

# Roundtable Session

## Foreign Policy Contours of Uzbekistan

*26<sup>th</sup> April 2018*



**Jointly Organized by**

**Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Islamabad and**

**Center for Global & Strategic Studies, Islamabad**

**at**

**Islamabad Club**

Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS) in collaboration with Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan organized a Roundtable Session by H.E. Furqat A. Sidikov – Ambassador of the Republic of Uzbekistan on “Foreign Policy Contours of Uzbekistan” on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2018 at Islamabad Club. The session was chaired by Mr. Ashfaq Ahmed Gondal – Former Secretary Information, Government of Pakistan and Senior Advisory Board Member of CGSS. The session was attended by Senior Advisory Board Members of CGSS and various dignitaries including:

- H.E Mr. Barlybay Sadykov – Ambassador of The Republic of Kazakhstan
- H.E Mr. Erik Beishembiev – Ambassador of Kyrgyz Republic
- H.E Mr. Atajan Movlamov – Ambassador of the Republic of Turkmenistan
- H.E Andrei Ermolovich, - Ambassador of the Republic of Belarus
- H.E Ali Alizada – Ambassador of Republic of Azerbaijan

In the opening remarks, Mr. Ashfaq Gondal extended a warm welcome to the worthy guests for their participation in the event and offered special gratitude to the honorable ambassadors from Central Asia on the behalf of Centre for Global & Strategic Studies.



Uzbekistan is a country which holds immense significance in Central Asia in the realm of peace and stability in the region.

Pakistan enjoys warm relations with Central Asian Republics (CARs). The wise leadership of the President of Republic of Uzbekistan, H.E Shavkat Mirzayev was lauded and it was hoped that his efforts to bring peace and integrate the region will prove to be the beginning of new era in socio-economic development of the region.

### **H.E. Furqat A. Sidiqov – Ambassador of the Republic of Uzbekistan**

The address of the Ambassador comprised the modern foreign policy of Uzbekistan under President Shavkat Mirzayev. The Uzbek Ambassador to Pakistan expressed gratitude to all the participants for their attendance. His speech comprised of the following important components:

For the first time in Uzbekistan's history, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan H.E. Shavkat Mirziyoyev addressed to the Oliy Majlis (Parliament) of the country on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2017. Special attention was paid to the modern foreign policy of Uzbekistan, which has been characterized by dynamism, openness, initiative and pragmatism in promoting national interests in the international arena during the past year. Uzbekistan has also retained the independence of its foreign policy such as constructive interaction with world and regional powers, international organizations. Last year, during high level contacts, Uzbekistan concluded more than 400 agreements including trade and investment contracts worth 60 billion US dollars.



Tashkent confirmed its non-participation in military-political blocs, as well as the non-admission of foreign military bases and facilities on its territory. The Uzbekistan side also excludes the possibility of participation of its armed forces in peacekeeping operations and military conflicts abroad. At the same time, Tashkent was able to carry out strategic partnerships with Russia, China, and United States as well as with Pakistan to a fundamentally new level.

At the regional level, Uzbekistan has seriously revised its approaches to expanding practical cooperation with The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

As priorities of the foreign policy, H.E Shavkat Mirziyoyev highlighted issues related to the resumption of negotiations on accession to the World Trade Organization; introduction of high-quality and certified products under Uzbek brand for foreign markets; expansion of the tourist flow to the country and attracting foreign direct investments and technologies.

**Uzbekistan-Central Asia:** Describing the core directions of Uzbekistan's modern foreign policy, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has confirmed that “**Central Asia is the main priority**”:

1. The year 2017 undoubtedly marked the "breakthrough" in the regional direction, ensuring an improvement in relations with Central Asian Republics and creating conditions for effective, mutually beneficial cooperation between the countries of the region
2. The leader of Uzbekistan was able to deploy Uzbekistan face to face with its neighbors in an extremely short time, to resolve a number of problems in the sphere of border delimitation and demarcation; as well as water use, which had remained problematic for years, provoked bilateral relations, as well as acted as sources of regional tension.
3. As the President of Uzbekistan repeatedly stressed, Tashkent is ready for reasonable compromises with its neighbors, finding mutually acceptable solutions on all issues without exception.
4. Uzbekistan has achieved much over the past year. Last year, head of the state held more than 20 meetings with leaders of the states from the region, carried out 10 state, official and working visits at the highest level.

