

تجلی هفته

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### TASHKENT CONFERENCE ON AFGHANISTAN; AND A LOOK AT THE INTERACTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY WITH THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE



Weekly Analysis is one of the CSRS' publications analyzing significant weekly political, social, economic, and security events of Afghanistan and the region. The prime motive behind this is to provide strategic insights and policy solutions to decision-making institutions and individuals in order to help them design better policies. Weekly Analysis is published in Pashto, Dari, English and Arabic languages.

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Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS)



## **TASHKENT CONFERENCE ON AFGHANISTAN; AND A LOOK AT THE INTERACTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY WITH THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

On July 26, the Uzbek capital of Tashkent hosted an international conference on Afghanistan, in which representatives of more than 20 countries and many international organizations participated. The acting foreign minister of the Islamic Emirate Amir Khan Muttaqi delivered a speech and told the conference that Afghanistan under the Taliban rule is open for business. Tashkent conference was significant for Afghanistan and the Islamic Emirate in particular, but it was also indicative of the extensive and close ties between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan has skillfully managed to engage with the Islamic Emirate and benefit from the existing opportunities, including economic cooperation, without upsetting the United States and other western powers. From the very beginning, Tashkent initiated direct communication with the Islamic Emirate and urged other countries to do the same. The dispatch of diplomats from the European Union to Kabul might be noted as an example.

In this week's analysis, we discuss the Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan and its accomplishments, as well as the bilateral relations between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan and how it has evolved under the Islamic Emirates. We also address the shared need for a constructive relationship between the two countries and the existing opportunities for cooperation.



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## A NEW CHAPTER IN RELATIONS BETWEEN KABUL AND TASHKENT

Uzbekistan has consistently attempted to maintain close relations with the Taliban. It had ties with the first era Islamic Emirate and it played a constructive role in the peace process of Afghanistan during the past two decades. During the previous period of the Taliban, in 1999, Uzbek foreign minister, Abdulaziz Kamlov, [visited Kandahar](#), where he met with the founder and late leader of the Taliban, Mullah Mohammad Umar and members of his cabinet. At the time, it was believed that his visit would help put a stop to the Afghan conflict, but in reality, it was to negotiate the TAPI gas pipeline project.

Uzbekistan's positive contribution to the Afghan peace process has allowed them to keep good ties with the Taliban throughout the past 20 years. In August 2019, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan hardly [criticized](#) Uzbekistan for formally hosting the Taliban delegation in which the head of Qatar's political office, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, met with the foreign minister Abdul Aziz Kamlov, and President's Special Envoy for Afghanistan Ismatullah Ergashev.

Contrary to other countries in the region and the world, Uzbekistan adopted a distinct, rational, and balanced policy towards Afghanistan following the collapse of the previous regime and the re-establishment of the Taliban. The Special Presidential Envoy for Afghanistan Ismatullah Ergashev said in an [interview](#) that "Since Uzbekistan views the Taliban as a reality that needs to be acknowledged, It maintains strong ties with them and engages them in dialogue on a broad range of issues." Uzbekistan's stand is that the Taliban have total control over the entire country and a lack of engagement will not only worsen its internal issues, but also the neighboring nations and the rest of the world would face new threats from Afghanistan. Embracing this new reality on the ground, Uzbekistan has started full interaction with the Taliban without official recognition. This approach has been welcomed by the international community. The US Secretary of State once told Uzbekistan officials: "We greatly appreciate your extensive humanitarian support to the Afghans."

During the past year, Uzbekistan had a greater engagement and interaction with Afghanistan, compared to the other countries of the region. The Uzbek Minister of Foreign



Affairs visited Kabul for the first time on October 7, 2021, only one month after Islamic Emirate took the power, leading a high-level government delegation and discussed major economic projects. On February 22, 2022, a high-level Uzbek delegation led by Deputy Prime Minister Sardar Umar Zakov visited Kabul, met with many officials, including the Prime Minister of the Islamic Emirate, and discussed ways to deepen bilateral ties and the implementation of major regional economic projects.

