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ANALYSIS OF RELATIONS BETWEEN UZBEKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN.

Introduction

One of Afghanistan's northern neighbours in Central Asia is Uzbekistan. Due to its military prowess, economic might, size, high literacy rate, and strategically advantageous location in the middle of Central Asia, Uzbekistan is the most powerful nation in the region. On the other hand, Uzbekistan performed better than other Central Asian republics during the Soviet Union, which has aided this nation in its efforts to establish itself as a regional leader in this region even after independence. This nation and Afghanistan have a 137-kilometer natural boundary that is formed by the Amu River.

The Soviet Union built the "Friendship Bridge" in 1982, which consisted of two rail and road lines connecting Termez City with Hairatan port, to establish a direct and official communication route between the two nations. Following the fall of the Soviet Union and the independence of Uzbekistan in 1991, official connections between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan were established. Three phases may be identified in the history of relations between the two nations. The first period, which lasted from Uzbekistan's independence in 1991 to 2001, was characterised by the absence of significant bilateral contacts because of the Afghan civil war and the shock of the country's early independence.

Uzbekistan, like other nations, tried to mend the relations after 2001 and the establishment of the US-backed Republic in Afghanistan by reopening its embassy there. The third stage, which started after the Taliban took control of the nation in 2021, is characterised by a persistent desire on both sides to strengthen government-to-government connections.

In light of this description, it is vital to inquire as to the nature of Uzbekistan's engagements and ties with the Taliban since the restoration of the Islamic Emirate, as well as the nature of those relations in the past. To answer this issue completely, the subject is examined from a variety of perspectives.

A VIEW FROM UZBEKISTAN OF THE TALIBAN AND THEIR FIRST RULE.

Prior to the foundation of the Islamic Emirate in 1996, the Uzbek government supported an organisation led by Abdul Rashid Dostum, who is of Uzbek heritage, while it appears to have had official connections with the Islamic State of Afghanistan under the leadership of Burhanuddin Rabbani. Relations between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan shifted after Tehreek-e-Taliban arose and swiftly seized 90% of Afghanistan. The Islamic Emirate dominated northern Afghanistan, including the cities of Mazar-e-Sharif and Bandar Hairatan, despite the security of its southern borders due to Abdul Rashid Dostum's dominance in those areas, so the Uzbek government was previously preoccupied with figuring out the share of Uzbeks

in Kabul's power structure. Uzbekistan suffered a great deal of insecurity in its southern regions.

It therefore undertook the toughest border control measures while blocking the Friendship Bridge.

A significant factor that contributed to Uzbekistan's sense of insecurity towards its neighbours was the potential for collaboration and collusion between the Islamic Emirate and the organisations. Additionally, organisations like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) actively opposed the Uzbek government. In spite of this anxiety, and in light of the Islamic Emirate's removal of the sole Uzbek party, led by Abdul Rashid Dostum, Uzbekistan followed a less sensible course of action and adopted an antagonistic position towards the Islamic Emirate.

The most crucial role for the Uzbek government during these conversations was to show its good intentions towards Afghanistan and to advocate for a peaceful resolution to the conflict in its neighbouring nation, even though there was little real impact on the situation in Afghanistan. Furthermore, Uzbekistan should forbid organisations opposed to the Uzbekistani government from conducting harmful activities against that nation from Afghanistan in order to minimise its vulnerability from that country.

The president of Uzbekistan publicly stated in 2000 that the Islamic Emirate is not a threat to his nation and that he merely anticipates a coalition administration between the Islamic Emirate and the Northern Alliance.

THE TALIBAN'S FIGHT AGAINST THE AMERICAN OCCUPATION AND THE POLICY OF UZBEKISTAN CONCERNING THE REPUBLIC.

Uzbekistan reopened its embassy in Kabul and a consulate office in Mazar-e-Sharif following the 9/11 attacks and the American invasion of Afghanistan, which led to the fall of the Islamic Emirate. In addition to improving ties with the Kabul government, Uzbekistan let the US to use the Karshi Air Base for military operations and logistical support in Afghanistan during this time. The United States' criticism at the Uzbek government's response to the Andijan events in 2005 led to a suspension of its usage of this base. Even after 2009, relations between Uzbekistan and the US improved despite the country's positive relations with Kabul's leadership; as a result, the US was once again allowed to provide supplies to Afghanistan via Uzbekistan. However, Uzbekistan never formally labelled the Taliban as a terrorist group and did not adopt a hostile position towards them throughout the 20-year conflict against the American occupation and the Kabul government.

The Uzbek government has pursued a peaceful and impartial stance towards Afghanistan during the past 20 years. At the NATO meeting in Bucharest in 2008, the president of this nation made a proposal to create a 3+6 contact group (consisting of six Afghanistan-neighboring nations plus Russia, America, and NATO), but all parties disregarded it.

The most significant of these activities is the nation's hosting of Taliban representatives in order to provide the ground for intra-Afghan negotiations. This country has increased its activity in recent years in order to strengthen its neutral policy as well as active diplomacy for Jamila's efforts and mediation regarding its neighbour in crisis. The Islamic Emirate did not adopt a hostile stance towards Afghanistan's neighbours, including Uzbekistan, during its 20-year struggle against the American occupation and the Kabul government. It also did not permit any group, particularly the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, to conduct destructive operations against Uzbekistan from areas under its control.

THE SECOND RULE OF THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE CONNECTS UZBEK-AFGHAN NATIONS.

