

THE PHENOMENON OF THE NEW UZBEKISTAN DIPLOMACY

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Abstract: *This paper examines the emergence of the New Uzbek Diplomacy under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, which has redefined Uzbekistan's role in Central Asia and beyond. Since 2016, Uzbekistan has shifted from isolationism toward an active, cooperative foreign policy grounded in dialogue, mutual trust, and preventive diplomacy—principles known collectively as the Mirziyoyev Doctrine. This new approach fostered regional unity, revived interstate dialogue, and reframed Afghanistan as an integral part of Central Asia. As a result, the region has developed what scholars call "the spirit of Central Asia," marked by openness and shared identity. Through ten UN resolutions and numerous regional initiatives, Uzbekistan has demonstrated how medium states can shape international agendas through soft power and pragmatic cooperation, making the New Uzbek Diplomacy a model of peace-oriented statecraft in the twenty-first century.*

Keywords: *Uzbekistan, Mirziyoyev Doctrine, New Uzbek Diplomacy, Central Asia*

Introduction

In recent years, politicians around the world have been actively discussing the profound changes taking place in Central Asia, and with good reason. First, this reflects a renewed global interest in the region. Second, history rarely records such rapid and sweeping transformations across such a vast territory in so short a time.

Examining recent history, we see that only a decade ago, the situation in Central Asia was genuinely precarious. Tensions and conflicts were on the rise, while unhealthy competition among states deepened. Even though a quarter of a century had passed since independence, borders had still not been fully delineated. This alone created fertile ground for disputes. Where borders were undefined, each side pressed its claims: "This is our land," one party insisted, and the other responded in kind. Inevitably, this produced confrontations and instability. On the one hand, undefined frontiers generated constant potential for conflict; on the other, as any ordinary person understands, a state cannot be fully sovereign and internationally recognized without clearly established borders.



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Unfortunately, at that time, the region's leaders were not ready for meaningful dialogue. Political elites displayed obstinacy, an inability to think strategically and foresee long-term consequences, and demonstrated incompetence in utilizing diplomatic resources. As a result, Central Asia's borders remained disputed zones, undermining both stability and trust.

This situation naturally reinforced the perception within the international community that Central Asia was "an unfinished region," not yet prepared for dialogue and cooperation. Mutually beneficial approaches to key regional problems were absent. For example, there was no single coordinated strategy for the use of shared water resources—an omission that left the region permanently poised on the brink of an "explosion."

The reality was clear to all observers: each country pulled the blanket toward itself, prioritizing narrow national interests while neglecting the broader regional good.

In truth, the region's development could only advance through unity and solidarity, yet this simple fact was ignored. For this reason, it was impossible to dismiss the arguments of scholars who pointed to strategic ambiguity and uncertainty in Central Asia, or the forecasts of experts warning that the region stood on the verge of major conflicts and possible upheaval.

The Emergence of the Mirziyoyev Doctrine

At this critical juncture, Central Asia experienced a turning point of historic importance. In Uzbekistan, the region's leading state and the only one sharing direct borders with all of its neighbors, a new generation of leadership emerged under Shavkat Mirziyoyev. From his very first days in office, the new president clearly understood the gravity of the situation and what needed to be done. That is why he immediately advanced a new approach and a new program of action. In fact, it can be said with confidence that this amounted to the doctrine of President Mirziyoyev on Central Asian regional policy.

The very notion of "doctrine" implies a coherent framework of policy and action — as in the Truman Doctrine, the Brezhnev Doctrine, or the Reagan Doctrine. Today, the processes unfolding in Central Asia can rightly be called a Doctrine of Development based on regional unity and strategic cooperation in the 21st century. It is thanks to this "Mirziyoyev Doctrine" that the situation in Central Asia has undergone a fundamental change.

First and foremost, interstate dialogue was restored, and dialogue itself is the most crucial element. At last, all issues began to be discussed at the negotiating table. The unique contribution of the Mirziyoyev Doctrine to global politics lies in its vision of Central Asia as a region with a shared

destiny. No state can progress in isolation. The region is so deeply interconnected that a problem in one country inevitably affects the others. Conversely, the success of each country positively influences the region as a whole.

