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INDIA AND UZBEKISTAN: PROSPECTS OF COOPERATION ON REGIONAL SECURITY

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this article is to consider the factors of external influence on the security of the two states - India and Uzbekistan, two of the leading countries in South and Central Asia, and the prospects for successful practical cooperation between them in combating against threats. In writing this research paper, observation, comparison, analysis, historical and statistical methods of empirical and theoretical methods were used. It also looks at the impact of threats such as terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking and the Afghan problem on both countries and regions. The effectiveness of the work is reflected in the chronological coverage of official meetings, agreements and arrangements between the two countries over the past five years in the field of defense and security.

Keywords: security, defense, external security factors, the Afghan problem, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

INTRODUCTION

It should be noted that the Uzbek-Indian views are close when it comes to topical foreign policy issues. In turn, the expansion of the scale of the problems in South Asia is accompanied by an increase in internal and external influences on India’s security. This situation has a direct impact on the interests of Uzbekistan, which has long and traditionally strong economic, political, social, cultural and spiritual ties with this country. Regular meetings of intergovernmental commissions provide an opportunity to combine efforts on regional and global issues, to form a common vision for security and peace.

One of the main factors driving the development of cooperation between India and Uzbekistan is the unity of purpose of the two countries in achieving regional peace and stability. If we divide the factors affecting the peace and stability of the two countries into internal and external, India and Uzbekistan have something in common. This, in turn, encourages the two countries to work together to combat them and develop measures.

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METHODOLOGY

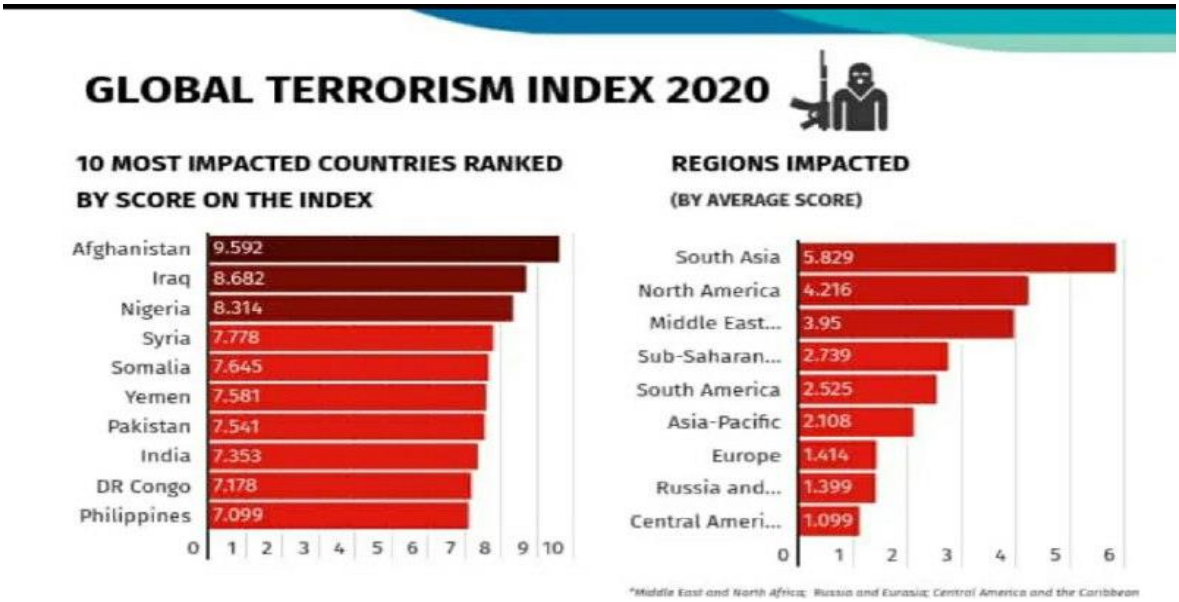
This article focuses on cooperation between the two countries against external security threats. When you look at the main external threat factors, 80% of them are important for both countries at the same time:

- *International terrorism;*
- *Religious extremism;*
- *Afghan problem;*
- *Cyber crime;*
- *Organized crime;*
- *Drug trafficking;*
- *ISIS problem;*

In particular, Central Asia is becoming a transit point for many drug trafficking across the region. Given the link between drug trafficking, terrorism, extremism and organized crime, the issue of security in the region is becoming increasingly important. This is rising the dynamics of the spread of violence in Central Asia against the background of the interdependence of regional terrorist groups.

