

Directions of Cultural Cooperation Between Egypt And Uzbekistan Within the Framework of The Organization of Islamic Cooperation

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Abstract: This article examines the formation and development of cultural relations between Uzbekistan and Egypt within the framework of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). It analyzes the main areas of bilateral cooperation, including education, science, tourism, theater, music, and cultural heritage. The study also highlights the stable institutional foundation of Uzbekistan–Egypt cultural relations through an assessment of academic exchanges, joint scientific events, and cooperation among higher education institutions, religious centers, and creative organizations in both countries. Furthermore, the article explores the role of cultural diplomacy in strengthening the historical and civilizational ties between the two nations, emphasizing its contribution to the development of sustainable bilateral cultural cooperation.

Keywords: Uzbekistan, Egypt, Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), cultural cooperation, education, Al-Azhar, Sharq Taronalari International Music Festival, public diplomacy, manuscripts, tourism, Islamic studies.

Introduction: One of the key priorities of the foreign policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan is the development of cultural, educational, and humanitarian cooperation with the Arab states, particularly the Arab Republic of Egypt. Following the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, cultural ties between the two countries began to develop in a consistent and systematic manner. In particular, cooperation within the framework of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has created favorable conditions not only for strengthening religious and educational relations but also for expanding collaboration in the fields of education, arts, literature, and cultural heritage. This article analyzes the processes of cultural exchange, academic cooperation, and the development of mutual understanding between the peoples of Uzbekistan and Egypt through a series of illustrative examples.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The cultural relations between Uzbekistan and Egypt have attracted increasing scholarly attention within the

broader framework of bilateral diplomacy, Islamic civilization, and the activities of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Existing studies generally emphasize the political and religious dimensions of cooperation, while the institutional development of cultural relations has received comparatively limited attention. The present study seeks to address this gap by examining cultural cooperation through the interconnected fields of education, science, cultural diplomacy, tourism, and the preservation of Islamic heritage.

Research on Uzbekistan's foreign policy has consistently identified cooperation with Arab countries as one of the country's important diplomatic priorities following independence. Numerous publications examine the establishment of diplomatic relations with Egypt in 1992 and highlight the role of bilateral agreements in expanding cooperation in education, culture, tourism, and scientific exchange. However, these studies often provide only a general overview of interstate relations without analyzing the institutional

mechanisms that facilitated sustained cultural interaction.

Particular attention has been devoted by scholars to educational cooperation between Uzbekistan and Egypt. Previous research has emphasized the significance of Al-Azhar University as one of the principal centers for academic exchange and Islamic education. Studies note that agreements reached during the early years of diplomatic relations enabled Uzbek students to pursue higher education in Cairo and encouraged cooperation between Al-Azhar University and educational institutions in Uzbekistan. Researchers have also discussed academic collaboration involving Cairo University, Ain Shams University, Alexandria University, and several Uzbek universities, stressing their contribution to the training of specialists in Arabic language, Islamic studies, and Oriental studies. Nevertheless, the long-term impact of these educational exchanges on cultural diplomacy has not yet been comprehensively evaluated.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a qualitative historical research approach. The principles of historicism, objectivity, and systematic analysis were applied to examine the development of cultural cooperation between Uzbekistan and Egypt within the framework of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The research is based on archival documents, official agreements, scholarly publications, and relevant academic sources. Historical-comparative, chronological, and document analysis methods were employed to evaluate the evolution of bilateral cooperation in the fields of education, culture, science, tourism, and cultural heritage.

RESULTS

Special attention should also be paid to the activities of the Uzbekistan–Arab Countries Friendship Association, which has made a significant contribution to the development of mutual cultural exchange and friendly relations. Established in Uzbekistan in February 1992, the Association has served as an important platform for strengthening relations between Uzbekistan and the Arab countries. Since its establishment, it has played a vital role in promoting cultural, educational, and humanitarian cooperation, thereby contributing to the expansion of people-to-people contacts and mutual understanding between Uzbekistan and the Arab world[1]. The Association has become an important instrument of public diplomacy, serving to strengthen cultural, educational, and humanitarian ties between Uzbekistan and the Arab world. In 1992, it hosted official delegations from Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Syria, and Libya, thereby fostering closer

relations between Uzbekistan and the Arab states[2]. During the same year, the Association organized commemorative events dedicated to the 1952 Egyptian Revolution and the anniversary of the Algerian People's Democratic Republic's Revolution, highlighting the significance of these historical milestones in the Arab world. In addition, the Association prepared informational materials concerning the official visits of the First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Islam A. Karimov, to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, contributing to the promotion of Uzbekistan's diplomatic engagement with the Arab region.