Their [position](#) on the recognition of the Islamic Emirate as a government was that it would be problematic for them to do so on their own; but in case of a coordinated action of the international community, they will also recognize the Taliban as the new government of Afghanistan . Tashkent is aware that engagement with Islamic Emirates should not be delayed under the pretext of official recognition because the Taliban have been at war with the West for at least 20 years, and it is difficult to assume that they will be recognized by Western countries anytime soon. Similarly, Uzbekistan has also realized that the Taliban has very little experience in governance and therefore needs time to resolve internal problems and it will be difficult to quickly, on national and international levels, accept the terms of the international community for recognition. Tashkent also understands that Islamic Emirate has a very limited experience in governance and that it will take some time for them to sort out their internal issues and that it is difficult to quickly fulfill the conditions of the international community for recognition.

## THE NEED FOR AFGHAN-UZBEK BILATERAL RELATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR COOPERATION

Both Afghanistan and Uzbekistan need strong diplomatic relations and joint cooperation, and there are many opportunities for collaboration. Some of these potential areas of cooperation are pointed at in the following lines:

**Transit and Trade:** Economic cooperation is of great importance for both countries. Afghanistan is a landlocked country that depends on the transit routes of its neighbors to transport its commercial goods. According to the [statistics](#) of the Afghan Ministry of Industry and Commerce, bilateral trade between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan was USD 550 million in



2020 and it was expected that it will reach two billion dollars in 2023. This commercial transaction will surely suffer greatly if the political ties between the two countries are strained; yet, if these ties are strengthening, so will the bilateral trade. Uzbekistan is also a landlocked country, and Afghanistan is a crucial entry point for the country's trade with the rest of the world. In addition, Afghanistan [imports](#) most of its electricity from Uzbekistan.

**Security and Stability:** Uzbekistan's national security concern is best summarized in the threats posed by ISIS emanating from the territory of Afghanistan. ISIS recently [claimed](#) to have launched a missile attack on Uzbekistan from the territory of Afghanistan in a video that was posted on April 19. ISIS claimed that they had targeted security centers in the border area of Uzbekistan from the Balkh province, despite the fact that this incident was not officially recognized by the authorities of either country. Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries are concerned about the potential ISIS attacks from Afghanistan, despite the Taliban having significantly suppressed ISIS over the last year and in particular because there have not been any deadly attacks by this group. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, led by Tahir Yuldashev, was active in Afghanistan during the first Taliban era, and Uzbekistan was deeply concerned about it. For this reason, in 2001, despite the tense relations between Tashkent and Washington, Qureshi-Khanabad or "K2" airbase was turned over to the US and permitted operations in Afghanistan from Uzbekistan's airspace.

**Prevention of Opium Cultivation and Drug Trafficking:** Opium cultivation and drug trafficking is another issue that is not be easy to combat without a close cooperation. In April of this year, the leader of Islamic Emirate banned the cultivation of opium poppies through a decree, which was welcomed by many countries, particularly those in the region.

**Changes in Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy:** Shaukat Mirziyoyev took office as president of Uzbekistan in 2016 following the death of Islam Karimov, and he also brought about a shift in the country's foreign policy. Mr. Mirziyoyev seeks to build strong ties with all the countries in the region, particularly Afghanistan. His foreign policy is centered on ensuring Uzbekistan's national security and economic growth, both of which are seen as opportunities to forge bilateral ties. Tashkent is a regional leader in relations with the Islamic Emirates for the same reason.



**What Both Countries Have in Common?** The other possibility for bilateral relations between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan is that both nations share religious, cultural, ethnic, and historical features and values. Based on these similarities, the two nations require close ties. The existence of Abdul Salam Hanafi, an Uzbek leader, in the cabinet of the Islamic Emirate has been crucial and has contributed favorably to the positive bilateral relations.

## TASHKENT CONFERENCE ON AFGHANISTAN AND ITS ACHIEVEMENTS

The Tashkent conference is so far the most significant international conference on Afghanistan since the Islamic Emirate came to power in August of 2021, in which the majority of the countries with an interest in Afghanistan have taken part. The conference focused on security, economy, and international cooperation.