If we look at the impact of the threat of terrorism alone, according to the 2020 Global Terrorism Index, India ranks eighth after Pakistan in the top ten countries most affected by terrorism.

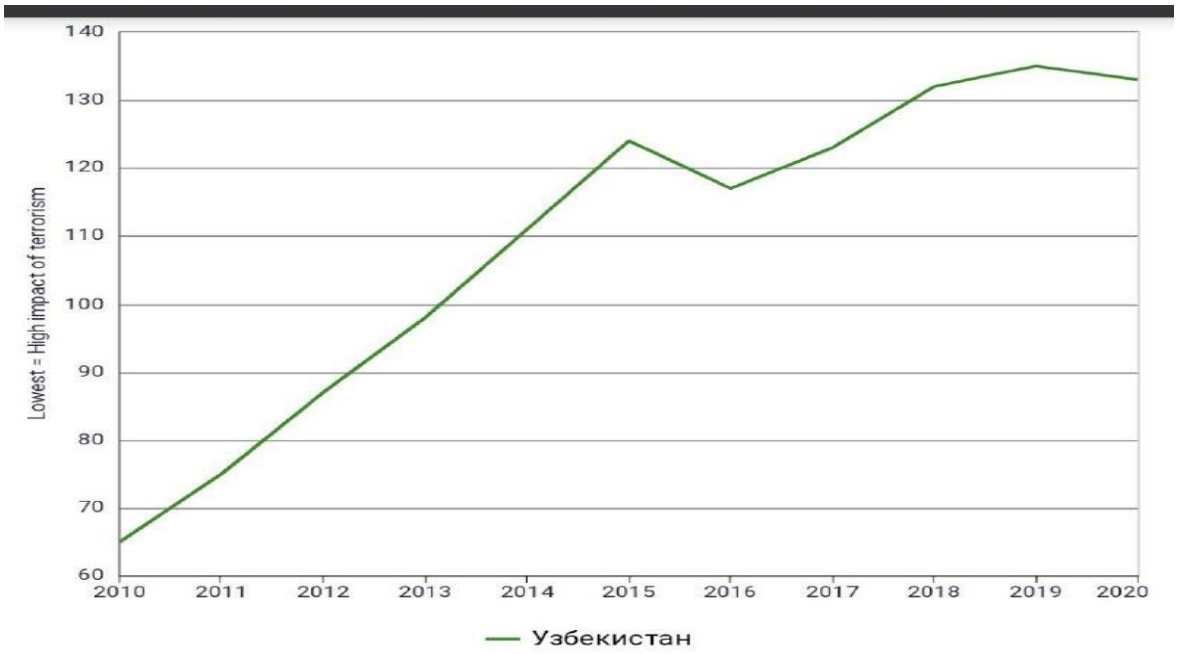
Picture 1



It can also be seen that the impact of terrorism on Uzbekistan has almost grown over the past 10 years:

Picture 2

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The influence of various extremist groups is also growing as radicalization among young people intensifies. As a result, by 2020, more than 5,000 Central Asians have joined ISIS. In turn, the growing influence of ISIS in Afghanistan and Pakistan has been felt directly in Kashmir. ISIS has already threatened India as well. Many Indians in the Middle East have been involved in the movement.

Terrorists from India, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan have never led a global jihad before, but now they are at the forefront of the jihad. As white nationalists gain worldwide popularity through racism, islamophobia and anti-Semitic movements, the focus on terrorism in the world seems to have shifted in the other direction. Many experts now call extremism an important driver of the terrorist threat.