Of course, competition has always existed and will continue to do so. This is natural. However, the character of such competition is decisive. If rivalry is reduced to nothing more than “I am stronger than you,” then the future is bleak. If, however, competition is expressed in terms of advancing shared interests and common goals, a different picture emerges entirely. It is precisely this constructive type of competition that lies at the heart of the Mirziyoyev Doctrine. Obstinance and the insistence that “things must be only as I say” lead nowhere but a dead end. On the other hand, it is widely acknowledged that problems can only be solved effectively by listening to all sides, weighing all factors, and pursuing consensus. This approach requires political will and considerable diplomatic skill.¹

Consider, for instance, the pressing issue of water resources in the region. Until 2016, the prevailing impression was that if one state gained, the others inevitably lost. This was not a solution but a recipe for instability. President Mirziyoyev proposed reframing the issue in terms of shared goals and joint solutions. This approach, naturally, served the interests of all and created the conditions for resolving the problem. In essence, this was an act of preventive diplomacy, a demonstration of diplomatic craftsmanship whose positive results were quickly recognized worldwide.

One striking outcome of this new policy of unity was the emergence in international political discourse of the phrase “the spirit of Central Asia.” The international community, including major powers and neighboring states, has unanimously acknowledged that Uzbekistan’s President, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, is responsible for these changes.

Jennifer Brick Murtazashvili, Director of the Center for Governance and Markets at the University of Pittsburgh and a longtime scholar of Central Asia, noted in an interview with international media: “It is time to see Central Asia as it truly is. It is no longer merely a post-Soviet space. It is Eurasia. For too long, the region was viewed only through a post-Soviet prism, rather than as the heart of the Eurasian supercontinent.”²

A similar perspective was voiced by the prominent Russian historian and anthropologist Sergey Abashin, who wrote on social media about Uzbekistan’s triumphs at the Paris Olympics: “The 2024 Olympics became a significant event, not because of debates about gender or art, but above all because of the achievements of Central Asian athletes — especially Uzbekistan, which won eight gold medals and ranked 13th overall. In sporting terms, we are witnessing Central Asian countries

being recognized globally as important players and fully fledged participants in international life. This is a genuine historical breakthrough, both for the world and for the post-Soviet space.”³

Both scholars point to the same conclusion: today, Central Asia is emerging as a coherent region with a renewed sense of identity and a determination to reintroduce itself to the world. Many other experts share this view. Princeton University professor Bernard Lewis, whose work on the Islamic world and Central Asia has gained wide recognition, observed in one of his interviews that Central Asia today is once again appearing on the geopolitical map much as it did in antiquity and the Middle Ages — as part of a broader civilizational space linking the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent, and the Far East. It can no longer be viewed solely within the borders of the former Soviet empire.

President Mirziyoyev himself has articulated a profoundly important idea: “Afghanistan is an integral part of Central Asia.” From the outdated post-Soviet perspective, Afghanistan seemed like “another world.” Nevertheless, today’s realities show otherwise. How can one carve out a country from the map that shares common rivers, landscapes, culture, and history with its neighbors? Moreover, crucially, how can one ignore the fact that Afghanistan is part of the region’s shared trade corridors?

Equally significant is the President’s call to view Afghanistan not as a source of threats, but as a land of opportunities. Stability in Afghanistan, he emphasized, is in the equal interest of all. For Afghans, peace and cooperation would fulfill long-held aspirations; for Uzbekistan and its neighbors, they would open new doors to security, economic development, and political stability. Currently, Afghanistan’s turmoil serves as a barrier between Central Asia and the vast markets of South and East Asia. Should stability return and the Trans-Afghan corridor be established, Uzbekistan’s access to global markets would be shortened by three to four times. Currently, transport and logistics account for 20–25 percent of the cost of our foreign trade—an enormous burden, given that the nearest seaport is approximately 3,000 kilometers away. The opening of Afghanistan would therefore provide unprecedented opportunities for the entire region.⁴

Whatever name we choose for the land that has been our typical home for millennia — Central Asia, Movarounnahr, or Turkestan — the essence is the same: the region must have a shared identity. Just as Europe has forged a collective identity despite linguistic diversity, so too must Central Asia affirm its shared values, heritage, and culture. This is the principle on which Uzbekistan’s leadership relies, and it is vital.

This approach was widely acknowledged at the presentation of a book on the history of Uzbek diplomacy at the University of World Economy

and Diplomacy. At the event, Kazakhstan's Ambassador to Uzbekistan remarked: "President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's initiative to convene a consultative meeting of regional leaders has changed the fate of Central Asia." This was a just and timely recognition, reflecting the fact that the region had been spared significant losses and upheaval.⁵

Institutionalization and Regional Cooperation

The Consultative Council of Central Asian Heads of State has already completed one successful cycle, and the question of its institutionalization now arises. Integration and institutionalization are weighty concepts that require a high degree of mutual trust and cooperation. The European Union emerged precisely because of shared systems, approaches, principles, standards, and, above all, values. Central Asia still has a way to go, but progress is evident.

