

UZBEKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

Ergasheva S

Teacher of University of World Economy and Diplomacy (Tashkent, Uzb)

s.ergasheva6252@icloud.com

Abstract: *This chapter analyses Uzbekistan's foreign-policy principles and their application to conflict resolution in the South Caucasus. The chapter argues that Uzbekistan's stance—combining principled neutrality, Turkic solidarity, and pragmatic cooperation—serves both normative and strategic aims: to promote regional stability, protect sovereign norms, and advance bilateral economic and political partnerships without endorsing separatist projects.*

Key words: *Uzbekistan; territorial integrity; Nagorno-Karabakh; Azerbaijan; Armenia; Georgia; multilateral diplomacy; UN; Turkic Council; sovereignty.*

Uzbekistan's official foreign policy is grounded in the sovereign equality of states, the inviolability of borders and peaceful dispute settlement. The Uzbek government website emphasizes an open, constructive foreign policy aimed at strengthening sovereignty and regional stability, explicitly stating that Uzbekistan “stands for the solution of all contradictions and conflicts exclusively by peaceful means”. Uzbek law enshrines these norms: the 1996 Law on Foreign Policy directs Tashkent to build relations on an “equal and mutually beneficial” basis, “excluding any possibility of intervention in internal affairs [or] infringement of independence and sovereignty”. Consistent with these principles, Uzbekistan maintains non-alignment (no military blocs or foreign bases) and prioritizes multilateral diplomacy (UN, CIS, SCO, OIC, etc.) to resolve disputes. President Mirziyoyev has reiterated that sensitive regional problems must be handled “based on the principles of international law and the UN Charter,” underscoring the primacy of norms and negotiation over force.

Given this framework, Uzbekistan's posture toward regional conflicts is uniform: it upholds each country's territorial integrity and advocates peaceful, legal settlements. By law and practice, Tashkent avoids military intervention and expects others to “respect borders”. This means that in conflicts involving post-Soviet neighbors (e.g. Azerbaijan–Armenia, Georgia–Abkhazia, etc.), Uzbekistan invariably calls for adherence to UN resolutions and negotiated solutions. Uzbek officials repeatedly stress dialog, “peaceful, political” means and full compliance with international law as the path to stability. In sum, Uzbekistan's common stance across disputes is to promote regional security through diplomacy – a stance enshrined in its laws and foreign policy doctrine.¹

The relationship between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan has deep cultural roots and has evolved into a multifaceted strategic partnership. In June 2022, Presidents Mirziyoyev and Aliyev signed a Declaration on deepening strategic partnership, launching cooperation in around 40 areas, including industry, transport, digital transformation, tourism, and

¹ Report of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan// 2025-05-01// gov.uz

military-technical collaboration. At that event, 18 bilateral documents ranging from agricultural agreements to transport and counter-migration policies were adopted. Uzbekistan also built a school in Fuzuli, and Azerbaijan opened a Heydar Aliyev memorial in Tashkent—symbolic gestures reinforcing their cultural ties.²

In August 2024, the relationship was elevated further with the signing of a Treaty on Allied Relations, officially formalizing their alliance. The treaty commits both states to coordinated foreign policy actions, mutual UN support, and rejection of hostile blocs. It details collaboration across 20 domains—from high-tech and green energy to cultural exchange—fostering a comprehensive and durable political and strategic alignment.

In practice, Uzbekistan has strongly sided with Azerbaijan in the long-running Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Uzbek leaders have consistently declared Azerbaijan's territorial integrity a "sacred" principle. President Islam Karimov publicly stated that Uzbekistan's Karabakh policy "remains unequivocal and unchanged," advocating a peaceful, political solution that recognizes "the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan as one of the key preconditions". He emphasized that Uzbekistan "considers the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan a sacred concept".³ This line is unchanged under President Mirziyoyev: in 2023 the Foreign Ministry explicitly affirmed that "Uzbekistan strongly supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan," condemning foreign interference and refusing to recognize separatist Karabakh elections. Such statements mirror Uzbekistan's official stance on state sovereignty and reflect its position as a Turkic and OIC nation allied to Azerbaijan.

