FORUM DIPLOMACY AS AN INSTRUMENT OF IMPLEMENTING THE FOREIGN POLICY OF NEW UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract

This article examines the theoretical foundations and practical dimensions of the development of forum diplomacy in the Republic of Uzbekistan amid the ongoing transformation of the international system. Drawing upon an analysis of major international forums hosted in Tashkent and Samarkand, the study conceptualizes forum diplomacy as an autonomous instrument of foreign policy that contributes to enhancing the country's international standing, broadening political dialogue, attracting foreign direct investment, and strengthening regional cooperation. Particular attention is devoted to the institutionalization of forum diplomacy following 2017, when openness and proactive international engagement became defining principles of Uzbekistan's foreign policy. The article argues that forum diplomacy is gradually evolving into one of the most effective mechanisms for enhancing the country's international agency, shaping regional and global agendas, and promoting its national interests.

Keywords: forum diplomacy; Uzbekistan; foreign policy; multilateral diplomacy; international forums; Samarkand; Central Asia; soft power.

Introduction

The contemporary international system is characterized by increasingly complex patterns of interstate interaction, the growing importance of informal negotiation platforms, and the expanding role of international forums as venues for political dialogue and diplomatic engagement. Alongside traditional diplomatic instruments, new forms of diplomacy have gained increasing prominence, among which forum diplomacy occupies a distinctive position.

Whereas international organizations and bilateral negotiations constituted the principal institutional mechanisms of international interaction throughout much of the twentieth century, the twenty-first century has witnessed a significant shift toward specialized international forums, conferences, summits, and dialogue platforms. These venues have evolved into important arenas for agenda-setting, confidence-building, policy coordination, and the development of new international initiatives. They facilitate political compromise while providing opportunities to address pressing issues related to global governance, sustainable development, regional security, and economic cooperation.

For the Republic of Uzbekistan, forum diplomacy has acquired particular strategic significance since 2017, when the country's foreign policy underwent a profound transformation based on the principles of openness, good-neighborliness, regional cooperation, pragmatism, and constructive international dialogue. This foreign policy reorientation has substantially increased Uzbekistan's diplomatic visibility and enabled the country to position itself as one of the leading platforms for international dialogue and multilateral cooperation in Central Asia [1].

The emergence of Uzbekistan as an active host of high-level international forums reflects broader changes in its foreign policy strategy. Rather than acting solely as a participant in international diplomatic processes, Uzbekistan has increasingly assumed the role of an agenda-setting state capable of initiating dialogue on issues of regional integration, sustainable development, climate change, transport connectivity, investment cooperation, and security. Consequently, forum diplomacy has become an integral component of the country's broader diplomatic strategy aimed at strengthening its international reputation, expanding strategic partnerships, and reinforcing its position within both regional and global governance frameworks.

Against this background, the present study seeks to examine the conceptual foundations of forum diplomacy and assess its role in the implementation of Uzbekistan's contemporary foreign policy. The article also explores how international forums have become effective instruments for advancing the country's foreign policy objectives, enhancing its international image, and promoting long-term national interests within an increasingly competitive international environment

Theoretical Foundations of Forum Diplomacy.

The concept of forum diplomacy has not yet acquired a universally accepted definition in the contemporary academic literature. Existing studies most frequently examine this phenomenon within the broader frameworks of multilateral diplomacy, public diplomacy, or international negotiations [2]. Although these approaches provide valuable analytical perspectives, they do not fully capture the distinctive characteristics and functional significance of contemporary international forums as independent instruments of diplomatic engagement.

In this study, forum diplomacy is defined as the set of diplomatic mechanisms involved in the organization, conduct, and strategic utilization of international forums, summits, conferences, and dialogue platforms to advance a state's foreign policy objectives and national interests [3]. Such a definition emphasizes not only the organizational dimension of international forums but also their strategic role in shaping diplomatic interaction and international agenda-setting.

Unlike traditional multilateral diplomacy, forum diplomacy possesses several distinctive features.

First, it is inherently event-oriented, with diplomatic interaction centered on specifically organized international forums and high-level meetings. Rather than relying exclusively on permanent international institutions, forum diplomacy operates through recurring or ad hoc platforms designed to facilitate dialogue among political leaders, policymakers, business representatives, experts, and civil society actors.

Second, forum diplomacy integrates multiple dimensions of international cooperation. Contemporary international forums simultaneously address political, economic, security, environmental, humanitarian, scientific, and cultural issues, thereby creating comprehensive platforms for multidimensional diplomatic engagement. This multidisciplinarity distinguishes forum diplomacy from conventional diplomatic practices that often focus on a single policy domain.

