



Research Article

THE ROLE OF UZBEK-PAKISTANI RELATIONS IN CONNECTING THE CENTRAL AND SOUTH ASIAN REGIONS

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the political aspects of establishing and developing relations between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, as well as the impact of the transformation of cooperation between the two states in recent years on the relationship between the states of Central and South Asia.

KEYWORDS

Historical communities, access to the Indian Ocean, foreign policy vector, expansion of multifaceted and mutually beneficial relations, problems of regional stability and security, trans-Afghan transport corridor.

INTRODUCTION

Modern relations between the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan are rooted in a long history and multifaceted ties between the peoples of the two countries, the

cornerstones of which are such factors as a deep commonality of a rich historical and heritage, and the Silk Road for many centuries played the role of a link and contributed to the development and



prosperity of ancient civilizations in the macro-region of present-day Central and South Asia[1].

The history of the independent development of Uzbekistan shows that the southern direction of Tashkent's regional policy has always been a priority due to a number of political and geopolitical reasons, including the desire of our country to get a short direct access to the Indian Ocean, the path to which lies through Afghanistan and Pakistan. In this regard, the geographical location of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in a strategically very important part of South Asia, adjacent to Central Asia, as well as practically next to the Middle East [2], determines the multidimensional significance of this country in terms of global and regional geopolitics, as well as the impact on the settlement of a number of problems. Associated with these regions of the world, on December 29, 2020, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev, in his next message to the parliament of the country, outlined the main directions of the country's foreign policy for the coming years. At the same time, India and Pakistan were named among the countries – “the main partners of Uzbekistan, with which it was planned to expand multifaceted and mutually beneficial relations” [3].

LITERATURE REVIEW

In preparing the material, a certain amount of literature was worked out, including speeches by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev, the leaders of Pakistan, information from international scientific and theoretical conferences, printed publications: monographs, analytical articles by domestic and foreign experts on the foreign policy of the states of Central and South Asia, and also Internet information in English, Russian and Uzbek. When developing the article, such methods and methods as historical, comparative and comparative analysis, etc. were applied.

DISCUSSION

Modern Uzbek-Pakistani relations are an example of the establishment and development of long-term mutually beneficial and multifaceted cooperation between two sovereign states that are mutually attracted to each other. A characteristic feature of this cooperation is an objective approach to the realities of the current situation in the macro-region of Central and South Asia, where the most influential regional players

are Uzbekistan and the second economy of South Asia - Pakistan. Both countries are making active attempts to destroy the stereotypes that have developed at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, based on the fact that the current ambiguous military-political situation in Afghanistan cannot be resolved by peaceful means and by the active positive diplomatic intervention of countries interested in creating stable prerequisites for all-round cooperation between them.

The countries of Central Asia that gained independence failed to immediately determine the vector of their foreign policy towards Pakistan, which was affected by the lack of experience in building approaches to this South Asian country, as well as the course of distancing from the Indian-Pakistani conflict.

Uzbekistan has chosen a line of establishing and further developing ties with the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in the trade, economic, political, diplomatic, scientific, humanitarian, cultural and other spheres, which fit perfectly into the objectives of Tashkent's foreign policy with the countries of South Asia - Pakistan and India. It is noteworthy that, along with other Central Asian

republics and the Republic of Uzbekistan, the government of Nawaz Sharif showed a balanced position in matters of diplomatic recognition, which reflected Islamabad's understanding of Tashkent's rejection of an ideological approach to the problems of international relations. Pakistan recognized the independence of Uzbekistan on December 20, 1991, and diplomatic relations between the countries were established on May 10, 1992. This was followed by the opening of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in Tashkent (in June of the same year), the Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Islamabad (in July 1994). A representative delegation of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, which visited Tashkent in early December 1991, proposed a package of initiatives for cooperation in such areas as trade, economy, finance, communications, etc. An agreement was reached on providing Uzbekistan with a commercial loan in the amount of \$30 million, as well as opening a direct communications between countries [4. 74]. It should be noted that from the very beginning, Pakistan looked with certain hopes at Uzbekistan as a country with a stable economic potential and a predominantly Muslim population, which accounted for more than half of the entire population of Central Asia.

