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Central Asia: Involvement Of Afghanistan In Regional Development Processes

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ABSTRACT

The article observes the contemporary processes of forming a system of good neighbourly relations in Central Asia with the participation of Afghanistan and increasing the potential for regional development.

The article maintains peace in Afghanistan is not only an important factor for sustainable development in the region but also an opportunity to intensify trade and economic cooperation with European countries in Asia to ensure the integration of transit and transport opportunities.

It is noted that Uzbekistan supports the further intensification of multifaceted cooperation with Afghanistan and the prompt establishment of peace and stability in the neighbouring country, the restoration of its economic and transport infrastructure.

KEYWORDS

Afghanistan, Central and South Asian region, Uzbekistan, UN, foreign policy, regional development, good-neighbourhood.

INTRODUCTION

During the years of independence, ensuring security in the Central Asian region and resolutely combating any threats to its stability

has become one of the most important directions of Uzbekistan's foreign policy.

The security and stability processes in Central Asia have a complex structure that is evolving

in the form of serious threats and new development opportunities at the national, regional and global levels. First of all, this is manifested in the growing scale of threats such as drug trafficking, illegal arms trade and international organized crime, international terrorism, extremism.

METHODS

Today, these threats are directly related to the turbulent situation in Afghanistan. The roots of this tension began with the withdrawal of the Soviet military contingent, the emergence of the Taliban and the seizure of power, following the 2001 terrorist attacks in US cities.

This circumstance is characterized by a complex military-political situation in modern Afghanistan, which is connected, on the one hand, with the lack of effective dialogue with the Taliban, who have sufficient supporters and a strong position, and, on the other hand, with an increase in the possibility of creating various terrorist groups in the country, since production and illegal trafficking drugs continue to rise.

The fact that the majority of the Afghan population remains in a difficult social situation and the ineffectiveness of the international community's efforts to rebuild the country's economic infrastructure has led to large-scale cultivation and production of drugs by ordinary Afghans.

In turn, this situation can not only be financial support to international terrorism and a serious factor destabilizing the situation in Afghanistan but also have a significant impact on the formation of an unstable socio-political environment in the adjacent Central Asian region.

In this context, it is becoming increasingly clear that the sustainable socio-economic development of the Central Asian region can be guaranteed only if peace and stability are achieved in Afghanistan.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It is known that from the very first days of independence, Uzbekistan has advocated the gradual reconstruction of this country, tired of war and conflict, advancing the idea that peace in Afghanistan can not be established by military means within the framework of many influential international organizations.

As early as 1993, at the 48th session of the United Nations General Assembly, the First President I. Karimov called on the world community to unite in resolving the Afghan problem. Also, at the 50th session of the UN General Assembly in 1995, the 1996 meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the 2000 Millennium Summit of the UN General Assembly, and the 65th session in 2010, Uzbekistan discussed alternative peaceful ways to resolve this issue. the question of finding was raised. (5, 6)

It was noted that Uzbekistan's international initiatives should seek ways to achieve peace and stability in Afghanistan, first of all, through the cessation of hostilities, the implementation of socially oriented projects with the support of the world community, the solution of the most acute socio-economic problems. This, of course, required the coordination of the efforts of all forces interested in the stabilization and reconstruction of Afghanistan and the achievement of consensus within the country.

In 1995, an international seminar on regional security issues in Central Asia was held in

Tashkent through the efforts of Uzbekistan, and in 1999, during the first meeting of the UN-sponsored 6 + 2 Afghanistan Group in Tashkent, the two Afghan warring parties gathered around a table and exchanged views.

The 6 + 2 Contact Group is an initiative of Uzbekistan to establish a dialogue between all internal forces in Afghanistan for peace and stability under the auspices of the United Nations. The group also includes Afghanistan's neighbours (Iran, China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan), the United States and Russia.

It should be noted that the 6 + 2 dialogue group was the only international mechanism that worked in 1997-2001 to resolve the situation in Afghanistan through peaceful negotiations. The Tashkent Declaration on the Basic Principles for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict in Afghanistan, adopted by the member states in 1999, served as a real basis for negotiations between the main opposition parties, became an official document of the 54th session of the UN General Assembly and the Security Council.

