

# Uzbekistan at the Centre of the New Great Game

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**Abstract:** *The aim of this article is to analyse and clarify the position of Uzbekistan as a country which attracts the attention of global powers, due to its security and strategic potential. The first part presents an analysis of statistical data. This data was prepared so as to identify which of these powers promote the most active foreign policy towards Uzbekistan within the sectors of cooperation defined further in the text. For this purpose several indexes of engagement are introduced. The second part of the text is devoted to the global power which gained the highest value on average out of all the indexes, with an emphasis on the impact on the relationship between this power (Russia) and Uzbekistan, and on all the other actors involved.*

**Keywords:** *Central Asia, Russia, Uzbekistan, powers, geopolitics, index, Islam Karimov, economic cooperation, political cooperation, development cooperation*

## Introduction

From the perspective of geopolitics, Central Asia is one of the most attractive regions. Most of the world's leading political scientists emphasize the strategic importance to this region. Authors such as Rudolph Kjellén, Halford Mackinder, Henry Kissinger and Thomas Barnett belong to this list (Mayer 2012). Central Asia is thus an area attracting the attention of global powers which have always interfered in its

affairs. Uzbekistan is therefore marked as a key state of Central Asia<sup>1</sup> and in addition, by using this example, the new great game of Central Asia may be properly analysed. For the above reasons, the subject of this article is about Uzbekistan, ruled by President Islam Karimov, and its relations with the outside world.

The aim of this article is to analyse the position of Uzbekistan as a state which is of high importance to the global powers regarding security and strategic concerns. Due to these reasons, the global powers try to ensure their interests through a wide range of activities. The main question of this research is the following: Which of the global powers promote the most active foreign policy towards Uzbekistan and what is the impact of this power's activity on Uzbekistan, Central Asia and also on the power itself?

The text is based on several premises that are deduced from this researched question. The first premise assumes that Russia lost its dominant position in this region after the collapse of the USSR, and that Uzbekistan moved away from the Russian sphere of influence due to its active and ambitious foreign policy. According to the second premise, Uzbekistan and Central Asia are areas of constant conflict among global powers, which can lead to a dangerous conflict among the dominant players in world politics. The arguments in this text also show that although strong relationships with Uzbekistan may be beneficial to Russia in the short-term, this alliance may bring several problems in the long-term.

The article is divided into two parts. The first part assesses the activities of individual actors engaging in Uzbekistan and divides it into three categories — policy, economy, and development assistance.<sup>2</sup> This part also includes a chronological summary of the development of Uzbek foreign policy and its geopolitical orientation. The author especially emphasizes the most important milestones, such as the riots in Andijan in 2005.

The research focuses on a bilateral relationship and the interactions between Uzbekistan and seven powers. Three of them could be labeled as global powers or *powers of the first order*.<sup>3</sup> These include China, Russia and the United States. India, Iran, Japan and Turkey are so called regional powers or *powers of the second order*. The European Union (EU) is another important player in this region. However, it is not included in this study because it is not a State and therefore its relationship with Uzbekistan works differently.

Many authors are interested in the geopolitical potential of Central Asian states and in the strategic power rivalry of this region. However, many of them do not focus only on the individual states of the region. Slavomír Horák is a respected expert on this region and the most important Czech author, whose texts are a key source for this text. Other important sources are foreign publications, such as monographs by Uzbek political scientist Farghod Tolipov, the world's leading political scientist, or another expert on the Russian-Uzbek relations, Sergei Blagov. Think-tanks such as

the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, the Eurasia Daily Monitor, the Institute for War and Peace Reporting and the Jamestown Foundation also offer high-quality analysis of this topic. Government websites of the discussed countries, especially their foreign ministries, embassies and development agencies, the press service of the President Islam Karimov, the Uzbek government, and Statistical committee, provide further important information. Additional data was drawn from the statistics of international organizations.

## Uzbekistan as a Subject of Geopolitical Games

Uzbekistan is an attractive ally for global and regional powers because of its geo-strategic location in the heart of Central Asia, and on the northern borders of Afghanistan. Its geographical proximity is one of the reasons why Uzbekistan plays an important role in stabilization for its southern neighbour (Karimova 2010). Among other factors, one can name the economic potential, an ambition to become the dominant state in this region, and Islam Karimov's fear of the possible spread of radical forms of Islam and terrorism (Tolipov 2011).

The last two reasons are the most important motives why I. Karimov seeks to play an active role in the Afghan peace process, which significantly affects Uzbekistan's national interests and security. The issue of Afghanistan is also important for global powers, in considering Uzbekistan as an important ally in effort to create a stable and secular Afghanistan. This effort is intensifying nowadays because of the planned withdrawal of allied troops from the country in 2014. Another important factor, that makes the country attractive for external actors, are the considerable reserves of raw materials, especially natural gas (NationMaster 2010). For those reasons, Uzbekistan has always been a key state for the powers who are interested in the region.

