

UNITED NATIONS AND CENTRAL ASIAN REGION DEVELOPMENTAL INITIATIVES WITH FOCUS ON UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract

Uzbekistan became a member of the United Nations (UN) on March 1992 at its 46th Session of the General Assembly. In the following year, the UN opened its office in Tashkent. For the last twenty two years close contacts were established with all major branches of the Organisation. Today, there are more UN programmers, funds and agencies operating in Central Asia including Uzbekistan. The UN organization in Central Asian countries works as a collaborating agency to support the national reform efforts. The article is devoted to delve upon partnership between Uzbekistan with the international organization, i.e. UN, for regional security, ecological problems, Afghan issue, nuclear weapon free zone and other concerns related to security and developmental issues of Uzbekistan. At end of 20th century, the Central Asian region witnessed the emergence of a number of sovereign countries. These developments would definitely have an influence on the world political arena. In Central Asia new independent countries like, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan which consists of one sub-region having more or less commonalities in resource landscape, initiated their new development strategy and national development models were adopted as sovereign countries, focusing on economic growth, security and peace. Since the sub-region is surrounded by important countries, it naturally attaches a unique geo-strategic importance. The countries of Central Asia eagerly want the region nuclear free and also their neighbour i.e. Afghanistan to be a settled zone. As such, relations established between Central Asian countries, particularly, Uzbekistan and UN have a heavy task to focus these critical issues for making the region safe, secure and prosperous.

Keywords

Uzbekistan, United Nations, UN Agencies, Central Asia, Regional Security, Ecological Problems, Afghan Issue, Nuclear Weapon Free Zone, Pollution.

Regional Geo-political Significance and UN

Central Asia which is important both geo-politically as well as strategically is considered to be the future supplier of energy resources to the world market. It faces complex political, economic and social challenges.¹ From the beginning of the 1990s, the Central Asia states have sought a new model of development. The countries of the region have common social, economic, environmental, and political problems and the solution of the most of the problems lie in

cooperation among these countries because as has been rightly observed by the regional strategists that it consists of one economic zone which is highly interdependent which can not sustain without regional cooperation. Above all such countries need to seek help from world bodies, particularly, UN. The countries of the region although have already developed relations and joint programmes with the United Nations, European Union (EU), Asian Development Bank (ADB), and other international organizations but it needs to be intensified. Under the auspices of the UN, Central Asian nations are actively involved in resolving international and regional issues. Keeping in view the eco-political scenario of these countries, the international organizations need to develop a clear and long-term strategy in Central Asia, covering the issues of security and sustainable development.² New borders carved up the region like a jigsaw puzzle. They interrupted trade and other human links and made the region critical and vulnerable in the context of water and energy systems. So UN seems morally bound to help in resolving such critical issues.

Dramatic economic collapse brought about a significant increase in poverty, severely weakening the region's human development and security. At the same time, the break-up of the Soviet Union also created new opportunities for establishing dynamic trade and communication links between the region and the rest of the world. These opportunities would require countries to work together towards a common future. Today, the Central Asian republics vary widely in terms of their geography, population, natural resource endowments, human development, political orientation and readiness to cooperate and integrate with each other and with the rest of the world. Nonetheless, they share many challenges and opportunities, in part because of their common history and their important cross-border trade, water, energy and environmental links as well as their shared perceptions and realities of internal and external threats to human and national security. The region is, particularly, vulnerable to climate change, water security especially in downstream states. In the last Soviet phase, the region has seen sharp economic growth, although there were wide disparities in economic strength between the countries. The growth is fuelled, in part, by increased oil and gas exports alongwith an expansion of oil related foreign investments. However, living standards have not always seen proportionate improvements and contributing to increased economic disparities. While there was reason for deep concern about the long-term future of the region in the late 1990s, there is justified hope that Central Asian countries can thrive and achieve rapid advances in human development and human security.