Third, forum diplomacy contributes to the establishment of long-term transnational networks linking governments, international organizations, the private sector, academic institutions, and expert communities. These networks extend diplomatic interaction beyond individual meetings, fostering sustained cooperation, confidence-building, policy coordination, and knowledge exchange. Consequently, the outcomes of forum diplomacy frequently continue to shape international cooperation long after a particular forum has concluded.

Finally, forum diplomacy enables states not merely to participate in international affairs but also to influence the formulation of the international agenda by initiating discussions on emerging global and regional challenges, proposing new policy initiatives, and creating platforms for multilateral dialogue [4]. In this regard, forum diplomacy transforms the role of the host state from that of a passive participant into an active agenda-setter capable of shaping diplomatic priorities and facilitating international consensus.

Therefore, the capacity to influence international agenda-setting represents one of the defining characteristics of forum diplomacy and distinguishes it from most other contemporary instruments of diplomatic practice. In an increasingly interconnected international environment, this function has become a significant source of diplomatic influence, allowing states to strengthen their international visibility, enhance their reputational capital, and promote national interests through the strategic organization of international dialogue.

The Institutionalization of Forum Diplomacy in Uzbekistan.

Following the inauguration of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev in 2016, Uzbekistan's foreign policy underwent a profound transformation that fundamentally redefined the country's international engagement. The previous model, characterized by relative diplomatic restraint and limited regional

interaction, was replaced by a more open, pragmatic, and proactive approach centered on regional cooperation, confidence-building, economic integration, and constructive international dialogue.

This strategic reorientation was accompanied by a substantial increase in the number and scale of high-level international forums, summits, and conferences hosted by Uzbekistan [5]. As a result, the country has progressively established itself as one of the principal venues for multilateral dialogue and diplomatic engagement in the Eurasian region.

Several international events have played a particularly significant role in this process. Among the most prominent are the 2022 Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Samarkand Summit, the Tashkent International Investment Forum, the Samarkand International Climate Forum, the Samarkand Forum on Human Rights, international conferences on Afghanistan, and the various "Central Asia Plus" dialogue formats involving external partners. Collectively, these initiatives have substantially expanded Uzbekistan's diplomatic outreach, strengthened its international reputation, and enhanced its capacity to engage constructively with both regional and global actors.

The growing frequency and diversity of these events indicate that hosting international forums has become an institutionalized component of Uzbekistan's foreign policy rather than a series of isolated diplomatic initiatives. Forum diplomacy has consequently evolved into a strategic mechanism through which the country promotes political dialogue, strengthens international partnerships, attracts investment, and reinforces its position within regional and global governance structures.

Forum Diplomacy as an Instrument for Strengthening International Agency.

One of the most significant functions of forum diplomacy is its contribution to enhancing a state's international agency. By organizing and hosting major international forums, a country moves beyond the role of a passive participant in international affairs and increasingly assumes the position of an active agenda-setter capable of shaping regional and global political discourse.

This transformation is particularly evident in the case of Uzbekistan. Whereas major diplomatic initiatives concerning Central Asia were traditionally proposed by major powers or international organizations, recent years have witnessed the emergence of Tashkent as an increasingly influential source of regional and international initiatives. This evolution reflects the country's growing diplomatic confidence and its aspiration to play a more proactive role in regional governance.

Among the most illustrative examples are the adoption of the Samarkand Declaration at the SCO Summit, the proposal to establish an International Climate Forum, the institutionalization of the Consultative Meetings of the Heads of State of Central Asia, initiatives aimed at strengthening regional transport connectivity, and sustained international dialogue on the future of Afghanistan [6]. These initiatives demonstrate Uzbekistan's capacity not only to facilitate diplomatic dialogue but also to generate substantive policy proposals addressing issues of regional and global importance.

Consequently, international forums should be understood not merely as venues for diplomatic negotiations but as mechanisms for policy innovation and international agenda-setting. Through forum diplomacy, Uzbekistan has expanded its ability to initiate dialogue, build political consensus, foster multilateral cooperation, and project itself as a responsible and constructive stakeholder in regional and international affairs. In this respect, forum diplomacy has become one of the principal instruments through which the country enhances its international visibility, strengthens its diplomatic influence, and advances its long-term foreign policy objectives.

The Economic Dimension of Forum Diplomacy.

