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## **MILITARY AIR FORCES OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN: YESTERDAY AND TODAY**

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### **Abstract**

This article analyzes the organization of the Air Force of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the stages of its development, the reforms carried out, and their results. The article is significant because it is written based on archival documents, periodical press materials, and scientific research materials, drawing on new information.

**Keywords:** Air Force, airfield, aeroclub, aviation school, aviation fuel, flight hours.

### **Introduction**

The Air Force plays a decisive role in the military construction of any state: it provides territorial defense, air defense, and creates intelligence capabilities. Due to the geographical location of Uzbekistan in the most important part of Central Asia, during the Soviet period this territory was of strategic importance, and a large number of aviation facilities and units were located there. As a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, in 1991-1992, the military unit and infrastructure on the territory of Uzbekistan were transferred to the defense system of the Republic of Uzbekistan; this process involved complex political, technical, and personnel issues. This study analyzes the formation of military aviation in the Republic of Uzbekistan, post-independence transformation, and modernization trends observed in 2000-2025 from a historical, legal, and technical point of view.

### **Literature Analysis and Methodology**

National researchers have studied personnel-related issues of the Air Force of the Republic of Uzbekistan. In particular, A.Kh. Yakhyaeva, Sh. Asranov, N.J. Eshnayev, G. Abduganieva widely covered issues of military educational institutions and their activities, foreign military cooperation in the training of qualified military



personnel[1]. Foreign researchers such as D. O'Connor, K.P. Wlosek, S. Drozdov also conducted research on this topic[2]. In particular, Daniel O'Connor's article expresses a positive attitude towards the reforms being implemented in the defense sector in Uzbekistan in recent years. The researcher, having studied the new defense doctrine published in the country in 2018, especially noted the introduction of a new management system in the military sphere. He emphasized that the modernization and professionalization of the defense system is an important step in the development of the sphere. At the same time, the article put forward a proposal to restore and further develop relations with Uzbekistan in the military sphere and assessed the army of Uzbekistan as an army in Central Asia that can achieve high results with minimal capital investment. The author of a number of scientific studies on security and the economic and political situation in the countries of the Central Asian region, K.P. Wlosek, having deeply analyzed the military policy and military equipment of Uzbekistan, especially noted the high effectiveness of the air defense system. The dynamics of the policy pursued by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev in Uzbekistan since the end of 2016 and its results were studied in comparison with neighboring republics. In the scientific works of S. Drozdov, the reforms carried out in Uzbekistan from the period when the foundation of the military aviation system was laid, that is, from 1917 to the present day, are deeply studied.

In contrast to the above-mentioned scientific research, this article comprehensively examines the process of formation of the Air Force troops in the Republic of Uzbekistan, their organizational structure, stages of development, technical potential, problems related to the shortage of specialists, as well as proposals and solutions for their elimination.

## **Result and Discussion**

After the proclamation of independence of the Republic of Uzbekistan, from May 18, 1992, airborne troops, military transport aviation, reconnaissance troops, and supply units stationed on the territory of the country were nationalized[3]. This is due to the strategic importance of these troops. In addition, Uzbekistan has many years of experience in the field of aviation. In particular, during the Second World War, several military aviation schools, in particular, Tambov and Armavir pilot-navigator schools, were transferred to the territory of Uzbekistan before the end of the war. Along with this, aviation units were organized in the territory of the Uzbek SSR, in



particular, in the city of Karshi. In the post-war period, that is, during the Soviet-Afghan War, the country's airfields were used as the main aviation base. The organization of this type of troops was carried out in accordance with the peculiarities of the state structure and the physical and geographical conditions of the region.

