

## **Uzbekistan-Afghanistan Cooperation: Need, Opportunity and Prospects**

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**Abstract---**This article reveals Uzbekistan's potential for stability in Afghanistan. The Uzbek factor is put forward as a decisive factor in solving the problem. The analysis of the possibility that the title in Uzbekistan is a significant part of the ethnic composition of the population of Afghanistan, is based on religious factors, and historical and cultural factors. At the same time, the prospective megaprojects (Trans-Afghan Railway, Trans-Afghan Gas Pipeline) will have a positive impact on the Afghan economy and social life.

**Keywords---** Afghanistan, Regional Cooperation, Stability, Transport and Communication System, Uzbekistan, Neighboring Countries, Security, Megaproject, Good Neighborly Policy, Subregion, Taliban Government, Trans-Afghan Transport Corridor, Geopolitical Superiority, Internal Conflicts, Social Problems.

### **I. It is Necessary to Cooperate with the Taliban**

First of all, let's talk about the need to cooperate with the Taliban government, as well as with Afghanistan. Cooperation with the Taliban is important from a security perspective. Instability in Afghanistan primarily affects its neighbors. Today, the security situation in Afghanistan cannot be assessed positively. There are still more than 20 international terrorist groups in the country, which pose a security threat to Afghanistan's neighbors and remote parts of the world. At the same time, the UN mission in Afghanistan estimates that ISIS's influence is now growing in all parts of Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the number of ISIS attacks has increased fivefold. (In 2 years - from 60 in 2020 to 334 in 2021.) Today, security is indivisible and boundless. That is, instability in one country affects the instability of an entire region. Instability in Afghanistan has reached a point where it can affect global security. The events of the beginning of the new century justify our opinion. Therefore, it is worthwhile to cooperate with any force in Afghanistan on the path to peace. The ultimate goal of the Uzbek government is to achieve lasting peace in Afghanistan. In addition, peace is the guarantee of mega-projects initiated by Uzbekistan and planned by us.

In addition, after the withdrawal of the international coalition, modern weapons remained in Afghanistan (their value is estimated at more than \$ 80 billion). If the situation in the country worsens, these weapons are more likely to fall into the hands of international terrorists. Uzbekistan mustn't allow this.

Another problem is drug cultivation, with the United Nations reporting a 37 percent increase in opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. Compared to May 2020, opium production is also expected to grow by 8% (6.8 tonnes) and revenue growth accordingly. (\$ 1 billion to \$ 2.7 billion) Afghanistan supplies 320 tons of heroin a year to world markets, accounting for 80 percent of world consumption. Therefore, it is important to prevent a recurrence of the situation in Afghanistan in the 1990s, when the civil war escalated and became a haven for international terrorists, a hotbed of drug production and arms smuggling. To this end, cooperation with the current government is a priority. Because the Taliban has repeatedly stated that it is committed to overcoming the above problems (fighting ISIS, and banning the cultivation of drugs). In addition, the Taliban movement is emerging today as a potential force capable of stabilizing Afghanistan.

### **II. Opportunities for Cooperation with Afghanistan**

There are several foundations of Afghan-Uzbek cooperation, one of which is the religious and cultural factors. That is, the majority of the population of the two countries believe in Islam. There are various religious centers in the territory of ancient Uzbekistan. By the 10<sup>th</sup> century, religious centers such as Bukhara and Samarkand were formed in the region. Even today, these places occupy a high position in the Islamic world. In particular, Bukhara is recognized as one of the five noble cities in the Islamic world and one of the religious centers. The tombs of the seven great saints whose names are mentioned in the series, which have a very high status in the Islamic world, are located here. The Mir Arab madrasah, which is famous in Central Asia, operates in the region. The Tashkent International Islamic Academy is the only one in the region that combines modern and religious knowledge. The fact that the majority of the population in Afghanistan believes in Islam and the strong interest in religious education also determines the prospects for cooperation in this area. Deep mastery of religious sciences will prevent fanaticism from developing in Afghanistan. Today, initiatives and good deeds in this direction continue. In his speech at the 72<sup>nd</sup> session of the UN General Assembly, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev for the first time from the international

rostrum stressed that Islam calls for goodness and peace, preservation of original human qualities, the invaluable contribution of many brilliant representatives of the Central Asian Renaissance to Islam and world civilization. Imam Bukhari, one of such great scholars, is recognized throughout the world as the author of Sahih Bukhari, the second most sacred book in Islam after the Qur'an.