### **Why did Uzbekistan declare Central Asia as its main foreign policy priority?**

Uzbekistan is the only state in Central Asia that borders with all countries of the region and





Afghanistan. Many issues of Uzbekistan's development in such areas as transport and communications, water use and energy, trade and, of course, security, are in many ways "tied" to the position of neighboring states. Thus, today, the main focus for the region is to realize our common destiny, our common interests and take advantage of the available opportunities to turn Central Asia into a stable, economically developed and prosperous region. To accomplish this, it is necessary to eliminate misunderstandings, show political will to solve the problems, establish stable and mutually beneficial economic and cultural-humanitarian ties, and ensure matching of national development prospects with region-wide priorities. As a result, in the year 2017, Uzbekistan's trade with the Central Asian Republics grew by 30% and with each individual state by almost 70%.

The most significant result of the regional policy of the President of Uzbekistan was the proposal to establish “**a consultative mechanism for regular meetings of the heads of state of Central Asia.**” In March this year, the first Summit of Central Asian leaders was held in Astana. The states of the region had opportunity to discuss existing problems in Central Asia independently, without intervention of external forces, to work out ways to solve them and negotiate the prospects for cooperation.

**Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan:** Between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, good-neighborhood partner

relations are being consistently strengthened. Cooperation between two countries is developing on the basis of high trust and mutual respect. In our country there are about 230 enterprises with the participation of Kazakhstan's capital, in Kazakhstan - more than 130 enterprises were established with Uzbekistan's capital.

Last year, the volume of mutual trade turnover between the two countries amounted to \$2 billion, which increased for 32% comparing with 2016. It is planned to increase trade turnover up to \$5 billion for 2020.

The launch of the Tashkent-Almaty high-speed train and bus routes between two countries will undoubtedly strengthen the transport links, serve to develop interregional contacts, trade and tourism.

**Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan:** Last year was historical in development of cooperation between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyz Republic.. Thanks to the political will of the leaders of two states, the mutual understanding on many issues and a common desire for cooperation have been strengthened. The volume of trade between our countries is growing rapidly. Last year the indicators of mutual trade grew by more than 56% and reached \$235 million. However, it is planned to diversify mutual trade and bring its volume up to 500 million dollars in 2018. More than 80% of the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border has also been settled. Agreements were reached on implementation of projects on organization of assembly production of Uzbekistan's agricultural machinery, cars, buses, special trailers in Kyrgyz Republic

A significant railway project, Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan-China railway, will enhance the attractiveness and fuller realization of the transit potential of Central Asia. In addition, there was mutual understanding between the two countries on construction of the Kambarata hydro power plant. For the first time Tashkent declared its readiness to consider possibility of participating in construction of this hydropower project.

**Uzbekistan-Tajikistan:** There have been enormous changes in bilateral relations with Tajikistan. The Presidents repeatedly expressed their readiness to work together to bring

bilateral ties to a new level, taking into account the interests of our peoples.

Last year, air and railway communication between our countries resumed, the international road was opened on the Samarkand-Penjikent section. The checkpoints on the Uzbek-Tajik state border have resumed their work.

As a result in 2017, the trade turnover amounted to 240 million US dollars. This is the highest rate for the last 20 years. Cooperation in energy sector has been established with Tajikistan. Currently, an active negotiation process is being conducted between Uzbekenergo State Company and "BarkiTojik" company on resuming the interaction of the energy systems in the framework of parallel work with the United Energy System of Central Asia.

On March 2018, the President of Uzbekistan, H.E Shavkat Mirziyoyev visited Tajikistan on an official visit. The meeting between the heads of states became truly historical. Within the framework of this visit were signed 27 agreements that touched upon various areas of cooperation while nine border points were opened between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan intend to increase the trade turnover to \$1 billion by the end of 2018.

**Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan:** The Uzbek and Turkmen nations have always been neighbors in peace and harmony. It should be noted that President Shavkat Mirziyoyev made his first state visit as President of Uzbekistan on March 6-7, 2017 to Turkmenistan. Last year became historical in cooperation development between our countries. President of Uzbekistan made three visits to Turkmenistan. This gave a new dynamic to the relations of strategic partnership.

Our countries actively participate in the implementation of major energy projects in the region, including the construction of the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan-China gas pipeline with an annual capacity of up to 25 billion cubic meters of gas.

