

Threats from Within: Regionalism and Foreign Policy in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan

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INTRODUCTION

In the initial period following independence, many observers and analysts assumed that Uzbekistan would come to be the dominant state in Central Asia and become the region's anchor of stability. Kadir Alimov, for example, wrote a few years after independence that there was an "absence of alternatives to Uzbekistan" and that it was unlikely that any other state in the region could be Central Asia's stabilizer. He went on to point out assets that gave Uzbekistan such enormous potential, including its population, the largest by far in Central Asia, its position at the geographic center of the region, its history as a center of power under the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, industry built by the Soviets, and its mineral wealth and high cotton exports.¹ S. Frederick Starr said that only Uzbekistan appeared to have the potential to be a stabilizer in Central Asia and that Kazakhstan was ill-suited to play the role because of weak institutions, underdeveloped industry, the lack of a scientific intelligentsia, and division between Russian and Kazakhs.² Perceptions of Uzbekistan's power have persisted for much of the period of independence, with commentators, analysts, and scholars referencing Uzbekistan's greater strength relative to its neighbors until quite recently.³ Reality has turned out quite differently,

¹ Kadir Alimov, "Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy: In Search of a Strategy," in *Central Asia: Conflict, Resolution, and Change*, ed. Roald Z. Sagdeev and Susan Eisenhower, 1995, <http://www.eisenhowerinstitute.org/programs/globalpartnerships/securityandterrorism/coalition/regionalrelations/ConflictBook/Alimov.htm> (accessed March 17, 2007).

² S. Frederick Starr, "Making Eurasia Stable," *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 1 (Jan./Feb/ 1996): 81.

³ See for example: Igor Torbakov, "Tajik-Uzbek Relations: Divergent National Historiographies Threaten To Aggravate Tensions," *Eurasianet*, June 12, 2001, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/culture/articles/eav061201.shtml> (accessed Nov. 16, 2006); Nicole Jackson, "Terrorism's Next Big Trigger," *The Globe and Mail*, April 5, 2004, <http://www.commondreams.org/views04/0405-06.htm> (accessed Nov. 18, 2006); or, Gulzina Karim kyzy, "Central Asian Border Tensions: The Worsening Uzbek-Kyrgyz Relations," *Central Asia – Caucasus Analyst*, Aug. 13, 2003, http://www.cacianalyst.org/view_article.php?articleid=1655 (accessed Nov. 16, 2006).

however, with both the Kazakhstani government and foreign governments now publicly proclaiming Kazakhstan as the region's leader.⁴

To be sure, both Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan had at their disposal many assets that bestowed them with potential for international success. But the two countries have played their cards very differently. While it is impossible to know for certain the intentions of either government's leader, each president's actions do allow one to paint a fairly clear picture of the strategies each has employed. President Nursultan Nazarbaev's decisions reveal a strategy aimed at raising Kazakhstan's international prestige, and he has tailored domestic policy to help create this image. President Islam Karimov, on the other hand, has subordinated Uzbekistan's foreign policy to his domestic political needs in spite of numerous warnings about the negative consequences of his decisions. Karimov's strategy has resulted in sudden and drastic shifts in the country's foreign policy orientation, a loss of international prestige, and a loss of power relative to its neighbors in Central Asia. Nazarbaev's strategy, meanwhile, has resulted in a steadier foreign policy that balances the interests of foreign partners, a higher international profile, and a legitimate claim to being the most powerful state in Central Asia.

In this essay, I seek to explain why Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have chosen such divergent foreign policies, which in turn helps explain how Kazakhstan has defied early predictions and come to be seen as Central Asia's most powerful state. I argue that ultimately, the reason that the governments of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, despite having had comparable opportunities for success, have made such different foreign policy decisions is found in

⁴ Kassymzhomart Tokaev, "Kazakhstan: The Democratic Path for Peace and Prosperity," Oct. 7, 2005, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/RussiaandEurasia/wm877.cfm> (accessed Nov. 15, 2006). U.S. Department of State, "Joint Statement Between the United States of America and the Republic of Kazakhstan," Sep. 29, 2006, <http://www.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rm/2006/71060.htm> (accessed Nov. 10, 2006).

differences in the nature and structure of domestic political cleavages and the resulting patterns of political competition within each country. Domestic political competition in both countries is among regionally based political networks; however, both the structures of regional competition each state inherited from its Soviet past and the ways in which the new governments have confronted that competition have differed greatly. I will argue that Uzbekistan inherited a system of competition in which a few regions dominated politics and that the government has only slowly been able to reconfigure the contours of competition. Kazakhstan, meanwhile, inherited a system of competition divided on both regional and ethnic lines and that the government has reconfigured greatly since independence. The result of these differences is that Uzbekistan's president faces enormous pressure to use foreign policy to shore up his power against real and potential domestic threats, while Kazakhstan's president, who now faces far fewer regionally-based domestic threats, is much freer to pursue a foreign policy that maximizes Kazakhstan's sovereignty and his own personal prestige.

EXPLAINING FOREIGN POLICY DIFFERENCES

That the governments of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have pursued different foreign policy paths is apparent, but the reasons that they have done so are far less so. Previous examinations of either these governments' foreign policies have highlighted the role of natural resources in international relations or the ideologies of Islam Karimov and Nursultan Nazarbaev. These factors are important to understanding each state's foreign policy, and they are good candidates for explaining differences in each state's foreign policies. However, they fail to draw attention to the crucial role the domestic political environment of each state plays in determining

how each president can and cannot use natural resources on the world stage and what ideological positions are available and appropriate to each leader. In other words, neither recognize that domestic political competition sets the structure of the game and determines the extent to which other factors are important to understanding Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan's foreign policies.

Oil and Gas

One candidate for explaining differences between the foreign policies of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan's governments is the differences between their natural resource endowments. Kazakhstan sits atop massive energy resources that have attracted major international attention, while Uzbekistan gets quite little attention despite it having important, if more modest, natural resources of its own.

Uzbekistan's oil and natural gas reserves are clearly smaller than Kazakhstan's, but they are not insignificant. Uzbekistan's estimated proven oil reserves stand at 600 million barrels and proven reserves of natural gas are believed to be 66 Tcf.⁵ There may also be much more oil and natural gas in unexplored reserves in Uzbekistan.⁶ Though Kazakhstan's oil reserves dwarf Uzbekistan's, their natural gas reserves are roughly equal.⁷ However, Uzbekistan's natural gas production far outpaces Kazakhstan's. In 2004, Uzbekistan produced nearly six times as much

⁵ U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Central Asia Country Analysis Brief," Sept. 2005. <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Centasia/Full.html> (accessed Nov. 10, 2006).

⁶ James P. Dorian, "Central Asia: A major emerging energy player in the 21st century," *Energy Policy* 34, no. 5 (March 2006): Dorian, 548.

⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*, 2007, <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/> (accessed Jan. 17, 2007).

natural gas as Kazakhstan,⁸ and exported nearly 100 Tcf more natural gas than did Kazakhstan the same year.⁹

Kazakhstan is obviously richer in energy reserves than Uzbekistan, but Uzbekistan also is an important producer of other resources. For the 2005-2006 season, Uzbekistan was the world's second largest exporter of cotton, exporting only about one quarter of what the United States exported, but considerably more than any other country in the world.¹⁰ Uzbekistan also sits atop a large portion of the Tien Shan gold belt, which is considered the second richest gold belt in the world.¹¹

Kazakhstan's oil and natural gas reserves are impressive. Estimates for reserves vary depending on the source. The Energy Information Administration says that Kazakhstan's estimated reserves of oil range between 9 and 40 billion barrels.¹² Dorian cites the conservative figure of 9 billion barrels in proven reserves,¹³ while Kaiser and Pulsipher rely on BP's claim that Kazakhstan's proven reserves stand at 39.6 billion barrels.¹⁴ There is similar disagreement over the size of Kazakhstan's natural gas reserves. The Energy Administration says they amount to between 65 and 100 trillion cubic feet (Tcf), though BP claims they stand at 105.9 Tcf.

⁸ Dorian, 548.

⁹ Central Intelligence Agency.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Cotton: World Markets and Trade*, Jan. 2007. <http://cottonusa.files.cms-plus.com/economicData/cottonfull00107.pdf> (accessed Feb. 1, 2007).

¹¹ The belt also runs through Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and portions of Kazakhstan and Xinjiang. Both Perseus Mining and Centrasia Mining remark on the wealth of the Tien Shan belt on their websites, which are found at <http://www.centrasiamining.com/s/Home.asp> and <http://www.perseusmining.com/projects/proj.htm>.

¹² U.S. Energy Information Administration, *Kazakhstan Country Analysis Brief, 2006*. <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Kazakhstan/Full.html> (accessed Nov. 10, 2006).

¹³ Dorian, 545.

¹⁴ Mark J. Kaiser & Allan G. Pulsipher, "A review of the oil and gas sector in Kazakhstan," *Energy Policy* 35, no. 2 (Feb. 2007): 1300. *BP Statistical Review of World Energy, 2006*. <http://www.bp.com/productlanding.do?categoryId=6842&contentId=7021390> (accessed Jan. 10, 2007).

Additionally, Kazakhstan has between 34.5 billion¹⁵ and 132.3 billion tons of coal, though much of it is low quality and difficult to access.¹⁶

Even if conservative estimates of Kazakhstan's energy resources are correct, they are significant and play an important role in Kazakhstan's economy, domestic policy, and foreign policy. Oil in particular has played a major role in recent years.¹⁷ The oil industry accounted for 29 percent of Kazakhstan gross domestic product and 57 percent of its export revenues in 2004.¹⁸ Production has nearly doubled from 2000 to 2005.¹⁹ This growth in production and exports has fueled high growth rates in Kazakhstan, and none of it would have been possible without foreign investment.²⁰ Foreign direct investment in exploration and production was \$4.6 billion in 2005 and is projected to remain between \$4 and \$5 billion annually over the next decade.²¹

Analyses of Kazakhstan's foreign policy since independence naturally draw great attention to the important role of the oil and natural gas sector in Kazakhstan's relations with the world. Martha Brill Olcott explains that Kazakhstan's large energy reserves make it a strategically important state. Untapped reserves have attracted foreign investors since before Kazakhstan's independence. Meanwhile, foreign governments have tried to woo Kazakhstan into exporting via each particular government's preferred route.²² Aware of the leverage this affords

¹⁵ U.S. Energy Information Administration, *Kazakhstan Country Analysis Brief*, 2006.

¹⁶ Dorian, 549.

¹⁷ This is partially because much of Kazakhstan's natural gas reserves are "associated" gas, meaning that they exist in oil fields. In some oil fields, natural gas is reinjected into the ground to maintain pressure for oil extraction. When the liquid oil is exhausted, the remaining natural gas can be recovered.

¹⁸ Kaiser & Pulsipher, 1301.

¹⁹ *BP Statistical Review of World Energy*, 2006.

²⁰ U.S. Agency for International Development, "Kazakhstan Economic Performance Assessment," November 2005, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADE692.pdf (accessed Feb. 2, 2007).

²¹ Kaiser & Pulsipher, 1300.

²² Martha Brill Olcott, *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002), 3-4, 145-148, 150-159.

them, Kazakhstan has made oil and gas the central and extremely powerful tool in its foreign policy.

Natural resources are important to Uzbekistan's foreign policy, but the Uzbek government does not employ them the same way that Kazakhstan does. At first glance, it would seem that what allows Kazakhstan to skillfully execute a multivector foreign policy that enhances its bargaining position with potential investors and energy consumers is its enormous proven reserves. Uzbekistan is far from resource-poor, though. Possessing exportable natural resources alone clearly does not translate into effective foreign policy. Uzbek government policies such as government control over resource extracting enterprises, high taxes, and the need for investment deals to secure the president's personal blessing have made it difficult for foreign investors to succeed, thereby reducing the attractiveness of Uzbekistan for investors.²³ Such economic policies have essentially made natural resources less of a factor in the Uzbek government's foreign policy. It is unlikely that Islam Karimov is unaware of the connection between his economic policies and his ability to use natural resources as an effective foreign policy tool. It is additionally unlikely that Karimov is behaving irrationally in continuing these policies.

Natural resources are at best an incomplete explanation for the differences between the foreign policies of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Placing too much emphasis on the role of natural resources in foreign policy misses a more fundamental element of the equation. In each state, other policies determine what role natural resources can play foreign policy. In turn, what shapes these policies is the competition for power between sub-national elite networks.

²³ U.S. Energy Information Agency, "Central Asia..."; Martha Brill Olcott, *Central Asia's New States: Independence, Foreign Policy, and Regional Security*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute for Peace Press, 1996), 134.

Presidential Personalities

Another body of analysis of the foreign policies of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan argues that to understand each state's foreign policy, one must examine each state's president. These arguments draw attention to the ideological and personal motivations of the presidents and how they respond to pressures and opportunities they face in determining foreign policy choices.

Islam Karimov's conservative transition strategy for Uzbekistan rests on three pillars. First, he seeks to establish and protect Uzbekistan's sovereignty. Second, he strives to guarantee political stability while gradually increasing political participation and rule of law. Finally, he works to foster gradual privatization and the expansion of free markets in a way that avoids undermining social well-being.²⁴ Leila Kazemi argues that Karimov's three pillars are integral to understanding his foreign policy.²⁵ Karimov, she says, pursues alliances outside of the CIS to maintain and increase Uzbekistan's sovereignty.²⁶ She also notes that his domestic policies have foreign policy consequences. For example, Karimov's intolerance of internal political dissent has caused problems in his relations with Western states, while his aggressive pursuit of Islamist opponents has led to incursions into Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. This in turn has the consequence that neighbors are wary of trusting Karimov.²⁷

The driving force behind Nursultan Nazarbaev's foreign policy, by contrast, is balance. In a 2006 speech in which he outlined his foreign policy priorities, Nazarbaev said that Kazakhstan should be a reliable international partner and that it should develop stronger ties with

²⁴ Starr, 86. Alimov, 190.

