AN EVALUATION OF THE US MILITARY PRESENCE IN CENTRAL ASIA: THE CASE OF UZBEKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

AN EVALUATION OF THE US MILITARY PRESENCE IN CENTRAL ASIA: THE CASE OF UZBEKISTAN

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This thesis sheds light on the Uzbekistan-United States of America (US or USA) security relations by addressing the security problems faced by Uzbekistan, which gained its independence in 1991 after the collapse of the USSR, during and after the state and nation-building process. In this context, US and Uzbekistan military relations and the future of these relations is analyzed. Since Uzbekistan exists in a geopolitically risky and security-threatening region and its own army is not developed well, it needed the support of powerful countriesWhile this thesis reflects the geopolitical priorities of Uzbekistan and the US, it also includes the relations with other regional realities, which have an influence in the region, so it offers a versatile perspective. As a result of this versatility, the focus has been on criticism against the military relations of Uzbekistan with the US. How geopolitics shapes the domestic and foreign policy environments of the main actors is also reflected in the thesis.

Keywords: Geopolitics, US, Uzbekistan, Security, Military Cooperation

ÖZ

ORTA ASYA'DAKİ ABD ASKERİ VARLIĞININ BİR DEĞERLENDİRMESİ: ÖZBEKİSTAN ÖRNEĞİ

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Bu tez, SSCB'nin dağılmasının ardından 1991 yılında bağımsızlığını kazanan Özbekistan'ın devlet ve ulus inşası sürecinde ve sonrasında karşılaştığı güvenlik sorunlarını ele alarak Özbekistan-Amerika Birleşik Devletleri (ABD) ilişkilerine ışık tutmaktadır. Bu bağlamda ABD ve Özbekistan askeri ilişkileri ve bu ilişkilerin geleceği analiz edilmektedir. Özbekistan bağımsızlığını kazandıktan bu yana jeopolitik olarak riskli ve güvenliği tehdit eden unsurlara açık bir bölgede bulunduğundan ve kendi ordusu sınırlı gelişime tabi olduğundan güçlü ülkelerin desteğine ihtiyaç duymuştur. Bu tez, Özbekistan ve ABD'nin jeopolitik önceliklerini yansıtırken, bölgede etkisi olan ülkelerle ilişkileri de içerdiğinden çok yönlü bir bakış açısı sunmaktadır. Bu çok yönlülüğün bir sonucu olarak, Özbekistan'ın ABD ile gerçekleştirdiği askeri ilişki şemalarına yer verilmektedir. Jeopolitiğin ana aktörlerinin iç ve dış politika ortamlarını nasıl şekillendirdiği teze yansıtılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Jeopolitik, ABD, Özbekistan, Güvenlik, Askeri İşbirliği

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1.Introducing The Study

The Caucasus and Central Asia have witnessed an increasing interest in world politics. One of the main reasons for this has been the development of Caspian oil and gas. The West's interest in oil production and export from the Caspian has been an important factor in increasing the importance of the Caucasus and Central Asia in the eyes of policymakers in the West. Apart from this, Central Asia is strategically located as a bridge on the road stretching from the west to China. It is also at the heart of Eurasia. It connects the region between Russia and the Islamic Crescent.[1] The essence of the rivalry between regional powers is related to the political and economic influence on the states of the region; in this framework, although natural resources played an important role, these countries are strategically significant due to their location.

The most important factor in determining the foreign policies of countries is national security issues. This situation is especially important for the bilateral relations of the countries that have common security problems. The administration of Uzbekistan had to face these security problems after gaining its independence. In the early years of its independence, Tashkent tried to approach the United States of America (United States or US) to overcome this threat. The United States only responded when faced with a similar security threat after the September 11 attacks. With the increasing geopolitical importance of Central Asia after the September 11 attacks, the US increased its relations with Uzbekistan and bilateral relations reached the level of strategic

[1] Nick Megoran & Sevara Sharapova, "Central Asia in International Relations: The Legacies of Halford Mackinder*" Oxford Academic*, (22 May 2014), pp.12.

partnership.[2] The US wanted to gain a superiority against the Taliban by taking advantage of Uzbekistan's geopolitical position due to its common threat perception.

After the September 11 attacks, Central Asia became important for the US and it started to increase its bilateral relations with Central Asian countries. From this period onwards, the US's regional policy consisted of military interests coinciding with security problems rather than economic ones. As a natural consequence of this strategic move of the US, Uzbekistan has become important for the US. Thus, the relationship between two countries with similar security problems turned into a relationship of an alliance.

As the threat from Afghanistan dominates any security debate in Central Asia, it has been valuable for the US to provide security assistance to the region. The government of Uzbekistan also sees Afghanistan as the biggest security threat to the country. Apart from this, although there are other factors affecting security like rivalry on access and control of the natural resources, conflicts with neighbors, and internal turmoils, attacks from Central Asian terrorist organizations organized in Afghanistan have been among the most worrying security problems. This danger explains the increasing military engagement of the US in the region after 9/11. Accordingly, in order to prevent this threat beyond its borders, Uzbekistan allowed the US to settle in the Karshi-Khanabad Base.

Using a Soviet-era airbase Karshi Khanabad (K2) which is 90 miles north of the Afghan border near the towns of Karshi and Khanabad was a huge advantage for the United States. In return, the United States provided security guarantees to Uzbekistan and stated that it would target terrorists belonging to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which is collaborating with the Taliban and al-Qaeda forces.[3]

[2] A.Sait Sönmez, "The Effects of Security Problems on the USA- Uzbekistan Relations", *Alternatives Turkish Journal Of International Relations,* 11(3), (2012), pp.31.

[3] Ibid, pp.39.

The US-Uzbekistan military alliances developed in this process. For instance, among the Central Asian states, only Uzbekistan joined the "coalition of the willing" that supported the US-led military operations in Iraq in February-March 2003. However, US-Uzbek relations became tense in 2004.[4] Tensions escalated, with US aid being partially cut off in FY2004 due to Uzbek human rights abuses, and Uzbek President Islam Karimov's growing concerns that the US was promoting Color Revolutions in the post-Soviet states. Uzbek authorities expected ample compensation for the use of K2 and complained that this compensation was delayed and insufficient; which included the 2003 US payment of $15.7 million in coalition support funds for the use of the K2 through "repayment of services" in December 2002. In May 2005, US Congress awarded military construction funds for the improvement of the runways and taxiways at K2. It provided $42.5 million in support, but the project was delayed due to growing tensions in relationships.[5] In July 2005, the government of Uzbekistan terminated the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), signed with the US government in 2001, which legitimizes the US acquisition of a base in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan notified that, under the terms of the agreement, the US military was required to abandon US base in K2 within six months.

In 2016, with the change in power in Uzbekistan, an open policy was adopted and common policies with the US have embraced again. During the presidency of Shavkat Mirziyoyev, relations with the United States began to be rapidly restructured. However, Russia and China, had increased their influence in Uzbekistan in the meantime.

In this study, I aim to analyze the policies preferred by Uzbekistan in coping with security problems based on its geopolitical importance. In this context, the relations shaped according to the geopolitical tendencies of Uzbekistan and other relevant countries will be explained by shedding light on the relations that developed between

[4] Jim Nichol, "Central Asia: Regional Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests", *Congressional Research Service, (*2015), pp. 5.

[5] James Nichol, "Uzbekistan's Closure of the Airbase at Karshi-Khanabad: Context and Issues*",* CRS Report for Congress, *Research Gate*, (October 2005), CRS-2.

the US and Uzbekistan from a security perspective, and by addressing the effects of the invasion of Afghanistan, the increase in the influence of Russia and China in the region, and the fluctuations in the US-Uzbekistan relations. First of all, the security problems of Uzbekistan after independence will be explained. Afterward, the military cooperation between the US and Uzbekistan will be given chronologically. Finally, the reasons and consequences of the US's withdrawal from Afghanistan are discussed, and the course of the military relations of the US with the Central Asian states and especially Uzbekistan will be evaluated.

1.2.Methodology

In this thesis, the documentary research method is used. Documentary research method includes government publications articles in scientific periodicals, weekly newspapers, online news sources, online and offline reports, statistical data, and archives. Therefore, printed and electronic materials were used in the research phase of this thesis. Books, articles, and newspapers are examined to present the importance of geopolitics, the internal and external security policy of Central Asia after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan, and its relations with neighbors, superpowers and organizations, and the conceptual framework of the future of these relations. Online news sources, archival materials, official and legal documents, reports, and records were used to show the military decisions of Uzbekistan from the past to the present.

Sources are mostly in English; however, official translations of Russian and Turkish sources were also used in certain parts of the thesis. The documents that used in the formation of thesis is important because it provides detailed information about the researched phenomenon. In addition, the documents related to historical events, phenomena, cultures, or traditions, have been a rich source of data in the thesis research and have added contextual meaning to the study. The type and distribution of resources used in this thesis have been consistent with the discursive and structural nature of geopolitics. After the subject to be researched has been determined, the main

target has been delimited and divided into sections. Legal and official documents, archival sources, and news obtained during the data collection phase were analyzed and the thesis was concluded. This research method has made a strong contribution to the subject and purpose of the thesis.

1.3.Organization Of The Thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters. The military relations between the US and Uzbekistan, which is the main target point of the thesis, are examined in these 7 chapters. The first chapter is the introductory part. In this chapter, the subjects of the study, the methodology and the organization of the thesis are introduced.

The second chapter is about the importance of Central Asia as a region. In this section, information about geopolitics and the concepts used in geopolitics is given, and the content regarding the geopolitical importance of the Eurasian region is presented.

The third chapter deals with post-Soviet Central Asia. This section focuses on the security problems in Uzbekistan from the past to the present, which is one of the focal points of the thesis. These security problems were particularly addressed as fundamentalism and Islamic extremism, internal conflicts, narcotics trafficking, and conflicts with the regional states for the control of water resources. Apart from security issues, the chapter also includes domestic and foreign policy preferences, economic policies, democratization and human rights elements of Uzbekistan in order to gain a general perspective on the country.

I the fourth chapter, the relations between the US and Uzbekistan, which gained its independence as a result of the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, are discussed. This section covers the gains of the US and Uzbekistan from their relations with each other. In the continuation of the section, turning points and developments in military relations are given chronologically. In this chapter, it is explained that the US-Uzbekistan relations, which were good at first, later deteriorated.

Chapter five sheds light on the normalization period of relations between the US and Uzbekistan. In this section, the relations that are tried to be re-established between the Us and Uzbekistan are explained. In addtion, the relations of Uzbekistan with Russia, China and other regional countries are given. In this section, it is reflected that Uzbekistan prefers a balancing policy in its relations with the great powers.

Chapter six is about the consequences of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the course of relations with Uzbekistan. This chapter also covers the future dynamics of the US-Uzbekistan relations.

Lastly, chapter seven is designed as the conclusion part of the thesis.

CHAPTER 2

THE IMPORTANCE OF CENTRAL ASIA

When considering US interests in Central Asia, it is important to focus specifically on geopolitical factors. Geopolitical actions towards economic and political goals are one of the alternative methods developed to achieve the defined goals. Each geographical location has had a significance in certain periods of history. Competing or manipulating geographies may differ according to the conjuncture of the time, but the emphasis on locations is usually constant. In this case, although the expressions of geopolitical interests may differ, they do not vanished.

While analyzing the general theory of the balance of power, it can be said that the connection between the balance of power and geopolitics is important when considering the large and small balancing actions and reactions of the many geopolitical actors, rising and falling powers, which are indispensable for filtering and understanding the events. To be more specific, geopolitics might be described as what Great Powers have interaction with, what they exercise, and what they are exceptional at. Variables from physical geography, including topography, climate, and demography, are becoming valuable assets for emerging and established great powers. Also, geopolitics provides the backdrop for great power contests to take place at any given moment.

Therefore, perceiving the geopolitical literature in the light of the balance of power with basic geopolitical standards offers a broader perspective on geopolitical processes. In this sense, considering geopolitical literature of the Central Asia will contribute to the drawing of the geopolitical framework of the study.

2.1. The Concept and Elements of Geopolitics

The idea that the world's land area is divided into separate continents was first discovered in the 6th century BC by an ancient Greek geographers such as Anaximander and Hecataeus, who defined the three continents as Europe, Asia, and Africa.[6] In later periods, the division of the world into continents continued as the concept of Europe itself changed, although it was suggested that Europe and Asia were clearly separated from each other by a significant body of water. But this did not mean that the interaction between Asia and Europe was cut off. The economic, political, and military ties that have been connecting Europe and Asia for years have progressed by getting stronger. [7] The geography called Eurasia today can actually be considered a product of this unity.

It would be incomplete to understand the geopolitics of Indo-Pacific without placing it in the Eurasian context. The concept of Eurasia refers to a wide area covering East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, North Eurasia/Russia, Europe, and the Middle East. Since the advent of modern geopolitics, Eurasia has been seen as the "heartland", arguably the most vital region of the world.[8] In connection with this idea, Halford Mackinder has put forward a theory based on the idea that the world is inherently divided into several areas, each of which fulfills a specific function. According to Mackinder's analysis, European history was the result of centuries of struggle against invasions from Asia.[9] According to his view, western progress and expansion were

[6] Hans Slomp, "Europe, A Political Profile: An American Companion to European Politics", *ABC-CLIO; Pck Edition,* (September 26, 2011), pp. 634.

[7] John Agnew, "Geopolitics: Re-visioning World Politics: Second Edition", *London: Routledge*, (2003), pp. 86.

[8]Aharon Klieman, "Great Powers and Geopolitics International Affairs in a Rebalancing World", *Springer,* (Switzerland: 2015), pp.183.

[9] Eldar Ismailov and Vladimer Papava, "Rethinking Central Eurasia: The Heartland Theory and the Present-Day Geopolitical Structure of Central Eurasia", *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program,* (Singapore: 2010), pp.22.

spurred by the need to respond to pressure from the center of Asia. Accordingly, the 'Heartland' was considered Eurasia, which served as the axis of all geopolitical transformations of historical dimensions within the World Island.[10] The hearth of Mackinder's theory has the following aphorism:

> Who rules Eastern Europe commands the Hearthland
> Who rules the Heartland commands the World Island
> Who rules the World Island commands the World [11]

In this theory, Eurasia was formulated to serve the strategic interests of the two Western Powers, British Empire and the US. In the 19th century European settlement spread to inland, and the expanding frontier caused national US territory to shift toward the Pacific. The dominant justification for the United States trying to be present on this continent has been its statements as "America's divine mission to spread American ideals and institutions to Asia - and beyond". This rhetoric reached its peak in the 1830-1840s, with the writing of "Manifest Destiny" and "The Great Nation of Futurity" by John Louis O'Sullivan.[12]

In the early 20th century, British interests in Central Asia and the Caucasus were dominated by geo-economic calculations around the region's potentially efficient resources. According to geographer Gerry Kearns, Mackinder's basic approach was revived in the late 20th century and adopted by the United States and the British Empire. Gerry Kearns argues that the political significance of Mackinder's analysis emerged by the Great Powers that have gained strength in global conflict through

[10] Halford MacKinder, "The geographical pivot of history (1904)." *The Geographical Journal,* 170 (4), (2004), pp.302-304.

[11] Anita Sengupta, "Heartlands of Eurasia: The Geopolitics of Political Space", *Lexington Books,* (July 16, 2009), pp.7.

[12] Agnew, "Geopolitics: Re-visioning World Politics: Second Edition", pp.90.

regional strategies which prioritize control over natural resources.[13] Kearns also argues that Mackinder's echoes may contribute to the characterization of military strategies. The vast Eurasian area, with its highly diverse regions and countries, is increasingly becoming an integrated strategic complex. As early as the 1990s, the Former National Security Advisor of the United States, Zbigniew Brzezinski predicted this when he referred to Eurasia as the "great chessboard." Due to its geographical location, Eurasia has been in the field of interest of many countries from the past to the present. For instance, it has become indirectly involved in events such as the Ukraine crisis, the Sino-Japanese conflict over the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea, and the US invasion of Afghanistan.

According to Brezinski, the key to controlling the Central Asian Republics is Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan, which is the most populous country among the Central Asian Republics has the power to pose a significant obstacle to any Russian control over the region according to Brezinski's view. Its independence is critical to the survival of other Central Asian Republics. According to him, Uzbekistan is actually a prime candidate for leadership in Central Asia.[14] This definition of Brezinski became especially important after 9/11. After the 9/11 incident, Uzbekistan was recognized as a key partner by the United States of America.

Alongside the great powers dealing with Eurasian issues such as Russia, the US, and several European states, some other powerful and ambitious players have emerged, notably China and, to a lesser extent, India. Thus, the Eurasian geopolitical space has become much more interesting in terms of the presence of large powers. While in the 1990s and 2000s the geopolitical order of Eurasia could largely be described as American hegemony, this is no longer the case today. As the unipolar era of Washington's domination is coming to an end, Eurasia has now entered the era of

[13] Gerry Kearns, "Geopolitics and Empire: The Legacy of Halford Mackinder (Oxford Geographical and Environmental Studies Series)", *Oxford University Press; 1st edition,* (August 17, 2009), pp.125.

[14] Sengupta, "Heartlands of Eurasia: The Geopolitics of Political Space", pp.18.

multipolarity. It can be said that this balance of power, in which the geopolitical influence is dispersed among a few prominent players, has already been established. This multipolarity is complex and multilayered, as related actors have different geopolitical potentials and interests. These actors are parties with significant material power and pragmatic ambitions whose political goals will shape the international order.[15]

2.2. Geopolitical Importance Of Central Asia

Central Asia, one of the vital points of the Eurasian geography, refers to a wide area stretching from the Chinese border in the east to the Caspian Sea in the west, and from Russia in the north to Iran and Afghanistan in the south. Central Asia, which has attracted the increasing interest of great powers throughout history with its geostrategic importance and potential energy sources, is located in the center of Eurasia and hence in the heart of Asia. It acts as a bridge between Eastern and Western countries by connecting Asia and Europe. The importance of Central Asia is identified with its geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geostrategic location. Geography has made Central Asian Republics important in a historical context for trade, competition or conflict.[16]

Central Asia was important for the great empires of the past, because of the commercial lifeline connecting Europe and Asia via the Silk Road. In the 19th century geostrategic context, the Central Asian states fall into the core of the Heartland Theory as mentioned by Halford Mackinder.

Later, this theory of Mackinder was developed by Nichols Spykman in 1944 and a different interpretation emerged known as the "Rimland Theory". According to this theory, control of heartland and sea around the Eurasian landmass are equally

[15] Klieman, "Great Powers and Geopolitics International Affairs in a Rebalancing World", pp.184.

[16] S. Showkat Dar, "Strategic Significance of Central Asia in 21st Century", *Journal Of Central Asia Studies*, 21 (1), (January 2014), pp.60.

important conditions for governing the world. Therefore, he expanded the borders of Heartland.

In this theory, Central Asia is at the center of these strategic fronts. Spykman changed the perspective of Mackinder's theory, but he recognized the concept of Eurasia as the epicenter of global geopolitical supremacy. Spykman summed up the key points of world domination with following words: "Whoever controls Rimland rules Eurasia; The ruler of Eurasia controls the fate of the world."[17]

Central Asia was integrated at the cultural, religious and linguistic levels before the arrival of the Russians. Historically, Central Asia was called Turkestan, which, in its literal translation from Persian, means 'the land of the Turks'. Turkic languages such as Turkmen, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Kazakh constituted the dominant language group of Turkestan.[18] Geographically, the territory of Turkestan extends from the area in the east of the Caspian Sea to the Altai Mountains, from the borders of Iran and Afghanistan in the south to the Russian lands in the north. The colonization process initiated by Tsarist Russia marked the beginning of the fragmentation of the region. This order of fragmentation was maintained and even strengthened in the Soviet era. Shortly, from 1860 until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Central Asia remained under Russian rule.

During the period of Russian domination, there was a change integrating with the dominance of Russian culture and language, as well as political and economic changes in the Central Asian Republics. The Russian language has become lingua franca for the people of Central Asia. The Soviet period was characterized by an intense process

[17] Muhammad Manzoor Elahi, "Heartland and Rimland Doctrines in CPEC Perspective: Strategic Interplay in 21st Century", Academic Session: Strategic Dimensions of CPEC, Proceedings of International Conference on CPEC Held at GC University, (December, 2015), pp.34.

[18] Michael Bruchis, "The Effect of the USSR's Language Policy on the National Languages of its Turkic Population", in YaacovRoi, ed., The USSR and the Muslim World: Issues in Domestic and Foreign Policy. London: George Allen and Unwin, (1984), pp.129.

of state-building. However, the process of creating an ethnonational identity was limited and dependent on development.[19] Policies for supranational identity and efforts to create a Soviet people brought the policies of Russification. In this framework, educational systems were changed, places of worship were destroyed, and objects distant to Russian culture were exterminated.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian Republics have been in constant instability. Central Asia, which has a serious energy resources potential, is experiencing many problems such as corruption, a new and inexperienced leadership, abuse of human rights, civil society problems, and internal turmoils. The fact that Central Asia has become open to foreign influences due to security problems and instability has created a great opportunity for states interested in geography.

In the post-Cold War period, theories have been developed emphasizing the importance of Central Asia for global power politics. A few years after the Cold War, as mentioned Zbigniew Brzezinski argued that the US was a great chessboard and Central Asian states were in the middle of the chessboard and they are the geopolitical center of it. Also former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice saw Central Asia as a land of opportunity.[20] Currently, many countries such as the US, Russia, China, India and Turkey are developing new strategies to have an influence in Central Asia.

[19] Paulo Duarte, "Central Asıa: The Planet's Pivot Area", (2014), pp.6.

[20] Ibid, 63.

CHAPTER 3

POST INDEPENDENCE CENTRAL ASIA (UZBEKISTAN CASE)

3.1. Ongoing Security Issues From The Past

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, five Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan gained their independence. Uzbekistan, is one of the important states of Central Asia, and have a significant impact on the geopolitical processes in the region after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Uzbekistan's geopolitical position in the region has been highly influenced by its history and the distinctive politics of its administration. In many ways, Uzbekistan has been discrete among the other countries in the Central Asia region. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan has the largest population after the Russian Federation and Ukraine. In addition, Uzbekistan is the only country with the most ethnically homogeneous structure among the Central Asian countries.

Uzbekistan is the closest country to becoming a regional power in Central Asia due to the factors such as having the strongest defenses in the region, a large number of natural resources, and a thriving economy. It is also important regarding its geopolitical position. Located in the heart of Central Asia, this country has common borders with Afghanistan and other Central Asian countries, while it does not have common borders with regional powers such as Russia, China or Iran.[21]

[21] Sönmez, "The Effects of Security Problems on the USA- Uzbekistan Relations", pp.28.

The most important factors determining the originality of the national development and foreign political priorities of the country since independence are the social problems such as the Uzbek communities scattered in neighboring republics, inconsistency of population growth with the vital space; shortage of water resources or problem of water supply; the existence of important natural resources and their inability to operate them properly; security issues arising from narcotics trafficking and geopolitics; human rights deficiencies; problems of Islamic extremism and fundamentalism; and economic difficulties. After independence, it was very difficult to deal with these problems for the newly elected government headed by President Islam Karimov.

3.1.1 Islamic Extremism and Fundamentalism

The threat of Islamic extremism has accelerated throughout Central Asia, and especially in Uzbekistan, due to the lack of economic and political reform and low levels of welfare. The Afghan crisis has had a significant impact on Uzbekistan's foreign policy. In the 1980s, Islamic fundamentalism began to penetrate the country, spreading in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan through people from Afghanistan and Iran who served in the Uzbek Army or worked as specialists on economic contracts.[22]

Although the main causes of Islamic extremism in Central Asia are factors such as poverty and dissatisfaction, the proximity of countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia to the region has been also effective in the spread of Islamic extremism. This extremist threat, which resulted in the formation of many militant Islamic groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and its split, the Islamic Jihad Union, potentially finds ground for themselves as the economic, social, and political problems in the region continue.[23]

[22] Eugene Rumer, Richard Sokolsky & Paul Stronski, "U.S. Policy Toward Central Asia 3.0", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, (Washington: 2016), pp.8.

[23] Ibid, pp.9.

Some Uzbeks concentrated in the Fergana Valley to keep Islamic practices alive even during the oppressive Soviet period, and after independence, they increased their activities by opposing the Uzbek government. The Islamic extremist threats to the regime continued to increase as long as the economic distress was not resolved as an outcome of the global economic crisis.[24] High unemployment and poverty rates among youth in the Fergana Valley have also made them vulnerable to joining religious extremist organizations.

In the early years of independence, as the country became increasingly vulnerable to Islamic extremism, authorities in Uzbekistan sought to take as much action as they could in Central Asia to combat this threat. Accordingly, dozens of Islamist extremists were imprisoned and mosques designated as assembly areas were closed. The country's legislature passed a law in 1998 outlawing all unregistered beliefs, censoring religious writing, and introducing restrictions that criminalize unlicensed teaching. The legislature has additionally passed laws that penalize forming, leading, or participating in extremist, separatist, fundamentalist, or other illegal groups. Public expressions of religiosity were banned. Nevertheless, this was not enough to solve the problem completely. In fact, as recommended by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) in 2006, then-Secretary Condoleezza Rice designated Uzbekistan as a "country of particular concern" (CPC) where serious terrorist actions and human rights violations could result in US sanctions.[25]

Uzbekistan and other Central Asian Republics arrested and sentenced many members of one of the largest of these extremist groups, Hizb ut Tahrir (HT; a politically oriented Islamic movement that sought the establishment of sharia rule), but this did not diminish HT supporters. In the early 1990s, after the collapse of the USSR, the predecessors organized in the Fergana Valley founded the IMU in 1991. Shortly after,

[24] James Nichols, "Central Asia's Security: Issues and Implications for U.S. Interests", *Congressional Research Service*, (March 2010), pp.3.

[25] Ibid, pp.4.

the IMU launched a series of gun attacks and began taking hostages. After the events of September 11, 2001, the IMU guerrillas fought alongside the Taliban against the US-led coalition, resulting in some militants being killed and some fled to Pakistan. During the US invasion of Afghanistan, the activities of the IMU were significantly reduced.[26]

It was a positive development for the Uzbek government's battle with Islamic fundamentalist terrorists from the IMU and HT activists when the United States became influential in Afghanistan. The IMU and HT had a common motive in overthrowing the Karimov regime and were willing to work with the Taliban and al-Qaeda to serve this mission. Although each extremist organization had a different tactical and political approach, their common goal was to overthrow Karimov and establish a Central Asian Caliphate. The US invasion of Afghanistan was a pleasant development for the Uzbek government, at least for the time being, to alleviate major concerns of Islamic terrorism.

The security environment has also seriously deteriorated in recent years with the presence of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/ISIS). More than 500 Islamists affiliated with Uzbekistan entered the war zones of Syria and Iraq. Many Uzbek-speaking militants were reported to have fought in the conflict throughout the Levant.[27]

Even the IMU declared an official allegiance to ISIS in September 2015.[28] In order to prevent this situation, the government of Uzbekistan started to authorize religious leaders to raise their voices against ISIS. As an example of this, former President Islam

[26]Vitaly V. Naumkin, "Militant Islam in Central Asia: The Case of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan", *Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies Working Paper Serie,* (2003), pp.4.

[27] Thomas F. Lynch III, Michael Bouffard, Kelsey King, & Graham Vickowski, "The Return of Foreign Fighters to Central Asia: Implications for U.S. Counterterrorism Policy", *Institute for National Strategic Studies Strategic Perspectives,* No. 21, (October 2016), pp.15.

[28] Ibid.

