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Institute for a Community  
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## The Dynamic Role of Uzbekistan for Interregional Cooperation between Central and South Asia



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Regional cooperation and integration have been the essence of diplomacy. Countries all around the world are trying to build connectivity and understand each other's cultures. Liberal and open policy regimes enable countries to cooperate in a number of areas. In this aspect, the grand initiative of Central and South Asian connectivity by His Excellency Shavkat Mirziyoyev has proved to be a milestone development for regional integration. The ancient Silk Road passed through South and Central Asia, and several empires ruled large portions of this part of the world for centuries. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, most of the region was under colonial rule, with the British controlling a majority of South Asia and the



Soviets Union occupying large areas of Central Asia. However, with the fall of the Berlin wall (end of the Cold War), certain major developments happened in the region. First, the colonial rule ended in Central and South Asia. Second, with the disintegration of the Soviets Union (USSR) in 1991, five Central Asian states (Uzbekistan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan) emerged

as independent, sovereign nations. Third, in 2013, China announced its exceptional Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) for inclusive economic development and connect countries worldwide to work for a community with a shared future for mankind. Fourth, reinvigorating regionalism and cooperation among Central and South Asia countries in modern times to revive centuries-old historical relationship.

At present, the initiative of South and Central Asian regional cooperation by His Excellency Shavkat Mirziyoyev has emerged as a significant factor in reinvigorating centuries-old traditional and cultural linkages between countries. Pakistan and Uzbekistan enjoy cordial relations and for more than a decade, bilateral ties have been strengthening via multilateral



collaboration and persistent diplomatic engagements. Both countries embarked on a new journey of prosperity, enhancing bilateral cooperation, joint ventures for regional peace and stability, and strengthening economic and strategic partnership, with the official visit of His Excellency, Prime Minister, Imran Khan to Tashkent, Uzbekistan, for the international conference "Central and South Asia: Regional Interconnectedness. Challenges and Opportunities." Pakistan's connectivity with Uzbekistan is vital, as improved trade would open up new avenues of regional

prosperity and development. Moreover, the broader regional alignment would usher in a new area of joint ventures and cooperation. In this regard, new infrastructure projects such as the 573-km trans-Afghan railway project, connecting Termez-Mazar-e-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar, will be crucial in improving regional trade and connectivity, offering the landlocked Central Asian region direct access to the Arabian Sea through Pakistan's seaports. Furthermore, Peace in Afghanistan acquires pivotal importance in advancing the connectivity agenda.

### A Brief Prelude of the International Conference:



The two-day international conference at Tashkent was successfully organized/hosted by Uzbekistan. The international conference was attended by the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, ministers of foreign affairs of the countries of Central and South Asia, delegations of 44 countries and about 30 international organizations, heads of authoritative research and analytical centers. The two-day international



conference was amid three plenary sessions. The details of three plenary sessions are mentioned below:

i. **Trade and Transport Connectivity for Sustainable Growth**

In the first plenary session, prospects for the modernization of Central and South Asian economies in the context of strengthening interregional connectivity were discussed. Moreover, opportunities for developing transport and communications connectivity in Central-South Asia were highlighted, including projects to expand and build new transport corridors.

ii. **Revival of Cultural and Humanitarian Ties as a way to Strengthen Friendship and Mutual Confidence**

In the second plenary session, broader areas of joint programs, including cooperation in research & development, preserving and promoting South and Central Asia's historical and cultural heritage were discussed. Moreover, the discussion was amid areas of cooperation in education, social support, protection of the youth interests, healthcare, science & technology, ecology, and tourism.

iii. **Regional Security: Challenges and Threats**

The third plenary session focused on the prospects of regional cooperation in combating new threats and challenges, as well as ensuring the security of the cross-border infrastructure.

## Regional Security and Peace: South and Central Asia



It was honour for me to address the third plenary session. My speech reflected the regional security and peace cooperation between Central and South Asia. Central Asia has remained the hub of the world's attention in economic terms. One of the primary reasons for this region's progress was the Old Silk Route that has made it the center of excellence, art, famous cuisine, innovation, spiritual land, and exceptional cultural norms. The wonderful architecture of Tashkent, Samarkand, Khiva and Bukhara reflect the ancient and varied nature of Central Asian historical heritage. For many years, Uzbekistan has been promoting cooperation to bridge the gap among South Asian nations and Central Asian Republics (CARs). In this aspect, Pakistan has been a major supporter in regional integration process. Central Asian countries, especially, Uzbekistan and Pakistan have developed a new equation of cooperation in contemporary times. In today's geo-political and geo-economic discourse, regional connectivity is a key catchword. It is significant for the socio-



economic development of any country. The changing security dynamics of regional and international discourse allows nations to enhance cooperation in multiple fields. Regional integration helps countries to overcome gaps, division, and challenges.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has many key determinants as it is the most revolutionary age in history. The pace and scope of the transformation have never been this great. Countries are inclined towards cooperation and wider integration through economic connectivity in the multipolar world, pursuing their common goals. Therefore, it is important to consider the complex balance sheet involving challenges and opportunities to access different aspects of security in the Central and South Asian regions.

