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Modernization of Uzbek Armed Forces under the new President Mirziyaev

After the death of the former President Karimov - which led Uzbekistan to the independence and ruled the country for 25 years - the new President Mirziyaev stated that the reform of the national Armed Forces - upgrading their military equipment with modern weapons and technology – is one of the key priorities for the next years.

It is interesting to observe how this strategic need will be achieved respecting the main cornerstones of the Uzbek foreign policy doctrine shaped by Karimov: no to deployment of foreign bases in Uzbekistan; no to membership in any military block; no to the mediation of any external power in the resolution of regional conflicts in Central Asia.

Russia has traditionally been one of the main weapons provider for Uzbekistan, even if the country is not member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) - which Tashkent withdrew for the second time in 2012 - and for this reason Uzbekistan can not benefit of preferential terms to buy Russian military equipment. Nevertheless, the bilateral cooperation with Russia in the military field is significantly relevant. After a bilateral summit in April 2016 Putin canceled Uzbek debt with Russia, allowing Tashkent to obtain Russian loans to purchase military equipment from Moscow, at Russian domestic prices. In November 2016 Uzbekistan and Russia signed a military-technical cooperation agreement which will help Tashkent to achieve its aim to modernize the national military forces.

However, one of the main pillars of the Uzbek foreign is to maintain a geopolitical equidistance between Russia and the West, developing bilateral cooperation in the military field also with United States and China. In 2015 Uzbekistan purchased one HQ-9 anti-aircraft missile complex by China, which shows Tashkent will to boycott Russian project to create a unified anti-missile system in post soviet Central Asia. Unlike CSTO, Uzbekistan is member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (another regional security bloc led by Russia and China). In 2015 US government decided to donate military hardware to Uzbekistan (308 armored vehicles) in order to help Tashkent to fight against terrorist threats coming from Afghanistan, following the US and NATO redeployment from the region. A revitalization of the American-Uzbek military cooperation has been possible after the lifting of the sanctions in 2014, which were adopted due to Andijan events, which froze the strategic partnership signed in 2001 following the involvement of Washington in the region after 9/11.

Fabio Indeo - *PhD holder in Geopolitics at University of Trieste and non-resident fellow research at Center for Energy Governance and Security (EGS South Korea)*