

The President of Uzbekistan's Visit to Georgia: A Gateway to Europe or a New Form of Dependency?

(Translated)

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Mirziyoyev's visit to Georgia was viewed by many as a routine diplomatic event; in reality, however, it may well be a significant indicator of Uzbekistan's geopolitical trajectory for the coming decade.

To view this visit merely in terms of bilateral relations between two nations would be to overlook the most critical aspect. The visit is not fundamentally about Georgia itself, but rather about the geopolitical path Uzbekistan will choose for the second quarter of the twenty-first century.

For the past thirty years, Central Asia's foreign trade transit relied primarily on Russia. Subsequently, China began making significant inroads into the region through investments, loans, and infrastructure projects. Now, the corridor extending across the Caspian Sea to Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey is attracting far greater attention. It would be a mistake to interpret this shift solely as a matter of transportation; a transport route is invariably a conduit for political influence and a component of broader geopolitical calculations.

Thus, the fundamental question today is: Is Uzbekistan seeking to break free from the Russia-dependent transit system to achieve genuine independence, or is it merely forging a new dependency on other geopolitical centers?

The answer to this question must begin in Moscow.

For Russia, Central Asia is not merely a neighboring region; it is a vital component of its security, economy, and geopolitical influence. Should Uzbekistan strengthen its ties with Europe via corridors that bypass Russian territory, it would represent a shift of strategic significance for Moscow. The primary risk for Moscow lies not in the railway line itself, but in the emergence of alternative options for Central Asia. Consequently, Russia's likely objective would not be to block this corridor at all costs, but instead to maintain its economic influence, access to energy resources, and political leverage in the region, a stance consistent with any major power's pursuit of protecting its interests.

China, however, views this process differently; its primary instrument of influence is economic rather than military. China expands its reach through investments, industry, infrastructure, and trade. Even if the new Caucasus corridor becomes operational, China is likely to seek participation in it, rather than avoiding it. Its overriding priority is ensuring that its goods reach European markets and maintaining the continuity of economic relations.

The United States views this process through a different lens; for Washington, absolute dominance by Russia or China in Central Asia is unacceptable. Consequently, Uzbekistan's diversification of its foreign economic relations holds distinct strategic importance from the American perspective. In recent years, major economic agreements and investment plans have been discussed between Uzbekistan and the United States. Yet, despite repeated assertions of mutual interest, the critical question in any such cooperation remains unchanged: who dictates the

terms, and who reaps the greatest benefit? Thus, in any external partnership, the question of “on what terms?” must be asked before “with whom?”

Turkey represents a natural link in this chain, with its role bolstered by geography, language, and cultural affinity. However, it, too, acts in accordance with its own narrow nationalistic interests. Like any other nation state, Turkey prioritizes its own economic and political calculations above all else.

In my view, however, the most important question raised in this article lies elsewhere.

Why is it that in every international discussion regarding Uzbekistan, the interests of Russia, China, the United States, or Turkey are cited, while the interests of the people of Uzbekistan are relegated to second place?

In Islam, the state's function is not merely to play a balancing game among foreign powers. The state is a trust, authority is a responsibility, and the Ummah's wealth, both hidden and manifest, belongs to the people. Therefore, the primary question regarding any external agreement must be: How will this impact the people's belief, security, and economy, as well as future generations?

If the path to Europe is opened, leading to the strengthening of Uzbek industry, the acquisition of technology, increased production, and the country's transformation from a raw material exporter into a producer of high-value-added goods, then this would indeed serve the interests of the people.

However, if the new corridor serves merely to accelerate the plunder and export of gold, copper, uranium, gas, and other strategic resources, with foreign investments flowing in while the people's economic situation, the quality of education, and productive capacity remain unchanged, then this shift will be merely cosmetic and superficial, leaving the fundamental nature of dependency intact.

Therefore, the true measure of Mirziyoyev's visit to Georgia lies not in ports or railways, but in the outcomes that will emerge in the coming years. Will Uzbekistan evolve into a state that makes independent decisions after diversifying its external orientation? Or will it remain just another significant arena of conflict in the rivalry between major powers?

No one can answer this question definitively at present.

However, one fact is clear: the interests of the Muslim people of Uzbekistan do not automatically align with the interests of Russia, China, America, or Europe. Protecting the vital interests of the people of Uzbekistan can only be guaranteed and secured if Islam is implemented as a way of life.

Not every path leading to Europe is a gateway to success; indeed, the opposite may well be true. Sometimes, a new form of dependency may lie behind that new door. Therefore, the most crucial task for Uzbekistan is not to move towards Europe, but to possess the political will to prioritize the interests of its people, regardless of the direction it takes. Allah (swt) says, **﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَنْ تَحْكُمُوا بِالْعَدْلِ﴾** **“Indeed, Allah commands you to return trusts to their rightful owners; and when you judge between people, judge with fairness”** [TMQ Surah An-Nisa, 4:58].