²⁵ Leila Kazemi, "Domestic Sources of Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy: 1991 to the Present," *Journal of International Affairs* 56, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 207-215.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 208-209.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 210-212.

Russia, the United States, China, the European Union, and Muslim states.²⁸ In other speeches, he emphasizes the same message of cooperation with foreign governments, increased international participation, playing a larger role in Central Asian security, raising Kazakhstan's profile and prestige, and the use of foreign policy to speed economic development.²⁹ To summarize, Nazarbaev's policy is to have the world know, love, and invest in Kazakhstan.

Tor Bukkvoll argues that to understand Nazarbaev's foreign policy, one must examine the interplay of personal and national interests that inform it.³⁰ Bukkvoll concludes that personal political survival comes first for Nazarbaev, but that he has largely been secure enough in his power to set the foreign policy agenda. Nazarbaev, Bukkvoll claims, uses this freedom to operate to both pursue Kazakhstan's national interests and to enhance his power, wealth, and prestige. Nazarbaev's relations with the West enhance his prestige as a respected statesman, and he would not be successful in achieving this did he not pursue Kazakhstan's national interests. Relations with Russia allow Nazarbaev to increase his wealth and power, though.³¹ In Bukkvoll's view, Nazarbaev's foreign policy uses Kazakhstan and its national interests as a means to personal ends.

Both Bukkvoll and Kazemi demonstrate the importance of presidential ideologies to understanding the foreign policies of Nazarbaev and Karimov. However, both offer only part of the story. Kazemi does not investigate why Karimov espouses his three pillars. In her analysis,

²⁸ Nursultan Nazarbaev, "Address of the President to the People of Kazakhstan," March 1, 2006, http://www.akorda.kz/page.php?page_id=156&lang=2&article_id=1433 (accessed Jan. 18, 2007).

²⁹ Nursultan Nazarbaev, "Address of the President to the People of Kazakhstan," 18th of February 2005, http://www.akorda.kz/page.php?page_id=156&lang=2&article_id=80 (accessed Jan. 18, 2007); "Address of the President to the People of Kazakhstan," 2004, http://www.akorda.kz/page.php?page_id=156&lang=2&article_id=383 (accessed Jan. 18, 2007); "Address of the President to the People of Kazakhstan," Sept. 3, 2001, http://www.akorda.kz/page.php?page_id=156&lang=2&article_id=376 (accessed Jan. 18, 2007).

³⁰ Tor Bukkvoll, "Astana's Privatized Independence: Private and National Interests in the Foreign Policy of Nursultan Nazarbayev," *Nationalities Papers*, 32, no. 3 (September 2003): 646-647.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 646-647.

Karimov's pillars simply exist, and one understands his foreign policy by turning to them. Her argument tells us little about what sub-national factors influence Karimov's ideology and decision-making, when Karimov himself has made quite clear his concerns that clans and regionalism are major challenges for Uzbekistan.³² Bukkvoll does a bit better on this in his analysis of Kazakhstan's foreign policy. He examines the foreign policy interests of domestic political forces and what influence they may have had on Nazarbaev's foreign policies. He concludes that the influence of these groups on Nazarbaev was slight.³³ However, he does not tell us why Nazarbaev rarely had to worry about domestic political forces. Understanding why domestic political forces have had little influence on Nazarbaev's foreign policy is key to understanding the heart of the difference between Uzbek and Kazakh foreign policies because Islam Karimov's foreign policy appears to be so heavily influenced by concerns about domestic political forces.

Clan, Tribe, and Central Asian Politics

An emerging literature on the development of Central Asian states since independence has drawn attention to the importance of political groups based on sub-national identities to understanding domestic politics. Though authors agree that sub-national cleavages matter to politics in the region, they are divided on both the kinds of and extents to which such cleavages matter. Those authors who have recently attempted to identify what cleavages matter to Central Asian politics are divided into those who argue that pre-Soviet identities are the most important

³² Islam Karimov, *O'zbekiston XXI Asr Bo'sag'asida: Xavfsizlikka Taxdid, Barqarorlik Shartlari va Taraqqiyot Kafolatlari*, (Tashkent: O'zbekiston, 1997), 102-105.

³³ *Ibid*, 637-641.

to understanding domestic political competition and those who argue that regional divisions inherited from Soviet era politics better explain such competition.

Kathleen Collins and Edward Schatz both argue that pre-Soviet clans – which are defined differently depending on the author and country under analysis – are of greatest importance to post-Soviet politics in Central Asia. These authors emphasize the survival and transformation of pre-Soviet identities throughout the Soviet period and into the present, where they continue to be of crucial importance to defining politics.

Kathleen Collins sees Central Asian states' politics centered on competition between clans, which she defines as “informal organization[s] comprising a network of individuals linked by kin and fictive kin identities.” Various social and kin relations bond members together into clans that vary drastically in size, link elites and non-elites, and cannot be easily entered or left.³⁴ Clans are to be distinguished from tribes, which she says are inconsistently defined and in the Central Asian context, were broken apart by the Soviet Union, leaving behind their smaller subdivisions. All of these subdivisions Collins collectively analyzes as clans.³⁵ Clans weathered collectivization, she says, because most communities remained intact. Indeed, she argues, when villages were combined within a *kolkhoz*, the real and fictive kinship ties of the various villages expanded to create a larger clan.³⁶ Collins argues that cadre policy placed more power in the hands of local elites, gave clans access to state resources and gave favored clans who held the power at the republican level incredible opportunity to cement their position at the top of the

³⁴ Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 17-18.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 37-38.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 85-88.

competition among clans.³⁷ The present nature of clan networks varies across the region, but she points out that Soviet policies removed many of these differences, leaving clans more homogenous in form, content, and function across the region.³⁸ Clans today in Uzbekistan, Collins says, operate at the very local level of the *mahalla* or *qishloq*, the provincial level, or at the national level.³⁹ Though she does not deal with Kazakhstan at similar length, she says that its politics too are heavily marked by clan competition.⁴⁰

Collins argues that traditional clans persisted, though Soviet policy reconfigured them, resulting in a more homogeneous clan system across Central Asia. Provincial and national level clans are the ones with access to state resources and the ones that influence state policies. While identifying and providing histories for political networks that are by their very nature obscured from view would be impossible, Collins does not offer a satisfactory sketch of how politically salient networks are bounded. She explains that the Soviet elevated favored clans, but does not explain who made up these clans, whether or not they have historical roots, or whether or not the same ones persist in their favored positions today. More importantly, she does not prove that these clans bridge the gap between elite and non-elite politics. She says that clans *can* be made up of elites and non-elites, but not that the ones competing at the provincial and national actually do. Because competition for control of administrative regions has been seen neither during the Soviet period nor since independence, it seems safe to assume that, if Collins is correct, a single clan was elevated to the top of each. Collins believes that administrative boundaries do not

³⁷ Ibid., 91-99.

³⁸ Ibid., 75.

³⁹ Ibid., 254.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 300-301.

coincide with clan boundaries, arguing that clans have a more permanent meaning.⁴¹ By this, she means that identities do not cleanly follow Soviet administrative boundaries. She acknowledges, however, that Soviet policy reshaped traditional clans' shapes and meanings. Since the Soviets elevated certain clans to the top of and bounded their power within new administrative boundaries, it is unclear why local clans would not reconfigure their allegiances to the elite clan at the top of their province or why elite clans would not come to define themselves in terms of their administrative region.

Collins does not analyze how clans influence Uzbekistan's foreign policy. She does, however, describe how clans have shaped the transformation of the Uzbek state since independence. In her narrative, she focuses on groups of political elites which she divides both by region of origin and family. For example, she says that the "Tashkent clan" and the "Samarkand clan" dominate post-Soviet politics in Uzbekistan. She says that these clans are really groups of smaller clans identified by family names, such as the "Alimov clan," the "Gulomov clan," or the "Rashidov clan."⁴² It is safe to assume that were she to extend her analysis to Uzbekistan's foreign policy, she would also focus on the same elite-led regional groups and find that foreign policy made at the center is shaped by competition with clans. Such a conclusion would duplicate the shortcomings of her analysis of Uzbekistan's politics in claiming that elite political networks are manifestations of traditional Uzbek social organization. Collins fails to conclusively argue that ruling clans in Uzbekistan actually are just more powerful than clans at the community level or that connections link elite clans to less powerful ones. In the face of insufficient evidence to do so, it is safer to treat forms of elite organization as entirely

⁴¹ Ibid., 58.

⁴² Ibid., 255.

different from forms of community organization, especially when elite networks behave so differently. This is an especially important distinction to make because Collins argues that clans generally play a negative role in Central Asian politics.⁴³ The evidence only allows us to conclude that competition between elite networks plays a negative role; much less clear is whether or not traditional forms of communal organization are destructive.

In Kazakhstan, Schatz argues, clans based on kinship, genealogical knowledge, and place play an important role in that country's politics.⁴⁴ Soviet policy, he says, increased the authority of local clans, leading to competition between hordes being overshadowed by that between local clans.⁴⁵ The Soviets publicly stigmatized clan, leading ultimately to place, especially the *kolkhoz*, being the new marker of subethnic identity. Schatz notes that clans usually remained intact within a *kolkhoz*, and he says that distributing scarce resources strengthened clans.⁴⁶ Since independence, Schatz says, clan conflict has flourished, and the importance of hordes to politics has reemerged.⁴⁷

Though Schatz says that competition between hordes was overshadowed during the Soviet period, he does not adequately explain why it reemerges after independence. He explains at length how clan and horde are critical to Kazakhstan's politics, though he notes that the outcomes are not what one would expect were clan so important. Namely, one does not see domination of government by President Nazarbaev's clan. Schatz says that what is actually going on in Kazakhstani politics is both the favoring of one's own clan *and* the balancing of clan

⁴³ Ibid., 298.

⁴⁴ Edward Schatz, *Modern Clan Politics: The Power of "Blood" in Kazakhstan and Beyond* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 26-33.

⁴⁵ Schatz, 33-39. The three *zhuz* of traditional Kazakh tribal division. It consists of the Elder, Middle, and Younger which inhabit different parts of the country.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 58-61.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 95.

interests.⁴⁸ Why this is the case is unfortunately not explained, and to assert that the importance of clan and horde to Kazakhstani politics yields unexpected outcomes without a strong explanation suggests that one might be able to explain any political outcome in Kazakhstan by pointing to clan and horde ties.

The shortcomings of clan-based explanations of Kazakhstan's politics are quite clear in Schatz's analysis. He clearly states that political outcomes in Kazakhstan are not what one would expect in an environment of clan competition. Therefore, one should not expect competition between clans to explain Kazakhstan's foreign policy decisions.

Schatz and Collins are somewhat right that clan identities are important in Central Asia. However, neither persuasively argues that they are anything more than socially relevant. That informants report the importance of clans to politics only conclusively proves that clan is perceived as an important factor. Central Asian politics are much better understood not by looking to pre-Soviet sources of identity, but instead to those created or encouraged by Soviet institutions.

Regional Elites and Central Asian Politics

Pauline Jones Luong also argues that political competition among elites has an enormous impact in Central Asian politics. Unlike Schatz and Collins, however, she argues that elites – especially in the early years of independence – have organized themselves not in traditional ways, but instead by *oblast* as a result of Soviet administrative policies. Jones Luong does not deny that traditional identities have persisted, but instead argues that they are not relevant to Central Asian politics. Her approach to understanding Central Asian politics is the one that I

⁴⁸ Ibid., 111.

employ. I agree that Central Asian politics is best understood by studying elite competition, and that the cleavages that divide elites result from pressures created by administrative policies. This approach helps us understand why both Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan's political elites were divided by *oblasts* at independence. Additionally, it explains why Kazakhstan's political leaders also divided along ethnicity, and why policy decisions by Nursultan Nazarbaev have reshaped elite competition since independence.

Pauline Jones Luong argues that Soviet policies eliminated pre-Soviet identities from politics, replacing them with regional political identities that persist as the most important dividing lines in elite-level post-Soviet politics. She emphasizes the destructive effects of Soviet policies on preexisting identities and the replacement of allegiances to tribes or historic regions to new regions created by the Soviets. Jones Luong argues that elites in Central Asia have embraced the political identities of the Soviet period – namely, regional ones that correspond to each country's *oblasts* – and have remained organized on the basis of regions.⁴⁹ Jones Luong says that regionalism is a deep-seated legacy left by the Soviet Union:

In short, Soviet policies and institutions in Central Asia created, transformed, and institutionalized regional political identities, while at the same time eliminating tribal, religious, and national identities, weakening them, or confining them to the social and cultural spheres. They also engendered the view that regional identities were the most appropriate identity for the political arena because they were more conducive to settling political disagreements peacefully than were other identities, which would encourage chauvinism and divisiveness.⁵⁰

The Soviet system, she explains, created structural incentives that encouraged Central Asian elites and masses to invest in regional identities that replaced preexisting identities. This occurred because national identities were far weaker than local ones and because administrative

⁴⁹ Pauline Jones Luong, *Institutional Change and Political Continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1-25.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

divisions complemented historical regional clan divisions, making it easy for new regional identities to supplant the political salience of local and tribal ones. In this new system, new officials took over the role played previously by local and tribal leaders, allowing for new patronage networks to be built at the level of the new regions.⁵¹ Further elements of the system such as the economic specialization of regions, the favoring of certain regions in cadre policy, and the election system all contributed to competition between the regions.⁵² Since independence, regionalism has been a basis for social movements and political parties and that it has manifested itself in struggles between the center and regions for decision-making power.⁵³

Jones Luong's use of inherited features of the Soviet era most accurately explains the nature of political competition in Central Asia, and hers is the approach most helpful for understanding how center-regional conflicts have shaped Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan's foreign policies. Political competition in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan follows roughly similar patterns, but structural differences between political competition in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan do exist and impact how each country's leader executes foreign policy. In both republics, Moscow cultivated ties with regional administrations, preventing the emergence of unified national elites.⁵⁴ Doing so fostered regionalism, but also left both new regimes with weak centers upon independence. Jones Luong notes that Soviet policies created hierarchies and an economic division of labor among Uzbekistan's administrative regions, with three regions – Samarkand, Tashkent, and Ferghana – coming to be the most prominent Uzbekistan's politics.⁵⁵ Because the

⁵¹ Ibid., 63-67.

