

Tashkent International Conference on Afghanistan became the starting point in the process of launching the inter-Afghan peace process

The long-awaited intra-Afghan negotiations on the establishment of peace and stability in Afghanistan started in Qatar. The meeting of the IRA government delegation with the Taliban in Doha has already been called "A historic opportunity for peace in Afghanistan".

"The direct dialogue was held for the first time in decades and gives real hope for the peaceful life of the Afghan people," **Bahodir Egamov, a leading researcher at the Institute for strategic and interregional studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan**, said in a comment to IA "Dunyo". - The official delegation of Uzbekistan participated in the opening ceremony, along with representatives of Qatar, the USA, Norway, Germany, Great Britain, Pakistan, Japan, and other countries.

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According to the ISRS, the official delegation of Uzbekistan, along with representatives of Qatar, the USA, Norway, Germany, Great Britain, Pakistan, Japan, and other countries, took part in the opening ceremony of the negotiations.

Talking about progress in promoting an intra-afghan settlement, both politicians and experts in Afghanistan itself and in the countries involved in the Afghan settlement invariably mention the key role of Tashkent in this process. Moreover, there is increasingly heard the assertion that it was the initiatives of the President of Uzbekistan on stabilization of the situation in Afghanistan that helped to "reset" the Afghan negotiation process itself and radically change the attitude of external players towards it.

Why is the policy of Uzbekistan receiving such high praise and recognition at all levels? What exactly is credited to Tashkent in the process of achieving peace in this long-suffering country? What initiatives of the President of Uzbekistan are cited as an example?

First, conduction of the International Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan in March 2018. This forum, initiated personally by the President of Uzbekistan, then once again returned the lost attention of the world community to the ongoing bloodshed in the Islamic Republic.

Ashraf Ghani, foreign ministers, high-ranking diplomats of almost all countries who were not indifferent to the fate of Afghanistan gathered at the site in Tashkent then. As a result of the conference, there was adopted the Tashkent Declaration, which laid down the key principles of a peaceful settlement. In fact, a consensus was reached on a strategy for further building peace in the country.

In confirmation of the fact about the special significance of both the conference itself and the efforts of Uzbekistan leadership for the Afghan crisis peaceful settlement, one can cite the words of the President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani, who at the end of March this year noted: "The Tashkent International Conference on Afghanistan, held two years ago at the initiative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, became a key event – a «starting point» in launching a political process for a peaceful settlement of the Afghan problem, searching for mutually acceptable forms and mechanisms of dialogue between stakeholders".

US Special Representative for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad also speaks about the decisive role of the Tashkent Forum, recognizing that "the conference laid a solid foundation for achieving current practical results." As you know, it was after this conference that direct negotiations between the American side and the Taliban were launched, the ultimate result of which was the signing of the Agreement between the United States and the Taliban on February 29, in the capital of Qatar.

It outlined almost all the important conditions for achieving peace in the country - a reduction in violence, the withdrawal of foreign troops, the release of prisoners, and as a result, the launch of inclusive intra-Afghan dialogue.

The signatories of this important Agreement, including **the head of the political office of the Taliban in Qatar, Mulla Baradar**, expressed their sincere gratitude to Uzbekistan, along with other key countries, for their assistance in promoting the peace process.

Secondly, the renewed policy and initiatives of Tashkent in the Afghan direction found a response within the whole of Afghanistan: the ordinary people, the official government, various political forces.

It should be noted that Uzbekistan is not burdened with a negative historical legacy in Afghanistan and has a positive image among the main Afghan forces and the general population.

In Afghanistan, people hope for and trust Tashkent. And I must say that our country does not fail the expectations of the Afghans.

An expert of Pakistani Center for Global and Strategic Studies Mahmoud ul-Hasan Khan explains this success by the fact that "Tashkent's policy in Afghanistan from the very beginning was based on an effective formula - winning the hearts of Afghan citizens through "intensive economic cooperation" with Kabul, the successful implementation of transport and logistics projects, as well as the expansion of educational programs".