Historically, Uzbekistan even conditioned its relations with Armenia on Karabakh. Azerbaijani officials note that under Karimov, Tashkent "refused to establish diplomatic relations with Armenia until a final settlement of the conflict" and "has always consistently supported [Azerbaijan's] fair position" in international fora. In June 2018 Azerbaijan's ambassador to Uzbekistan recalled that tradition, and added that Mirziyoyev likewise "repeatedly stressed that [Uzbekistan's] position ... remains unchanged: Uzbekistan sees the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the unconditional implementation of the resolutions of the UN Security Council". These commitments led Uzbekistan to vote alongside Azerbaijan in UN resolutions on Karabakh. For example, Uzbek representatives backed the 2008 UN General Assembly resolution reaffirming Azerbaijan's sovereignty (calling for Armenian forces' withdrawal) and other Azerbaijan-led initiatives.⁴

Azerbaijani leaders have publicly thanked Uzbekistan for this "principled, consistent" support. In bilateral talks, President Aliyev praised Uzbekistan's adherence to international law and called Uzbek-Azeri relations one of "friendship and brotherhood between our peoples". He noted that Uzbekistan's support at the UN (during the 2008 vote on occupied Azerbaijani territory) "further strengthens our belief that we can restore the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan through diplomatic means". This rhetoric reflects shared Turkic and cultural ties – Uzbekistan is an active member of the Turkic Council (Organization of Turkic States), and Mirziyoyev has even proposed a formal "Agreement on Strategic Partnership, Eternal Friendship, and Brotherhood among Turkic States" to be signed at an

² Report of Press-secretary of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan// 21.06.2022//President.uz

³ Joint press statements of Presidents of Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan in 27 September 2010// president.az

⁴ Statement of Press-secretary of President of Azerbaijan in 27 September 2010//president.az

upcoming summit.⁵ All of these gestures underscore that Uzbekistan's foreign policy in the Karabakh case is deeply intertwined with its identity as a Turkic state and its commitment to collective security and sovereignty of its "brother" nations.

Uzbekistan's bilateral relations with Armenia have traditionally been low-key, largely due to the Karabakh issue.

Formal ties were only established in 1995 – later than with most neighbors – and under Karimov they were essentially frozen as long as the conflict remained unresolved. Unlike many CIS countries, Tashkent did not openly side with Armenia. Instead, Uzbekistan focused on engaging Armenia in cultural and economic areas while repeatedly affirming Azerbaijani claims.

In recent years, however, Tashkent has begun to expand contacts with Yerevan under Mirziyoyev.

For example, in July 2023 Mirziyoyev spoke by phone with Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan about strengthening trade, economic, cultural and humanitarian ties. Similarly, a 2019 meeting between leaders aimed to create an Uzbek-Armenian commission on economic cooperation.

These engagements reflect Uzbekistan's broader policy of regional cooperation. Nevertheless, even as diplomatic and economic interactions grow, Uzbekistan's official line on Karabakh has remained firmly with Azerbaijan.

Uzbek statements continue to support UN-backed peace accords and make clear that nothing in enhanced Tashkent-Yerevan ties changes Uzbekistan's core position on territorial integrity.

Since diplomatic relations with Armenia established in 1995, have grown cautiously. Though initial contacts were limited due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, recent years have seen expansion in cooperation. In July 2023, the first session of an Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation took place in Tashkent, signaling a renewed practical engagement in areas like trade and transport. Between 2020 and 2024, bilateral trade increased from \$7.6 million to \$26.2 million, demonstrating tangible growth even amid political sensitivities⁶

Uzbekistan also maintains friendly but pragmatic ties with Georgia. Diplomatic relations were set up in August 1994, and Uzbekistan covers Georgia through its embassy in Baku.⁷ Tashkent and Tbilisi cooperate in trade and culture, and Uzbek officials have hosted Georgian counterparts (for example, meetings of the foreign ministers in recent years). However, Uzbekistan has shown no support for separatist claims in Georgia.

Consistent with its doctrine, Uzbekistan implicitly endorses Georgia's sovereignty. In the UN, Tashkent's voting aligns with Georgia's position: Civil.ge reports that Uzbekistan abstained on Georgia's IDP resolution in 2020 but switched to vote in favor in 2021, joining the broad majority that upholds the right of displaced Georgians to return.⁸ Although Uzbekistan has not issued high-profile statements on Abkhazia or South Ossetia, its

⁵ Address by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev at the informal summit of the Organisation of Turkic States in 21.05.2025// President.uz

⁶ Report of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia in 23.12.2024// Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia

⁷ Report of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia mfa.gov.ge

⁸ Resolution Recognizing Right of Return for Georgia's Displaced Persons, Refugees, Deferring Action on Security Council Reform of General Assembly UN// Seventy-fifth Session, 80th & 81st Meetings//GA/12338//16 June 2021//https://press.un.org/

general policy suggests it views those regions as part of Georgia and supports negotiated solutions.

In sum, Uzbekistan's Caucasus policy beyond Azerbaijan mirrors its template: it remains neutral yet law-oriented and values good-neighborliness – developing trade and people-to-people links with both Armenia and Georgia while standing behind international norms of territorial integrity.

Uzbekistan's positions are also visible in international bodies. As noted, Uzbekistan consistently voted for UN resolutions backing Azerbaijan's territorial claims (for instance, supporting the March 2008 resolution demanding Armenian withdrawal). It likewise backed Georgia's UN initiatives on IDPs once, demonstrating alignment with those outcomes.

