Foreign Policy Orientation of Independent Central Asian States: Looking Through the Prism of Ideas and Identities

Alina Nomerovchenko, Jaechun Kim, and William Kang

Since the Soviet dissolution in 1991, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have promoted the most active foreign policies in the region. From a wide perspective, they both have much in common. They both were under Russian domination along with being ruled by their respective irremovable leaders. Despite all those commonalities, they both have taken different foreign policy paths. This article explores and discusses the interconnection between national identity and foreign policy construction in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan by examining comparatively at the driving forces through which the regimes adopted identities based upon historical narratives of their demographics that have led to the formation of divergent foreign policies (Uzbekistan's unilateralism and Kazakhstan's multilateralism). This article adopts the constructivist approach to answer the puzzle, where the theory delineates the connection and pertinence of national identity to foreign policy because the process of identifying the contrast of "self" and the "other" is socially constructed.

Key Words: national identity, foreign policy, constructivism, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan

In 1991, the Soviet Union's dissolution transmuted the world map; such that the incipient Central Asian states faced many challenges and their foreign policy building have been one of the most laborious undertakings, as each has tried to gain its national interests and to improve its international status. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have promoted the most active foreign policies in

*Alina Nomerovchenko, Master of International Relations, Graduate School of International Studies, Sogang University, email – ids_alina@mail.ru

**Jaechun Kim, Professor of International Relations, Graduate School of International Studies, Sogang University, email – jaechun@sogang.ac.kr

***William Kang, Master of International Relations, Graduate School of International Studies, Sogang University, email – williamkang84@gmail.com

the region. From a wide perspective, both states have much in common. They both were under Russian domination for 150 years, and Russian remains the lingua franca of Central Asia. Historically, both ethnic Uzbeks and Kazakhs originated from a similar genetic makeup of Turkic and Mongol tribes. They both gained independence in 1991, and afterward, for 25 years, irremovable leaders (President Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan and President Nursultan Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan) have ruled these countries, where both subscribe to the principles of non-interference into their regimes' affairs. Despite all those commonalities both states have taken different foreign policy paths. Uzbekistan has adopted a foreign policy with a more unilateral approach, while Kazakhstan's foreign policy orientation has embraced multilateralism.

Thus, the puzzle is why the nascent independent Central Asian states, under the same international condition, have built their foreign policies in different ways? When scholars analyze foreign policy formation, the focus has been on the region's international environment and structure, and most existing studies from international relations (IR) focus on the strategies of big powers toward Central Asian states and vice versa (Brzezinski 1997; Cornell 2007; Dawisha 2015); those studies minimized the post-Soviet states' internal situations. For Central Asians, the chief threats are not the powerful states, but rather internal opponents to the regime, or more generally, the potential failure of internal development and prosperity (David 1991; Neuman 1998). John Ruggie (1998) emphasizes that these "material" approaches have always minimized the role that ideational factors play in the social world. These post-Soviet states have the inclination toward ideological and internal instability while undergoing nation-building, such that they "have led to a powerful role of ideas, identity and symbols" (Jones 2004, 85) in Central Asia. Linking identity to foreign policy research is nothing new, where some scholars focused on such analyses (Chafetz, Spirtas, and Frankel 1998; Fawn 2004).

In this regard, this article explores and discusses the interconnection between national identity and foreign policy construction in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan by examining comparatively at the driving forces through which the regimes adopted identities, based upon historical narratives of their demographics that have led to the formation of divergent foreign policies (Uzbekistan's unilateralism and Kazakhstan's multilateralism). Furthermore, to answer this puzzle, the domestic-level variables are given attention, rather than relying on structural IR theories that are insufficient in explaining the small states' foreign policy behaviors. This article adopts the constructivist approach by using secondary sources to discuss identity politics, where the theory delineates the connection and pertinence of national identity to foreign policy because the

process of identifying the contrast of “self” and the “other” is socially constructed (Johnston 1995). After discussing the theoretical framework, identity construction of post-Soviet Central Asian states, the case studies on Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan’s foreign policies, and concluding remarks are in order.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF DIVERGENT FOREIGN POLICIES OF CENTRAL ASIAN STATES

