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AN ANALYSIS OF RELATIONS BETWEEN ISLAMIC EMIRATE AND UZBEKISTAN



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AN ANALYSIS OF RELATIONS BETWEEN ISLAMIC EMIRATE AND UZBEKISTAN

INTRODUCTION

Uzbekistan is one of Afghanistan's northern neighbors in Central Asia. Uzbekistan is the most powerful Central Asian country due to its military prowess, economic strength, population size, and high literacy rate, as well as its geopolitically strategic location in the heart of Central Asia.. Uzbekistan, on the other hand, had a superior role during the Soviet Union compared to other Central Asian republics, which has helped this country to try to position itself as a regional leader in this region even after independence.. The natural border line of the Amu River divides this country from Afghanistan, with a common border of 137 kilometer. To establish a direct and official communication route between the two countries, the Soviet Union constructed the "Friendship Bridge" in 1982, which consisted of two rail and road lines connecting Termez City with Hairatan port..

Official relations between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan began following the collapse of the Soviet Union and Uzbekistan's independence in 1991. The history of relationships between the two countries can be divided into three stages. Due to the Afghan civil war and the shock of Uzbekistan's early independence, the first period, which spanned from Uzbekistan's independence in 1991 to 2001, was characterized by the absence of substantial bilateral ties. After 2001 and the establishment of the US-backed Republic in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, like other countries, attempted to fix the relations and reopened its embassy in Kabul.. Finally, the third stage begun after the Islamic Emirate's takeover in of the country in 2021, and it is characterized by a constant mutual will to expand the government-to-government ties.

In light of this description, it is necessary to ask what kind of engagements and relationships Uzbekistan has had with the Tehreek-e-Taliban since the restoration of the Islamic Emirate, as well as what that country's historical relationship with the Tehreek-e-Taliban was. The topic is looked at from several angles in order to come up with a comprehensive response to this question.



UZBEKISTAN'S PERSPECTIVE OF THE TEHREEK-E-TALIBAN AND THEIR FIRST RULE

Prior to the establishment of the Islamic Emirate in 1996, the government of Uzbekistan, while apparently having official relations with the Islamic State of Afghanistan led by Burhanuddin Rabbani, supported a group led by Abdul Rashid Dostum (Uzbek descent) who was fighting the central government. After Tehreek-e-Taliban emerged and quickly captured 90% of Afghanistan, relations between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan changed. Previously, the Uzbek government was preoccupied with determining the share of Uzbeks in Kabul's power structure after the Islamic Emirate dominated northern Afghanistan, including the cities of Mazar-e-Sharif and Bandar Hairatan, despite the security of its southern borders due to Abdul Rashid Dostum's dominance in those areas. In its southern territories, Uzbekistan felt extremely insecure. As a result, while closing the Friendship Bridge, it implemented the strictest border protection.¹

The possibility of cooperation and collusion between the Islamic Emirate and the groups was a major factor that made Uzbekistan feel insecure of its neighbors. And groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) were active in their opposition to the Uzbek government. Despite this fear, and in light of the Islamic

Emirate's elimination of the only Uzbek party and led by Abdul Rashid Dostum, Uzbekistan adopted a less pragmatic policy and took a hostile stance against the Islamic Emirate.

This country attempted to portray itself as neutral in the conflict between the Islamic Emirate and the so-called Resistance Front, a coalition of remnants of the Islamic State led by Burhanuddin Rabbani and other groups such as the Junbish Party led by Abdul Rashid Dostum that sought to establish an inclusive government in Afghanistan. Apart from that, the Uzbek government has not been idle when it comes to Afghanistan issues, and has initiated the 6+2 contact group (six neighboring countries of Afghanistan, including Russia and the United States) to resolve the Afghan crisis, which resulted in the issuance of a 13-point declaration in Tashkent in July 1999, emphasizing the general principle that the military option is not the solution to the Afghan crisis and the crisis of this country.

Although these negotiations had no tangible impact on the situation in Afghanistan, the most important function for Uzbekistan's government was to demonstrate its good intentions towards Afghanistan and to promote a peaceful solution to the crisis in its neighboring country. Furthermore, in order to reduce its vulnerability from Afghanistan as much as possible,

¹ The strict border security measures implemented by Uzbekistan along its border with Afghanistan are said to be second only to the border security measures between North and South Korea.



Uzbekistan should not allow groups opposed to the government of Uzbekistan to carry out destructive operations against that country from Afghanistan.

In 2000, the President of Uzbekistan openly declared that he does not consider the Islamic Emirate to be a threat to his country and only expects the Islamic Emirate and the Northern Alliance to form a coalition government. Even the Uzbek ambassador in Islamabad met with the representatives of the Islamic Emirate where both sides committed to non-interference in each other's internal affairs.