Karimov released Hayrulla Hamidov, a respected Islamic poet and teacher, from prison to make him the face of the anti-ISIS campaign. Hamidov's efforts to counter the ISIS messages caught the great attention of Uzbek people.[29]

3.1.2. Internal Turmoil: The 2005 Violence in Andijan

In the early 2000s, the United States attempted to root out al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Central Asia by providing support to the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom and NATO's International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. Operating in the Ferghana Valley region of Central Asia in the late 1990s, IMU increased its influence in Afghanistan in the 2000s. After many struggles, IMU supporters who were exiled from Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001-2002 were reunited in Pakistan. There the IMU maintained links with the Taliban and al-Qaeda. It can be argued that after 2001, the priorities of the IMU shifted to a broader global jihadist agenda rather than overthrowing the governing regime of Uzbekistan, largely due to the complex network of alliances that IMU members formed over the years of their residence in Pakistan's tribal areas.[30]

Despite the views that the US, which settled in Afghanistan after the September 11 attacks, would act as a foreign security guarantor in Central Asia and transfer large amounts of financial support to the regional governments, these expectations could not be met. In addition, the US began to constantly criticize Uzbekistan on human rights and democratization. This situation led to deterioration in US-Uzbekistan relations.

Meanwhile, Uzbekistan had internal turmoil to deal with rather than struggling with the US. In light of the growing influence of the Color Revolutions that created dramatic political changes in Eurasia led to the events in Andijan. The economic problems and public discontent, before the 2007 presidential elections of Uzbekistan, and the

[29] Ibid, pp.16.

[30] Annette Bohr, "Central Asia: Responding to the Multi-Vectoring Game", *R Niblett (ed) America and a Changed World: A Question of Leadership, Wiley- Blackwell/Chatham House*, (2010), pp.111.

complexity and crisis environment in the country triggered the Andijan events. In March 2003, thousands of students protested in Samarkand after the administration dismissed a university rector. In November 2004, thousands of people protested against the government's taxation and trade policies in the city of Ferghana Valley, Kokand. Similar protests arose elsewhere in the Fergana Valley. In early May 2005, just before Andijan, there was a notable change in the government's response when riot police forcibly dispersed a small rally outside the US embassy in Tashkent.[31] Violence began to be used against the protesters without separating them as women and children. Then the Andijan events broke out. Rising tensions in Central Asia during those days resulted in Uzbekistan government troops firing at armed and unarmed protesters in the city of Ferghana Valley, Andijan in May 2005.

The protesters demanded the end of the trial of 23 prominent local businessmen accused of being members of an Islamic terrorist organization. The night before the incident, a group raided the prison where these prosecuted people were held, and released hundreds of prisoners. The released prisoners later joined the demonstrators to raid government buildings. Resistance was suppressed on 13 May after President Islam Karimov came to the city to direct the operations. Dozens of civilians were killed or injured on May 13, 2005, after Uzbek soldiers opened fire on demonstrators in the town of Andijan. After the incident, some western countries, especially the US, called for an international investigation which the Uzbek government refused.[32]

After the events, the US government accused Uzbekistan's ruling circles of using disproportionate force and called for an independent, international investigation into the matter. The Uzbek government, which was criticized by many Western governments, received full support from the Russian and Chinese leaders. Wanting to

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[31] Daniel Kimmage, "Uzbekistan: Police Crush Protest in Tashkent", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, (2005), https://www.rferl.org/a/1058798.html.

[32] Nichol, "Central Asia's Security: Issues and Implications for U.S. Interests", pp.6.

thwart the United States' plans to maintain a long-term military presence in Central Asia, China and Russia sought ways to diminish the US influence in Central Asia.[33] Western criticism and demands for an independent investigation of the Andijan massacre in Uzbekistan in 2005 marked a turning point in US-Central Asia relations.

In July 2005 at the summit of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), an intercontinental political, economic, security and military alliance consisting of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan leaders expressed their disappointment at the demands of western countries for an independent investigation on the events in Uzbekistan. Former President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov said that "Foreign powers are imposing development models that destabilize Central Asia".[34] In fact, stating that Uzbekistan would have closer relations with both Russia and China after the events in Andijan in 2005. Karimov went to Shanghai to attend the SCO summit in June 2006 and approved a statement criticizing the US foreign policy.[35] After the Andijan massacre in 2005, Russia and Uzbekistan signed an alliance agreement and in 2006 Uzbekistan proved its rapprochement with Russia by joining the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)[36] under the leadership of Russia.[37] Uzbekistan had became a member of CSTO again in 2006, of which it was one of the founders, but left in 1999 to pursue more independent policies. It is

[33] Zhuldyz Kanapiyanova, "The Us And Russian Policy Toward Central Asia In The Framework Of The Geopolitical Theory", *Eurasian Research Journal*, 2(2), July 2020, pp. 59.

[34] Ezeli Azarkan, "The Relations between Central Asia States and United States, China and Russian within the Framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization", *Turkish Journal of International Relations,* 8(3), (Fall 2009), pp.7.

[35] Nichol, "Central Asia's Security: Issues and Implications for U.S. Interests", pp.19.

[36] The Collective Security Treaty Organization is an intergovernmental military alliance established in 1992 in Eurasia. The CSTO consists of states established after the Soviet Union.

[37] Kathleen Collins and William Wohlforth, "Central Asia: Defying 'Great Game' Expectations," in *Strategic Asia 2003-04: Fragility and Crisis*, ed. Richard Ellings and Michael Wills (Seattle, Washington: National Bureau of Asia Research, 2003), pp.304.

noteworthy that Uzbekistan started to develop close relations with Russia when relations with the US began to disrupt.

President Karimov perceived the unrest in Andijan as a warning that the Color Revolutions over Georgia (November 2003), Ukraine (December 2004), and Kyrgyzstan (March 2005) were about to spill over into Uzbekistan. Regional media claimed that one of the reasons for the overthrow of the regimes in these countries was the active presence of US-led NGOs that supported these activities with the discourse of promoting democracy.[38] Because of this belief, Karimov has closed more than 200 NGOs, most of them US-based, after Andijan events.

After the Andijan events, in 2005, the declining relations between the US and Uzbekistan were also reflected in the military field. Uzbekistan, terminated the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA)[39] that allowed the US military to use the Karshi-Khanabad Air Base, and reported that it gave the Pentagon 180 days to evacuate the base.[40] The loss of the airbase was a development that undermined the activities of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Sanctions were imposed on Uzbekistan by EU officials following the Andijan uprising, which hindered Western nations' so-called efforts to promote democracy in Central Asia. Although the US lost most of its power and influence in Uzbekistan during this period, the regional states still perceived the US as an important ally in

[38] Amina Afzal, "Security In The CIS: Implications Of The 'Colour Revolutions'", *Strategic Studies*, 25(3), (Autumn, 2005) pp. 112.

[39] SOFA is an agreement between a host country and a foreign nation that places military forces in that country. SOFAs are often signed along with other types of military agreements as part of a comprehensive security arrangement.

[40] John C.K. Daly, Kurt H. Meppen, Vladimir Socor & S. Frederick Starr, "Anatomy of A Crisis: U.S.-Uzbekistan Relations, 2001-2005", *Silk Road Paper, (2006),* pp.105.

helping to integrate into the world economy.[41] In this period, especially Western energy companies were preferred the foreign direct investments to develop the oil fields, which provide economic and political power to the region.

3.1.3. Narcotics Trafficking

Central Asia is one of the regions where the security effect of narcotics trafficking is most striking. Narcotics trafficking, a largely unknown problem in the early 1990s, became widespread in the region as time goes by. The rapid increase in drug trafficking in Central Asia in the early 2000s began to seriously affect the security of the region. Although radical Islamic movements and drug smuggling issues seem to be separate, there are factors that closely affect each other. In Uzbekistan, there are allegations that the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the main armed anti-state movement in the region, is influential in the narcotics trafficking through Central Asia. The oppressive regimes and narcotics trafficking fueled radical Islamic extremism. According to some analysts, raising living standards, allowing free expression of grievances and religious affiliations, and restricting the production and distribution of narcotics would undermine the foundations of Islamic terrorism in the region.[42]

The US, which also aims to eradicate narcotics trafficking in Central Asia with the claim of promoting democratization, took advantage of this situation to increase its influence in the country, even though the Uzbek government opposes a long-term American presence in the region. The Uzbek government was concerned that the United States, under the pretext of ensuring security, would become involved in internal conflicts between ethnic groups, dissidents, terrorists, and other groups in the

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[41] Frédérique Guérin, 'Tajikistan's International Positioning: Between Nationalism and Geopolitical Realism', *Journal of International and Strategic Studies*, European Centre for International and Strategic Studies, (Spring 2008), pp. 23.

[42] Richard Weisz, "Storm Clouds over Central Asia: Revival of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)? ", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism,* 27(6), (2004), pp. 519.

region. In addition, it was thought that a large US military presence in Central Asia would alarm Russia and China, and this would negatively affect relations with China and Russia.

There are also views that the long-term military presence of the United States will ensure peace, justice, and democracy in a region that has the potential to be an additional source of oil and natural gas for the world market, in addition to the fight against terrorism.[43]

Accordingly, the views are intensifying that military contact with the US will enable the Uzbek army to receive professional training and increase security in the region, especially in the region's energy resources, which will encourage economic development.[44] On the other hand, Uzbekistan, which had to deal with such problems after independence, tried to be as independent as possible, and prevent the growth of terrorism, narcotics trafficking, and other social concerns by itself, however it was difficult to escape the influence of other countries.

While the effect of narcotics trafficking, which hinders the functioning of the already weak governance in Uzbekistan, has increased rapidly, the social and economic security as well as the political stability of the country has been endangered. Politically and militarily, both national and regional security elements in the region have been severely affected by the collusion between ideologically violent non-state actors and narcotics trafficking.[45]

[43] Sönmez, "The Effects of Security Problems on the USA- Uzbekistan Relations", pp. 32.

[44] Weisz, "Storm Clouds over Central Asia: Revival of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)?", pp. 520-521.

[45] Svante Cornell, Narcotics, Radicalism and Security in Central Asia : The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, *Working Papers, 84, Dept. of East European Studies,* (2004), pp6.

3.1.4. Contested Water Access

After the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001 in the US, the counter-terrorism actions showed their effect in Central Asia. However, this was not enough to solve the security problems in the region. In addition to combating narcotic trafficking and Islamic extremism, one of the most important issue affecting security in Central Asia have been competition to manage water resources and develop and distribute energy resources.

When Central Asia is evaluated, the long-standing conflicts between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan over the sharing of important water resources and bilateral and multilateral trade and transit of gas resources draw attention. Besides, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have also competed for regional influence and also have conflicts over water sharing. Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan relations also deteriorated due to ethnic violence and discrimination, especially during and after the conflict between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Osh and Jalalabad in Southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010.[46] So, it is important to attract attention to the conflicts between the Central Asian countries.

The main sources of water for Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and some parts of Kazakhstan are the Amu Darya and Syr Darya Rivers flowing through Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The water resources in this region gained value, especially during the Soviet period, after the construction of dams, reservoirs and many irrigation channels in the region in order to maximize cotton production. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian states constantly clashed with each other over the operation and maintenance of these inherited facilities. Dreams of co-operation also fell through, for instance; since Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are poor in oil and gas but have abundant water resources, in 1998 they agreed with Uzbekistan to exchange oil

[46] S Reza Kazemi, "A Potential Afghan Spill-Over: How Real Are Central Asia Fears?", *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, (12 December 2012), https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/regional-relations/a-potential-afghan-spill-over-how-real-are-central-asian-fears/

and gas for water. However, the agreement could not be acted upon, partly because no oversight body was established.[47]

Persistently malfunctioning irrigation canals, and conflicts over who should operate them, dried up the Amu and Syr Darya Rivers, leaving less and less water to reach the Aral Sea, which borders Uzbekistan. The shrinkage of the Aral Sea has also increased environmental problems throughout the region. Therefore, the conflicts among the Central Asian countries resulted in the risk of drying up of natural beauty.

The Central Asian states are actually so intertwined and interconnected that the problem between two of them also affects other states as well. As an example of the lack of regional cooperation, Uzbekistan cut off electricity transmission from Turkmenistan to its territory in December 2008, causing an electricity crisis in Tajikistan. In late 2009, Uzbekistan accused Tajikistan of stealing electricity and withdrew from the Central Asia Unified Energy System. Tajikistan stated that the withdrawal was made to bring up regional agreements to exchange electricity with water and argued that the region would be badly affected by this attitude. Thus, Tajikistan's relations with Uzbekistan have been problematic, including disputes over water sharing, gas resources, borders, and environmental pollution. Uzbekistan's relations with Turkmenistan are also tense. Even Uzbekistan sentenced four citizens to 15-18 years in prison for spying on the Turkmen intelligence on water supply, border security, and other issues.[48]

In addition to all these conflicts, there have been promising developments on the subject in recent years. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, which have held bilateral summits since the early 2010s, signed a strategic partnership agreement on developing transportation, communication, economic, military-technical and cultural cooperation. In June 2013, former President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev and former

[47] Kai Wegerich, "Hydro-Hegemony in the Amu Darya Basin," *Water Policy*, 10(2), (2008), pp.73.

[48] Nichol, "Central Asia: Regional Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests", pp.18.

President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov called for cooperation in solving regional water-sharing problems.[49] Karimov underlined that the two countries have complementary natural resources and should not be regional economic rivals. Relations between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan also began to develop after Gurbanguly Berdimuhammedow came to power in Turkmenistan. In October 2012, President Karimov visited Turkmenistan and met with President Berdimuhamedow, where the two leaders discussed increasing trade and other cooperation issues.[50]

However, in 2016, disagreements flared up between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan over disputed territories. In March 2016, Uzbekistan deployed troops and military equipment, including armored vehicles and trucks, to the unmarked area on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border. The Kyrgyz side responded in a similar way and sent a diplomatic note to Tashkent. Until the Presidency of Shavkat Mirziyoyev in September 2016, the Orto Tokoi Kasan Sai reservoir issue had been a source of contention between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.[51]

Developments in relations gained momentum when Shavkat Mirziyoyev became president of Uzbekistan. After Mirziyoyev became President, he stated at the meeting of the United Nations "Water, peace and security issues are inextricably linked...There is no alternative to solving the water problem other than taking into account the interests of the countries and nations of the region equally"[52]. One of the focal points of the Uzbekistan's 2017-2021 Development Strategy is water problems. The strategy proposed comprehensive reforms in the agricultural sector, primarily by increasing

[49] Seilbek S. Asanov, Malik A. Augan, Yermek S. Chukubayev, "Kazakh-Uzbek Relations In The Context Of Regional Security", *UNISCI Journal*, No: 45 (October 2017), pp.276.

[50] James Nichol, "Turkmenistan: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests", *Congressional Research Service*, (December 2013), pp.13.

[51] Beishenbek Toktogulov, "The Failure of Settlement on Kyrgyz-Uzbek Border Issues: a Lack of Diplomacy?", *Bilge Strateji*, 10 (19), (Spring 2018), pp.87.

[52] Oybek Ochilovich Sirojov, "Interests Of Uzbekistan In The Cooperation Process In Central Asia", *Palarch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, 17(2), (2020), pp:9000.

productivity. In this context, the focus was on solving water-related problems in the region.

An agreement was signed with Kazakhstan in 2017 under the leadership of Mirziyoyev, who is familiar with water management issues as a graduate of the Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Agricultural Mechanization Engineers. Nazarbayev and Mirziyoyev signed another document. According to this document, while the parties have agreed on the common use of the reservoir, Uzbekistan undertakes obligations to finance the operation of the reservoir, which constitutes 92% of the total cost. All these developments show that both countries have made great progress by agreeing on issues related to a border dispute that has lasted two decades.[53]

A more recent example of increased cooperation is the speech delivered by Shavkat Mirziyoyev at the online meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council on May 27, 2022. In this meeting, it was stated that the railway construction between China, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan will start soon. In addition, a spokesman of the President of Kyrgyzstan pointed out the future cooperation between the Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and said that constructive relations have been developed on issues related to the two countries, including water issues. Shortly after the summit, on June 8, 2022, Kyrgyzstan announced the start of construction of a hydroelectric power plant. It was reported that Uzbekistan, which opposed such constructions in the past, also participated in the project.[54]

Under President Mirziyoyev, two major developments that will be effective in terms of relations with Tajikistan were announced in 2018. First, Uzbekistan stopped objecting to the construction of the energy project. The first hydroelectric unit was inaugurated in November 2018. Uzbekistan has decided to participate in the Tajik hydroelectric project, which is of mutual benefit to the two countries. With the

[53] Toktogulov, "The Failure of Settlement on Kyrgyz-Uzbek Border Issues: a Lack of Diplomacy?, pp.100.
[54] "How much progress has been made on Kyrgyz-Uzbek water cooperation?", Climate Diplomacy, July 2022, https://climate-diplomacy.org/magazine/cooperation/how-much-progress-has-been-made-kyrgyz-uzbek-water-cooperation

completion of the project, the 335-meter-high Rogun Dam will become the world's highest hydroelectric dam. Secondly, Tashkent announced that it will continue to supply natural gas to Tajikistan at lower rates than global prices.[55]

As a reflection of the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan partnership, the visit of the President of Turkmenistan, Serdar Berdimuhamedow, to the capital of Uzbekistan on 14-15 July 2022, at the invitation of Shavkat Mirziyoyev, can be cited as an example in terms of current developments. Berdimuhamedow's visit to Tashkent has resulted in a higher level of bilateral cooperation. Accordingly, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan aim projects that foresee environmental sustainability that will realize the rational and integrated use of water and energy resources that go beyond the border of Central Asia.

In this framework, permanent and constructive collaborations are formed between Tashkent and Ashgabat in the fields of ecology and water management. Since both countries have experience in unresolved disputes related to water management, the related officials of the countries keep the issue on the agenda by holding regular meetings. Therefore, it was decided to establish an Intergovernmental Commission on Water Management Issues. In this context, it is an important development that Berdimuhamedow and Mirziyoyev signed the Amu Darya Agreement, which will ensure the efficient use of water resources.[56]

According to the statement made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the signing of this document will serve as a new breakthrough in the

[55] Zaki Shaikh, "Uzbekistan, Tajikistan discuss water, Afghanistan at summit level meeting", *Anadolu Agency*, 14 June 2021, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/analysis-uzbekistan-tajikistan-discuss-water-afghanistan-at-summit-level-meeting/2273056

[56] Perizat Risbekkizi, "A New Level of Strategic Partnership: Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan Relations", *ANKASAM,* 23 July 2022, https://www.ankasam.org/a-new-level-of-strategic-partnership-uzbekistan-turkmenistan-relations/?lang=en,

joint use of transboundary water resources on a rational and fair basis, in the spirit of friendship and good neighborliness.[57]

3.2. Political Developments

Security problems critically affected the determination of Uzbekistan's domestic and foreign policies following its independence. In particular, the security of the political regime, the fight against fundamental dangers, and the prevention of the spread of civil wars in Uzbekistan have become the most important political priorities.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the newly independent Central Asian states, including Uzbekistan, sought ways to integrate with the world community while trying to establish their own national and regional security systems. After independence, Uzbekistan enacted the national constitution and established a national army. As an important aspect of this evolving national security policy, during the first years of independence, Uzbekistan has signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).[58] Therefore, while seeking ways to ensure regional and global security, Uzbekistan followed policies such as participating in international non-proliferation treaties, promoting the establishment of a nuclear-weapons-free zone in Central Asia; and maintain bilateral cooperation with the United States on non-proliferation.

Uzbekistan was also involved in more regional agreements such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which provides a multilateral framework for addressing Afghanistan and transnational issues. While determining the domestic and foreign policies of Uzbekistan, it should be noted that its goal has been to increase its

[57] Ibid.

[58] Kholisa Sodikova, "Uzbekistan's National Security Policy And Nonproliferation", *The Nonproliferation Review,* (1999), pp.144, http://cns.miis.edu/npr/pdfs/sodik62.pdf

potential as a strategic transportation corridor and workforce center and to decline the risks of security issues.

Uzbekistan's domestic and foreign policy decisions and the policy-making process are fluctuating and changing quickly. Factors such as the adoption of uncoordinated and contradictory foreign policies, the effects of domestic policy on foreign policy-making, the integration of domestic political factors and foreign policy-making have key importance in the international relations of post-Soviet Central Asia.[59] First of all, domestic policy decisions significantly influenced the way regional actors interpret and develop their relations with foreign powers. Afterwards, Uzbekistan's perceptions of regional security dynamics played a fundamental role both in determining its regional stances and its relations with the neighboring countries.[60] Finally, domestic political consolidation initiatives guided by regime propaganda emerged as an important element in foreign policy nation-building programs implemented in the country.

The most important external factor shaping the domestic politics of Uzbekistan has primarily been the internal dynamics of the Central Asia. Accordingly, the mutual relationship between domestic political evaluation and foreign policy in Uzbekistan will be examined in this section.

3.2.1. Foreign Policy and Defense

After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Uzbekistan was exposed to pressure in many areas. Observing this situation, President Karimov was aware of the fragility of the country. Therefore, he devoted himself above all to the preservation and strengthening of the sovereignty of the newly independent Uzbekistan.

[59] Stephen Blank, "Rethinking Central Asia And Its Security Issues", *UNISCI Discussion Papers,* No 28, (2012), pp.31.

[60] Stuart Horsman, "Uzbekistan's involvement in the Tajik civil war 1992–1997: domestic considerations", *Central Asia Survey,* 18 (1), (1999), pp. 38-39.

Karimov enacted a new constitution to protect the state against serious foreign and domestic challenges, established key ministries at home, embassies abroad, and sought to create an environment in which he could take his first cautious steps from a state-dominated economy. Uzbekistan, with its deep cultural and historical roots, is the most capable country in the region to use resources effectively to build its strong national identity.[61] Although Uzbekistan followed a pragmatic, and versatile approach in some periods, due to regional tribal tensions, Tashkent was sensitive to regime security. Therefore, Uzbekistan's foreign policy behavior has been shaped by an inconsistent policy of multilateralism, which has gone through a stream of cooperation and reorganization with various international powers to ensure it can remain politically strong.

Uzbekistan became committed to the "NATO Partnership for Peace" program on 13 July 1993. The newly independent Uzbek administration saw NATO as an important unity in ensuring peace and stability, regional and national security, and protecting national independence and sovereignty.[62] On the other hand, Uzbekistan was not involved in alliances that would prevent it from pursuing its own strategic route in the region and internationally. Accordingly, the government of Uzbekistan, the Central Asian country that was the best able to eradicate Russia's cultural heritage from the country, announced its refusal to be a part of the "Collective Security Treaty Organization" (CSTO) at the beginning of February 1999.

Russia seeks to strengthen its economic and military position in Central Asia through multilateral initiatives, including the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and the Collective Security Treaty Organization

[61] Alina Nomerovchenko, Jaechun Kim & William Kang, "Foreign Policy Orientation of Independent Central Asia States: Looking Through the Prism of Ideas and Identities", *The Korean Journal of International Studies*, 16(3), (2018), pp.390-391.

[62] Marina Pikulina, "Uzbekistan in the Mirror of Military Security: A Historical Preface to Current Events", *Conflict Studies Research Center*, K27, (November 1999), pp.11.

(CSTO). Over time, CSTO has positioned itself as the main peacekeeper capable of conducting peacekeeping operations in Central Asia.

Russia prefers to develop bilateral security cooperation, especially with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.[63] In this context, Tashkent signed strategic cooperation agreements with Moscow. Although Uzbekistan is no longer a member of the CSTO, it can be said that its bilateral relations with Russia affect the organization's decisions and actions.[64]

It is also necessary to mention the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the most important regional collective of Central Asia and primarily concerned with the management of affairs in Central Asia. [65] At the meeting of the organization in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, in July 2000, Uzbekistan was granted observer status. At this meeting, former President of China, Jiang Zemin, proposed to transform the "Shanghai Five" into a regular and institutionalized mechanism for multilateral cooperation. The "Shanghai Five" officially became the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on June 15, 2001, with the inclusion of Uzbekistan as a member of the group.[66]

The Uzbek regime began to regard the US as a reliable security partner after the events of September 11, following the security crises created by the potential attacks of the anti-Karimov Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The US listed the IMU as a terrorist organization linked to al-Qaeda following the attack on the World Trade Center. Uzbekistan was quick to offer the Americans the use of a former Soviet airbase just north of the Afghan border. In return, it received hundreds of millions of dollars in grants from 2001 to 2003, as well as a US-Uzbekistan "Strategic Partnership and

[63] Beishenbek Toktogulov, "Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy Under Mirziyoyev: Change Or Continuity*?", Eurasian Research Journal,* 4(1), (2022), pp.56.

[64] Sarwat Rauf & Adam Saud, "Prospects of CSTO and SCO in Regional Politics of Central Asia", *International Journal of Politics and Security (IJPS)* / 2(4), (July 2020), pp.38.

[65] Toktogulov, "Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy Under Mirziyoyev: Change Or Continuity*?",* pp.52.

[66] Ibid, pp.55.

Co-operation Framework Agreement" signed during President Karimov's 2002 visit to Washington.[67]

When the United States announced that it was pursuing the military option against the Taliban in Afghanistan after the September 11, 2001 attacks, the Central Asian countries, which had been plagued by religious revolts for years, took immediate action. To ensure the security of Central Asia as well, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan allowed the deployment of American troops at the Khanabad and Manas airbases. About 16.000 military personnel were deployed to Karshi-Khanabad Air Base (K2).[68] In March 12, 2002 the US-Uzbekistan joint declaration on the "Strategic Partnership and Co-operation Framework" was announced.[69] However, during the Andijan uprising in 2005, US soldiers were expelled from the country. Along with the economic and population size of the remaining Central Asian states, Uzbekistan had tended to balance relations with China and Russia by joining the SCO and withdrawing American aid and military presence from its territory.

The pro-American interim period only lasted a few years during Karimov's period. Until 2003, terrorist organizations' attacks on Uzbekistan had decreased. But when the US administration supported "Color Revolutions" in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, the undemocratic regime in Tashkent had a reason to worry. By 2004, the West's discomfort with Uzbekistan's poor human rights record became more pronounced. In early May 2005, Uzbekistan broke away from the pro-Western GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development[70], which was comprised

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[68]"Karshi Khanabad Air Base", *The Stronghold Freedom Foundation*, https://strongholdfreedomfoundation.org/k2-facts/

[69] Chienpeng Chung, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: China's Changing Influence in Central Asia*", The China Quarterly* / Vol. 180, (December 2004), pp.997.

[70] GUAM aimed to develop regional economic cooperation through the development of the Europe-Caucasus-Asia transport corridor. The group was called GUUAM before Uzbekistan officially announced its withdrawal from the organization in May 2005, shortly after the Andijan massacre.

Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Moldova. In the same month, the negative and repressive reactions of the West to the Andijan massacre, reduced the US influence in Uzbekistan.[71]

Russia has always benefited from transit fees for oil and gas from Central Asia and sold to Europe. LUKoil and Uzbekneftgas have joined forces to explore oil in Uzbekistan as well. In addition, Russian Gazprom was given permission to explore natural gas in possible areas in Uzbekistan. Gazprom has agreed to replace the deteriorated pipelines of Uzbekistan to Russia.[72]

In the following years, cooperation in the field of energy between the two countries gradually intensified. In fact, until 2009, President Karimov promised to send 16 billion meters of gas as a reserve. However, Uzbekistan did not want to be too dependent on Russian companies to develop its energy sector. In this context, agreements were signed with different countries. For example, an agreement was signed for the geological research of possible energy fields with a Japanese brand. India has also imported gas from Uzbekistan under an agreement after developing trade with the growing economy.[73]

In 1996, the first legal regulation ruling the foreign policy of Uzbekistan, "The Law on the Main Principles of Foreign Political Activities of the Republic of Uzbekistan" was accepted. This law included principles such as establishing mutually beneficial relations, being involved in international organizations, integrating into regional and international security structures, and giving priority to interstate entities that ensure

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71 Olga Oliker & David Shlapak, "U.S. Interests in Central Asia: Policy Priorities and Military Roles", RAND, Santa Monica, California, (2005), pp.30-31.

72 Nina Poussenkova, "The Global Expansion Of Russia's Energy Giants", *Journal of International Affairs*, 63(2), (Spring/Summer 2010), pp. 107.