Uzbekistan sought to reorient its foreign policy from Russia towards the U.S. and the EU, and to a lesser extent towards the states of the Middle East after the collapse of the Soviet empire. Global and regional powers, however, hesitated to become active in Central Asia because the area was still considered to be under the Russian's sphere of dominance (Dobrovolský 2010).

In the case of Uzbekistan, Turkey (and later also Iran) was the first daring power in the early 1990s, but these states did not have enough resources to finance a costly geopolitical game (Horák 2005a). That is why these regional powers did not become so important to the country.

In addition, Islam Karimov suspected Iran, and especially Turkey, of supporting Islamist movements in Uzbekistan (Devlet, 2012). The formerly flowering Uzbek-Turkish relations have started to deteriorate since 2003, when Turkey's governing Justice and Development Party seized power. Tashkent underlined the party's Islam-

ist orientation and criticized its willing to harbour Uzbek “terrorists” and critics of the regime, and to sponsor Islamist opposition (Eurasianet, 2012). As Ankara did not comply with Karimov’s request to extradite his opponent Muhammad Salikh, relations became cold. As a consequence, Tashkent intensified an effort to minimize Turkish cultural and economic influence in the country. For example, Uzbek authorities arrested 54 Turkish entrepreneur, closed more than 50 Turkish businesses and imposed a ban on airing Turkish sitcoms (Eurasianet, 2012).

Uzbekistan clearly declared its pro-Western orientation when it became a member of the western-minded Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM)<sup>4</sup> in 1999 and then the organisation changed its official name to GUUAM. It was originally an economic organisation, but gradually transformed into a military and political formation. Today the main aim of the group is to make the Russian influence in Central Asia weaker and to deepen cooperation with the U.S. and the EU (Daly 2005).

Nevertheless a series of events prompted Islam Karimov to strive to move closer to the former hegemony — Russia. When Vladimir Putin took over power in 2000, Russian foreign policy turned to a paternalistic approach, and the new President put his country into the role as the only guarantor of safety of Uzbekistan (Dobrovolský 2010). During this period, Uzbek security was threatened by the conflicts in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, and related militant groups. They were often involved in drug trafficking or supporting Islamic groups standing in opposition to the Karimov regime (Menteshashvil 1999). A combination of these factors resulted in a realignment of Uzbekistan and Russia in 2000–2001. In the same period Uzbekistan started to develop its relationship with its neighbours, and with another important player — China (Nichol 2011). It was completed in May 2001 when Uzbekistan joined the Shanghai Organisation for Cooperation.<sup>5</sup>

An important milestone in the geopolitical orientation of Uzbekistan was the start of the allied operations in Afghanistan in autumn of 2001, which meant a unique opportunity for I. Karimov to gain political and financial support from the U.S. in exchange for cooperation and provision of military bases. The establishment of Uzbekistan as the most important ally of the U.S. and the simultaneous weakening of the Islamic opposition allowed I. Karimov to consolidate his position (Horák 2005). During this period, regional powers such as Japan or India began to engage in activities in Uzbekistan, however, I. Karimov’s priority was the consolidation of Uzbekistan’s alliance with the U.S. and the EU, while maintaining good relations with Russia and China (Nichol 2011).

However, soon after the relations between Uzbekistan and the U.S. got into trouble because of the western pressure to liberalize the economy and to respect human rights. In addition, the West disappointed Uzbek elites because the Uzbek government expected a much larger influx of financial support and investment, and the

United States also refused to play the role of a security guarantor in the Central Asian region (Daly 2005).

Therefore, Uzbekistan again decided to change its foreign policy. An important meeting of the Presidents of Russia and Uzbekistan took place in August 2003 during Vladimir Putin's visit in Samarkand. It became a turning point and more intense economic cooperation was introduced at this meeting (Horák 2008).

The Uzbek and American relationship was finally disrupted by events in Andijan in May 2005. In the opinion of the Uzbek government, the Islamists wanted to overthrow power, and neighbouring Kyrgyzstan and the United States were entangled in this affair (Nichol 2011). According to respected non-governmental organisations, however, Islam Karimov abused the peaceful demonstration to suppress political opposition. According to the BBC, in result of the crackdown on armed forces against demonstrators hundreds of civilians were killed, and the Uzbek Government stresses that the Islamists insurgents killed 187 people (BBC 2005).

The international community, led by the EU and the U.S., demanded an independent investigation of May's violence immediately afterwards. However, the Uzbek side rejected this requirement as unacceptable interference in the state's sovereignty. The reaction of the EU was an introduction of the arms embargo and a restriction of diplomatic visa issuances from member states. The United States even suspended the financial flow for development assistance, and military and technical aid (Nichol 2011). In return, the Uzbek government banned the night operations of allied troops on its territory and imposed limitations on using the American military base at Karshi-Kanabad (called K2) in southern Uzbekistan (Global Security: undated – a).

The U.S. got into a situation where they had to decide whether to continue to support the regime, which violated human rights but was indispensable for achieving their goals or not. Stephen Blank, an expert from the Institute of Strategic Studies in Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), describes it as follows: *"The priority aim of the U.S. policy in Central Asia and Uzbekistan is winning the war in Afghanistan, a goal that makes retention of the base at Karshi Khanabad of vital importance, but the war also heightens the importance of democracy as an operating principle of U.S. foreign policy and so it is in conflict with that goal"* (Blank 2005).