UZBEKISTAN'S POLICY TOWARDS THE REPUBLIC AND THE TALIBAN'S FIGHT AGAINST AMERICAN OCCUPATION

After the events of September 11 and the American invasion of Afghanistan, which resulted in the collapse of the Islamic Emirate, Uzbekistan, reopened its embassy in Kabul and a consulate office in Mazar-e-Sharif. During this time, Uzbekistan allowed the US to use the Karshi Air Base for military operations and logistical support in Afghanistan, in addition to expanding relations with the Kabul administration. United States use of this base was halted as a result of its protest against the Uzbek government's response to the events of Andijan in 2005.

Despite the fact that Uzbekistan had good relations with the Kabul administration, and even after 2009, relations between this country and the US grew closer, and the US was once again permitted to transfer civilian items to Afghanistan through this country. However, during the 20-year war against the American occupation and the Kabul government, Uzbekistan never officially designated the Taliban as a terrorist organization and did not take a hostile stance toward them. =.

During the last two decades, the government of Uzbekistan has maintained a neutral and peaceful policy toward Afghanistan. As in the late 1990s, the president of this country presented a plan to establish a 3+6 contact group (six neighboring countries of Afghanistan plus Russia, America, and NATO) at the NATO meeting in Bucharest in 2008, which was ignored by all parties.

This country has become more active in recent years in order to strengthen its neutral policy while also active diplomacy for Jamila's efforts and mediation regarding its neighbor in crisis,



the most important of which is the country's hosting of Taliban representatives in order to provide the ground for intra-Afghan negotiations. Throughout its 20-year struggle against the American occupation and Kabul government, the Islamic Emirate took no hostile stance toward Afghanistan's neighbors, including Uzbekistan, and did not allow any group, particularly the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, to carry out destructive operations against Uzbekistan from areas under its control.

UZBEK-AFGHAN TIES IN THE SECOND RULE OF THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE

After the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the collapse of the Republic, Islamic Emirate took control of the country for the second time. Officials and spokesmen of the Islamic Emirate has clearly and officially stated their position towards the neighboring countries, emphasizing that the Islamic Emirate wants to have good relations with all countries, especially its neighbors, and thato group will be allowed to use Afghanistan's territory against any country. Also, the basic principle on which the Islamic Emirate bases its relations with other countries is neutrality and economic orientation in foreign policy. Even though Uzbekistan's good behavior with the Islamic Emirate before the collapse of the republican system had removed any concerns of Uzbekistan about the re-establishment of the Islamic Emirate, but the official announcement of the Islamic Emirate's good-neighborly foreign policy and economic-oriented neutrality made Uzbekistan feel more comfortable and calmer about Afghanistan.

Uzbekistan has officially suspended the recognition of the Islamic Emirate, but has tried to maintain its political relations at an acceptable level by refraining from interfering in Afghanistan's affairs and not supporting any group. In order to strengthen political relations, officials from both sides have visiting, the most important of which is the visit of the Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan to Kabul and the visit of the Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Emirate to Uzbekistan.

In the economic field, the relations between the two sides have reached a more favorable level. The review of economic transactions between the two sides in this one year and several months shows that Uzbekistan has a great desire and interest in developing its economic relations with Afghanistan. The most recent case that shows the expansion of economic relations between the two sides is the efforts to create a common trade market between the two countries.



A PERSPECTIVE OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES:

Based on several factors, it can be concluded that the two countries have had good relations.

First; Absence of secure environment on the relations of two countries: based on the theories of regional studies, especially the theory of regional security complexes, the most important factor that gives the relations of the countries a negative or positive direction is the existence or non-existence of security issues between the two countries. As explained in the previous discussions of this article, there have been no security issues between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan under the rule of the Islamic Emirate (both in the first period of the Emirate and now). The absence of security issues allows the two countries to safely expand their bilateral relations, especially at the economic level. Such countries have never joined political alliances and military alliances against each other, but on the contrary, they will try to learn their mutual interests from each other, either at the bilateral level or by joining political and economic organizations. Clearly the existence of a de-secured environment brings good prospects and opportunities for Uzbekistan and Afghanistan relations.

According to the theory of the regional security complex, security issues between two countries are said to be issues that cannot be resolved through political and diplomatic means, and both sides use other means, such as military power, to solve them absolutely in their own interests, whether using them individually, unilaterally, or collectively in alliance with other countries. Among the most important security issues, we can mention historical enmities, border and territorial disputes and claims, support of related populations in a country, etc.