On 22 September 1993, the Uzbekistan–Arab Countries Friendship Association organized a meeting at the National Association for International Cultural and Educational Relations of the Republic of Uzbekistan (NACER). During this event, the participants were officially introduced to Mohammad Abdulghani, the Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to Uzbekistan. Later, on 14 December 1993, a similar meeting was held to introduce Reda Tnani, the Ambassador of Tunisia. These diplomatic events contributed to strengthening mutual understanding and expanding cultural and humanitarian cooperation between Uzbekistan and the Arab states[3].

In 1994, the Association focused its activities primarily on fostering an accurate and objective understanding of the Republic of Uzbekistan among the public in Arab countries. At the same time, it sought to establish partnerships with counterpart organizations across the Arab world in order to strengthen institutional cooperation and promote long-term cultural, educational, and humanitarian relations between Uzbekistan and the Arab states[4].

The Association planned to organize a commemorative event on 23 July 1994 to mark the anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution. However, for reasons that remained unknown to the Association, the event did not take place as scheduled. Nevertheless, on 31 July 1995, a ceremony commemorating the anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution was successfully organized at a high level, reflecting the Association's continued commitment to strengthening cultural relations and fostering friendly ties between Uzbekistan and the Arab Republic of Egypt[5].

On 1 November 1994, the Association also organized commemorative events marking the 40th anniversary of the outbreak of the Algerian National Liberation Revolution. These activities reflected Uzbekistan's respect for the historical struggles of Arab nations and further strengthened cultural dialogue and friendly relations between Uzbekistan and the Arab world[6].

The Association devoted particular attention to

expanding educational cooperation by supporting the enrollment of Uzbek students in leading universities across the Arab world, especially at Al-Azhar University in Cairo. This academic collaboration played a significant role in strengthening mutual understanding, trust, and cultural ties between the peoples of Uzbekistan and Egypt. A notable milestone in this process was the official visit of the First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Islam A. Karimov, to Egypt in December 1991. In addition to signing a number of bilateral agreements, the two sides reached an understanding that would enable Uzbek students to pursue higher education at Al-Azhar University, one of the most prestigious centers of Islamic learning in the world[7].

At this point, it is important to highlight the friendly relations between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Arab Republic of Egypt. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were officially established in January 1992, laying the foundation for the subsequent development of bilateral cooperation in the political, economic, cultural, educational, and humanitarian spheres[8].

In December of the same year, the official visit of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Islam A. Karimov, to Egypt marked an important milestone in bilateral relations and laid the foundation for expanding cooperation between the two countries in the fields of science, tourism, sports, and culture[9]. In 1993, Egypt opened its Embassy in Uzbekistan, and Mohamed Abdel Ghani was appointed as the first Ambassador. In 1994, Uzbekistan established its Embassy in Egypt, with Shamsiddin Bobokhonov appointed as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary[10].

Beginning in May 1992, an official delegation headed by Egypt's Minister of Higher Education, Hussein Kamal Bahaaddin, and comprising rectors of leading Egyptian universities, visited Uzbekistan. During the visit, the two sides exchanged views on expanding cooperation in the fields of science, culture, and higher education, resulting in the signing of a number of bilateral agreements[11].

Long-standing academic partnerships were established between the Institute of Oriental Studies of Uzbekistan and Alexandria University as well as Ain Shams University. As a result of this cooperation, by 1996 more than 110 Egyptian students had studied at higher educational institutions in Tashkent, over 70 of whom had successfully earned the academic degree of Candidate of Sciences (PhD equivalent)[12].

Between 1992 and 1999, the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Arab Republic of Egypt signed a total of thirteen

bilateral agreements, providing the legal and institutional framework for expanding cooperation across various sectors, including education, culture, science, and economic relations[13].

On 16 July 1997, Iran and Uzbekistan signed a Memorandum on Mutual Assistance and Scientific-Technical Cooperation aimed at strengthening bilateral cooperation in the field of geology. The memorandum established a legal framework for scientific and technological exchange in the exploration and sustainable utilization of natural resources, particularly geological and mineral deposits. Beyond promoting the economic interests of both countries, this cooperation also contributed to regional geopolitical stability and the development of strategies for the sustainable management of natural resources. Furthermore, the regular participation of employees of the National Company Uzbektourism in the annual International Tourism training seminars, financed by the Egypt Fund for Technical Cooperation with the CIS countries, demonstrates Uzbekistan's commitment to international knowledge and experience exchange in the tourism sector. This initiative has played an important role not only in enhancing the professional qualifications of tourism specialists but also in aligning the country's tourism infrastructure with international standards.