⁵² Ibid., 67-73.

⁵³ Ibid., 56.

⁵⁴ Neil J. Melvin, "Patterns of Centre-Regional Relations in Central Asia: The Cases of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan", in *Regional & Federal Studies* 11, no. 3 (Autumn 2001), 169-170.

⁵⁵ Jones Luong, 86-88.

system encouraged regional identities in Uzbekistan, elites could only realistically compete within regions or between regions.⁵⁶ Soviet policy in Kazakhstan encouraged both regional and ethnic cleavages.⁵⁷ The result of policies was to create three arenas of elite competition: between ethnic leaders at the republican level; among administrative regions regardless of nationality; and, within regions between members of both nationalities.⁵⁸

As a result, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan entered independence with different institutional inheritances, in spite of both having political systems divided by regional cleavages. Uzbekistan's politics were divided rigidly between three powerful regional elite networks which expected the president to maintain the balance of power among them. Kazakhstan's politics exhibited both regional and ethnic divisions, creating a more fluid political environment. The effect of these differences on foreign policy has been to restrict Islam Karimov's options for Uzbek foreign policy and to leave Kazakhstan's foreign policy with fewer marks of regionalism over time as the center has undermined the bases of sub-state cleavages.

Below, I examine Islam Karimov and Nursultan Nazarbaev's foreign policy decisions through the lens of each president's battles with regional elite networks. In Uzbekistan, I show that Islam Karimov has repeatedly sought to build close ties with outside partners in order to strengthen his government, but that he has been unable to meet allies' expectations as a result of the threats posed by regional elites. In Kazakhstan, I demonstrate that Nursultan Nazarbaev's foreign policy was greatly driven in the early years of independence by potential regional threats, and that his ability to eliminate regionalism from domestic politics allowed him to implement a more strategic foreign policy that has contributed greatly to Kazakhstan's strength in Central

⁵⁶ Ibid., 90.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 91.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 98.

Asia. In my closing remarks, I consider the effects of regionalism on the foreign policies of other post-Soviet states and consider the implications of regionalism for Western foreign policy toward states in which regional cleavages divide elites against each other and the state.

UZBEKISTAN

Political Competition in Uzbekistan

Before 1989, Islam Karimov's political career seemed to be at a dead end. Nothing indicated that he would become the most powerful political figure in Uzbekistan. He was an economic technocrat who became the Minister of Finance for the Uzbek SSR in 1986, only to be demoted shortly thereafter to the backwater position of first secretary of the Qashqadaryo *oblast*.⁵⁹ Ironically, it is precisely because Karimov was the head of a backwater region without strong ties to any political network that he became Uzbekistan's first secretary in 1989 and president a year later.

Following the June 1989 riots in Ferghana, members of Uzbekistan's elites and representatives of the republic's major regional divisions met in Tashkent to propose a new leader to replace Rafik Nishanov. They sought a strong leader with local legitimacy that would protect Uzbekistan's interests against Moscow and protect elites' interests by backing informal deals among them.⁶⁰ Participants in the behind-the-scenes meeting considered a handful of candidates to lead the Uzbek SSR including Ismoil Jurabekov, Minister for Water Management and head of the Samarkand network, and Shukrullo Mirsaidov, Mayor of Tashkent and head of Tashkent-based elites. Both were ultimately rejected, and threw their support to Islam Karimov.

⁵⁹ Donald S. Carlisle, "Geopolitics of Uzbekistan," in *Muslim Eurasia: Conflicting Legacies*, ed. Yaacov Ro'i. (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1995), 79-81.

⁶⁰ Collins, 122-123.

Jurabekov played the most important role in orchestrating a pact between elites to support Karimov for the post of first secretary.⁶¹ Jurabekov viewed Karimov's ascension to leadership of the Uzbek SSR as an opportunity to place the Samarkand group back in control of the republic. He saw Karimov as tied by birth to the interests of Samarkand's elites. As appealing as the choice of Karimov seemed to Jurabekov for advancing his own interests, Karimov also proved acceptable to the rest of Uzbekistan's political elites. Not only did he meet the qualities sought for in a leader, he lacked a personal power base, limiting his ability to act outside the interests of those who supported his rise.

Islam Karimov's position as leader of Uzbekistan has burdened him with the difficult task of balancing the interests of regional political elite networks. To reward Mirsaidov and Jurabekov for their support, Karimov appointed both as prime minister and deputy prime minister respectively.⁶² He soon faced resistance from Mirsaidov, whom he removed from power, prompting what some interpreted as revolt from the Tashkent elite.⁶³ Karimov forged a new deal with Tashkent's politically powerful elites and sought a way out of having to deal with never-ending conflict between and resistance from regional networks.⁶⁴

One of Karimov's goals throughout his tenure has been to eliminate the rigid regionalism that Uzbekistan inherited from Soviet rule. He has called regionalism a threat to the stability of the states and called its elimination one of the state's most important tasks.⁶⁵ Strategies to stop regionalism have focused on centralizing and strengthening state power and undermining the

⁶¹ Ibid., 122-123.

⁶² Alisher Ilkhamov, "The Limits of Centralization: Regional Challenges in Uzbekistan," in *The Transformation of Central Asia: States and Societies from Soviet Rule to Independence*, ed., Pauline Jones Luong. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 177-178.

⁶³ Carlisle, 81-82.

⁶⁴ Ilkhamov 2004, 178-179.

⁶⁵ Karimov, *O'zbekiston...*, 102-105.

basis for regional identification. Shortly after independence, administrative reforms broadly expanded Karimov's power over other branches of government and greatly diminished the role and power of regional leaders by increasing links between the center and local governments.⁶⁶ The state has complemented these links by giving more responsibility to local governments and increasing the role of *mahallas* in political life.⁶⁷ Karimov complemented political centralization with economic centralization. Economic reforms centralized economic resources and power in the hands of the state and placed the responsibility for implementation on local governments, cutting regional *hokims* out of the equation.⁶⁸ Not all regions suffered equally though. Because the state still relied heavily on cotton production for income, regional leaders in Samarkand and Ferghana perceived themselves as maintaining relative power and influence in comparison to leaders of less important regions.⁶⁹

The state complemented administrative reforms with attempts to change the bases for political identity in Uzbekistan. One such strategy has been to attempt to create a shared national identity for Uzbeks to supplant regional identification.⁷⁰ Karimov has also long sought to increase the role of political parties in Uzbekistan to encourage the attachment of political fortunes to parties rather than regional networks. For example, in negotiations to establish Uzbekistan's electoral system shortly after independence, Karimov attempted to reserve the right to nominate candidates solely for political parties, all of which he controlled.⁷¹ Increasing the role of political parties is still a concern for Karimov. The President recently proposed a

⁶⁶ Ilkhamov 2004, 162-164; Jones Luong, 121-124.

⁶⁷ Annette Bohr, *Uzbekistan: Politics and Foreign Policy* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1998), 21-22. Human Rights Watch, *From House to House: Abuses by Mahalla Committees*, <http://hrw.org/reports/2003/Uzbekistan0903/index.htm> (accessed Feb. 18, 2007).

⁶⁸ Ilkhamov 2004, 165-167; Jones Luong 130-132.

⁶⁹ Jones Luong, 132-133.

⁷⁰ Bohr, 20-21; Jones Luong, 121.

⁷¹ Jones Luong, 200.

constitutional amendment that would increase the relevance of political parties in the parliament and ultimately increase the power of the state to manage the legislative branch.⁷² It is quite unlikely that efforts to bolster political parties would change Uzbekistan's politics in any meaningful way. However, when coupled with President Karimov's anti-regionalist rhetoric, the fact that he promotes political parties signals to Uzbekistan's elites that de-regionalized political parties are a more legitimate vehicle for political action than are region based networks. And should they be convinced, so much the better for the Uzbek executive, as national parties are far easier to manipulate and control than exclusive, regional elite networks.

Looking North and East

Uzbekistan's foreign policy in the early years of independence bore marks of Karimov's battles with regional elite networks. While neighboring Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan dabbled with democratization, Karimov looked to South Korea and China as models of economic development that justified a strong, authoritarian state and gradual reform of the economy.⁷³ Given Karimov's weakness vis-à-vis Uzbekistan's regional elites in the early 1990's, the Chinese and South Korean experiences appealed to him as they promised him the power to smash regional elite networks not loyal to the center while also rapidly growing the economy. South Korea became an important investor in Uzbekistan, but Karimov was not able to successfully emulate either model of authoritarian economic reform. Karimov began to speak instead of a uniquely Uzbek model of reform, to which observers continued to cite superficial similarities to Chinese

⁷² "Constitutional Reform Means Little," *Institute for War & Peace Reporting*, Jan. 17, 2007, http://www.iwpr.net/?p=buz&s=b&o=325446&apc_state=henh (accessed Feb. 18, 2007).

⁷³ Richard Pomfret, "The Uzbek Model of Economic Development 1991-9," <http://www.economics.adelaide.edu.au/contacts/archive/pomfret/eotzub.pdf> (accessed May 14, 2007).

gradualism.⁷⁴ The content of this model is unclear due to its incoherent mix of proactive reform and reaction to events.⁷⁵ Because Uzbekistan's most powerful regional elite groups controlled vital elements of the economy, they prevented Karimov from sticking to a consistent strategy that, at times, hurt their interests. Regionalism kept Karimov from following the Chinese or South Korean path, and instead forced him to proclaim his inconsistent economic policies a new model of reform.

President Karimov also sought to strengthen the Uzbek state during the first decade of independence by building ties with a variety of partners. Unprepared for independence, Karimov first attempted to maintain a close relationship with Russia. Considering Uzbekistan's importance to the Soviet economy, Karimov likely calculated that the best way to balance the interests of regional competitors and to protect himself was to try to keep old economic links alive with himself as the intermediary between Moscow and Uzbekistan's political elite networks. Relations between Russia and Uzbekistan in the first two years of independence were extremely close. Of the bilateral relationship, Karimov said, "...we need Russia like the air, like water," and cited the economic reliance of Uzbekistan on Russia.⁷⁶ In the summer of 1992, Boris Yeltsin and Islam Karimov signed a friendship treaty. In remarks at the signing ceremony, Yeltsin said that the two countries were priority economic partners, and that the two sides agreed that coordinated economic reforms were necessary for stable economic relations between the two.⁷⁷ Karimov was unable to deliver what Russia requested of him. In the latter half of 1993, Uzbekistan seemed enthusiastic about joining the ruble zone with other members of the

⁷⁴ Mikhail Borisov, "New Profile of Uzbek Reform," *Russian Press Digest*, Feb. 11, 1994.

⁷⁵ Pomfret, "The Uzbek Model..."

⁷⁶ "Karimov Defends His Policies Against Accusations of Strong-Arm Tactics," *BBC Monitoring*, June 12, 1993.

⁷⁷ "Karimov's Visit to Moscow; Friendship Treaty Signed," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, June 2, 1992.

Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), but Karimov balked when Russia demanded control of members' economic policies.⁷⁸ Had Karimov ceded economic power to Russia, he ran the risk of duplicating the old Soviet relationship between Uzbekistan and Moscow, in which the government in Tashkent was bypassed and regional elite groups were granted economic power in the republic. Karimov needed economic control not only to protect himself against domestic opponents, but also to make himself a relevant intermediary in bilateral relations with Russia. Karimov still believed close ties to Russia vital to Uzbekistan's economy, and the Uzbek government nevertheless remained committed to the idea of monetary union with Russia after the ruble zone's collapse.⁷⁹

By 1996, however, Islam Karimov's attitude toward close ties with Russia and the CIS had changed. Uzbekistan's Foreign Minister, Abdulaziz Komilov, said that Uzbekistan would not participate in CIS institutions that would centralize control over former Soviet states.⁸⁰ President Karimov voiced strong opposition to CIS centralization as well, saying that Uzbekistan's government would not hand over "even a particle" of its sovereignty to supranational CIS institutions.⁸¹

Karimov's aggressive protection of sovereignty developed alongside his inability to undermine regionalism in Uzbekistan. Throughout this entire period – and indeed throughout his entire term as president – Karimov was been forced to protect and balance (or at the very least to tolerate) the interests of powerful regions to maintain his position as president. Handing over any

⁷⁸ Geoff Winestock and Sander Thoenes, "Russia: Ruble Zone Fails After Only Two Months," *IPS-Inter Press Service/Global Information Network*, Nov. 3, 1993.

⁷⁹ Vera Kuznetsova, "Uzbekistan Remains Loyal To Ruble," *Russian Press Digest*, Nov. 6, 1993.

⁸⁰ "Foreign Minister Warns Against CIS Centralization," *ITAR-TASS*, Aug. 26, 1996.

⁸¹ Elmira Akhundova, "Aliyev And Karimov Have No Nostalgia For USSR Or Aspiration For 'Quadripartite Pact,'" *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, June 5, 1996.

of his power would have put him at great risk. Regional elite networks control important government ministries and economic resources, and Karimov has been unable to do little more than to guarantee that no faction gets too powerful.⁸² Tashkent's elite network controlled the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations, the tax inspectorate, and the general procurator in addition to playing a large role in many of the country's banks, import-export business, a chain of elite stores, and the largest bazaar. The Samarkand network, which was until fairly recently under the leadership of Ismoil Jurabekov, exercises considerable control over the state oil and gas company, much of the cotton trade, and many bazaars.⁸³ It has also been reported to have a role in the narcotics trade and to have made a fortune manipulating the differences between official and black market exchange rates. The Ferghana network received control of the National Bank of Uzbekistan and Ferghana province became the target of much of the state's investment in the Ferghana Valley. Regional networks also control security organs and regional and local governments often control the police forces in their territory, denying Karimov a monopoly of force.⁸⁴ Zokirjon Almatov, a member of the Samarkand network, which has become increasingly disenchanted with Karimov, controlled the Ministry of Internal Affairs and its force of about 86,000 men until his resignation in 2005.⁸⁵ Rustam Inoyatov controls the State Security Service.

