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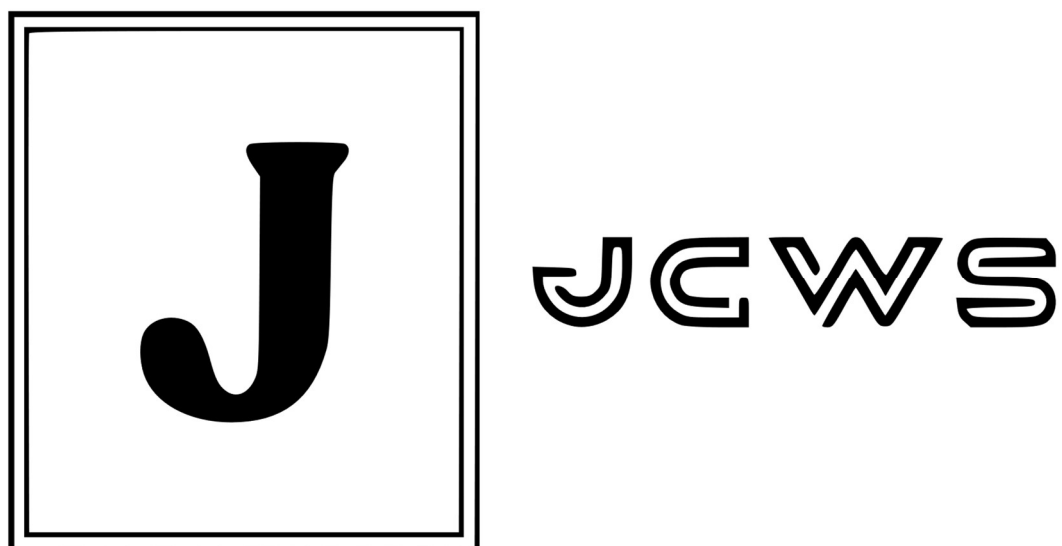
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UZBEKISTAN'S MODERATOR ROLE IN ENSURING POLITICAL STABILITY IN AFGHANISTAN

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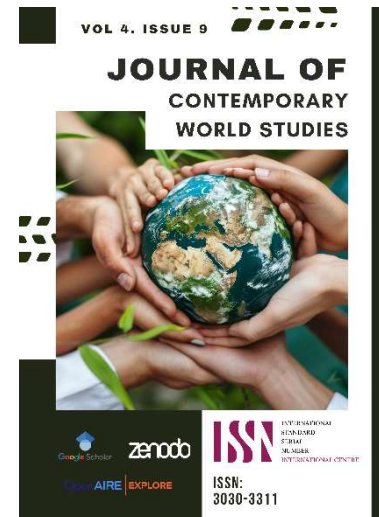
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ANNOTATION:

This article analyzes Uzbekistan's initiatives on the Afghan issue at both regional and international levels, as well as its proposals that are considered important for ensuring stability in Afghanistan. In particular, the history of the Uzbek leadership's diplomatic policy toward Afghanistan is examined through two distinct periods.

KEYWORDS:

Afghanistan, moderation (mediating role), Trans-Afghan Railway, OSCE, Taliban, NATO, session, SCO, security, dialogue, diplomacy.



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Introduction

Today's world increasingly views solidarity among states, mutual cooperation, and the development of trade-economic and diplomatic relations as key measures for preventing global conflicts and instability. The Government of Uzbekistan has consistently emphasized that "without resolving issues related to Afghanistan, it is impossible to strengthen regional stability; Afghanistan is not a peripheral part of our region but its natural component. Moreover, lasting peace and stability throughout Central Asia largely depend on the recovery and development of Afghanistan" [1].