These developments indicate that, by the late 1990s, Uzbekistan's strategy of international cooperation had evolved beyond the political and diplomatic spheres to embrace a multidimensional model of integration encompassing economic, scientific and technological, and tourism cooperation[14]. The agreements concluded and the practical initiatives implemented served as effective institutional mechanisms for achieving these objectives and strengthening long-term bilateral cooperation.

From 15 to 30 August 1997, the Anor Song and Dance Ensemble from Quva District of the Fergana Region represented Uzbekistan at the International Folklore Festival held in Ismailia, Arab Republic of Egypt. The ensemble's participation served as an important platform for promoting Uzbekistan's rich cultural heritage and strengthening cultural exchange between the two countries[15]. The participation of the Anor Ensemble in this festival may be regarded as an effective example of Uzbekistan's cultural diplomacy aimed at showcasing its rich folk traditions and intangible cultural heritage on the international stage. Moreover, the involvement of regional cultural groups, such as the ensemble from Quva District, demonstrates that Uzbekistan pursued a decentralized and inclusive cultural policy, actively promoting local artistic communities as representatives of the nation's cultural

identity in international cultural exchanges.

Between 1997 and 2002, cultural relations between Uzbekistan and Egypt developed actively and consistently, reflecting the growing institutionalization and sustainability of bilateral cultural cooperation[16]. In particular:

- From 25 to 31 August 1997, Egyptian artists participated in the Sharq Taronalari (Melodies of the East) International Music Festival held in Samarkand, further promoting cultural exchange and strengthening artistic cooperation between Uzbekistan and Egypt.
- From 1 to 11 September 1997, the Hamza State Drama Theatre of Uzbekistan participated in the Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre with a delegation of eighteen actors, presenting the play *Chimildiq*. The performance introduced Uzbek theatrical traditions to an international audience and further strengthened cultural dialogue and artistic cooperation between Uzbekistan and Egypt.
- From 25 to 31 August 1999, Egyptian artists once again participated in the Sharq Taronalari (Melodies of the East) International Music Festival in Samarkand, demonstrating the continuity of cultural exchange and the sustained development of bilateral cultural cooperation between Uzbekistan and Egypt.
- From 1 to 11 September 1999, the Eski Machit Theatre Studio from Qarshi participated in the Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre, presenting the play *Nayman Ona Nidosi* (The Cry of Mother Nayman). The performance further enhanced Uzbekistan's cultural presence in Egypt and contributed to strengthening bilateral cooperation in the field of theatre and the performing arts.
- From 25 to 31 August 2001, Egypt's Angham al-Shabab ensemble actively participated in the Sharq Taronalari (Melodies of the East) International Music Festival held in Samarkand and was awarded a special prize by the festival's Organizing Committee.

From 18 to 20 June 2001, pursuant to Directive No. 17/31-176 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 5 June 2001, the Third Session of the Uzbekistan–Egypt Joint Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, and Technical Cooperation was held jointly by the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Arab Republic of Egypt[17]. The meeting focused primarily on expanding bilateral cooperation in the fields of information and mass media[18], healthcare, pharmaceuticals and medical sciences[19], as well as trade and economic relations[20]. In this context, during the official visit of the delegation of the Arab Republic of Egypt[21] headed by the Minister for International Cooperation,

Mr. Ahmad Al-Dori, from 16 to 21 June 2001, particular attention was devoted to strengthening cooperation in banking[22], investment, the organization of trade fairs and exhibitions, transport, and tourism. The two sides also agreed to revitalize the implementation of the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Tourism, originally signed on 19 October 1995.

These cultural exchanges between 1997 and 2002 clearly demonstrate the stable and institutionalized development of humanitarian cooperation between Uzbekistan and Egypt. The sustained implementation of high-level cultural initiatives not only strengthened bilateral relations in the political and economic spheres but also deepened the cultural and civilizational ties between the two countries, fostering mutual understanding, intercultural dialogue, and long-term people-to-people cooperation.

The Sharq Taronalari (Melodies of the East) International Music Festival in Samarkand provided Egyptian artists with an important platform for engaging in an intercultural environment rooted in Islamic culture and Eastern artistic traditions. Conversely, the participation of Uzbek theatre companies in international theatre festivals held in Cairo served to showcase Uzbekistan's artistic potential and creative achievements on the global stage, while enhancing the country's capacity for cultural diplomacy and the international promotion of its cultural heritage.