Beyond the UN, Uzbekistan participates in the OIC and Turkic Council, which regularly issue communiqués in support of Azerbaijan on Karabakh. In fact, sources note that Uzbekistan – as an OIC member – has “repeatedly voiced support for Azerbaijan's position” on Nagorno-Karabakh. Conversely, there are no records of Uzbekistan ever recognizing breakaway entities in these conflicts (it never recognized Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh as independent, nor has it acknowledged Abkhazia or South Ossetia as separate states). Uzbek law (and practice) forbids any use of force abroad, and Uzbekistan has not participated in any Caucasus military blocs or peacekeeping outside UN frameworks.

In public diplomacy, Uzbekistan echoes its legal commitments. For example, on foreign soil or at conferences, Uzbek leaders emphasize negotiation and UN norms. President Mirziyoyev's remarks at a 2025 Turkic summit stressed peaceful diplomacy and respect for ceasefires (citing Ukraine, Gaza, Afghanistan, etc.), implicitly reinforcing that conflicts must be resolved multilaterally.⁹ In the case of the Caucasus, Uzbek officials have repeatedly called for UN resolutions to be honored (a demand raised for Karabakh in almost every statement) and condemned unilateral actions that threaten stability. Through its voting and statements, Uzbekistan thereby maintains a cohesive message: disputes should be settled according to international law, no state's borders should be altered by force, and Central Asian countries (including Uzbekistan) will not allow regional conflicts to spread into their own sphere.

In conclusion, Uzbekistan's approach to all these conflicts is remarkably consistent. Guided by constitutional law and strategic partnership, Tashkent upholds sovereignty, inviolable borders, and peaceful settlement in line with UN-charter principles. It has applied this framework across the Caucasus disputes – siding with Azerbaijan (a Turkic brother) on Karabakh, respecting Georgia's integrity in its UN support, and engaging cooperatively with Armenia without conceding on disputed territory. These positions are grounded in Uzbekistan's declared foreign policy and have been reinforced by bilateral diplomacy.

As Uzbek law stipulates, Tashkent seeks regional stability by building equal, mutual relations and rejecting any interference in others' internal affairs.

⁹ Address by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev at the informal summit of the Organisation of Turkic States in 21.05.2025// President.uz

All the evidence shows that whether in declarations or votes, Uzbekistan links these conflicts through the same principles of international law and regional security, consistently acting as an advocate for negotiated peace and territorial integrity in Eurasia.

REFERENCES:

1. Mirziyoyev, Shavkat. *On the Path to a New Renaissance in Uzbekistan*. Tashkent: National Development Press, 2017. [translated title as provided]
2. Mirziyoyev, Shavkat. *International Friendship and Cooperation*. Tashkent: National Development Press, 2017. [translated title as provided]
3. Richmond, O. P. *Peace Formation and Political Order in Conflict-Affected Societies*. Oxford University Press, 2016.
4. Robert M. Cutler. *The Kura–Araxes Basin: Transboundary Hydro-Politics*, in *Caucasus Analytical Digest* (2023)
5. Suny, Ronald Grigor. *The Making of the Georgian Nation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press (1994)
6. Wolff, Stefan. *Georgia: Abkhazia and South Ossetia*. *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Self-Determination* (2016)
7. Anggraeni, Shafira Khairunnisa. “Analyzing Russia’s Interests in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War.” *Jurnal Hubungan Internasional* 15, no. 2 (Dec. 2022).
8. Asseburg, Muriel; Lacher, Wolfram; Transfeld, Mareike. “Mission Impossible? UN Mediation in Libya, Syria and Yemen.” *German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) Research Paper*, 8 Oct. 2018.
9. Council of Europe / Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) Resolution 2085 (2016): “Inhabitants of frontier regions of Azerbaijan are deliberately deprived of water.” <https://assembly.coe.int>
10. EFE / Reuters / Thomson Reuters stories (Psaledakis et al., 2025; Solovyov & Miles, 2017).
11. Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust article: “Why Third-Party Mediation Efforts Have Failed in Nagorno-Karabakh” (19 July 2019). <https://hart-uk.org>
12. Human Rights Watch / Helsinki Watch: “AZERBAIJAN: Seven Years of Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh” (Dec 8, 1994) — Library of Congress data included in your list. <https://www.hrw.org/>
13. Ministry reports: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia (23 Dec 2024); MFA of Georgia (mfa.gov.ge);
14. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan (Report 2025-05-01) — official sites have press releases.
15. Robert M. Cutler — *Caucasus Analytical Digest* entries (2023). <https://www.laender-analysen.de/cad/>
16. Security Council Press Release SC/9438 (28 Aug 2008) — UN press site. <https://press.un.org>