UNDP is working with the five countries both at the national and regional levels to build national capacities to advance human development and achieve the globally agreed anti-poverty targets according to the Millennium Development Goals. Weak regional cooperations, however, continues to be a major obstacle preventing countries from developing unified strategies for promoting trade, protecting the environment and ensuring the continued flow of water and energy. UNDP views increased and effective cooperation as a driving force for improved human development, greater equity and enhanced security.

UN-Uzbek Engagements

Uzbekistan joined the United Nations in 1992 as a new sovereign and independent state. The United Nations opened its office in Tashkent in October 1993. Presently, there are 11 UN programmers and funding agencies operating in the country. The UN system in Uzbekistan works as a collaborating agency to support the national reform efforts. During its more than decade-long experience here, UN has been committed to help the country and has worked intensively to support the Government, civil society and people in Uzbekistan to overcome the numerous challenges of transition. UN has assisted governmental and non-governmental institutions in improving literacy in the country alongwith facilitating the mobilization of resources, need for successful pursuit of economic and social reforms to ensure a promising future for the Uzbek people. UN assistance in Uzbekistan, focuses on two interlinked objectives, 1stly, to support the Government in advancing economic and democratic reforms, 2ndly, to strengthen and fostering the participation of civil society in development process at local and national levels. UNDP is concentrating on three thematic areas:³

- Economic governance and poverty reduction;
- Environment and energy;
- Democratic governance.

In 2002 the former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, visited Uzbekistan which was followed by the visits of Ban Ki Moon, who took stock of the deteriorating environmental conditions of Aral Sea which he was shocked to see and termed it as one of the worst environmental disasters in the world. While representing UN, he signed some joint agreements with Uzbekistan and assured to help them, particularly, in the issues of regional security, environmental protection and human rights.⁴

Central Asian Region: Peace and Reconstruction

In order to bring peace, safety and development in the region, Uzbekistan President has expressed already in detail before the world community about the requirements during 48th Session of General Assembly in 1993 and second time in 50th Session of UN. The President highlighted the importance of the region – the home of nearly 60 million people belonging to various ethnic origin in which a significant share consists of youth who being the future of Uzbekistan, need to be trained and channelized properly. The civil war in Tajikistan, extremism in Afghanistan and other inter and intra regional clashes including disputes on transborder water resources in the region pose serious challenges to the safety, peace and sustainable development. The region would remain safe while working and coordinating with international organizations like UN etc. which has an effective control on global powers. The international terrorism is seen the most difficult problem among the countries of Central Asia and the UN is being considered the most effective organization to save the region from this menace in which not only the other parts of region but Uzbekistan has become a casualty.⁵ Although all the republics are contributing in their own way, Uzbekistan also is doing a commendable job towards achieving the regional targets.

Central Asian countries implore and repulse the implications from Afghanistan which has been a serious problem within Asia, recognized by UN as well. Afghanistan being strategically important falling within South Asian-Central Asian Grid, any aggravated problem ignited here can engulf the vast surroundings, particularly, Central Asia. Therefore, the peace in Afghanistan is of paramount importance and in the interest of whole region. On the initiatives taken by UN, the matter for making the region's troubled areas weapon free, which was supported also by some other regional forces, yielded positive results. The countries of Central Asian region supported this idea and demonstrated their full cooperation. Uzbekistan initiated a Working Group on Afghanistan with six bordering countries of Afghanistan plus Russia and USA. Afterwards, this group was called "6+2" comprising China, Pakistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Russia and USA. This followed a series of efforts in the desired direction. In 1997 on 16 October the first meeting of "6+2" took place in New York and on 14th January, 1999 the next meeting was held in Tashkent. The biggest achievement of "6+2" in Tashkent Summit was that two main rival groups in Afghanistan were convinced to work together for their mutual interests. Infact, some scholars argue that "6+3" is inevitable for defusing the Afghan problem and, simultaneously, to contribute towards peace and prosperity in the region.

