

Development of Relations between the Cooperation Council of Central Asia and the Arab Gulf Countries

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Abstract:

In the 1980s, Arab countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the Sultanate of Oman, Qatar and Kuwait also created the Gulf Cooperation Council. The goals of the council and areas of cooperation are highlighted. The relations established between the countries of Central Asia, in particular, Uzbekistan and the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Persian Gulf, are analyzed.

Keywords: Uzbekistan, Saudi Arabia, Gulf Cooperation Council, European Union, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Organization of Turkish States, Movraunnahr.

From the world experience, it is clear that no country can hold its place in the global community without establishing economic, political, and social relations with other countries. As modern terminology puts it, the integration of states is crucial for their economic development, scientific and technological progress, improvement in living standards, and the rapprochement of various nations and cultures. The integration processes encompassing different continents of the world can be observed in organisations such as the "European Union," the "Shanghai Cooperation Organization," the "Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe," and the "Organization of Turkic States." The deep economic interdependence among the member states of the aforementioned organizations explains this process.

One of such councils is the "Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf" (hereinafter referred to as CCASG), which is composed of six Arab countries. Based on Islamic principles, this council aims to foster cooperation in all areas and coordinate integration processes among the member countries.

The CCASG was established on February 4, 1981, during a meeting of foreign ministers held in Riyadh with the participation of six countries.

On May 25, 1981, in the city of Abu Dhabi, during a meeting of the leaders of the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the Sultanate of Oman, Qatar, and Kuwait, the Charter of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (CCASG) was established. Article 4 of the GCC Charter places special emphasis on deepening and strengthening religious and cultural relations among the citizens of the member countries. This structure aims to fortify the mutual relations among peoples who share common religious and cultural views, address security and economic development issues in the region, and represents a practical expression of the aspiration for regional unity.

The Charter of the "Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf" (CCASG) consists of 22 articles, outlining the structure of the council, the composition and procedures of the council of ministers, as well as the procedures for the conflict resolution commission. Additionally, it aims to achieve unity among the member states through coordination in all areas, including economic and financial affairs, trade, customs and communications, education and culture, social affairs and healthcare, information and tourism, legislation and governance, industry, mining, agriculture, and scientific and technological progress. It also includes the establishment of a research centre¹.

The headquarters of the Cooperation Council is located in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The Council can hold its meetings in Riyadh or in member states.

The peoples of Central Asia and the Gulf region have been closely connected since ancient times through trade, shared values, and religious affiliations. Moreover, scholars and hadith scholars from Central Asia have played an invaluable role in the historical scientific relations between Transoxiana and Arabia.

Today, the countries of the Central Asian region are actively engaged in the process of cooperation, expanding the geography of their relationships. In particular, they are paying special attention to expanding relations not only with the countries of Europe and Asia but also with the Arab world.

The CCASG plays a significant role in cooperation with Central Asian countries. In particular, Uzbekistan is further developing its relations in all areas with the member states of the CCASG. Strengthening cooperation between the countries, the participation of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, in the first summit of the Cooperation Council between Central Asia and the Arab Gulf states on July 19, 2023, is of special importance. In his speech at the summit, the head of state emphasized, "We will mobilize all our efforts to ensure that our great shared history and heritage serve as a solid foundation for our modern relations."²

In order to establish mutual cooperation with the CCASG, the first meeting of the "Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf - Central Asia" strategic dialogue was held in Riyadh on September 7, 2022. The meeting was attended by the foreign ministers of the member states - the UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, as well as the Central Asian countries - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Representing Uzbekistan, Foreign Minister V. Norov expressed Uzbekistan's interest in elevating relations with the CCASG member states to a new level and stated the country's readiness for cooperation. He emphasized the importance of establishing a business council to develop trade and economic relations between the Gulf Arab states and Central Asian countries, accelerating the construction of the Termiz – Mazar-i-Sharif – Kabul – Peshawar railway in the transport sector. Additionally, he proposed expanding trade and economic ties, and implementing projects related to the pharmaceutical and education sectors, as well as startups. The foreign ministers suggested holding the second high-level strategic

¹ The website of Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf <https://www.gcc-sg.org/ar-sa/Pages/default.aspx>

² Newspaper "Xalk so'zi" July 20, 2023 № 148 (8491).

dialogue meeting of the "Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf - Central Asia" in Uzbekistan.³

To further develop the cooperative relations between Central Asia and the Gulf Arab states, the first summit of the Cooperation Council between Central Asia and the Gulf Arab states was organized in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on July 18-19, 2023. At the invitation of King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, also participated in this summit. At the summit, Shavkat Mirziyoyev emphasized cooperation in the following five areas:

1. **Political Cooperation:** Establishing interregional cooperation between states and peoples.
2. **High Technology and Investment:** Cooperation in energy, "green" economy, and digitalization.
3. **Trade and Transport:** Developing e-commerce in trade, using the most efficient corridors for transport and transit, increasing direct flights, and participating in the Trans-Afghan railway construction project.
4. **Environmental and Climate Change Issues:** Highlighting the "Middle East Green Initiative" of Saudi Arabia for its contribution to regional ecological improvement and establishing international cooperation with the Central Asia Environmental and Climate Change University opening in Uzbekistan.
5. **Tourism:** Creating a visa-free tourism area for the Gulf and Central Asian states, establishing modern clusters for tourists, and increasing the flow of tourists by organizing exhibitions within the framework of intergovernmental national culture weeks.

Additionally, it was emphasized that strengthening cooperation in combating global issues such as terrorism, extremism, radicalism, and drug trafficking is crucial. The importance of addressing the Afghanistan issue for regional peace and development was also highlighted.⁴

Further strengthening these relations and advancing to a new stage, the second meeting of the foreign ministers of the "Cooperation Council between Central Asia and the Gulf Arab States" was held on April 15, 2024. The meeting was attended by the Secretary-General of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (CCASG), Jasem Muhammad Al-Budayvi, and the foreign ministers of the member states of the Central Asian countries. During the meeting, preparations for the second high-level summit in the "Cooperation Council between Central Asia and the Gulf Arab States" format, scheduled to be held in Samarkand next year, were discussed. Attention was also given to implementing the initiatives discussed during the first high-level summit in Jeddah in July 2023 under the format of "Cooperation Council between the Gulf Arab States and Central Asia". Additionally, security issues in the region were addressed.

During the first summit of the Cooperation Council between Central Asia and the Gulf Arab States, held in 2023, a Joint Action Plan covering the period from 2023 to 2027 was reviewed, and additional measures were discussed to implement it in practice.

It's important to note that Uzbekistan is further expanding cooperation with Arab states. Particularly, there is potential for growth in trade, economic, and investment areas with countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar. Saudi Arabia is especially showing leadership in these

³ The official website of the Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Kazakhstan:

<https://www.uzembassy.kz/uz/article/korfaz-arab-davlatlari-hamkorlik-kengashi---markaziy-osiyo-strategik-muloqotining-birinchi-yigilishi-bolib-otdi>

⁴ The speech of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan at the first summit of leaders of Central Asian and Gulf Arab states held on July 18-19, 2023. (Published in "Xalq So'zi" newspaper, July 20, 2023, issue number 148 (8491)).

areas. Currently, the volume of agreements signed between Saudi Arabia and Uzbekistan has reached 12.5 billion USD. Similarly, the UAE and Qatar are also investing in Uzbekistan.

It can be said that the cooperation being established between Central Asian and Arab states is creating favourable opportunities for the integration processes of the two regional countries.

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