In accordance with the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated July 13, 1992, the units of the Air Force, communications and artillery troops located on the territory of the country, consisting of a total of 13,299 servicemen, as well as their formations, were transferred to the jurisdiction of the Republic of Uzbekistan. On the basis of the Aviation Directorate of the Ministry of Defense and the former 73rd Air Army, the apparatus of the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the troops of the Air Force were created. It was deemed expedient to reorganize the Air Force, communications, and artillery forces based on a 50% reduction in their numbers. The adoption of such a decision was primarily due to the need to form a small but highly combat-ready army, the shortage of local specialists, the return of existing personnel to their republics, as well as the technical condition of aircraft and helicopters, fuel shortages, and other material and technical factors. The main reason for this situation is that during the Soviet era, local personnel in the field of aviation were practically not trained in the territory of the Uzbek SSR.

In accordance with Resolution No. PP-495 of November 12, 1992, "On Air Defense Units Located on the Territory of the Republic of Uzbekistan," the Air Defense Unit (12th Separate Air Defense Army) was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Republic of Uzbekistan with a 60% reduction in the number of combat and technical support military units[4; 18]. The reason was the small number of Uzbek military personnel in these troops and other issues related to the material and technical situation[4; 4]. To further strengthen the defense of the Republic of Uzbekistan, in accordance with the order of the Minister of Defense of August 1993 "On the Introduction of a Manual on the Organization and Conduct of Combat Duty in the Air Defense Forces," the Air Defense Forces began guarding the air borders of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Air Defense Forces, in cooperation with units of the Air Force and Ground Forces, have been established to protect the country from air attacks.

However, the number of national military personnel in the aviation sector within the Armed Forces of the republic was small. In particular, the 1992 report of the Deputy Commander of the Air Force of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Colonel T.M. Yusupov, confirms the above: "Currently, out of every 100 Air Force pilots in the republic, 99



do not belong to the national contingent. We need to eliminate this imbalance, because after some time, these 99 pilots will leave for their homes, and the planes and helicopters will remain here. Therefore, it is necessary to create an air club in each region for training paratroopers and pilots"[5; 6]. From the mid-1990s, the conscription of Uzbek officers into the reserve in the Armed Forces of Uzbekistan, including the Air Force, and the training of new personnel in the country's military educational institutions and foreign higher military educational institutions after independence, led to an increase in the proportion of national personnel in the officer corps.

At the end of 1991, the country had four flight clubs of the defense support organization "Vatanparvar"\*. These are: Andijan, Namangan, Samarkand and Tashkent/Aranchi air clubs. The organization has An-2, Yak-18T, and Yak-52 aircraft at its disposal, and flight practice classes were conducted using these aircraft. However, due to the obsolescence of flight equipment, the number of aeroclubs has decreased, and in the remaining aeroclubs, a decrease in the number of aircraft can be observed. For example, as of 2004, the Namangan Aeroclub had three or four An-2 aircraft, and the Aranchi Flying Club had six An-2 and 14 Yak-52 aircraft[6; 25].

In the first years of independence, a number of measures were implemented to address the personnel issue.

Firstly, the Jizzakh Higher Military Aviation School was established. This educational institution was established in accordance with the resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated June 20, 1994, the order of the Minister of Defense of July 9, 1994, and the order of the Commander of the Air Force of the country dated August 1, 1994. The educational institution trained helicopter aviation pilot-engineers, combat control officers, navigators, engineers and technicians for aircraft and engines, aviation weapons and equipment, and radio-electronic equipment. The establishment of the Jizzakh Higher Military Aviation School is inextricably linked with the establishment of the "Aviation" Department of the Tashkent Higher Combined Arms Command School in 1993. In 1993, 100 cadets began studying at this department exclusively in the field of aviation. In August 1994, cadets of the specialty "pilot," "technician-mechanic" in the operation of aircraft and engines were admitted to the Jizzakh Higher Military Aviation School. On October 14, 1997, 97 of the first graduates graduated from the school in flight and engineering-technical specialties. In 1997-2012, the school trained 234 pilots, 71 navigators, 456



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engineering and technical specialists, and 143 combat control officers - a total of more than 900 personnel [6; 29].

The Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, during his visit to the Khanabad military airfield in the city of Karshi, Kashkadarya region in 2018, during a conversation with pilots serving in the Air Force, spoke about the role and importance of this airfield in the defense of the country's Air Force and air defense, and made a proposal to relocate the Jizzakh Higher Military Aviation School to the city of Karshi, and the Khanabad airfield should serve as an internship center for training future pilots and engineering cadets. Because this airfield differs from other airfields in its geographical location, internal capabilities, and long-term historical experience. In accordance with the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated January 18, 2018, the Jizzakh Higher Military Aviation School was renamed the Higher Military Aviation School of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The building of the former Sergeant Training School in the city of Karshi was chosen as the location for this educational institution [7]. The fact that Uzbekistan has its own military aviation school in this field allows the country to independently train personnel in the field of military aviation. This will lead to the further strengthening of the defense system.

Secondly, based on the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 386-95 of August 12, 1999, "On the Training of Officer Personnel for the Anti-Aircraft and Radio Engineering Troops of the Air Defense Forces of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Uzbekistan," starting September 1 of this year, it was decided to organize the training of officers for the anti-aircraft missile and radio engineering troops of the Air Force of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the basis of the special faculty of the Tashkent Electrotechnical Institute of Communications. In the 1999-2000 academic year, the number of applicants for the first year of the special faculty was set at 25 [4; 140].

Thirdly, foreign cooperation has been established to further strengthen the capabilities and effectiveness of this type of troops. In particular, on the basis of the Treaty on the Fundamentals of Interstate Relations, Friendship and Cooperation between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Russian Federation, as well as the Treaty on Mutual Cooperation signed between Uzbekistan and Russia on March 2, 1994, the training of pilot personnel in military universities of the Russian Federation has been established. Uzbek cadets and officers were sent to Krasnodar, Syzran, Tambov Higher Aviation Schools, the Yuri Gagarin Higher Military Academy, the Air Defense Military



University, and the Higher Aviation Technical University for training and advanced training[5; 10]. In particular, in 2002, servicemen of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Uzbekistan were sent for training and advanced training to such higher military educational institutions of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation as the Krasnodar Military Aviation Institute, the Tambov Military Aviation and Engineering Institute, the Sizran Military Aviation Institute, the Military University of Air Defense of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, located in Smolensk, and the branch of the Military University of Air Defense of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, established in Orenburg[4; 119].

In 1993, the "Vatanparvar" organization trained 86 cadets in the aviation-technical direction for the Air Force. However, due to interruptions in the supply of gasoline, the flight program was not fully implemented. As a result, 35 cadets (33%) were admitted to the aviation faculty of the Tashkent University of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education\*, 10 did not pass the interview of the commission, and the rest were not admitted due to low general educational training [5; 39-40]. Or the Andijan Aeroclub in 1992 had the capacity to train only six pilots a year. This indicator was extremely low for the needs of the republic and was not able to eliminate the shortage of specialists in the Air Force. By reconstructing the club's activities, updating its material and technical base, and equipping it with modern training equipment, it would be possible to increase its capacity to 20-25 pilots per year. However, such large-scale modernization work required a lot of time, financial resources, and the formation of a corps of qualified teachers. Therefore, during this period, the issue of training aviation specialists became one of the most pressing problems in the military sphere of Uzbekistan [5; 7]. On February 24, 2023, at a meeting with cadets of the Higher Military Aviation School in the city of Karshi, the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev said: "Everyone will hear how you are being trained, who and how you teach, on which equipment you are being tested. You say 50 hours of flight. Here, the elders say that during their time, it was at most 20 hours. Why? There were no conditions, no opportunities, no funds"[8]. The above information once again confirms that these problems are caused by financial shortages.