Regarding Central Asian states like Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, the earlier studies which have taken into account the domestic factors highlighted the variables of natural resources, the legal institutional aspects, and the personal characteristics of countries’ leaders (Abazov 1999; Olcott 2002; Kazemi 2003; Lee 2010). The works of Luca Anceschi (2010; 2014) focus on the Central Asian regimes’ manipulation of foreign policies to guarantee regime survival along with a state’s “propagandistic exploitation” of foreign policy to increase population compliance to the regime. While, Bernardo Teles Fazendeiro (2017) focuses on the nature of Uzbekistan’s foreign policy, which adopted a “defensive self-reliance” strategy for international engagement purposes. Although these works are great contributions to the study of foreign policy behaviors of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, this article looks at the domestic factors that are not related to resources or legal institutions. Instead, this article looks at how and why the regimes promote particular national identities based on the demographics that will result in certain divergent foreign policies. Based on the demographics, such national identities carry historical narratives and this article attempts to examine the origins and mechanisms that influence foreign policy behavior and implications.

National identity is generally conceptualized within national boundaries by communities as a sense of shared common history and culture which strengthens social stability, such that it is the prerequisite for any government to develop its economy, governance, and social welfare (Chou 2010, 74). National identity can overlap with and has implications for state identity (Matsumura 2008, 3), can mirror sub-national identity (Lee 2010, 53), and identity is one of the crucial factors to understand how a state’s domestic realm interacts with global politics (Hopf 1998, 192). For newly independent states, it is arduous for leaders building and promoting common national identities, since they need to reinforce social cohesion in societies that are divided by ethnic, religious, and various social lines (Chou 2010, 74). For Central Asia, such promotion of national identity by the central authorities must resonate with the masses to

give support for the legitimate government. History offers resources to construct national identity (Wertsch 2002).

Theoretically, a newly independent nation-state's foreign policy behavior that aims to promote both domestic and international goals will hinge upon its national identity. Also, such national identity uses a historical narrative to augment social cohesion, such that the population in return offers a support base, which gives the regime the capacity for governance and other legitimate political activities and purposes. The choice of national identity also depends upon the specific demographics within the state, which also implies that the model and compatibility of a historical narrative are of paramount importance. In regard to the post-Soviet states of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, they both share the same international condition of becoming newly independent nation-states after the Soviet dissolution. Even though both states had irremovable leaders, they emerged with divergent foreign policies. Table 1 below shows the divergent foreign policies of the two post-Soviet states.

Table 1. Divergent Foreign Policies of Central Asian States

Post-Soviet States	Conditions	Outcomes
Uzbekistan	Soviet Dissolution	Unilateralism
Kazakhstan	Soviet Dissolution	Multilateralism

When the state demographics are heterogeneous, multiple ethnicities are residing within that state. The regime cannot promote one ethnicity over others, because ethnic tensions can arise domestically within that state and if a specific ethnic group has ties with another state that can bring about foreign policy challenges. The historical narrative must fit with the promotion of a national identity that does not prioritize one ethnicity while subordinating other ethnic minorities. National identity will ipso facto be a non-ethnonational identity that focuses on the civic aspect of nationalism, such that the regime will promote a historical narrative to fit that condition. The foreign policy behavior of a heterogeneous state, due to the conditions stated, will promulgate a foreign policy behavior in tune with multilateralism. Multilateralism is defined as “the practice of coordinating national policies in groups of three or more states” (Keohane 1990, 731). Unilateralism, by contrast, refers to a state opting out of the practice of coordinating national policies with three or more states, and that state can act alone to address a particular challenge without the need of collective action. A state adopts multilateralism so that it does not gain a negative reputation for its domestic affairs from international actors and

negative consequences it can reap from such reputation or from the ties that a subordinated ethnic group has with another international actor. Kazakhstan fits the bill of a heterogeneous state. Table 2 below shows what constitutes the foreign policy process of a heterogeneous state.

