



The Cambridge Security Initiative

UZBEKISTAN FLIRTS WITH CHINA, RUSSIA

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After years of pursuing a cautious balancing act in terms of its relations with regional and international powers, Uzbekistan has intensified relations with China and Russia since 2016. Lying at the geographical heart of Central Asia, Uzbekistan presents significant opportunity for those wishing to trade across the entire region. However, there is the risk of geopolitical competition between the principal regional powers of Russia and China, as both have increased their foothold in the country.

Under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, military cooperation between Russia and Uzbekistan has been growing. As a result, Moscow has opened up export credit lines worth millions of dollars for arms sales to Tashkent. Russian media [reports](#) increased defence sales to Uzbekistan, including Typhoon and Tiger armoured vehicles, as well as BTR-82A armoured personnel carriers. Moscow's clever use of defence engagement to reassert its influence and bolster cooperation with a post-Soviet state that has, until recently, sought to go its own way appears to be paying off. One of the key topics in the upcoming December parliamentary elections is Uzbekistan's potential membership in the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). While membership would reflect Russia's status as a key trade partner, joining the EEU could complicate Uzbekistan's hopes of acceding to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) as EEU membership could challenge the WTO's non-discrimination principles.

Whilst trade with Russia reached \$2.9 billion during the first six months of 2019, it is China that Uzbek Prime Minister Abdulla Aripov described as his country's 'closest and most reliable neighbour and partner'. China became Uzbekistan's largest trading partner in 2017, amounting to \$3.9 billion in the first half of 2019. Moving forwards, China's Belt and Road Initiative will undoubtedly continue to provide an important source of foreign investment.

OUTLOOK

Uzbekistan is at a crucial point in its post-Soviet evolution and the next few years will be critical for its continued progress. It is keen to attract foreign partners willing to invest, but there is a risk of geopolitical and financial instability if Russia and China compete for influence. The strategic choices Tashkent makes now will have a long-term impact on both the economic development of the country and its prospects for continued global integration.