The U.S. still insisted on an independent investigation of the events in Andijan. The consequence of this dispute was the requirement to withdraw the American troops from K2 which had been used as a base for U.S. and NATO operations in Afghanistan from 2001 till 2005 (Radio Free Europe 2005a). In addition, Uzbekistan terminated its membership in the pro-Western organisation GUUAM (Radio Free Europe 2005b).

On the other hand, China saw the response of the Uzbek government as a legitimate act and Russia endorsed its ally via investigation of these events and came to

the conclusion that the reaction of the Uzbek government was justified and took proportionate action against the Islamists' militants (Blank 2005).

As a result of these events there was a shift towards Russia and a strengthening of economic ties with China, at the expense of the collaboration with the West, which lasted until 2008. Then, the EU and U.S. began to drop their sanctions and started to re-develop cooperation with Uzbekistan. In the case of the United States, an effort to improve the situation was evident especially after the deterioration of the relationship between them and another strategic ally — Pakistan (Crilly 2011).

Uzbekistan is trying to use this opportunity and get the most out of it. So in accordance with the Uzbek's effort at so called multi-vector foreign policy, which will be explained later, it collaborates with each of the powers now. Regional and global powers engaging in Uzbekistan seek to ensure their security and strategic interests, and they use a wide range of instruments as tools. The result is a complex network of relationships (Weil 2011).

## The Index of Political Engagement in Uzbekistan

The Index of political engagement includes four indicators of cooperation. The first two show typical characteristics of relations between the two states — establishing bilateral diplomatic relations and the existence of embassies. Uzbekistan began to establish diplomatic relations with other countries in the world after the collapse of the Soviet Empire. China was the first country from this group of aforementioned powers that recognized the independence of Uzbekistan, and the other powers followed in 1992. After the establishment of bilateral relations, each individual state started to introduce their embassies in Uzbekistan. Now there are 47 embassies in Tashkent and all the states from the observed group have their own embassy there (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan: undated – d).

In the case of regional or global powers and strategically important countries like Uzbekistan, the indicators mentioned above are nearly self-evident. Therefore, a more provable indicator of political interest in Uzbekistan could be the number of state visits undertaken at the highest level.<sup>6</sup> It could illustrate how important this country is for the aforementioned powers by the fact of how much money and time together top leaders have spent with President Islam Karimov, indicating how invested they are into the country. The number of state visits undertaken between Uzbekistan and the observed countries can be seen in Table 1: State Visits at the Highest Level From 1992 Till Now.

**Table 1: State Visits at the Highest Level From 1992 Till Now**

| State         | State visit to Uzbekistan | State visit paid by Islam Karimov |
|---------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| China         | 3                         | 8                                 |
| India         | 2                         | 4                                 |
| Iran          | 1                         | 1                                 |
| Japan         | 2                         | 3                                 |
| Russia        | 3                         | 7                                 |
| United States | 0                         | 3                                 |
| Turkey        | 1                         | 1                                 |

Source: Press-service of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan (undated)

The last political indicator is membership in the same international organizations, which can illustrate the geopolitical interest of Uzbekistan and the interest of the discussed powers regarding mutual cooperation. Uzbekistan is a member of the international organizations listed in Table 2: Memberships of Uzbekistan in International Organizations. As is apparent from the title, the table also shows the membership of the observed powers in the given organisation. Most of the organizations listed in the table are formed on a regional basis, while worldwide organisations such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the International Red Cross and so on are not included because their members include all the aforementioned countries as well as Uzbekistan.

**Table 2: Memberships of Uzbekistan in International Organizations**

| Organisation   | Member states  |
|--|--|
| Asian Development Bank   | China, Japan, India, Turkey, United States             |
| Islamic Development Bank Group                                     | Iran, Turkey   |
| Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia | China, India, Iran, Russia, Turkey                     |
| Economic Cooperation Organization                                  | Iran, Turkey   |
| Organisation of Islamic Cooperation                                | Iran, Turkey   |
| Collective Security Treaty Organisation                            | Russia   |
| Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe               | Russia, Turkey, United States                          |
| Eurasian Union   | Russia   |
| Partnership for Peace  | Russia + member states of NATO (United States, Turkey) |
| Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council                                  | Russia, Turkey, United States                          |

|                                    |                               |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Commonwealth of Independent States | Russia                        |
| Central Asian Union                | —                             |
| World Bank Group                   | Russia, Turkey, United States |
| Shanghai Cooperation Organisation  | China, Russia                 |

Source: CIA (2012) – modified by author

Using the procedure explained in the references, the values mentioned in Table 3: The Index of Political Engagement were obtained.<sup>7</sup>