Thus, the prospect of coordinating ISIS and Taliban militant activities in Asia has exacerbated regional instability.

At the same time, both countries cannot remain ignoring the Afghan problem. The security and stability of road traffic in Central and South Asia is directly related to the situation in Afghanistan. India has an international border with Afghanistan through Jammu and Kashmir, a 330-kilometer area, but the area is now under Pakistani control. Therefore, India is currently unable to enter the land border with Afghanistan. The country can reach Afghanistan by the sea (Chahbahar port).

Uzbekistan, on the other hand, has a 137-kilometer border with Afghanistan, and the rise in cross-border terrorism is urging countries to pay more attention to security.

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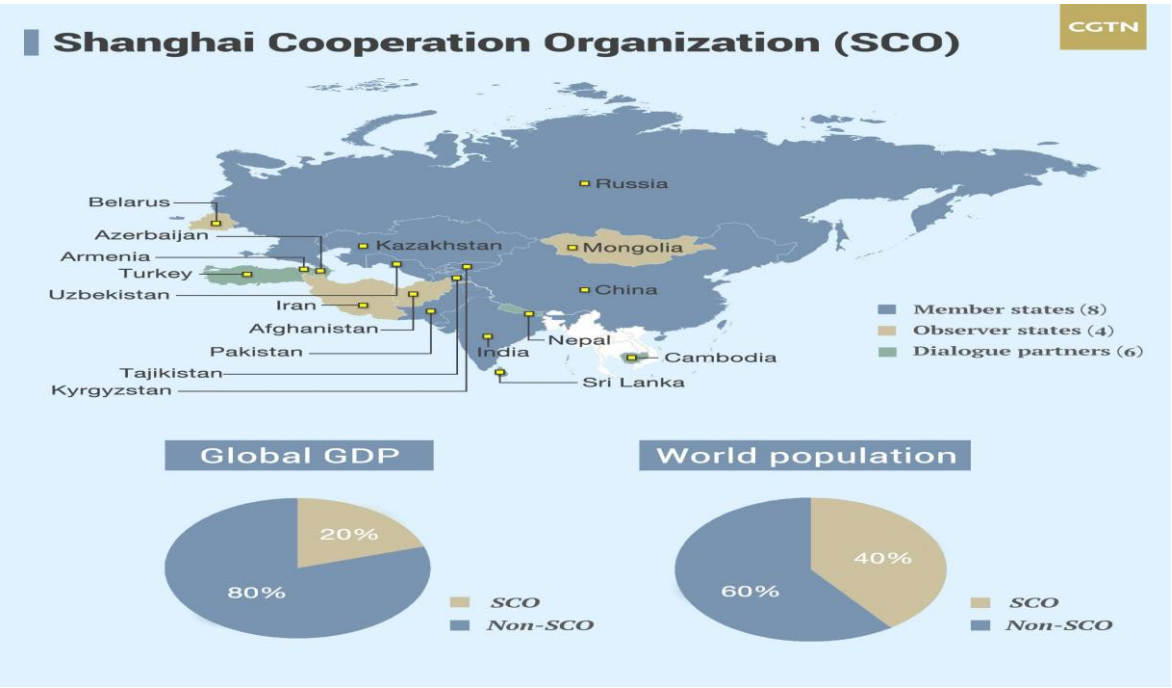
In terms of defense and security, India wants to help fight terrorism and extremism in Afghanistan and ensure its role as a trade bridge between South and Central Asia. India also emphasizes its support for the peaceful reconstruction of Afghanistan and the Afghan government, which belongs to the real Afghans. The joint statements clearly point the goal of peace in Afghanistan to ensure the overall security and stability of India and Central Asia.

In the midst of a series of problems, India could not neglect the changes taking place in its northern and northwestern part of the country. India's regional security initiative includes the establishment of Joint Counter-Terrorism Working Groups with Uzbekistan and joint military exercises, research and in-depth consultations on Afghanistan, as well as defense cooperation included improvements.