⁸² Collins, 264-265.

⁸³ How much power the Samarkand elite currently have is a matter for debate. Those with links to Jurabekov still occupy important positions. For instance, the current head of Uzbekneftegaz, the state oil and gas holding company, is Abdusalom Azizov, a former deputy interior minister. The Interior Ministry was, until 2005, controlled by Zakirjon Almatov, a member of the Samarkand elite. Both Almatov and Jurabekov, who faced criminal charges and public attacks in the press in 2005 following his 2004 dismissal, are now private citizens. This network is still, one must assume based on the positions its members occupy, quite powerful. At the same time, it is protecting what it still has by being obedient. On press attacks on Jurabekov, see: Daniel Kimmage, "Analysis: An Uzbek Eminence Falls From Grace," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, Feb. 22, 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/02/19897784-aec5-4d7f-97d9-87e6f249296d.html?napage=3> (accessed April 30, 2007).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 274-275

⁸⁵ Prior to his resignation, Almatov's ministry was stripped of control of its troops. "Controversial Uzbek Interior Minister Resigns," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, Dec. 22, 2005,

While he does not have strong ties to either the Samarkand or Tashkent networks that dominate politics, he is aligned with Tashkent's elites.⁸⁶ These two ministries were openly hostile to one another with Almatov and Inoyatov at their heads, and that hostility sometimes spilled into the press.⁸⁷ Their competition with one another protected Karimov to a degree, but worry over power ministries outside of his control prompted the president to establish his own personal security service. Little is known about it, but it is presumed though to be directly controlled by the president.⁸⁸

Uzbekistan Moves West

In this atmosphere of enduring regionalism, Islam Karimov began to look beyond Russia and the CIS for international relationships. Efforts to spearhead the creation of a regional cooperation organization under the "Turkestan is Our Common Home" campaign fell flat.⁸⁹ Karimov's attempts to make Uzbekistan a valued partner of Western states yielded the minor success of military ties with NATO.⁹⁰ In 1999, Karimov joined Uzbekistan to GUAM, the partnership organization consisting of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova. Membership in the newly renamed GUUAM affirmed Uzbekistan's developing Western orientation and – like his efforts to build cooperation with other Central Asian states and a relationship with the West –

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/12/4bdd6821-cbd1-4ed0-b714-ca0e3c431aed.html> (accessed Feb. 18, 2007).

⁸⁶ Collins, 275; Gulnoza Saidazimova, "Uzbekistan: Islam Karimov vs. The Clans," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 22, 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/04/51d08217-f03f-4906-9cc7-6224a3cff08b.html> (accessed February 18, 2007).

⁸⁷ Alisher Ilkhamov, "Speculation Continues Over Appointment of New Uzbek MVD Chief, Resignation of SNB Chair Seems Inevitable," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Jan. 31, 2006, http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=414&issue_id=3602&article_id=2370725 (accessed February 18, 2007).

⁸⁸ Collins, 275.

⁸⁹ For more on the president's ideas on the matter, see: Islam Karimov, *Turkistan – nash obshchii dom*, (Tashkent: O'zbekiston, 1997).

⁹⁰ Marth Brill Olcott, *Central Asia's Second Chance*, (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution Press, 2005): 66-72.

offered Karimov the chance to enter into a relationship with states that both saw Uzbekistan as an equal partner and could offer backing to the Uzbek state.⁹¹ GUUAM did not meet Karimov's expectations, and he decided to withdraw from the organization in 2002 because it "failed to ensure an effective level of integration."⁹² Membership in GUUAM had failed to enhance Karimov's power against the forces of regionalism, and by the time he decided to leave the organization, he was in the early stages of a relationship with the United States that promised to greatly enhance the strength of the Uzbek state.

September 11th gave Karimov the chance to build the close relationship with the United States he had long sought.⁹³ After September 11th, Uzbekistan's government moved quickly to aid the United States. On October 5th, Islam Karimov offered to let the US military to base troops and aircraft in Uzbekistan for use in aid and rescue missions. Publicly, nothing was expected in return. A few days later, C-130 cargo planes arrived at the Karshi-Khanabad (sometimes referred to as K2) airbase outside of the southern city of Karshi carrying troops and equipment.⁹⁴ Offering the airbase was a significant foreign policy statement for Uzbekistan's government. The move placed it as standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the United States, at least rhetorically. The decision shocked many in Russia, where there were reports claimed that the US had offered \$8

⁹¹ "Uzbekistan Joins GUAM Alliance of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova," *Interfax*, April 25, 1999.

⁹² Vilor Niyazmatov, "Uzbekistan Pulls Out From GUUAM," *ITAR-TASS*, June 24, 2002. Uzbekistan did not fully quit GUUAM until just before the Andijan events of 2005, by which time both Ukraine and Georgia had undergone "color revolutions." From 2002-2005, Uzbekistan was not active, but stayed a member of GUUAM partially at the request of the United States.

⁹³ Shahram Akbarzadeh, *Uzbekistan and the United States: Authoritarianism, Islamism & Washington's Security Agenda* (New York: Zed Books, 2005), 57-61.

⁹⁴ C.J. Chivers, "A Nation Challenged: 2nd Wave of Troops Arrives in Uzbekistan," *The New York Times*, Oct. 7, 2001, 8.

billion worth of investment in Uzbek industry to secure a bridgehead that would create “a dramatic geopolitical change in Central Asia.”⁹⁵

The United States and Uzbekistan formalized their growing relationship with the signature of a declaration on strategic partnership and cooperation.⁹⁶ The document envisioned partnership on a broad range of shared interests. The two sides agreed that the inviolability of Uzbekistan’s borders and defense of the country’s “independence, territorial integrity, and sustainable development” were key factors to stability in the Central Asian region. They further agreed that it was impossible to separate Central Asian security from global security. The governments declared that “consistent implementation of democratic and market reforms in Uzbekistan” were integral “for ensuring political, social, and economic stability, sustainable development, prosperity, and national security.” The document also reaffirmed the partners’ commitments to international human rights agreements to which both parties are signatories.

The strategic partnership declaration clearly states the specific expectations of both sides. Uzbekistan agreed to a sweeping package of reforms. Uzbekistan’s government pledged democratization and political liberalization at faster pace. It committed itself to administrative reform and greater transparency. Uzbekistan’s government was also to implement a broad range of economic reforms to support growth and attract investment. The partnership agreement obligated the US to support Uzbekistan’s reforms and provide military training and equipment to bolster Uzbekistan’s ability to protect itself from outside threats.

⁹⁵ Vladimir Georgiyev, “Uzbekistan Sells Itself Off to Washington for 8 Billion Dollars,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Oct. 19, 2001, 1.

⁹⁶ U.S. Department of State, “Declaration on the Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework Between the United States of America and the Republic of Uzbekistan,” July 8, 2002, <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/or/2002/11711.htm> (accessed Feb. 16, 2007).

A close reading of the strategic partnership agreement reveals it as a simple exchange between the two sides.⁹⁷ The US government recognized the security of the Uzbek state as a matter of international security and gave tacit recognition to Uzbekistan's regional foreign policy ambitions.⁹⁸ The US also agreed with Uzbekistan that economics should be a priority in the relationship and offered to support Uzbekistan's government in seeking investment and in its dialogue with international financial institutions. The Uzbek government offered in return to implement human rights, political, and economic reforms in addition to supporting US foreign policy worldwide and allowing the use of K2 for operations in Afghanistan.

Islam Karimov's hopes for an expanded bilateral relationship with the United States were very high. Karimov sought a permanent US military presence from the United States when meeting with President Bush while in Washington to sign the strategic partnership agreement in March 2002.⁹⁹ Though he was not able to secure this, he did receive a pledge from the US in 2001 to support efforts of the Uzbek government to craft a foreign policy that would break it free from Russia's sphere of influence.¹⁰⁰ Karimov hoped the US relationship would prove lucrative. Prior to his departure to Washington to sign the strategic partnership declaration, Karimov made quite clear that Uzbekistan needed large sums of money to reform and that he expected close relations with the US to result in investments that would turn the economy around. He also stated

⁹⁷ U.S. Department of State, "United States-Uzbekistan Declaration on the Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework," May 12, 2002, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2002/8736.htm> (accessed Feb. 16, 2006).

⁹⁸ Akbarzadeh, 83.

⁹⁹ "Bush Reportedly Rejects Uzbek Request for Permanent US Military Presence," *BBC Monitoring*, March 13, 2002.

¹⁰⁰ Farida Harba, "US Aid to Uzbekistan to Greatly Expand Under Economic Cooperation Agreement," *Eurasianet.org*, Dec. 10, 2001, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/business/articles/eav121001.shtml> (accessed Feb. 18, 2007).

that Europe and Japan would surely provide assistance and investment shortly after the US.¹⁰¹ Karimov had some reason for such enthusiasm after receiving a massive one-time economic assistance grant in December 2001. In 2003, Uzbek officials again confirmed their hope that ties with the US would bring investment by brushing aside the importance of a significant drop in US aid, saying instead that what Uzbekistan needs are “real investments.”¹⁰²

“Real investments” were not in the cards for Islam Karimov’s government, however. The United States proved not to be the kind of partner that Karimov sought for his government. Due largely to the Uzbek government’s failure to reform its economy, no significant investments materialized. Additionally, investment that the US agreed to secure through international financial institutions never arrived.¹⁰³ And because continued direct US aid to Uzbekistan was implicitly contingent on the Uzbek government’s progress with human rights, political, and economic reforms, aid did not continue at such high levels. American diplomats often found themselves in the awkward position of having to criticize Uzbekistan’s poor human rights record on the one hand while on the other praising an important ally for what meager reforms it had made. For example, in a 2002 media roundtable in Tashkent, the US Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Lorne Craner both acknowledged that Uzbekistan had serious human rights problems while emphasizing that progress had been

¹⁰¹ “Uzbek Leader Calls For Closer Ties With Russia,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 9, 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/05/F3B5117D-BACA-4F1F-92DA-0EB4CB15F55C.html> (accessed Jan. 8, 2007). Sergei Blagov, “Karimov to the United States Seeking More Assistance and Investment,” *Eurasianet*, March 11, 2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/business/articles/eav031102.shtml> (accessed Feb. 1, 2007).

¹⁰² Timur Abdullaev, “Uzbekistan Maneuvers,” *Perspective*, June-July 2005, <http://www.bu.edu/iscip/vol14/Abdullaev.html> (accessed Feb. 12, 2007).

¹⁰³ Evgeniy Abdullaev, “Uzbekistan: Between Traditionalism and Westernization,” in *Central Asia at the End of the Transition*, ed. Boris Rumer. (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), 272.

made.¹⁰⁴ A year later at a Tashkent press conference, Craner and Elizabeth Jones, the Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, again praised Uzbekistan's progress while calling on it to meet its obligations under the terms of the strategic partnership declaration.¹⁰⁵ By 2004, the US message had shifted in favor of emphasizing criticism. The State Department decided that Uzbekistan's government had failed to make enough progress on aid and froze \$18 million in aid.¹⁰⁶ Assistant Secretary Jones reassured Tashkent that the US was still interested in cooperation with Uzbekistan, but criticized Uzbekistan's government a few days later, citing "no progress" on a number of reforms.¹⁰⁷ The State Department's continued criticism of the Uzbek government increasingly gave Uzbekistan more reason to drift away from its partnership with the US.¹⁰⁸

Each side misunderstood the other's hopes, expectations, and obligations regarding the relationship. US policy toward Uzbekistan vastly overestimated Karimov's ability to enact rapid economic and political liberalization. Assuming Karimov made the pledges to reform found in the strategic partnership framework in good faith, brisk liberalization would have threatened the power of regional elites. Policymakers in Washington did not understand that any liberalization Karimov instituted would require the removal of threats from regional competitors. US criticism that Karimov was not moving quickly enough forced him to choose between pleasing a

¹⁰⁴ U.S. Department of State, "Democracy and Human Rights in Uzbekistan," June 7, 2002, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/rm/11112.htm> (accessed Feb 2, 2007).

¹⁰⁵ U.S. Department of State, "Press Conference with Assistant Secretaries Jones and Craner," Nov. 10, 2003, <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2003/26275.htm> (accessed Feb. 2, 2007).

¹⁰⁶ Anne Penketh, "US Moves to Cut Off Aid to Uzbekistan," *The Independent*, July 14, 2004.

¹⁰⁷ Daniel Kimmage, "Analysis: U.S. Aid to Uzbekistan: Carrots and Sticks," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 22, 2004, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/07/39c081ce-2c0d-44e7-a26d-b1ac60b85fc2.html> (accessed March 10, 2007).

¹⁰⁸ T. Abdullaev.

disappointing ally and putting his own position at risk by upsetting regional elites of dubious loyalty.

The experience of the Uzbek government with currency reform illustrates how outside demands for liberalization collided with the interests of regional competitors. As noted earlier, those who were able to buy dollars at favorable government exchange rates were able to make a fortune. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) visited Tashkent in 2002 to assess the Uzbek government's progress with economic reforms which in turn would determine whether or not Uzbekistan would be eligible to receive large sums of IMF funding. Currency convertibility was the major issue on the agenda. The IMF noted that Karimov had long been promising to introduce full convertibility, but had been thwarted by those who had a stake in keeping the split rate system. By the time of the IMF visit, he had again failed to follow through on his pledge, and the IMF criticized his failure to make what they saw as the most pressing economic reform.¹⁰⁹ But Karimov had partially devalued the *so'm* by the time of the IMF assessment, and to make up for regional elites' loss of exchange rate manipulation as a source of income, Karimov offered a substitute. The president sealed Uzbekistan's land borders and closed Tashkent's bazaars, ostensibly to protect the country first from disease and then from low quality consumer goods. Bazaars around the country were also closed, eliminating cross-border and bazaar trade from competition with the retail sector, which was dominated by members of various regional elite networks. Essentially, Karimov was only able to partially achieve an

¹⁰⁹ Denise Albrighton, "Uzbekistan Could Lose Out With US Over Economy, Rights: Analysts," *Agence France Presse*, Sept. 26, 2002.

economic reform the IMF desired by substituting regional elites' opportunities for a particular form of corruption with a monopoly on trade.¹¹⁰

Karimov considered steps like these to be significant, and he had no choice but to refrain from too much liberalization in order to protect himself from domestic competition. From his perspective, the United States failed to follow through on what he understood to be promises of diplomatic and security support and economic aid and investment. Given Karimov's need for dependable allies to consolidate his position, he likely intended for the United States to be perceived by his domestic allies as a guarantor of his regime. The US did not comprehend the position that Karimov was in, and this failure to understand caused frustration with Uzbekistan to gradually build in Washington. The relationship seemed headed for collapse. All it needed was a trigger.