**Table 3: The Index of Political Engagement**

| State                | Bilateral diplomatic relations | Embassy | State visits | International organisation | Index of political engagement |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|---------|--------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>China</b>         | 14,3                           | 14,3    | 28,1         | 4,6                        | <b>61,3</b>                   |
| <b>India</b>         | 14,3                           | 14,3    | 15,5         | 3,1                        | <b>47,2</b>                   |
| <b>Iran</b>          | 14,3                           | 14,3    | 5,1          | 6,1                        | <b>39,6</b>                   |
| <b>Japan</b>         | 14,3                           | 14,3    | 12,8         | 1,6                        | <b>42,9</b>                   |
| <b>Russia</b>        | 14,3                           | 14,3    | 25,6         | 13,5                       | <b>67,9</b>                   |
| <b>United States</b> | 14,3                           | 14,3    | 7,7          | 7,6                        | <b>43,9</b>                   |
| <b>Turkey</b>        | 14,3                           | 14,3    | 5,1          | 13,5                       | <b>47,4</b>                   |

Russia dominates the index of political engagement with 67.9 points, followed by China, Turkey and India and other observed states. In the case of political engagement, the differences among various powers are not considerable.

## The Index of Economic Engagement in Uzbekistan

The Index of Economic Engagement includes four indicators. The first one is mutual trade exchange expressed by the percentage of foreign trade. Russia is the most important trading partner for Uzbekistan, with a 29.2 % share. Other powers trade with Uzbekistan to a much lesser extent. Mutual trade exchange is nearly negligible in the cases of India, Japan and the U.S. Data for individual countries is listed in Table 4: Import & Export Trade of Uzbekistan in 2010.



**Table 4: Import & Export Trade of Uzbekistan in 2010**

| <b>State</b>         | <b>Percentage of foreign trade</b> |
|----------------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>China</b>         | 9.5 %                              |
| <b>India</b>         | 0.7 %                              |
| <b>Iran</b>          | 3.0 %                              |
| <b>Japan</b>         | 0.6 %                              |
| <b>Russia</b>        | 29.2 %                             |
| <b>United States</b> | 0.8 %                              |
| <b>Turkey</b>        | 4.5 %                              |

Source: The State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics (undated) – modified by the author

Foreign investments are another important economic indicator illustrating the interests of the individual states being discussed. Foreign direct investments (FDI) are the most important flow of investments. Current data showing the flow from each of the observed countries to Uzbekistan is not available because no Uzbek institution, international organization nor investing country publishes these statistics. Nevertheless, the number of the so-called joint ventures is accessible.

The Uzbek government defines these companies as the companies in which at least one foreign investor figures and owns at least 30 % of its value, which generally is at least 150 000 USD (Shiells, 2003). The most actual figures are listed in Table 5: Joint Ventures in Uzbekistan. There are considerable differences in the number of joint ventures among the countries. Russia owns most of the joint ventures, followed by Turkey, China and the United States. On the contrary, only a few joint ventures are owned by Iran, India or Japan. This indicator is limited, because the number of companies with foreign capital does not represent the size of the investments and thus the total volume of financial flow. On the other hand, it provides at least a partial picture of the FDI in Uzbekistan, and, because the FDI is one of the most important economic characteristics, it should be included in the index of economic engagement.

**Table 5: Joint Ventures in Uzbekistan**

| <b>Investor</b> | <b>Number of joint ventures</b> |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>China</b>    | 347 (2009)                      |
| <b>India</b>    | 62 (2010)                       |
| <b>Iran</b>     | 89 (2007)                       |

|                      |            |
|----------------------|------------|
| <b>Japan</b>         | 10 (2010)  |
| <b>Russia</b>        | 843 (2009) |
| <b>United States</b> | 240 (2010) |
| <b>Turkey</b>        | 534 (2007) |

Source: Afro-Asian Business Chronicle (2012), Asia Invest Bank (undated), Embassy of Uzbekistan to the United States (2011), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan (undated - b), The Free Library (undated), Turkish Weekly (2008)

The existence of an intergovernmental institution responsible for the development of cooperation and preferential trade arrangement is another important characteristic. All of the observed states have built business relationships with Uzbekistan, and gradually have signed trade contracts. Uzbekistan even signed an intergovernmental contract which established organizations to support the development of economic cooperation with certain countries. It established just such an organisation in cooperation with the United States (The American Uzbekistan Chambre of Commerce 2011) and also with Russia (Asia Invest Bank: undated), Japan (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan: undated – b), India (Ministry of External Affairs of India 2012) and Turkey (Uzbekistan Today 2008), while no government nor other source mentions the existence of similar institutions between Uzbekistan and China, and Iran respectively.

All the countries discussed, except Japan, have signed customs agreements with Uzbekistan aiming to promote the development of mutual trade. The Free Trade Agreement (FTA)<sup>8</sup> between Russia and Uzbekistan was signed in 1992 (Asia Invest Bank: undated) and later this agreement was included in the free trade area within the Society of Independent States, which came into force in 2011 (Panov 2010). In 2003, the member states of the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO), among them Uzbekistan, Iran and Turkey, started to build a common market (Economic Cooperation Organisation 2003). The U.S. guaranteed Uzbekistan the position of the Most Favoured Nation<sup>9</sup> (MFN) and a year later (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan: undated – a), then the same agreement between Uzbekistan and China (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan: undated – b), and India respectively (Ministry of External Affairs of India 2012), came into force also in 2004. Japan remains the only state that does not trade with Uzbekistan on the basis of specific customs arrangements (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan: undated – b).