The railway and road bridges across the Amu Darya "Turkmenabad-Farab" were launched, which allowed the realization of an important part of the transport-communication route "Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Oman".

President of Turkmenistan paid a state visit to Uzbekistan, during which agreements and contracts were signed for the amount of more than 250 million dollars, as well as documents aimed at further strengthening and progressive development of bilateral cooperation in political, transport-communication, educational and sports spheres. Also, within the framework of the visit, 15 documents were signed between universities and in the information and communication sphere.

Only in the first quarter of the year 2018, the trade turnover between Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan countries increased for 55%. It is indicated that there are all the possibilities for bringing the volume of trade to \$500 million by 2020.

**Uzbekistan-Afghanistan:** Today, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan have close political, trade, economic, cultural and humanitarian relations. Last year, the volume of trade increased for 15%, it is about 600 million dollars. In near future, we intend to increase this figure several times and bring it up to 1.5 billion dollars.

Uzbekistan has also initiated several infrastructure projects jointly with Afghanistan, which



are potentially capable of changing the face of Central Asia and South Asia including a new railway "Mazar-i-Sharif-Herat" with the length of 657 km. The total cost is \$1.8 billion. It is estimated to provide jobs for 30,000 Afghani people. Moreover, the road will bring income of 40 million dollars annually. The launch of the road will help to increase the foreign trade turnover of the Afghanistan by 50%. The projected volume of cargo transit in the first year of operation will be about 5.3 million tons, with further increase of up to 15 million tons per year.

Another example is the projected construction of power transmission line "Surkhan-Puli-Khumri" with capacity of 500 kWh; Its length will be 260 km, including 45 km along the territory of Uzbekistan. The project will increase the supply of electricity from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan by 70% - up to 6 billion kWh per year.

Uzbekistan is already making its contribution to the training of the future generation of Afghanistan. Under initiative of Uzbekistan President, the Educational Center for the Training of Afghan Citizens was established in the Termez city. After graduation, Afghan citizens will receive a bachelor's degree. 50% of the cost for education is paid at the expense of the sending party, the rest is covered by Uzbekistan side.

**Peaceful settlement of Afghan Conflict:** Perspectives of stable and sustainable developments of Central Asia are connected with peace and stability in neighboring Afghanistan. Afghanistan always remained as a core part of Central Asia connected by common history, religion, culture and traditions. We have common interests in the sphere of ensuring security and trade development. Peaceful Afghanistan may open the shortest gates to the ports of Pakistan like Gwadar and Karachi as well as to Persian Gulf.

We need to consider Afghanistan not as a source of regional threats and challenges, but as a land of unique strategic opportunities for wide trans-regional connectivity in whole Eurasia. In this context, Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan held on March 27, was initiated by the President of Uzbekistan together with the Afghan President. Presidents of Uzbekistan and Afghanistan H.E Shavkat Mirziyoyev and H.E Ashraf Ghani themselves opened the conference. The forum hosted

delegations of over 20 states, high representatives of the United Nations, the European Union, NATO, the SCO and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. At the conference, the President of Uzbekistan presented his assessment of the situation in Afghanistan and the vision of the prospects for a peaceful settlement of the conflict in that country. As a solution of the Afghan conflict, the President of Uzbekistan proposed to develop the Comprehensive Peace Program for Afghanistan.

At the intra-Afghan level, Uzbekistan aspires to ensure the launch of a direct dialogue without preconditions between the central government and Taliban. In this regard, the President of Uzbekistan stated that he is ready to create all the necessary conditions for organizing direct talks in Uzbekistan between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban at any stage of the peace process.

At the regional level, Uzbekistan seeks to ensure the achievement of a firm consensus, primarily with the support of Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and the countries of Central Asia. We all understand that



the solution of a number of key issues of economic development, regional security and stability in Afghanistan depend to a large extent on us, neighboring countries, on our goodwill and readiness to actively promote national reconciliation process.

At the global level Uzbekistan aims to provide principled political support for the peace process and financial assistance to the socio-economic reconstruction of Afghanistan by world powers and donor organizations. In this regard, the President of Uzbekistan proposed the creation of a special International Fund for Supporting of Education in Afghanistan. The main goal of the Fund is to assist the Afghan Government in training national personnel for the most needed specialties, providing scholarships and grants for talented students and young scientists.