Andijan and the Return to Russia

The Uzbek government responded quickly to an armed uprising in Andijan on May 13, 2005, unleashing massive firepower on a crowd of mostly unarmed people in the city's Bobur Square in order to stave off what Islam Karimov characterized as an attempt to topple him from power in identical fashion to Askar Akaev's ouster a short time earlier.¹¹¹ Estimates of the death toll range widely from claims of thousands killed in the days immediately following the violence to current estimates of between the government's figure of 187 and outside figures of several hundred. The US was initially cautious in its response, but eventually joined European

¹¹⁰ Craig Murray, *Murder in Samarkand* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2006), 55-57.

¹¹¹ "Uzbek Leader Gives News Conference on Andijon Events," *BBC Monitoring*, May 15, 2005.

governments in calling for an international inquiry into the Andijan events.¹¹² At the end of July, the Uzbek government ordered the United States to vacate the Karshi-Khanabad airbase to protest the US role in evacuating Andijan refugees from Kyrgyzstan.¹¹³ The government of Uzbekistan eventually began criticizing both the US and European governments for playing a role in Andijan, showing how much the Uzbek government had soured on the West. The Uzbek prosecutor's office referred in a report to parliament to "screenwriters" orchestrating the Andijan events by coordinating an armed uprising with an "information war" executed by international NGOs and foreign media.¹¹⁴ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs called the removal of Andijan refugees from Kyrgyzstan another element of the "information attack" on Uzbekistan.¹¹⁵ Though officials never identify the "screenwriter," a June speech by Islam Karimov leaves little doubt that he believes that Western governments were behind the Andijan events.¹¹⁶

The exact nature of the Andijan events is still unknown. The Uzbek government has issued what it considers the final word on the matter – that Islamic radicals seeking to copy Kyrgyzstan's "color revolution" were to blame. There is some evidence to cast the events as a dramatic explosion of regional opposition to President Karimov and the center. The former *hokim* of Andijan *viloyat* was arrested in 2006 on the charge that he was responsible for planning

¹¹² Robert McMahon, "U.S. Renews Calls for Inquiry into Uzbek Events," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 25, 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/5/E4F60886-6EF2-4369-A9FD-C669046D7640.html> (accessed Feb. 3, 2007). Andrew Tully, "U.S. Urges Restraint in Uzbekistan," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 13, 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/05/206a58b9-86a7-43af-90ef-dd19201fca20.html> (accessed Feb. 3, 2007).

¹¹³ Thom Shanker & Steven Weisman, "Uzbeks Order U.S. From Base in Refugee Rift," *The New York Times*, July 31, 2005, 1. Ron Synovitz, "Uzbekistan: U.S. Confirms End of Air Base Agreement With Tashkent," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/07/f30ba0ce-ce97-47a1-9116-e27d25bbce8a.html> (accessed Feb. 4, 2007).

¹¹⁴ "Prosecutor's Office presents report on Andijan to Parliament commission," *UzA Uzbekistan National News Agency*, Sept. 7, 2005, <http://www.uza.uz/eng/news/?id1=5054> (accessed Jan. 15, 2007).

¹¹⁵ "Uzbek Foreign Ministry Statement," *UzA Uzbekistan National News Agency*, Aug. 1, 2005, <http://www.uza.uz/eng/news/?id1=4525> (accessed Feb. 1, 2007).

¹¹⁶ Islam Karimov, "Uzbek Leader Praises Professionalism of Journalists on Press Day," *BBC Monitoring*, June 27, 2005.

the uprising.¹¹⁷ Rustam Burnashev and Irina Chernykh recently argued that post-Andijon shuffling in the power ministries suggests the Andijon events were part of regional political struggles.¹¹⁸ Using that same approach, the aforementioned replacement of *hokims* across the Ferghana Valley *viloyats* since the Andijan events also suggests that the 2005 violence is perceived in Tashkent to show a regionally based threat to the center. It is impossible to make an airtight case that the Andijan events were an attack on the center orchestrated by regional elites. The above suggests that it has been at least partially perceived as such by Karimov. The shock of the attack underlined Karimov's need of external backers against his domestic competitors, and criticism of his response from the US emphasized that the US-Uzbek relationship had not met expectations.

With internal threats and disappointment with the West fresh in his mind, Islam Karimov rapidly accelerated Uzbekistan's drift toward Russia that had already started the year before. The Russian government uncritically backed the Uzbek government's characterization of the Andijan events.¹¹⁹ And in the following months, Russian political analysts offered support to Uzbekistan.¹²⁰ Diplomatic and security contacts flourished between the two sides, culminating in a strategic partnership document that cemented extremely close ties between the governments. The agreement proclaimed the Russian and Uzbek governments' shared desire for regional

¹¹⁷ "Vyvshii khokim Andijanskoi oblasti Uzbekistana obvinyatsya v organizatii sobytii 13 maya 2005 goda," *Ferghana.ru*, Oct. 10, 2006, <http://www.ferghana.ru/news.php?id=3641&mode=snews> (accessed April 20, 2007).

¹¹⁸ Rustam Burnashev and Irina Chernykh, "Changes in Uzbekistan's Military Policy after the Andijan Events," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (2007): 67-73, http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/CEF/Quarterly/February_2007/Burnashev_Chernykh.pdf (accessed April 30, 2007).

¹¹⁹ Igor Torbakov, "Uzbek Violence Deepens Russia's Central Asia Dilemma," *Eurasianet*, May 17, 2005, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav051705.shtml> (accessed Jan. 20, 2007).

¹²⁰ Julie A. Corwin, "Uzbekistan: Is Russia Helping Tashkent Clean Up After Andijon?" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 15, 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/07/892b3212-52f2-4e91-b68e-74eac613bdb8.html>, (accessed Feb. 10, 2007).

stability and Islam Karimov obtained the possibility of intervention from Russia to provide security assistance should his government be threatened by domestic unrest.¹²¹ Russian investment in Uzbekistan followed, building on an already high and growing trade volume.¹²² Gazprom agreed in January 2006 to invest \$1.5 billion to develop natural gas and oil extraction in Uzbekistan.¹²³ Overall, relations improved dramatically in the year after the Andijon events, and shortly before the first anniversary, Islam Karimov called for the alliance between Russia and Uzbekistan to grow.¹²⁴ And grow they have. The two states have expressed interest in bringing their political systems closer to one another's.¹²⁵ But the two sides have also realized more concrete growth. Uzbekistan's government recently announced plans to develop its energy sector and Russia's state-controlled energy companies have moved forward with plans to help the Uzbek government realize its goals.¹²⁶ The Uzbek government has also offered Russia's military the use of the Navoiy airfield under limited circumstances.¹²⁷

Russia's alliance with Uzbekistan has, however, hit some rough patches. Mutual dissatisfaction was voiced during Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov's visit to Tashkent in

¹²¹ Claire Bigg, "Russia, Uzbekistan To Sign New Accord," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, Nov. 14, 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/11/65fc169f-18c8-4206-8089-8ecac0d2155f.html> (accessed Feb. 18, 2007). Eric Marquardt & Yevgeny Bendersky, "Uzbekistan's New Foreign Policy Strategy," *PINR*, Nov. 23, 2005, http://www.pinr.com/report.php?ac=view_report&report_id=404 (accessed Feb. 17, 2007).

¹²² Daniel Kimmage, "Uzbekistan: Between East and West," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, Nov. 17, 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/11/92a6ac50-57bc-45c3-aa47-ab431761f85d.html> (accessed, Feb. 4, 2007). Press Service of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, "Uzbekistan & Russia – Allies," Nov. 14, 2005, <http://www.press-service.uz/en/gsection.scm?groupId=5203&contented=15435> (accessed Feb. 4, 2007).

¹²³ Martin Arnold, Christopher Condon, Sarah Laitner, Arkady Ostrovsky, and Tom Warner, "Gazprom to sign \$1.5bn gas deal with Uzbekistan," *Financial Times*, Jan. 26, 2006, 12.

¹²⁴ "Uzbek Leader Calls..."

¹²⁵ Daniel Kimmage, "Russia/Uzbekistan: Bringing Political Systems 'Closer Together,'" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, Nov. 22, 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/11/C6CC107E-8F39-4884-A733-A3640B5B8561.html> (accessed Feb. 18, 2007).

¹²⁶ Sergei Blagov, "Uzbekistan Harbors Energy Development Plans: Russia Ready to Help," *Eurasianet*, Feb. 15, 2007, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav021507a.shtml> (accessed Feb. 18, 2007).

¹²⁷ Stephen Blank, "An Uzbek Air Base: Russia's Newest Achievement in Central Asia," *Eurasianet*, Jan. 11, 2007, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav011107a.shtml> (accessed Feb. 12, 2007).

March of this year. The Uzbek government accused Gazprom of dragging its feet on investment projects in Uzbekistan and threatened to halt gas shipments to Russia. The Russian side complained about the difficulty of converting local profits to hard currency and delays in repatriating gains, among other issues.¹²⁸ Disappointment over a failure to invest was a feature of Uzbekistan's relationship with the United States, and, I argue, an indicator how important such investment is to enhancing the power of the central government over its domestic rivals. Interestingly, complaints about the inconvertibility of Uzbekistan's currency were also common during Uzbekistan's close relationship with the US. Put together, this suggests that the same domestic factors that shaped Karimov's foreign policy decisions during Uzbekistan's strategic partnership with the US are doing so in the relationship with Russia.

Though fissures are developing that may undermine the relationship, Uzbekistan's alliance with Russia has strengthened Karimov's position vis-à-vis his domestic rivals in two important ways. First and most importantly, Karimov has a possible external guarantor of his regime in the form of Russia's government. The Russian side agreed to intervene in the case of a domestic threat to the state only if they saw fit, but the possibility is important to Karimov. Possible Russian intervention increases Islam Karimov's perceived power against possible domestic opponents. Ties between Islam Karimov and powerful figures in Russia make Russian protection for his rule more than a mere possibility. For example, according to Former British Ambassador to Uzbekistan Craig Murray, Karimov's daughter, Gulnara Karimova has many

¹²⁸ "SMI Uzbekistana i Rosii o vizite M. Fradkova b Tashkent," *Ferghana.ru*, March 9, 2007, <http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=4966> (accessed April 3, 2007). Sergei Blagov, "Russian Economic Ties With Uzbekistan Hit Turbulence," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, March 8, 2007 http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2371978 (accessed April 3, 2007).

business ties with the ethnic Uzbek Russian oligarch Alisher Usmanov.¹²⁹ Both played an important role in brokering Gazprom deals to secure rights to Uzbekistan's natural gas, and Murray cites Karimova's business deals with Usmanov and others in Russia as a large part of the reason for the Uzbek government's drift away from the West and toward Moscow.¹³⁰ There are even rumors that the Russian government would like Usmanov to take up a leadership position in Uzbekistan.¹³¹ The second way in which relations with Russia improve Karimov's position is the wealth that comes to Uzbekistan through Russian investment. The new business deals between the two countries are a source of wealth for Karimov and his relatives. The resources these deals bring in also grant Karimov the wealth to build patronage networks loyal to him and to realign the existing patronage flows to being more closely tied to the central government.

The State of Play

The pact between regional networks that Karimov presides over has become less stable over time. Until recently low cotton and gold prices and an inability to attract investment in the energy sector reduced the resources available to divide among Uzbekistan's regional elites, exacerbating tensions between them. To stay on top, Karimov has tried to exclude leading figures in the networks from power and shuffled provincial officials regularly.¹³² Both high *hokim* turnover and the exclusion of potential threats to Karimov's power like Ismoil Jurabekov and Zokirjon Almatov indicate a widespread lack of loyalty to the state among Uzbekistan's

¹²⁹ Craig Murray, "Why the US won't admit it was jilted," *The Guardian*, Aug. 3, 2005 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,1541384,00.html> (accessed Feb. 24, 2007).

¹³⁰ Craig Murray, "Opposition Leader Tortured With Drugs," *Craig Murray – Writer and Broadcaster*, Oct. 30, 2005, http://www.craigmurray.co.uk/archives/2005/10/opposition_lead_1.html (accessed Feb. 4, 2007). Andrew Osborn, "Uzbekistan told US to close down airbase after gas deal with Russia," *The Independent*, Aug. 1, 2005.

¹³¹ Sergei Yezhkov, "Islam Karimov's presidency may end well before the date specified by the Constitution," *Ferghana.ru*, Oct. 6, 2005, <http://enews.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=1074> (accessed Feb. 6, 2007).