The initial attempts of Pakistan and Uzbekistan at the initial stage of establishing relations to intensify cooperation testified to the real interest of Islamabad in involving the Republic of Uzbekistan in the implementation of its strategic plans in the Central Asian region. This approach was reflected in the initiatives of Islamabad: in March 1992, the Minister of Finance of the PRI, Sartaj Aziz, visited Uzbekistan, in the same year (June) Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif also visited Tashkent, during which the Protocol on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Uzbekistan and Pakistan, Treaty on the principles of interstate relations and cooperation, agreement on trade and economic cooperation between the two countries [4. 78].

The results of the talks held in Tashkent in July 1992 with the Pakistani delegation on economic issues were the conclusion of documents on measures to organize trade between Uzbekistan and Pakistan through the territory of Afghanistan, in which the intention of the parties to cooperate in the construction of a railway line through Afghanistan were recorded [4. 83]. During the official visit of the President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov to Pakistan in August 1992, a package of bilateral agreements on cooperation in the fields

of energy and irrigation, development of postal and telecommunications, mutual protection of investments, etc was signed. Issues of developing trade and economic ties were at the center of subsequent Pakistani-Uzbek summits. Discussion of these problems was one of the aims of the visit of IRP Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto to Tashkent at the end of May 1995.

However, Islamabad's support in the second half of the 1990s and in the subsequent period of the Taliban had a negative impact on bilateral Pakistani-Uzbek relations, since the political elites of Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries saw the Taliban as a threat to regional security and their sympathies were on the side of other military-political groups participating in the intra-Afghan conflict.

In the 90s and the beginning of the 2000s, Uzbekistan ranked first in trade and economic relations between the states of Central Asia and Pakistan, and for ten years, the share of our country has consistently accounted for more than half of the total volume of trade between the Central Asian states and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan [5]. This circumstance, along with other political factors, prompted the Pakistani

leadership to convince the Uzbek side of the expediency of choosing a route focused on gaining access to the waters of the Indian Ocean through the IRP. This is evidenced by the statement of Parviz Musharraf that “Pakistan provides a natural link between the SCO states, connecting the heart of Eurasia with the Arabian Sea and South Asia... We offer critical land routes and communications for mutually beneficial trade and energy deals within and between regions” [4. 85]. However, the establishment of trade and economic ties ran into insufficient development of communications in Central Asia. In this regard, the opinion of R. Mukimdzhanova, a Russian expert on South Asian issues, expressed back in 2005, that “there are several options for creating a transit corridor from Central Asia to Pakistan, is of interest. One of the proposed routes originates in the southernmost point of Uzbekistan - in the area of the city of Termez, not far from which a bridge was built across the river. Amu Darya, and, through the cities of Mazar-i-Sharif, Kabul and Jalalabad, and goes to the Afghan-Pakistani border” [6].

It should be stated that for the entire period of the existence of relations between the IRP and the Republic of Uzbekistan, the most urgent and

priority problem was interaction in resolving the situation in Afghanistan, which was discussed by the parties at the highest levels. At the same time, the Uzbek side attached particular importance to the fact that the settlement of the Afghan problem is directly related not only to the issues of peace and stability in Afghanistan, countering religious extremism and terrorism, illegal arms and drug trafficking, but also South and Central Asia as a whole. Going towards Uzbekistan, Pakistan in January 2001 signed an extradition agreement with the Republic of Uzbekistan, while pledging to support the Uzbek authorities in the capture, detention and extradition of members of the IMU (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan). An agreement was also reached on the exchange of information and intelligence. During the visit of President P. Musharraf to Tashkent on March 5–6, 2005, the parties signed an Agreement on cooperation in the fight against international terrorism. In addition, Pakistan supported the positions of Uzbekistan after the Andijan events [7]. And in subsequent years, Pakistani-Uzbek relations have been further developed due to the changed security paradigms. In particular, during a visit to Islamabad in May 2006 by Islam Karimov, the parties agreed to develop trade and economic ties and coordinate anti-terrorist activities, they also

confirmed their desire to develop highways and railways aimed at providing access to the Central Asian states, including Uzbekistan, to the ports of Pakistan in order to develop trade with other regions [8].