Cooperation between Uzbekistan and Egypt in the fields of Islamic studies and the Arabic language constituted one of the most significant dimensions of bilateral humanitarian relations.

Uzbekistan and Egypt have established strong cooperation in the field of higher education[23], particularly in Arabic language and literature, Islamic studies, source studies, the economies of the Arab East, pharmacology, agriculture, veterinary sciences, and other academic disciplines. At the same time, several higher education institutions in Uzbekistan have developed specialized programmes for training experts in the Arabic language. In particular, students pursue Arabic language studies as a distinct academic discipline at Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies, the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan, Uzbekistan State World Languages University, Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages, Tashkent State University of Uzbek Language and Literature, and the University of World Economy and Diplomacy[24].

Cooperative partnerships were also established with several of Egypt's leading academic and research institutions, including Cairo University, Al-Azhar University, the Petroleum Research Institute, the

National Authority for Remote Sensing and Space Sciences, and specialized ophthalmology research institutes[25].

A significant development in academic cooperation occurred in 2001, when Al-Azhar University announced a project to digitize and provide online access to its manuscript collection, comprising more than 40,000 manuscripts. This initiative substantially expanded global access to one of the world's most important repositories of Islamic and Oriental manuscripts, which had previously been accessible only through on-site consultation in Cairo. The collection contains manuscripts primarily in Arabic, as well as works in Persian, Turkish, and Urdu, covering a wide range of disciplines, including Islamic studies, literature, medicine, and linguistics.

The digitization project was supported by a donation of USD 5 million from Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai, while IBM provided technical assistance. The first digital manuscripts became available online in late 2002, with the remaining collection scheduled for gradual publication. This initiative significantly facilitated access to primary historical sources for scholars worldwide, including researchers from Uzbekistan, enabling comparative studies of authoritative manuscripts of prominent Hanafi scholars such as Imam al-Maturidi and Imam al-Marghinani and supporting the preparation of reliable scholarly translations and editions of their works[26].

In 2002, the Egyptian Opera House hosted a concert by Muassar Razzakova, People's Artist of Uzbekistan[27]. This performance represented an important example of individual-level cultural diplomacy within the broader framework of bilateral cultural cooperation. Razzakova's concert at one of Egypt's most prestigious cultural venues demonstrated the practical implementation of the two countries' strategy of strengthening friendly relations through cultural exchange while promoting Uzbekistan's national musical heritage to Egyptian audiences.

From 28 April to 1 May 2004, Cairo hosted the International Conference on Tolerance and Forgiveness in Islamic Culture[28]. The event brought together representatives from dozens of countries, including Abdurashid Qori Bahromov, Chairman of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan and Mufti of Uzbekistan, who delivered a keynote address. The conference aimed to promote the principles of tolerance and forgiveness in Islamic culture, strengthen interreligious tolerance, and foster mutual respect and peaceful coexistence among followers of different faiths. The participation and address of Mufti Abdurashid Qori Bahromov highlighted Uzbekistan's active engagement in

international Islamic dialogue and enhanced the international standing of the country's religious institutions within the broader framework of humanitarian and cultural cooperation.

In 2006, Dr. Youssef Ziedan, Head of a Department at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Cairo, published the book *Millennial Manuscripts: A Hidden Treasure*, in which Uzbekistan was identified as one of the countries possessing an exceptionally rich heritage of ancient manuscripts[29]. The book also highlights the scholarly significance of Uzbekistan's manuscript collections, providing information on their preservation, cataloguing, and academic study. Particular emphasis is placed on the country's sustained efforts to safeguard this documentary heritage and on the international scholarly importance of its manuscript repositories.

The year 2010 was proclaimed the Year of Arab-Islamic Culture, following a UNESCO resolution to commemorate the cultural and intellectual heritage of Arab-Islamic civilization. In accordance with this initiative, more than eighty international cultural events were organized in different countries under the theme "Dialogue of Cultures." The inaugural event took place in Paris, France, where symposia devoted to "Al-Farabi and the European Renaissance" were held. As part of this international programme, similar academic and cultural events were subsequently organized in Egypt and Uzbekistan, further promoting intercultural dialogue, highlighting the shared intellectual heritage of the Islamic world[30] and strengthening humanitarian and cultural cooperation between the participating countries.