Despite the above shortcomings, the Air Defense Forces and the Air Force effectively perform such important tasks as air reconnaissance, landing, destroying hostile forces, striking their bases, and transporting military equipment and cargo during operations



against terrorist groups that attempted to invade Uzbekistan in 1999-2000 in the southeastern territories of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, in particular in the vicinity of Batken and Sokh, as well as in the mountainous regions of Tashkent and Surkhandarya regions.

At the same time, in order to eliminate the shortcomings identified in these military operations, the structure was involved in reforms. In accordance with the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated September 29, 2000, the Air Defense Forces and the Air Force were merged. This structure, which began operating as a single command on November 6, 2000, consisted of anti-aircraft missile and radio engineering troops, fighter, assault, military transport, helicopter and reconnaissance aviation, as well as special forces and logistical support units.

In 2002-2003, the Air Defense Forces and the Air Force's anti-aircraft missile troops, fighter and helicopter aviation conducted their first combat firing field exercises. According to the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 122-29 of April 10, 2002, the "Kulkuduk" air-land training ground of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Uzbekistan began its activities in the Navoi region[4; 163].

Initial reforms for the development of the Air Force accelerated from 2000. The practical results of the reforms are divided into four stages:

**Stage 1 (2000-2001)** - optimization of the regulatory framework and organizational structure of the troops, revision of their composition and deployment, repair of weapons and military equipment, sale of disposed property, and creation of separate military training grounds.

**Stage 2 (2002-2005)** - Work was carried out aimed at modernizing the Air Defense and Air Force training system, automating command and control processes, improving the support system, restoring modern weapons and military equipment, and increasing the combat potential of the Air Force.

**Stage 3 (2006-2016)** - contracts were concluded in this area with France, Germany, China, and other developed countries for the purchase of new models of aircraft.

**Stage 4 (2016-2025)** - in order to increase the potential of national personnel, the Karshi Higher Aviation School was created. New models of Airbus Helicopters and Mi helicopters for the Air Force were imported on a large scale. The new "Defense Doctrine" was legally enshrined, in 2017 the activities of the Defense Industry Committee were established, and in 2019 the Kattakurgan test site was commissioned in accordance with modern standards. At the same time, new equipment was



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purchased for the air defense forces, existing weapons were modernized, and combat capabilities were expanded.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it can be noted that the Air Force of the Republic of Uzbekistan has come a long and arduous way. In the first years of independence, along with all other spheres, there were a number of problems in the air force system:

- firstly, problems related to the shortage of specialists. That is, the fact that during the Soviet era, the main part of Uzbek personnel served on land and in military construction battalions, and after the collapse of the USSR and the country gained independence, the existing personnel left to continue their service in their republics caused a shortage of personnel in this area. This issue was resolved through the establishment of the Jizzakh Higher Military Aviation School in the country, with the subsequent opening of the Karshi Higher Military Aviation School on its basis and the training or advanced training of specialists abroad.
- secondly, negative situations arising from the compliance and readiness of equipment with modern requirements. This problem was solved through the utilization of faulty equipment, the repair of usable equipment, modernization in accordance with modern requirements, the acquisition of new equipment by expanding cooperation with foreign countries, and the establishment of the Defense Industry Committee.
- thirdly, conditions related to aviation fuel, its supply and quality. Fuel constitutes one of the important bases of transport movement. Problems with the supply of aviation gasoline led to the non-fulfillment by pilots of the standard flight time. This led to insufficient formation of the qualifications of future pilots. The solution to this problem can be proven by increasing the flight time of military pilots from 20 to 50 hours. These results were achieved mainly through the reforms carried out in the years following 2016.
- Fourthly, shortcomings in the material and technical base of educational institutions had a direct impact on the number and quality of specialists. This is clearly visible in the absence of airfields or training grounds that meet modern educational requirements and in other situations. This issue was resolved as a result of reforms, such as the construction of the Kulkuduk and other airfields, and the reconstruction of the Khanabad airfield in accordance with modern requirements.



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