It should be emphasized that thanks to the balanced and thoughtful policy of the leaders of Uzbekistan and Pakistan in recent years, relations between the countries have entered a new, better stage in their development. Over the past period, bilateral cooperation has been characterized by multifaceted interaction, which most fully takes into account the mutual interests of Tashkent and Islamabad in matters of regional security and stability. Adoption during the visit in July 2021 of the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan Imran Khan to Uzbekistan of the Joint Declaration on strategic partnership between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, as well as the signing in March 2022 during the visit of Shavkat Mirziyoyev to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan of the Joint Declaration on further steps on the development of a strategic partnership between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan reflect the desire of the parties through the intensive development of the transport

infrastructure between Pakistan and Uzbekistan, which will run through the territory of Afghanistan, to contribute to the sustainable stabilization of security in Central and South Asia. As the President of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev stated, “we believe that the construction of the Termez-Mazari-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway, called the Project of the Century, will contribute not only to the general well-being of our countries, but also to the peoples of our vast regions”[9].

Several dozens of interstate, intergovernmental and interdepartmental documents covering various areas have been signed between Pakistan and Uzbekistan. In our country, there are more than 50 enterprises created in cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, engaged in the supply of agricultural products to Uzbekistan. It should be especially noted that the interest of the Republic of Uzbekistan in South Asia is directly related to the logic of the reforms carried out in our country in recent years, which to a certain extent economize the main directions of Tashkent’s foreign policy. This takes into account the fact that the countries of South Asia represent a huge market for sales and investment. In this regard, the markets of Pakistan, along with India

and Bangladesh, have great consumer potential, which will stimulate the Uzbek industry, agriculture and services.

RESULTS

An analysis of the preliminary results of the current state of interstate relations between Uzbekistan and Pakistan, as well as promising directions for comprehensive ties for the near foreseeable future on regional security issues, creates a qualitatively new basis for mutual understanding between these countries, which generally corresponds to the common interests of the foreign policy activities of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The transformation of cooperation between the two states observed in recent years can strengthen the trends of interconnectedness and cooperation between the regions of Central and South Asia. Suhrob Buronov, expert on Afghanistan writes that Uzbekistan is a country connected to Afghanistan by all modes of transport. This is an important geopolitical advantage, which will further increase the central role and prestige of Uzbekistan in the prospect of connecting Central Asia with the sea corridors

through Afghanistan, making it an important link in the system of trans-regional relations. In this regard, Trans-Afghan corridor is the most perspective project for Uzbekistan (Buranov, p. 2022).

CONCLUSION

Mutually beneficial and multifaceted cooperation between Pakistan and Uzbekistan, developing on the basis of the determination of the leaders of the two countries, has a good prospect not only for these states, but also has a certain potential for ensuring regional security, including the entire complex of the Afghan settlement, establishing multifaceted ties between the states of Central and South Asia. The agreement between Islamabad and Tashkent on the construction of the Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway may give rise to other major projects, thus becoming a catalyst for lively trade and economic ties and effective cooperation between the main parts of the countries of these regions. The main idea proposed by the Pakistani and Uzbek sides is the solution of security problems through the development of the economy, which can be called economic diplomacy. At the same time, Tashkent

and Islamabad emphasize the importance of ensuring stability in Afghanistan as a key factor in the development of bilateral cooperation, which at the same time will help strengthen cooperation between Pakistan and the countries of Central Asia in the context of solving regional problems [10]. Summarizing the above, we can say that the positive development of bilateral relations over the past few years in its essence and forms is a vivid example of the transformation of the approaches of Tashkent and Islamabad to the problems of regional stability and security, designed to improve the atmosphere of interstate relations and expand the scope of interconnectedness and cooperation between the two neighboring regions.

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