The security of Afghanistan is the security of Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan also has experienced promoting the peace process in Afghanistan. In 1999, in Tashkent, the "6+2" meeting was organized at the level of foreign ministers of the neighboring countries of Afghanistan, Russia and the United States. It was also attended by representatives of the Northern Alliance and the Taliban movement. Following the talks, the Tashkent Declaration was adopted.

**Uzbekistan's Participation in Regional Energy Projects:** A new page in our relations can also be opened up in the energy sector. The projected capacity of the Surkhan-Puli-Khumri line is 500 kW. However, in the long term it can be increased by several times. In fact, it can become an integral part of the **CASA-1000** project, through which electricity will be supplied to Pakistan from the Central Asian states.



Uzbekistan is ready to participate in the massive **TAPI** pipeline project. The readiness of Uzbekistan was also emphasized by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev during bilateral meeting with President of Turkmenistan in Tashkent 23th April 2018. It must be realized that this is our common region. We are connected to each other with one history, one religion and common values. By promoting the implementation of our common projects, we will achieve our common goals, create conditions for the full realization of all available potential of our relations.

#### **H.E Mr. Barlybay Sadykov – Ambassador of The Republic of Kazakhstan to Pakistan**

H.E Mr. Barlybay Sadykov expressed his gratitude to Center for Global & Strategic Studies, Islamabad and the Embassy of Republic of Uzbekistan for invitation to the informative roundtable session. While appreciating the foreign policies of Uzbekistan towards the region he expressed his conviction that this will help enhance the cooperation with Central Asia. Specifically applauding two important aspects of H.E. Furqat A. Sidiqov – Ambassador of

Republic of Uzbekistan's speech regarding Uzbekistan's President Shaukat Mirzayev, this can prove to be constructive for the region, such as:

- Solving border issues with the neighbors is very important while specially mentioning the successful settlement of Kazakhstan's border issues with its neighboring countries.
- Economic integration, peace and cooperation in the region

The Ambassador of Kazakhstan concluded on a positive note by lending complete support to Uzbekistan's initiatives for peace and stability.

**Lieutenant General (Retd) Asad Duranni (Former Director General ISI)**

The former DG ISI was of the view that the most important issues concerning Central Asia in general and Uzbekistan in particular are:

- Water sharing disputes in Central Asia
- Border issues
- Reforms for sustainable development
- Integration of the region

Hence, Pakistan is closely observing the renewed Uzbekistan model of resolving their disputes and would like to follow the suite by resolving its own problems through the lessons learnt from the Uzbek model.



## Interactive Question and Answer Session

### Question # 1

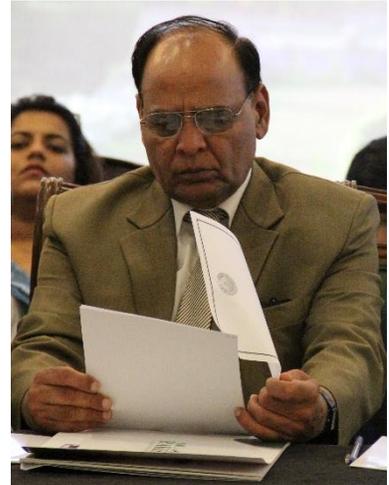
**Mr. Tauqir Ahmad (Advisory Board Member)**

What can Uzbekistan do to stop terrorist activities within Pakistan?

**Answer: H.E. Furqat A. Sidikov – Ambassador of Republic of Uzbekistan**

Terrorism is a common threat and Uzbekistan appreciate Pakistan's efforts against terrorism. In fact, military operations such as Zarb-e-Azb are not only eradicating terrorism inside Pakistan but also contributes to peace and stability in the whole region and we highly appreciate the efforts of government and Pakistan Army in this regards. In order to enable Afghanistan as a transport corridor, stability in Afghanistan is imperative. When we talk on negotiating table, we solve many problems. Uzbekistan enjoys favorable image and influence in northern Afghanistan due to its contributions towards the infrastructure developments.

**Mr. Ashfaq Gondal** added that Uzbekistan is contributing towards regional peace and stability by involving all stakeholders in the conflict including Taliban. The situation in Afghanistan directly impacts Pakistan, hence, Uzbekistan's efforts must be appreciated.



### Question # 2

**Air Marshal (Retd) Waseem-ud-din**

How does Uzbekistan intend to engage the US regarding possible settlement of the Afghan conflict?



