



## UZBEKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES SINCE 2016: PRAGMATISM AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

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**Annotation:** This article examines the key priorities and strategic orientations of Uzbekistan's foreign policy in the post-2016 period, following the leadership transition after the death of President Islam Karimov and the inauguration of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. It focuses on the shift toward pragmatic diplomacy, regional cooperation, and constructive international engagement. The article highlights how Uzbekistan has redefined its foreign policy to prioritize mutually beneficial ties with Central Asian neighbors, enhance regional security, attract foreign investment, and build multivector partnerships with global powers. By analyzing official policies, international agreements, and diplomatic initiatives, the paper provides insight into the evolving foreign policy doctrine of Uzbekistan and its impact on regional stability and global integration.

**Keywords:** Uzbekistan, foreign policy, regional cooperation, pragmatism, Central Asia, diplomacy, multivector strategy, Mirziyoyev, international relations, post-2016.

The year 2016 marked a pivotal turning point in Uzbekistan's political and foreign policy trajectory. With the passing of longtime President Islam Karimov and the ascent of Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan began a period of significant transformation, both domestically and internationally. One of the most noticeable shifts was in its foreign policy — moving away from isolationism toward openness, pragmatism, and regional cooperation.

Under Mirziyoyev's leadership, Uzbekistan launched a foreign policy agenda centered on building good-neighborly relations, restoring regional trust, and fostering economic integration within Central Asia. At the same time, Tashkent has pursued a multivector strategy by deepening partnerships with major global players such as Russia, China, the European Union, and the United States. The country's foreign policy is now more dynamic, flexible, and responsive to changing geopolitical realities.





This article explores the defining characteristics of Uzbekistan's foreign policy since 2016, with particular attention to its strategic pragmatism and commitment to regional cooperation. It also considers the outcomes and challenges of this new approach in shaping Uzbekistan's international role and influence.

Since 2016, Uzbekistan has undergone a significant transformation in its foreign policy under the leadership of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. Breaking away from the isolationist and cautious diplomacy of the Karimov era, the new administration has embraced a pragmatic, proactive, and regionally oriented foreign policy strategy. This transformation reflects a broader agenda of internal reform, economic liberalization, and re-engagement with the international community.

At the heart of this new approach lies a strong emphasis on regional cooperation. For the first time in decades, Uzbekistan began actively fostering friendly and constructive relations with its Central Asian neighbors. Tensions over water, borders, trade, and migration—long-standing points of contention in the region—have been addressed through diplomatic dialogue and bilateral agreements. One of the most symbolic examples is Uzbekistan's normalization of relations with Tajikistan, including the reopening of borders and the restoration of direct flights after nearly a decade of estrangement. Similarly, cooperation with Kyrgyzstan has improved significantly, with progress on long-disputed border demarcations.

Uzbekistan has also become a driving force behind regional multilateralism. The country has revitalized its role in platforms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), while also initiating new regional summits focused exclusively on Central Asia. By doing so, Tashkent has positioned itself as a bridge-builder and a key actor in promoting regional integration, stability, and sustainable development.

The second defining feature of post-2016 foreign policy is its pragmatism. Uzbekistan has pursued a multivector strategy—developing balanced relations with global powers while avoiding excessive dependence on any single actor. Relations with Russia have remained strong in economic and security spheres, while ties with China have expanded significantly through participation in the Belt and Road Initiative. At the same time, Uzbekistan has sought closer engagement with Western countries,





particularly the United States and the European Union, to attract foreign investment, technology transfer, and educational cooperation.

Uzbekistan's pragmatic diplomacy has also prioritized economic interests. The government has focused on making the country more attractive to investors by simplifying visa procedures, joining international trade organizations, and creating special economic zones. Foreign policy has thus been closely aligned with the country's internal reform agenda, serving as a tool for economic diversification and modernization.

Another important development is Uzbekistan's greater involvement in global issues. The country has taken active positions on matters such as climate change, water resource management, and regional security. Tashkent has hosted several international conferences and summits, including on Afghanistan, where it has advocated for peace, stability, and economic connectivity in the broader region.

Despite these achievements, challenges remain. Regional cooperation still requires sustained political will, especially on issues like transboundary water management. Additionally, while Uzbekistan has improved its international image, maintaining a balance between different global actors—particularly amid growing tensions between Russia, the West, and China—will demand careful diplomacy.

Nevertheless, the shift since 2016 marks a decisive break from the past. Uzbekistan's foreign policy is no longer reactive or narrowly defensive; it is increasingly shaped by a clear vision of national interest, long-term development, and regional leadership. This proactive and pragmatic strategy has earned the country greater international recognition and has created new opportunities for cooperation, trade, and diplomacy across multiple fronts.

Uzbekistan's foreign policy since 2016 has undergone a remarkable transformation, shifting from isolationist tendencies to a pragmatic, regionally focused, and globally engaged strategy. Under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's leadership, the country has prioritized improving relations with its Central Asian neighbors, resolving historical disputes, and fostering economic, political, and cultural cooperation in the region. This new orientation has contributed to a more stable and interconnected Central Asia.

At the same time, Uzbekistan's multivector diplomacy has allowed it to build balanced and productive relationships with major global powers, ensuring flexibility in





a rapidly changing international environment. The country's emphasis on economic diplomacy, investment attraction, and regional leadership has enhanced its visibility and credibility on the global stage.

While significant progress has been made, Uzbekistan's foreign policy still faces challenges that require strategic foresight, diplomatic agility, and continued commitment to reform. Nevertheless, the trajectory since 2016 demonstrates a clear and deliberate shift toward openness, cooperation, and development—firmly placing Uzbekistan as a constructive actor in both regional and international affairs.

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