Islamic Emirate regained control of the nation after the US withdrew from Afghanistan and the collapse of the Republic. The Islamic Emirate's officials and spokespeople have publicly and unequivocally stated their position towards the neighbouring nations,

emphasising that the Islamic Emirate seeks to have positive relations with all nations, particularly its neighbours, and that any group may use Afghan territory for military purposes. Additionally, neutrality and an emphasis on economic interests in foreign policy serve as the cornerstones upon which the Islamic Emirate bases its interactions with other nations.

Even though Uzbekistan's good relations with the Islamic Emirate before the collapse of the republican system had allayed any worries about the Islamic Emirate's restoration, the official declaration of the Islamic Emirate's good-neighborly foreign policy and its neutrality with regard to economic matters made Uzbekistan feel more secure and at ease about Afghanistan.

Although Uzbekistan has formally ceased to recognise the Islamic Emirate, it has made efforts to keep its political ties at a respectable level by refraining from meddling in Afghanistan's internal affairs and from lending support to any one cause.

The most significant visits by officials from both sides to develop political ties were those of the acting foreign minister of the Islamic Emirate to Uzbekistan and the foreign minister of Uzbekistan to Kabul.

Relationships between the two sides are now more favourable in the business sphere. Reviewing the economic exchanges that have taken place between the two parties over the past 12 months and more clearly demonstrates Uzbekistan's strong interest in expanding its trade with Afghanistan. The most recent example of how the two sides' economic ties have grown is the efforts to establish a common trading market between them.

A VIEW OF THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.

It can be inferred from a number of variables that the two nations have enjoyed positive relations. First, the absence of a secure environment has a negative impact on bilateral relations. According to theories of regional studies, particularly the theory of regional security complexes, the presence or absence of security concerns between the two countries is the most significant factor influencing bilateral relations. There have never been any security concerns between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan while the Islamic Emirate has been in power, as was discussed in earlier sections of this article. The absence of security concerns enables the two nations to strengthen their bilateral ties in a secure manner, particularly at the economic level.

Such nations have never allied militarily or politically against one another; instead, they will work to understand one another's shared interests, whether on a bilateral basis or by joining organisations that promote trade and diplomacy. Clearly, the presence of a de-secured environment offers positive prospects and potential for relations between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan.

According to the theory of the regional security complex, safety concerns between two nations are said to be problems that can't be settled through political and diplomatic efforts, and both parties use other methods, like military power, to resolve them completely in their own interests, whether using them individually, unilaterally, or collectively in alliance with other countries.

Second; The relationship between Afghan political and social stability and Uzbekistan's security. The relationship between Uzbekistan's own security and the security and stability of Afghanistan is the second thing that drives it to work tirelessly to install a stable government there and avoid taking any destabilising action there. In fact, Uzbekistan has long felt threatened by the existence of groups hostile to its own, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and, more recently, the more dangerous ISIS group. If Afghanistan is unstable, both ISIS and the groups hostile to the Uzbek government will have an opportunity to attack and destabilise that nation. As a result, that nation is attempting to

increase its internal security and stability in order to support the existence of security in Afghanistan.

Third: The two countries' shared economic interests and needs: The section on economic attractiveness and transit requirements allows readers to examine the benefits and requirements of the two nations. Uzbekistan, Afghanistan's neighbour, offers a variety of economic and production opportunities, which can significantly boost Afghanistan's economic growth. Uzbekistan, a nation abundant in mineral resources, particularly oil and gas, as well as in the generation of power, plays a significant part in supplying Afghanistan's current demands. Due to its reasonably developed industry for producing various types of machinery and its considerable experience in the field of mechanised agricultural output, this country can serve as a good assistant for Afghanistan in the industrial and agricultural sectors.

Conclusion.

Since Afghanistan's independence in 1991, Uzbekistan has had political relations with it, with the exception of one time (during the civil wars between jihadist organisations in the first half of the 1990s) in earlier stages of history. Uzbekistan is the most powerful nation in Central Asia and one of Afghanistan's northern neighbours. In its thirty-year relationship with Afghanistan, it has taken a neutral stance in its internal affairs. Pragmatism, state-to-state ties, active diplomatic efforts, and mediation are the models Uzbekistan has adopted in its conflict with Afghanistan. In the late 1990s and in 2008, that nation unveiled its ground-breaking 6+2 contact group and 6+3 plans.

Additionally, during the past few years, this nation has showed a strong interest in hosting intra-Afghan talks, demonstrating its good nature. Since its founding till the present, relations and contacts between the Islamic Emirate and Uzbekistan have been free of any tension or hostility. Additionally, the Islamic Emirate gave Uzbekistan additional incentive to improve relations, particularly in the area of business, by announcing a neutral and economy-focused foreign policy. As a result, as was mentioned in the discussion of this article, the interaction between the two countries has improved from a normal level to an acceptable level since the re-establishment of the Islamic Emirate, which indicates better prospects for their future relations.

However, the current development of these ties is based on the positive ones already in place and is targeted at the time's urgent economic necessity for Afghanistan. By doing this, the level of economic interactions is raised, Afghan infrastructure investments by Uzbek investors are enhanced, and on the other hand, transit services are made available. The two governments are particularly concerned about Afghan traders travelling to Uzbekistan.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

The following recommendations are made in light of the analysis presented above:

1. The governments of Afghanistan and Uzbekistan should regularly develop their political connections in order to broaden them as much as feasible.

2- In order to expedite trade and boost economic exchanges between the two nations, the two governments should offer special facilities for merchants travelling between the two nations.

3- The Trans-Afghan Project and the extension of the Khaf-Herat railway line to Mazar-e-Sharif should receive more attention from the two governments in order to expedite the region's link, which is desperately needed by the entire region.

4- The two nations should formally ratify significant economic agreements that will open up new markets for investment between them.

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