It is noteworthy that during this period - in 2005, India joined the SCO as an observer state. By 2017, it had become a full member. The organization has emerged as a key player in the regional security architecture. The SCO's commitment to regional stability and the fight against terrorism, extremism and separatism have become important in a region facing geopolitical tensions.

The following is a map of the SCO member states, their share in the world economy in terms of GDP and percentage in terms of population.

Picture 3



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The organization's charter sets out common goals for combating the threat of terrorism, separatism and extremism. The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) has been an important body since 2005 and has been widely recognized for its success in combating drug trafficking. To date, more than 900 anti-terrorist personnel have been trained. The SCO has also expressed concern about the growing threat in Afghanistan. Most members say they need to be involved in some way to stabilize the country. The SCO can thus facilitate greater security cooperation between member states through the exchange of intelligence and interaction between law enforcement agencies. This basic security policy of regional stabilization is in line with India's neighborhood problems. Therefore, India shares its experience and even provides customized proposals, solutions when needed. As the SCO's actions are developed on the basis of consensus, India will negotiate outcomes that are directly related to its core security interests.

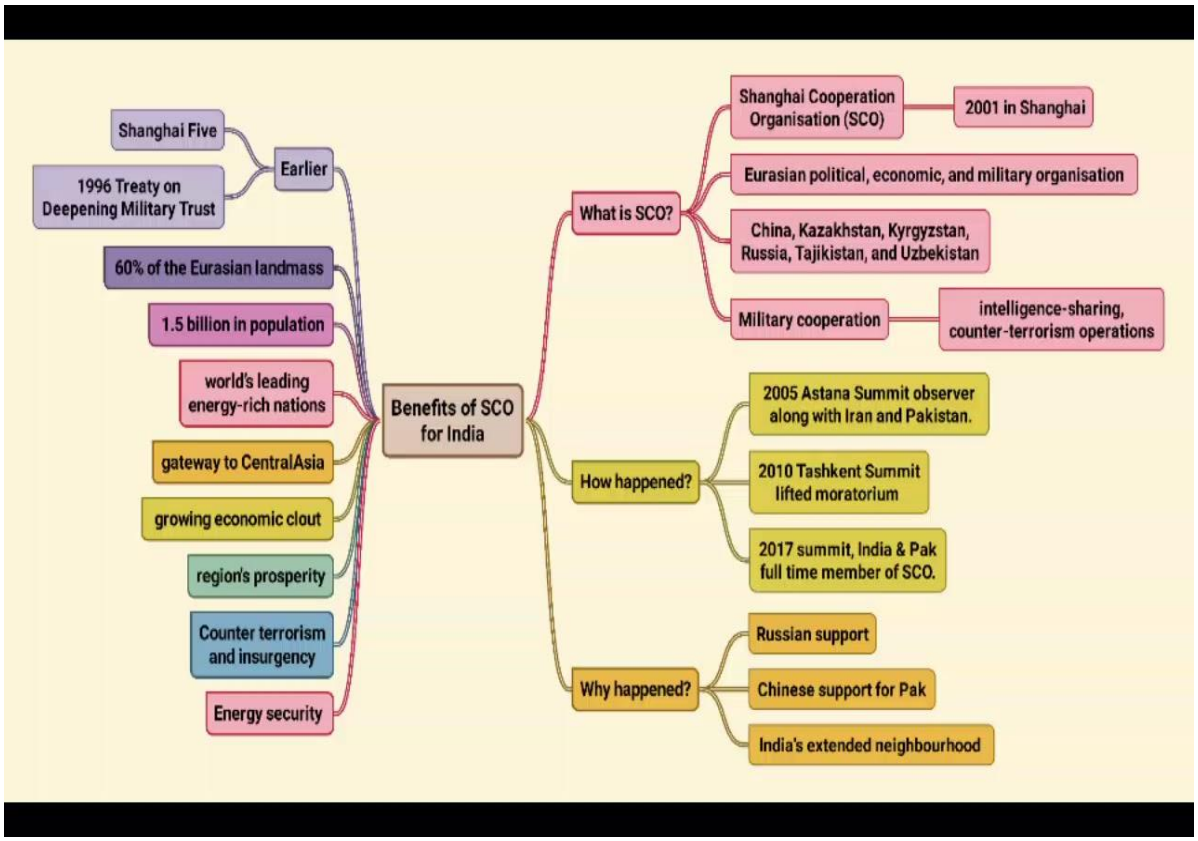
Topics such as political relations, security and the fight against terrorism are at the center of the conversations. It is stressed the importance of adequate and timely response to threats to national and regional stability and prosperity. The parties agreed to improve the quality and coordination of laws in the fight against regional threats, as well as to expand cooperation between law enforcement agencies and special services of the two countries in the field of defense and cyber security in the framework of the Uzbek-Indian Joint Counter-Terrorism Working Group. At the same time, they discussed the importance of the situation in Afghanistan for the security and stability of the entire region.