The index of economic engagement, which is noted in Table 6: The Index of Economic Engagement, consists of the above explained indicators and the calculation uses the same methodology.<sup>10</sup>

**Table 6: The Index of Economic Engagement**

| State                | Foreign trade | FDI  | Customs agreement | Intergovernmental institution | Index of economic engagement |
|----------------------|---------------|------|-------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>China</b>         | 19.6          | 8.2  | 11.1              | 0                             | <b>38.9</b>                  |
| <b>India</b>         | 1.4           | 1.5  | 11.1              | 10                            | <b>24</b>                    |
| <b>Iran</b>          | 6.2           | 2.1  | 22.2              | 0                             | <b>30.5</b>                  |
| <b>Japan</b>         | 1.2           | 0.2  | 0                 | 10                            | <b>11.4</b>                  |
| <b>Russia</b>        | 60            | 19.8 | 22.2              | 10                            | <b>112</b>                   |
| <b>United States</b> | 1.7           | 5.6  | 11.1              | 10                            | <b>28.4</b>                  |
| <b>Turkey</b>        | 9.3           | 12.6 | 22.2              | 10                            | <b>54.1</b>                  |

The table above shows that Russia is a dominant player in the economic sphere. Turkey is the second most important but scored much less than Russia. Other powers achieved similar results ranging from 24 to 38.9 points, except for Japan, which is not very active in the economic sphere.

## The Index of Development Engagement in Uzbekistan

The indicators of development cooperation offer another interesting perspective on the intensity of relations between Uzbekistan and the powers mentioned. From a geopolitical point of view, development cooperation is less critical than, for example, the existence of a military base, but in the context of complex interests in Uzbekistan the index of development engagement is an important part of this article.

Lack of available data and different ways of reporting the development cooperation (only Japan, the United States and Turkey use the standardized concept Official Development Assistance – ODA) are a problematic aspect for this part. These three states also belong among the top ten donors of Uzbekistan which together provide 94 % of the total ODA and development assistance reported in other ways (OECD/DAC: undated – c). For these reasons the following part is devoted only to Japan, the United States and Turkey.

The index of development engagement consists of two indicators. The first one shows the value of ODA in 2010 recorded in Table 7: Uzbekistan: ODA in 2010 From Selected Donors.

**Table 7: Uzbekistan: ODA in 2010 From Selected Donors**

| State         | ODA in millions USD – 2010 |
|---------------|----------------------------|
| Japan         | 70.4                       |
| United States | 17.9                       |
| Turkey        | 8.1                        |

Source: Trading Economics (undated) – modified by author

The second indicator shows Uzbekistan’s position as a recipient of aid. It consists of four sub-indicators — identification of Uzbekistan as a priority country of the donor’s development policy, the foundation of development agency bureau in Uzbekistan, inclusion of Uzbekistan on the list of top ten recipients of assistance, and Uzbek share in the total ODA. The values of each sub-indicator are listed in Table 8: Uzbekistan as a Recipient of Aid.

**Table 8: Uzbekistan as a Recipient of Aid**

| Sate          | Priority country     | Bureau | Uzbekistan on the list of top 10 recipients | Share in total ODA |
|---------------|----------------------|--------|---|--------------------|
| Japan         | yes                  | yes    | no  | 0.44 %             |
| United States | partly <sup>11</sup> | no     | no  | 0.06 %             |
| Turkey        | yes                  | yes    | no  | 0.84 %             |

Source: OECD/DAC (undated – a), OECD/DAC(undated – b) , Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey (undated), USAID (2010), USAID (2011), JICA (2012) – modified by author

Both indicators of development engagement have the same importance. The first one is calculated by the same method, the second uses a more complicated procedure.<sup>12</sup> The final index of development engagement counts up the values of both indicators and it is noted in Table 9: The Index of Development Engagement.

**Table 9: The Index of development engagement**

| Sate          | ODA  | Uzbekistan as a recipient of aid | Index of development engagement |
|---------------|------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Japan         | 64.2 | 30.7                             | <b>94.9</b>                     |
| United States | 23.9 | 6.1                              | <b>30</b>                       |
| Turkey        | 10.9 | 38.2                             | <b>49.1</b>                     |

Japan has the highest index value and also dominates in the total volume of ODA and in nearly all parts of the second indicator. Turkey received about half the points, followed by the United States, which has a very low second indicator value.

## Russian Hegemony in Uzbekistan

The activities of regional and global powers in Uzbekistan have a principal impact on the situation in Uzbekistan, as well as throughout Central Asia. In addition, they significantly influence relations among the powers themselves. Uzbek foreign policy is another very important factor affecting all the actors involved.

The indexes explained above show that the economic and political sphere is dominated by Russia, which in turn belongs to the states that do not develop significant development activities towards Uzbekistan. Japan is a key player in this sector, but is not intensively involved in the remaining areas of cooperation. However, development cooperation has only limited potential in terms of geopolitics, so the next chapter is devoted to the Uzbek-Russian relations.

