




Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the republic of Uzbekistan: a new perspective on relations

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Abstract: This paper examines the historical background and current state of collaboration between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It explores the prospects for the further development of this partnership, which is actively promoted by both countries. Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia are working to strengthen bilateral relations and enhance cooperation in various sectors, such as economics, trade, investment, education, energy, healthcare. The paper identifies key areas where cooperation can bring mutual benefits and examines recent developments in the two countries' agreements.

Keywords: Republic of Uzbekistan, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, cooperation, prospects, trade, economic relations, investment, educational exchange, cultural exchange, diplomatic relations.

Introduction: Today's new image of Uzbekistan reflects the country's role and position in global development, its active involvement in significant international socio-political events, and its numerous initiatives on relevant issues.

It should be noted that President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's participation in the first summit of Central Asian leaders and the Cooperation Council of the Arab States of the Gulf, which took place on July 19, 2024, represents a new stage in relations between these countries. The summit was hosted by the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia and Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud.

According to the agenda, discussions focused on enhancing constructive dialogue, expanding trade and economic cooperation, promoting investment collaboration, and strengthening cultural and humanitarian connections. Views were also exchanged on important aspects of regional and global policy. In his

speech, the president emphasized the long-standing history of relations between the people of Central Asia and the Gulf region, based on close trade links, shared values, and traditions, as well as the sacred religion of Islam. Indeed, the role of great thinkers and scholars in the development of historical relations between Movarounnahr and the lands of Arabia is incomparable. An example of this is the great scholar, Imam Bukhari, who was considered "the head of all scholars of hadith"[1 b.3].

At the conclusion of the summit, participants expressed support for Uzbekistan's proposal to host the next meeting of the "Cooperation Council between Central Asian Countries and Gulf States," which would take place in Samarkand.

Saudi Arabia and Uzbekistan have established strong and friendly relations since Uzbekistan achieved independence on August 31st, 1991. On December 30th, 1991, Saudi Arabia recognized Uzbekistan's independence, and on February 20th, 1992, the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding on diplomatic relations, focusing on economic cooperation and investment. This cooperation has primarily focused on trade and investment issues. Saudi Arabia views Uzbekistan as a potential market for its investments in sectors such as oil and gas, agriculture, and textiles. Diplomatic missions have been opened, and an agreement on political, trade, economic, investment, technological, cultural, youth, sporting, and investment protection and promotion has been signed. There is significant potential for further cooperation between the two nations, and their leaders are committed to implementing this cooperation.[2 6.5]

The participation of Shavkat Mirziyoyev, President of Uzbekistan, in the Riyadh summit on May 20-21, 2017, at the invitation of King Salman bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia, marked a significant milestone in bilateral relations between the two countries. During this visit, meetings were held by the leader of Uzbekistan, during which promising areas for future cooperation were identified.

This new stage in cooperation between Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia opens up wide prospects for the development of mutually beneficial relations in various sectors, including agriculture, tourism, and oil and gas. Both countries are significant players in Central Asia and the Middle East, with significant economic and geopolitical importance, and possess significant resources and potential for economic growth. In recent years, Uzbekistan has undertaken a series of reforms aimed at liberalizing its economy and attracting foreign investment. These reforms have helped to create a

more favorable investment climate, which has led to increased interest from international investors. Saudi Arabia, one of the largest oil exporters in the world, is a significant partner in the development of the energy sector in Uzbekistan. Over the past few years, numerous agreements and contracts have been concluded for investments in various economic sectors, and future cooperation between the two countries promises to be even more fruitful and beneficial for both parties.[3]

The main part

On December 30, 1991, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia recognized the independence of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Diplomatic relations were established between the two countries in February 1992. In the same year, I.A.Karimov of the Republic paid an official visit to Saudi Arabia. In November 1993, the Consulate General of Uzbekistan was opened in Jeddah, followed by the opening of the Embassy of Uzbekistan in Riyadh in 1995. The Embassy of Saudi Arabia has been operating in Tashkent since 2009. During the period of in the first president Islam Karimov (1994–2021), relations between Saudi Arabia and Uzbekistan were characterized by their unique features. They focused primarily on the areas of economy, trade, energy, culture, and education. Significant steps were taken to develop these relations in both directions. Close ties were established, and mutual coordination between the two countries improved significantly in the political and economic fields. Cooperation agreements were concluded in various sectors, including transport, energy, trade and investment. This led to an increase in trade volume between countries and the implementation of joint projects and investments.[4]

After Shavkat Mirziyoyev assumed the presidency of the Republic of Uzbekistan in December 2016, cooperation between the two countries has been further strengthened and enhanced. In 2017, he paid a visit to Saudi Arabia to further solidify ties and sign several agreements. These agreements were aimed at further strengthening bilateral relations. In June 2021, a fourth round of political consultations was held, during which both parties discussed current events and prospects for future collaboration in various fields, including political, economic, trade, investment, culture, humanitarian affairs, and international relations.[5]

