

BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN UZBEKISTAN AND THE USA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract: The paper considers the main stages of the relationship between Uzbekistan and the United States beginning with the period of their strategic cooperation after the events of September 11, 2001 and until the end of 2017. For a more detailed study of the problem, this work is divided into three periods reflecting the evolution of the relationship of the two over the past 17 years. The provisions of the study can be used to further exploration of this problem, as well as in the teaching of disciplines related to international relations. Upon that, problematic-chronological and comparative-historical methods were applied. First of all, the period of strategic partnership between Uzbekistan and the United States, which began immediately after the September 11 attacks, was reviewed and analyzed. Further, the advantages of the geopolitical position of Uzbekistan located in the heart of the Central Asiatic region, were noted. After that, the period of the crisis in relations between Uzbekistan and the US in connection with the color revolutions, as well as the events in Andijan in May 2005 is considered. At the same time, the reasons for mutual criticism were revealed. Then the period of normalization of mutual relations of the two countries is described. At the end of the paper, conclusions are drawn based on an analysis of current integration processes in the region.

Keywords: International relations, politics, history, USA, Uzbekistan, strategic partnership, geopolitics, Central Asia, terrorism.

1 Introduction

With the growing geopolitical importance of Central Asia after the September 11 attacks, Washington strengthened its relations with the countries of the region, including with Uzbekistan, despite the discrepancy of the latter with liberal values and ideas. During this period, relations between the US and Uzbekistan reached a level of strategic partnership. The actual factor in its formation was such their common enemies as the radical Islamist organizations "Taliban", "Al-Qaida", and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). However, the color revolutions in the former Soviet republics, supported by the United States, changed these relations. In particular, the support received by the United States from Uzbekistan was severely affected after the Andijan events. The United States lost an important lever of influence in Central Asia when its military base in Uzbekistan was closed. On the other hand, after these events, the positions of Russia and China strengthened in the region.

2 Methodology

In the course of the research, problematic-chronological and historical-comparative methods were used, what allowed us to operate with chronologically correct and reliably stated facts for revealing the motives and driving forces of the most important events in the region. The method of *study of the process* made it possible to emphasize the key directions of political and international processes in Central Asia. In addition, the article uses literature on the history and contemporary development of international relations. All this helped to identify the interconnectedness of regional and global development processes.

3 Results

3.1 The period of strategic cooperation (2001-2003).

After the terrorist attacks of 11 September, 2001, Uzbekistan was one of the first to express its support for the United States. It agreed to use its infrastructure for military purposes during the antiterrorist campaign in Afghanistan. At this time, the US and Uzbekistan developed close political relations, which was demonstrated in March 2002 during the visit of the President of Uzbekistan to Washington, where he met with George W. Bush and the signing of a strategic partnership agreement.

Improvement of relations with Washington has brought great advantages to Uzbekistan. First of all, this made it possible to eliminate the influence of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which became the greatest threat to the Republic. In addition, Uzbekistan becoming an "anchor" country for the United States

in Central Asia, hoped for US investment in its economy, especially in the oil and gas sector. In addition, it was assumed that Tashkent's influence on Afghanistan would increase, and the southern borders of Uzbekistan would be safe.

For the United States, Uzbekistan was a springboard for penetration into Central Asia and for creating a zone of influence in the region in order to oust Russia and China. At the same time, the geopolitical significance of Central Asia and Uzbekistan was recognized by US leaders even before the September 11 incident. The neo-conservatives in the New American Century project in 1997 stressed the need for American control in regions of strategic importance to prevent the growth of potential rivals. And such authors as S. Frederick Starr and Z. Brzezinski noted the important strategic location of Uzbekistan in Central Asia. Starr stated that this country is an "island of stability" and has the potential to be a balancing regional power in Central Asia (Starr, 1996). Brzezinski stressed the location of Uzbekistan in the region, calling it "the most important candidate for participation in regional leadership" (Brzezinski, 1997). In the same period, under the leadership of President V. V. Putin, Russia began to pursue an active foreign policy in Central Asia, initiating the Eurasian integration processes. China also strengthened its influence in the region through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The Bush administration understood that the influence of these countries in the region should not be allowed to spread (Villalobos Antúnez & Ganga, 2016).