Indeed, the Government of Uzbekistan is currently advancing important initiatives within various international organizations and forums aimed at ensuring stability in Afghanistan and integrating the country into regional cooperation processes. In these engagements, Uzbekistan has been acting as a close partner and brotherly neighbor of Afghanistan, performing the role of a "moderator" in promoting dialogue and cooperation. One of the most significant initiatives is the construction of the Trans-Afghan Railway, designed to connect Central and South Asia. The implementation of this project is expected to facilitate trade and investment and, most importantly, contribute to Afghanistan's economic recovery and development. Although the Government of Uzbekistan has not yet officially recognized the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, it continues to maintain active diplomatic, trade-economic, energy, and transportation relations with the country. The primary objective of this policy is to prevent neighboring Afghanistan from becoming isolated from regional processes and to support the restoration and development of its economy.

Main part

Uzbekistan's Moderating Role in Ensuring Political Stability in Afghanistan. During the presidency of **Islam Karimov**, Uzbekistan's diplomacy toward Afghanistan was characterized by a highly cautious approach, and Afghan territory was often perceived as a potential source of security threats. As a result, comprehensive cooperation between the two countries developed slowly and, at certain periods, was even suspended. The second stage in the development of political and multifaceted relations between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Government of Afghanistan is closely associated with the leadership and foreign policy vision of Shavkat Mirziyoyev. Beginning in 2017, Uzbekistan's relations with countries around the world, including Afghanistan, entered a new phase shaped by a renewed political outlook.

First, one of the most significant changes in Uzbekistan's foreign policy toward Afghanistan after 2016 was the **desecuritization** of bilateral relations. Rather than focusing primarily on security concerns, Tashkent shifted its attention toward strengthening trade and economic cooperation, cultural and educational exchanges, and people-to-people contacts. Existing restrictions on Afghan companies' access to the Uzbek market, the use of Uzbekistan's railway corridors for imports and exports, and visa issuance for Afghan citizens were rapidly eased or removed. Uzbekistan also began promoting its goods and services in Afghanistan through the establishment of representative offices and trade houses [12:6]. On **22 September 2017**, President Shavkat Mirziyev addressed the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly. In his speech, he emphasized the importance of Afghanistan for regional stability and expressed Uzbekistan's support for the call

made by Donald Trump for Afghanistan's neighboring countries to contribute to the peaceful resolution of the Afghan issue. According to President Mirziyoyev, the only viable path to peace in Afghanistan is direct dialogue, without preconditions, between the central government and the country's principal political forces [5].

Uzbekistan also sought to act in solidarity with the international community on Afghan affairs. Consequently, nineteen years after the adoption of the first **Tashkent Declaration** by the **6+2 Group**, Uzbekistan hosted a major international conference on Afghanistan on **26–27 March 2018** [13:55]. In order to draw the attention of the international community to developments in Afghanistan, the capital city of Tashkent hosted the **Tashkent International Conference on Afghanistan: "Peace Process, Security Cooperation and Regional Connectivity"** on 27 March 2018. The conference brought together representatives from 25 countries and international organizations, demonstrating broad international support for efforts aimed at promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Uzbekistan's Moderating Role in Ensuring Political Stability in Afghanistan (continued). One of the most significant outcomes of the conference for Uzbekistan was the support expressed by the United States for Tashkent's initiatives and Washington's recognition of Uzbekistan as an important regional actor in Afghan affairs. It was largely due to the Afghan issue that Shavkat Mirziyoyev and Uzbek diplomacy as a whole succeeded in establishing a pragmatic and constructive dialogue with the United States at the current stage [8:784]. Since the conference, Uzbekistan's position in the Afghan peace process has increasingly been characterized as that of a **"mediator"** and an **"alternative moderator"** [13:56]. One of the most

important proposals aimed at stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan was presented by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev during his address in the Uzbek language at the 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly on 23 September 2020. In his speech, he emphasized: "We regard Afghanistan as an integral part of Central Asia. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a permanent committee under the United Nations that would listen to the concerns of the Afghan people. The primary task of this committee should be to facilitate Afghanistan's economic and social development" [6]. The new realities that emerged following the return of the Taliban to power on 15 August 2021 did not fundamentally alter Uzbekistan's approach, which is based on a cautious and pragmatic foreign policy. Uzbekistan has continued to advocate active engagement in Afghan affairs, constructive cooperation with the new authorities, and the prevention of Afghanistan's international isolation. At the same time, Tashkent has refrained from formally recognizing the new government. According to Ismatilla Irgashev, Uzbekistan intends to coordinate its position on the formal recognition of Afghanistan's new authorities with the broader international community [14:114].