Table 2. Foreign Policy Process of the Heterogeneous State

Condition	Outcome
The demographics of this state are heterogeneous, and the state adopts a non-ethnonational identity that focuses on the civic aspect of nationalism	The heterogeneous state's foreign policy behavior corresponds with multilateralism to maintain demographic stability

In contrast, when state demographics are more homogeneous, the state has an ethnic group that is overwhelmingly the majority within that state. The regime can promote an ethnonational identity successfully with a historical narrative that fits the ethnonational character of the demographics. There are two pathways that a homogeneous state could take regarding its foreign policy behavior. When the homogeneous demographics of that state are more congruent, in other words, when there are relatively little to no regional, tribal, or clan tensions, then the homogeneous state will promulgate a foreign policy behavior that is consistently more unilateral. However, the unilateral actions of the homogeneous state do not compare to the unilateral actions of the United States; furthermore, the homogeneous state will not risk global isolation. On the other hand, if the state demographics are homogeneous and incongruent, the foreign policy behavior of that state will display limitations and be reactionary to certain political shocks. In other words, an inconsistent unilateral foreign policy exposes the behavior of the regime or leader that prioritizes political survival from domestic and/or international threats, such that the foreign policy of that state will be drastic and sudden due to finding international partners that can support the regime or leader to stay in power. Table 3 below shows what constitutes the foreign policy process of a homogeneous state in two causal pathways, where Pathway A represents the homogeneous state with congruent demographics and Pathway B represents the homogeneous state with incongruent demographics. The case of Uzbekistan will follow Pathway B.

Table 3. Foreign Policy Process of the Homogeneous State in Two Causal Pathways

Pathway Scenarios	Conditions	Outcomes
Pathway A	The state demographics are homogeneous and congruent, the state adopts a compatible ethnonational identity	The homogeneous state's foreign policy behavior corresponds with unilateralism that is more consistent and independent
Pathway B	The state demographics are homogeneous and incongruent, the state adopts a compatible ethnonational identity	The homogeneous state's foreign policy behavior corresponds with unilateralism that is more inconsistent and reactionary due to political shocks

IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF CENTRAL ASIAN STATES AFTER INDEPENDENCE

NATIONALISM, “DE-SOVIETIZATION,” AND REVIVAL OF UZBEKISTAN AS A “GREAT STATE”

Uzbekistan with its deep cultural and historical roots was the most capable country in the region to utilize a plethora of tools and sources to construct its strong national identity by deriving from the rich cultural background and past legacy. The country’s historical heritage dates back to the Shaybanid and Timurid Dynasties in the 15th and 16th centuries. After the Russian occupation of Central Asian territories, the Uzbek tradition and community underwent Tsarist Russian and further Soviet engineering; however, due to their sedentary lifestyle, the Uzbeks were able to maintain many traditional ways of living, especially they were able to practice the religion of Islam. Right after independence, the revival of Islamic culture was a significant part of Uzbekistan’s national-building process promoted by elites through national policies. For instance, President Karimov restored religious places and mosques and allowed citizens to freely practice the religious holidays. He performed his pilgrimage to Mecca for the sake of being seen as a devout leader to the Uzbek community. The ruling elite regarded Islam as a source of culture and instrument to court popular support (Everett-Heath 2003, 143). During the early years of the post-independence, ideological and physical security threats plagued Uzbekistan, such that they were the main policy agenda for the new government (Horsman 2005, 199). The year before the Soviet dissolution, Karimov publicly expressed dismay over the Soviet Union’s animus and censorship over the beliefs and institutions of Islam by stating: “I must say that the gravest crisis that has befallen us is not economic

but moral. The consequences of the destruction of age-old moral principles for ideological reasons will be far more difficult to overcome than the chaos in the economy” (Berger 1991, 30). Furthermore, Karimov (2008) articulates that an absence of ideology poses danger to the survival of the new state by stating: “The ideological landfill is ten times more powerful than the nuclear test site and the lack of ideological immunity will lead to chaos.”

