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Uzbekistan's approach to Afghanistan, policies, and prospects

What is clear is that Uzbekistan's policy towards Afghanistan will be influenced by domestic, regional, and international factors, pragmatism and multilateralism, diplomacy, balancing security and economic issues, and countering instability.



Uzbekistan is the most populous country in Central Asia. In addition to sharing a 137-kilometer border with Afghanistan, the two countries have cultural, historical, and linguistic commonalities. Instead of adopting ideological positions, Uzbekistan has pursued a realistic and situation-based policy without officially recognizing the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan, keeping diplomatic channels open and expanding bilateral diplomatic visits and openings.

Uzbekistan is committed to the Taliban's promises to contain various threats

In recent years, The appointment of a special representative of Uzbekistan in Afghanistan and the activation of relations at the highest level, the holding of an Afghan meeting in Tashkent, the consultations of Uzbek officials with the Taliban, etc., are also signs of Tashkent's desire to play a more active role in Afghanistan.

The President of Uzbekistan recently warned that the international community is underestimating the challenges arising from Afghanistan. In this area, encouraging cooperation with Taliban officials on interaction in migration and regional [issues](#) is also considered.

Uzbekistan's greater mobility in the 5+1 mechanism (five Central Asian countries with the United States) and greater cooperation with Washington on the issue of Afghanistan, the Russian-Uzbek partnership, expanding cooperation with China, and repelling threats in the Afghan sphere are important axes in Uzbekistan's bilateral cooperation with other partners.

The recent [Central Asia-EU](#) summit in Samarkand also focused on the issues of regional security and cooperation with Afghanistan, and the leaders called for the establishment of an inclusive government in April 2025, respect for human rights, and access of women and girls to education and fundamental freedoms for all Afghan citizens.

To prevent the spillover of threats arising from insecurity and the influx of extremist forces such as ISIS-k and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) into Afghanistan, Uzbekistan has taken security and political measures, including strengthening border management and military bases, intelligence cooperation with regional countries and regional organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

In this approach, drug trafficking from Afghanistan spills over to the borders of Uzbekistan and will pose a major social and security threat to local communities in Uzbekistan. Instability in Afghanistan can also increase the activity of terrorist groups and migration to Uzbekistan.

Tashkent, by participating in projects such as the Security Belt around Afghanistan, the Eurasian Regional Group on Combating Money Laundering and [Terrorism](#) Financing, is seeking joint measures to counter the threat of terrorism, seeking to improve security, counter the spread of terrorism and illegal activities from Afghanistan to its neighbors, strengthen regional cooperation, and counter threats and extremism in Afghanistan.

The Taliban have repeatedly assured that they will not allow Afghanistan's soil to be used for attacks against its neighbors, so despite the continuing terrorist threats against Uzbekistan, Tashkent also relies on the Taliban to suppress the activities of extremist actors in northern

Afghanistan. In another section, Economic and trade factors play an important role in Uzbekistan's approach. Tashkent, taking a pragmatic approach, wants to turn Afghanistan into a bridge for broader regional integration through a combination of humanitarian aid, economic cooperation, and infrastructure development.

In 2024, Uzbekistan-Afghanistan trade reached about [\\$1.1](#) billion, of which more than \$1 billion was Uzbekistan's exports to Afghanistan. Last year, the two sides announced their intention to increase bilateral trade turnover to [\\$3](#) billion. An important part of the topics of bilateral trips between Uzbekistan and the Taliban is related to the economy and trade. An international trade center in Termez has significantly increased bilateral trade turnover. Apart from the construction of an [Uzbek trade](#) center in Mazar-i-Sharif, the easing of restrictions on the import of Afghan goods, the agreement to create a free economic zone in the Uzbek border region, and Afghanistan's population of 4-41 million provide opportunities for Uzbek-Afghan exports and trade.

Uzbekistan is the largest exporter of electricity to Afghanistan, and with progress on the transmission line from Uzbekistan to Pul-e-Khomri, electricity exports will increase. Uzbekistan also signed a ten-year contract for the development of a gas field in November 2024, and Uzbek investors are preparing to start building a cement factory in Samangan Province, Afghanistan.

Uzbekistan, as a country with the (Doubled Landlocked Country) condition, is paying special attention to participation and playing a role in transit projects such as the Afghanistan-Iran-Uzbekistan transit project through the Chabahar port. Also, Tashkent is trying to create a bridge between Central Asia and South Asia through Afghanistan. Therefore, the development and construction of the Termez-Mazar Sharif Kabul-Peshawar railway) can simplify access to the Indian Ocean.

Meanwhile, cooperation between Kabul and Tashkent in extending the railway from Mazar-e-Sharif to Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif to Herat seems to be developing.

Although the construction of the Qosh Tepe Canal in northern Afghanistan will absorb a significant amount of water from the Amu Darya by 2028, Mullah Baradar also [spoke](#) about the responsible use of water. An important agreement on joint management of the Amu Darya water [basin](#) was also signed, which ensures fair and rational use of the river's resources.

Tashkent's foreign policy orientation towards Afghanistan is mainly focused on the northern provinces. The provinces of Jawzjan and Faryab, Afghanistan, are home to a significant Uzbek community, and Tashkent has promoted cultural influence in Afghanistan and the

Uzbek community. Uzbekistan places significant emphasis on strengthening the health sector and educational initiatives in northern Afghanistan. Tashkent wants to contribute to a more positive perception of Uzbekistan in Afghanistan by supporting the construction of the Imam Bukhari [madrasa](#) in Mazar-e-Sharif.

Challenges and Outlook

Uzbekistan has previously not given the Taliban military equipment and 46 aircraft in Uzbekistan from the former Afghan government. Uzbekistan is significantly dependent on the Amu Darya. The channel can affect the economy, water-based industries, and hydro-agriculture of Uzbekistan.

The Taliban have stressed the lack of a treaty in the Amu Darya basin. Uzbekistan's future approach to the Qush-Tepe canal project will be based on concerns about water security.

Challenges could affect the development of bilateral relations. Despite the Taliban's demands for formal recognition, problems such as the Taliban's lack of inclusiveness, instability, and challenges of terrorism continue to plague Uzbekistan.

What is clear is that Uzbekistan's policy towards Afghanistan will be influenced by domestic, regional, and international factors, pragmatism and multilateralism, diplomacy, balancing security and economic issues, and countering instability. However, Uzbekistan is committed to the Taliban's promises to contain various threats. Therefore, the main and important "option" is to engage with the Taliban without prior recognition by partners and the international community, broad representation of all groups, especially the Uzbek community, and the fight against terrorism.

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