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The Role of The Asia–Pacific Region in Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy (On the Example of The History of Cooperation with Indonesia, Malaysia And Singapore)

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Abstract: Today, the regional dimension is becoming increasingly significant in the system of international relations. To put it briefly, most analysts attempt to categorize the world on the basis of regions, systematize it and, on this basis, demonstrate the role of regions in global politics and economics. Despite the fact that the term "Asia-Pacific region" is a relatively recent addition to the system of international relations and world politics, it stands out from other regions due to its potential and promising future development. The Republic of Uzbekistan places special emphasis on cooperation with the advanced countries of the region, considering this region as a priority direction in its foreign policy. Relations with the countries in the region, including Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, have yielded some positive results over the past year. This article will analyze the significance of this region in Uzbekistan's foreign policy.

Keywords: The Asia-Pacific region, cooperation, Uzbekistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore.

Introduction: According to the regional perspective, the "Asia–Pacific region" is currently emerging as a major political, military, and economic "actor" in the international relations system. At the beginning of the 21st century, many were confidently predicting that this period would be the "Asian Century" or the "Asia-Pacific

Century." Now, as we enter its second decade, this prediction continues to hold true [1, P.1]. The region serves as a driver of global development. The Asia-Pacific region is acknowledged as the "center of the world economy and politics" in Uzbekistan's foreign policy strategy. [2, B.13].

It should be noted that the term "Asia-Pacific region" was first introduced in the "new policy" of Japanese Foreign Minister Miki in 1963. [1, P.3]. This concept appeared in scientific literature in the late 1970s. [3, S.14]. In official circles, the term "Asia-Pacific region" has been used since the mid-1980s. [4, B.14], by the end of the century, this concept had become widely adopted internationally. [1, P.3].

The Asia-Pacific region is an important aspect of the foreign policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The country pays great attention to cooperation with countries such as Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, as well as China [5].

In the "Concept of Foreign Policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan", which is the primary legal document governing the country's foreign relations, China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, and Malaysia are listed as priority partners for Uzbekistan in the Asia-Pacific region. [2, B.13-14].

METHOD

During the period of independence, the role of the developed and dynamically developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region in Uzbekistan's foreign policy has increased and they have become reliable and key partners for the country. Uzbekistan has established strategic partnerships with countries such as the People's Republic of China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea [6, B.50-51]. The legal framework for strategic cooperation with Malaysia was also established [7]. These developments demonstrate the significance of the region in the foreign policy of Uzbekistan. In the year 2000, exports from the republic to countries in this region accounted for 24.2% of the total exports, whereas imports accounted for 39.7%. At the end of the year 2018, these figures had increased to 38.1% and 53.7% respectively. [8, V.1-2]. In addition, the countries of the region are the main investment partners of Uzbekistan. In 2017 alone, 80.9% of investments into fixed assets in the republic came from the countries of Asia-Pacific [9, V.12]. Certainly, the contributions of the developed countries in the region account for the majority of this. However, cooperation with countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, which are also developing, plays a role in Uzbekistan's economic development and strengthening its position on the international stage.

The establishment and development of cooperation

between Uzbekistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore can be attributed to several factors:

The first and most significant factor is related to economic factors. The First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov noted at the time that "consolidating cooperation with related countries at the highest level allows the republic to enter into a system of world economic relations based on principles of truly equal partnership and mutual respect. This determines our desire to establish external relations primarily with countries of the Asia-Pacific region" [10, B.56]. It is well known that Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, among other countries in the region, gained independence during a long and difficult period of political and economic colonization. Due to the positive impact of fundamental reforms implemented, these countries have since become part of a group of steadily developing nations, significantly outpacing in terms of economic growth countries that achieved independence around the same time (commonly referred to as "third world countries"). Therefore, the countries of the Asia-Pacific region with a high level of development that have achieved positive results in modernizing their economies can have a positive impact on internal changes in the Republic of Uzbekistan [11, S.111]. In addition, "An important aspect of Uzbekistan's foreign policy activation is the development of equal relations with newly industrialized countries in Southeast Asia. The republic is keenly interested in learning from these countries' experiences in modernizing their economies and attracting investment, both in the processing of agricultural products and in knowledge-intensive sectors [10, B.58]". In particular, although relations between Singapore and Uzbekistan have not acquired any significant geopolitical importance, it is on the basis of its achievements over the past two decades that the development of relations with this country would be advisable [12, B.275].

The second factor should be related to political considerations. The developed and rapidly developing countries in the region operate under various political systems in their public administrations. The existence of different types of political systems, including a one-party parliamentary republic (PRC), a constitutional monarchy (Japan), a elected federal constitutional monarchy based on presidential rule (the Republic of Korea and Indonesia), and a parliamentary republic (Singapore), demonstrates that the specific political system is not the primary determinant of economic development. In this context, the experience of these countries in the field of governance requires a certain level of consideration when shaping the future institutions of Uzbekistan, a newly independent

sovereign state. In particular, for Uzbekistan, which is establishing its own institutions of sovereign statehood, it is essential to study the accumulated experience of the political institutions of other republican states in the region. Rafiz Abazov, a prominent expert on the foreign policies of Central Asian states during this period, supports his arguments with a quote by Cassandra Cavanaugh: "He (Islam Karimov) called for the "study and apply" approach for a successful transition of his country to prosperity and strong development after his well-publicised trips to South Korea, Malaysia and Indonesia in 1992" [13, P.20.]. The First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan stated that: "We strive to live in harmony with all people and nations who follow the path of progress and strive for a free and prosperous life. We draw on the experience not only of Western countries, but also of developed countries in the East such as Japan, South Korea, and Malaysia" [14, B.249].