The regime fastidiously chose symbols and national figures in pursuance of constructing Uzbek national identity. First, the regime placed the crescent moon on the national flag which represented the symbol of Islam in the Uzbek nation’s identity. The other Central Asian states, such as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were vague, for they did not have conspicuous symbols emphasizing Islamic culture on their flags. Also, when comparing the effect of the religious factor in the national identity of Uzbekistan to that of Kazakhstan, it is possible to see important differences. While the multi-ethnic structure of the Kazakh people restricted the impact of religious identity, the mono-ethnic and mono-confessional nature of the Uzbek society enabled the strong impact of religion in Uzbekistan’s identity (Yereshkeshava 2008, 585). Another aim of Uzbekistan in reviving the Islamic religion was to distinguish itself from being Russian, by eliminating remnants of the Soviet past right after the USSR dissolution. The Tsarist and Soviet past are openly depicted as destructively oppressive, where they deprived the Uzbeks of their freedom and independence (Juraev and Faizullaev 2002, 3).

Throughout the country villages and streets named after socialist heroes have been revamped with new Uzbek labels. Concomitantly, this process has also included the transformation of public spaces. In 1992, the regime removed the statue of Lenin from the central square of Tashkent and the area itself was renamed Independence Square. Soon afterward, in 1993, the regime removed the Karl Marx monument to give way to the huge statue of Amir Timur (Tamerlane), and three years later the regime exalted Tamerlane’s status by honoring him with a museum commemorating his 660th anniversary (Finke 2014, 55). “If somebody wants to understand who the Uzbeks are,” President Karimov said in words immortalized on the Tashkent museum walls, “if somebody wants to comprehend all the power, might, justice and unlimited abilities of the Uzbek people, their contribution to global development, their belief in the future, he should recall the image of Tamerlane” (McMahon 1999).

The Uzbek government has undergone de-Sovietization and revision of state history by promoting Tamerlane as a national hero. The regime has introduced the study of the Timurid Empire in Uzbekistan at all levels of public education and cultural life; moreover, they named streets, schools, public organizations,

administrative districts, and even a state medal after Tamerlane. With calculated timing, the regime deliberately chose Tamerlane's birthday to be annually celebrated starting from 1996; the holiday was significant enough to be published in an article by an Uzbek news agency (Jahon Informational Agency 2004). According to Juraev and Faizullaev (2002, 166), "remembering him [Tamerlane] is very important for the creation of a democratic state, which should get its honorable place in the international community," and for the "fulfillment of the future of Uzbekistan is a Great State idea." Furthermore, national holidays are generally utilized by states as visible expressions of national identity (Spillman 1997).

The first reason the regime gives preference to Tamerlane is due to his legacy of creating an empire by conquest and consolidating dispersed Uzbek tribes. When summarized, this leads to the conclusion that Tamerlane has become an ideological symbol of the Uzbek nation, where the nationalistic Uzbeks consider Tamerlane's 14th century empire as the "Golden age" of Uzbekistan, and Tamerlane's reign resonates as a political model to be followed by the Uzbeks. The regime has projected Karimov as a great leader equaling Tamerlane, where the latter created an empire that glorified the region and placed Samarkand as the capital (Suneel 2013, 102). Karimov was also from Samarkand, where he made efforts to unite the people of his country, and he subsequently also glorified Uzbekistan in his speeches and writings. The elite's main agenda is to evince Tamerlane and Karimov as one of the same to construct the national identity, where the metaphor of a "Great Uzbek state" is in equal footing with Tamerlane's Empire and the establishment of the Uzbek President as a strong leader is analogous to Tamerlane himself.