¹³² Collins, 270-271; Ilkhamov 2004, 169.

officials and elites and show that the president has a deep-seated distrust of all but those who are depend on and are particularly close to him. The mutual lack of trust among regional elite networks, and between the president and regional networks, has been and continues to be a defining feature of politics in Uzbekistan. In recent years, Karimov is reported to have increased the pace of *hokim* replacement, and his denouncements of removed officials often cite their “clannishness.”¹³³

Throughout this history of conflict between the center and the regions, most particularly the Samarkand and Ferghana elite networks, Karimov and the Uzbek executive appear to be gradually growing in strength, with the 2005 uprising in Andijon giving the center a powerful reason to bury its opponents once and for all. In the past two years, Ferghana looks to have entirely lost its independence from the center. Leadership positions in local and *viloyat* level governments in the Ferghana *viloyats* have been turned over to former members of the security services.¹³⁴ After the violence in Andijon, Rustam Inoyatov and the State Security Service came to occupy the preeminent position among Uzbekistan’s power ministries, further showing increased central power as Inoyatov is perceived to be more or less loyal to the Tashkent elite.¹³⁵ Even Karimov’s recent plans to increase the role of political parties are a sign of the center’s growing power. When he attempted to enact similar policies earlier in his tenure, he faced resistance from the regions. It is important to remember though that past resistance to an increased role for political parties in the legislature came in the years shortly after independence,

¹³³ Collins, 273.

¹³⁴ Ruslan Nagaev and Ulhom Ahmedov, “Security Service Veterans Rising to the Top in Uzbekistan,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, April 12, 2007, http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2372096 (accessed April 30, 2007).

¹³⁵ Roger McDermott, “Uzbekistan Fosters EU Contacts,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, April 10, 2007, http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2372087 (accessed April 30, 2007).

when Karimov was less powerful. In the current context, it makes sense for regional elites to bide their time and display obedience. Karimov is nearing the end of his final term as president, and even should he stay on as president, he is nearly 70 years old. The apparent quiet in Uzbekistan's regional politics since 2005 is neither a sign that Karimov has undermined regional elite networks nor that he has yet undermined the bases for the salience of region to politics. Instead, leaders of Uzbekistan's regional elite groups likely calculate that it is safer to wait either for Karimov's exit from politics or for a more auspicious time to resist. Regardless of whether or not Karimov steps down at the end of 2007, continued foreign policy incoherence as a result of regionalism should be expected in the future.

The trend in politics in Uzbekistan may be toward more executive control, but it is crucial to keep in mind that for all of the post-independence period, the center has perceived itself to be under great threat from domestic threats. From the beginning of his tenure in office, President Karimov has sought opportunities to enhance his power over regional elite networks. Recognizing the president's fears of regional elites and his motivation to reduce the salience of regionalism improves our understanding of Karimov's foreign policy decisions. Karimov sought foreign partnerships that brought with them investments and backing for his government's rule, enhancing his power over his domestic competitors. At the same time, he has avoided foreign policy decisions that could potentially undermine his power vis-à-vis regional elites.

In Uzbekistan, the state has constantly subordinated its foreign policy to its need to survive in competition with and undermine regional elite networks. Islam Karimov has sought opportunities to enhance the power of the Uzbek state, and he has failed to meet obligations to foreign partners when doing so would weaken him against his competitors. The history of

Kazakhstan's foreign policy since independence also bears marks of the center's need to defeat domestic competitors. However, in Kazakhstan, President Nazarbaev managed to supplant the regional and ethnic elite networks found at independence with new, easily managed, national elites. Not having to worry about regional elite groups the way that Karimov does, Nazarbaev is able to implement a more strategic foreign policy that is less shackled by the need to ensure state survival. The result of this is that Kazakhstan has emerged the more powerful of the two states in recent years.

KAZAKHSTAN

Political Competition in Kazakhstan

Nursultan Nazarbaev came to power in Kazakhstan in 1989, succeeding Gennadii Kolbin, a Slav with no ties to the Kazakh SSR prior to his appointment as first secretary of the republic's Communist Party in 1986. Gorbachev had appointed Kolbin believing his lack of ties in Kazakhstan would make him an effective agent for rooting out corruption, but Kazakhs perceived him as a repressive outsider bent on silencing Kazakh nationalism. Therefore, unlike Karimov, who came to power as a weak broker of others' interests, when Nazarbaev replaced Kolbin, he enjoyed public good will among Kazakhs. With changes in the Soviet Union quickening in pace, Nazarbaev immediately faced the need to find new sources of legitimacy to secure and enhance his power in the republic.¹³⁶ And with the collapse of the Soviet system, Nazarbaev encountered an even larger set of problems for his rule. On the surface, the tasks before Nazarbaev resembled the difficulties Islam Karimov faced in Uzbekistan. The power of regional elites undermined each president's hold on power. Upon closer examination though,

¹³⁶ Furman, 198.

Nazarbaev had to deal with a very different sort of regionalism in Kazakhstan. Whereas Uzbek politics were contested along fairly rigid regional lines, Kazakhstani political cleavages were both ethnic and regional. In the northern *oblasts*, the concentration of Slavs increased made the perceived threat of secession much more likely in Kazakhstan than in Uzbekistan. Nazarbaev was forced to deal with both regional and ethnic competition simultaneously. While it may seem that this made Nazarbaev's task more difficult, the added dimension of competition allowed him to "divide and conquer" Kazakhstan's elites. With those threats contained, he then undermined the bases for the reemergence of such threats by reorganizing territorial boundaries and the structure of the state, ultimately fostering the emergence of a new class of political leaders with closer ties to the president than to regional networks.¹³⁷

The contours of cleavages in Kazakhstan differ from Uzbekistan's in important ways. The multiple arenas of political competition in Kazakhstan make the political scene more chaotic than in Uzbekistan. However, the rigidity of the divisions in Uzbekistan's regional politics increases the stakes of upsetting the regional balance of power, especially for the central government. Bold moves that disrupt the status quo risk provoking hostility from unified regional elite groups. However, in Kazakhstan, unification within regions was not as strong as in Uzbekistan, nor was competition at the national level solely between regions. Ethnic elites competed with one another within regions, and ethnic leaders competed nationally. Regionalism was not as strongly built into Kazakhstan's politics, meaning that Nazarbaev had both less regional resistance to worry about than did Karimov, and more opportunities to convince elites to transfer allegiances to the center.

¹³⁷ Melvin 2001, 173-174. Melvin identified the containment of regional threats and the reorganization of territorial boundaries and the state as two distinct phases in Nazarbaev's fight against regionalism. The emergence of a national elite has occurred since Melvin's article was published and is discussed later in this essay.

In the early years of independence, President Nazarbaev did rule over a far less orderly political landscape than he does now. The northern *oblasts* had strong cross-border economic links with Russia in addition to being dominated by Russians who still viewed Moscow as the center. Elite network ties in northern Kazakhstan continued to run across the Russian border.¹³⁸ Economic reforms increased the autonomy of *oblast akims* (governors), and they played an important role in the realization of foreign investment projects.¹³⁹ Wealthy regions such as Atyrau and Almaty were displeased with what they perceived to be exploitation of their wealth by the center for the benefit of poorer regions.¹⁴⁰ Party politics reflected regional fault lines in politics. The parliament's pro-government faction hailed primarily from Kazakhstan's southern *oblasts*, and opposition parties tended to reflect regions with grievances against the center.¹⁴¹ Poor economic performance in the years following independence further added to the president's troubles. Falling public legitimacy and fault lines within the central elite required Nazarbaev to rely on provincial elites for legitimacy.¹⁴² In short, to consolidate and expand his authority, Nazarbaev had to contain ethnic and regional threats.

There were no serious indications of resistance to central authority from Kazakhstan's regions shortly after independence, but there were signs of potential trouble President Nazarbaev believed it necessary to counter centrifugal forces lest they become a problem in the future.¹⁴³ Nazarbaev's first goal was to eliminate the potential threats to the state posed by Kazakhstan's large Russian population concentrated in the northern *oblasts* of the country.

¹³⁸ Sally N. Cummings, *Kazakhstan: Centre-Periphery Relations* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2000), 26.

¹³⁹ Olcott 2002, 100.

¹⁴⁰ Cummings 2000, 22-23.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁴³ Olcott 2002, 97.

Our Common Home

The northern regions of the Kazakh SSR were closely tied to the regions across the border in the Russian SSR. Once the border between the two became an international boundary, the north's large Russian population's calls for their territory to become part of the Russian Federation made it seem very possible that Kazakhstan could lose a large, industrialized portion of its land. President Nazarbaev's response to this situation could not simply be a domestic matter. Russian nationalists just across the border in the Russian Federation supported their Russian nationalists in Kazakhstan, and any move perceived to be directed against the Kazakhstan's Russian population would almost certainly sour relations with Russia. In the early years of independence, ethno-regional domestic political competition shaped Nursultan Nazarbaev's foreign policy more than any other factor.¹⁴⁴

When Kazakhstan became independent, Russians accounted for more than half of the populations of two northern *oblasts*, and outnumbered Kazakhs in all but two of the remaining *oblasts* in the north.¹⁴⁵ For many years preceding independence, demographic trends indicated an eventual ethnic Kazakh majority in the SSR.¹⁴⁶ Throughout the republic as a whole, Russians made 36.4 per cent of the population. Ukrainians, German, and other populations who shared Russian fears over "Kazakhization" totaled another approximately 10 per cent.¹⁴⁷ Many Russians left Kazakhstan, but the response of many to "Kazakhization" was to move from southern

¹⁴⁴ Olcott 1996, 59.

¹⁴⁵ Robert Kaiser and Jeff Chinn, "Russian-Kazakh Relations in Kazakhstan," *Post-Soviet Geography* 36, no. 5 (1995): 260. Kaiser and Chinn provide percentages for a total of seven northern regions, six of which are *oblasts*. For the seventh region, they combined multiple *oblasts* in order to have a geographically comparable unit for which to compare population figures over time.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 259.

¹⁴⁷ Neil Melvin, "Russia and the ethno-politics of Kazakhstan," *The World Today*, Nov. 1993, 208.

oblasts to northern ones, resulting in a net increase in the Russian population of these *oblasts*, according to some data.¹⁴⁸ Even with the Kazakh portion of the population growing, the size, concentration, and strong cross-border ties of the Russian population in the north made the threat of secession an explosive political issue in Kazakhstan.¹⁴⁹

That Russians in Kazakhstan who viewed the northern *oblasts* as rightfully part of Russia found support in nationalist rhetoric in Russia worried Nazarbaev. The Russian government recognized the existing borders and Kazakhstan's territorial integrity in a friendship treaty signed between the two governments in 1992, and Boris Yeltsin reaffirmed Russia's respect for Kazakhstan's sovereignty and territorial integrity in 1996.¹⁵⁰ However, this did not stop Russian nationalists from offering support to Russians in Kazakhstan. Nationalist politicians called for the restoration of lost territories to Moscow's rule while more moderate Russian officials lobbied Kazakhstan's government on behalf of Russians living in Kazakhstan. Meanwhile, Russian newspapers carried reports on the plight of Kazakhstan's Russians.¹⁵¹

Nazarbaev had no choice but to mind the concerns of the Russian populations in Kazakhstan's northern *oblasts*. That the Russian Federation spoke on their behalf drove the point home and made his response both a domestic and foreign matter. He responded by calling for closer ties with Russia and by offering rhetorical support for a non-ethnic state identity while simultaneously quietly promoting the interests of Kazakhs. Nazarbaev sought to reassure Russian officials not only in Moscow, but also in regions on Kazakhstan's border, that discrimination against Russians did not occur in Kazakhstan and that he wished for closer economic ties across

¹⁴⁸ Reuel R. Hanks, "Directions in the Ethnic Politics of Kazakhstan: Concession, Compromise, or Catastrophe," *Journal of Third World Studies* 15, no. 1 (1998): 147-148. Kaiser and Chinn, 264.

¹⁴⁹ Olcott 1996, 60.

¹⁵⁰ Cummings 2000, 34; Hanks, 150.

¹⁵¹ Hanks, 150-154; Kaiser and Chinn, 268-269; Olcott 1996, 69.

a more easily-crossed border.¹⁵² The president reinforced this message in interviews with Russian journalists in which he pointed out that the two countries are economically linked, and therefore need one another. He used those interviews to also promote his message that the Kazakh government is responsible for protecting the rights of all its citizens regardless of their nationality.¹⁵³ Nazarbaev continued to promote a concept of civic identity uniting all citizens of Kazakhstan as Kazakhstani – ultimately prompting a backlash from many Kazakh nationalists.¹⁵⁴ Despite public rhetoric, Nazarbaev did little to give these nationalists much reason to complain. While proclaiming a civic identity for a new Kazakhstani nation, Nazarbaev took steps to promote the status of Kazakh language and culture. Meanwhile, his replacement of regional elites led to an increase in the number of ethnic Kazakhs in government at the expense of Russians.¹⁵⁵ Finally, the president decided to move Kazakhstan’s capital to Astana; a move that many believe he made to bring the northern regions under more direct central control.¹⁵⁶ In the end, the importance of the ethno-regional divide simply moved away from center stage. Nazarbaev reassured politicians in Russia that he intended no harm while building stronger ties with the regions immediately across the border. He gave them less reason to involve themselves in Kazakhstan’s politics. Meanwhile, he promoted a non-ethnic identity for all citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Over the years, stronger presidential control of the regions further reduced the risk of secession.

¹⁵² Hanks, 155.

¹⁵³ Ivan Vasilyev, “Sovereign Kazakhstan is Responsible for Other Nationalities’ Equal Rights – Nursultan Nazarbayev Sees Road to Prosperity in Unity,” *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, 1994: 15-16.

¹⁵⁴ William Fierman, “Kazakh Language and Prospects for Its Role in Kazakh ‘Groupness,’” *Ab Imperio* 2, 2005: 393-423.

¹⁵⁵ Kaiser and Chinn, 262-268.

¹⁵⁶ Cummings, 45.

The concentration of Russians in Kazakhstan's northern *oblasts* and its potential threat to the territorial integrity of Kazakhstan meant that regionalism was a central consideration in the early years of Nursultan Nazarbaev's foreign policy. Promotion of Kazakhstani identity worried ethnic Kazakhs, and cultural and political Kazakhization appeared to confirm Russian fears that the Kazakh government was making them into second-class citizens. However, building good relations with Russia and the promotion of Kazakhstani identity helped to reduce the importance of the ethno-regional divide to foreign policy by encouraging Russian politicians to reduce their role in the matter. Meanwhile, Nazarbaev's concentration of power, which rolled back regional autonomy across the country, further reduced the credibility of northern secession. As a result, before the end of Kazakhstan's first decade of independence, potential ethnic and regional opposition played a nearly nonexistent role in Kazakhstan's foreign policy.