Diplomatic relations between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are actively developing and friendly. In January 2021, leaders of both countries, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev of Uzbekistan and King Salman bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia, met in Riyadh for talks. During the meeting, they discussed expanding cooperation between their respective countries in various areas, such as

economics, investment, energy, agriculture, transportation, and tourism. The leaders also signed several agreements to strengthen the cooperation. For example, in February 2019, a mutual benefits agreement was signed between the two countries, promoting the development of trade, economic, scientific, technological, cultural, and other relations. Additionally, in July 2005, King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz visited Uzbekistan to meet with President Karimov. During this visit, issues of cooperation and opportunities for further development of bilateral relations were discussed. The visit of the President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, to Saudi Arabia in October 2021 provided a new impetus for bilateral relations. During the visit, meetings were held with high-ranking Saudi officials, and several agreements, memorandums of understanding, and cooperation agreements in various industries were signed.[6]

The economic relationship between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is expanding in various sectors. One of the significant areas of cooperation is the energy industry, with Saudi Arabia being one of the world's largest oil producers and Uzbekistan possessing significant natural gas reserves. In 2019, both countries signed an agreement on energy cooperation, which included discussions on oil and gas exploration and production. In 2020, the State Coordination Service of Saudi Arabia (Sabika) signed an agreement with UzAvtoSanoat, a joint-stock company in Uzbekistan, for the construction of road infrastructure worth over 200 million USD. The project involves the development of a road linking Tashkent and Navoi, as well as the modernization of existing roadways. Investment cooperation between the two nations is also actively advancing within the context of economic collaboration. In 2019, Aramco announced its plans to invest in oil exploration and development projects in Uzbekistan. This initiative contributes to the further strengthening of relations between the two nations and the diversification of Uzbekistan's economy. A new company, Uzbekistan Gas and Chemicals Investment LLC (UGCI), has been established to develop several oil fields within the country. Additionally, in 2020, ACWA Power, a Saudi Arabian company, signed an agreement to construct a 1 gigawatt (GW) solar power plant in Uzbekistan, valued at 1.3 billion US dollars. This project is being implemented through a joint venture between ACWA, Uzbek partners, and has the potential to boost trade cooperation between the two countries. Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia both possess significant natural resources and economic potential, creating opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration. Uzbekistan benefits from favorable agricultural

conditions and climate, while Saudi Arabia is an important importer of agricultural products. Cooperation opportunities may include the export of cereals, fruit, vegetables, and other agricultural products from Uzbekistan to Saudi Arabia. In 2019, Uz-Kor Gas Chemical, a company based in Uzbekistan, entered into a contract with Saudi Arabia to supply polymers. The value of the contract was 17 million USD, and it was the first time that Uzbek polymers had been exported to Saudi Arabia under that agreement. Additionally, in 2020, an agreement was reached between the two countries to establish a joint committee on trade and economic cooperation. The goal of this committee is to improve trade relations and increase the volume of trade between the two nations.[7]

Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia have a long-standing history of cooperation in various sectors, including education. Both nations attach significant importance to education and acknowledge its significance for economic and societal development. In the year 2019, both countries signed a cooperation agreement in the field of education, which includes the exchange of students, educators, and researchers as well as the development of collaborative projects and programs.

One specific project under this partnership was the establishment of the Uzbek-Saudi University in Tashkent, which focuses on engineering, medicine, and business studies. Additionally, Saudi Arabia provides scholarships for Uzbek students to pursue higher education in their country's institutions. Furthermore, Saudi financial assistance is being provided to modernize the Uzbek education system. As part of this support, funding is provided for projects aimed at the construction of new educational institutions, as well as for the supply of modern equipment and the development of training programs. Furthermore, cultural exchanges between countries take place, including educational programs and meetings. These events help to promote cultural understanding and facilitate the exchange of educational experience.

The Islamic University of Medina has expressed its willingness to collaborate with universities in Uzbekistan on several fronts, including:

1. The provision of educational scholarships for Uzbek students.
2. Organization of specialized courses on Arabic language teaching.
3. Development of curricula for Arabic teachers in Uzbekistan.
4. Support for professional development of Uzbek teachers of Arabic.

5. Establishment of a group dedicated to Arabic calligraphy and organization of related courses.

A fruitful cooperation has been established between Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies (TSUOS) and the Saudi Center for Research and Knowledge Exchange (SCORE). This cooperation has provided TSUOS with a significant number of books in various fields, including history, philosophy, literature, and Arabic dictionaries, which are essential for students studying Arabic. TSUOS and King Saud University (KSU) plan to continue this collaboration. The possibility of signing a memorandum of understanding between higher education institutions in both countries was discussed during a meeting between representatives of the Embassy of Uzbekistan and the head of the international relations department at the Saudi university. During the visit of TSUOS leaders to Saudi Arabia in January 2023, an agreement was reached on this matter. The representative of the Saudi university stated that he has closely followed the large-scale educational reforms in Uzbekistan and expressed interest in establishing cooperation with Uzbek partners. The Saudi government has given its approval for the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with TSUOS.