The official state visit of the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Abdel Fattah Saeed Hussein Khalil El-Sisi, to Uzbekistan on 4 September 2018, at the invitation of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, marked a significant milestone in the development of bilateral relations. The visit resulted in the signing of a number of substantive intergovernmental and interagency agreements aimed at strengthening and expanding cooperation in the fields of politics, trade and economic relations, tourism, science, education, culture, and sports[31]. In particular, the agreements reached in the field of education made a substantial contribution to advancing long-term cooperation between Uzbekistan and Egypt. These initiatives not only served the strategic interests of both countries but also promoted sustainable development through enhanced academic exchange, institutional partnerships, and human capital development.

In 2018, the official visit to Uzbekistan of a high-level delegation from Al-Azhar, led by the Grand Imam of Egypt, Sheikh Ahmed Mohamed El-Tayeb, marked a

new stage in bilateral cooperation between the two countries. During the visit, the delegation was received by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and held meetings at the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan, the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, and the Center for Islamic Civilization of Uzbekistan. These engagements significantly strengthened institutional cooperation in the fields of Islamic education, religious scholarship, and cultural exchange, thereby elevating Uzbekistan–Egypt relations to a qualitatively new level.

On 11 January 2019, at the invitation of the Egyptian side, an official delegation of Uzbekistan paid a working visit to Cairo to discuss and coordinate the implementation of the agreements envisaged in the 2019–2023 Roadmap for cooperation between the religious institutions of Uzbekistan and Egypt. The consultations focused on strengthening institutional collaboration and ensuring the effective implementation of joint initiatives in the fields of Islamic education, religious scholarship, and academic exchange, thereby further consolidating bilateral humanitarian cooperation[32].

Within the framework of this cooperation, specialized curricula in Arabic language and Islamic studies were developed, and student exchange programmes were established to promote academic mobility, strengthen institutional partnerships, and enhance the quality of higher education in both countries.

The official visit of President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt to Uzbekistan on 4–5 September 2018 marked a historic milestone in the development of bilateral relations. During the same year, Uzbekistan's Ambassador to Egypt, Oybek Usmanov, met with Egypt's Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, Dr. Khaled El-Anany, who expressed Egypt's readiness to implement joint practical projects with the Center for Islamic Civilization of Uzbekistan[34]. The Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, and the National Library and Archives of Egypt also reaffirmed their commitment to developing scientific, technical, and humanitarian cooperation with Uzbek institutions. The discussions emphasized that such collaboration would play a significant role in the study of primary historical sources, the conservation and restoration of historical manuscripts, and the preservation and international promotion of the shared historical and cultural heritage of the two countries.

On 4 March 2020, the city of Samarkand hosted the International Scientific Conference entitled "Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi and the Maturidi School: Past and Present[35]." Among the distinguished participants was Sheikh Ahmed El-Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar,

who was awarded the title of Honorary Citizen of Samarkand in recognition of his contribution to the development of religious, scholarly, and cultural cooperation between Uzbekistan and Egypt. As part of the conference, Sheikh Ahmed El-Tayeb was presented with a special letter conveying the best wishes of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, together with a facsimile edition of the thirteenth-century manuscript of *Al-Hidayah* by the eminent Islamic jurist Burhan al-Din al-Marghinani. The presentation of this rare manuscript symbolized the shared commitment of both countries to preserving and promoting the intellectual heritage of Islamic civilization. It was anticipated that the facsimile would be preserved at Al-Azhar as a valuable historical source and would further support scholarly research in Islamic jurisprudence and Islamic studies.

At present, Uzbekistan and Egypt continue to maintain productive cooperation in promoting the Islamic principles of tolerance, enlightenment, and humanism, while also working jointly to preserve, protect, and promote their shared religious and spiritual heritage through scholarly research and academic collaboration. Furthermore, both countries regard cooperation in addressing contemporary security challenges—particularly religious radicalism and violent extremism—as a strategic priority within the framework of their bilateral partnership.

CONCLUSION

Cultural cooperation between Uzbekistan and Egypt has acquired a strong institutional foundation not only within the framework of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) but also through the broader development of bilateral relations. Joint initiatives implemented in the fields of culture, education, scientific research, tourism, theatre, and people-to-people diplomacy have not only strengthened the longstanding ties of friendship between the two nations but have also enhanced the international recognition and promotion of their national cultural heritage. Furthermore, Uzbekistan and Egypt have established themselves as key partners in the preservation, scholarly study, and promotion of the intellectual and cultural legacy of Islamic civilization, as well as in advancing the principles of religious tolerance and enlightenment. The sustained expansion of institutional cooperation, together with the growing convergence of strategic interests, has created a solid foundation for the further diversification and long-term development of bilateral cultural and humanitarian relations.

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