After the events of September 11, I.A. Karimov said that the country is "ready to cooperate with the US in the fight against terrorism" (Ülkü, 2002). During the visit of US Secretary of Defense D. Rumsfeld to Tashkent on October 5, 2001, an agreement was signed on bilateral cooperation in the fight against terrorism. In a short, it was stated in a joint declaration that Uzbekistan gives the US agreed to use the airspace, as well as one of its airfields for "humanitarian operations" (Djalili & Kellner, 2009).

Thus, NATO and the US acquired a strategically important stronghold in Karshi-Khanabad, located in the southeast of Uzbekistan, near the Afghan border. This base has become the largest point of the US support in the region, where up to three thousand servicemen have been deployed. Later it became an instrument of restraining Russia (Lachowski, 2007). However, close ties did not last long. Human rights violations in Uzbekistan served as a pretext for their breakdown in 2004-2005.

3.2 The crisis period (2004-2007).

Cooperation between the United States and Uzbekistan reached its peak in 2003. However, the project of the Greater Middle East, as well as the strategy of democratization in the region, including violently, aroused I.A. Karimov's fears. Tashkent's concern grew as the "color revolutions" were carried out with the help of the United States in the republics of the former Soviet Union.

In late 2003, Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze tried to get closer to Russia, but was overthrown, and Mikhail Saakashvili, a politician dependent on the US, came to power during the Rose Revolution. This prompted the administration of I.A. Karimov to take decisive action. First of all, the activity of all foreign non-governmental organizations operating in Uzbekistan was limited (Genç, 2010). The activities of those organizations that carried a potential danger ceased. A number of events that occurred in 2004 created tensions between the US and Uzbekistan. Sometime after this, I.A. Karimov made a diplomatic maneuver and made an official visit to Moscow, during which it was decided to jointly fight terrorism.

Washington has always faced a dilemma in its relations with Uzbekistan: continue to support the authoritarian administration

in accordance with its strategic interests, or abide by the declared principles of freedom and democracy.

The Orange Revolution held in Ukraine in 2004, further strengthened I.A. Karimov's doubts. In a statement made in January 2005, he accused the Western powers of supporting the opposition in Uzbekistan and stated that he would review Uzbekistan's membership in GUUAM (Azizian, 2005). After a while, riots erupted in Kyrgyzstan, which grew into a "revolution of tulips". The administration of I.A. Karimov, who believed that Uzbekistan will become the next, refused to participate in the GUUAM meeting in Moldova on April, 2005. In early May of the same year, Uzbekistan withdrew from GUUAM.

Soon, a real crisis in relations with the US was caused by riots that began in Andijan and were severely suppressed by the administration of I.A. Karimov on 13 May, 2005. The fact that the riots in other former Soviet republics were organized by non-governmental organizations with the help of the United States made I.A. Karimov to take notice on their involvement in the Andijan events.

The US, along with other Western countries, demanded that the events in Andijan be investigated by an independent committee under the aegis of the United Nations. Nevertheless, they did not intend to distance themselves from Uzbekistan. However, the relationship was reduced to a minimum, because the administration of I.A. Karimov intended to completely protect the country from US influence. After having received the support of Russia and China, Uzbekistan agreed at the next SCO summit on the closure of the US base in Karshi-Khanabad within six months (Azarkan, 2009).

The United States and the European Union (EU) decided to impose an embargo that included a ban on the sale of arms to Uzbekistan. In addition, the EU imposed a ban on issuing visas to eight well-known Uzbek officials. I. A. Karimov urged the West not to interfere in the internal affairs of Uzbekistan under the slogan of promoting democracy. After these events, I. A. Karimov unfolded a foreign policy toward Russia and China, who supported him during the Andijan events. In particular, in 2006 Uzbekistan became a member of the Eurasian integration structures initiated by Russia: the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

3.3 The normalization period (from 2007 to the present)

Two years later, the administration of I.A. Karimov decided to normalize relations with the US and other Western countries. At the end of 2006, I. A. Karimov dismissed the mayor of Andijan for neglecting people's complaints and lack of success in resolving the growing social and economic problems. In the same year, he expressed interest in joining to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) gas pipeline project. In response, the US and the EU began gradually to ease the embargo. In May, 2007 the visa ban imposed by the EU to leading Uzbek officials was abolished. In September of the same year R. Norland, appointed by the US Ambassador to Uzbekistan, held a number of meetings, including with I.A. Karimov, which was perceived as a signal to a "thaw" in the relationships. I. A. Karimov, in a report made to overcome the consequences of the Andijan crisis, said: Uzbekistan in its foreign policy adhered to mutually beneficial cooperation and mutual respect of its close and with distant neighbors, including the United States and Europe. Moreover, we can confidently state that the foundation for equal and mutually beneficial relations that meet our national interests is further strengthened. In addition, I. A. Karimov began to distance himself from Moscow and suspended membership of Uzbekistan in the Eurasian Economic Community in early 2008.