At the same time, it is essential to note that the activation of foreign policy in the eastern direction, with a focus on the Asia-Pacific region, while taking into account national interests, is a significant factor in creating additional conditions for sustainable development in Uzbekistan. Consequently, this direction of Uzbekistan's foreign policy may serve as an incentive for other leading global "actors" who have a geopolitical influence on our country's strategic interests in the Central Asian region, to follow the "balance principle" [15, B.6].

In addition, an analysis of the official visits made by the First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan during the first year after independence also reveals that countries on the Asian continent were given priority in the foreign policy of the country. (In 1992, the President paid official visits to countries within the CIS and Turkey in Europe, as well as to Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, China, South Korea, Indonesia, and Malaysia.). A. Kyrgyzboev, a scientist who has researched the history of relations between independent Uzbekistan and Asian nations, emphasizes that in its foreign policy, Uzbekistan places significant emphasis on cooperation with the countries of the Asia-Pacific region, among the more developed nations of Asia. [16, B.42].

The third factor can be appropriately explained by spiritual proximity. Historically, the ancestors of the peoples who lived in what is now Uzbekistan established relations with other peoples on the continent. These relations were political, economic, cultural and religious in nature, and included trade. Today, factors such as Islam and the Eastern mentality are bringing the people of the continent together. Undoubtedly, Islam plays a significant role in this regard. Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, among

other countries, regard Uzbekistan as a highly respected and popular destination in the Muslim world. Most importantly, the history of relations between nations is also connected to Islam. Due to the fact that the opinions of scholars who acknowledge the historical significance of Uzbekistan's role in spreading Islam to modern-day Indonesians, we can conclude that the history of state relations dates back several centuries. [17, P.35-40]. On the Indonesian side, it is believed that the first two Islamic preachers out of the nine were natives of Samarkand, which is now located in Uzbekistan.

Additionally, another factor that historically links Uzbekistan with Muslims in Indonesia, Malaysia, and other Southeast Asian nations on the basis of a shared religious identity is the Naqshbandi order. The origin of the tariqa is in Uzbekistan, from which it subsequently expanded to various regions of the world. Today, there are many thousands of followers of the Naqshbandi Tariqa in the countries of Southeast Asia. Even in Malaysia, there is the "World Sufi Centre" of Tariqa. In addition, there are several Naqshbandi Sufi centres in Indonesia and Singapore. Undoubtedly, the adherents of the Naqshbandi order in these states have treated the land and people of Uzbekistan, which is regarded as the birthplace of the order, with great respect. Such historical ties, where the commonality of religion and values is the main factor that encourages states to be closer.

It should be noted that the values of humanism, ethnic and religious tolerance that have been formed in the context of the diverse religious beliefs, languages, cultures, and traditions of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, harmoniously integrate with the spiritual values of Uzbekistan. This contributes to the closer interstate relations between these countries.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The above factors have a significant impact on the cooperation between the Republic of Uzbekistan and Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. In the 1990s, Indonesia held a leading position in its relations with Uzbekistan, compared to its other two neighbors. However, since the beginning of the 21st century, this position has been first taken over by Malaysia and later by Singapore.

This is demonstrated by the visits of state leaders at the official level. In the history of Uzbek-Indonesian relations, heads of state have paid mutual visits at the highest level on one occasions: in 1992 and 1995. The presidents of Uzbekistan have paid state visits to Malaysia three times (in 1992, 2005, and 2025), and the heads of government of Malaysia have also paid state visits to Uzbekistan the same number of times (in 1993,

2008, and 2024). During the past period of cooperation, heads of state from Uzbekistan paid state visits to Singapore twice (in 2007 and 2013), and representatives from Singapore paid a state visit to Uzbekistan in 2023.

The scale of trade relations between countries throughout the history of their relationship also reflects the corresponding dynamics. In the last decade of the 20th century, Indonesia played the role of Uzbekistan's main foreign trading partner in the region. However, from the next decade, Malaysia and Singapore have taken the lead in this role. In particular, while the volume of trade between Uzbekistan and Indonesia has not reached one hundred million dollars in the history of their cooperation, the figure for trade relations with Singapore has exceeded three hundred million dollars. [18].

CONCLUSION

Since the early years of its independence, the Republic of Uzbekistan has been establishing bilateral and multilateral cooperation with other countries in the Asia-Pacific region. These established ties were based on a variety of political and economic factors. In establishing relations with Indonesia and Malaysia, which are among the leading developing countries in Southeast Asia along with other economically developed countries in the region, several factors have played a significant role. These include the similarity of approaches to foreign policy, the availability of sustainable development indicators, and a certain degree of religious commonality.

The political dialogue, which was established at a certain point in the history of Uzbekistan's cooperation with Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, has been one of the most significant mechanisms for addressing important issues in international, regional, and mutual relations. With the support of an ever-growing foreign policy, the development of this dialogue and its regularization in our country will be beneficial for all parties involved.

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