



UNGA Speeches by Central Asian Leaders

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The United Nations held its annual General Assembly of 2017 in September. The theme of the 72nd session was, 'Focusing on People – Striving for Peace and a Decent Life for All on a Sustainable Planet'. Among other dignitaries, the General Assembly was also addressed by the leaders and representatives from the five Central Asian republics. The speeches from the Central Asian leaders broadly covered the following issues:

Sustainable Development

The Central Asian countries spoke on the issue of sustainable development. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda was termed as a “milestone for the international community” to work together to achieve the objectives. Tajikistan said that it has made “great strides” in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Kazakhstan urged all member-states to consider the link between security and development. It was mentioned by Uzbekistan that the Central Asian region should become a “zone of stability” and “sustainable development”. Turkmenistan described SDGs as a “critical area” for cooperation and it also called for “sustainable transport” and “sustainable energy”. Kyrgyzstan underlined that it was committed to achieving the SDGs.

Terrorism & Extremism

The issue of terrorism and extremism also featured in the speeches made by leaders from Central Asia. It was said that terrorism continued to pose a serious threat. It threatened to undermine global efforts towards prosperity. Terrorist movements “flourished in hot spots” around the world. The horrors were not connected with Islamic teachings and did

not know the tolerance of Islam. Among the causes of international terrorism and extremism, ignorance and intolerance were identified as being at the heart. It was emphasised that member-states should make “stupendous efforts” and refrain from “double standards”. The counter-measures should not be reduced to only combating the consequences of the challenge, rather, its root causes need to be addressed. It was proposed that as most extremist violence are committed by people below 30, efforts should be made so that youth do not get radicalised. A multilateral counter-terrorism mechanism that sought long-term comprehensive solutions was advocated. Terrorism and extremism must be addressed by the international community, particularly as they related to money laundering and drug trafficking, it was said. Support to the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy was also extended.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan also featured in the address by Central Asian countries, especially those bordering it. The reportedly “growing activity” of violent terrorist groups was seen as a matter of “serious concern”. Bringing stability was considered an important condition to ensure regional and global security. A direct dialogue without preconditions among the central government and main domestic political forces was advocated. Uzbekistan mentioned that the negotiations should be “Afghan-led”, on the territory of Afghanistan and “under the auspices of the UN.”

North Korean Nuclear issue

The issue of nuclear proliferation was termed as the “greatest risk to humanity”, and it was mentioned that North Korea’s further development of nuclear programme was “totally unacceptable”. Kazakhstan said removing the nuclear danger is the most urgent task of humanity in 21st century. It was underlined that the problem can be resolved by way of “constructive engagement” within the UN framework.

Climate Change/Sharing of Water resources

Climate change was mentioned as a “particular menace” to mountainous countries like Kyrgyzstan. It affects the economy and increases the occurrence of natural disasters. The transition to sustainable development was called a “matter of survival.” Climate change increases the pace of melting of glaciers. In Tajikistan over the last 30 years, more than 1,000 glaciers out of the total 13,000 have already been degraded and it can affect the water resources in the region, said the Tajik President. The UN was urged to translate words into actions and implement the objectives of the Paris Agreement and Agenda 2030. Kazakhstan emphasised its commitment to a green economy through diversifying and developing alternative energy sources.

During the speech, Uzbekistan called for the joint use of the region's shared water resources and mentioned that there is no alternative to addressing the water problem except by equally taking into consideration the interests of all the nations in the region. The desiccation of the Aral Sea was termed as "catastrophe" and consolidation of international efforts was sought to address the issue.

UN reform

The regional leaders called for reform of the UN, including expansion of the Security Council. They mentioned that the reform should be gradual and reflect the realities of the contemporary world. The reform should also enhance the capability of the organisation. The broad and equitable representation in the UN Security Council should also include representations from developing countries.

Apart from the issues mentioned above, some regional countries paid greater attention to regional and global developments.

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan was represented by Kairat Abdrakhmanov, Minister for Foreign Affairs. Abdrakhmanov stated that his country is a "net contributor" to peace and stability, and urged all member-states to consider the link between security and development. He said that Kazakhstan aspires to become one of the 30 most competitive economies in the world by 2050.

West Asia (Syria, Iraq, Palestine)

The situation in West Asia (Middle East) was termed as one of "grave concern" to Kazakhstan and OIC members. Astana hosted talks on Syria. It was mentioned that the Astana Process aims for the peaceful settlement of the Syrian crisis. Priority should be given to end the suffering of the people in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen. Kazakhstan reiterated the case for a two-state solution to Israel-Palestine issue.

UN reforms

The Foreign Minister mentioned that Kazakhstan supports the UN Secretary-General's revitalisation plan and peacekeeping reform proposal. Kazakhstan was ready to participate in the process and send more personnel to UN missions. He suggested that as Kazakhstan prepares to assume the presidency of the UN Security Council, plans were in place to foster open debate that accounted for the security-development nexus. At the core of that nexus was the elimination of the risk posed by nuclear weapons.

Rohingya issue

The Kazakhstan speaker expressed concern over the situation faced by the Rohingya community in Myanmar. Kazakhstan had recently hosted the Organization of Islamic Conference Summit on Science and Technology. The speaker called for dialogue between the UN, OIC and the government of Myanmar to address the humanitarian crisis.