Reshaping Elite Politics

Before the end of the first decade of independence, President Nazarbaev implemented a number of policies designed to undermine the power of regional elites, especially in what Melvin describes as the second phase of Nazarbaev's campaign against regional challenges.¹⁵⁷ Beginning in 1995, Nazarbaev launched an ambitious effort to weaken regional leaders by reorganizing the state. The center excluded regional actors from decisions on privatization and foreign investment, and it exerted control over regional budgets, delegitimizing regional elites in the public's eye by depriving them of the ability to meet their obligations to keep social welfare and education adequately funded.¹⁵⁸ In 1995, the executive's power grew significantly with the

¹⁵⁷ Melvin 2001, 174-175.

¹⁵⁸ Cummings 2005, 107.

dissolution of the old parliament and the introduction of a new constitution. The new constitution, in addition to extending Nazarbaev's mandate until 2000, formally identified Kazakhstan as a unitary state, concentrated power in the hands of a network of *oblast akims* who were directly subordinate to the president, and increased presidential control over executive institutions.¹⁵⁹ The new parliament included an upper house, the *Senat*, which ostensibly represents territorial interests as each *oblast* selects two members. In reality, the new bicameral legislature was subject to far greater presidential control and the legislative branch became a far weaker political institution. *Oblast* administrations (*akimats*), themselves extensions of Nazarbaev's power under the terms of the 1995 constitution, controlled regional election commissions and ensured the election of deputies preferred by the center. The *akimats* also manipulated the selection of *Senat* members, making the upper house, which already included seven members and a chairman selected by the president, more representative of central, rather than regional, interests.¹⁶⁰ The center further extended its control abolishing and consolidating *oblasts* on the grounds that this would increase government efficiency.¹⁶¹ This decision merged five *oblasts* into neighboring ones, but left alone the oil- and gas-rich *oblasts* in the west of the country out of fear that consolidating them would create potential future threats.¹⁶² The transfer of the capital from Almaty to Astana is often explained as a step to secure central control over the heavily Russian northern *oblasts*. However, it also strengthened Nazarbaev by allowing him

¹⁵⁹ Melvin 2001, 177-176; Cummings 2000, 7.

¹⁶⁰ Cummings 2005, 104-105; Melvin 2001, 177-178.

¹⁶¹ Cummings 2000, 8-10

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 44.

to extend his political patronage to the north and create economic patronage opportunities connected to construction in the new capital.¹⁶³

The president used his new powers to transfer power to the coalescing national elites. Personnel policy centralized government power in the executive and enhanced the powers of President Nazarbaev.¹⁶⁴ The president holds the right to appoint and dismiss *oblast akims* at will, and Nazarbaev has used this power to extend the reach of the central administration into the regions. Nazarbaev has appointed politicians with close links to him as governors of certain regions. He has further blurred the line between regional and national elites by promoting regional elites to central posts.¹⁶⁵ The president has also shuffled elites often, such that it is quite common for career paths to move back and forth between not just different parts of government, but also between government and business.¹⁶⁶ Nazarbaev has also created new patronage links to control Kazakhstan's elite.¹⁶⁷

The net result of Nazarbaev's attack on bases of independent regional power has been a far more powerful executive that dominates politics at the national and *oblast* levels, as well as the rise of a new national elite since independence. Nazarbaev-dominated politics has shrunk the size of Kazakhstan's political class, making it easier for the president to play quarreling elites off one another.¹⁶⁸ Nazarbaev's post-independence reforms divided the old Soviet elite into winners and losers. Economic reforms spawned new powerful actors who joined the surviving Soviet-era political elite to form a new group of national leaders.¹⁶⁹ Though new economic actors have

¹⁶³ Cummings 2000, 45; Olcott 2002, 107.

¹⁶⁴ Cummings 2000, 42-44.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 43.

¹⁶⁶ Cummings 2005, 112-114.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 110-112.

¹⁶⁸ Cummings 2000, 38-39.

¹⁶⁹ Olcott 2002, 92-93 & 171.

joined regional networks in the *oblasts*, politics is dominated by a small number of national elite groups close to President Nazarbaev and his family.¹⁷⁰ By the end of the first decade of independence, all political leaders were connected with the center, and the cleavages dividing the elite cut across regional, clan, and horde lines, instead following far more important lines of patronage.¹⁷¹ As time has passed, presidential preferences have come to be all that matter in Kazakhstan's politics.

Multivector Foreign Policy in the Post-9/11 World

As noted earlier, Nursultan Nazarbaev's foreign policy goals are for the world to know, love, and invest in Kazakhstan, and lacking regional threats, the post-9/11 world has presented him with plenty of opportunities. He has been remarkably successful in achieving his goals by balancing the interests of foreign actors in Kazakhstan and playing competitors for his favor off one another. The results have been economic growth in Kazakhstan, increased international power and standing for the Kazakh government, and more wealth and prestige for the president. The strategy promotes the president's personal interests as well as Kazakhstan's national interests, rather than those of a particular region or segment of the elite. Superficially, this would suggest a similarity with Islam Karimov's foreign policy. However, his leveraging of external actors against one another shows that Nazarbaev is willing to accept deferred, and probably larger, payoffs from deals with foreign partners, and that he does not seek the patronage of a foreign state. Were the president's domestic position less certain, it is likely that his policies

¹⁷⁰ Cummings 2005, 42-45.

¹⁷¹ Olcott 2002, 187.

would resemble Karimov's, which seek quick payoffs from an external sponsor. Nazarbaev has been able to execute such a foreign policy with an unfettered hand because the centralization of state and elite power affords him great power and autonomy.

Nowhere is Kazakhstan's multivector foreign policy more apparent than in negotiations over extraction and export of Kazakhstan's oil and natural gas reserves. Kazakhstan's existing pipeline infrastructure guarantees that most of the country's oil and natural gas must be exported through Russia. Nazarbaev's government knows that the development of other export options strengthens its bargaining position with Russia's energy companies, and foreign delegations visiting Astana almost always bring up proposals for new pipelines. To date, only one of these projects is operational – an oil pipeline to Western China. Kazakhstan's government has voiced support for other proposals, especially those involving transport across the Caspian Sea. Plans for shipping oil via Caspian routes take various forms, and the most recently favored plan in Astana is one that would ship high volumes of oil by barge to Baku, where it will enter the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline.¹⁷² Diversification has yet to be realized, however, and almost all of Kazakhstan's oil and gas still finds its way to customers through the Russian pipeline network. That should come as no surprise because agreements on or declarations in support of non-Russian export options or energy exploitation deals are typically coincide with meetings with Russian officials on energy issues, pressure from Russia, or the signature of new deals with Russian energy companies.¹⁷³ It is impossible to divine the intentions of the Kazakh government,

¹⁷² James Delly, "Kazakhstan Eyes New Oil Export Route Via Caspian Sea," *Eurasianet*, April 11, 2007, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav041107.shtml> (accessed April 12, 2007).

¹⁷³ Examples abound, but near the time that Kazakhstan recently reiterated interest in shipping large quantities of oil through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, it rejected joining pipeline project shipping oil to Europe that does not involve Russia in favor of one that does. See "Kazaks Opt for Bulgarian Pipeline," *News Briefing Central Asia*, April 11, 2007, http://www.iwpr.net/?p=bkz&s=b&o=334803&apc_state=henb (accessed April 12, 2007).

but this behavior yields generally good results. Threatening to export through non-Russian pipelines encourages the Russian government and Russian energy companies to conclude deals in Kazakhstan before foreign competitors do, and the both the operational oil pipeline to China proves that Kazakhstan will avoid shipping through Russia if it is in its interests.¹⁷⁴ Stalling on further deals with the West and China keeps them on a string and provides Nazarbaev with a credible threat to use in deals with Russia. This strategy keeps foreign actors on their best behavior with Nazarbaev and his government, boosting profits from the energy sector, limiting the ability of foreign governments and corporations to gain too much influence in Kazakhstan, and increasing the strategic and economic importance of Kazakhstan.

While Nazarbaev's use of oil and gas in foreign policy create wealth and power for both him and Kazakhstan, the cultivation of ties with the United States and European governments boosts Nazarbaev's prestige. Nazarbaev has aligned himself with Western governments in some surprising ways. For example, he sent a handful of troops from Kazakhstan's peacekeeping battalion, KAZBAT, to serve under Polish command in Iraq, where they performed demining and water purification missions. This was the first time that peacekeepers from Central Asia had served outside of their own region. The mission gave the troops valuable experience and made it easier for KAZBAT to participate in future peacekeeping missions. Nazarbaev faced strong opposition from members of Kazakhstan's parliament over the decision to send the troops, but despite this domestic opposition, the decision was worth it for Nazarbaev. It earned him gratitude

¹⁷⁴ This pipeline also shows that it may be in Kazakhstan's interest to try to maximize gains from exports through Russia until other export options are actually running. It took nine years from the time the sides agreed to build the Kazakhstan-China pipeline for it to start transporting oil. It will not be at full capacity until 2011.

and goodwill from the US government.¹⁷⁵ Kazakhstan's government has also leaned toward the position of Western governments on Iran, encouraging Iran to reconcile with the West,¹⁷⁶ and opposing its full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.¹⁷⁷ Nazarbaev has also sought closer ties with European states, offering to help them meet their energy needs with Kazakh oil and gas exported through pipelines avoiding Russian territory.

Nazarbaev's outreach to the West is not confined to dealing with Western governments only on matters of energy and security. The president has committed his government to gaining prestige for Kazakhstan. In spite of a few blunders that have made Kazakhstan appear humorless and ham-fisted, such as its anger in 2005 over the performance of British Sacha Baron Cohen as the fictional Kazakh journalist Borat at an MTV Europe awards show, efforts to raise the country's prestige have largely been successful.¹⁷⁸ One way that his government has done this in recent years is by targeting Western publics with advertisements promoting Kazakhstan's achievements. Advertisements have appeared in major American newspapers promoting Kazakhstan's achievements and its cooperation with the United States. The Kazakh government is a repeat customer of East West Communications, a firm that offers nation-branding services.

¹⁷⁵ Roger McDermott, "KAZBAT Deployment in Iraq Faces Uncertainty," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, May 21, 2004, http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=401&issue_id=2961&article_id=236748 (accessed Feb. 27, 2007).

¹⁷⁶ Marat Yermukanov, "Kazakhstan Seeks Iran's Reconciliation With The West," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, June 16, 2006, http://jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2371193 (accessed Feb. 27, 2007).

¹⁷⁷ Roger McDermott, "Kazakhstan Builds Partnership With Germany," *Central Asia – Caucasus Analyst*, May 31, 2006, http://www.cacianalyst.org/view_article.php?articleid=4243 (accessed Feb. 27, 2007).

¹⁷⁸ Kazakh officials threatened a lawsuit over the performance, and his website, which was hosted on Kazakhstan's .kz top level domain, was shut down. *RFE/RL Newslines*, Nov. 15, 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/newslines/2005/11/151105.asp> (accessed April 12, 2007). "Kazakhstan Suspends Website of British Comedian," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, Dec. 13, 2005, http://www.rferl.org/features/features_Article.aspx?m=12&y=2005&id=22B788AB-0EE7-4FC5-A444-A4E9DB5DBFB8 (accessed April 12, 2007).

The company helped Kazakhstan's government to promote its participation in Iraq,¹⁷⁹ its commitment to fighting nuclear proliferation,¹⁸⁰ and its religious tolerance.¹⁸¹ Many of the advertisements are designed to look like newspaper articles, giving the impression that the message they send is objective reportage.¹⁸² Video is also an important tool used for promoting Kazakhstan's image. Prior to Nursultan Nazarbaev's visit to the United States in 2006, advertisements promoting Kazakhstan as a leader in Central Asia ran on national television networks in the US during evening news broadcasts. Roman Vassilenko, the spokesman for the Kazakh embassy in Washington, DC, has proven himself quite web-savvy and created an account on the popular YouTube video sharing website to host this advertisement and other short videos promoting Kazakhstan.¹⁸³ The messages in these promotional videos – that Kazakhstan is a democratizing, economically vibrant, tolerant, bridge between Europe and Asia – also features prominently in Kazakhstan's bid to chair the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 2009.¹⁸⁴ Chairmanship of the body would serve as a signifier of Kazakhstan having achieved acceptance as more or less of an equal among Western governments. Therefore,

¹⁷⁹ Embassy of Kazakhstan to the United States & Canada, "Kazakh Troops Bring Peace to Iraq," newspaper advertisement (East West Communications), http://diplomatictraffic.com/kazakh_ad_2-1.pdf (accessed Feb. 27, 2007.)

¹⁸⁰ Embassy of Kazakhstan to the United States & Canada, "Kazakhstan, U.S. Expand Cooperation to Fight Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction," newspaper advertisement (East West Communications), http://diplomatictraffic.com/kazakh_ad1-1.pdf (accessed February 27, 2007).

¹⁸¹ Embassy of Kazakhstan to the United States & Canada, "President says Kazakhstan's Example Is the Way to World Peace," newspaper advertisement (East West Communications), <http://diplomatictraffic.com/Kazakhstan-Wash-Post-Oct-20.pdf> (accessed Feb. 27, 2007.)

¹⁸² Kazakhstan is apparently quite happy with this kind of promotion. East West Communications maintains a page of examples of its nation-branding advertising purchases in US newspapers. Fourteen of the examples, more than half, are advertisements for Kazakhstan. The website can be found at: http://diplomatictraffic.com/washington_post_reports.asp

¹⁸³ Mr. Vassilenko's account at which the videos can be found is at: <http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=rvasilenko> (Accessed February 27, 2007).

¹⁸⁴ Kassymzhomart Tokaev, "Address by H.E. Mr. Kassymzhomart Tokaev, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan at the 631st special meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council," Oct. 27, 2006, http://www.osce.org/documents/pc/2006/10/21876_en.pdf (accessed April 14, 2007).