In general, cooperation between Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia in the field of education promotes the development of educational programs, exchange of knowledge and expertise, as well as encouraging international mobility of students and researchers. This fosters favourable conditions for educational systems and opportunities for both countries.[8]

Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia share a long history of cultural connections rooted in religious ties. Both countries represent the Islamic world, which contributes to mutual understanding and collaboration in various fields, including cultural exchange. Recently, Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia have actively developed their cultural cooperation. In 2020, for example, the "Day of Culture" festival was held in Uzbekistan, showcasing traditional music, dance, and costumes. Additionally, an exhibition of contemporary arts and photography was organized as part of this event. Memorandums of cooperation in the cultural and artistic fields were also signed between the two countries. In 2019, the Uzbek National Museum of Art, named after Islam Karimov, hosted an exhibition featuring works by Saudi artist Abdullah Al-Osaimi. The exhibition showcased his works in various art genres. The potential for further growth in cultural cooperation between Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia is significant.. Both countries have a rich cultural heritage which can be harnessed to create collaborative projects and initiatives. In the future, we anticipate

that ties between the two nations in the realm of culture and the arts will continue to strengthen.[9]

Cooperation between Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia in the field of health care covers various aspects such as medical education, exchange of expertise, and transfer of the latest technologies. Saudi Arabia invites Uzbek medical professionals to participate in conferences, seminars, and training events at medical facilities, with the aim of improving the quality of healthcare delivery and expanding the scope of medical services between the two nations. Doctors and medical professionals from Uzbekistan are studying and receiving education at medical universities and centres in Saudi Arabia, acquiring modern knowledge and skills in the field of medicine. Additionally, Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia are actively developing and promoting medical tourism, attracting international patients for high-quality medical treatments. On March 26, 2023, within the framework of the Tashkent International Investment Forum, a ceremony was held to sign a memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Healthcare of Uzbekistan, the Direct Investment Fund of Uzbekistan, and Dr. Sulaiman Al-Habib Medical Group of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.. Sulaima Al-Habiba Medical Group (HMG) is a leading healthcare provider in the Middle East with operations in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain, with 18 clinics. The company intends to implement modern technologies into the healthcare system in Uzbekistan, digitizing and centralizing medical data and interactions with patients. This includes a pilot project connecting the largest hospital in Tashkent with IT solutions from HMG. HMG plans to establish a medical academy in Uzbekistan to train and enhance the skills of local medical professionals. Additionally, HMG will send up to 10 junior medical professionals from Uzbekistan annually to its hospitals in Saudi Arabia for training and skill development. The memorandum further discusses the implementation of an investment project to build a modern, multidisciplinary medical center in Tashkent, which will comply with HMG's standards and be equipped with advanced technology.[10]

The prospects for further strengthening the partnership between Uzbekistan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are positive. Both countries possess significant potential for collaboration in various areas, including the economic, energy, petroleum, tourism, and cultural sectors. One of the most significant areas of potential collaboration is the exchange of goods, services, and investment between the two nations. Uzbekistan boasts abundant natural resources and a robust economy, while the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia boasts vast petroleum reserves and other natural assets. This collaboration could benefit both nations by creating

new job opportunities, stimulating economic growth, and fostering cultural exchange. Cultural exchange between the two countries also holds great promise for growth. Both nations have rich historical and cultural legacies that could be shared through the arts, literature, music, and other cultural expressions. Cooperation in education and research could be highly advantageous for both countries. The exchange of knowledge and state-of-the-art technology could contribute significantly to the advancement and innovation of each nation.

As a result, the potential for future growth in the partnership between Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia is promising. Both countries possess a strong basis for collaboration in various sectors, and their cooperation has the potential to yield mutual benefits and enhance relations between them.[11]

CONCLUSION

Based on the above, it can be concluded that cooperation between Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia has entered a new stage. This development holds great promise for future mutually beneficial collaboration. The recent visit of the King of Saudi Arabia to Uzbekistan and subsequent visits of senior officials from both countries have laid the foundation for a political and economic dialogue between the two nations. Both parties have expressed a desire to strengthen ties and broaden cooperation in various fields. Uzbekistan offers investment possibilities, especially in the oil, gas, and energy industries, as well as agriculture and tourism. Saudi Arabia, in turn, can provide financial support and technical assistance for the development of these areas. The exchange of knowledge, experience, and expertise between the two countries can contribute to the development of educational programs and preservation of cultural heritage. Furthermore, it can facilitate the exchange of medical technologies and practices. In order to fully realize these opportunities, it is essential to establish closer cooperation at the state and regional levels, promote business interactions, and create favorable conditions for investment and technology transfer. The current stage of cooperation between Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia presents promising prospects for the further expansion of bilateral relations across various sectors. Both nations can mutually benefit from enhanced collaboration and fruitful partnerships.

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