Besides security and economic development, many other issues related to Afghanistan were discussed. “In the post-crisis era, it is very vital for international and regional security to help Afghanistan with its development efforts” the Uzbek Foreign Minister stated during his speech at this conference. He asserted that the Tashkent conference, in conjunction with the international community's concerted efforts, will contribute to the stability, security, and economic recovery of the nation.

This conference was also called an achievement for the Islamic Emirate. On one hand, the Afghan delegation addressed the world on a significant platform, while on the other hand, progress was made for the unfreezing of Afghanistan's frozen assets. In [his speech](#), the Islamic Emirate's acting Minister of Foreign Affairs mentioned some of the Islamic Emirate's accomplishments and claimed that the Taliban had been able to quickly establish security, supply the national budget with their own national revenues, and bring corruption to a complete standstill.. He assured that neither the regional nor the rest of the world will be in danger from the territory of Afghanistan and the Taliban intend to turn Afghanistan into regional economic hub. He called on the United States to unfreeze the frozen Afghan assets, a request that was echoed by several other participants of the conference. Russian President Vladimir Putin's



Special Envoy for Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, stated at the conference that his country supported the Taliban's demand for the return of the "stolen" Afghan money. After the conference, the Afghan and American delegations [met](#) and discussed the frozen assets, economic stability and humanitarian aids. The United States Deputy Secretary of the Treasury participated this meeting.

At the end of the conference, the host country, Uzbekistan, released a 12-point [statement](#) that touched on a number of issues including Afghanistan's economic development, regional economic cooperation (such as the Termez-Mazar-I-Sharif-Peshawar railway), humanitarian aids, unfreezing Afghanistan's assets, support for the Afghan government, the need for an inclusive government, human rights, particularly women's rights and girls' right to education. The statement also welcomed the Afghan delegation's pledges and commitments.

Although the Islamic Emirate was treated as the de facto government of Afghanistan during this conference, as was to be expected, there was no discernible progress in the recognition of the Islamic Emirate. The Uzbek Foreign Minister welcomed the Afghan delegation as the "delegation of the Interim Government" of Afghanistan during his speech, and the Afghan delegation was mentioned to as "The Government of Afghanistan" in the conference's closing statement.

Fortunately, currently no country in the region or the world supports overthrowing the existing government in Afghanistan through violence and armed struggle. The significance of this conference stems from the fact that such regional and international conferences are the only appropriate means of resolving the Afghan dilemma. Through such forums, internal and external parties can come together and progressively agree on a course of action that will ensure the political and security stability of the country while taking into account the August 2021 change and the current situation and system in Afghanistan.





## CONCLUSION

The Tashkent conference, on the one hand, demonstrates the expansion of bilateral ties between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan and the beginning of a new chapter in those ties, while on the other, it also shows the increasing level of interaction between the international community and the interim government of the Islamic Emirate. This is because delegations from many countries and international organizations with an interest in Afghanistan participated the conference.

Uzbekistan has many economic projects and interests linked to Afghanistan because it lacks access to free water and needs the Afghan route to expand its trade with South Asia. Uzbekistan, like other Central Asian nations, is concerned about potential threats to its national security coming from Afghanistan and wishes to control these threats from within Afghanistan. This is the reason Uzbekistan has kept up strong relations with every Afghan government, and these relations have mostly revolved around the economy.

In addition, the Tashkent conference sent Islamic Emirate the message that, despite the fact that certain countries engage with it and recognize it as the de facto government of Afghanistan, official recognition will not occur without the Taliban performing a number of clear actions including the formation of an inclusive government, upholding human rights, particularly the right to employment and the right of women and girls to an education.

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The Centre for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS) is an independent, non-profit, and non-governmental research organization established in July 2009 in Kabul. CSRS is committed to promoting policy-oriented research through conducting authentic and unbiased research concerning Afghanistan and the region.

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