The advantage of Tashkent is the point that it managed to build a personal and confidential dialogue with the head of the republic A. Ghani, to achieve complete mutual understanding on a wide range of issues.

In addition, Uzbekistan enjoys authority among other domestic political forces in Afghanistan, including the Taliban. For example, expressing hope for cooperation with Tashkent, **the deputy head of the DT office in Qatar, Abdul Salom Hanafiy**, noted that "the Taliban highly appreciate the efforts of the President of Uzbekistan, who put forward initiatives in the interests of peace, stability, and security in Afghanistan."

Nor did it go unnoticed in Afghanistan that during the difficult period of the pandemic, Uzbekistan again proved itself as a true friend of the Afghan people, who never left them in difficult years of trials and tribulations. While other countries have closed their borders with Afghanistan due to the pandemic, Uzbekistan has once again shown a truly brotherly attitude towards Afghans. Thanks to the principled position of the President of Uzbekistan, our border has always remained open for all transport freight traffic. Cargoes with foodstuffs, essential goods, raw materials, and fuel went to Afghanistan without stopping, ensuring the normal life of the country in this difficult time.

In addition, during the pandemic, **President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev** has repeatedly made decisions to provide humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people. Tons of flour, rice, vegetable oil, sugar, baby clothes, medical protection, and hygiene products, and much more were delivered to Mazari-Sharif, in northern Afghanistan.

It is noteworthy that **UN Secretary-General A. Guterres** expressed gratitude to President Mirziyoyev for his efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to the affected states in the region, including Afghanistan.

It is clear that in this situation, the participation of the Uzbek side in the peace process will undoubtedly have a positive impact on the negotiations. In this regard, Director of the Center for Afghan Studies at the University of Nebraska Sher Ahmadzai points out, "The Afghan government and people are very pleased with the wider involvement of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and his Administration in the Afghan direction. People are very optimistic and positive about the participation of the Uzbek government in the Afghan issue. "

Thirdly, the course of the President of Uzbekistan made it possible to look anew at Afghanistan, to start considering it as an organic, integral part of the whole of Central Asia.

James Durso, a columnist for the American magazine «The Diplomat», wrote in his recent article on Uzbekistan's contribution to Afghan reconciliation that “the coming to power of President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev in 2016 changed the character of the region's views on Afghanistan and contributed to the recognition of this country as part of Central Asia. The neighbors of the Islamic Republic from the CA region can now take part in the integration of Afghanistan into the economy of the region and prevent another collapse of the government and civil war. ”

The Uzbek leader's call to stop perceiving this country solely as a source of the threat, and to start looking at Afghanistan from the point of opportunities received broad international support. Now there is a common understanding of the need to involve Afghanistan in regional economic processes.

This idea was supported by participants of the Tashkent Conference, the Seventh Conference of Regional Economic Cooperation on Afghanistan in November 2017 in Ashgabat, and the International Conference on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism in Dushanbe in May 2018.

Moreover, there is being strengthened the understanding that economic development programs can themselves act as a unifying starting point for achieving intra-Afghan national reconciliation, and form the socio-economic basis of a political settlement of the situation in Afghanistan. For example, **the leading German expert on Central Asia, Gunther Knabe**, agrees with this. He emphasizes that Uzbekistan's Afghan strategy can become the foundation for solving economic and political problems and will contribute to ending the conflict in a long-suffering country.

Therefore, today it is extremely important to take advantage of the emerging situation, ensure the continuity and progress of the peace process, and, in parallel with efforts to reconcile the conflicting parties, start investing in the economic future of Afghanistan, show all the participants in the intra-Afghan confrontation the real benefits of peaceful collaboration labor and regional cooperation.

The efforts undertaken by the President of Uzbekistan are aimed at achieving these goals and therefore are so important for promoting intra-Afghan reconciliation, for future peace in Afghanistan.

Source