The SCO provides India with the following benefits and opportunities, as well as closely monitoring the development of these events and thus calibrating its strategy (Picture 4).

This article is a fundamental research work, the subject of which is the regional security issues and cooperation between India and Uzbekistan in this field. Historical, observational, analytical, comparative, and statistical methods of empirical and theoretical methods were used in writing this article. The initiatives of practical cooperation between Uzbekistan and India in the field of defense and security over the past five years are presented in chronological order.

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Picture 4



As noted above, the joint efforts of India and Uzbekistan to ensure peace and stability in the region have intensified in recent years. In particular, over the past 5 years, India and Uzbekistan have held the following official meetings in the field of security and defense, adopted decisions and signed agreements and treaties:

I. In 2016 Memorandum On Cooperation in the area of Cyber Security was signed between Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) in the Department of Electronics and Information Technology of the Republic of India and Information Security Center (ISC) under the Ministry for Development of Information Technologies and Communications of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The scope of cooperation between the sides includes the following areas relating to Cyber Security:

1. Establish a broader framework for future dialogue;

2. Exchange of information on cyber attacks, response to them and investigation of the causes of the cyber security incidents and their consequences;

3. Cyber security technology cooperation;

4. Exchange of information on prevalent cyber security policies and best practices;

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5. Exchange of expertise in the field of cyber security.

II. The state visit of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev to India from September 30 to October 1, 2018 also laid the foundation for the development of regional security cooperation between the two countries in a number of areas. During the bilateral talks, the sides also discussed the expansion and further strengthening of long-term cooperation between India and Uzbekistan in various fields, including political relations, defense, security and the fight against terrorism. Both sides unanimously supported the early termination of the Comprehensive Convention against Terrorism. Expansion of defense cooperation between the parties, joint military exercises in the fight against terrorism, cooperation in the field of military education and military medicine, the establishment of a joint working group to monitor their implementation and the establishment of a Defense Wing at the Uzbek Embassy in India. The heads of state discussed the situation in Afghanistan and stressed that the establishment of peace in this country is of great importance for the security and stability of the entire region.

III. According to the agreement, an international conference on "Peace Process, Regional Cooperation in Security" was held in Uzbekistan on March 26-27, 2018, and the Tashkent Declaration on Afghanistan was signed. The two sides also reaffirmed the need for the United Nations to play a central role in maintaining global peace and security and promoting international cooperation. They agreed to strengthen mutual assistance and cooperation at the United Nations and other international and regional organizations. Uzbekistan confirmed its support for India's candidacy for permanent membership in the UN Security Council.

IV. Cooperation in the field of defense reached a new level of intensity after the visit of the Minister of Defense of Uzbekistan, Major General Abdusalam Azizov to India on September 4-7, 2018. It was agreed that regular cooperation in defense would be carried out through annual plans. The plan for 2019-20 includes joint training of Special Forces, organization of training courses on military engineering for Uzbek soldiers and exchange of experience between the Air Force to assist in the development of the Karshi Aviation School in Uzbekistan, existing agreements had been improved. India also assisted in setting up an Indian room at the Uzbek Armed Forces Academy in Tashkent.