After a major terrorist attack in New York on September 11, 2001, a long-running counterterrorism operation in Afghanistan by US-led international coalition forces failed to achieve its ultimate goal, which was to achieve peace on the suffering Afghan soil.

This underscored the need for constructive dialogue on the path to peace between the conflicting internal forces in Afghanistan.

At the NATO / Euro-Atlantic Cooperation Council summit in Bucharest in April 2008, Uzbekistan stressed the impossibility of resolving the Afghan problem by military means alone. In addition, a proposal was made

to re-launch in the format of the "6 + 3" group. (7: 313-317)

This initiative has aroused great interest in the world political community. Many countries around the world are coming to practical conclusions, realizing that the Afghan problem cannot be solved by military means alone.

Analyses show that economic, financial, social and humanitarian assistance under the auspices of the United Nations can help the Afghan people, regardless of their ethnicity, views and ideology, to reach an internal compromise. Respect for their traditional, cultural and religious values is crucial in this process.

It is known that mutually beneficial cooperation of all countries, first of all with neighbouring countries, is reflected in the Action Strategy for the five priority areas of development of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2017-2021 as the main goal of our country's foreign policy. Issues such as a well-thought-out, mutually beneficial and practical foreign policy, transforming the Central Asian region into a zone of stability, sustainable development and good neighbourliness have been identified as priorities. In the recent past, historic steps have been taken in these directions. (16)

Thanks to the initiative, strong political will and efforts of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, and due to his political will, a significant increase in the level of mutual trust in the Central Asian region has been achieved. As the Uzbek leader noted, "We will continue the political path aimed at strengthening the peace and security of Uzbekistan, which is based on the idea that the Uzbek people need peace and prosperity." (8: 19)

The role and importance of neighbouring Afghanistan in the strategy of the peaceful foreign policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan are incomparable. In 2017, Uzbekistan participated in various international and regional conferences on Afghanistan, including the expanded Moscow meeting (April), the "Admission Process" (June), the Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation on the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (Ashgabat, November), Heart - Istanbul Process" (Baku, November-December) and the International Dialogue Group (Oslo, December). (2)

In his speeches at international forums (72nd session of the UN General Assembly, September 19, 2017; UN-sponsored major international conference "Central Asia: Common History and Common Future, Cooperation for Sustainable Development and Progress", Samarkand, November 10-11, 2017; Tashkent High-Level International Conference on Afghanistan "Security Cooperation and Regional Partnership", March 26-27, 2018), President Sh. Mirziyoyev put forward proposals to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan and involve the country in the process of strengthening peace and good neighbourly relations in Central Asia.

In particular, the Tashkent International Conference held on March 26-27, 2018, created a platform for direct dialogue on the Afghan issue and launched an ongoing process in this regard. (1)

In his speech at the conference, President Sh. Mirziyoyev said that Uzbekistan supports the Afghan government to start direct talks with the Taliban on **the basis of "no preconditions and no threat of violence"**. He noted that Uzbekistan is ready to create all conditions for

the organization of such talks at any stage of the peace process on its territory.

As the Uzbek leader noted, "... the main condition for the peace movement, in our opinion, is the development and implementation of a single comprehensive peace program for Afghanistan, agreed primarily at the regional and global levels." (15)

Indeed, in the regular dialogue between all conflicting internal forces in Afghanistan without pre-determined conditions and requirements, without varying degrees of pressure, the parties listen to each other, thereby providing an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the situation and elements of consensus.

In fact, such dialogues can serve as a starting point for reconciling the parties on a troubled Afghan soil, resolving internal conflicts, and achieving peace and stability.

In our opinion, one of the main ideas of the Tashkent conference was that the active participation of Central Asian states together with other interested countries in the restoration and peace-building and creative work in Afghanistan is a requirement of the time.

In this regard, President Sh. Mirziyoyev noted that "the security of Afghanistan is a guarantee of security of Uzbekistan, stability and development of the entire vast Central and South Asian region."