Also by 1989, ethnic Uzbeks accounted for 71.4% of the population, such that the justification of an ethnonational identity was more than warranted. Tamerlane's contribution was his landmark achievement of quelling tribal disunity in the region (Sengupta 2017, 31). Tamerlane's achievement also parallels the early years of the Karimov regime's political survival. During pre-independence, Soviet policies strengthened clans, such that collectivization policies "pushed members together onto the same state-run farms, a situation that put new levers of power into the hands of clan-based networks" (Collins 2002, 144). Furthermore, the three factors that explain the relevance of clans in Uzbekistan's domestic politics are due to clan structures being augmented by the Soviets during colonialism, the delayed national identity formation, and of a non-existent market economy (Collins 2006, 23-32). Even though Karimov is from the clan of Samarkand region, he came to power through his connections with the Tashkent clan, but as soon as he won the presidential elections in

December 1991, he was able to politically quell the Tashkent clan once he was able to consolidate power (Khegai 2004, 16). The reason for Karimov's bold move is due to the problems he faces when forming any type of politics besides clan-based politics during clan competition (Collins 2002, 143). It was a slippery slope for Karimov's political career, for he did not extinguish the political power of the clans in Uzbekistan, except he only weakened them to prevent further domestic tensions so he can have political support in the future (Khegai 2004, 11). However, on May 13, 2005, Karimov ordered troops to open fire on protesters in the city of Andijan, where thousands were weary of his "heavy-handed politics" (Mirovalev 2015).

NOMADIC CULTURE OF MULTI-NATIONAL KAZAKHSTAN AND ITS "EURASIONISM"

Modern Kazakhstan is a resource-rich, multi-ethnic state, with a Muslim majority and a significant Slavic Orthodox Christian minority. Kazakhstan is the product of Stalin's nationalities policies, where the territory which Kazakhstan occupies now was historically the domain of two steppe nomad groups, the most recent of which were the Kazakhs (Beachain and Kevlihan 2011). Due to their nomadic lifestyle, Kazakhs did not consign a strong affiliation to Islam and are relatively new converts. Islam was first brought to Central Asia by the Arab armies as early as 705 A.D., and before the Arabs, many inhabitants were Zoroastrians and Buddhists (Hanks 1993, 60). By the 10th century, a few tribes began to adopt the Muslim practice, but still, most nomadic Kazakhs were elusive to preachers and maintained their traditional forms of animism and ancestor worship until the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Such forms of worship were more suitable to the nomadic Kazakh lifestyle because Mosques were stationary. After independence, the Muslim population has continued to observe Islamic rituals at birth, marriage, and death (Rashid 1994), however, compared to Uzbekistan the devotion of people to Islam, in general, was much weaker.

Thus, the ruling elite decided to place emphasis not on nationalism and Islam, but on its multi-ethnicity and nomadic culture in constructing Kazakhstan's national identity. Large communities of Russians, Germans, Ukrainians, Koreans, Jews, Arabs, and Gypsies have congregated in and even dominated certain geographical points. Today Kazakhstan hosts nearly 130 nationalities, and up until the late 1980s, the Kazakhs were not the population majority. According to the statistics taken in 1989, Kazakhs constituted 39.7% of the population, while Russians were 37.8% of the population. Combining Russians with Ukrainians (5.4%) and Belarusians (1.1%), the Slavs in total represented

44.3% of the population; when also taking into account the Russified Germans (5.8%), non-Kazakh people formed a majority of the Republic (Dave 2003). And many of the Slavs are still settled in homogeneous communities in the country's north. By the time Kazakhstan became independent in 1991, the ruling government's legitimate sources for mono-ethnic nationalism became deprived, and the psychological basis for statehood was anemic.

Upon independence, President Nazarbayev was prudent in maneuvering between the increasingly nationalistic Kazakhs and Russians who were fearful about their future in the newly independent state. Kazakhstan was the last of the Soviet republics to declare its independence in 1991. Nazarbayev laboriously tried to prevent the collapse of the USSR and explicitly expressed the desire for Kazakhstan to remain part of the union, in which he states: "We the people's deputies of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, expressing the anxiety and aspiration of the peoples in our multi-ethnic republic, [intend] to do everything possible to prevent a catastrophe, the collapse of our Great Union" (Fawn 2004, 145).