In an article published in 2022, political scientist Rustam Mahmudov noted that President Mirziyoyev had outlined Uzbekistan's vision for resolving the Afghan conflict through the promotion of a comprehensive peace process at three interrelated levels:

- **The intra-Afghan level**, which requires the initiation of direct and unconditional dialogue between the central government and the principal armed opposition forces, particularly the Taliban;
- **The regional level**, aimed at achieving a stable consensus with the support of Pakistan, India, Iran, Türkiye,

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and the Central Asian states;

- **The global level**, which envisages strong political support for the peace process and the provision of financial assistance by major world powers and donor organizations for Afghanistan's socio-economic reconstruction [15].

On 26–27 July 2022, Tashkent hosted the international conference **“Afghanistan: Security and Economic Development.”** During the event, President Mirziyoyev noted that the Interim Government of Afghanistan had taken certain steps toward establishing peace and improving the country's socio-economic conditions. Most importantly, he called upon the current Afghan authorities to demonstrate firm political will in preventing and combating all forms of terrorism and extremism, as well as to sever ties with all international terrorist organizations [2].

Uzbekistan's leadership has consistently sought to address the Afghan issue through various international platforms and to promote collective solutions. For example, on 2 March 2023, President Mirziyoyev participated in the Summit of the Contact Group of the Non-Aligned Movement held in Baku. During his address, he emphasized that long-standing conflicts in the Middle East and Afghanistan still lack comprehensive solutions. He also called for support for Uzbekistan's proposal to establish an **International Negotiation Group under the United Nations** to develop a coordinated algorithm for addressing the Afghan issue [3].

On 4 July 2023, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev participated in the Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, held under India's chairmanship, and delivered a speech. During his address, the President drew the participants' attention to the Afghan issue, emphasizing that a

solution could only be achieved through constructive engagement with the Afghan authorities within the framework of the United Nations. He also highlighted the importance of resuming consultations in the format of the **“SCO–Afghanistan Contact Group”** [4]. In general, Uzbekistan has consistently promoted initiatives aimed at expanding trade and economic cooperation with Afghanistan and providing systematic humanitarian assistance. These efforts are intended to prevent Afghanistan from becoming isolated and turning into a “problem state” disconnected from regional and international processes.

Another important example of such initiatives was President Mirziyoyev's participation in the anniversary session of the United Nations General Assembly held from 20 to 24 September 2025 [6]. In his address, the President stressed the following points:

- The international community should consolidate its efforts to support the Afghan people's aspiration for a peaceful and stable life, and preventing Afghanistan's isolation remains of critical importance;

- Uzbekistan is implementing major economic and infrastructure projects in Afghanistan and has proposed the adoption of a special UN resolution on the development of international transport and energy corridors passing through Afghan territory.

These statements clearly demonstrate that Uzbekistan remains committed to supporting Afghanistan and its people in overcoming humanitarian and socio-economic challenges and is prepared to continue providing assistance whenever necessary.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the stability of Afghanistan has the potential to become a cornerstone of peace and sustainable

development throughout the wider region. Recognizing this reality, Uzbekistan's leadership has consistently pursued a proactive policy toward the Afghan issue, strengthening its role as an initiator, mediator, and moderator in international diplomatic efforts aimed at resolving the Afghan conflict. Through its diplomatic initiatives, humanitarian assistance, and support for regional connectivity projects, Uzbekistan has emerged as a significant actor in promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan. These efforts not only contribute to enhancing Uzbekistan's international standing but also create favorable conditions for the expansion of economic opportunities, the strengthening of regional cooperation, and the establishment of a secure and stable environment across Central and South Asia. As a result, Uzbekistan's moderating role has become an important factor in fostering both Afghanistan's recovery and the long-term stability of the region as a whole.

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