Second; Correlation between security and political stability in Afghanistan and the security of Uzbekistan: The second factor that makes Uzbekistan continuously strive to establish a stable government in Afghanistan and refrain from any destabilizing action in



Afghanistan is the correlation between its own security and security and stability in Afghanistan. In fact, Uzbekistan always feels threatened by the existence of groups against its own, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and now the more dangerous ISIS group, and if there is instability in Afghanistan, there is an opportunity for the groups against the Uzbek government and ISIS to attack and destabilize that country. Therefore, that country is trying to strengthen its internal security and stability, to support the existence of security and stability in Afghanistan, which is now caused by the Islamic Emirate.

Third; The mutual economic attractions and requirements of two countries: The attractions and requirements of the two countries can be examined in the economic attractions and transit requirements section. In terms of economic attractions, Uzbekistan as a neighbor has many economic and production capacities for Afghanistan, which can greatly contribute to the prosperity of Afghanistan's economy. Uzbekistan, a country rich in mineral resources, especially oil and gas, and electricity production, plays a prominent role in meeting Afghanistan's current needs. In the industrial and agricultural fields, this country can be a suitable assistant for Afghanistan due to having a relatively advanced industry in the production of various types of machinery and having sufficient experience in the field of mechanized agricultural production. The first railway line of Afghanistan (Bandar Hairatan-Mazar Sharif railway line) was built with the help of Uzbekistan. Afghanistan, on the other hand, is an export destination for Uzbekistan as an attractive country for investment in the industrial and agricultural sectors. Uzbekistan can make profitable investments in fields such as mining and processing, road and rail infrastructure, and mechanization of agricultural production in Afghanistan regarding the transit requirements of the two countries, it can be said that Uzbekistan, as a manufacturing country, can be connected to the densely populated region of South Asia through Afghanistan. Also, by passing through Afghanistan, this country should reach the countries of Pakistan and Iran and finally reach the water ports in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman. The Afghanistan side can also access the countries of Kazakhstan,



Kyrgyzstan, China and Russia through Uzbekistan. What's more, the direct railway line that connects Afghanistan to China passes through Uzbekistan first. In this regard, the two countries of Afghanistan and Uzbekistan should focus as much as possible on the early implementation of the Trans-Afghan railway line and the extension of the Khaf-Herat railway line to Mazar-e-Sharif, which directly connects the Uzbek Termez port to the Iranian railway network and make a revolution in the field of transit and interregional trade.

The security puzzle is a situation where, when a country feels threatened by another, it devotes most of its attention and economic power to increasing its offensive military power, while the other country tries to do the same. This process, which leads to an arms race, always puts two countries in constant fear of each other. It is said that the rocket attack on the territory of Uzbekistan, which was carried out from the territory of Afghanistan, was the work of the Daesh group.



CONCLUSION

As the most powerful country in Central Asia and one of Afghanistan's northern neighbours, Uzbekistan has had political relations with Afghanistan since its independence in 1991, except for one period (during the civil wars between jihadist organizations in the first half of the 1990s) in other stages of history. In its thirty-year-old relation with Afghanistan adopted a neutral side in the affairs of this country. The models that Uzbekistan has chosen in its confrontation with Afghanistan are pragmatism, relations at the state-state level, and active diplomacy efforts and mediation. That country presented the innovative plans of 6+2 contact group in the late 1990s, and 6+3 in 2008. Also, in the past few years, this country has shown great interest in hosting intra-Afghan talks, which indicates its benevolent intentions. In such an environment, relations and interactions between the Islamic Emirate and Uzbekistan have been far from the atmosphere of tension and conflict since its establishment until now. In addition, the Islamic Emirate, by declaring a neutral and economy-oriented foreign policy, created more motivation in the country of Uzbekistan to develop relations, especially in the economic field. Therefore, as discussed in the discussions of this article, after the re-establishment of the Islamic Emirate, the interaction between the two countries has been upgraded from a normal level to an acceptable level, which shows the prospects of the relations between the two countries in a better way in the future.

However, the current growth of these ties is built on the good ones that currently exist and is focused on Afghanistan's pressing economic need at the time. By doing this, the degree of economic exchanges is increased, Uzbek investors' infrastructure investments in Afghanistan are increased, and on the other hand, transit facilities are offered. The governments of the two countries are especially worried about Afghan traders going to Uzbekistan.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the above analysis, it is recommended that:

- 1- The governments of Afghanistan and Uzbekistan should promote their political relations on a regular basis in order to expand as much as possible.
- 2- The two governments should provide special facilities for the transit of merchants between the two countries in order to speed up the trade process and increase the level of economic exchanges between the two countries.
- 3- The two governments should increase their focus on the implementation of the Trans-Afghan project and the extension of the Khaf-Herat railway line to Mazar-e-Sharif in order to speed up the connection of the region, which is the dire need of the entire region



- 4- The two countries should sign major economic contracts at the bilateral level that provide investment opportunities in the two countries.

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