As shown in the previous part, Russia considers Uzbekistan as a strategically important state and therefore it implements active and obliging foreign policy towards this state. This trend has been reinforced especially after 2005, when Russia again became the most important ally of Uzbekistan.

There have also been controversial issues in their relations, which have reoccurred from time to time, and have caused slight cooling of cooperation. The hydro-power plant disputes in Central Asia are a typical example. In this case, Russia was trying to balance its relationship with all five countries. Uzbekistan feels damaged by the construction of hydro-power plants which were built by the Russian companies, with Russia also as the major investor (Akhmadov 2009). Due to these constructions Russia increased its influence in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan but harmed its relations with the regime of I. Karimov (Radio Free Europe 2005c).

In the field of economics, Uzbek unwillingness to acknowledge its debt to Russia during Soviet times is a major problem (Akhmadov 2009). The debt has not been repaid since 1998 and its current level is estimated to be at \$ 700 million (Blagov 2007). As a result of this Uzbekistan is unable to use Russian loans.

The Uzbek position regarding membership in certain international organizations is another problematic aspect. In 2008, for example, Uzbekistan left the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEc)<sup>13</sup> led by Russia, ceased to attend meetings of the Collective Security Treaty, and also refused to participate in the formation of the Rapid Reaction Force within this group (Akhmadov 2009). Uzbekistan has also taken a negative stand regarding the customs union which was formed in 2010 among

Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus. This agreement, which entered into force in early 2012, established among them a single market with free movement of goods, labour and investment (Cutler 2010).

Russia would like to deepen this integration in the future and to form the Eurasian Union. However, the member countries of the existing customs union, except Russia, and other potential members do not agree with this aim. Uzbekistan and other countries do not trust that Moscow is motivated solely by economic interests and that the new integration would be based on equality for all its members. I. Karimov expressed his worries, “*Uzbekistan remembers the oppressive Soviet rule well and regards the customs and Eurasian Unions as Russian imperialism in disguise* (Blagov 2010).”

Even if Uzbekistan could be convinced of Russia’s economic interests and mutual benefits, an excessive economic dependence on only one power is considered by Uzbekistan and other Central Asian states as a significant threat. The use of military force is unrealistic in the case of relations between Russia and Central Asia, but the economic system can become an effective tool for influencing the internal affairs and foreign policy of Central Asian regimes (Blagov 2010).

In addition, I. Karimov prefers multi-vector foreign policy, and so he is not willing to integrate so deeply with only a single power. Due to this policy he is always able to choose the best partner for cooperation, in accordance with the country’s national interests and current situation. The main benefit is that Uzbekistan has not gotten into any sphere of influence after gaining independence and it has been able to use its attractiveness to improve its position, especially after 2001. As a result of this policy even Russia has had only limited impact on Uzbek policy because the government headed by I. Karimov could always turn to another actor for support (Institute for War and Peace Reporting 2012). According to the Uzbek independent analyst Dilarom Iskhakova, whatever happens between the Russian-Uzbek relations depends mainly on I. Karimov (UzNews 2012).

Multi-vector Uzbek foreign policy is a considerable threat for the stability of Central Asia. Other Central Asian states have tried to implement a similar policy, although to a lesser extent and with limited benefits. The result brings an overlap of national interests, competition for support and close relations with powers (Weil 2011). For this reason, it is very difficult to create a common foreign policy that would allow cooperation in solving problems which threaten the whole region (Shlapentokh 2012a).

In the future, this approach could bring a lot of problems, especially in connection with the population growth and its radicalism. Therefore, some analysts expect that Central Asia could become an area of conflict, among the states of this region rather than among the external powers (Shlapentokh 2012b). Global powers are aware of the fact that competition could bring a loss to all of them instead of an aimed geostrategical victory, and most of all in the context of regarding the current

situation in this region. The powers are also realizing that due to cooperation, or at least some reduction of leadership competition, this could then achieve common goals, which include a secular, stable and prosperous Afghanistan (Feffer 2006).

However, from the Russian side there is an apparent effort to maintain good relations with the strategically important Central Asian state. Vladimir Putin confirmed the fact in 2010, *“Uzbekistan is the key country in Central Asia. We have special relations with Uzbekistan”* (Bhadrakumar 2010). In connection with his re-election as a Russian President, analysts do not expect any radical changes in the Russian policy towards Uzbekistan and some of them even suggest further development of cooperation (UzNews 2012).

A crucial turning point in relations between Moscow and Tashkent was the Treaty of Allied Relations, signed in 2005 (Alliance treaty between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Uzbekistan 2005). Uzbekistan has been Russia’s most important ally in Central Asia from this time on and Uzbekistan has significantly moved closer into the Russian sphere of influence. A short time after, some regional analysts started to insist that the agreement is a victory for Russian geopolitics in the short term, but in the long run it could bring about a lot of substantial problems (Torbakov 2005).