Contemporary forum diplomacy is closely intertwined with economic diplomacy, reflecting the increasing interdependence between political dialogue and international economic cooperation. In the context of globalization, international forums have evolved beyond platforms for diplomatic exchanges and have become important mechanisms for promoting investment, trade, innovation, and sustainable economic development.

A notable example is the Tashkent International Investment Forum (TIIF), which has emerged as one of the flagship instruments of Uzbekistan's economic diplomacy. Unlike conventional investment conferences, the Forum simultaneously performs several complementary functions. It serves as a platform for presenting the country's investment potential, facilitating direct negotiations between

government officials and foreign investors, concluding investment agreements, promoting export opportunities, and strengthening the confidence of the international business community in Uzbekistan's economic reforms [7].

Beyond its immediate economic outcomes, the Forum contributes to the country's broader strategy of economic modernization by enhancing communication between policymakers, international financial institutions, multinational corporations, and development partners. Consequently, the Tashkent International Investment Forum functions as an effective mechanism for implementing Uzbekistan's external economic strategy, linking high-level political dialogue with tangible economic outcomes and long-term investment partnerships.

Forum Diplomacy and Soft Power.

Another significant function of forum diplomacy is its contribution to strengthening a state's soft power resources [8]. By hosting high-profile international events in Samarkand, Bukhara, and Tashkent, Uzbekistan has significantly enhanced its international image and reinforced its reputation as a reliable and constructive partner in international affairs.

In this context, the historical legacy of the Silk Road is employed not merely as a cultural or tourism asset but also as an important instrument of diplomatic branding and international positioning. Through the strategic use of its historical and cultural heritage, Uzbekistan has successfully integrated elements of cultural diplomacy into its broader foreign policy strategy.

Samarkand, in particular, is gradually acquiring the status of an internationally recognized venue for political dialogue, comparable in diplomatic significance to Davos, Munich, or Singapore, while preserving its distinctive Eurasian location and Central Asian civilizational identity. This approach substantially enhances the country's symbolic capital, increases its international visibility, and strengthens the confidence of foreign governments, international organizations, and business partners.

Consequently, forum diplomacy complements traditional diplomatic instruments by reinforcing the country's international reputation, expanding its influence through attraction rather than coercion, and consolidating its position within regional and global governance networks.

The Institutionalization of Multilateral Dialogue and the Samarkand Process.

A central component of Uzbekistan's forum diplomacy is the emergence of the Samarkand Process, which may be understood as the gradual transformation of the historic city of Samarkand into an internationally recognized hub for diplomatic dialogue and multilateral cooperation. Rather than referring to a single initiative, the Samarkand Process encompasses a series of interconnected diplomatic platforms designed to generate inclusive approaches to addressing regional and global challenges.

The conceptual foundation of this process was laid by the Samarkand Solidarity Initiative for Common Security and Prosperity, proposed by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summit in September 2022. The initiative advocates an inclusive model of international dialogue involving all states willing to seek mutually acceptable solutions regardless of ideological differences, political systems, or cultural diversity [8].

The notion of the "Spirit of Samarkand" has subsequently evolved into a symbolic representation of Uzbekistan's emerging role as a mediator and facilitator of international dialogue. It seeks to extend the successful experience of regional confidence-building in Central Asia to the broader international arena while promoting the principles of inclusiveness, sovereign equality, mutual respect, and civilizational dialogue amid an increasingly fragmented geopolitical environment.

Conclusion.

The findings of this study lead to several important conclusions.

First, forum diplomacy should be regarded as an independent dimension of contemporary diplomatic practice, possessing its own objectives, institutional mechanisms, and operational instruments. Although it shares certain characteristics with multilateral and public diplomacy, its primary function lies in creating institutionalized platforms that facilitate dialogue, agenda-setting, and international cooperation.

Second, since 2017 Uzbekistan has consistently developed a distinctive national model of forum diplomacy based on the principles of openness, pragmatism, multilateral engagement, and regional cooperation. The increasing number of international forums hosted by the country reflects the growing institutionalization of this diplomatic approach.

Third, forum diplomacy has significantly contributed to strengthening Uzbekistan's international agency by expanding economic cooperation, promoting regional integration, enhancing the country's international reputation, and positioning it as an active contributor to regional and global governance.

Finally, the continued development of forum diplomacy is likely to remain one of the defining priorities of Uzbekistan's contemporary foreign policy. By institutionalizing new platforms for international dialogue, facilitating inclusive multilateral cooperation, and promoting innovative diplomatic initiatives, forum diplomacy provides an effective mechanism for advancing national interests while simultaneously contributing to regional stability, sustainable development, and international peace.

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