73 Dina Rome Spechler & Martin C. Spechler, "The foreign policy of Uzbekistan: sources, objectives and outcomes: 1991–2009", *Central Asia Survey*, 29(2), (2010), pp. 165.

stability, sustainable development, and national security. Nevertheless, Tashkent did not fully implement its foreign policy within the scope of this law. Considering Uzbekistan's pragmatic foreign policy between Moscow and Washington, which changes direction from time to time, its relations with Turkey, its complex and tense relations with neighboring Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and its attitudes towards NATO, foreign policy had shifted from this law.[74] However, Tashkent's active participation in joint exercises with NATO in the second half of the 1990s and its closer cooperation with the US during the 9/11 alliance, cooperation with the SCO, cooperation with neighboring Central Asian countries were in line with the principles of the law.

In August 2012, this law was revised and the first comprehensive foreign policy law entitled "The Law on the Approval of the Concept of Foreign Policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan" was adopted. It emphasized that Uzbekistan would adopt a policy of neutrality in security relations in the future. In this sense, the non-bloc policy of Uzbekistan was underlined and it became difficult to establish foreign military bases in the country.[75] By leaving the CSTO, Tashkent emphasized its non-bloc policy and signaled that it had no plans to join any military alliance. In general, the document was a message to the international community and geopolitical rivals in Central Asia and response to various claims and speculations regarding Uzbekistan's foreign policy.

When relations between Uzbekistan and Turkey are examined, Turkey was the first country to recognize the independence of Uzbekistan on December 16, 1991. Diplomatic relations were established between the two countries on March 4, 1992. In order to form the legal basis of the relations, many bilateral agreements and protocols were signed between them, and many high-level mutual visits were made. However, tensions between the two states started to revive in 1994. During this period, Muhammed Salih, who was an opponent and rival of Karimov, took refuge in Turkey.

[74] Toktogulov, "Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy Under Mirziyoyev: Change Or Continuity*?",* pp.54.

[75] Jim Nichol, "Uzbekistan: Recent developments and US interests", *CRS Report for Congress*, (2012), https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/RS21238.pdf

The Uzbek government, made an official application to Turkey to extradite Salih to Uzbekistan, but when Turkey's response was negative, Islam Karimov withdrew its Ambassador in Ankara. Nevertheless, assurances were given that Salih would not be allowed to engage in any political activity in Turkey, so the return of the Ambassador of Uzbekistan was ensured. After Salih left Turkey in October 1994 and moved to Germany, relations between Turkey and Uzbekistan returned to their normal course.[76]

After Shavkat Mirziyoyev became president following Karimov's death in September 2016, some argued that Uzbekistan would become even closer to Russia because of the personal relationship between him and the Russian elite.[77] Uzbekistan, under Mirziyoyev's rule, adhered to the principles of not being a member of foreign military alliances, not having foreign military bases on its territory, and not deploying Uzbek troops in foreign countries, showing that the country continued to pursue its policy of military neutrality.

President Mirziyoyev focused on promoting "good neighborliness". If Mirziyoyev's foreign policy approach towards Uzbekistan's neighbors is evaluated, although most of the agreements are bilateral, there have also been important multilateral initiatives. For example, in 2018, a regional summit attended only by Central Asian leaders was held for the first time in ten years. A year later, a follow-up summit was held, hosted by Tashkent and attended by the leaders of five Central Asian countries. Although neither summit could be active on taking action on how to solve the long-standing problems of the region, these meetings began to be held annually.[78] Uzbekistan's accession to the Eurasian Economic Union as an observer in April 2020 also raised

[76] Aidarbek Amirbek, Almasbek Anuarbekuly & Kanat Makhanov, "Türk Dili Konuşan Ülkeler Entegrasyonu: Tarihsel Geçmişi ve Kurumsallaşması", *ANKASAM | Bölgesel Araştırmalar Dergisi,* 1(3), (December, 2017), pp. 175.

[77] Toktogulov, "Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy Under Mirziyoyev: Change Or Continuity*?",* pp: 51.

[78] Kristiina Silvan, "Uzbekistan's New Central Asia Policy The Economic Rationale And Political Implications Of Good Neighbourliness", *FIIA Workign Paper*, (November 2020), pp.9

possible future membership. While the country did not abandon its military neutrality policy, it gave signals that it could be a part of regional unity in economic terms.

Mirziyoyev has tried to improve its relations with Russia and China, he also tried to improve its cooperation with the US and the European Union. China and Russia are of particular importance as Uzbekistan's largest trading partners and sources of foreign direct investment.

Russia welcomed this regional opening policy of Mirziyoyev. In the field of security, Moscow has shared Tashkent's interests in avoiding destabilization in Afghanistan that could potentially spread in its direction.[79] For China, Uzbekistan is important in that it is a strong supporter of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Due to its strategic location, China can directly benefit from Uzbekistan's acts related to the BRI. The positive attitude of the people of Uzbekistan towards China contributed to the development of the government's relations with Beijing. Finally, from China's point of view, it is important to minimize disruptions in cross-border trade and improve existing relations between Central Asian states for deeper trade and infrastructure integration in the region. Both the US and the EU predicted that after the invasion of Afghanistan, its integration into the Central Asia would be easier. In this EU strategy for Central Asia, Uzbekistan is included in projects and programs in the fields of cross-border trade, education, and civil society.

During the Mirziyoyev period, steps were taken to re-establish Uzbekistan's relations with Turkey too. As can be seen from the concrete steps taken so far, Turkey has been one of the important foreign policy priorities for Uzbekistan. Mirziyoyev's visit to Ankara in October 2017 marked a turning point in Uzbek-Turkey relations as he became the first Uzbek leader to visit the Turkish capital since 1999. Recent developments such as Uzbekistan's resumption of visa-free transit for Turkish citizens and the decision to establish a the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council' to

[79] Stefan Hedlund, "Uzbekistan emerging from isolation," *GIS Report*, (15 February 2019), https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/uzbekistan-reforms/

intensify the reopening of cooperation and communication channels have resulted in an increase in the bilateral trade volume in Uzbek-Turkish relations.[80] Uzbekistan's full membership to the Turkic Council in October 2019 has been a powerful step for Uzbekistan to re-establish and build close relations with Turkey and other member states.

Uzbekistan under Mirziyoyev's leadership has improved its relations with international institutions. After his presidency, Uzbekistan implemented the priority areas specified in 'The Development Strategy for 2017-2021'. In 2017, Uzbekistan and the EU renewed the EU-Uzbekistan Memorandum of Understanding on energy cooperation, held the first EU-Uzbekistan Cooperation Council meeting within the Uzbek government, and Uzbekistan confirmed the Textile Protocol with the EU. In short, while Tashkent strives to maintain its non-bloc policy, it aims at comprehensive pragmatic cooperation in order to stay at an equal distance from the great powers.

Both the Karimov and Mirziyoyev administrations established extensive relations with the United States while operating their policies. Expanding trade, investment and technology transfer; security assistance, including defense training, military equipment and support for counter-terrorism; diplomatic confirmation and recognition of Uzbekistan's domestic achievements and international interests were among the objectives determining the Uzbek foreign policy. And balancing other foreign powers to get all of this done, the United States was seen as an important ally. When the problems in Afghanistan after independence added to the internal security issues in Central Asia, the need for development in defense issues led the country to foreign aid.

After the independence, the pressure on religious organizations in the Uzbek government increased. Terrorist groups were organizing in Afghanistan, and creating internal turmoil there.[81] Echoes of these turmoils were carried over to Central Asia as well. When the US invaded Afghanistan after 9/11, it was time for Central Asia to take

[80] Toktogulov, "Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy Under Mirziyoyev: Change Or Continuity*",* pp.62.

[81] Shireen Hunter, "Religion, Politics, and Security in Central Asia". *SAIS Review,* 21(2), (2001), pp. 71-72.

a deep breath. By giving certain military bases to the United States, they prevented security threats from Afghanistan. However, as of 2021, after the US withdrew its troops from Afghanistan, the Taliban, which is considered a terrorist organization, gained power and overthrew the government, and security threats for Central Asia revived again.

3.2.2. Dynamics of the Region

Uzbekistan is perhaps the most important Central Asian country in terms of ensuring regional stability. It is the country with the largest population among the five Central Asian countries and also has different ethnic identities within its borders, many of them live in neighboring countries. This raises the possibility that any internal instability will cross national borders.

Uzbekistan has become a focus of regional economic and political integration efforts as it has borders with other four Central Asian countries. This became a factor affecting the country's domestic and foreign policy decisions. In fact, as the administration of Mirziyovev openly stated, "The main priority of Uzbekistan in foreign policy is Central Asia".[82] This shows that the decisions taken by the country are at a level that will affect the entire region.

Under Uzbekistan's former President Islam Karimov, Uzbekistan's ties with major multinational institutions operating in Eurasia were restricted. The government had limited its participation in Russian-led initiatives such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), for fear that these projects would undermine Uzbekistan's autonomy. Mirziyoyev's government, by contrast, focused on implementing major reforms at the domestic level and improving bilateral relations with key partners in Central Asia. [83]

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[82] "Послание Президента Республики Узбекистан Шавката Мирзиёева Олий Мажлису*," Press Service of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan*, 22 December 2017, http://president.uz/ru/lists/view/1371

[83] Toktogulov, "Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy Under Mirziyoyev: Change Or Continuity*?"*, pp.56.

The Mirziyoyev administration significantly softened the harsh discourse on regional water sharing, and suggested joint development of Eurasian hydroelectric resources. Regional threats gained power due to the strengthening of terrorist groups and the potential for citizens fighting in the Middle East to come to Central Asia. Uzbek authorities have sought to strengthen national and regional defenses against terrorism through multilateral cooperation, as well as reducing the appeal of militant Islam. In addition to reducing human and drug trafficking through its territory, the Uzbek government has also pledged to end forced child labor, which is a common problem in the region and to improve low levels of human rights.[84] Uzbekistan has launched various local and regional initiatives toward these goals. In addition, positive steps were taken during this period, both in the economic and security sphere, thanks to greater participation in supporting Uzbek-Afghan relations. Various bilateral projects, and multilateral frameworks such as those supported by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the European Union (EU) activated.

Interconnectedness of regional economic and safety nets; the importance of water, energy and other transnational issues; and the need to complete the definition of national borders arbitrarily redrawn by the Soviet authorities became the mainstay of the country's political decisions. For instance, during most of Shavkat Mirziyoyev's trips abroad in 2017, he went to Central Asian countries to make holding regular meetings with Eurasian actors a habit and to overcome the past divisions between Uzbekistan and its neighbors.The importance that Uzbekistan attaches to Central Asian politics and its relations with the countries of the region greatly improved during the Mirziyoyev period. As an indication of this, Uzbekistan promoted the "Consultative Meeting of Heads of Central Asian States" initiative in 2017. In this way, Uzbekistan pioneered the institutionalization of regional meetings of Central Asian leaders. The importance that Uzbekistan attaches to Central Asian politics and its relations with the countries of the region greatly improved during the Mirziyoyev

[84] Ibid, pp.58.

period. As an indication of this, Uzbekistan promoted the Central Asian States Presidents Consultative Meeting initiative in 2017. Uzbekistan pioneered the institutionalization of regional meetings of Central Asian leaders. The presidents of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan regularly attend the summits held in this context every year. The first summit was in Tashkent in March 2018. Subsequent summits took place in Tashkent in November 2019, in Avaza in August 2021, and in Cholpon-Ata in July 2022.[85]

Uzbekistan also encouraged regional meetings at lower levels. For instance, the governor of Fergana Province invited the governor of Tajikistan's Sughd Province and the governor of Kyrgyzstan's Batken Province to the city of Fergana in April 2021. The parties committed to commercial and cultural development among the three provinces.[86]

In addition to promoting regional cooperation, Mirziyoyev also put his bilateral relations with the countries of the region into a recovery process. He visited Tajikistan in March 2018 and signed an agreement to conclude a border agreement and establish a 30-day visa-free regime between the two countries. After this meeting, air, road and rail traffic between the two states were also secured.[87] As of August 2018, the two countries began conducting military exercises. They are also conducting counter-terrorism exercises, which have become much more critical after the spread of instability in Afghanistan to Central Asia became a clear possibility.[88]

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[85] Fatma Aslı Kelkitli, "Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy Under The Leadership Of Mirziyoyev: Struggle To Sustain Autonomy" *MUTAD*, 9 (1), (May, 2022) pp:35.

[86] Bruce Pannier, "Uzbek, Tajik, and Kyrgyz Governors Hold Landmark Forum in Ferghana Valley", *RFERL*, 27 April 2021, https://www.rferl.org/a/ferghana-valley-talks-uzbekistan-kyrgyzstan-tajikistan/31226060.html

[87] Adam Saud, "Changing Dynamics of Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy under Shavkat Mirziyoyev: Prospects for Central Asian Regional Economic Integration", *Central Asia Journal*, 82(1), (2018), pp. 17.

[88] Kelkitli, "Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy Under The Leadership Of Mirziyoyev: Struggle To Sustain Autonomy", pp.36.

Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan launched an important transportation project in June 2020 under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Accordingly, when this China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan road-railway link is completed, it will become one of the shortest routes between China and Western Europe. After this, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan will be positioned as important transit countries for Chinese exports.[89]

Mirziyoyev made his first visit to Turkmenistan in March 2017. After this meeting, Turkmenistan started to export electricity to Tajikistan via Uzbekistan. In August 2021, a leap was made in regulating mutual air and road traffic. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan opened the high-speed rail link. The two countries finalized the technical details of the Silk Visa in May 2021. Accordingly, citizens of two countries will be able to visit the other one without a visa.[90]

Ensuring peace and stability in Central Asia is important for Uzbekistan both in terms of security and economy. After Mirziyoyev came to power, Uzbekistan gave special importance to the development of commercial ties with its Central Asian neighbors. In 2020, the trade volume between Uzbekistan and the Central Asian Republics has doubled and reached approximately five billion US dollars. Similarly, from 2016 to January 2021, the number of joint ventures with Central Asian states in Uzbekistan increased from 312 to 1,451.[91]

3.3. Economic Developments

Incidents like illegal immigration, illegal arms trade, and goods smuggling, which are transboundary not only undermine domestic stability but also adversely affect

[89] Yunis Sharifli, "China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway: Opportunities and Challenges for China", *The Diplomat*, 15 July 2022 https://thediplomat.com/2022/07/china-kyrgyzstan-uzbekistan-railway-opportunities-and-challenges-for-china/, Accessed: 12 September 2022.

[90] Saud, "Changing Dynamics of Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy under Shavkat Mirziyoyev: Prospects for Central Asian Regional Economic Integration", pp.15.

[91] Kelkitli, "Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy Under The Leadership Of Mirziyoyev: Struggle To Sustain Autonomy", pp: 36-37.

economies. Therefore, Central Asian countries need to strengthen their law enforcement and security capabilities and continue active international cooperation in order to eliminate the serious unconventional threats posed by transnational organized crime in Central Asia.

After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Uzbekistan was subjected to various pressures. Observing this situation, President Karimov, considering the fragility of the country, tried to protect and strengthen the sovereignty of Uzbekistan, which had just gained its independence. In this context, the policies to be focused on economy were also very valuable.

In the early years of independence, international financial institutions and western governments pressured Uzbekistan for the rapid privatization of state assets and "shock therapy"[92] to join the market economy. Others argued that Uzbekistan should be under Moscow's umbrella, suggesting that it should maintain or re-establish old economic ties with Russia.[93] This recommendation was designed upon Russia's adoption of the former Soviet Union and Uzbekistan's inclusion in military and economic alliances that Russia insisted on.

According to the World Bank's indicators, all five Central Asian states suffered from bad governance after the independence. Corruption and the lack of rule of law, which has been deep-rooted problems since independence, pose major obstacles to economic growth. Without a transparent judicial system, there is no credible mechanism to protect private property from the state or major figures in governance structures. The absence of a fundamental rule of law has implications for investment, economic

[92] Shock therapy is a theory that sudden, dramatic changes in national economic policy can transform a state-controlled economy into a free market economy.

[93] S. Frederick Starr, Svante E. Cornell, "Change and Continuity in Uzbekistan, 1991-2016", Lanham, *Maryland : Rowman & Littlefield*, (2018), pp.21.

growth, exports of natural gas and other natural resources retards the development of industries.[94]

Compared to other countries in the region, Uzbekistan adopted a more cautious approach to economic reform and generally preserved the economic and financial environment inherited from the Soviet Union, rather than completely re-establishing the economic structure. President Islam Karimov, in his publication 'Uzbekistan, The Road to Independence and Progress' in 1992, openly criticized the free-market-oriented policies adopted by the neighbors and said that such policies were not suitable for Uzbekistan. Accordingly, Uzbekistan adopted the policy of "don't demolish the old house until you build a new one".[95]

Uzbekistan has been a member of several international organizations, including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Asian Development Bank, but demands of the IMF to reduce the government's control over the economy in the area of foreign trade, foreign exchange market and financial systems, was repulsed by Tashkent. For this reason, it had been criticized by international organizations and western analysts that Tashkent maintains tight control over the economy and fails to implement market economy reforms. However, Uzbekistan's economy has not progressed badly, although it has closed itself to foreign influences to some extent. According to the IMF, the success of Uzbekistan's transition period can be attributed to the country's relatively low initial degree of industrialization, domestic cotton production, and the country's self-sufficiency in production.[96]

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[94] Rumer, Sokolsky & Stronski, "U.S. Policy Toward Central Asia 3.0", pp.8

[95] Islam Karimov, "The global financial-economic Crisis; Ways and Measures to overcome it in the Conditions of Uzbekistan", *International Conference,* (2009).

[96] Jeromin Zettelmeyer, "The Uzbek growth puzzle", *IMF Working Paper*, (1998).

During the Karimov era, the borders of Uzbekistan, which were controlled for security reasons, were also tightly controlled to protect import-competing industries. It brought with it the obstacles that producers of export-oriented goods would face. For example, it was difficult to procure quality products from abroad, and although exportable products were produced, foreign exchange controls limited the exporter's legal income.

President Mirziyoyev inherited a relatively stable economic system after serving as Prime Minister of Uzbekistan from 2003 until the death of President Karimov. After Mirziyoyev's election as president, many reform policies were implemented. The most valuable among these was the currency reform implemented in September 2017. The state of the Uzbek economy at the end of 2016 presented an opportunity for the new leader Shavkat Mirziyoyev to launch a new wave of reforms from a position of power and security. In February 2017, Uzbekistan presented a comprehensive reform manifesto. Accordingly, the 2017-2021 National Development Strategy was determined. The strategy concentrated on five priority areas. These are public administration reform; judicial reform and strengthening of the rule of law; economic development and liberalization; social area; and security and foreign policy.[97]

Accordingly Mirziyoyev's government sought to expand national exports, attract international investment, import free market mechanisms, and make the national economy more competitive. It devalued the national currency (soum), switched to a floating exchange rate, and for the first time after independence, Uzbek citizens were allowed to buy foreign currency.[98] The government also eliminated the official export monopoly of Uzagroexport - a foreign trade company specializing in the export of

[97] "Uzbekistan's Development Strategy for 2017-2021 has been adopted following public consultation," *Tashkent Times*, February 8, 2017, Retrieved from: http://tashkenttimes.uz/national/541-uzbekistan-s-development-strategy-for-2017-2021-has-been-adopted-following-discussion, Accessed: 20 April 2022.

[98] Richard Weitz, "Uzbekistan's New Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity under New Leadership", *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program,* (2018), pp.25.

fresh and processed fruit and vegetable products - and allowed farmers to sell the food products themselves.[99]

Tourism, high-tech and scientific-technological education, and research projects are also included in the agenda of shaping the dimensions of the government's domestic economy policy. In addition, new technologies are sought to increase the use of renewable energy sources, strengthen the resilience of the national energy grid against natural and terror threats, increase efficiency and reduce wasted energy, and limit greenhouse gas emissions. All these reforms have been developments that contributed to the increase in the trade in Uzbekistan.[100]

The mentioned recent government reforms have increased Uzbekistan's international competitiveness, encouraged entrepreneurship, and increased foreign investment. In particular, initiatives such as loosening foreign exchange regulations and participation in regional trade fairs have contributed to Uzbekistan's increased trade with its Central Asian neighbors. Foreign economic ties of Uzbekistan, which affect its domestic economic policies, also include the South Caucasus, the United States, Europe, and South, and East Asia.

3.4. Democratization

The form of government can be an indicator of security-related problems. In the first year of the post-Soviet period, Uzbekistan encountered the restrictions and harsh policies of Islam Karimov on the institutionalization of the secular state. In particular, the rise of radical Islam in the region has been influential in the reshaping of the Karimov's regime policies. While dealing with the identity and state-building process after gaining its independence, Uzbekistan was caught unprepared for the increasing

[99] Kenneth Rapoza, "Eurasia's Latest Economic Reboot Can Be Found in Uzbekistan," *Forbes,* 14 September 2017, https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2017/09/14/eurasias-new-perestroika-uzbekistan-silk-road-china/#48278aa6f25c

[100] Toktogulov, "Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy Under Mirziyoyev: Change Or Continuity?", pp.58.

political Islam. In this process, the pressure and restrictions applied by the Karimov regime prevented the formation of a democratic state.

The lack of institutionalized political opposition in Uzbekistan, the formation of informal organizations such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Hizb ut-Tahrir as a representative form of political society, and conflicts with neighbors over the exploitation of natural resources have been some factors that prevented the state from advancing on a democratic line.[101] The Human Rights Association of Uzbekistan and the Independent Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan were registered by the Uzbek government prior to Karimov's visit to the US in 2002. The development of political society in Uzbekistan was severely restricted by the regime after the outbreak of the post-Soviet revolutions and the Andijan events. President Karimov saw the Rose Revolution in Georgia in November 2003 as a major threat to his regime. At that time, Human Rights Watch and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) were allowed to stay in the country with some restrictions.[102] In addition, the threat perception of the Uzbek regime toward the developing Western-supported NGO culture caused the foreign and security policy preferences of Uzbekistan to change. As mentioned before, after the Andijan events, Karimov broke the military alliance and strategic partnership with the United States.

When Mirziyoyev succeeded Karimov, who passed away on September 2, 2016, he quickly promoted the development of greater openness, inclusiveness, and accountability in society on behalf of public officials, themes that would form the core of the Strategy for Action and Reform Program. Mirziyoyev also made promises to reform the relationship between elected officials and voters and to build civic participation through government and education reforms in general.

[101] Daniel Stevens, 'Political Society and Civil Society in Uzbekistan- Never the Twain Shall Meet?', *Central Asia Survey*, 26(1), (2007), pp. 53.

[102] Nick Megoran, 'Framing Andijan narrating the nation: Islam Karimov's account of the events of 13 May 2005, *Central Asia Survey*, 27(1), (August 2008), pp. 15.

On February 7, 2017, Mirziyoyev approved a major program called "Action Strategy on the Five Priority Areas of Development of the Country for 2017-2021". Accordingly, priority was give to improving the state and public construction system; ensuring the rule of law and further reforming the judicial system; economic development and liberalization; the development of the social sphere; promoting security, interethnic harmon, and religious tolerance; and establishing a balanced, mutually beneficial and constructive foreign policy.

The aim of the Action Strategy has been mentioned as making the government an active and responsible guardian of the public interest. Among the topics covered by the Action Strategy "ensuring the real independence of the judiciary, increasing the authority of the courts, and democratizing and improving the judicial system" were one of the important ones. One of the other issues addressed by the Action Strategy was economic development and liberalization. This was clearly a point which any improvement or failure would directly and tangibly affect the public at large.[103] In short, Mirziyoyev committed in his Action Strategy to "reduce the presence of the state in the economy, strengthen the protection of rights and the priority role of private property, and promote the development of small businesses".

The Action Strategy announced that it aims to advance democratic reforms and the development of an independent civil society. Education of young people was one of the key points of the strategy. Mirziyoyev sees this as necessary in order to resist the lure of foreign powers and to reduce the migration of job-seeker youth. Finally, the Action Strategy called for prioritization in the area of security, religious tolerance, and inter-ethnic harmony. Strengthening the independence and sovereignty of the state, further strengthening the country's place and role as a full subject of international relations, joining the ranks of developed democratic states and creating a security,

[103] Anthony Bowyer, "Political Reform in Uzbekistan: Elections, Political Parties & Civil Society*", Silk Road Paper*, (2018), pp.24.

stability, and security belt, and establishing good neighborly relations around Uzbekistan were also prioritized in this strategy document.[104]

When the case of Uzbekistan in 2021 is evaluated after this strategy, a situation emerges where there were some setbacks as well as progress in a number of issues. As an example of positive developments in terms of democracy, Uzbekistan's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities can be given. But in some areas it lags behind real rhetoric. For instance, the NGO Law and Penal Code promised under the strategy have not yet been published and their first drafts are not fully in line with international standards.[105] A new Religious Freedom Act was passed in July; however, it does not address many of the OSCE and Venice Commission recommendations.[106] Mirziyoyev, who was re-elected president in October 24, 2021, promised to strengthen NGOs in his inauguration speech again, but registration for independent NGOs is still difficult. As a result, there is a conflict between the legal framework and official statements regarding human rights and democracy and the reality on the ground.

[104] Ibid.

[105]"Eu Annual Report On Human Rights And Democracy In The World 2021 Country Updates", (19 April 2022), pp.68, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/EN_149.pdf

[106] "USCIRF Concerned by New Uzbekistan Religion Law", *USCIRF*, July 16,2021, https://www.uscirf.gov/countries/uzbekistan/uscirf-concerned-new-uzbekistan-religion-law

CHAPTER 4

UNITED STATES-UZBEKISTAN BILATERAL RELATIONS (1991-2007)

Geopolitical changes and internal dynamics have begun to develop relations with two great powers, Russia and China, at a time when the US presence in the Central Asia became less hospitable to the promotion of democracy. It seems that US interests in Central Asia can be in danger in the new conjuncture. But this has not always been the case since independence. Although the US did not prioritize its Central Asia policy after the dissolution of the USSR, Central Asia became an important ally after the September 11 attacks.

In the 1990s, the US started a military engagement with Central Asia with the rhetoric of supporting the integration of the region with western political-military institutions and helping these states protect their sovereignty and independence, and improving their border security against transnational threats. The US, operates with the aim of adopting the reform and democratization steps focused on the market economy, provides access to energy resources in the region. US military cooperation expanded rapidly with the Central Asian states, immediately after 9/11. While Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan were the states that played an important role in Operation Enduring Freedom, the US established a base in Uzbekistan for the first time in response to the changing security environment. Although different objectives have been shown, mainly the fight against terrorism has become the focal point of US policy in the region.

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States signed the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and other security agreements with several Central Asian states to use their airspace for the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Uzbekistan made a number of requests during the SOFA negotiations, including US

security and assistance and a focus on humanitarian and search-and-rescue missions rather than airstrikes or air refueling.

In the early years of independence, Uzbekistan had a geopolitical orientation towards the West. The United States helped this state to establish its sovereignty after independence. The US has fulfilled its promise of partnership on various issues at this critical stage. However, in the course of time, Uzbekistan found itself in the middle of a major geopolitical change, as it reduced its ties with the Euro-Atlantic community and approached China and Russia. Beijing and Moscow are now emerging as the region's main candidates for economic, political and security partners due to the increasing regional economic power of China under the Belt and Road project and the residual presence of Russia.

4.1. The Interests of the United States

The US did not focus on developing any policy in Uzbekistan after Central Asian countries gained their independence. In the 1990s, after the collapse of the USSR, US policy towards the Central Asia region was focused on regional initiatives rather than identifying the specific needs of individual countries. During the statement of then Deputy Foreign Minister Strobe Talbott on the US policy in the region in 1997, Uzbekistan was not even mentioned. Before September 11, the Uzbek government tried to divert Washington's attention to terrorism, but there was no response. After September 11, when the US government focused on its counter-terrorism mission, Uzbekistan finally got the security support it needed.[107]

After September 11, the US tried to increase its effectiveness in Central Asia with objectives such as the destruction of weapons from the USSR era, the establishment of a nuclear-free zone in Central Asia, and the prevention of domination by any foreign power or group of powers.

[107] Elizabeth Wishnick, "Growing U.S. Security Interests In Central Asia", *Army War Coll Strategic Studies Inst Carlisle Barracks Pa*, pp: 3.

Preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction has been the biggest concern of the US in Central Asia. Indeed, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, especially Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan hosted the largest remnants of the Soviet nuclear arsenal and associated nuclear infrastructure. The United States envisaged taking measures to improve the physical security of these facilities and strengthen border controls. It was important for the US to ensure that Central Asia did not become a haven for radical Islamist militants. Since 2000, several terrorist groups of Central Asia origin have been operating in Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan, which are of interest to the United States.[108]

One of the other United States' interests in Central Asia is to build a market for energy, linked to Afghanistan, South Asia, Europe and East Asia. To date, US efforts have focused on a plan to build a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan, Pakistan and India (TAPI). [109] The P5+1 nuclear deal with Iran could change the energy dynamics of the region, and as a result, pipeline projects and energy links between Central and South Asia could be revived. Beyond extracting and exporting hydrocarbons and other natural resources, expanded regional economic cooperation and diversification are capable of serving US interests.

The TAPI project is in line with the US's desire to be active in the region due to the energy exported from Central Asia. In this context, TAPI has strategic importance for the US to maintain its military presence in Central Asia. The inauguration ceremony of the TAPI project was held in Turkmenistan in December 2015 and was scheduled to be put into service immediately. However, continued instability in Afghanistan is affecting the construction of the pipeline. Another obstacle to the project stems from the tension between Pakistan and India. Despite this, regional leaders announced in February 2018 that the Afghan part of the TAPI project would start immediately. In

[108] Rumer, Sokolsky & Stronski, "U.S. Policy Toward Central Asia 3.0", pp.18.

[109] Kanapiyanova, "The Us And Russian Policy Toward Central Asia In The Framework Of The Geopolitical Theory", pp: 63.

addition to Pakistan and Afghanistan, the US plays an important role in the implementation of this project. With the TAPI Project, the US wishes to take a step towards the enforcement of a joint Central Asia energy network or the Greater Central Asia Project involving Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.[110]

Although the US has tried to be active in Central Asia to promote democracy and respect for human rights, it has not yet produced sustainable and meaningful results in most of the region. Uzbekistan did not respond to these efforts, suspecting that the US was trying to create another Color Revolution behind the efforts of promote democracy and human rights. Strict restrictions on independent media, civil society, and local and international non-governmental organizations leave little room for US activities to advance democracy and defend human rights.

Currently, US military intervention in Central Asia can only be justified if there is a direct threat to the US homeland or US facilities in the region. China and Russia have much greater interests in the region and nearby assets than the United States and are therefore at the forefront of taking responsibility for security matters to Central Asian Republics.[111]

Past experience has shown that pressure alone does not affect reforms. Instead, governments need to understand that change will be in their own interest and that delaying reform will not benefit them.The assistance needed for this may come from both individual nation-states and international donor organizations, but if aid plans are not well planned and coordinated, and the sanctions are not credible or rational, they will not be effective. Rather than aid provided to corrupt political systems and economic structures, the security needs of these countries needed to be addressed.

[110] Ibid, pp.64.

[111] Bobo Lo, "China and Russia: Common Interests, Contrasting Perceptions", *Insight Turkey,* 9(2), (2007), pp. 149.

Only in this way the United States can take remarkable steps on issues of interest in the region.

4.2. The Interests of Uzbekistan

Even though Tashkent's efforts to approach Washington were unrequited in the 1990s, Uzbekistan-US relations had an important opportunity to develop under the conditions that emerged after 9/11. Developing relations with Washington provided many advantages to Uzbekistan. "The Declaration on Strategic Partnership" signed between the US and Uzbekistan in March 2002 has been the culmination of the relations that the Uzbeks have been trying to establish with the United States for years.

First of all, the activities of the IMU, which had become the most important threat in Uzbekistan, could be restricted in cooperation with United States.[112] Although nearly ten years have passed since the independence, Russia's influence in Central Asia was pushing the borders of the sovereignty of the countries in the region. For Uzbekistan, the United States has strategic influence to counterbalance Russian influence. In addition, the US and financial institutions supported by the US have the power to help the Uzbek economy. The IMU threat to Uzbekistan has been reduced by the action and presence of the United States. At the same time, Uzbekistan, which sees itself as a regional power, wanted to get the chance to become US's anchor state in Central Asia.[113]

From the perspective of Uzbekistan, the events that developed after September 11 were seen as an investment area in the Uzbek economy, especially in the oil and natural gas sectors, beyond military cooperation. In addition, during the overthrow of the Taliban,

[112] Nermin Güler, "11 Eylül Sonrası ABD ve Rusya Arasında Özbekistan", Avrasya Dosyası: Özbekistan Özel, *ASAM*, 7(3), (Autumn 2001), pp. 194.

[113] Shahram Akbarzadeh,"U.S.–Uzbek partnership and democratic reforms", *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity,* 32(2), (2004), p.277

Tashkent's influence on Afghanistan could increase and Uzbekistan's southern borders could be secured.

Seeing the events of September 11 as an opportunity to improve relations with the United States, Karimov, in his speech the day after the attacks, declared that Uzbekistan was "ready to cooperate with the United States in the war against terrorism".[114]

In the following process, during the visit of US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to Tashkent in 2004, an agreement was signed between the two countries, which envisages bilateral cooperation against terrorism. Later, in a joint statement, it was announced that Uzbekistan allowed its airspace and one of its airports to be used by the United States for humanitarian operations. Thus, NATO and the US obtained important rights in the Karshi-Khanabad Base, which is located in the southeast of Uzbekistan, close to the Afghan border, and has strategic importance for operations.[115] The use of Uzbek airspace allowed deployment of 15.777 US soldiers.[116] Thus, the US gained an important base in one of the republics of the former Soviet Union. This base has become the United States' largest base in the region which later became a tool for balance forces with Russia. Combating terrorism together with the US and developing new relations for the establishment of regional stability and security were important targets for Uzbekistan.

According to the last clause of the agreement: "This agreement contains the urgent need to consult on appropriate steps to address the situation in case of a direct threat

[114] İrfan Ülkü, "Moskova'yla İslam Arasında Orta Asya", *Kum Saati Yayınları,* (2002), p. 14.

[115] Nichol, "Uzbekistan's Closure of the Airbase at Karshi-Khanabad: Context and Issues*,* CRS-4.

[116]Karshi Khanabad Air Base", *The Stronghold Freedom Foundation*, https://strongholdfreedomfoundation.org/k2-facts/

to the security or territorial integrity of the Republic of Uzbekistan".[117] Therefore, although it did not constitute a real security guarantee, the US would at least consult with Tashkent when there was a threat to the security and territorial integrity of Uzbekistan. This was a commitment the United States had never made to any former Soviet Republic. It was important for Uzbekistan in this respect.

Former US General Richard Bowman Myers stated that they aim to develop joint exercises and training programs with the Uzbek armed forces. Thus, the ability of the armed forces of the two countries to act jointly would increase.[118] In the ongoing process, a bilateral working group in "technical and military" fields was formed by the senior military officials of the two countries.

4.3. Relations After Independence

In the first period from the collapse of the Soviet Union to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the US was pushing the geopolitical approach to Central Asia into the background, and focused solely on controlling the legacy of the Soviet weapons of mass destruction; helping Central Asian countries defend their newly sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity against the potential resurgence of Russian neo-imperialism; and promised to break Russia's monopoly on Central Asia's oil and gas pipelines and transit routes, however, relations have remained superficial. The authoritarian structure of the Uzbek government has prevented Uzbekistan from developing relations with Western European states. The US, which has the potential to balance Russia, has become the only state that can be an ally of Uzbekistan.

[117] Mohammad-Reza Djalili & Thierry Kellner, "Yeni Orta Asya Jeopolitiği, SSCB'nin Bitiminden 11 Eylül Sonrasına", Translated in to Turkish by Reşat Uzmen, *Bilge Kültür Sanat Yayınları*, (2009), pp. 358.

[118] Sönmez "The Effects of Security Problems on the USA- Uzbekistan Relations" pp. 37.

During this period, the US's strategy towards the region developed as follows[119]:

- Supporting the independence, sovereignty, and security of Central Asian states
- Helping to establish a free-market economy and democratic system
- Integrating Central Asianunt states with the world community and promoting them
- Participation in the Euro-Atlantic security dialogue and joint programs within this framework
- Increasing the role and scope of the US Commercial interests, and have an influence on the use of regional energy reserves

Diplomatic relations between the US and Uzbekistan were built with the visit of the then US Secretary of State James Baker to Uzbekistan in February 1992. During this meeting, issues such as democratization, human rights, and the emergence of free markets were emphasized.[120]

During the Presidency of Bill Clinton, the US government implemented a series of economic aid programs for the countries of the region in 1992. With the "Freedom Support Act" adopted in April, economic assistance was provided to Central Asian countries in areas such as energy activity and market reform, environmental policies and technologies, and private sector entrepreneurship. Some steps were taken in this process on the Uzbekistan side too. It was the first Central Asian state that participated in international non-proliferation treaties such as the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBC). It also joined the International Atomic Energy Agency in September 1992. The Karimov administration

[119] Rumer, Sokolsky & Stronski, "U.S. Policy Toward Central Asia 3.0", pp:17-22.

[120] Fırat Purtaş, Rusya Federasyonu Ekseninde Bağımsız Devletler Topluluğu, Platin Yayınları, (2005), p.138.

encouraged the establishment of a nuclear-weapons-free zone in Central Asia and continued bilateral cooperation with the United States on non-proliferation.[121]

The trade relations of the two countries were regulated by the bilateral trade agreement that entered into force in January 1994. This agreement also facilitated the expansion of the most preferred nation trade status between the United States and Uzbekistan. During this period, the two countries also cooperated in the military field.[122] Uzbekistan has joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Partnership for Peace (PFP) program. Under this program, Uzbek officers also participated in peacekeeping exercises with the United States and Western Europe.

In February 1998, the two countries established a joint US-Uzbekistan commission. This commission had four committees; a political committee, a security committee, an investment, trade, and economic committee, and an energy cooperation and reform committee. In 1998, American commando units began to stay in Uzbekistan for a longer period of time to train the armies in counter-terrorism. In addition, Washington put the IMU on its list of terrorist organizations. After the IMU attacks, then-US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright visited Tashkent in April 2000[123] and donated $10 million to Uzbekistan to be used for counterterrorism.

The geopolitical importance of Uzbekistan was revealed during the struggle to eliminate the terrorist network of Osama Bin Laden, the founder of al-Qaeda, and within this framework, the US-Uzbekistan Joint Commission was established.[124] In

[121] Kholisa Sodikova, "Uzbekistan's National Security Policy and Nonproliferation", *The Nonproliferation Review*, (1999), pp.144.

[122] Sönmez "The Effects of Security Problems on the USA- Uzbekistan Relations", pp:33.

[123] Mehdi Amineh, "The Greater Middle East in Global Politics: Social Science Perspectives on the Changing Geography of the World Politics", *BRILL; Illustrated edition,* (October 30, 2007), pp.105.

[124] Strobe Talbott, "The Great Game Is Over," *Financial Times*, (September 1997), p. 9.

1999, the United States and Uzbekistan signed a the Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) agreement to deploy a biological weapons research facility and provide alternative employment for scientists. The first Security contacts started in 1994 through the CTR program[125].

In the following period, Uzbekistan became a member of GUAM[126]. It has made its choice of foreign policy openly as a member of this anti-Russian and pro-American group. Karimov also supported the expansion of NATO to include the Baltic states and claimed that this did not pose a threat to Russia. He also supported NATO's operation in Kosovo and the US and British operation in Iraq.

As a result, Uzbekistan was keen to develop foreign and security policies with the United States in the 1990s. The foreign policy adopted in the second half of the 1990s was mainly based on US economic interests. During this period, relations between the US and Uzbekistan remained limited as a part of these policies. The closer relations that the Karimov administration expected would take place after the September 11 attacks.

4.3.1. Post-9/11 Policy (2001-2004)

The policies of the US in the region started to change remarkably after 9/11. Military and security considerations have been added to the ongoing political and economic reform agenda. The logistical requirements for large-scale US military operations in Afghanistan and the consequent over-reliance on access to regional military installations precluded commitments to promoting political and economic reforms and human rights. For the US, Uzbekistan was in a valuable position to establish a military

[125] The Department of Defense Cooperative Threat Mitigation (CTR) program, also known as the Nunn-Lugar program, was created to secure and dismantle weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their associated infrastructure in states located in the former territory of the disbanded Soviet Union.

[126] The GUAM treaty, which designed to harmonize and integrate commercial, diplomatic and democratic relations, was signed in 2001. In 2003, GUAM became an observer at the UN General Assembly. In 2007, GUAM also established a military peacekeeping force and held joint military exercises. This integration and relations became deeper and deeper. GUAM has led to it playing an important role in the diplomatic and trade relations of the member states (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova, Uzbekistan- Uzbekistan separated in 2005).

base. In this process, the importance of the US's geopolitical position in the region has also increased. Because Central Asian countries have changed their policies from an environmental concern to a regional one that has a much higher priority in US's strategy. Uzbekistan, has also gravitated toward a policy of regional resentment based primarily on Afghan stabilization efforts.

After the attacks on September 11, the fight against terrorism became a priority of US foreign policy. This situation resulted in a major change in Washington's foreign relations, and it took steps toward improving its relations with Central Asia, which it had previously ignored. On the 6th month anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, then US President George W. Bush stated that US needs the "critical support" from countries such as Uzbekistan.[127] After this policy shift, US started to focus on improving bilateral relations.

In Central Asia, the shift in US priorities has made Uzbekistan in particular and, to a lesser extent, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan suddenly become front-line states in the fight against the Taliban and al-Qaeda terrorist organizations. Senior US officials made visits to capital of Central Asian Republics. Islam Karimov, President of Uzbekistan and Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of Kazakhstan held summits with President Bush.

In his speech at the United States Military Academy at West Point on June 1, 2002, Bush identified three aspects of his foreign policy as follows: defending peace against terrorists and tyrannical threats; maintaining peace by establishing good relations between the great powers, and expanding peace by promoting free and open societies.[128] After providing background on the development of US security interests in Uzbekistan, trends in US policy and military engagement have increased.

[127] "Dangerous Dealings: Changes to U.S. Military Assistance After September 11", *Human Rights Watch,* 14(1), (2002), pp.4.

[128] Wishnick, "Growing U.S. Security Interests In Central Asia" , pp.2.

Given Uzbekistan's growing concerns about the threat of Islamic extremism in the region, it made sense to ally with a country that has a developed military presence such as the United States. In fact, the terrorist threat to the region has largely been managed and contained south of the border.[129] However, the threat still remained in the region, and this threat had the potential of increasing the scale of the crises caused by the economic problems in the region, the succession of the leadership, the unresolved problems with the neighbors.

By 2002, the United States had become a central actor in security affairs among Central Asia. During this period, the "strategic alliance" between Tashkent and Washington was announced to the public. The agreement on the use of the Karshi-Khanabad Base by US troops provided for intelligence sharing. There was also a clause in the agreement that Uzbek authorities stipulate that the Khanabad-based aircraft will be used primarily for humanitarian aid, search and rescue attacks.[130] In addition, no negotiations were made in the agreement regarding how long the US military presence would remain in the region.

First used by the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) to topple the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001, the Khanabad Base has played a key role in maintaining the logistics needed to keep a modern military force on duty against terrorism. In the process, the United States has become a symbol of power projection in an isolated, landlocked and politically challenging area. As a result of close cooperation with the United States in the war on terror, much more security and economic aid were promised to Tashkent. The US was offering them because it needed, an airbase of the size and capacity like Khanabad. From the Uzbek perspective, such an airbase could turn into a source of investment, potentially stimulating the local economy[131] and drive

[129] Rumer, Sokolsky & Stronski, "U.S. Policy Toward Central Asia 3.0", pp.9.

[130] Ibid, pp.14.

[131] Daly, Meppen, Socor & Starr, "Anatomy of A Crisis: U.S.-Uzbekistan Relations, 2001-2005", pp.15.

Uzbekistan towards improved relations with the United States, which has major military power.

The United States benefited from the relations it had developed through its military contacts with Uzbekistan. Given the Uzbek government's long-standing desire to establish closer and better relations with the United States, Uzbekistan hoped this would bring both political and economic benefits. Uzbekistan was generous in its support for Operation Enduring Freedom. In return, the United States offered various assistance. The US responded to the support it received from Uzbekistan, both economically and militarily. The US even worked with representatives of the defense ministries of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to identify new aid packages.[132] This assistance included two armored cutters (for patrolling the Amu Darya River), radios, a helicopter modeling and simulation center, psychological operations training, and a navigation system installations.[133]

Despite the significant gains in aid in the first years of the US-Uzbekistan military interaction and the loss of power of the IMU as a result of the US military operations in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan did not receive any alliance commitments or security guarantees later on. Although the "Declaration on the Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework"[134] signed between the United States and Uzbekistan on March 12, 2002, it fell behind such commitments. The Uzbek government has made reminders to the United States for both a clearer legal structure to encompass the US presence and some form of payment for the US to use Karshi-Khanabad as it did to Manas base in Kyrgyzstan. Uzbek authorities continued to demand further renovation

[132] Oliker & Shlapak, "U.S. Interests in Central Asia: Policy Priorities and Military Roles", pp.12.

[133] Ibid.

[134] According to this agreement, the parties would implement bilateral cooperation and develop a strategic partnership based on universally accepted principles and norms of international law. Respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of both states; non-interference in each other's internal affairs; commitment to democratic values and human rights and freedoms; and conscientious fulfillment of international obligations are important provisions.

of Karshi-Khanabad, including repair of the runway. Uzbekistan hoped that the US military presence would translate into a larger investment, but that did not happen. Meanwhile, Uzbekistan's relations with Russia began to improve. The friendly visit of the Russian president in 2003 was the most important sign of this. However, Uzbekistan-US military relations still did not deteriorate. In fact, Uzbekistan was the only Central Asian state to join the "coalition of the willing" that supported the US-led military operations in Iraq in February-March 2003.[135]

A joint exercise, "Balanced Knife", was held in March 2003. Joint training between the US and Uzbekistan were planned, involving special forces, peacekeepers, and rapid response units, until 2004. Assistance was also promised in counter-terrorism training and military reform. Uzbekistan also benefited from the exercises and joint military exercises carried out by the US troops and Uzbek Air Force personnel at the Khanabad Air Base.[136]

4.3.2. Redefining the US-Uzbekistan Relations (2004-2007)

The ups and downs in US policy were sometimes confusing, and disappointing, but enough to be rationally expected by Central Asian states. Former Uzbek President Islam Karimov's foreign policy focused primarily on independence from Moscow. As a result, Uzbekistan has forged closer relations with the United States as a potential mechanism to reduce Russia's economic or political influence over the country. However, Karimov's notions of affinity with the United States were tarnished, when Washington's concerns increased about the human rights record in Uzbekistan and the slow pace of economic and political reform.[137]

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[135] Daly, Meppen, Socor & Starr, "Anatomy of A Crisis: U.S.-Uzbekistan Relations, 2001-2005", pp.84

[136] Oliker & Shlapak, "U.S. Interests in Central Asia: Policy Priorities and Military Roles", pp.13.

[137] Olga Oliker, and Thomas S. Szayna, eds., "Faultlines of Conflict in Central Asia and the South Caucasus: Implications for the U.S. Army", *RAND Corporation*, MR-1598-A, (2003), pp.9.

At the end of 2003, Tashkent raised the issue of some form of programmatic charging for the US to use Khanabad Air Base. During the period from late 2003 to early 2005, Tashkent drafted a permanent agreement for the US to use Khanabad Base. Based on the favorable terms afforded to the United States in the SOFA[138] and the Framework Agreement, Washington has shown little inclination to negotiate.

The close relations between Tashkent and Washington reversed especially after the wind of political change in Georgia and Ukraine in 2003 and 2004. These revolutions were considered to directly threaten the perception of the legitimacy of Karimov's regime. Tashkent has suspended the activities of US-funded NGOs as it sees them as a potential threat to its current political structure.[139]

In this process, as the Uzbek regime moved away from the United States, the regime became more repressive, discontent in the country increased, prices had increased due to economic difficulties, and corrupt officials continued to take their share of the revenues. Public discontent showed itself in the protests. Protests grew, including in rural areas. During these protests, a prison break occurred in Andijan province, Uzbekistan, in May 2005, and political demonstrations increased on a public scale, which unfortunately resulted in bloodshed. On the night of May 12-13, many people were detained on charges of Islamic radical activism.[140]

Later, the demonstrators captured the main town hall and tried to seize the headquarter of the national security agency, but this attempt was unsuccessful. However, street protests continued in the square in front of the confiscated city hall. Security forces opened fire on the crowd, which included both escaped prisoners and unarmed civilians. It was reported that 187 people were killed, including Uzbek security

[139] Daly, Meppen, Socor & Starr, "Anatomy of A Crisis: U.S.-Uzbekistan Relations, 2001-2005", pp:30.

[140] Oliker & Shlapak, "U.S. Interests in Central Asia: Policy Priorities and Military Roles", pp.26.

personnel. Some human rights groups said the number of death was much higher, even thousands.[141]

After the May 2005 events in Andijan, it was proven once again that the region suffered from corruption; public dissatisfaction; economic underdevelopment; and the dangerous combination of often weak central control, mixed with growing authoritarianism and repression.

After the Andijan events, the tension between Uzbekistan and the US increased. Although Tashkent invited the US and the United Kingdom to send representatives to its commission on the events that took place there, it refused an independent international investigation into the incident. In this period, Russia and China expressed their support for Uzbekistan right after the crisis. The Andijan incident has shown how easily a situation in Uzbekistan can become uncontrollable. It also showed that the country could easily be plunged into a political chaos and that the potential for the internal conflict in Uzbekistan was high.

4.4. Aftermath of the Andijan Events

After the Color Revolutions' appearance in the media, Karimov saw the events in Andijan as a coup attempt against the Uzbek government. He believed that the attack on the prison was carried out with international support, including US government-sponsored NGOs.

After Andijan, the Uzbek government took swift steps to eliminate the sources of such future demonstrations. A large number of people allegedly involved in the organization of the prison break in Andijan were judged. International institutions that promoted free and fair elections, aimed to strengthen opposition political parties and

[141] "Burying the Truth Uzbekistan Rewrites the Story of the Andijan Massacre", *Human Rights Watch*, Vol. 17, No. 6, (2005), pp.10.

supported the development of local media were expelled. The government also accused campaigners of social reform for a range of crimes, including treason.[142]

The reactions of the Uzbek government and the international community to the Andijan events blunted relations between the US and Uzbekistan. In addition to exporting the US military airbase, the Uzbek government forced international organizations and media to leave the country. The European Union reacted by refusing visas to large numbers of government officials and imposing arms embargo sanctions. The United States subsequently reduced its foreign aid to Uzbekistan.[143]

US efforts to strengthen restrictions on international travelers from Uzbekistan to the United States and to strengthen pressure on the liberalization of Uzbekistan's political system have resulted in Uzbekistan's withdrawal from western engagement. Initially, after the terror events in September 2001, the Karimov regime saw the United States, particularly its military presence and security assistance, to bolster Uzbekistan's defense capacity. But when Karimov was convinced that Washington was determined to play a decisive role in regime changes in Eurasia, the United States became a threat. For Karimov, maintaining internal control was more important than the US contribution to the modernization of the Uzbek military and security services. For this reason, especially in the process following the Andijan events, Karimov tried to develop Uzbekistan's relations with different countries such as Russia, India, and China. He hoped that this would both provide physical protection to the country and not bring loss to his administration. Karimov thought that these countries would ignore the issues of political and economic reform, which the US government was constantly put under pressure. In light of these events, the only option for the US government and the international community to maintain good relations with Uzbekistan was to

[142] John C.K. Daly, "Rush to Judgment: Western Media and the 2005 Andijan Violence", *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program— A Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center*, (May 2016), pp:58.

[143] Fiona Hill & Kevin Jones, "Fear of democracy or revolution: The reaction to Andijan", *The Washington Quarterly,* 29(3), (2006), pp:119.

encourage the government to open lines of communication.[144] In this context, the US strategy has been to underline evolution, not revolution, by emphasizing that it wants to see a reform in Uzbekistan that would only benefit the Uzbek people.

4.4.1. Closure of the Air Base at Karshi-Khanabad

Karimov, in his statement in January 2005, accused the Western powers of supporting the opposition in Uzbekistan and stated that they would reconsider Uzbekistan's membership of GUUAM, which it was a member of since 1999. When the Color Revolutions spread to Central Asia after the demonstrations in Kyrgyzstan shortly after this statement, Karimov withdrew from GUUAM in May 2005 by not attending the GUUAM meeting held in Moldova in April 2005, believing that Uzbekistan would be the country that would face the next Color Revolution.[145]

When the real crisis between the US and Uzbekistan was experienced after the events in Andijan was bloodily suppressed by the Karimov administration, the US kept its initial reaction at a low level first, then it reacted more harshly in the following period. However, the United States did not intend to completely disrupt relations with Uzbekistan. Because the Karshi-Khanabad Base in Uzbekistan was still important for the ongoing operations in Afghanistan.

The US aid to Uzbekistan partially cut off in 2004 due to Uzbek human rights abuses, and President Karimov's growing fears that the United States was promoting democratic revolutions in the post-Soviet states. The Uzbek authorities expected ample compensation for the use of Karshi-Khanabad, and complained that this compensation was delayed and insufficient.[146]

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[144] Ibid, pp:122.

[145] Timuçin Kodaman, Haktan Birsel, "Bağımsızlık Sonrası Özbekistan ve Dış Politikası", *Fırat Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi,* 16 (2), (2006), pp. 433.

[146] Nichol, "Uzbekistan's Closure of the Airbase at Karshi-Khanabad: Context and Issues*",* CRS-4.

As a matter of fact, after the Andijan events, Uzbek officials made a visit to the US embassy in Tashkent, demanding that the US use of Karshi-Khanabad be terminated within six months. Uzbek lawmakers argued that US operations should finish because they harm the environment, and they were no longer necessary because they did not succeed on solving the terrorist incidents in Afghanistan. Uzbek side also accused the US of promoting the overthrow of the government after the Andijan events. As a result, Uzbekistan withdrew from SOFA and terminated the agreement.

In the next period, the US, which emptied the Uzbek base, tried to improve its relations with other Central Asian countries. The share of economic aid related to security in these countries increased. The US and the EU decided to implement an embargo, including arms sales to Uzbekistan. The World Bank stopped lending to Uzbekistan after the attempts of the US. After these sanctions, Karimov urged the West not to interfere in its internal affairs under the guise of promoting democracy.[147]

4.5. Uzbekistan's Orientation to Different Cooperations

According to a 2004 US Department of Defense assessment, then-Uzbek Defense Minister Qodir Gulomov was keen to "Westernize" the armed forces, including increasing interoperability with NATO forces, building the non-commissioned officer corps, and restructuring conscription and retention. However, such plans fell through before they materialized as Uzbekistan solidified its ties with Russia and China as the dominant suppliers of equipment and training support. This trend further increased after the European Union imposed arms exports and visa sanctions on Uzbekistan. In mid-November 2005, Russia and Uzbekistan signed a Treaty on Allied Relations urging both sides to access each other's military facilities and engage in mutual

[147] "Order and Disorder in the International System", Edited by: Sai Felicia Krishna-Hense, *Ashgate Publishing,* (2010), pp.59.

defense consultations.[148] This agreement marked a turning point in Tashkent's relations with Moscow after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It also meant the return of the Central Asian Republics to Russian orbit.

After the statements and support of Russia and China that the events in Andijan were related to the internal affairs of Uzbekistan and therefore an international investigation could not be accepted, unlike the US, it became clear which side Karimov would approach. Marking increased security cooperation, China and Russia held their first military exercises in China in August 2005, observed by Uzbekistan and other Central Asian members of the SCO.[149] Although the ability of Russia and China to adequately address terrorist threats in the region was skeptical, given their inadequate efforts to establish security in the Central Asia before the start of US-led coalition operations in Afghanistan, Karimov choose to maintain his power and preferred to develop its relations with parties that would not question his management style rather than a US-allied security window.