The Uzbek political analyst Farkhod Tolipov argues that the primary problem is the reason for alliance. Uzbekistan was in real danger during the years 1996–2001, because its stability and safety were threatened by the instability in Afghanistan and by the attacks of Islamic radicals. However, during the same period, I. Karimov’s regime was stable and so he did not seek a security guarantee from Russia because he was trying to reduce the Kremlin’s influence in his country.

At the end of 2005, I. Karimov radically reconsidered his country’s position and decided to establish very close cooperation with Russia, despite the official statement that the government’s anti-terrorist campaign was successful, and therefore Tashkent refused to let the U.S. troops stay at the K2 base (Tolipov 2006). This way, Uzbekistan established close relations with Russia although it was not endangered by any external threats. According to F. Tolipov, the pact was not signed due to a real external threat to Uzbekistan’s national interests, but due to the danger to I. Karimov’s regime. Therefore, he considered the agreement as a tool for protection of I. Karimov and not the Republic of Uzbekistan (Tolipov 2006). Some Russian media also highlights the fact that, *“Moscow guarantees Tashkent its full backing in the event that Karimov regime is threatened either from the outside or inside”* (Torbakov 2005).

This aspect of the alliance could become very problematic in the case of destabilization of the situation in the country. Kremlin would have to deal with the dilemma of whether to remain loyal to its ally and be pulled into protracted internal conflict, or to ignore its allied obligations and thus lose credibility in the eyes of other partners and damage its position in Central Asia (Torbakov 2005).

To what extent can the fall of I. Karimov's regime become a reality? This topic became widely discussed after the events of the Arab Spring. The question of the expansion of revolutions into Central Asia was also very popular. The fact is that the local authoritarian leaders have been in power for many years (N. Nazarbayev and I. Karimov even since independence) and there are similar problems in these states which have sparked riots in the states of North Africa and the Middle East, namely poverty, repression of freedom of the press, and lack of opportunities for a large number of young people (Dougherty 2011).

On the other hand, there are also a lot of different factors in Central Asia. According to A. Malashenko, the most important one of these includes a complete adaptation to the regimes and an introduction of authoritarian regimes that already were in the Soviet era, caused the fact that the people in Central Asia had become accustomed to live under authoritarian rules (Zikibayeva 2011). Other factors may be the negative experience of previous revolutionary attempts which were harshly suppressed and did not receive the necessary international support (Kocaman 2012). The rebellion in Andijan might be an example. The participants were bloodily decimated by security forces and the West did not provide them protection or support. Additionally, global powers are not willing to risk their relations with the allies in this strategically important region and to further destabilize this area (Pannier 2012).

The case of Uzbekistan should be compared with the situation in Egypt before the fall of President Hosni Mubarak. There are several factors which played a key role in this African country — the strong position of the opposition (Muslim Brotherhood), mobilization of the population through social networks, confidence in the army and very high unemployment (Strachansky 2011).

In contrast, in Uzbekistan nearly all organized oppositions to the regime have been eliminated or discredited, people have much less Internet access, the army is strongly linked to the ruling regime and the unemployment rate is high, however not as high as in Egypt. (Kocaman 2012). For these reasons, spreading of the revolutionary waves to Uzbekistan is not probable. On the contrary, I. Karimov abused these events to consolidate his regime. He used a proven strategy and misused the combat strategy against Islamic extremism as a pretext for suppressing of opposition (Zikibayeva 2011).

To sum up, the stability of the Uzbek regime is not threatened by the opposition groups. The external influences are not so dangerous. So in the near future, a major destabilizing factor may become the centralization of power. I. Karimov uses this strategy to strengthen his position (Pannier 2012). As a result of this policy this president, who is seventy-four years old, makes it impossible to educate his successor. I. Karimov has no dynastic successor in his male line because he does not keep a close relationship with his son from his first marriage and with his second wife he has two daughters, who are publicly known individuals, but not so popular (Strachansky 2011).



In addition, the method of transferring power from generation to generation within one powerful dynasty is not popular in Central Asia (Anceschi 2012). I. Karimov has outlined a new procedure for succession in case of his death or incapacitation, but if he does not take steps to follow through with this procedure, it is very probable that the Uzbek regime will not last even up to the day of death of its current leader. So after his death, a struggle for power will burst out among different clans and to a lesser extent among the Islamic opposition (Zikibayeva 2011).

Close ties with Uzbekistan may also damage Russian relations with another important Central Asian state — Kazakhstan, Uzbek's main rival — and with the EU as well. On the other hand, the relation with the U.S. has not worsened, because the United States also need Uzbekistan as an ally, additionally having similar targets and interests, and concern for the stability of the region.

## Conclusion

Uzbekistan is a very attractive ally for the global powers which try to develop mutual cooperation. They have thus implemented active foreign policies toward the state headed by the regime of I. Karimov.