President Mirziyoyev's initiatives have already achieved results that rival those for which leaders elsewhere have been awarded international honors, including the Nobel Peace Prize. Why should his contributions — which not only preserved regional peace but also provided a powerful impetus for economic development — not be recognized in the same way? They are fully deserving of such acknowledgment.

History reminds us that Central Asia has always played a pivotal role in the development of great civilizations, including those of China, India, the Middle East, Russia, and Europe. Central Asians have made significant contributions to the formation of powerful states across these regions — from the Mughal Empire in India to China's cultural legacy. Today, Central Asia is playing a vital role in shaping the new Asia and the wider world. It possesses not only cultural and intellectual strength but also key transport corridors and vast energy resources that impact global markets.

The lessons of history are clear: Central Asia's most remarkable flourishing occurred when long-distance trade routes thrived, linking Samarkand to Byzantium and Korea, exchanging not only goods but also ideas, science, and culture. The Samarkand dirham once accounted for 60–70 percent of world trade, as central in its time as the US dollar is today. This prosperity was founded on economic strength, scientific advancements, and military capabilities. To restore such dynamism, the region must once again embrace openness, cooperation, and foresight.

In recent years, Uzbekistan's foreign policy, based on openness and multi-vector diplomacy, has embodied these historical lessons. Regional trade, which once accounted for only 8 percent of overall turnover, has increased several times over the last half-decade, reaching \$11 billion. This is one of the tangible results of Uzbekistan's proactive diplomacy.

Today, the country's foreign policy is recognized worldwide for its pragmatism, dignity, and initiative. Unlike the passive approach of the past, waiting for events to unfold, the new diplomacy is preventive and forward-looking — the kind that ensures victory. ⁶

Indeed, over the past seven to eight years, Uzbekistan has authored ten UN resolutions adopted unanimously by the General Assembly — a feat unmatched by many major powers. These resolutions, including on the Aral Sea crisis and the establishment of consultative meetings in Central Asia, have addressed real problems faced by humanity. Additionally, Uzbekistan has initiated more than 300 projects in major international forums. Each was based on a deep analysis and a clear understanding of the consequences, demonstrating the weight, pragmatism, and initiative that define the New Uzbek Diplomacy.

Conclusion: The New Uzbek Diplomacy as a Rational Model

Ultimately, the fate of surrounding states depends on the emergence of pivotal regional powers, and Uzbekistan is rapidly assuming that role. The country now acts not only regionally but also globally, speaking at the UN on the looming threat of ecological catastrophe and urging the world to recognize that all states share a common interest in confronting transboundary challenges. No nation can resolve such problems alone; only cooperation can bring solutions.

It is in this spirit that the New Uzbek Diplomacy, underpinned by the Mirziyoyev Doctrine, continues to promote peace, foster stability, and guide the region toward development. The April 2023 "Central Asia–European Union" summit in Samarkand was a vivid manifestation of this vision. Held under the slogan "Investing in the Future," it symbolized rapprochement between Europe and Asia, marking a new stage in Uzbekistan's foreign policy—one rooted not only in economic pragmatism but also in civilizational and humanistic principles. ⁷

The Mirziyoyev Doctrine today has become not only a cornerstone of regional politics but also an emerging pillar of global diplomacy. It connects Central Asia with a wider arc stretching from Afghanistan to Europe, ensuring dialogue and sustainable development. This is the new stage in Uzbekistan's international role: the transformation of the country into a recognized political actor of global significance — a historic achievement of the New Uzbek Diplomacy.

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³ Абашин С. *Комментарий в социальных сетях о победах Узбекистана на Олимпийских играх 2024 года в Париже*. 2024.

⁴ Мирзиёев Ш.М. *Выступление на международной конференции «Central and South Asia: Regional Connectivity. Challenges and Opportunities»*. Ташкент, 16 июля 2021 г.

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⁶ Ministry of Investments, Industry and Trade of the Republic of Uzbekistan. *Report on Regional Economic Cooperation*. Tashkent, 2022.

⁷ European External Action Service. *EU–Central Asia Leaders' Meeting: Investing in the Future*. Samarkand, April 2023. Официальное коммюнике.