Nazarbaev's government places high value on the chairmanship and other markers of prestige and acceptance as a member of the world's more powerful and respected countries. He has, for example, tasked his government with making Kazakhstan's economy one of the fifty most competitive in the world and many of Kazakhstan's athletic teams compete in European leagues to show where Nazarbaev thinks Kazakhstan belongs.

Kazakhstan's Elite Today

Though the national elite is small and managed carefully by President Nazarbaev, there are fault lines dividing various factions. None of these groups present a serious threat to Nazarbaev's position. As in Russia, the concept of the "Family" has caught on to describe the network of ruling elites surrounding the president.¹⁸⁵ These leaders consist of the president's kin as well as friends and other close associates, some of whom are not ethnic Kazakhs. The ruling class is divided further into factions centered on one or two powerful actors. In 2000, there appeared to be six to eight groups with state and economic power headed by individuals in the highest circles of power.¹⁸⁶ Five years later, the number of top-level elite groups is reported to have shrunk to four, with less powerful groups led by individual politicians and businessmen or less prominent presidential kin, followed by even less influential regional leaders also playing an active role in politics.¹⁸⁷ The most powerful elites are clients of the president, but they are competitors with one another. Leadership groups compete for Nazarbaev's attention and

¹⁸⁵ Furman 2005, 219-220.

¹⁸⁶ Sally N. Cummings, *Kazakhstan: Power and the Elite* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 42.

¹⁸⁷ Daniel Kimmage, "Kazakhstan: A Shaken System," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, March 3, 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/3/DB5B3199-34BD-4D3E-BD3F-8B74FC42000F.html> (accessed Feb. 25, 2007).

generosity.¹⁸⁸ Disputes sometimes become fierce. The aggressiveness of Nazarbaev's son-in-law, Rakhat Aliev, angered other members of the Family and led the president to twice "exile" him to ambassadorial posts in Austria.¹⁸⁹ The president plays the role of referee of these disputes. This role in turn reinforces his power over the political class by allowing him to play groups off of each other and constantly serving as a reminder that his rule guarantees that loyal elites' interests will be protected.¹⁹⁰

Today, President Nazarbaev faces little opposition. What opposition that does arise comes from within the de-regionalized post-independence political class.¹⁹¹ Economic reforms and foreign investments create opportunities for the formation of regional elite groups, but the presidential administration's dominance of both the political and economic spheres guarantees that regional leaders will be closely tied to and controlled by the patronage networks created by President Nazarbaev. The most powerful political actors are the handful of national networks close to the president. There are disagreements and occasionally nasty competition between these groups, but they all look to Nursultan Nazarbaev as the guarantor of their wealth and influence, and have in fact played an active role in constructing a highly centralized government and elite system under Nazarbaev's control.¹⁹² President Nazarbaev has had an ever freer hand in all spheres of policy making since Kazakhstan achieved independence.

¹⁸⁸ Dmitrii Furman, "The Regime in Kazakhstan," in *Central Asia at the End of the Transition*, ed. Boris Rumer (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), 221.

¹⁸⁹ Bruce Pannier, "Kazakhstan: Nazarbaev's Son-In-Law Sent To Austria Amid More Accusations," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, Feb. 22, 2007, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/2/99F4970E-84DC-447E-8521-ECC80A8DCD05.html> (accessed Feb. 22, 2007). Furman, 230-231.

¹⁹⁰ Kimmage 2006n.

¹⁹¹ For example, Nazarbaev's main opponent in the 2005 presidential election was former Majlis Chairman Zharmakhan Tuyakbay, and another prominent recent opposition figure was Altynbek Sarsenbaiuly until his murder by members of Kazakhstan's security services. His career prior to joining the opposition in 2003 included positions as mayor of Almaty, interior minister, and ambassador to Russia.

¹⁹² Cummings 2000, 48-51.

Though Nazarbaev can chalk up some of this success to political skill, he owes at least some of it to the nature of Kazakhstan's domestic political cleavages. The task before him was more complex than the one before Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan, but this complexity was an asset to Nazarbaev. Cleavages ran between nationalities, among regions, and within regions, contributing to more fluid political allegiances in Kazakhstani politics, more opportunities for the center to reshape the nature of political competition, and lower stakes, especially as time wore on, for attacking regionalism.

In recent years, and in contrast to Islam Karimov, Nursultan Nazarbaev has not had to worry much about regional cleavages when formulating his foreign policy. He has easily managed competition among de-regionalized elite groups, and his policies have shown no mark of concern over domestic political competition. However, in the early years of Kazakhstan's independence, Nazarbaev's largest foreign policy challenge was how to deal with the large Russian population in Kazakhstan's northern *oblasts* – a challenge that was entirely about domestic cleavages. With these threats gone, Kazakhstan's current foreign policy bears marks of its crafter's independence and power. Nursultan Nazarbaev is almost entirely free of restraints or considerations such as competition from regional or national elites.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Above, I have argued that in both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the nature of domestic political competition has had a profound influence on the foreign policy decisions of each country's president. For almost the entire period since independence, rigidly divided and very powerful regional elite networks have been a threat to Islam Karimov. His foreign policy decisions have reflected his worries about the position of both he and his allies in the Tashkent

elite. He has therefore entered into close partnerships with first Russia, then the United States, and then again with Russia in search of external patrons who could offer him both the ability to credibly claim an external guarantor of his regime against domestic foes and investments that would allow him to build an elite class reliant on the state for its power. In Kazakhstan, President Nazarbaev initially faced what he perceived to be grave ethno-regional threats to Kazakhstan's territorial integrity. But because Kazakhstan's domestic politics were initially contested along both ethnic and regional cleavages at three levels, he has had a much easier time dismantling the threats of elite networks to his rule. In the early years of independence, he worked domestically to contain ethno-regional threats, and his foreign policy exhibited his concern over the loyalties of Kazakhstan's northern *oblasts*. In the mid-90s, Nazarbaev began to dismantle the bases for ethnic and regional political identities and to create an elite class dependent on the state. Kazakhstan's elite groups squabble among themselves, but none challenge the president, as he is the source of all political power in Kazakhstan. Nazarbaev's foreign policy decisions now show few signs of presidential concerns over domestic challengers. Unlike Karimov, who seeks quickly realized investment and external security guarantees from allies, Nazarbaev chooses to keep Kazakhstan friendly with – but not too close to, multiple foreign partners – and to defer the possibility of immediate investment for the chance at better deals for Kazakhstan down the road.

One of the more important outcomes of the differences between the two president's foreign policy strategies is that they have yielded unexpected outcomes in the perceived balance of power in Central Asia. Early analyses predicted Uzbekistan would become the most powerful state in Central Asia and the anchor of regional stability. Kazakhstan, though, is the state that has emerged in the last few years and the perceived leader among Central Asian states, and it is

relating to at least some of its neighbors in the region as a source of stability and advice on good governance. For example, President Nazarbaev recently paid a visit to Kyrgyzstan, where he instructed his Kyrgyz counterpart, Kurmanbek Bakiev, to focus on economic development to reduce the severity of Kyrgyzstan's political crises. Nazarbaev told Bakiev that if Kyrgyzstan emulated Kazakhstan's policies, then Kazakhstan would invest billions of dollars into the Kyrgyz economy.¹⁹³ A failure to appreciate the differences between and the significance of regionalism in the politics of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan caused observers in the first years of independence to underestimate Kazakhstan's potential and overestimates the amount of international prestige and power Uzbekistan was likely to achieve.

Regionalism and Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Space

Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are not the only post-Soviet states in which regional divisions among political elites have shaped foreign policy. My argument – that competition from and among regional political networks reduces the state's foreign policy options and increases the odds of sudden foreign policy shifts – applies to other post-Soviet states as well.

In Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akaev came to power in a pact among elites much like Karimov did.¹⁹⁴ Also as in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan's political elites are rigidly divided along the axis of geographic region. In Kyrgyzstan, however, Soviet policy strengthened the rivalry between northern and southern regions while also fostering competition among northern *oblasts*.¹⁹⁵ President Akaev used political appointments to reduce tensions among northern regions, and the

¹⁹³ Joanna Lillis, "Nazarbayev Flexes Diplomatic Muscle During Visit to Kyrgyzstan," *Eurasianet*, May 1, 2007, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav050107.shtml> (accessed May 1, 2007).

¹⁹⁴ Collins, 125-128.

¹⁹⁵ Jones Luong, 74-82.

north-south regional split remains the most relevant to Kyrgyzstan's politics today.¹⁹⁶ Akaev's ability to manage regional competition diminished during his time in office. In 2005, protests against him were fiercest in the south, and after he fled the country, a southerner, Kurmanbek Bakiev, replaced him. Bakiev entered office weak, and immediately faced regional tensions. Thousands of squatters mostly from southern Kyrgyzstan seized land near Bishkek, spurring anger from northerners.¹⁹⁷ In need of external support to strengthen his position, Bakiev seemed unable to decide which way to lean.¹⁹⁸ He bowed to Russian and Chinese pressure to call for negotiations with the United States on the closure of its airbase in Kyrgyzstan. The base proved too potentially lucrative for Bakiev, however, and he instead demanded more money for the base, securing a large aid and rent package for continued use of the airfield. As mentioned earlier, Kazakhstan is a potentially important source of support for Bakiev and investments for Kyrgyzstan. But because regional cleavages are of a different nature and much more salient in Kyrgyzstan than in Kazakhstan, it is almost certain that Bakiev will not be able to meet Nazarbaev's conditions for investment. While Bakiev's foreign policy may superficially seem to be a copy of Kazakhstan's multivector foreign policy, its failure to fully gravitate toward any pole is far more likely a result of the pressures of regional competition among political elites.

The effects of regionalism on foreign policy can be seen in post-Soviet states beyond Central Asia. In Ukraine, foreign policy is a battleground for political elites from the country's east who want to maintain close ties to Russia and leaders from the west who want to cultivate

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 82.

¹⁹⁷ Antoine Blua, "Kyrgyzstan: Authorities, Bishkek Residents Alarmed at Land Seizures," *RFE/RL*, April 15, 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/04/998333f7-5566-4ffa-bcfb-61301739ac53.html> (accessed May 15, 2007).

¹⁹⁸ Gulnoza Saidazimova, "Kyrgyzstan: What Will Be New Government's Domestic, Foreign Policies?" *RFE/RL*, July 12, 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/07/ca28cb36-daf6-44a3-ba2f-7935e7e0f5ad.html> (accessed May 15, 2007).

ties with the United States and the European Union. President Viktor Yushchenko proclaimed his intention to move Ukraine toward NATO and the EU. Official statements showed inconsistency even before the pro-Russian eastern leader Viktor Yanukovich became Prime Minister in August, 2006. Though Yushchenko favored integration with the West, he voiced support for maintaining friendly relations with Russia, while other officials announced Ukraine's opposition to abandon certain ties with Russia, such as membership in the Single Economic Space.¹⁹⁹ After Yanukovich became Prime Minister in 2006, Yushchenko was at pains to convince the West that Ukraine still intended to join NATO and the EU.²⁰⁰ Staying on a Western course has become much more difficult, however, as Yanukovich has inserted himself and the parliament into foreign policy making, reversing course on NATO policy and revoking the Yushchenko's right to appoint the foreign minister.²⁰¹ Given Ukraine's deep regional divisions and the severity of the conflict between the east and west of the country, regionalism will continue to shape Ukrainian foreign policy for the foreseeable future.

Implications for Western Foreign Policy

Academics and analysts have not been the only ones to fail to recognize the importance of regionalism to foreign policies of Central Asian states. With regionalism all but eliminated in Kazakhstan's politics, foreign governments can be fairly confident that the central government is in control and can deliver on promises. But with Uzbekistan, where regional concerns have

¹⁹⁹ Valentinas Mite, "Ukraine: Official Misstatements Show Lack Of Unity In Foreign Policy," *RFE/RL*, Aug. 23, 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/08/fc12f167-6668-4c8b-a2bc-d760eab5d72c.html> (accessed May 15, 2007).

²⁰⁰ Ron Popeski, "Ukraine President Says Foreign Policy Still on Course," *Reuters*, Nov. 13, 2006.

²⁰¹ Marc Champion, "In Ukraine, a Friend of Russia Stages Sweeping Political Makeover," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 15, 2007, page A1.

played a very large role in informing foreign policy decisions, Western governments' insensitivity to the nature of Uzbek politics has contributed greatly to a souring of relations. The West cannot use a cookie-cutter approach to relations with governments in the former Soviet Union, and particularly not with those in Central Asia. For governments like Uzbekistan's, the most important task is the consolidation of the state's power. Because Western governments failed to recognize the fractured political nature of Uzbekistan, they spoke in different terms than did the Uzbek government. The West viewed liberalization a matter of Karimov's will, while Karimov worried that calls for him to rapidly reform Uzbekistan's politics and economy were a way to undermine his authority, especially in the wake of the "color revolutions."

Should Western governments reengage with Uzbekistan, they should not bend over backwards to please the Uzbek government by downplaying the seriousness of its human rights abuses. The German government, currently holding the EU presidency, has been pinning great significance on human rights dialogue with Tashkent even as the Uzbek government has been arresting journalists and human rights activists in a new round of crackdowns.²⁰² However, should the US and European governments start to form new relationships with Uzbekistan, they would be well advised to craft policies that recognize that, despite appearances to the contrary, its Soviet past left the Uzbek government weak and in need of resources and assistance that will help it undermine regional threats to stability. In fact, because Soviet policy has left some of its other successor states susceptible to different manifestations of regionalism, sensitivity to the limiting effects of regionalism on state effectiveness should be central to Western engagement throughout the region. After all, Kazakhstan's successes are in large part due to the government's

²⁰² Ahto Lobjakas, "EU: Drive for Central Asia Strategy Could Shape Uzbekistan Policy," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 20, 2007, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/4/db0c0318-3aa9-4de9-ace7-71c5e5c5d93b.html> (accessed April 21, 2007).

ability to subdue regionalism's threat. The task before the Uzbek government is more difficult and still incomplete.

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