Regional Connectivity

Stabilization and positive changes in Afghanistan throw new opportunities for Central Asian cooperation. Improvement of transport connections between Central Asia and Afghanistan would be a significant contribution toward future economic recovery and political stabilization of Afghanistan and also development of transport communications of Central Asian countries with the South and East Asia. In June 2003, the trio i.e. Uzbekistan, Iran and Afghanistan signed an agreement for creation of International Trans-Afghan Corridor and the construction of a 2400 km highway road (possibly railway network in future) through Termez-Mazare-Sharif-Heart to Iranian sea ports Bandar-e Abbas and Chorbakhor. This road will allow Central Asian countries to reach the Persian Gulf and increase interlinks among Central Asia, Russia (West Siberia), and China (Xinjiang) with the Middle East, Southwest Asia and Europe. Another Trans-Afghan project is transport corridor from Uzbekistan-Afghanistan and Pakistan which is important for Central Asian countries trade through the Arabian Sea on the doors of South, Southwest Asia and Middle East and it will reduce the distance by 1200-1400 km. The transport road project Murghab-Kulma will connect Tajikistan with the Karakorum highway in China and Pakistan, and allow Central Asian nations access to the Pakistani ports of Karachi and Gwadar. In December 2005 the construction of a 988 km Kazakhstan-China oil pipeline from Atasu in West Kazakhstan to the Chinese border town Alashankou was completed. It enables Kazakhstan to export up to 10 million barrel of oil a year. These transport projects will help to develop alternative transport projects and bring positive changes in the geo-strategic and geo-economic situation in Central Asia.⁶

Central Asia as Nuclear Free Zone

For smooth development, peace is a pre-condition. So making Central Asian region nuclear weapon free zone, is on the development agenda of the region which is patronized by UN and other global peace bodies. The idea of establishing nuclear-weapon-free zones (NWFZs) was conceived with a view to preventing the emergence of new nuclear weapon states. As early as 1958, 10 years before the signing of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Polish government which feared the nuclearization of West Germany and wanted to prevent the deployment of Soviet nuclear weapons on its territory, put forward a proposal, called the Rapacki Plan (after the Polish foreign minister), for a NWFZ in Central Europe. The zone comprises Poland, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, and the Federal Republic of Germany, while other European countries would have the opportunity to accede. Under this parley the stationing, manufacturing and stockpiling of nuclear weapons and of nuclear delivery vehicles would be prohibited. The nuclear powers would have to respect the nuclear weapon-free status of the zone and undertake not to use nuclear weapons against any territory of the zone. In political climate of the 1950s, the Rapacki Plan had no chance of becoming a subject of serious international negotiation. Nonetheless, several of its elements were later adopted as guidelines for the establishment of denuclearized zones.⁷ A nuclear-weapons-free zone (NWFZ) is defined by the United Nations as an agreement which a group of states has freely established by treaty or convention, that bans the use, development, or deployment of nuclear weapons in a given area, that has mechanisms of verification and control to enforce its obligations, and that is recognized as such by the General Assembly of the United Nations. NWFZs have a similar purpose too, but are distinct from, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to which all countries except for four nuclear weapons states are party. In addition, nuclear-free zone often means an area which has banned both nuclear power and nuclear weapons, and sometimes nuclear waste and nuclear propulsion, usually does not mean a UN-acknowledged international treaty.

Presently there are five zones covering continental or sub-continental groups of countries (including their territorial waters and airspace), and UN-recognized one zone consisting of a single country, Mongolia, and Antarctica, the seabed, and outer space which are not part of any state. The Antarctic, seabed, and space zones preceded all but one of the zones on national territories. Most of the earth's oceans above the seabed are not covered by NWFZs, since freedom of the sea restricts it in international waters. As of 15 July 2009 when the African NWFZ came into force, the six land zones cover 56 percent of the earth's land area of 149 million square kilometers and 60 percent of the 193 states on earth, up from 34 percent and 30 percent the previous year. However, only 39 percent of the world's population lives in NWFZs, while the nine nuclear weapons states have 28 percent of the world's land area and 46 percent of the world population.⁸ NWFZ is a specified region in which countries commit themselves not to manufacture, acquire, test, or possess nuclear weapons. Five such zones exist today, with four of them spanning the entire Southern Hemisphere. The regions currently covered under NWFZ

agreements include Latin America (the 1967 Treaty of Tlatelolco), the South Pacific (the 1985 Treaty of Rarotonga), Southeast Asia (the 1995 Treaty of Bangkok) Africa (the 1996 Treaty of Pelindaba) and Central Asia (the 2006 Treaty of Semipalatinsk).

The Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (CANWFZ) Treaty, also known as the Treaty of Semipalatinsk, includes the Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The Treaty bans the conduct of research on development, manufacture, acquisition, or otherwise possession of any nuclear explosive device. It prohibits the disposal of radioactive waste within the CANWFZ territory and stipulates that no state perform a nuclear explosion of any kind, in accordance with the CTBT. The Treaty also addresses environmental concerns unique to the region. It requires each party to assist any efforts toward the environmental rehabilitation of territories contaminated as a result of past activities related to the development, production or storage of nuclear weapons. In addition, each party must conclude an agreement with the IAEA for application of its safeguards to the state's nuclear activities. Similar to the Treaty of Pelindaba, the Treaty of Semipalatinsk obligates states to uphold international standards concerning the protection of its nuclear materials and facilities to prevent theft. The treaty also respects the right of each party to remain free to decide for itself whether to allow visits by foreign vessels and aircrafts to its ports and airfields. It contains one protocol, which commits NPT-designated nuclear weapon states (NWS) to a pledge not to use or threaten to use a nuclear explosive device against any party to the region.

The initiative on creation Nuclear Free Zone in Central Asia was put forward by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan from a rostrum of the United Nations at the 48th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1993.⁹ Since then several attempts were made in this regard like, Almaty Declaration of the Presidents of the Central Asian states in 1997, the Tashkent Declaration of Ministers for Foreign Affairs of five Central Asian states (C-5) on September 17, 1997 and the Communiqué of Advisory Meeting of five C-5 and the countries of the Nuclear Five (P-5) in Bishkek on July 10, 1998.¹⁰ In the field of security and nuclear nonproliferation, the Central Asian states have been successful in using the UN as a platform from where they could prove to be able to successfully bargain matters related to their survival, even proposing themselves as an example for other regions to the world. The formal setting up for the CANWFZ actually started in 1997. In the statement issued at Tashkent on 15 September, 1997 the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, then submitted to the UN their consent to sign a treaty instituting the CANWFZ, following their common commitment to sovereign equality, use of diplomacy and international law as means for peaceful coexistence and stressing those rules facilitating security maintenance and survival among nations. The UN noticed the normative convergence of the Central Asian states in the realm of non-proliferation declaring that the treaty on a NWFZ in Central Asia, on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region, constitutes an important step towards strengthening the nuclear non-proliferation regime and ensuring regional and international peace and security.¹¹

To sum up, the Central Asian political leadership, its civil society as well as its diaspora – all are struggling hard to make this region a prosperous one with peaceful coexistence with all its immediate, extended as well as global neighbourhood. As development has been always a casualty of instability, so peace has to be achieved if the region has to develop in sustainable manner. This is the reason of assigning importance not only to the regional problems like political reforms, ethnic issues, boundary delineations, transborder water disputes, cultural bickering, environmental degradation etc., but also to the Afghan problem, ripples of civil war, nuclear issues and a host of other related problems. Here it is pertinent to note that the individual as well as national / international issues are being treated in a cooperative and targeted manner in which Uzbekistan has been always cooperating and volunteered to coordinate. Some regional organizations proved ineffective but others have started to yield results. Yes, terrorism which is a great threat to humanity needs attention. In all such efforts the role of United Nations has been encouraging. Improvements are evident when the relevant data collected from various international agencies is analyzed. However, the role of UN needs to be strengthened and requires to work in a more responsible way as expected, and for which it stands for.

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