Especially, after intense sanctions from the US and the west, Karimov adopted a foreign policy that preferred to develop relations with Russia and China by burning the bridges with the West. In the continuation of this policy, Karimov, who visited China right after the Andijan events, signed an energy agreement of 600 million dollars. At the same time, it was decided to implement a military exchange program between Uzbekistan and China. Karimov also met with the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin in Moscow on November 14, 2005, during which an allied agreement was signed between the two countries.[150]

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[148] Nichol, "Uzbekistan's Closure of the Airbase at Karshi-Khanabad: Context and Issues*",* CRS-4.

[149] Claire Bigg, "Russia: Joint Military Exercises With China A Result Of New Strategic Partnership" RFERL, (August 18, 2005), Retrieved from: https://www.rferl.org/a/1060767.html, Accessed: 23 September 2022.

[150] Sönmez, "The Effects of Security Problems on the USA- Uzbekistan Relations", pp:40.

At the meeting between Putin and Karimov, Karimov made the following remarks targeting the US: "The main purpose of the US is to neutralize the independent policies of Uzbekistan, to disrupt the peace and stability in the country and to make Uzbekistan obedient"[151].

Shortly after, Uzbekistan increased its activities in the SCO under the influence of Russia and China and became a member again of the CSTO, which it left in 1999, and the Eurasian Economic Community (EuraAsec-EEC)[152], which it refused to be a member before.

The government of Uzbekistan has always pursued geopolitical opportunities to increase the benefits of support and assistance. Instability in Uzbekistan has repeatedly forced the country to enter into various alliances in order to maximize its interests, minimize its damages, and maintain the independence of the country.[153]

[151] Sedat Laçiner, "Hazar Enerji Kaynakları ve Enerji Siyaset İlişkisi", *OAKA*, 1(1), (2006), pp:60.

[152] The Eurasian Economic Union established by Russian Federation in 2001, which hosted Belarus, Kazakhstan, Krygzistan and Tajikistan.

[153]Luca Anceschi, "Integrating domestic politics and foreign policy making: the cases of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan*", Central Asia Survey*, 29(2), (June 2010), pp.153.

CHAPTER 5

PERIOD OF NORMALIZATION AFTER 2007

Afterwards the trauma experienced in the US-Uzbek relations due to the Andijan events, the Karimov administration started to communicate again with the US in order to normalize its relations with the Western countries after 2007. In the same year, Karimov expressed his interest in participating in the BTC natural gas pipeline project.[154] The US and the EU also started to gradually abandon the embargoes on Uzbekistan. In May 2007, the EU's visa ban on Uzbek officials was lifted.

Karimov's approach to the US gained momentum with the presidency of Barack Obama in 2009. Accordingly, in 2009 Washington was given the opportunity to use the Uzbek airspace and the military base in Termez for US troops.[155] In September 2009, the relations between the US and Uzbekistan began to be restored when a training team from the US Navy conducted a two-week training course for the State Border Guard Marine Service and the Uzbekistan Navy in Termez, on the border with Afghanistan.[156]

According to the records of the US Department of State, the largest training conducted in 2010 was "Special Operations—Countering Terrorism", normally taught at the Joint

[154] Azarkan, "The Relations between Central Asia States and United States, China and Russia within the Framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization", pp. 14.

[155] Sönmez, "The Effects of Security Problems on the USA- Uzbekistan Relations", pp: 41.

[156] Ibid, pp:42.

Special Operations University (JSOU) in Florida, conducted by a Mobile Training Team in Uzbekistan.[157]

Karimov was invited to Brussels by the Former President of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso. Karimov met both Barroso and former NATO Secretary-General A. Fogh Rasmussen when he visited Brussels on 24 January 2011. This marked a turning point in Uzbekistan's relations with the western world. It meant that the EU and NATO were satisfied with the latest developments in Uzbek foreign policy. For NATO, Tashkent was a crucial partner to International Security Assistance Force's (ISAF) success. Uzbekistan was valuable for being an important element of the Northern Transport Corridor which purveyed approximately 30% of the supply to the troops operating as part of the OEF and ISAF operations in Afghanistan. From a Western perspective, Tashkent was seen as a state that would play an important role in stabilizing Afghanistan. The EU also saw Uzbekistan as a potential gas source for Europe, although the natural gas extraction potential in this country was limited.[158]

US officials, including the commander of the NATO-led ISAF, had criticized Pakistan's failure to curb the Pakistan-based Haqqani network as attacks on US and NATO troops escalated, including the attack on the US Embassy in Kabul on September 13, 2011. However, one of the actions taken for this purpose led to the death of innocent Pakistanis. NATO air craft had accidentally killed 25 Pakistani soldiers in November 2011. Upon this event, the Pakistani government demanded that the United States evacuate the Shami Air Base in Pakistan within fifteen days.[159] Thus,

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[157] Joshua Kucera, "U.S. Military Aid to Central Asia: Who Benefits?", Open Society Foundations, *Central Eurasia Project, Occasional Paper Series,* No. 7, (2012), pp:20.

[158] "The President of Uzbekistan visits Brussels", *Centre for Eastern Studies*, January 26, 2011 https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2011-01-26/president-uzbekistan-visits-brussels,

[159] K. Jaishankar & Natti Ronel, "Global Criminology: Crime and Victimization in a Globalized Era", *Routledge; 1st edition,* (March 25, 2013), pp:7.

the geopolitical importance of Uzbekistan came to the fore again for the Pentagon after losing its base in the south of Afghanistan.

In the fall of 2011, on the initiative of the White House, Congress passed a financing bill that would allow Uzbekistan to reinstate US military aid. As a matter of fact, the US was trying to improve relations with Uzbekistan. In September 2011, the United States took steps to revoke sanctions banning Foreign Military Sales (FMS) to Uzbekistan. The first tranche of this assistance was funding for GPS systems, night vision goggles and body armor.[160] Former United States Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, who visited Tashkent in October 2011, stated that the Karimov administration had made progress on human rights and political freedoms. Following this, on December 16, 2011, the US Congress lifted the "military aid ban" that they started to implement after 2004.

Uzbekistan had returned to the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in 2006. However, it did not actively participate in military and other areas of cooperation within the CSTO and did not take part in joint military exercises effectively. Therefore, its membership remained superficial. In June 2012, Tashkent suspended its membership in this regional military formation again, by accusing the organization with ignoring Uzbekistan's concerns.

In August, shortly after the suspension of CSTO membership, the Uzbek Senate published the first comprehensive foreign policy law entitled "The Law on the Approval of the Concept of Foreign Policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan"in 2012. This Foreign Policy Concept reflected the foreign policy strategy that Uzbekistan would follow in the near future.[161] After this law, the country returned to the pre-2005 moderate policy. This change also affected relations with US forces. Karimov was willing to maintain the good relations that had been left outstanding. Moreover, when

[160] Kucera, "U.S. Military Aid to Central Asia: Who Benefits?", pp.21.

[161] Toktogulov, "Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy Under Mirziyoyev: Change Or Continuity?", pp: 55.

social upheavals took place in Kyrgyzstan, which hosts US base, Uzbekistan's charm increased and Karimov wanted to turn this situation into an opportunity.

In 2012, Uzbekistan turned to NATO for assistance with the Reform of Professional Military Education (PME) through the Defense Education Advancement Program (DEEP) initiative. As a comprehensive program, DEEP is designed to deliver a demand-based curriculum to countries. Launched in 2007, DEEP has provided PME support to Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Croatia, Georgia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Mauritania, Moldova, Mongolia, Serbia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.[162] The DEEP in Uzbekistan aimed to strengthen the professional military curriculum, civil-military relations with lessons learned from the US/NATO experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In the fall of 2015, the United States and Central Asian republics implemented C5+1[163] after the meeting held in Samarkand. The US, trying to promote dialogue within the framework of this platform, aims to use C5+1 to balance the hegemonic power of Russia and China in the region and to create an overall strategy for eliminating regional difficulties. In addition, US non-governmental organizations and think tanks have tried to contribute to a more collaborative partnership by hosting consultation workshops and conferences due to Uzbekistan's recent good attitude towards the US.[164]

162 Mariya Omelicheva, "The United States and Uzbekistan: Military- to- Military Relations in a New Era of Strategic Partnership", *Ponas Eurasia*, July 2019, https://www.ponarseurasia.org/the-united-states-and-uzbekistan-military-to-military-relations-in-a-new-era-of-strategic-partnership/

163 C5+1 is a platform that brings together the five states of Central Asia and the United States to discuss and work on issues of common concern in Afghanistan.

164 Gülay Mutlu, "Is The C5+1 A Long-Awaited Initiative For Central Asia?", *Eurasia Review*, November 30, 2015, https://www.eurasiareview.com/30112015-is-the-c51-a-long-awaited-initiative-for-central-asia-analysis/

5.1. Modifications After Mirziyoyev

The President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, served as the Prime Minister (PM) for 13 years during the Presidency of Islam Karimov, after 13 years of administrative experience as PM, Shavkat Mirziyoyev gained extensive knowledge about domestic and foreign political and economic processes of the country. So, it was not surprising to the Uzbek people that Mirziyoyev became President after Karimov's death in 2016. After his presidency, Mirziyoyev brought many changes, such as lowering export taxes, improving the situation in agriculture, and weakening the influence of the state on small businesses.

Shortly before Karimov's presidency ended, people of Uzbek origin carried out terrorist attacks in the West. These events raised the issue of whether these people were radicalized online or as a result of Uzbekistan's restrictive political system. Besides, corruption has increased in Uzbekistan due to harassment by the police, forced sterilization of women and forced labor of citizens in cotton fields, these behaviors have damaged the image of the Uzbek government. After Karimov's death, a series of reforms took place in Uzbekistan under the new leadership. Mirziyoyev's most notable steps were the release of some of the detained civil society activists and political prisoners, and the liquidation of most of the government staff, people who served in the Karimov era.[165] After Shavkat Mirziyoyev became President, he signed the "Decree On Uzbekistan's Development Strategy". He ultimately approved five-domain development strategies for Uzbekistan between 2017-2021. Mirziyoyev identified the following priority areas for the development of the country[166];

[165] Charles J. Sullivan, "Uzbekistan And The United States: Interests And Avenues For Cooperation", *Asian Affairs*, (2019), pp:3.

[166] "Uzbekistan's Development Strategy for 2017-2021 has been adopted following public consultation," *Tashkent Times*,

- Improving the construction of the state and society (it was announced that e-government will be implemented in the spirit of democratic reform and modernization);
- Ensuring the rule of law and judicial and legal reform;
- Development and liberalization of the economy;
- The development of the social field;
- Ensuring security and harmony and religious tolerance among the various national groups and implementing a sustainable security foreign policy.

Mirziyoyev openly criticized the ruling institutions of the Karimov era and within this framework, he attracted certain public support. As a result, since 2016, there has been liberalization in the political and economic system of Uzbekistan. This liberalization significantly improved the quality of life and increased the welfare of society.
The regime of coercion and repression were important elements of Karimov's rule. During his reign, Karimov appealed to the National Security Service of Uzbekistan to suppress any independent civil society. He justified his tight control over such activities, claiming that some groups pose a threat to national security. Mirziyoyev also reorganized government ministries, where corruption was common, and moved the headquarters of the National Security Service out of the capital. He closed the notorious Tashkent Prison. The National Security Service was renamed as the State Security Service, and with the newly adopted system, courts would no longer accept misguided information or evidence against tortured persons in custody.[167]

Social change was encouraged in the country through new policies such as the release of political prisoners, the introduction of issues such as workers' rights, and the adoption of a "good neighborly policy" regarding Central Asia. A positive wave of change has been captured as Uzbekistan improves its relations with the governments in the region.

[167] M. Marszewski, "Thaw in Uzbekistan. Reforms By President Mirziyoyev", *Centre for Eastern Studies (Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich)*, Vol. 278, (July 2018), pp:4-5.

Despite the many reforms made during Mirziyoyev's period, innovations in the defense and security has come to the fore. Uzbekistan's new defense doctrine, which defines the main approaches of the defense policy of Uzbekistan and the tasks and criteria for the use of the armed forces, published in December 2017. This progress has been positively received by the US defense community due to its emphasis on military modernization and professionalization.[168]

The regulations and organizational structures that previously prevented the Uzbek army from participating in combat training were changed. These measures were developed in order to strengthen the professional skills of the army and its readiness to perform the tasks necessary for the defense of the country. In this context, Mirziyoyev gave importance to the psychological resilience of the military as well as the physical stamina.[169] Particular attention was paid to this, as most casualties resulting from hostilities among military personnel were associated with severe psychological stress and pressures that could not be easily overcome even in peacetime.

The establishment of the "State Committee for the Defence Industry" was the first important step in the formation of the national defense-industrial complex, because it united all the key enterprises of the country.[170] In addition to providing the national army with modern weapons and equipment, the new Uzbek government was trying to implement policies aimed at creating additional employment and contributing to the diversification of the country's economy.

[168] Toktogulov, "Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy Under Mirziyoyev: Change Or Continuity?", pp:57.

[169] "Law Of The Republic Of Uzbekistan: About the defense doctrine of the Republic of Uzbekistan", No. ZRU-458, January 9, 2018, CIS Legislation.

[170] M. M. Ibragimov, "Priorities of the Construction of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the Conditions of Development of Forms and Methods of Contemporary Armed Struggle", Translated by Robert F. Baumann, *Army University Press*, January-February 2019, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/Jan-Feb-2019/Ibragimov-Priorities/

In the following years, President Mirziyoyev has given priority to the following topics for the construction of the armed forces of the Republic of Uzbekistan[171];

- Activate and strengthen the role of civil society and government officials on the ground by adopting a system that requires the active personal participation of government leaders at all levels. Issues such as improving the infrastructure of military units and developing military-patriotic education programs for youth will be prioritized. A sense of loyalty will be cultivated among the soldiers who must be ready to defend their homeland at any moment[172].
- It is aimed to automate and optimize the command and control systems necessary for the military operations of the armed forces of the Republic of Uzbekistan.
- In order to ensure the security of the country and strengthen its organizational structure, there is a need to review the regulatory framework for the use of the armed forces.
- Troops have the goal of further improving the combat and operational training system.
- It is necessary to maintain a central focus on the systematic analysis of the actual needs of the troops, increasing their level of capability with up-to-date weapons and other new systems.
- The social security system for soldiers should be further developed.

After the tumultuous process in the Uzbek defense and security system in the Karimov era, Mirziyoyev wanted the military units to change not only the way they do business but also the way they think. Within this framework, the Armed Forces Academy (AFA) in Tashkent, has brought in foreign soldiers to help diversify its teaching techniques. In this context, military cooperation with the US began to increase. For

[171] Ibid.

[172] Ibid.

example; The Ministry of Defense Advisors (MoDA), a program the US holds in many foreign countries, was established. However, in Uzbekistan, the MoDA is located in the Armed Forces Academy instead of the Ministry of Defense. This position was established to assist the Armed Forces Academy in Uzbekistan to provide expertise and core competencies.[173]

In addition, Uzbekistan made a significant effort to stabilize Afghanistan. Relations with the United States entered a recovery phase when Uzbekistan realized the need for a security chain because a security problem inside Afghanistan would harm it.

5.2. Relations in Recent Years Between The US and Uzbekistan

Mirziyoyev considers it a strategic move to develop relations with neighboring countries and reshape ties with the United States in order to achieve the above-mentioned goals. Therefore, Tashkent sought to attract Washington by asserting its geostrategic value and removing some of the harshest features of Karimov's legacy.

In this context, Mirziyoyev's official visit to Washington in May 2018 opened a new page in the US-Uzbekistan strategic partnership with the signing of the first five-year military cooperation plan. This visit of Mirziyoyev is important as it is the first Uzbek presidential visit since 2002.[174]

After President Mirziyoyev's first official visit to Washington and meeting with former US President Donald Trump, military and commercial relations were revived. A series of military exchanges and meetings followed that evolution. In November 2018, the Uzbek Ministry of Defense welcomed a US military delegation in the capital. In fact, it was stated that the US and Uzbekistan worked closely on issues such as

[173] Omelicheva, "The United States and Uzbekistan: Military- to- Military Relations in a New Era of Strategic Partnership".

[174] Omelicheva, "The United States and Uzbekistan: Military- to- Military Relations in a New Era of Strategic Partnership".

counter-terrorism, border security and establishing defense institutions during this period.[175]

During this meeting, President Mirziyoyev stated that the progress and development in Uzbekistan express continuity and underlined that the government should always keep the interests of the Uzbek people at the forefront. President Trump, reminded the historical partnership between the US and Uzbekistan in the fight against terrorism. He mentioned that after the September 11, 2001 attacks, Uzbekistan provided critical access and support to the United States to destroy al-Qaeda terrorists. During the visit, issues of strengthening bilateral cooperation between the US and Uzbekistan, sharing burdens and addressing regional security issues, including stability in Afghanistan, were also discussed.[176]

During the presidency of Mirziyoyev, the 2018 "Tashkent International Conference on Peace Process, Security Cooperation and Regional Connection in Afghanistan" was held, reaffirming the unification of the international community on the peace talks between the Taliban and Afghanistan. Uzbekistan's mediation capacity also played an important role in developing relations with the United States..[177]
There were two meetings that laid the groundwork for this conference held in Tashkent. The first one was held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan on 10-11 November 2017 under the title of "Central Asia: One Past and A Common Future, Cooperation for

[175] Ibid.

[176] Muhammet Fatih Özkan & Otabek Omonkulov, "Uzbekistan's Mediator Role in the Afghan Peace Process as a Neighboring and Small State", International Journal Of Political Studies, 6(2), August 2020, pp: 52.

[177] "Tashkent to Host a High-Level Conference on Afghanistan The global and regional powers, Afghanistan's neighbors will attend the Tashkent International Conference Peace Process, Security Cooperation and Regional Connectivity", *The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the United Nations,* March 7, 2018, https://www.un.int/uzbekistan/fr/news/tashkent-host-high-level-conference-afghanistan-global-and-regional-powers-afghanistan%E2%80%99s

Sustainable Development and Mutual Prosperity". There, Mirziyoyev linked the economic prosperity of Central Asia with the realization of peace in Afghanistan.[178]

After these meeting, President Mirziyoyev accelerated his initiatives. The second meeting was held between The Uzbek and Afghan governments. They made a joint presentation on their peace conference plans at the UN Security Council meeting on January 19, 2018. At the end of this conference, "The Declaration of Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan: Peace Process, Security Cooperation & Regional Connectivity" was accepted.[179] Uzbekistan's key role in this important dialogue and the US's promise to support cooperation and development through the C5+1 regional format has been strengthened after this conference. Following this meeting, both the US and Uzbek leaders expressed their support for the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan and they became willing to be included in the multilateral cooperations in Central Asia. [180]

In January 2019, Uzbekistan's special forces participated in the first joint exercise with the US National Guard in Mississippi, and an Uzbek delegation visited the US Central Command headquarters in Florida. In July 2019, Acting Minister of Defense Mark Esper hosted the new Minister of Defense of Uzbekistan, Major General Bakhodir Kurbanov, and it was mentioned that more visits were planned in the near future. Esper noted that the US has developed a curriculum for the Uzbekistan Armed Forces Academy (AFA).[181]

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[178] Khabibullo Sadibakosev, "New Uzbekistan Strategy in Political Views", *Middle European Scientific Bulletin*, Vol:20, (January, 2022), pp:26.

[179] Özkan & Omonkulov, "Uzbekistan's Mediator Role in the Afghan Peace Process as a Neighboring and Small State", pp: 52.

[180] Özkan & Omonkulov, "Uzbekistan's Mediator Role in the Afghan Peace Process as a Neighboring and Small State", pp:49.

[181] David Vergun, "U.S. Hopes to Build on Cooperation With Uzbekistan", *U.S. Department of Defence*, July 2019, https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/1903730/us-hopes-to-build-on-cooperation-with-uzbekistan/

Established as an in-service training institution that prepares Uzbek officers for higher-level leadership positions, AFA has emerged as one of the leading institutions of the Professional Military Education (PME) in Central Asia. Located on a modern and technologically advanced campus in Tashkent, AFA has been central to Uzbekistan's military system and has been at the forefront of military education reform.[182]

In July 2019, the Minister of Defense of Uzbekistan, Bakhodir Kurbanov, during his visit to the United States, went to the Defense Language Institute at the Joint Base San Antonio (Texas), where three Uzbek officers learned English, and the Columbus Air Force Base (Mississippi), where an Uzbek served as a pilot. The US has invited an Uzbek officer for a 10-month program at the College for International Security Affairs (CISA).[183] The delegation of the Uzbek Ministry of Defense expressed their decision to develop teaching qualifications that would reflect Western and NATO standards in order to integrate civilian institutions into military education.

In 2020, unique challenges were faced in the fields of international security and cooperation due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Multiple security challenges have been tackled around the world caused by the changing lines of international security. Steps such as modernizing the defense capacity and updating the doctrine and protocol had to be taken. One of the most outstanding features of Uzbekistan's current defense modernization program is the government's determination to undertake ongoing domestic reforms and improvements. In defense reform, the development of foreign relations has always played a key role. Improving professional military training in Uzbekistan is important in establishing stable and constructive relations with foreign countries. For this reason, relations were tried to be maintained during the pandemic process.

[182] Ibid.

[183] Ibid.

The serious threats of international terrorism, violent extremism, human trafficking, and transnational crime in Uzbekistan both alarmed Uzbekistan and the US, by so means the two sides encouraged closer cooperation and increased exchange to support regional security. Both sides drew attention to the necessity of fulfilling the obligations and provisions under the UN Security Council Resolution 2396 for the fight against terrorism. The United States has announced a more than $9 million aid plan to Uzbekistan to fight transnational organized crime and promote rule of law and anti-corruption initiatives. The United States and Uzbekistan reaffirmed their shared interest in advancing multilateral cooperation across the region, including the C5+1 framework. Also in 2020, Uzbekistan reaffirmed its efforts to develop economic, commercial, educational, and cultural ties with Afghanistan and to make these lands secure. In this framework, the "US-Afghanistan-Uzbekistan Trilateral Meeting" was held on May 27, 2020. After this meeting, these three countries stated that they were determined to cooperate more among themselves. It also reiterated its goal of encouraging the countries of the region and the international community to promote the peace process in Afghanistan and to find a lasting political solution that would end the war.[184]

In the presidential elections of Uzbekistan held in October 2021, Shavkat Mirziyoyev was re-elected President with more than 80% of the votes. When Mirziyoyev took office again, he was determined to maintain relations with the United States, which he had been trying to renew since his presidency. While maintaining its bilateral relations with Uzbekistan, the US cooperates with regional and multilateral associations such as the OSCE In 2017, Uzbekistan emphasized its interest in more active interaction with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)[185] and sought

[184] "Joint Statement on the U.S. – Afghanistan – Uzbekistan Trilateral Meeting", U.S. Department Of State Office of the Spokesperson For Immediate Release, *U.S. Embassy*, May, 27 2020, https://uz.usembassy.gov/joint-statement-on-the-u-s-afghanistan-uzbekistan-trilateral-meeting/

[185] OSCE is a security association covering political-military, economic and environmental and humanitarian aspects. It focuses on many aspects of security, including confidence and security-building measures, human rights,

to implement a series of comprehensive domestic reforms in the country within this development strategy, largely in line with OSCE commitments. The OSCE affirmed the provision of an enhanced arms control regime and developed confidence-building measures in military matters by promoting transparency and cooperation. It reformed the security sector and focused on the safe storage and destruction of small arms, light weapons, and conventional weapons.[186]

The United States contributes to efforts to combat terrorism, promote regional stability, and energy security, and increase economic prosperity in the Central Asia region and beyond. Because this geography is significant for the US to be able to counter security threats of the region that may directly threaten its interests abroad and its own territory. For this reason, the US does not withhold its aid to these countries. Accordingly, under the United States Foreign Military Sales (FMS) system, in 2021, Uzbekistan received $40 million worth of equipment for its armed forces through a combination of national funds and Foreign Military Financing (FMF).

On December 13, 2021, Abdulaziz Kamilov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and Donald Lu, Deputy Secretary of the Bureau of South and Central Asia Affairs of the US Department of State, met in Tashkent and held the "US-Uzbekistan Strategic Partnership Dialogue". At this meeting, the US supported Uzbekistan's reform program aimed at economic liberalization, the development of human rights, democratic institutions, and civil society.[187] The parties took steps to deepen ties between law enforcement and border and customs authorities in the field

national minorities, democratization, counter-terrorism and economic activities. Its decisions are not legally binding.

[186]"What is the OSCE?" *Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe*, https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/d/d/35775_7.pdf

[187] "Joint Statement between the United States and Uzbekistan Following the Inaugural Meeting of the Strategic Partnership Dialogue", *U.S. Department of State*, December 13, 2021, https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-between-the-united-states-and-uzbekistan-following-the-inaugural-meeting-of-the-strategic-partnership-dialogue/

of defense. At the end of the dialogue meeting, Foreign Minister Kamilov and Deputy Secretary Lu confirmed that the next meeting will be held in 2022 in Washington DC.

With Mirziyoyev's new strategies toward Uzbekistan, joint training activities and military aid between the US and Uzbekistan have increased. The Mirziyoyev administration has openly admitted that it will need Washington for its goals of military modernization and social revival. At this point, US cooperation efforts have to contend with other geographical realities.

5.3. Other Geographical Realities Affecting the US-Uzbekistan Relations

Like the United States, Russia and China also have special interests in Uzbekistan. Therefore, in the geopolitics of Central Asia, the big game between the great powers is being revived. As the balance of power continues to shift around the world, the United States has had to update its policy decisions outside of its territory. Regarding the issue, General Joseph Votel, the former commander of the US Central Command, mentioned in his statement in the US Senate that "the former Soviet Union countries trust Russia and thus Russia has a significant influence in Central Asia". As can be understood from this statement, the US is quite aware of the Russian influence in Central Asia. On the other hand, China, which has become increasingly assertive, is partnering with Russia on economic and security dominance in Central Asia, while at challenging US influence in the region. China argues that the US influence and support are not enough for regional concerns; hence China is trying to take advantage of this gap.

5.3.1. China as a Neighbour

For the last two decades, US policy towards Central Asia has been an extension of its security policy in Afghanistan. However, the presence of the US in the region has experienced ups and downs and in the meantime relations have been reformulated. The integration of China's growing engagement with the region into these reformulated goals has been rapid.

China's presence in the region has not been related to security and military perspective much but to economic cooperation. However, it still had an impact on the security of energy corridors. China has built new infrastructure, including energy pipelines, new highways, and rail networks, in Central Asia, especially in recent years, and has become the region's leading source of development finance. Therefore, China continues its role in the region as a foreign trade partner, economic mediator, and development financer.[188]

The efforts by the Uzbek government to strengthen economic ties with China are valuable for both sides to use better their important geographical locations and natural resources that will benefit each other. Bordering other Central Asian countries and Afghanistan, Uzbekistan has transit connections in all directions. It is important for China to establish close relations with Uzbekistan, which has these cross-border transport links.

Relations between China and Uzbekistan began with the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992 after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The first turning point in relations was Uzbekistan's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001, a regional economic and security alliance currently consisting of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, India, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Iran.[189] President Mirziyoyev's reforms liberalized Uzbekistan's security policies. Uzbekistan started to take a more active role in the SCO. While there are disagreements over the SCO's role in Uzbekistan, Tashkent hopes to capitalize on its security relationship with Beijing.

The second milestone came in 2013 when China launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China launched the Belt and Road Initiative as a part of the long-term and stable

[188] Tilman Pradt, "The Prequel to China's New Silk Road: Preparing the Ground in Central Asia", *Palgrave Macmillan; 1st ed. 2020 edition,* (June 6, 2020), pp:40-41.