Politics by I. A. Karimov on rapprochement with the US gained momentum with the coming to power of the administration of Barack Obama. Accordingly, in 2009, Washington was given the opportunity to use Uzbekistan's airspace and military base in Termez.

In February 2009, the Collective Rapid Reaction Force (CRRF) was formed within the CSTO for emergency situations, but Uzbekistan did not join this initiative. In addition, it did not participate in military exercises conducted within the CSTO since 2011. This meant that in fact he left the organization. Formally, the exit took place in 2012.

On 2 December, 2010, H. Clinton made an official visit to Uzbekistan, during which an agreement on cooperation in the field of science and technology was signed. The visit of the Secretary of State was the first after visit of Colin Powell in December 2001, what indicated the improvement of relations between the states.

In 2013 the USA has offered to Uzbekistan various investment projects totaling \$ 4 billion. As a result both I. A. Karimov, and later Sh. Mirziyoyev, supported all-round ties with the United States. For Uzbekistan, the objectives of cooperation include the expansion of trade, investment and technology transfer, security assistance, including training in defense, supply of military equipment and support in the fight against terrorism; diplomatic approval and recognition of Uzbekistan's domestic achievements and international interests, as well as maintaining a significant US presence in the balance of other external forces. The Washington's list of priorities for cooperation with Tashkent included combating terrorism, countering to proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, supporting stability in Afghanistan, ensuring the sovereignty and autonomy of Uzbekistan, developing bilateral economic ties and improving human rights.

D. Trump's support for US foreign policy based on realistic principles and the establishment of priorities for national sovereignty is consistent with the position of Uzbekistan under the leadership of Sh. Mirziyoyev. The prospects for improving relations between the United States and Uzbekistan during Trump's presidency may have strengthened the position of Tashkent's non-participation in Eurasian integration projects under the leadership of Moscow, such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Eurasian Economic Union. Nevertheless, under Sh. M. Mirziyoyev the relations between Uzbekistan with Russia significantly strengthened (Sulkarnaeva et al, 2018).

On 19 December, 2017, the presidents of the United States and Uzbekistan discussed regional security, economic reforms in Uzbekistan and other "opportunities for improving cooperation". The Government of Uzbekistan stressed that Trump welcomed the development of his productive relations with neighboring countries and supported the democratic changes and economic reforms taking place in the country aimed at strengthening civil society, the rule of law and economic liberalization.

4 Discussion

During the study of the US foreign policy strategy in Central Asia, as well as bilateral relations with Uzbekistan, the authors of the paper have analyzed a wide range of works.

Leading Uzbek and Central Asian representatives of scientific journalism presented their vision of the situation. Among them we can name such experts as Sarabekov, Abulgazin. The work of the Uzbek researcher Shukurzoda "The Chronology of American-Uzbek Relations, 1992-2012" deserves special attention; it analyzes the bilateral relations during this period (Sarabekov, 2014; Shukurzoda, 2012).

The place and prospects of Central Asia in the international arena is mentioned in the collective work of D. V. Trenin and his foreign colleagues "Central Asia: A View from Washington, Moscow and Beijing" (Rumer et al, 2008). It provides a multifaceted assessment of the processes taking place in the region studied by specialists from the United States, Russia and China. Among the works by researchers from the US, it seems interesting the paper by M.B. Olcott "The Second Chance of Central Asia" (Olcott, 2005), which describes the events in

Central Asia after 11 September, 2001. The author gives a detailed analysis of the human rights situation in Central Asia.

5 Conclusions

The United States and Uzbekistan are not sure of the reliability of their partnership. There is only one reason for improving their relations: the geopolitical position of Uzbekistan. It can be assumed that the actions of radical Islamists and security problems, especially those related to Afghanistan, will be the main factors determining the form of relations between the US and Uzbekistan in the long term. In general, the partnership between the United States and Uzbekistan has no firm basis and is of a temporary nature. However, at the moment we see how the interests of the two countries coincide on a number of issues, and both states use this. The US needs a reliable partner in the region with a more or less independent foreign policy and try to find it in the person of Uzbekistan, which can distance itself from other actors in the region.

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