The first assumption that Russia has lost its dominant position in Uzbekistan since the collapse of the USSR, and that Uzbekistan has emerged from its sphere of influence due to its active and ambitious foreign policy, was examined in the first chapter. An analysis of statistical data showed that despite the active effort of other powers, Russia still has a privileged position in this country. Although I. Karimov tries, as well as other representatives of newly formed Central Asian republics, to break away from the Russian sphere of influence, especially after 2005, Uzbekistan has been constantly returning to it again. Despite the fact that the Uzbek leader seeks to orient foreign policy towards the highest possible number of actors, the dependence on Russia is still considerable. This fact is illustrated by several indexes which are part of the text. Russia is dominant in the indexes of political and economic engagement. The sphere of development cooperation is the only area in which Russia is lagging behind the other powers. That is why the first proposition is valid only partly. Nowadays, Russia can be described as the most important foreign partner of Uzbekistan, but its dependence is reduced due to active and multi-vector foreign policy.

The other assumption supposes that Uzbekistan and the whole of Central Asia are an area of constant conflicts of powers, which can result in conflict among the dominant players in world geopolitics. This is not true, as shown in the last chapter of this article. Global powers are aware that, in the context of instability in this region, the rivalry could harm everyone involved. On the contrary, the representatives of the

Central Asian states often use nationalist rhetoric to gain popularity and are not willing to compromise in regards to the aforementioned common threats and challenges. Therefore, they are of a greater danger to the stability of the region. The Uzbek effort to implement multi-vector foreign policy and to reduce its dependence on Russia causes instability to the state policy. Thus, Uzbekistan does not represent a stable partner for negotiations. It may further aggravate its relations with its neighbours and contribute to the development of conflict.

The last argument is that although strong relations with Uzbekistan may be beneficial to Russia in the short-term, it may bring a lot of problems to Russian leaders in the long-term. Russia could be drawn into the conflicts due to its close relations with Uzbekistan because it guarantees I. Karimov's regime protection against external and internal threats.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Definition of Central Asia is not uniform but obviously five former Soviet republics – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are included.
- <sup>2</sup> The Index of engagement is composed for each sphere of cooperation – economy, policy and development. The text does not include the index of military engagement because of lack of information, although it is another interesting characteristic. All indexes consist of several indicators whose choice is justified in the article. Ascertained data are transferred to the final value of indicator according to the following key. 100 points, or 50 points in the cases when the indicator has lower explanatory value or its effect on the interactions is less detectable, are divided among the observed powers within one indicator. The appropriate number of points assigned to the given state is equivalent to number of dividing points multiply by value of the indicator of a given state divide the sum of the values of all states in the same indicator. For example there are 2322 joint ventures in Uzbekistan in the observed period and 404 of them are partly owned by China investors, so the calculation is  $50 \text{ points} * 404 / 2322 = 17.4 \text{ point}$  for China in this indicator. The values of individual indicators within a given index are added. The indexes for each of the observed states are created. Than these figures could be compared within the given category and so it is possible to determine which power plays the most important role in each of the sectors of cooperation.
- <sup>3</sup> Alexander Hamilton was the first author who used these labels.
- <sup>4</sup> GUAM is an intergovernmental organization of four post-Soviet states – Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.
- <sup>5</sup> The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is an organisation which was founded in 2001 by China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. It aims to promote cooperation in the sphere of economy and regional security.
- <sup>6</sup> State visit at the highest level means official state visit paid by the head of the executive, president or premier depending on the type of constitutional order.

- <sup>7</sup> Only 50 points are divided within the indicator observing membership of Uzbekistan in the international organizations because the membership in the same organisation should be caused only by geographic proximity and so this indicator has lower explanatory value than other. Since all powers have their embassy in Tashkent and have established bilateral relation with Uzbekistan, 100 point are divided equally in the cases of first two indicator and each of the powers have received 14.3 points and 14.3 points.
- <sup>8</sup> Free Trade Area is a trade bloc whose member states have eliminated tariffs and import quotas on most or all goods and services traded between them.
- <sup>9</sup> MFN is a provision in an international agreement which means that the country must receive equal trade advantages as the „most favoured nation“ by the country granting such treatment.
- <sup>10</sup> The indicator monitoring existence of intergovernmental institution promoting economic cooperation uses different way of calculation. Since it is not able to illustrate their effectiveness or real benefit, only 50 points are divided within this indicator. Each power having the institution (5 of them) have received 10 point. Also the indicator observing custom agreements use different methodology. Countries which had established FTA with Uzbekistan have obtained 22.2 points and states which had guaranteed to Uzbekistan MFN have gained 11.1 points.
- <sup>11</sup> U.S. defines the priority countries of development policy in four sectors of development assistance; Uzbekistan has this posture in two of them.
- <sup>12</sup> This indicator is composed of four characteristics. Each of them is valued by 25 points and first three of them use specific methodology. Powers which had included Uzbekistan on the list of priority countries have received 10 or 5 points in the case of U.S. Powers which had established development agency bureau in Uzbekistan have gained 12.5 points and, power without it have obtained 0 points. In the last case all states have received 0 points because any powers had not integrated Uzbekistan on the list of top ten recipients of assistance.
- <sup>13</sup> EurAsEc is a regional integration which was established for promotion the creation of the Customs Union. Russia has a very strong posture in EurAsEc.

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