[189] Chung, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: China" Changing Influence in Central Asia", pp: 991.

economic growth that will increase its international influence and enable access to energy resources. The BRI will represent a long corridor spanning the Central Asia. For Central Asia, this can serve as a stabilizing, profitable project, but it will also strengthen China's position in the region in many areas, militarily, economically, and politically. For the Belt and Road Initiative, Uzbekistan has strategic geopolitical importance in the region. Uzbekistan's geographic location puts it on the way to China's important natural gas resources. In addition, due to its proximity to the Caspian Sea, Uzbekistan is a convenient corridor that opens trade routes to the Persian Gulf and the Black Sea ports. Uzbekistan itself also exports a significant amount of natural gas to China.[190]

Groupings such as the SCO are important to the success of China's BRI. Such groups are crucial to achieve the full potential of a trade network extending to Central Asia, both in terms of the states it will benefit from along the way and in ensuring security along the planned route. The new development period, which started within the scope of the five-year development strategy adopted by Uzbekistan for the period between 2017-2021, had a positive impact on the development of cultural ties and the rise of the organization within the SCO. At the SCO Council of Heads of State meeting held in Nur-Sultan on June 9, 2017, the Republic of Uzbekistan accepted the initiatives and proposals of the SCO member states regarding the full use of people's diplomacy mechanisms and established the Shanghai Cooperation Organization People's Diplomacy Center in Uzbekistan.[191]

Political ties between China and Central Asian states have grown exponentially over the past few years. China has opened a number of channels of multilateral diplomacy around Afghanistan, participated in regional talks, worked with Uzbekistan to bring

[190] Wenxian Zhang, Ilan Alon & Christoph Lattemann, "China's Belt and Road Initiative: Changing the Rules of Globalization (Palgrave Studies of Internationalization in Emerging Markets)", *Palgrave Macmillan; 1st ed. 2018 edition* (June 6, 2018), pp:141-142.

[191] Dr. Durbek Sayfullayev, "International Journal of Social Science And Human Research", *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research*, 5(5), (May 2022), pp.1771.

the Taliban to the negotiation table, and repeatedly tried to get the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to take action on the issue.

China, whose influence in the region became evident after the beginning of withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan on May 1, 2021, hosted the second 5+1 Format Meeting (C+C5) of Foreign Ministers with Central Asia in Xi'an on May 12, 2021.[192] The first group of foreign officials invited to China since the start of the pandemic were those of the five Central Asian states.

During the Mirziyoyev era, Uzbekistan became the most productive Central Asian Republic where China actively cooperated in numerous fields from infrastructure development to scientific research.
In 2020, Uzbekistan has set the visa-free system which let Chinese citizens to stay in the country for 7 days to facilitate travel and tourism in the country. The two countries also deepened cultural communication. Uzbekistan became the first country in the region to open the Confucius Institute[193], a Chinese language, and cultural institution; in return, Uzbek language and culture research centers were established at Chinese universities.

On September 8, 2021, the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Commerce of China and the First Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Investment and Foreign Trade of Uzbekistan co-chaired the seventh meeting of the Economic and Commercial Cooperation Subcommittee. The China-Uzbekistan Intergovernmental Cooperation Committee held opinions on deepening bilateral cooperation. At the meeting, it was stated that China is willing to work with Uzbekistan to promote Belt and Road

[192] Sabir Askeroğlu, "Towards the "Geopolitical Competition": Central Asia-China Foreign Ministers Meeting", *ANKASAM*, June 23, 2022, https://www.ankasam.org/towards-the-geopolitical-competition-central-asia-china-foreign-ministers-meeting/?lang=en

[193] Ren Qi, "Uzbekistan embarks on journey", *China Daily*, March 30, 2017, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/beltandroadinitiative/2017-03/30/content_28731593.htm.

cooperation and that the Trade and Investment Cooperation Plan (2022-2026) between China and Uzbekistan has been signed.[194] This cooperation will deepen bilateral pragmatic relations.

Russia is Uzbekistan's largest trading partner, but China is following it resolutely. For instance, in 2021, Uzbekistan's bilateral trade with Russia was 7.5 billion dollars, and its trade with China was 7.4 billion dollars. Meanwhile, China's advancement of its BRI is paving the way for it to assume a more primary role in the region.[195]

In May 2019, The Uzbekistan National Guard and the Chinese People's Armed Police (PAP) held a bilateral training designed to detect and eliminate terrorists at high risk. The conducted counter-terrorism exercises have been a reflection of the growing status of the Chinese military elements of the National Guard within the armed forces of Uzbekistan and a signal of increased cooperation with foreign partners.[196]

In addition, Uzbekistan's growing interest in joint training and exercises and language courses with Chinese forces is growing. China also funds language courses at the Uzbekistan National Guard Military-Technical Institute. The People's Liberation Army, the Chinese army, also established a training exchange with the Uzbek Armed Forces Academy. The growing influence of China on the security mechanisms of Uzbekistan strengthens its position in the country and in the Central Asia.[197]
Uzbekistan also purchased Chinese defense equipment as part of its developing security relationship with Beijing. In fact, Uzbekistan became the first Central Asian

[194] "China-Uzbekistan: Bilateral Trade and Future Outlook", *China Briefing*, September 22, 2021, https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china-uzbekistan-bilateral-trade-and-future-outlook/

[195] Ibid.

[196] Umida Hashimova, "Uzbekistan Leans on China for Public Security Cooperation", *The Diplomat*, May 28, 2022, https://thediplomat.com/2019/05/uzbekistan-leans-on-china-for-public-security-cooperation/

[197] Ibid.

country to receive the Chinese-made Wing Loong I military drone. In addition, Tashkent tested the shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missile system of China in 2019.[198]

While Tashkent's joint military-training programs continued to increase with Beijing, it pursued to maintain a strong security relation with Moscow too.

5.3.2. Russia as an Inheritor

The US withdrawal from Afghanistan provided an opportunity for China, Russia, and other Eurasian powers to fill the void. For Russia, which has traditionally been a prominent place for Uzbekistan, it has been an exciting situation that a competitor like the US has lost its place in the Central Asian equation. Uzbekistan and Russia are united by their political, economic, and cultural ties throughout history. Nevertheless, the Russian influence inherited from the Soviets was tried to be purged from domestic and foreign policy during the era of the first president of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov. Even after independence, among the Central Asian countries, Uzbekistan had the most incompatible relations with Russia. During the first presidency of Shavkat Mirziyoyev between 2016-2021, a consistent expansion policy was experienced in the foreign policy and foreign economic relations of the country. Uzbekistan's openness in its foreign policy has been the country's most distinguishing feature from the Karimov era. In this context, it will also be important to examine the changes observed in Uzbek-Russian relations under the presidency of Mirziyoyev.

Mirziyoyev, in his speech at the parliament of Uzbekistan on September 8, 2016, emphasized that the state would focus on areas of development. During this speech, he summarized the main priority of Uzbekistan's foreign policy as the security and development of the Central Asia region. Talking about the post-Soviet space,

[198] Dante Schulz, "China-Uzbekistan Bilateral Relations", *Caspian Policy Center*, March 21, 2021, https://www.caspianpolicy.org/research/security-and-politics-program-spp/china-uzbekistan-bilateral-relations#_edn17

Mirziyoyev also stated that Tashkent is interested in continuous development and comprehensive strengthening of friendly ties with the Russian Federation.[199]

The change in the nature of the relations between Russia and Uzbekistan and the dynamics of the contacts enabled the realization of interregional cooperation with meetings at the high level and intergovernmental contacts. The Russian-Uzbek talks also brought about large-scale projects. The Uzbek side's openness to discuss issues that were closed before, such as joining The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)[200], and a series of initiatives and proposals from the Uzbek side were enthusiastically received in Moscow.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to Uzbekistan on 18-19 October 2018 has been important for strengthening Russia-Uzbek relations. At the same time, the First Forum of Russia-Uzbek Interregional Cooperation was held in Tashkent. After these meetings, contracts worth 27 billion dollars were signed between the two countries, which will contribute to increasing the trade volume. [201]

Both sides also signed the Agreement on Program of Economic Cooperation for 2019-2024, the Cooperation Program in Cultural and Humanitarian Spheres for 2019-2021, and the International Radio Astronomy Observatory "Suffa". They also made an $11 billion deal to build a nuclear power plant. This plant is expected to be completed by 2030. This project will be financed by a loan from Russia and will be done by the Russian state enterprise "Rosatom".[202]

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[199] Anatolii Petraszczuk, "Russian vector in foreign policy of Uzbekistan during the presidency of Sh. Mirziyoyev", *Central Asia and The Caucasus*, 23(1), (April 2022), pp.5231.

[200] The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) is an international organization established by the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union and came into force on 1 January 2015. The EAEU aimed at regional economic integration and ensures the free movement of goods, services, capital and labor. The Member States of the Union are the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Belarus, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and the Russian Federation.

[201] Petraszczuk, "Russian vector in foreign policy of Uzbekistan during the presidency of Sh. Mirziyoyev", pp.5232.

[202] Ibid.

According to Mirziyoyev, Russia is in high demand as a security partner. Military relations actually started as soon as Mirziyoyev became President. On November 29, 2016, the defense ministers of the two countries signed an agreement on military-technical cooperation, which allowed the Uzbek side to negotiate directly with Russian arms manufacturers. This agreement paved the way for negotiations to supply Russia's Mi-25 helicopters in 2017.[203]

In this process, Russia attached special importance to the development of military relations with Uzbekistan. This orientation is clearly manifested in Russia's decision to supply Uzbekistan with military products at local prices. The importance of this is that Uzbekistan is the only country which is not a member of CSTO and has such a privilege in Central Asia. With the effect of close contacts at the political level, cooperation in the military field has multiplied. In 2018-2019, Uzbekistan purchased several dozen armored vehicles "Tiger", and "Typhoon-K", "BTR-82A" armored personnel carrier and "Sopka 2 Radar System" from Russia.[204] In addition, in 2018, Uzbekistan signed a 432 million dollar arms deal with the Russian Federation for 12 Mi-35M attack helicopters. This has been the largest arms sale to Uzbekistan since 2012. Uzbekistan's biggest arms sale to date has been the 103 million dollar deal with China.[205]

The development of Uzbek-Russian security relations in recent years has shown its dynamism through joint military exercises. In October 2017, Uzbekistan and Russia held the first military exercise since 2005. Uzbekistan's decision to hold a joint

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[203] Omelicheva, "The United States and Uzbekistan: Military-to-Military Relations in a New Era of Strategic Partnership".

[204]"Uzbekistan purchases a large batch of Typhoon armored vehicles from Russia", *Kun.Uz.*, October 29, 2019, https://kun.uz/en/news/2019/10/29/uzbekistan-purchases-a-large-batch-of-typhoon-armored-vehicles-from-russia,

[205] "Russia inks contract with Uzbekistan to deliver more than 10 Mi-35 helicopters" *TASS*, March 29, 2018, https://tass.com/defense/996636?utm_source=google.com&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=google.com&utm_referrer=google.com,

military exercise with Russia has given a hope for Russia that Uzbekistan can join the Russian-led CSTO again.

In addition to expanding bilateral security cooperation between Russia and Uzbekistan, destabilizing Afghanistan was accompanied by the expansion of Moscow-Tashkent cooperation. Karimov's harmonious approach to Russia's peacekeeping role in Afghanistan provided the basis for deeper Moscow-Tashkent cooperation in Afghanistan under Mirziyoyev's administration. In this context, Mirziyoyev announced that Uzbekistan will work with Russia under the umbrella of international institutions to solve Afghanistan's security problems.[206]

From 2018 to 2021, several joint counter-terrorism exercises were held between Uzbek and Russian special forces. During the exercises, particular attention was drawn to the practices of combating illegal groups that use drones for both reconnaissance and attack. In 2019, both sides conducted tactical exercises for tank units. More than 1.000 soldiers participated in this exercise and nearly 200 piece of military equipment were used.[207]

The strategic partnership program in the military field for the period of 2021-2025, adopted by Moscow and Tashkent in April 2021, right after the CSTO summit in 2021 is worth mentioning incase of its role on the level of military-technical cooperation.

Despite all these advances in expanding military cooperation with Russia, as mentioned in the previous sections, Uzbekistan continues to develop its security partnership with other countries too. Therefore, the modernization of the Uzbek army is being developed under the influence of numerous bilateral military exercises with multiple states.

[206] Ramani, "Russia and Uzbekistan's Renewed Security Partnership".

[207] Petraszczuk, "Russian vector in foreign policy of Uzbekistan during the presidency of Sh. Mirziyoyev", pp.5236.

5.3.3. Rising Regional Cooperation

In the following years of independence, Central Asia has been one of the world's least integrated regions in terms of regional trade, investment, and multilateral cooperation. However, after the change of power in Uzbekistan in 2016, this situation has also changed. In this context, Uzbekistan increased its regional commercial ties exponentially and started to develop new joint projects. After the development of Uzbekistan between 2017-2021, the new realities determined for Uzbekistan's foreign policy were based on the need for the development of the country to be coordinated with the development of the region. For this reason, policies have been put at the forefront of resolving key issues of regional security, including helping to resolve the situation in Afghanistan.

One of the most valuable ways to increase regional security is through regional integration. It is important for Central Asian countries to create a unified strategy against security threats on the region's southern border with Afghanistan. When the relations between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are examined, the two countries held the first bilateral exercise, Jaihun-2018, in the south of Tajikistan, after the tensions between the two countries were at their peaks. Afterward, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan signed a military-technical cooperation agreement in March 2019, which envisages bilateral exercises and joint production of military equipment. According to this agreement, the two countries held three more exercises, all with the participation of special operations fo (International Crisis Group, 2022)rces. In April 2020, the two countries signed an agreement on intelligence sharing.[208]

In August 2021, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan conducted joint military exercises in the Kharb-Maidon range, located 20 kilometers from the Afghanistan border. It is the first time that three countries have held such a counter-terrorism exercise. The Chief of General Staff of Uzbekistan, Shukhrat Kholmukhamedov, praised the

[208] Kennan Cable, "Central Asia's Multi-vector Defense Diplomacy", *Wilson Center*, No:68, (June 2021).

tripartite exercise and said that the situation in Afghanistan requires vigilance and preservation of combat capabilities. A total of 2,500 soldiers, 1,800 of whom were from Russia, and approximately 500 piece of military equipment were used in the exercises.[209]

The relations between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the largest states in the region, are of great importance in terms of sustaining the development of the region and strengthening regional cooperation after the withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan. The geographical proximity between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan allows them for close interaction. However, until 2016, the two countries had difficulties in developing a common approach; the reason behind this can be shown as the secret leadership among the first presidents of states. However, after the decision of openness in foreign policy during Mirziyoyev's period, these relations changed in a positive way.

With Mirziyoyev's presidency, the increasing ties between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan brought new dimensions to interstate cooperation. When Shavkat Mirziyoyev was re-elected as president in 2021, state visits were held where the issues of ensuring regional security were brought to the agenda. These contacts show that Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan relations continue to be a priority in foreign policy. Important steps were taken regarding the course of relations during Mirziyoyev's official visit to the city of Nur-Sultan on December 6, 2021, upon the invitation of the President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. The "Declaration of Joint Relations between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Kazakhstan" was signed after the meetings between the leaders; this is important in terms of structuring the relations of the two countries. After this agreement, the Inter-State Supreme Council, the Inter-

[209] "Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan complete joint military drills near Afghan border", *TASS,* August 10, 2021, https://tass.com/defense/1324249?utm_source=google.com&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=google.com&utm_referrer=google.com

Parliamentary Cooperation Council, and the Council of Foreign Ministers were established.[210]

This document is of great importance for the entire region. Because the legal and institutional framework created by the rapprochement of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan will generally contribute positively to the multilateral cooperation on the rising regional security of Central Asia.

The unifying role of the two countries to ensure the sustainable development of the region and to address the urgent problems in the field of security shows itself with various examples. The efforts of the two countries are focused on combating the security problems of the entire Central Asia region, such as the suppression of terrorism, religious extremism and illegal drug trafficking. These efforts also receive the support of the UN Security Council. The participation of the UN increases the impact of agreements in the field of ensuring regional security and maintaining stability.[211]

In May 2021, Kazakhstan also voted for the initiative of Mirziyoyev regarding the adoption of a special resolution of the UN General Assembly to declare the Aral Sea region a zone of environmental innovations and technologies. Therefore, there is supranational support for Uzbekistan's regional cooperation initiatives.[212]

Mirziyoyev also took steps to deepen and develop relations with Kyrgyzstan under the act of good relations with neighbors. In September 2016 Shavkat Mirziyoyev quickly resolved the sudden tension on the Kyrgyzstan border by releasing 4 Kyrgyz workers,

[210] Umarbek Nuriddinov, "Bilateral Cooperation Between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan: Will the Dynamics Continue?", *Central Asia Bureau for Analytical Reporting*, January 14, 2022, https://cabar.asia/en/bilateral-cooperation-between-uzbekistan-and-kazakhstan-will-the-dynamics-continue,

[211] Dauren Aben, "Regional Security In Central Asia: Addressing Existing And Potential Threats And Challenges" *Eurasian Research Journal*, 1(1), (January 2019, pp:53.

[212] Lee Kyung-sik, "Uzbekistan declares the Aral Sea region a zone of environmental innovations", *The Korea Post*, May 2021, https://www.koreapost.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=22942

who were initially detained by Uzbek troops in Ungar-too, a mountain in a disputed border area. On October 1st, Kyrgyzstan's Deputy Prime Minister paid a friendly visit to Andijan. At the end of the month, the Uzbeks sent a delegation to Kyrgyzstan as a return visit. Then, the news in the media of both countries reflected that the two states had serious border talks and tried to develop joint security strategies. This communication resulted in an interim agreement on the undecided areas of the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border.[213]

In October 2017, former President of Kyrgyzstan, Almazbek Atambayev, signed the Declaration of Strategic Partnership with Mirziyoyev while visiting Tashkent. In December 2017, Kyrgyzstan ratified an agreement signed in October to settle controversial aspects of the water reservoir, which was built during the Soviet era and filled with funds from the Kyrgyz and Uzbek SSR.[214]

The official visit of Sadyr Japarov, who started his duty as the President of Kyrgyzstan in January 2021, to Uzbekistan on 11-12 March 2021, is important in terms of the steps taken in the development of relations in the many fields. The new President accelerated the process of convergence of relations , like Mirziyoyev. He was accompanied by ministers, several regional governors, military and border security chiefs, and various other government representatives. During these meetings, the border issue, which could not be resolved, was discussed again. Japarov and Mirziyoyev mentioned that they prioritize regulations that will contribute to border security and intensify the negotiation process. Mirziyoyev described the conversation as a meeting dedicated to resolving boundary issues, for the first time in mutual relations in the last 30 years. Even regions that were not covered in the past were covered in depth.[215] Mirziyoyev's

[213] Catherine Pultz, "Mirziyoyev Keeping Up the Good Neighbor Act", *The Diplomat*, November 2, 2016, https://thediplomat.com/2016/11/mirziyoyev-keeping-up-the-good-neighbor-act/

[214] "Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan Ink Era-Defining Partnership Deal", *Eurasianet*, October 6, 2017, https://eurasianet.org/uzbekistan-kyrgyzstan-ink-era-defining-partnership-deal

[215] Catherine Pultz, "Kyrgyz President Japarov Touches Down in Tashkent", *The Diplomat*, March 11, 2021, https://thediplomat.com/2021/03/kyrgyz-president-japarov-touches-down-in-tashkent/

meeting with the Kyrgyz leader shows that the focus of the foreign policy of Uzbekistan will be on solving border security problems. The Uzbek leadership will take decisive steps in this regard in order to prevent major border conflicts that may occur in the future.

Another issue that was discussed during this meeting but will probably not be resolved immediately was the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan (CKU) railway.[216] The use of this railway was discussed in the main line of conversations about trade and transportation. Finally, in May 2022, Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan Akylbek Japarov mentioned that the construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway line will begin in the autumn of 2022, calling the project the largest in the history of Kyrgyzstan.[217]
President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev tried to develop relations with Turkmenistan during the regional goodwill visits of Tashkent's regional policy. During the official visit of the Turkmen government to Uzbekistan, the former president Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow was invited Uzbekistan to discuss the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline. In this meeting, the two countries agreed that regional security and stability largely depend on the developments in Afghanistan, and argued that they should contribute to the normalization of the political situation in Afghanistan, and the re-establishment of the social sphere and its inclusion in the regional and global economic order.[218]

[216] Ibid.

[217] "Construction of China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway will start soon", *The Global Times,* June 7, 2022, https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202206/1267513.shtml

[218] Ruslan Rehimov, "Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan reaffirm their commitment to Afghanistan people", *Anadolu Agency*, October 5, 2021, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/turkmenistan-uzbekistan-reaffirm-their-commitment-to-afghanistan-people/2383910

CHAPTER 6

THE FUTURE OF UZBEKISTAN-US RELATIONS

6.1. The Consequences of the US Withdrawal From Afghanistan

When former US President Donald Trump took office in January 2017, he held the first official and direct meetings between the US and the Taliban in 2018, without the involvement of the Afghan government. During these conversations, developed with the participation of Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad, Trump expressed the desire of the United States to withdrew seven thousand troops, which was about half of the total US deployments in Afghanistan.[219]

According to the decisions taken at the end of the meeting; the United States and the Taliban agreed on a formal agreement[220] under which the United States committed to withdrawing all American troops and non-diplomatic civilian personnel from Afghanistan by the end of April 2021, and the number of military forces was halved by mid-July. In response, the Taliban has pledged to thwart such attempts by not allowing any group, including al-Qaeda, to threaten the United States or its allies.[221] However, last president of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani insisted that it is necessary for the Taliban to meet the conditions of the legitimate government before starting negotiations.

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[219] Özkan & Omonkulov, "Uzbekistan's Mediator Role in the Afghan Peace Process as a Neighboring and Small State", pp: 53-54.

[220]"Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America", February 2020, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Agreement-For-Bringing-Peace-to-Afghanistan-02.29.20.pdf

[221]"U.S. Military Withdrawal and Taliban Takeover in Afghanistan: FAQs", *Congressional Research Service*, (September 2021), pp 6-7.

As a result of this meeting, the US-Taliban agreement did not call for an immediate ceasefire, and shortly after its signing, Taliban fighters launched attacks on Afghan security forces. In response, US forces interfere with these attacks with an airstrike against the Taliban in the southern province of Helmand.[222]

In September 2020, the Taliban and representatives of the Afghan government met in Doha, Qatar, after nearly two decades of war. Negotiations, which had been repeatedly delayed due to the prisoner swap proposed in the previous US-Taliban agreement, resumed after the Afghan government agreed to the release of 5,000 Taliban prisoners. In this meeting, both sides agreed to bring peace to Afghanistan and create a safe framework for Afghan society after the withdrawal of US troops.[223]

Shortly before Joe Biden, who was elected as the new US President, took office in January 2021, Acting US Defense Secretary Christopher C. Miller announced that the number of troops in Afghanistan would be reduced to 2,500 by mid-January. Thousands of troops have withdrawn following a deal with the Taliban in February. Meanwhile, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg warned that withdrawing troops early could make Afghanistan a haven for terrorists.[224]

When President Biden took office, he announced his intention to withdraw US forces completely by September 11, 2021. The first phase of the US troop withdrawal began on May 1, 2021, and by June, United States Central Command (CENTCOM) announced that 44% of the process was completed. At the end of August, the last US

[222] Ibid.

[223] Zafar Iqbal Yousafzai, "The Troubled Triangle: U.S.-Pakistan Relations under the Taliban's Shadow", *Routledge India,* 8 December 2021, pp.117.

[224]"by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the extraordinary meeting of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs", *NATO,* August 20, 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_186088.htm

military forces withdrew from Afghanistan. The withdrawal followed a chaotic two-week retreat in which more than 120,000 people were evacuated.[225]
When US troops withdrew from Afghanistan, the Afghan armed forces, which had become dependent on US support, were soon defeated by the Taliban and the city of Kabul fell. Ghani fled from Afghanistan the day Kabul fell.[226]

While the US started the withdrawal process in 2021, it was said that after the US military presence in Afghanistan ends, it would continue its ability to combat terrorist threats in Afghanistan by using assets located outside Afghanistan. US officials have described this as a "over the horizon" approach. But when control of Afghanistan quickly fell from the former Afghan government to the hands of the Taliban, all plans based on the continued US indirect presence in the country had to change. At this point, the building of diplomatic or political cooperation with Taliban officials would be impossible or very difficult.[227]

The power of the Taliban has triggered the characterization of Afghanistan, already one of the poor and aid-dependent countries, as potentially the site of the world's worst humanitarian crisis by the United Nations[228]. A number of interrelated factors contributed to the economic collapse underlying the humanitarian crisis, including the cutback of international development aid, international sanctions against the Taliban, and the US holding of Afghanistan's central bank assets.

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[225] "U.S. Military Withdrawal and Taliban Takeover in Afghanistan: FAQs", *Congressional Research Service*, (September 2021), pp.9.

[226] Susannah George, Claire Parker, John Hudson, Karen DeYoung, Dan Lamothe & Bryan Pietsch, "Afghan government collapses as Taliban sweeps in, U.S. sends more troops to aid chaotic withdrawal", *The Washington Post,* August 15, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/08/15/afghanistan-taliban-kabul-embassy-jalalabad/

[227]"U.S. Military Withdrawal and Taliban Takeover in Afghanistan: FAQs", pp:9.

[228] Clayton Thomas, "Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy: In Brief", *Congressional Research Service*, (February 2022), pp. 9-11.

The events in Afghanistan, which is surrounded by land on all sides and exposed to the intervention of its neighbors and other foreign powers throughout its history, directly affect the regional dynamics. Therefore, the situation in Afghanistan had consequences for its neighbors in Central Asia too.

Afghanistan's Central Asian neighbors Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have responded to the Taliban takeover of government in different ways. The governments of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have prioritized economic relations, especially because of the planned TAPI gas pipeline. In fact, the Uzbek foreign minister held a visit to Kabul to officially contact the Taliban. Although Uzbekistan stated that it would not officially recognize the Taliban, it also contacted the Taliban. This thin line in relations allowed Uzbekistan to begin exploring opportunities for economic cooperation with Kabul without alienating the United States and other Western states, which sought to isolate Afghanistan with heavy sanctions.

In the short term, Uzbekistan played a key role in delivering humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. Mirziyoyev recently sent a delegation to Washington calling for more aid to Afghanistan. Tashkent also embarked on efforts to persuade the European Union and the United States to send their diplomats back to Kabul.[229]

6.2. Security of Uzbekistan in the New Conjuncture

Over the years, ties between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan in the fields of energy, culture, humanitarian and transportation have strengthened. Since 2018, Afghans have the opportunity to study in Uzbekistan at a training center exclusively for Afghan citizens. Afghanistan is important in terms of opening access to the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf, and transporting Uzbek goods to the Chinese and European markets. In this context, the government of Uzbekistan has made efforts to contribute to the peaceful resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan. On this basis, at the initiative of the President of Uzbekistan, several international conferences were held. One of them was

[229] Navbahor Imamova, "Uzbekistan Seeks to Engage Taliban Without Alienating West", *VOA News*, May 4, 2022, https://www.voanews.com/a/uzbekistan-seeks-to-engage-taliban-without-alienating-west/6557338.html,

"Peace Process, Security Cooperation and Regional Interaction" in 2018. The second large-scale international conference was "Central and South Asia: Regional Relations. Challenges and Opportunities". Representatives of Asian and European countries, and international and regional organizations attended the conferences. The Tashkent Declaration and the Joint Agreement were signed at the end of the conferences. These conferences contributed to the further development of cooperation between Central and South Asian states. During the conferences, a C5+1 meeting was also held where the participating states discussed the threats and challenges posed by the instability in Afghanistan.[230]

The formal withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan is particularly important for Central Asian countries given their geographic proximity and it will also have the power to create strategic consequences. In this context, without wasting any time US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with the foreign ministers of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan on April 23, 2021, within the framework of C5+1. These talks can be characterized as an attempt by the US to reiterate its security partnership with the region and to signal other regional countries.[231]

Before Afghanistan is fully demilitarized, the virtual meetings, between the US and Central Asian countries, are started as a part of an approach to find new channels through which the United States can continue to be influential after withdrawing from the region. As a result of these meetings, Central Asian countries would gain regional stability within the framework of international and multilateral mechanisms and dialogues and through cooperation with Afghanistan in many fields such as trade, culture, energy, human rights, and security.