Climate change

Recognising Kazakhstan's conventional energy resources, the country pledged that it will pursue the objective of a green economy.

Kyrgyzstan

President of Kyrgyzstan Almazbek Atambaev addressed the UNGA on September 20, 2017. He mentioned that Kyrgyzstan is committed to achieving the SDGs. Human welfare and prosperity were primary objectives. Kyrgyzstan has embarked on major projects to improve infrastructure, achieve energy independence and create a stable energy sector. It aims to become a transit country. The President said that Kyrgyzstan was elaborating a strategy for sustainable development through 2040, aiming to create jobs, ensure social well-being, raise living standards and promote parliamentary democracy with a strong civil society. He expected Kyrgyzstan to become a prosperous and safe country as it approached 2040 with a sense of self-reliance and a high level of development.

The President underlined that terrorism and extremism must be addressed by the international community, particularly as they related to money laundering and drug trafficking.

Climate Change

President Almazbek stressed that climate change was a particular menace to mountainous countries like Kyrgyzstan. Destruction of glaciers was another problem for Kyrgyzstan and its neighbours. Protection of snow leopards was critical, as they neared extinction. He said that prosperity would hinge in part on the effective use of scarce water resources. Management of uranium stockpiles inherited from the former Soviet Union were a significant threat to the region, as many of them were located near water resources.

Inter-cultural Dialogue

The Kyrgyz President expressed concern about the divisions created by political and social expressions, stating that Kyrgyzstan had launched various initiatives to promote inter-cultural dialogue, including a recent conference on Islam.

Rohingya Issue

The President condemned the recent violence in Myanmar and called upon all parties to engage in peaceful negotiations.

Tajikistan

President Emomali Rahmon represented Tajikistan at the UNGA. President Rahmon said that rapid globalisation had led to development as well as challenges that had sometimes jeopardised UN efforts to help people lead secure lives. Strengthening and reform of the UN is necessary to address new global challenges. Tragic events caused by terrorism, transnational organised crime and drug trafficking have hindered progress and achievement of SDGs. For achieving the SDGs, Rahmon urged the UN, through its Economic and Social Council and specialised agencies, to play an important role in assisting landlocked countries like Tajikistan as they lack access to ports.

He condemned the efforts to connect terrorism with the teachings of Islam. Solution to these challenges lies in stupendous efforts to be made by member-states in refraining from double standards.

Afghanistan/North Korea

The President of Tajikistan, which shares a long border with Afghanistan, said that the growing activity of violent terror groups in Afghanistan was a matter of serious concern.

He urged strong, coordinated measures to tackle terrorism and drug trafficking.

About the North Korean nuclear issue, the President said that peace, stability and cooperation were essential for resolving the situation.

Climate change

Climate change is an important issue for Tajikistan. On the Paris Agreement, the President said that the goals enshrined in that document determined the obligations of the international community in reducing carbon dioxide emissions. Climate change had accelerated the melting of glaciers, which affected water level rise. Tajikistan suffered from water-related disasters and spent hundreds of millions of dollars in tackling such problems.

Turkmenistan

Ms. Aksoltan Ataeva, the Permanent Representative to the UN represented her country. She held that, among other factors, global cooperation is the key to resolving the issues of hunger, terrorism and drug trade. Terrorism is the gravest concern that threatens to undermine global efforts to achieve prosperity. Turkmenistan supports the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and its implementation at all levels, and the Ashgabat Declaration on the implementation of the UN Counter-Terrorism Framework in Central Asia.

Describing SDGs as another critical area for cooperation, she outlined the country's national focus on sports for the achievement of peace and development, and said that Turkmenistan would host the upcoming Seventh International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials responsible for sports.

Underlining the importance of Assembly resolutions 69/217 and 70/217 on sustainable transport, Aksoltan Ataeva said that Turkmenistan would submit a resolution on that matter. Turkmenistan would also be the next chair of the International Energy Charter and it is working to develop new global policies on sustainable energy.

Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan was represented by the President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. He emphasised that as Uzbekistan is at the heart of Central Asia, the region should become a zone of stability and sustainable development. He underlined that Uzbekistan is determined to engage in dialogue and constructive interaction and make reasonable compromises with the countries of Central Asia such as the signing of the Treaty on the state border between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in September 2017, which has been hailed as a landmark event.

Afghanistan

Uzbekistan also shares a border with Afghanistan. The President mentioned that stability in that country was an important condition to ensure not only regional but global security. He suggested that the only way to bring peace to that country was through a direct dialogue between the central government and the main domestic political forces without preconditions. The talks should be Afghan-led, on the territory of Afghanistan and under the auspices of the UN. Uzbekistan had been making contributions to the economic reconstruction of Afghanistan and would continue to do so.

Climate change/water

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev stated that the issue of shared water resources was also key to security and stability in Central Asia and there was no alternative to addressing the water problem other than considering the interests of all countries in the region. Uzbekistan supports the draft conventions on the use of water resources of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya river basins developed by the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy. The President urged international efforts to save the Aral Sea from drying up.

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