Central Asian Republics have been playing a significant role in resolving the common security issues, strengthen cross-border security infrastructure and decades-long Afghan conflict. In this aspect, His Excellency, Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev has played a dynamic role in the socio-economic reconstruction of Afghanistan and regional security stability. Peace in Afghanistan is one of the most important priorities for Uzbekistan and Pakistan's foreign policy. Uzbekistan commitment for establishing peace in Afghanistan through its allies is based on its willingness to increase trade and desire to stop the spilling over of religious, ethnic extremism and drug trafficking. The issue of terrorism has been curtailed to much extent. However, strong efforts are required to stop the re-emergence of extremist activities in the region and beyond. The Uzbekistan government's constant efforts for erasing the mistrust between Afghanistan's neighbouring countries has achieved milestone



developments. In this regard, a new political atmosphere based on mutual trust and cooperation has been seen between previously contradicting neighbouring states.

Moreover, certain aspects are necessary to highlight for regional alignments for multilateral dialogue process amid cooperation with extra-regional partners:

- Enhanced Collaboration between Allied/partner Countries
- Regional Unity and a holistic framework of cooperation to Counter Hostilities and Common Challenges
- The Amalgamation of Enhanced Cooperation with other regional countries and Goodwill
- Broader Regional Alliances and Accepting Culture Diversities
- Joint Ventures and Enhanced Academic Cooperation

In a nutshell, the idea of Central-South Asian connectivity incapsulates broader paradigms, i.e., economic growth and revival of cultural and humanitarian relations. It will further strengthen friendship and confidence, ensuring the security of cross broader infrastructure and formulating effective policies for countering common threats. In general, by promoting socio-economic, energy, transport and communication projects and enhancing trade ties, Uzbekistan seeks to establish the transformative link between Central and South Asia. Pakistan, as a good ally, appreciates and supports this exceptional initiative. In this context, Pakistan is ready to enhance its cooperation in multiple fields to curtail the differences, bring regional peace, promote friendly relations, enhance cultural integration, unity, and combat common threats.





### Salient Features of the International Conference:

History has marked the efforts of H.E. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to provide platform to all regional countries to strengthen partnership, resolve differences, revive cultural linkages, and establish an integrated



framework of future cooperation. In the international conference “Central and South Asia: Regional Interconnectedness. Challenges and Opportunities” His Excellency, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, has provided significant ten-points agenda to enhance regional cooperation and combat challenges. The details of the ten-points agenda are mentioned below:

- i. Expansion of scientific, cultural, and humanitarian exchanges. In this regard, it was proposed to hold an international forum on the historical heritage of



Central and South Asia under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Termez.

- ii. Strengthening peace and friendship, trust, and good-neighbourliness.
- iii. Building an open and constructive policy to meet the common interests of all countries of Central and South Asia.
- iv. Strengthening trade and economic cooperation and an annual interregional forum was proposed to discuss topical issues of expanding the economic agenda of cooperation and investment interaction between the countries of two regions.
- v. Building a transport and logistics infrastructure that will effectively and safely connect Central and South Asia. In this regard, the Termez-Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway is to become a key element of the entire architecture of the interconnectedness of regions.
- vi. To develop specific measures to implement digital connectivity in trade, transit, and border crossing to adopt a Joint Action Strategy. In this aspect, the H.E. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev proposed to hold a meeting of regional agriculture ministers under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) Food and Agriculture Organization to develop a joint program of measures.
- vii. Measures to strengthen security and stability in the region to combat terrorism and extremism.
- viii. Environmental protection and the development of a green economy.
- ix. Formation of a single platform of tour operators to enhance the tourism potential of Central and South Asia within the framework of the World Tourism Organization.

- x. Reinvigorate cooperation in the fields of science, technology and innovation. The importance of stimulating joint research and exchange programs, as well as introducing a simplified visa regime for scientists and researchers were emphasized.

### Interregional Cooperation: Reviving Ancient Contacts between South and Central Asia

Central and South Asia have interacted with each other since ancient times. Unfortunately, in the 19th century, the interconnectedness was broken. Multiple obstacles arose, and the era of cooperation was replaced by a period of confrontation and mistrust. However, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed important developments and transformations in the regional political and economic landscape. The initiative of Uzbekistan under the visionary leadership of H.E Shavkat Mirziyoyev to connect Central and South Asian countries has proved to be a milestone development.

In this aspect, the successful conduct of the two-day international conference at Tashkent proved to be a significant step in the right direction to harness economic potentials, integrate nations at one platform, enhance trade-transport connectivity, revive historical and cultural



ties, strengthen international/regional security infrastructure, curtail differences, and bring peace to the regional. Thereby, expanding mutually beneficial



cooperation, building an open and constructive policy to meet common interests of all Central and South Asian countries, are the dire need of time. Moreover, it has been planned to develop a special draft resolution, which will be submitted for consideration to the United Nations General Assembly as a result of the two-day international conference.