[230] Elena Izteleuova, "The Afghan Issue on the Agendas of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan", *Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting (CABAR)*, January 7, 2022, https://cabar.asia/en/the-afghan-issue-on-the-agendas-of-uzbekistan-and-kazakhstan#_ftn1

[231] "Secretary Blinken's Call with Central Asian Foreign Ministers*", U.S. Department of State*, February 28,2022, https://www.state.gov/secretary-blinkens-call-with-central-asian-foreign-ministers/

In addition, it was agreed during these meetings to continuously develop security cooperation between the United States and Central Asian countries as a means of enhancing stability and regional security and combating cross-border security problems arising from Afghanistan. This meeting and the subsequent visit of the US Special Envoy for Reconciliation to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, to Tashkent, and Dushanbe in early May, revealed the possibility of development on military relations between the US and Central Asian countries.

For Central Asian countries, the existing Taliban regime in Afghanistan brings many difficulties. The deepening of the internal conflict in Afghanistan could lead to a weakening of control over the country's northern borders. For Uzbekistan, this could lead to a drastic increase in smuggling and drug trafficking. In addition, this may necessitate additional protection not only for the region, but also for major foreign partners, particularly China, Russia, and South Asian countries, for additional protection for key infrastructure facilities such as strategically important mineral deposits and gas pipelines. In such a situation, the region needs external protection, and this paves the way for the US, China, and Russia to increase their influence in the region.

The economic consequences of the presence of the US military forces in Afghanistan are important. The total cost of this military action to the United States was up to 2.3 trillion dollars.[232] The foreign investment and financial support provided by the United States to Afghanistan ensured additional opportunities for it to develop trade and economic relations with foreign partners, including Central Asian countries. If economic relations with Afghanistan deteriorate after the US withdrawal from the region, there will be a significant risk of market loss for countries such as Kazakhstan

[232] "Cost of War", *Brown University-Watson Institute International & Public Affairs*, August 2021, https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/figures/2021/human-and-budgetary-costs-date-us-war-afghanistan-2001-2022,

and Uzbekistan, which have high turnover from commercial activities with Afghanistan.[233]

The worsening of the situation in Afghanistan delayed the commissioning of long-planned projects with good potential, such as new railways, international power lines and the TAPI gas pipeline. The increasing strengthening of the Taliban's position in Afghanistan and the possible intensification of the internal political crisis may push back foreign investors and partners coming to these countries. For this reason, the stabilization of Afghanistan and closing security gaps in the region are important for Central Asian countries due to the effects they will create in many different areas.

Therefore, for Central Asia, the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan will have economic consequences as well as trigger new security threats. Even though the Central Asian states try to maintain bilateral relations with Afghanistan, they face an interlocutor with a lot of risks. To date, foreign support for Afghanistan has waned after the withdrawal was completed due to the sanctions, and such elements of instability have only further provoked the actions of extremist groups in the country.[234] China has been one of the active powers in the region in terms of trade activities recently. However, the wave of insecurity covering the region is not likely to be resolved with financial support or trade alone. At the same time, the security of infrastructure projects and trade flows in the region need to be controlled.

Uzbekistan is trying to deal with the Taliban in its own way, both by being open and moderate in foreign policy and without restricting its own sovereignty. Uzbekistan is attempting to reduce the potential for aggression by establishing diplomatic relations with the Taliban. It made statements that Afghanistan is an integral part of Central Asia. This soft tone is to create a bargaining edge when dealing with Uzbekistan's

[233] Izteleuova, "The Afghan Issue on the Agendas of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan".

[234] "U.S. Military Withdrawal and Taliban Takeover in Afghanistan: FAQs", pp:50.

economic and security relations with Afghanistan. All countries in the region are increasingly establishing a dialogue with the Taliban to prevent possible threats. In this way, the Taliban became a legitimate political force. In order not to attract the reaction of the West, Uzbekistan claimed that it would work with the Taliban on the condition that Afghanistan remains a republic and does not become an Islamic Emirate.[235]

For the Taliban government in Afghanistan, feeling any American military presence around it will have a catastrophic effect. It is also important for the Taliban to establish good relations with its neighbors in this respect. After many years, Afghanistan, which was purified from US troops, does not want to bring any foreign power back to its territory and be suppressed. Afghanistan currently borders six countries, none of which have US bases.[236] These countries are Iran, Pakistan, China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. For this reason, the military cooperation of these countries with the US is important for Afghanistan because it is undesirous of creating US-based pressure in its country again.

The recent deepening of Uzbek-American cooperation can be attributed to the increasing relations between the two states for the preservation of security and stability in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan is considered a key partner by the United States as it supports international efforts to stabilize Afghanistan. In the recent period, there has been an increase in military training activities in the military cooperation between Uzbekistan and the US. The US has been training soldiers of Uzbek Special Forces since 2015. In addition, the US provides consultancy to the Uzbek army and assistance to Uzbek professional military institutions.[237]

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[235] "Afghanistan's Security Challenges under the Taliban", *International Crisis Group*, August 12, 2022, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/326-afghanistans-security-challenges-under-taliban

[236] Temur Umarov, "Is There a Place for a U.S. Military Base in Central Asia?", *Carnegie Moscow*, June 4, 2021, https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/84685

[237] Kelkitli, "Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy Under The Leadership Of Mirziyoyev: Struggle To Sustain Autonomy", pp.34.

In October 2021, US Undersecretary for Defense Policy Colin Kal made a speech at a hearing in the US Senate Armed Forces Committee that the Pentagon would take steps to establish bases in the Central Asian region, if necessary. After the withdrawal of the American army, it was stated that special operations in Afghanistan would be carried out with missile attacks from the horizon using long-range Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV). The primary plan of the US is to carry out drone settlement in Uzbek lands, rather than establishing a military base. [238]

Ensuring security and stabilization in Afghanistan has been the main axis of relations between Uzbekistan and the US during Mirziyoyev's period. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 and the suspension of its embassy in Kabul, as well as the resumption of Taliban control in Afghanistan, have exposed the southern regions of Uzbekistan to new risks and dangers.

In mid-August 2021, about 50 helicopters and planes were taken to Uzbekistan as Afghan air force personnel and former Afghan President Ashraf Ghani fled the country and Taliban forces captured the capital, Kabul. A few planes and helicopters were also taken to Tajikistan to prevent them from falling into the control of the Taliban. Ever since, the Taliban have insisted that the planes are Afghan property and have demanded them back. On the other hand, officials in Uzbekistan emphasized that dozens of planes that flew to its territory when the Afghan government collapsed, belonged to the United States and will not be returned to the interim government in Afghanistan.[239]

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238 Ahmad Khan Dawlatyar, "What Does the United States Hope to Achieve with UAVs in Afghanistan?", *Ankara Center for Crisis & Policy Studies*, September 19, 2022, https://www.ankasam.org/what-does-the-united-states-hope-to-achieve-with-uavs-in-afghanistan/?lang=en

239 Navbahor Imamova & Jeff Seldin, "Uzbeks Say Aircraft Flown From Afghanistan Are US Property", *VOA News*, April 29, 2022, https://www.voanews.com/a/uzbeks-say-aircraft-flown-from-afghanistan-are-us-property-/6551163.html

According to a 2022 report assessing the collapse of the Afghan government, Afghanistan Air Force pilots have flown about 25 percent of the total available aircraft to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to avoid the capture of the Taliban.[240] Satellite images analyzed by the Center for Strategic and International Studies show that a large number of aircraft, including C-208s, A-29s, Mi-17s, Mi-25s and UH-60 Black Hawks, have landed in Uzbekistan.[241]

The fate of these planes and helicopters in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan has been uncertain for more than a year. According to a senior Defense Department official and a congressional aide with direct knowledge, US officials aim to take advantage of these planes when they need to gain a foothold on Afghan soil. Accordingly, the relevant officials said that the US plans to make an assessment of the performance of the aircraft. The aim here is to deepen security cooperation with Uzbekistan on border security and the fight against terrorism.[242]

On 4 October 2021, US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, Congress delegation, and various Defense Department officials visited Tashkent. These officials stated that American assistance would be needed on the ground to contribute to counter-terrorism operations in Afghanistan.[243] While the US interest in the region has increased or decreased in response to geopolitical developments, a picture reminiscent of the period after September 11, when the US opened military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to support operations in Afghanistan, emerges.

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[240] "Collapse of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: An Assessment of the Factors That Led to Its Demise", *SIGAR,* May 2022, pp.36.

[241] Matthew P. Funaiole & Joseph S. Bermudez Jr., "Afghan Military Aircraft Land in Uzbekistan, Move to Tajikistan," *Center for Strategic and International Studies,* September 2, 2021, https://www.csis.org/analysis/afghan-military-aircraft-land-uzbekistan-move-tajikistan-updated

[242] Lara Seligman, "U.S. looks to trade former Afghan aircraft for counterterrorism help in Central Asia", *Politico,* September 19, 2022, https://www.politico.com/news/2022/09/19/afghan-aircraft-trade-counterterrorism-al-qaeda-00057564

[243] "Deputy Secretary Sherman's Meeting with Uzbekistan President Mirziyoyev", *U.S. Embassy & Consulates in Russia*, https://ru.usembassy.gov/deputy-secretary-shermans-meeting-with-uzbekistan-president-mirziyoyev/

During the meeting on December 2021, between Abdulaziz Kamilov, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and Donald Lu, Deputy Minister of South and Central Asian Affairs of the US Department of State, Lu underlined that US aid would increase to support Uzbekistan's reform program. During this meeting, the parties agreed to deepen ties with defense departments, law enforcement and border and customs authorities. Representatives of the United States and Uzbekistan stressed the importance of strengthening security cooperation.[244]

The parties stated the commitment of Uzbekistan and the US to continue humanitarian support directly to the Afghan people. In this context, the US expressed its appreciation for the humanitarian aid services transferred from Termez Cargo Center. Both sides expressed their support for further intensification of regional participation through the C5+1[245] and the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA).[246]

At the beginning of July 2022, Uzbekistan hosted delegates from more than 20 countries and international organizations at a conference about Afghanistan. The US also attended this meeting. At this point, Uzbekistan is important in terms of hosting the dialogue on the negotiations between the US and the Taliban.[247]

Diplomatic relations between the US and Uzbekistan, which were established for the first time in 1992, have been on a course of variation for 30 years. In this time period, the United States and Uzbekistan have developed a broad relationship, and cooperated

[244] "Joint Statement between the United States and Uzbekistan Following the Inaugural Meeting of the Strategic Partnership Dialogue".

[245] Ibid.

[246] An agreement between Central Asian countries and the United States, in which they emphasized their desire to promote an attractive investment climate and expand trade in products and services.

[247] Ayaz Gul, "Uzbekistan to Host US-Taliban Talks on Economic Challenges Facing Afghans", *VOA News*, July 25, 2022, https://www.voanews.com/a/uzbekistan-to-host-us-taliban-talks-on-economic-challenges-facing-afghans/6673250.html

in areas such as border and regional security programs, economic relations, political and civil society issues, and military training. Uzbekistan is an important partner for the United States in bringing stability and providing international humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, which poses a significant security threat to Central Asia, as well as in fighting with regional threats such as narcotics and human trafficking, terrorism and violent extremism. Within this framework, efforts are being made to develop relations among the US and Uzbekistan.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, 15 Republics, including the 5 Central Asian states that gained their independence, took their places as new actors in the international system. However, these states have faced many problems in the process of state and nation-building. These countries have tried produce various policies to eliminate dependency on Russia, to switch to a market economy, and to fight security threats. Developing relations with international actors is a part of this. Considering these international actors, it has been valuable to form an alliance with a western superpower like the US for newly independent states that want to keep away from the influence and legacy of Russia.

Among these countries, Uzbekistan has been different in many ways in the Central Asia. With a number of 34 million, Uzbekistan has the largest population among the former Soviet republics after the Russian Federation and Ukraine. In addition, Uzbekistan is the only country among the Central Asian countries that has a truly homogeneous ethnicity. Besides, it is a country with the strongest army in the region, it has many natural resources and a thriving economy. For these reasons, Uzbekistan is an important candidate to be a regional power in Central Asia. In addition, Uzbekistan's geopolitical position offers freedom of action for the country. Located in the heart of Central Asia, this country represents strategical importance because of its borders with Afghanistan and other Central Asian countries.

The domestic and foreign policy that Uzbekistan followed after gaining its independence was heavily shaped by the influence of security problems such as fundamentalism and extremism, internal conflicts, narcotics trafficking, and access to water resources.

In particular, Uzbekistan's priorities in the security of the political regime are the fight against terrorism and the prevention of the spread of civil wars. This security policy of the Uzbek administration is clearly seen in its bilateral relations with countries such as the US, Russia, and China.

In the post-Cold War era, the US has become a strategic actor whose influence is increasing in the former Soviet geography. The US, which wanted to have competitive power with Russia in Central Asia and the Caucasus, tried to establish good relations with the countries of the region. In the first years following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the US had goals such as supporting the independence of the countries, having a say in the sharing of energy resources, and denuclearization the countries in the region, but the relations could not progress much. After the September 11 attacks, this situation changed and relations gained momentum.

The geopolitical significance of the Central Asia increased with the September 11 terror attacks. The US, which struggled with the Taliban, started to increase its bilateral relations with the Central Asian countries. From this period onwards, it is necessary to evaluate the US's Central Asia policy by considering security problems as well as economic interests. As a natural result of this change of strategy, Uzbekistan had become an important ally for the US. Hereafter, the relationship between the two countries, whose security problems intersect, turned into a relationship of an alliance. After the September 11 attacks in the US, existing American interests combined with security problems, and Uzbekistan gave the green light to support the United States and approved the use of its military facilities for operations in Afghanistan. As a result, the Karshi-Khanabad (K2) base provided a significant advantage for the United States. In return, Uzbekistan received significant military aid from the United States, both financially and in militarily.

However, good relations between the United States and Uzbekistan did not last long. The wave of democratization that started after the Tulip Revolution, which overthrew the authoritarian government of Kyrgyzstan, hit Uzbekistan too.

In this period, the human rights violations in Uzbekistan started to be a concern for the US.

After the Color Revolutions started, the wave of movement reached Uzbekistan in 2005 and the Andijan events began. While the state focused on the solution to internal turmoil in this period, it closed itself to the outside and relations with the US deteriorated, which was already disturbed by the US's criticism of human rights violations in Uzbekistan. After the United States began criticizing the Uzbek government for its actions and pressing for an independent investigation of the Andijan events, Tashkent informed Washington that all US troops should leave K2. After that, Uzbekistan ruptured its relations with the US. The US was deployed from the Karshi-Khanabad (K2) base. However, no matter how much Uzbekistan tried to reduce its foreign dependency, it was insufficient to solve the security problems. In accordance, in November 2005, an cooperation agreement was signed with Russia, providing protection to Uzbekistan. Relations with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization were also developed.

In the summer of 2005, when the Shanghai Cooperation Organization convened for its annual meeting, a statement was issued demanding that the United States should set a timetable for the withdrawal of its military forces from the Central Asia. Therefore, after the raid in Andijan and after the United States left the K2 airbase, relations between Uzbekistan and the United States have deteriorated considerably.

Before his death in 2016, Karimov, who suspended relations with the US, entered the process of reopening with the US in the following period and tried to take steps to improve military and economic relations. These relations between Uzbekistan and the United States began to be restructured quickly when Karimov passed away and Shavkat Mirziyoyev took over the presidency instead.

For Uzbekistan, renewed cooperation with the United States brought clear advantages. Even if Mirziyoyev established close relations with Russia, this raised concerns that Russian influence would prevail in the future. Over the past few years, China, as the

main economic partner in the region, has sought to lock Uzbekistan more closely into its political and economic orbit. At the same time, the Uzbek government believes that it will benefit from a deeper military, economic and diplomatic ties with the United States under the idea of a "war on terror" to counterbalance the great powers.

Uzbekistan does not maintain any country's military bases on its territory and, unlike Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, is not a member of the Russian-led CSTO.[248] Uzbekistan relies on bilateral military agreements rather than hosting any base as long as it can provide protection to keep out IMU militants and other extremist organizations based in Afghanistan and other security issues.

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan are members of the Russia-led CSTO. In this context, there is a CSTO base under Russian command in Kant, Kyrgyzstan. In addition, Kyrgyzstan proved to be closer to Russia by closing its US military base in Manas and, became a member of the EAEU. The fact that Russia's largest military base is located in Tajikistan shows that this country is under Russian influence. Russia-led CSTO conducted exercises with Central Asian member states following the Taliban's re-conquest of Afghanistan, including exercises in Tajikistan, which is close to the Afghan border.[249] Therefore, CSTO members in Central Asia have openness toward Russian military units. Uzbekistan, which left the organization twice, the first in 1999 and the second in 2012, not currently a member of CSTO. Indeed, Russia is looking forward to the possible membership of Uzbekistan, as this would be a development that would also could increase Russia's influence immensely.[250] However, Moscow was only able to persuade Tashkent to join the EAEU as an observer member. Ultimately, Uzbekistan will not have foreign troops in its territory

[248] Zhuldyz Kanapiyanova, "The Us And Russian Policy Toward Central Asia In The Framework Of The Geopolitical Theory", pp.62.

[249] Ibid, pp:65.

[250] Kanapiyanova, "The Us And Russian Policy Toward Central Asia In The Framework Of The Geopolitical Theory", pp.62.

unless it requires foreign assistance for any security issue related to the border with Afghanistan or any other issue that it can rely on the CSTO to resolve.

Nevertheless, although Uzbekistan is not a member of the CSTO, its close ties with Russia can be seen from different examples. For instance, Uzbek officers began to receive training in military institutions in Russia, joint exercises took place in Uzbekistan after many years, and Uzbekistan began to purchase Russian military equipment[251] are indications that military-technical cooperation has developed and continues to a great extent. Russia closely followed the US initiatives in Uzbekistan and entered the race to make more useful moves for Tashkent than Washington in security cooperation. However, the United States has had a distinct advantage in meeting Uzbekistan's demands for high-quality professional military training (PME).

China, on the other hand, is trying to activate the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in order to balance the power of the US, apart from bilateral trade with the region. China maintains its security presence in the region to reduce the permeability of Tajik and Pakistani borders, which facilitates the trafficking of drugs, weapons, and people from Afghanistan to China.

China is increasing its security presence in Central Asia through strategic military bases in Tajikistan, a Central Asian country bordered by Afghanistan to the south and China's XUAR Autonomous Region to the south. China is strengthening its influence in the region under the excuse of defending region against the terrorist threat, which has been fueled by security concerns in the region after the Taliban's capture of Afghanistan.

China is currently not only an important economic partner for Uzbekistan but also actively acting to institutionalize its relations with the Central Asian states. The C+C5 meeting between China's foreign ministers and Central Asian countries was held in

[251] Toktogulov, "Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy Under Mirziyoyev: Change Or Continuity?", pp.60.

Xi'an. Speaking on behalf of all countries, in this meeting the Chinese foreign minister criticized the US meddling in the internal affairs of other countries.

Uzbekistan and Turkey, which have deep historical and cultural ties, have recently developed relations too. Turkey and Uzbekistan cooperate on Afghanistan. Uzbekistan participated in the "Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process" (HoA-IP) platform established under the leadership of Turkey for the solution of the Afghanistan problem. For the permanent establishment of stability in Afghanistan, Turkey is an important partner for the Central Asian states. In this framework, Turkey acts in coordination with Uzbekistan.[252]

Looking at the big picture, in Central Asia, lately the economic partner role is generally paired with China and the security role with Russia. Although it is not clearly stated whether there is such a division of labor between these two countries, the fact that both countries are included in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization shows that they can act within the framework of common interests regarding the Central Asia.[253] The strategic concerns that exist for the Central Asian countries cause them to prioritize security interests in their foreign relations, and they strive to develop their own regional roles along the lines.

Uzbekistan became interested in transforming the way of thinking and learning in military education as well as its outdated curriculum, doctrine, and educational philosophy during Karimov's reign. In doing so, benefiting from the intellectual knowledge of Western partners has become valuable for Uzbekistan.

The goal that Uzbekistan wants to achieve as a result of this military cooperation is to have the ability to maintain its own teaching faculty and academic programs and to ensure the continuous professionalization of the army. Additionally, the armed forces

[252] Halit Hamzaoğlu, "Turkey-Uzbekistan Relations: Strategic Cooperation and Partnership", *International Journal of Social Sciences,* 6(2), September 2022, pp: 325.

will become more capable of conducting their own independent actions domestically and providing security leadership in the region. In addition, the comparability of the PME standards and the joint training to be carried out will strengthen the interoperability of the Uzbek troops with the US and provide a security guarantee to Uzbekistan. This will open up the possibility of Uzbek armed forces joining and having a say in allied troops for peacekeeping or other operations.

The politics and society of Uzbekistan will also benefit from changes in the nature of military education. In addition, a professional army will strengthen the security bond between Uzbek citizens and state institutions and increase the reputation of the military profession in Uzbekistan. As an example of this convergence, the Uzbek leader visited Washington in 2018 and signed the first military cooperation plan with the United States. Since then, the number of joint military exercises has increased and a certain number of Uzbek officers are now trained by US soldiers.

Uzbekistan hosted a series of conferences during the Mirziyoyev era that focused on ending the conflict in Afghanistan in line with its security interests. In May 2020, Washington, Tashkent and Kabul started their first tripartite dialogue. There ar changes in the scope of military relations between the United States and Uzbekistan after the US withdrew from Afghanistan.

The US, which has been on the territory of Afghanistan for years, has given signals that security will be ensured after leaving there. However, at the moment, there is no geographical proximity of the US to the region that can provide this. In this context, it is also important for the US to increase the size of military alliances with Central Asian countries. In this way, the US will not lose its access to the region and will not leave the environment empty against the influence of countries such as Russia and China, which have interests in the region. The withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan also raised concerns for the Central Asian countries. The IMU and the Hizb-ut-Tahrir, which are the two strongest terrorist organizations in the Uzbekistan, can be organized in Afghanistan and this security gap carries a great risk with it.

Although Uzbekistan, which is trapped in terms of security, develop positive relations with the incumbent Taliban government, this method can only eliminate security problems in the short term. It must be admitted that Central Asian states that choose to engage with the Taliban have limited resources to fill the security gap after the US withdrawal.

Against these security concerns, Central Asian states' attempts to intervene independently and without a common strategy will not be more than a futile effort. Any intervention by these countries could even pave the way for a direct military attack of the Taliban on Central Asian countries. In this framework, the option for Uzbekistan is to act jointly with other regional powers in the long term or to receive the help of foreign powers. When the situation is evaluated in terms of Uzbekistan-US relations, it is seen that both sides have interests in the field of military cooperation.

Military relations between the US and Uzbekistan developed rapidly during the Mirziyoyev period. Nevertheless, many factors can be addressed that would complicate the establishment of a powerful US- Uzbekistan military cooperation. First of all while implementing its security policies, Uzbekistan tried not to clash with the Taliban and not to attract the reaction of the West. At the same time, it focused on developing relations with two countries which are China and Russia. Therefore, although the presence of a US military cooperation is a factor that will ensure the security of Uzbekistan, it may draw the reaction of other countries which Uzbekistan has developed military relations. Secondly, if a military deal is made in which the United States is given great privileges, the public may react to it. Thirdly, the Taliban government will show serious reactions to a US military presence in close proximity to the Afghanistan, and more conflicts and bloodshed will arise than ever before.

There are currently no foreign soldiers in Uzbekistan. The country relies on bilateral agreements rather than hosting any foreign troops to deal with the security threats it may face. This reflects both the declining role of the United States in the region and the intensifying rivalry between global powers.

Uzbekistan's foreign policy concept, updated after Mirziyoyev, raised such questions as 'Will Uzbekistan abandon its military neutrality and improve its military cooperation agreement with the United States?' or 'Will the country participate the CSTO or the Eurasian Economic Union (EEA)?' and 'Will it select another country as a foreign policy priority?'. What is certain for now is that Uzbekistan has turned to a policy of balance and has determined domestic and foreign policies to protect its country from security threats.

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APPENDICES

A: TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Soğuk Savaş sonrası bağımsızlığını kazanan Orta Asya devletleri dünya siyasetine artan bir ilgiyle dahil olmaya çalışmıştır. Benzer şekilde onlar da dünya siyasetine dahil edilmeye çalışılmıştır. Bunun ana nedenlerinden biri Orta Asya'nın coğrafi olarak Hazar petrol ve gazının geliştiği alanda bulunuyor olmasıdır. Özellikle batının Hazar'dan petrol üretimine ve ihracatına olan ilgisi, Batı'daki politika yapıcılar nezdinde Kafkaslar ve Orta Asya'nın öneminin artmasında önemli bir faktör olmuştur. Bunun dışında Orta Asya batıdan Çin'e kadar uzanan yol üzerinde stratejik bir köprü konumunda bulunması açısından değerlidir. Jeostratejik önemi ve potansiyel enerji kaynakları ile tarih boyunca büyük güçlerin ilgisini çeken Orta Asya, Avrasya'nın merkezinde yer almaktadır ve bu özelliklerine istinaden Avrasya'nın kalbi olarak adlandırılmaktadır. Dolayısıyla Doğu ile Batı arasında Asya ve Avrupa'yı birbirine bağlayan Orta Asya'nın önemi, jeopolitik, jeoekonomik ve jeostratejik konumu ile tanımlanmaktadır. Coğrafya, Orta Asya devletlerini ticaret, rekabet ve çatışmalar içeren bir tarihin unsurları haline getirmiştir.

Bölgesel güçler arasındaki rekabetin özü, bölge devletleri üzerindeki siyasi ve ekonomik etki ile ilgilidir; bu çerçevede, doğal kaynaklar önemli bir rol oynamış olsa da, farklı etkenlerden de bahsedilebilir. 1991 yılında elde edilen bağımsızlıktan bu yana Orta Asya ülkelerinin ulusal kalkınmasının özgünlüğünü ve dış siyasi önceliklerini belirleyen en önemli etkenler, komşu cumhuriyetlere dağılmış yerel topluluklar, nüfus artışının yaşam alanıyla tutarsızlığı; su kaynaklarının kıtlığı veya su temini sorunu; önemli doğal kaynakların varlığı ve bunların uygun şekilde işletilememesi; narkotik kaçakçılığı ve jeopolitikten kaynaklanan güvenlik sorunları; insan hakları konusunda yaşanan eksiklikler ve yetersizlik; İslami aşırılık ve köktencilik sorunları; ve ekonomik zorluklar olmuştur. Bu faktörler Orta Asya'nın

güvenliğini zayıflatarak bu ülkelerin iç ve dış siyasetinde söz sahibi olan bir etkiye sahip olmuştur.

Orta Asya'nın önemli devletlerinden biri olan Özbekistan, Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasından sonra bölgedeki jeopolitik süreçler üzerinde önemli bir etkiye sahip olmuştur. Özbekistan'ın bölgedeki jeopolitik konumu, tarihinin ve yönetiminin kendine özgü siyasetinden büyük ölçüde etkilenmiştir. Özbekistan birçok yönden Orta Asya bölgesindeki diğer ülkelerden farklı olmuştur. Öncelikle Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasından sonra Rusya Federasyonu ve Ukrayna'dan sonra en büyük nüfusa sahip ülke konumundadır. İkinci olarak, Özbekistan, Orta Asya ülkeleri arasında etnik açıdan en homojen yapıya sahip ülkedir. Ayrıca bu ülke, bölge ülkelerine göre nispeten daha güçlü bir savunmaya sahip olması, çok sayıda doğal kaynağa ev sahipliği yapması ve gelişen bir ekonomisinin olması gibi faktörler nedeniyle Orta Asya'da bölgesel bir güç olmaya en yakın konumdadır. Jeopolitik konumu itibarıyla hareket özgürlüğü de vardır. Orta Asya'nın kalbinde yer alan bu ülke, Afganistan ve diğer Orta Asya ülkeleriyle ortak sınırlara sahipken, Rusya, Çin veya İran gibi bölgesel güçlerle ortak sınırları bulunmamaktadır.

