekistan and Central Asian countries have radically improved. If 5 years ago, **200-300 people** crossed the border between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan a day, now this number **has reached 30,000. 20,000** people cross the border with Tajikistan every day.

The delegation of the Government of Uzbekistan held a total of 63 talks with neighboring countries on the delimitation and demarcation of the state border, including 17 with **Kazakhstan**, 27 with **Kyrgyzstan**, 9 with **Tajikistan** and **Turkmenistan**. As a result, the delimitation of the state border with Kazakhstan has been completed. An agreement has been reached with Kyrgyzstan on **95%** of the border. **99.9%** of the border with Tajikistan has been agreed.

The friendly and good-neighborly environment formed in Central Asia, in turn, is an important factor in expanding the trade and economic potential and opportunities of the region. For example, the trade turnover between the countries of the region in 2016 **was \$ 2.4 billion**, while this number is 2019 the year **of \$ 5.2 billion**. Despite the pandemic conditions, the trade turnover in 2020 was **\$ 3.8 billion**.

Investment cooperation of Uzbekistan with Central Asian countries is also developing rapidly. For comparison, we would like to give the following figures: in 2017, **312** enterprises with regional capital operated in the territory of Uzbekistan, while in 2020 this figure increased **fourfold** to **1,357**. For example, the number of enterprises with Kazakh capital increased from **281 to 896** in 2017-2020, the number of enterprises with Kyrgyz capital **increased from 57 to 175**, and the number of enterprises in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan increased **from 180 to 140**. At the same time, the share of Uzbek investment in neighboring countries is growing.

This ensures the economic stability of the region and creates a favorable investment climate for foreign countries and international financial institutions. Just one example: in 2016-2019, foreign investment in the economies of the region increased **by 40% to \$ 37.6 billion**. The foreign trade turnover of the countries of the region with foreign countries increased **by 56%** over the same period, **reaching \$168.2 billion**.

Of course, the improvement of these indicators is leading to rapid growth of the region's GDP. In particular, compared to 2016, in 2019 the region's GDP grew **by 19.6% to \$ 302.8 billion**. Despite the circumstances of the pandemic, in 2020 this figure was only **2.5 percent to \$ 295.1 billion**, decreasing around.

Evaluating the process, **The Diplomat**, one of the world's leading international political and social publications, said: ***"Thanks to the renewed foreign policy of the Uzbek leader in the region, the political will for open and constructive dialogue, the remaining problems with neighboring countries are being addressed. Central Asia is becoming a region of new opportunities."***

The adoption by the US government of a special Strategy for Central Asia in 2020, entitled **"Strengthening Independence and Economic Prosperity"** for the first time in the Central Asian region, was another international recognition of the new political reality in the region.

Speaking about the regional foreign policy of Uzbekistan, it is worthwhile to focus on the current situation in Afghanistan, which is another important area, and the issue of achieving peace and economic stability in this country.

From the first days of our country's entry into a new era of development, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev has put forward a completely new conceptual approach to Afghanistan. Today, Afghanistan is an integral part of Central Asia, and the Afghan people are recognized as a people who for centuries lived in a single cultural and civilizational space with the peoples of the region.

At the initiative of the leadership of Uzbekistan in January 2018, a special meeting of the UN Security Council with the participation of Central Asian foreign ministers was held on **"Establishing regional cooperation in Afghanistan and Central Asia as an interdependent model of security and development."** Through this meeting, a common position of the Central Asian states on Afghanistan was formed. In particular, the main directions of new cooperation between the countries of the region on the broad involvement of Afghanistan in trade, economic and infrastructure projects in Central Asia were identified.

### Conclusion

Sum up, such positive trends in the region show that serious political transformations are taking place in Central Asia, where the principles of openness and constructiveness, mutual trust and respect are becoming stronger.

This gives hope that in the near future Central Asia will enter the process of global integration as the only place with sustainable development and give it a new quality and content.

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