To preserve and study the rich heritage of this great man, and to spread the teachings of enlightened Islam, we decided to establish an International Research Center named after Imam Bukhari in Samarkand. The activities of the Center for Islamic Civilization in Tashkent also serve this purpose.”[7] In addition, some progress has been made between the two countries in this regard. In particular, in January 2018, an educational center specializing in the training of Afghan citizens was opened in Termez. It trains specialists in the field of teaching the Uzbek language and railways for Afghanistan.

It is well known that culture and art bring people closer together. Under the influence of such factors, the peoples of the region have become closer and more harmonious. Cultural and historical riches played an important role in this. The following remarks of Chingiz Aitmatov are noteworthy: "As much as the ancient Byzantium had a strong influence on the development of the Slavic peoples, so the Uzbek culture had a strong influence on the development of the culture of the peoples of Central Asia" [14.] Indeed, Uzbekistan has made great cultural and historical achievements and made a worthy contribution to world civilization. The ancient land has produced world-renowned figures in the fields of statehood, literature, art, architecture, education, medicine, exact sciences, and enlightenment. These traditions continue in later periods. Days of Culture of the peoples of the region, art festivals, and cultural evenings are held in Uzbekistan. In particular, since 1998, Samarkand has been hosting the traditional Sharq Taronalari festival every two years. Afghan artists are also taking part.

Our country has a historical statehood experience and an ancient agricultural culture. The agricultural sector plays an important role in the Afghan economy. Thus, cooperation with Uzbekistan in the development and diversification is promising.

If we analyze the issue from a geopolitical point of view. Today, Uzbekistan's geopolitical interests with Afghanistan can be studied and analyzed from three perspectives. They are:

First, improving the transport and communication system in the region;

Second, to have a leading position in the Afghan market and to bring the region's existing natural resources (mainly oil and gas) to the world market;

Third, to ensure regional security by participating in reconstruction and stabilization in Afghanistan.

Today, the transport and communication system is gaining not only economic but also geopolitical importance, which is especially important for Uzbekistan, which connects East and West.

The role of Uzbekistan in the world trade system is largely explained by the fact that our country is connected to the global transport and communication system through convenient corridors. To achieve the strategic goal in this regard, we have the following two tasks.

The first task is to solve the problem of effective diversification of transport corridors. To do this, first of all, the issue of economic efficiency should be given priority and the volume of transit traffic should be increased by attracting the attention of international carriers by opening competitive transport corridors.

The second task is to create a system of coordinated development of transport communications and the regional economy.

The restoration of the Great Silk Road, which has long served the interests of the region, is important. The complexity of the matter is that first of all this road must be able to compete with the existing sea routes and alternative transport corridors on land.

With this in mind, Uzbekistan is trying to build new routes that will bring its resources to the world market. The solution to this problem is of great importance for the economic development of states. Prevents them from becoming dependent on external forces. At the initiative of the Government of Uzbekistan, work is underway on the Trans-Afghan Railway. The Trans-Afghan route connects the region with the Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-Indian Ocean, increasing the efficiency of freight traffic by 1.5-2 times [8].

The only obstacle to the implementation of the above megaproject is the construction of the Trans-Afghan railway corridor. This corridor not only provides huge economic opportunities (according to some estimates, brings Uzbekistan about 10 billion US dollars a year) but also gives Central Asia a geopolitical advantage. It will eliminate the dependence of the Central Asian region, including Uzbekistan, on Russia for access to the sea. There is an opportunity to form a corridor that is several times more efficient than our existing transport corridor. Today, our government is negotiating with the Taliban, the Afghan interim government, to begin the construction of the project.