**Answer: H.E. Furqat A. Sidikov – Ambassador of Republic of Uzbekistan**

Uzbekistan is conducting a conference in Tashkent to discuss the future of Afghanistan which will include 20 countries including the USA. It was made clear that the Afghan conflict must be resolved by Afghans themselves while the regional powers and the international actors should assist the initiatives. The cooperation should be sought between all stakeholders inside Afghanistan that also includes Taliban as a key stakeholder. Furthermore, consensus should also be evolved amongst regional countries on the solution of Afghan conflict.

**Question # 3**

**Lieutenant General (Retd) Ubaidullah Khan**

I had been the defense attaché to Afghanistan for 3 years and analyzed the Afghan problem from close proximity. I appreciate our dear friend H. E Furqat Sidiqov for his pertinent speech regarding Uzbekistan's foreign policy and special mention to Afghanistan. It is indeed a fact that a journey of thousand miles can be covered once we initiate the first step.

The water sharing issues between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan were amicably solved and now the focus is on building roads and railways which should be appreciated.

We need to help the Afghan society in the following areas, such as:

- Initiating military training courses to its Afghan compatriots
- Educational degrees
- Connectivity (Rail- Road) and TAPI

**Answer: H.E. Furqat A. Sidikov – Ambassador of Republic of Uzbekistan**

Uzbekistan is actively involved in the capacity building of Afghan forces and conducts military exercises involving its special forces. Furthermore, Uzbekistan is also enhancing its military and increasing military ties with Islamabad in exchange of defense trainers and teachers on various courses.



#### Question # 4

**Farhat Asif (Peace and Development Institute)**

The question has two parts:

- a) How is the foreign policy made in Uzbekistan and where does the power base lie to ascertain the direction of the country?
- b) As there are two powers in Uzbekistan's backyard i.e. Russia and China. So, how is the balance maintained while carrying out relations with both countries?
- c) Briefly highlight the counter terror structure of Uzbekistan?



**Answer: H.E. Furqat A. Sidikov – Ambassador of Republic of Uzbekistan**

Foreign policy in Uzbekistan is initiated and led by the President of Uzbekistan, H.E. Shavkat Mirziyoyev. For the past 25 years, the country was primarily focused on enhancing the security of the state. However, the current President is also prioritizing the economic aspect. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has faced multiple issues in order to realize the new foreign policy. Uzbekistan has changed the approach through cooperation with neighboring countries. It is a fact that neighbors are given by GOD and can't be changed, hence, close ties must be enhanced. Due to the renewed Uzbek approach, Tajik visitors to Uzbekistan has reached 300,000. Hence, the enhanced people to people contact may have parallel with the aftermath of the Berlin Wall dismantlement. Uzbekistan needs attractive new markets for its goods and services while Pakistan is one of them. In the renewed foreign policy, the concerns of the EU and West regarding Human Rights are also confronted.

Regarding the second part of the question, it can be said that Russia and China are Uzbekistan's cooperating partners, hence, there is no need to balance them out. Russia is the main strategic partner where Uzbekistan enjoys no-visa regime. In addition, 3000 Uzbek students study in Russia and Russian is part of Uzbek culture. Uzbekistan shares common view with Russia on regional issues. China is a rising economic power and Uzbekistan is prospecting new opportunities to enhance its cooperation.

We believe, in order to counter terror, education is the answer. Therefore, Uzbekistan devotes its 70% on education, enabling free education for all.

#### **Question # 5**

How can Uzbekistan actively cooperate in energy cooperation projects such as TAPI?

**Answer: H.E. Furqat A. Sidikov – Ambassador of Republic of Uzbekistan**

Uzbekistan fully supports such ventures and is ready to partially finance the project. Furthermore, it is looking for possible cooperation on other projects of mutual interest.

**Lieutenant General (Retd) Asad Duranni (Former Director General ISI)**

Pakistan's experience of regional cooperation has not been encouraging or pleasant. We are happy that Uzbekistan is going to do it and we are hopeful that they will be successful. Hence, don't let us down!

**H.E. Furqat A. Sidikov – Ambassador of Republic of Uzbekistan**

There is no doubt that the road of regional cooperation is long and difficult but we don't want to forward problems to our next generation. Therefore, we don't have any option but to act today.