Ekonomik ve siyasi reform eksikliği ve düşük refah seviyeleri nedeniyle Orta Asya'da İslami aşırılık tehdidi hızlanmıştır. Afgan krizinin Özbekistan'ın dış politikası üzerinde özellikle önemli bir etkisi olmuştur. 1980'lerde, İslami köktencilik ülkeye nüfuz etmeye başlamış ve giderek yaygınlaşmıştır. Özbekistan ve diğer Orta Asya devletleri arasında aşırılık yanlısı grupların en büyükleri Hizb ut Tahrir (HT; şeriat kuralının kurulmasını amaçlayan siyasi yönelimli İslami bir hareket) ve Özbekistan İslami Hareketi (ÖİH) olmuştur. ÖİH ve HT'nin ilk Özbekistan Cumhurbaşkanı İslam Kerimov'u devirme konusunda ortaklaşan bir amaçları vardı ve bu misyona hizmet etmek için Taliban ve El Kaide ile birlikte çalışmaya istekliydiler.

ÖİH kurulduktan kısa bir süre sonra bir dizi silahlı saldırı düzenlemiş ve rehineler almaya başlamıştır. 11 Eylül 2001 tarihinde militan İslamcı aşırılık yanlısı El Kaide örgütü tarafında ABD'de gerçekleştirilen terör olaylarından sonra, ÖİH gerillaları

ABD liderliğinde kurulan koalisyona karşı Afganistan'daki İslami köktendinci, militan İslamcı ve cihatçı siyasi hareket Taliban'ın yanında savaşmıştır ve bazı militanların öldürülmesine ve bazılarınınsa kaçmasına neden olmuştur. ABD'nin Afganistan'ı işgali sırasında, ÖİH'in faaliyetleri önemli ölçüde azalmıştır ancak sonlanmamıştır. Bunun yanısıra güvenlik ortamı Irak ve Şam İslam Devleti'nin (IŞİD) varlığından da etkilenmiş ve Özbekistan açısından ciddi bir güvenlik tehdidi olarak nitelendirilmiştir . Özbekçe konuşan birçok militanın IŞİD safhalarında çatışmaya girdiği bildirilmiş ve hatta ÖİH, IŞİD'le iş birliği içinde olacaklarını dile getirmiştir.

2000'lerin başında ABD liderliğindeki Sonsuz Özgürlük Operasyonu ve NATO'nun Afganistan'daki Uluslararası Güvenlik Destek Gücü, El Kaide ve Taliban'ın Orta Asya'dan kökünü kazımaya çalışmıştır. 2001-2002'de Sonsuz Özgürlük Operasyonu sırasında Afganistan'dan çıkarılan ÖİH destekçileri birçok mücadelenin ardından Pakistan'da yeniden bir araya gelmiştir. Burada, Taliban ve El Kaide ile bağlantılarını sürdürmüştür.

Özbekistan'da iç karışıklıklar da güvenliği etkileyen sebeplerden biri olmuştur. Bunun en önemli örneklerinden biri 2007 cumhurbaşkanlığı seçimleri öncesinde özellikle ekonomik sorunlar ve halkın hoşnutsuzluğu sonucu hız kazanan Andican olaylarıdır. Gürcistan'da dramatik siyasi değişim yaratan hareketlerin artan etkisi ve tüm Avrasya'yı kavuran Renkli Devrimler ışığında Özbekistan'daki karmaşıklık ve kriz ortamı Andican olaylarına zemin hazırlamıştır. Mart 2003'te, yönetimin bir üniversite rektörünü görevden almasının ardından Semerkant'ta binlerce öğrenci protestolara başlamıştır. Kasım 2004'te, Ferghana Vadisi'nin Kokand şehrinde binlerce kişi hükümetin vergilendirme ve ticaret politikalarını protesto etmiştir. Benzer protestolar Fergana Vadisi'nin farklı bölgelerinde de ortaya çıkmıştır. Mayıs 2005'in başlarında, Andican'dan hemen önce, çevik kuvvet birlikleri Taşkent'teki ABD büyükelçiliği önündeki bir mitingi zorla dağıttığında hükümetin tepkisinde kayda değer bir değişiklik gözlemlenmiştir. Protestoculara karşı kadın ve çocuk ayrımı yapılmadan şiddet uygulanmaya başlanmış ve sonucunda Andican olayları ortaya çıkmıştır.

Orta Asya'da, narkotik kaçakçılığı da güvenlik açığınınen çarpıcı şekilde hissedildiği alanlardan biridir. 1990'ların başında pek bilinmeyen bir sorun olan narkotik kaçakçılığı bölgede giderek yaygınlaşmaya başlamıştır. 2000'li yılların başında Orta Asya'da uyuşturucu kaçakçılığının hızla artması bölge güvenliğini ciddi seviyede tehlikeye atmıştır. Siyasi ve askeri açıdan, bölgedeki güvenlik unsurları, ideolojik olarak şiddet içeren devlet dışı aktörler ile uyuşturucu kaçakçılığı arasındaki gizli anlaşmadan ciddi şekilde etkilenmiştir. Narkotik kaçakçılığıyla savaş bölgenin güvenlik öncelikleri arasında yer almaktadır.

Orta Asya'daki güvenlik problemlerine sebep olan bir farklı unsur da ülkelerin kendi aralarında yaşadığı anlaşmazlıklar olmaktadır. Bunların başında da su kaynaklarının yönetimi gelmektedir. Özbekistan, Türkmenistan ve Kazakistan'ın bazı bölgelerinin ana su kaynakları, Kırgızistan ve Tacikistan'dan geçen Amu Derya ve Sir Derya Nehirleridir. Bu bölgedeki su kaynakları, pamuk üretimini en üst düzeye çıkarmak için bölgede baraj, rezervuar ve birçok sulama kanalının inşa edilmesinden sonra özellikle Sovyet döneminde değer kazanmıştır. Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasının ardından Orta Asya devletleri, miras kalan bu tesislerin işletilmesi ve bakımı konusunda birbirleriyle bağımsız olduktan itibaren çatışmalara girmiştir. Ancak Shavkat Mirziyoyev'in Özbekistan Cumhurbaşkanı olmasıyla ilişkilerdeki gelişmeler iyi anlamda ivme kazanmıştır. Özbekistan'ın 2017-2021 Kalkınma Stratejisi'nin odak noktalarından biri de su sorunları olmuştur. Strateji, verimliliği artırarak tarım sektöründe kapsamlı reformlar önermiştir. Bu kapsamda bölgedeki su ile ilgili sorunların çözümüne odaklanılmış ve bu gelişmeyi takiben Orta Asya devletlerinin liderleriyle su kaynaklarının işletilmesi ve kullanımı konusundaki anlaşmazlıkları çözemeye yönelik bir dizi toplantı ve ziyaret düzenlenmiştir.

Güvenlik sorunları, tüm Orta Asya devletleri gibi Özbekistan'ın da bağımsızlık sonrasında iç ve dış politikasının belirlenmesini önemli ölçüde etkilemiştir. Özellikle siyasi rejimin güvenliği, temel tehlikelerle mücadele ve bölgesel iç çatışmaların tüm Özbekistan'a yayılmasının önlenmesi en önemli siyasi öncelikler haline gelmiştir. Özbek yönetiminin bu politikası ABD, Rusya ve Çin gibi uluslararası aktörlerle olan

ikili ilişkilerinde kendini göstermektedir. Özbekistan gibi demokratik anlayışı zayıf olan yönetim biçimlerine sahip ülkelerde iç faktörlerin dış politika oluşumuna göre önceliği daha güçlü olduğundan, en baskıcı siyasi unsurlardan birine sahip olan Özbekistan'da iç politika değerlendirmeleri ile dış politika arasındaki karşılıklı ilişki birbiriyle bağlantılıdır.

Kaçakçılık, yasa dışı göç, yasa dışı silah ticareti, mal kaçakçılığı gibi sınır aşan olaylar Orta Asya'da sadece iç istikrarı sarsmakla kalmamış bu ülkelerin ekonomilerini de olumsuz etkilemiştir. Bu nedenle, Orta Asya ülkelerinin, bölgedeki ulus-ötesi organize suçların oluşturduğu ciddi tehditleri ortadan kaldırmak için güvenlik yeteneklerini güçlendirmeleri ve aktif olarak uluslararası işbirliklerini geliştirmeleri gerekmiştir. Bu durum da şüphesiz ülkelerin iç ve dış politikalarını etkileyen en önemli etkenlerden olmuştur.

Jeopolitik değişimler ve iç dinamikler, ABD'nin Orta Asya bölgesindeki varlığının ilerletilmesine karşı daha az misafirperver hale geldiği bir dönemde, iki büyük güç olan Rusya ve Çin ile ilişkiler geliştirilmeye başlamıştır. Yeni konjonktürde ABD'nin Orta Asya'daki çıkarları tehlikede gibi görünmektedir. Ancak bağımsızlıktan bu yana her zaman böyle olmamıştır. ABD, SSCB'nin dağılmasından sonra Orta Asya politikasına öncelik vermese de, 11 Eylül saldırılarından sonra Orta Asya önemli bir müttefik haline gelmiştir. Doğal kaynak rezervleri ve bölgenin konumu, Orta Asya'nın stratejik önemini büyük ölçüde artırmıştır.

1990'larda Taşkent'in Washington'a yaklaşma çabaları karşılıksız kalsa da, Özbekistan-ABD ilişkilerinin 11 Eylül sonrası ortaya çıkan koşullarda gelişmek için önemli bir fırsatı olmuştur. Washington ile gelişen ilişkiler Özbekistan'a birçok avantaj sağlamıştır. ABD ile Özbekistan arasında Mart 2002'de imzalanan Stratejik Ortaklık Bildirgesi, Özbeklerin yıllardır ABD ile kurmaya çalıştıkları ilişkilerin doruk noktası olmuştur.

ABD'nin bölge politikaları 11 Eylül'den sonra önemli ölçüde değişmeye başlamıştır. Devam eden siyasi ve ekonomik reform gündemine askeri ve güvenlikle ilgili hususlar eklenmiştir. Afganistan'daki büyük ölçekli ABD askeri operasyonları için lojistik gereklilikler ve bunun sonucunda bölgesel askeri tesislere erişime aşırı bağımlılık, siyasi ve ekonomik reformları ve insan haklarını teşvik etme taahhütlerini geri plana itmiştir.

ABD açısından Özbekistan askeri üs kurmak için değerli bir konumdaydı. Bu süreçte ABD'nin bölgedeki jeopolitik konumunun önemi de artmıştır. 11 Eylül'den sonra ABD, SSCB döneminden kalma silahların imhası, Orta Asya'da herhangi bir yabancı güç veya grubun hakimiyetinin önlenmesi gibi hedeflerle bu bölgedeki etkinliğini artırmaya çalışmıştır. Özbekistan açısından 11 Eylül sonrası gelişen olaylar, Özbek ekonomisinde askeri işbirliğinin ötesinde özellikle petrol ve doğalgaz sektörlerinde bir yatırım alanı olarak görülmüştür. Ayrıca terörle mücadele noktasında ABD'nin desteği Özbekistan'ın güney sınırlarını güvence altına alma potansiyeli açısından önemli olmuştur.

Güvenlik açısından ABD, terörle mücadelenin yanı sıra bölgedeki Rus emperyalizminin potansiyeli konusunda endişeliydi ve bazıları ABD'nin Özbekistan ve diğer Sovyet sonrası devletlerle yakın ilişkilerinin Rusya'nın eylemlerinin sınırlı olmasını sağlayacağını savunmaktaydı. Daha sonra denkleme Çin eklendi ve bu bakış açısına göre ABD için sınırlandırılması gereken başka bir büyük güç ortaya çıkmıştır. ABD Kongresi, bölgede etkili olabilmek için terörle savaş adına askeri bir varlık elde etmiştir. Özbek topraklarında yer alan Karshi-Khanabad Hava Üssü'ne erişimin düzenlenmesi sürecinde, Özbekistan'ın da önceliği ABD kuvvetlerine askeri faaliyetlerini gerçekleştirebilecekleri bu alanı tesis ederek güvenlik tehditlerini bir ölçüde bertaraf etmek olmuştur.

Özbekistan'ın bölgede İslami aşırılık tehdidiyle ilgili artan endişeleri göz önüne alındığında, gelişmiş bir askeri varlığı olan ABD ile ittifak yapmak mantıklı bir seçenek haline gelmiştir. Özbekistan İslami Hareketi ve İslami Cihad Örgütü gibi

grupların faaliyetleri, büyük ölçüde Orta Asya hükümetlerinin onları uzaklaştırmadaki başarısı nedeniyle Orta Asya'dan Güney Asya'ya taşınmış olsa da, bölgedeki tehdit ortadan kalkmamıştır. Bu durum bölgedeki ekonomik sorunların ve komşularla çözülmemiş problemlerin neden olduğu krizlerin boyutunu artırma potansiyeline sahipti. Özbekistan ABD ile askeri temaslarını geliştirdiği takdirde bu tarz problemlerin önüne geçmenin yanı sıra hem siyasi hem de ekonomik faydalar sağlayacağını ummuştur. Özbekistan, 11 Eylül saldırılarının ardından ABD tarafından Afganistan'da başlatılan Kalıcı Özgürlük Operasyonu'na desteklerinde cömert davranmıştır. Bunun karşılığında Amerika Birleşik Devletleri çeşitli yardımlarda bulunmuştur. ABD, Özbekistan'dan aldığı desteğe hem ekonomik hem de askeri olarak karşılık vermiştir. Bu yardım, iki zırhlı aracı, telsizleri, helikopter modelleme ve simülasyon merkezini, psikolojik harekat eğitimini, navigasyon sistemi kurulumlarını ve Özbekler için bir havaalanını içermektedir.

Taşkent ve Washington arasındaki yakın ilişkiler, 2003 ve 2004 yıllarında Gürcistan ve Ukrayna'daki siyasi değişim rüzgarından sonra tersine dönmüştür. Bazı taraflarca bu devrimlerin Kerimov rejiminin meşruiyet algısını doğrudan tehdit ettiği düşünülmüştür. Taşkent, ABD tarafından finanse edilen STK'ların faaliyetlerini mevcut siyasi yapısına potansiyel bir tehdit olarak gördüğü için bu kurumların faaliyetlerini askıya almıştır. ABD-Özbekistan ilişkileri 2004-2005 yıllarında, Özbek insan hakları ihlalleri ve Kerimov'un ABD'nin Sovyet sonrası devletlerde demokratik devrimleri desteklediğine dair artan endişeleri nedeniyle 2004'te ABD yardımının kısmen kesilmesiyle gerginleşmiştir. Sonrasında 2005 yılında meydana gelen Andican olaylarının ardından Özbekistan ile ABD arasındaki gerilim artış eğilimine geçmiştir. Bu dönemde Rusya ve Çin, krizin hemen ardından Özbekistan'a desteklerini ifade etmiş ve Özbekistan'ın dış politikası bu ülkelerle ilişkilerin geliştirilmesine yönelmişlerdir. Andican olayları, Özbekistan'daki bir durumun ne kadar kolay kontrol edilemez hale gelebileceğini göstermiştir. Ayrıca ülkenin kolayca siyasi kaosa sürüklenebileceğini ve Özbekistan'da iç çatışma potansiyelinin yüksek olduğunu kanıtlar nitelikte olmuştur.

Nitekim Andican olaylarının ardından Özbek yetkililer, ABD'nin Taşkent Büyükelçiliği'ni ziyaret ederek, ABD'nin Karshi-Khanabad kullanımının altı ay içinde sona ermesini talep etmiştir. Andican olayları nedeniyle ABD-Özbek ilişkilerinde yaşanan travmanın ardından Kerimov yönetimi, Andican olaylarının üzerinden henüz iki yıl geçmeden 2006 yılının sonlarında, halkın sorunlarına çözüm getirememesi ve sosyo-ekonomik sorunları çözememesi nedeniyle ABD ve diğer Batılı ülkelerle ilişkilerini normalleştirmeye yönelik adımlar atmaya başlamıştır.

Kerimov'un cumhurbaşkanlığı sona ermeden kısa bir süre önce Özbek kökenli insanlar Batı'da terör saldırıları düzenlemiştir. Bu olaylar, bu kişilerin çevrimiçi ortamda mı yoksa Özbekistan'ın kısıtlayıcı siyasi sisteminin bir sonucu olarak mı radikalleştiği konusunu gündeme getirmiştir. Ayrıca Özbekistan'da polisin tacizleri, kadınların zorla kısırlaştırılması ve vatandaşların pamuk tarlalarında çalıştırılması gibi durumlar nedeniyle uluslararası toplumda yaygınlaşan yolsuzluklar artmış ve Özbek hükümetinin imajını zedelemiştir. Kerimov'un ölümünün ardından Özbekistan'da yeni liderlik altında bir dizi reform gerçekleştirilmiştir. Yeni Cumhurbaşkanı Shavkat Mirziyoyev, komşu ülkelerle ilişkileri geliştirmek ve ABD ile ilişkileri yeniden şekillendirmek için stratejik pek çok hamle gerçekleştirmiştir. Bu dönemde Taşkent, jeostratejik değerini öne sürerek ve Kerimov'un mirasının en sert özelliklerinden bazılarını ortadan kaldırarak Washington'u kendine çekmeye çalışmıştır. Bu dönemde ABD-Özbekistan ilişkileri hızla gelişmeye başlamıştır.

ABD'nin Afganistan'dan askerlerini çekmesi, Çin, Rusya ve diğer Avrasya güçlerinin boşluğu doldurması için bir fırsat yaratmıştır. Özbekistan için geleneksel olarak bağlara sahip olduğu bir ülke olan Rusya adına ABD gibi bir rakibin Orta Asya denklemindeki yerini kaybetmesi heyecan verici bir durum olmuştur. Özbekistan'ın ilk cumhurbaşkanı İslam Kerimov döneminde Sovyetlerden miras kalan Rus etkisi iç ve dış politikadan arındırılmaya çalışılmıştır. Bağımsızlıktan sonra, Orta Asya ülkeleri arasında Özbekistan, Rusya ile en uyumsuz ilişkilere sahip olmuştur. Shavkat Mirziyoyev'in 2016-2021 yılları arasındaki ilk cumhurbaşkanlığı döneminde ülkenin dış politikasında ve dış ekonomik ilişkilerinde tutarlı bir genişleme politikası

yaşanmıştır. Özbekistan'ın dış politikasındaki açıklık, Shavkat Mirziyoyev'in başkanlığındaki Özbek-Rus ilişkilerinde gözlemlenen gelişmeleri de beraberinde getirmiştir.

Derin tarihi ve kültürel bağlara sahip olan Özbekistan ve Türkiye de yakın zamanda ilişkiler geliştirmiştir. Türkiye ve Özbekistan Afganistan konusunda işbirliği yapmaktadır. Özbekistan, Afganistan sorununun çözümü için Türkiye öncülüğünde kurulan "Asya'nın Kalbi – İstanbul Süreci" platformuna da katılmıştır. Afganistan'da istikrarın kalıcı olarak tesisi için Türkiye, Orta Asya devletleri için önemli bir ortak konumundadır. Bu çerçevede Türkiye, Özbekistan ile koordineli hareket etmektedir.

Büyük resme bakıldığında, Orta Asya'da son zamanlarda ekonomik ortak rolü genellikle Çin ile güvenlik rolü Rusya ile eşleştirilmektedir. Bu iki ülke arasında böyle bir iş bölümü net olarak belirtilmese de her iki ülkenin de Şanghay İşbirliği Örgütü'ne dahil olması, Orta Asya ile ilgili ortak çıkarlar çerçevesinde hareket edebileceklerini göstermektedir. Orta Asya ülkeleri için var olan stratejik kaygılar, dış ilişkilerinde güvenlik çıkarlarını ön planda tutmalarına neden olmakta ve bu doğrultuda kendi bölgesel rollerini geliştirmeye çalışmaktadırlar.

Özbekistan, Mirziyoyev döneminde Kerimov'un saltanatı sırasında kullanılan askeri eğitimdeki eski müfredatı, doktrini ve eğitim felsefesini dönüştürmekle ilgilenmiştir. Bunu yaparken Batılı ortakların entelektüel bilgilerinden yararlanmak Özbekistan için değerli hale gelmiştir.

Özbekistan'ın bu kapsamdaki askeri iş birliği sonucunda ulaşmak istediği hedef, kendi öğretim fakültesini ve akademik programlarını sürdürebilme yeteneğine sahip olmak ve ordunun sürekli profesyonelleşmesini sağlamaktır. Ek olarak, silahlı kuvvetler kendi bağımsız eylemlerini yurt içinde yürütme ve bölgede güvenlik liderliği sağlama konusunda daha yetenekli hale gelecektir. Ayrıca PME standartlarının karşılaştırılabilirliği ve gerçekleştirilecek ortak eğitim, Özbek birliklerinin ABD ile iş birliğini güçlendirecek ve Özbekistan'a güvenlik garantisi sağlayacaktır. Bu, Özbek

silahlı kuvvetlerinin barışı koruma veya diğer operasyonlar için müttefik birliklere katılma ve söz sahibi olma olasılığını da artıracaktır.

Özbekistan siyaseti ve toplumu da askeri eğitimin niteliğindeki değişikliklerden yararlanacaktır. Ayrıca profesyonel bir ordu, Özbek vatandaşları ile devlet kurumları arasındaki güvenlik bağını güçlendirecek ve Özbekistan'da askerlik mesleğinin itibarını artıracaktır. Bu yakınlaşmaya örnek olarak Özbek lider, 2018 yılında Washington'u ziyaret ederek ABD ile ilk askeri iş birliği planını imzalamıştır. O zamandan beri, ortak askeri tatbikatların sayısı artmış ve belirli sayıda Özbek subayı ABD askerleri tarafından eğitilmektedir.

Özbekistan, Mirziyoyev döneminde Afganistan'daki çatışmayı güvenlik çıkarları doğrultusunda sona erdirmeye odaklanan bir dizi konferansa ev sahipliği yapmıştır. Bu çerçevede Mayıs 2020'de Washington, Taşkent ve Kabil ilk üçlü diyaloglarına başlamıştır.

Yıllardır Afganistan topraklarında bulunan ABD, oradan ayrıldıktan sonra güvenliğin sağlanacağına dair sinyaller verse de şu anda ABD'nin bölgeye bunu sağlayabilecek bir coğrafi yakınlığı bulunmamaktadır. Bu bağlamda ABD'nin Orta Asya ülkeleriyle askeri ittifaklarının boyutunu artırması da önemlidir. Bu sayede ABD bölgeye erişimini kaybetmeyecek ve bölgede çıkarları olan Rusya ve Çin gibi ülkelerin etkisine karşı ortamı boş bırakmayacaktır. ABD'nin Afganistan'dan çekilmesi Orta Asya ülkelerini de endişelendirmektedir. Özbekistan'ın en güçlü iki terör örgütü olan IMU ve Hizb-ut Tahrir'in, Afganistan'da örgütlenme ihtimali büyük bir riski beraberinde getirerek güvenlik açığı oluşturmaktadır.

Güvenlik açısından kapana kısılmış olan Özbekistan, görevdeki Taliban hükümetiyle olumlu ilişkiler geliştirse de bu yöntem güvenlik sorunlarını ancak kısa vadede ortadan kaldırabilir. Kabul edilmelidir ki, Taliban ile diplomatik ilişkiler kurmayı seçen Orta Asya devletleri, ABD'nin çekilmesinden sonra güvenlik boşluğunu doldurmak için sınırlı kaynaklara sahiptir.

Bu güvenlik kaygıları karşısında Orta Asya devletlerinin bağımsız ve ortak bir strateji olmaksızın müdahale girişimleri beyhude bir çabadan öteye geçmeyecektir. Bu ülkelerin herhangi bir müdahalesi, Taliban'ın Orta Asya ülkelerine doğrudan bir askeri saldırısının yolunu bile açabilir. Bu çerçevede Özbekistan için seçenek, uzun vadede diğer bölgesel güçlerle ortak hareket etmek veya dış güçlerin yardımını almaktır. Özbekistan-ABD ilişkileri açısından durum değerlendirildiğinde, her iki tarafın da askeri iş birliği alanında çıkarlarının olduğu görülmektedir.

Bununla birlikte Mirziyoyev döneminde güçlü bir ABD-Özbekistan askeri işbirliğinin kurulmasını zorlaştıracak faktörler de ele alınabilir. Özbekistan her şeyden önce güvenlik politikalarını uygularken Taliban ile çatışmamaya ve aynı zamanda Taliban ile kurduğu ilişkiler kapsamında Batı'nın tepkisini çekmemeye çalışmaktadır. Aynı zamanda Çin ve Rusya olmak üzere iki ülke ile ilişkilerini geliştirmeye odaklanmıştır. Dolayısıyla ABD askeri iş birliğinin varlığı Özbekistan'ın güvenliğini sağlayacak bir unsur olsa da, Özbekistan'ın askeri ilişkiler geliştirdiği diğer ülkelerin tepkisini çekebilir. Ayrıca, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'ne büyük ayrıcalıklar tanıyan bir askeri anlaşma yapılırsa, halk buna tepki gösterebilir. Taliban hükümeti de Afganistan'a çok yakın bir ABD askeri varlığına ciddi tepkiler gösterecek ve her zamankinden daha fazla çatışma çıkacak ve kan dökülecektir.

Ancak Özbek-Amerikan işbirliğinin son zamanlarda çeşitli ziyaretler ve toplantılarla derinleşmeye başlamıştır. Bu durum Afganistan'da güvenlik ve istikrarın korunmasına yönelik olarak iki devlet arasında artan ilişkilere bağlanabilir. Özbekistan, Afganistan'ı istikrara kavuşturmak için uluslararası çabaları desteklediği için ABD tarafından önemli bir ortak olarak görülmektedir. Özbekistan ve ABD arasındaki askeri işbirliğinde son dönemde askeri eğitim faaliyetlerinde artış yaşanmıştır. ABD, 2015 yılından bu yana Özbek Özel Kuvvetlerinin askerlerini eğitmektedir. Ayrıca ABD, Özbek ordusuna danışmanlık ve Özbek profesyonel askeri kurumlarına yardım sağlamaktadır.

ABD ile Özbekistan arasında ilk kez 1992 yılında kurulan diplomatik ilişkiler 30 yıldır değişken bir seyir izlemektedir. Bu süre zarfında ABD ve Özbekistan geniş bir ilişki geliştirmiş, sınır ve bölgesel güvenlik programları, ekonomik ilişkiler, siyasi ve sivil toplum sorunları, askeri eğitim gibi alanlarda işbirliği yapmıştır. Özbekistan, Orta Asya için önemli bir güvenlik tehdidi oluşturan Afganistan'a istikrar getirme ve uluslararası insani yardım sağlamanın yanı sıra narkotik ve insan kaçakçılığı, terörizm ve şiddet içeren aşırıcılık gibi bölgesel tehditlerle mücadelede ABD için önemli bir ortak konumundadır. Bu çerçevede ABD ve Özbekistan arasındaki ilişkilerin geliştirilmesine yönelik çalışmalar yapılmaktadır.

Şu anda Özbekistan'da yabancı asker yer almamaktadır. Ülke, karşılaşabileceği güvenlik tehditleriyle başa çıkmak için herhangi bir yabancı birliğe ev sahipliği yapmak yerine ikili anlaşmalara güvenmektedir. Bu, hem ABD'nin bölgedeki azalan rolünü hem de küresel güçler arasında yoğunlaşan rekabeti yansıtmaktadır. Özbekistan'ın Mirziyoyev'den sonra güncellenen dış politika konsepti, 'Özbekistan askeri tarafsızlığından vazgeçip ABD ile askeri işbirliği anlaşmasını iyileştirecek mi?' veya 'Ülke CSTO'ya mı yoksa Avrasya Ekonomik Birliği'ne (AÇA) mı katılacak?' gibi soruları gündeme getirmektedir. Şimdilik kesin olan şey, Özbekistan'ın denge politikasına yöneldiği ve ülkesini güvenlik tehditlerinden korumak için iç ve dış politikalar belirlediğidir.

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