Another advantage of this project is that it will be an important step in the reconstruction and economic development of Afghanistan. The reason is that the railways, which are the lifeblood of the economy, are limited in Afghanistan. In addition, the problem of unemployment, which afflicts our neighbors today, will help to overcome

the problem of hunger. This project will pave the way for foreign investment in the country. As a result, Afghanistan, a hotbed of instability and terrorism, will become a country of great potential. The Afghan people and Uzbekistan will also be interested in this. Therefore, the implementation of the above projects in the context of strengthening cooperation between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan will serve not only the interests of both countries but also the interests of the region.

1) The next geopolitical interest of Uzbekistan is related to the occupation of certain areas of the Afghan market. For example, we have ample opportunities to occupy the regional car market, construction materials, and consumer market. In addition, the border with Afghanistan, and the development of the transport system (Afghanistan's railway system is connected only with the Uzbek railway system) will help reduce the cost of delivery to the market.

The next issue is Uzbekistan's participation in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Uzbekistan is a major supplier of electricity to Afghanistan. The reception will be lit by Uzbek electricity. Cooperation in railway transport and electricity is the basis for rebuilding Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is a large market with a population of about 40 million. Our proximity allows us to dominate certain segments of this market. In today's globalized world, market ownership is even more important. On the other hand, more than 5 million Uzbeks live in northern Afghanistan. This is also one of the main factors encouraging cooperation with neighbors.

### III. The Conclusion

is that Uzbekistan has played a leading military-strategic role in preventing the spread of the Afghan conflict throughout the region. The role of our country in solving the problems in the region is also recognized by the world's leading political scientists. This has been demonstrated by many researchers in their work. Brzezinski argues that Uzbekistan's independence will play an important role in the survival of other Central Asian states, and maybe a major opposition to Russia's policies to establish dominance in the region.

President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh.M. Mirziyoyev's conceptual idea is "mutually beneficial cooperation, not a competition with our neighbors."

Today, one of the priorities of Uzbekistan's foreign policy is to raise cooperation from sub-regional Central Asia to regional South Asia.

This will ensure the development of the modern network of the Great Silk Road, one of our age-old dreams, the east-south network, in which Uzbekistan will occupy a central place. If we look at history, prosperity also increased during the development of the Great Silk Road. As a country bordering Afghanistan, Uzbekistan is actively pursuing a policy of maintaining peace and stability in Afghanistan. He has always been a loyal neighbor. One of the important values of Uzbekistan's foreign policy is the policy of not leaving one's neighbor alone on a difficult day, based on millennial traditions. Uzbekistan remains a supporter of the following basic principle of achieving peace in this country - the political process of lasting peace in the country must be carried out only under the leadership of the Afghans themselves and the Afghan people. This principled and long-term position of the Republic of Uzbekistan, recognized today by all parties to the Afghan conflict, is widely supported by the international community [17].

In October 2018, the Consulate General of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was opened in Termez. The appointment of the Special Representative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Afghanistan is another confirmation of the great attention paid by the leadership of Uzbekistan to the gradual and targeted development of relations with Afghanistan. In addition, Uzbekistan considers Afghanistan an integral part of Central Asia and seeks to involve the country in regional integration processes. In this regard, Uzbekistan was one of the first to send humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, and this trend continues.

### IV. Suggestions

In cooperation with the Taliban government, it is important to make effective use of the "soft power" factor (cooperation in education and tourism).

Cooperation with Afghanistan in the field of higher religious education is promising. While the current Afghan government is very interested in this, Uzbekistan has ample opportunities (higher education institutions).

It is worthwhile to cooperate with Pakistan as well as India in rebuilding Afghanistan and implementing the mega projects discussed above.

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