V. In January 2019, the first India-Central Asia Dialogue was held in Samarkand at the level of Foreign Ministers of India and Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries.

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VI. In July 2019, the 8th meeting of the Joint Working Group on Combating Terrorism was held in New Delhi. It was agreed to work in several areas on training and capacity building in the field of law enforcement and counter-terrorism operations.

VII. On September 25, 2019 in Tashkent, a bilateral consultation was held between the Office of the Security Council under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Secretariat of the National Security Council of the Republic of India. The issues of regional security and stability were discussed at the talks, with special emphasis on strengthening the legal and contractual framework in this area. Representatives of the two sides also expressed readiness for joint practical actions in the field of regional security. In particular, it was agreed to develop effective regional and international programs to improve effective mechanisms in the fight against terrorism and extremism in the region, to struggle drug trafficking, to assist resolve the Afghan problem that threatens regional security and many other threats. A special protocol was signed to work together on the issues considered.

VIII. In November 2019, the two countries held their official meetings of Defense Ministers. During the meeting, India-Uzbekistan agreed to expand training, capacity building and direct exchanges between the Indian and Uzbek armed forces. The issue of launching the Uzbek Dustlik (friendship) Joint Field Exercise was considered. After that, it was reported that the India-Uzbekistan Dustlik Joint Field Exercise was held. As a result of the agreements, the joint exercises, which began on November 4, included counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations in the city scenario, as well as exchange of experience in armament skills and combat shooting. The exercises provided an opportunity for the armies of the two countries to exchange experiences and strengthen mutual trust and cooperation.

IX. As part of the growing cooperation in the field of security, the Minister of Internal Affairs of Uzbekistan Pulat Bobojonov visited India on November 20-22, 2019. During his visit, he held consultations with the Indian Home Minister and the two Ministers signed an Agreement on Security Cooperation.

X. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan A.Kamilov took part in the second virtual forum "India-Central Asia Dialogue", which was held on October 28, 2020. The sides exchanged views on political, security, humanitarian and cultural spheres, as well as regional and international issues of mutual interest.

XI. A meeting between the Director of the Executive Committee of SCO RATS Jumakhon Ghiyosov with the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of India to the Republic of Uzbekistan Manish Prabhat was held at

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the initiative of the Indian side at the headquarters of the SCO RATS Executive Committee on November 2, 2020. During the conversation, the Sides exchanged views on regional security issues and further measures to strengthen practical cooperation between the SCO RATS and the competent authorities of the Republic of India in the fight against terrorism, separatism and extremism.

XII. On December 11, 2020, a virtual summit was held between Prime Minister Sri Narendra Modi and President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. Bilateral issues were discussed during the summit, including politics, security cooperation, the Afghan problem and other regional issues.

XIII. On March 2-10 this year, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan Abdulaziz Kamilov met with the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan. The delegations of the two countries headed by them were invited to take part in the conference "Central and South Asia: regional interdependence. Threats and Opportunities" that to be held in 2021 in Tashkent. This initiative itself is a sign of the common sources of threats to the security of the two regions and the growing need to develop joint measures against them.

CONCLUSION

Under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's positive and dialogue-based neighborhood policy, Uzbekistan is playing the role of "integrator" for Central Asia. Continuous dialogue and cooperation between the leaders and politicians of the two countries will be very beneficial to ensure India’s long-term positive relationship with Central Asia.

The fifth direction of the Strategy for the Further Developments on the five priorities of Uzbekistan's development envisages an open, constructive and mutually beneficial foreign policy, including the creation of a belt of security, stability and good neighborliness around Uzbekistan. This once again shows that cooperation with the South Asian region, which borders Central Asia, is very important for our country.

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