It should be noted that the stable balance in Afghanistan will also have a positive impact on neighbouring countries. In this context, it is appropriate to see Afghanistan not as an area of unrest and tension, but as a country whose potential for deepening regional cooperation

has not yet been fully realized. The humanitarian sector also plays a key role in efforts to rebuild Afghanistan.

Today, in Afghanistan, where 71 per cent of the population is under the age of 30, a very large generation has grown up who have experienced the intensity of the war that has been going on for almost 40 years. (3)

Some experts say this will be one of the biggest obstacles to stability in Afghanistan.

On the other hand, on the contrary, this part of the Afghan people is tired of war and has a strong desire for peace and social well-being. In this sense, it can become a leading force and support for the creative work of the majority of the Afghan people in their country. To this end, it is possible to convey the human nature and enlightenment of Islam to the younger and middle generations, to open modern educational opportunities for them on the basis of **the principle of "enlightenment against ignorance."**

In this regard, the initiative of the Uzbek leader to establish a special international fund to support education in Afghanistan is relevant. The reason is that we believe that **the idea of "not leaving such a troubled country to future generations"** can be widely promoted in the Afghan society only through enlightenment, which will serve to raise the spirit of national unity and mutual understanding among the Afghan public.

In recent years, Uzbekistan's multifaceted bilateral relations with Afghanistan have become more active. The Republic of Uzbekistan promotes the establishment of peace and stability in the neighbouring country, the restoration and development of its economic, transport and energy

infrastructure, and vocational education. For example, the amount of electricity supplied by Uzbekistan to this country is growing from year to year, the country has completed the construction of a 75-kilometre railway "Termez - Hairatan - Mazar-i-Sharif."

The official visit of the President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani to Uzbekistan on December 4-6, 2017 opened a new page in bilateral relations. Most of the more than 20 documents signed during the visit are of strategic importance not only for Afghanistan and Uzbekistan but also for the whole region.

Of particular note are the agreements reached by Uzbek specialists on the construction of the Mazar-i-Sharif-Hirat railway and the new Surkhan-Puli Khumri power transmission line. For example, the Mazar-i-Sharif-Herat railway will increase Afghanistan's transit capacity in the development of regional trade and economic cooperation between the countries of Central and South Asia and the Middle East, making it a unique bridge country. The Surkhan-Puli Khumri transmission line will play an important role in meeting the electricity needs of the capital Kabul and the northern regions, improving the lives of the Afghan people and returning to the path of peaceful development.

In 2018, positive changes are taking place in the social and humanitarian spheres. As a symbol of Uzbekistan's friendly attitude to Afghanistan and its readiness to continue to help the Afghan people, a special education centre for Afghan citizens has been established in Termez this year. (19)

Also, in January 2018, 25 buses, 3 tractors and trailers were presented to the people of Afghanistan on behalf of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Hairatan. (14)

CONCLUSIONS

In general, the neighbours of Afghanistan are interested in the establishment of peace and stability in Afghanistan. In this regard, Uzbekistan, located in the "heart" of Central Asia, realizes its responsibility to strengthen peace and stability in the region, based on **the principle of "Peace of the neighbour – you are peace."**

Uzbekistan's foreign policy is aimed at establishing peace and stability in Afghanistan. Relations between the two countries are aimed at strengthening the spirit of good neighbourliness and brotherhood, it's further strengthening through active trade and economic ties, consistent implementation of major projects in the transport, infrastructure and humanitarian spheres.

It should also be noted that Uzbekistan's foreign policy is aimed at promoting the inclusion of Afghanistan in the process of regional development in Central Asia.

In conclusion, the trend of interstate partnership in the spirit of mutual respect, friendship and good neighbourliness, formed by the efforts of Uzbekistan in the Central Asian region, is an important factor in ensuring the stability and development of the region.

We are convinced that this factor will help stabilize the situation in Afghanistan, and in the future, it will become not only a historical and civilizational, but also an integral part of Central Asia.

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