Nevertheless, Nazarbayev skillfully managed the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional problems of his country. To consolidate southern and northern Kazakhstan under a single authority, Nazarbayev moved the capital from Almaty in the southeast to the town of Akhmola (later called Astana) in the northwest to preempt potential Russian separatism and to encourage Kazakh migration to the north (Hoffman 1997). Nazarbayev also has been virtuously playing with the ethnic card most when discussing Kazakhstan's relations with Russia; during his early presentations of the idea of the Eurasian Union in 1994, Nazarbayev stated that Kazakhstan and Russia have "blood interests" in working together (Cummings 2005, 83). When dealing with the religious factor in nation-building, the President incipiently declared his country's intention to follow the Turkish model that would incorporate a Muslim heritage into a secular, Europeanized state (*Ibid.*). Nazarbayev made sure to travel both on the hajj and to the Vatican in 1994 to bring harmony to the religious groups. With a sizeable Russian population in northern Kazakhstan, there were cross-border elite economic ties that run across the Russian border (Cummings 2000, 26). When Nazarbayev tried to implement the ethnonational identity, it only stirred fears of "Kazakhization" among the Russians, Ukrainians, Germans, and other ethnic groups (Melvin 1993, 208). It was a risky move for Nazarbayev, he had no choice but to implement a civic form of national identity that incorporated all ethnic groups in Kazakhstan (Olcott 1996, 60), while at the same time keep close ties to Russia due to the fact that Russia began to clamor about Kazakhstan's ethnonational identity policy (Lee 2010, 59).

Another reason the ruling elite adopted the multi-ethnic and civic aspect of nationalism when constructing Kazakhstan's national identity was due to the nomadic cultural heritage. According to Seidumanov, Shaukenova, Kononov, and Zabirowa (2016), the Ethnic Kazakhs historically embraced the nomadic lifestyle and nomadic culture with "astonishing openness to accept different cultures and ideas, regardless of where they come from, irrespective of the place of origin." The Kazakh government made considerable investments to popularizing nomadic tradition through modern architecture, films, and art. The ruling government created new state symbols to reflect the ethnic iconography of dominant ethnic groups. The blue color of Kazakhstan's state flag is allegedly related to the history of early medieval Turks and the golden eagle soaring under the sun represents an important symbol of nomads (Omeliicheva 2014).

Finally, due to the country's geographical location, the Kazakh government refers to their country as *Eurasian*, bridging the East and West. The leadership claims that the snow leopard symbolizes Kazakhstan's Eurasian uniqueness, an animal inhabiting Kazakhstani mountains "with inherent elitarianism, sense of independence, intelligence, courage and nobleness, bravery and cunning but never the first to attack anyone" (The General Prosecutor's Office of The Republic of Kazakhstan 2012). They further comment that the snow leopard combines "western elegance multiplied by the advanced level of development and oriental wisdom," embodying 'a space that links Europe to the Asia-Pacific region' (*Ibid.*). President Nazarbayev has often explicitly defined Kazakhstan as a Eurasian state straddling the East and West with the implication that it is uniquely positioned as the "bridge" between Europe and Asia (Clarke 2015).

CONNECTING IDENTITIES WITH FOREIGN POLICIES

UZBEKISTAN

In its foreign policy, Uzbekistan continuously tried to distance itself from Russia and to broaden foreign connections with the United States and other countries as evidence of its unwillingness to stay under Russian patronage. The current Uzbek leadership uses the history of Tamerlane's legacy to effectuate its geopolitical ambitions and to legitimize its unilateral foreign policy. At the regional level when confrontational issues with its Central Asian neighbors surge, Uzbekistan has flexed its muscles toward weaker Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan by using economic pressure on these countries which are dependent on Uzbek gas supplies. Kyrgyzstan continuously has territory disputes with Uzbekistan over the Fergana Valley. Several clashes broke out around the disputed borders

in 2010, 2012, and 2013. As for Tajikistan, the main dispute today centers on Tajikistan's decision to resume construction of the Rogun hydropower plant, which could alleviate winter power shortages in Tajikistan but at the expense of water flow reduction to the Amu Darya River, which may damage Uzbek agriculture and cause environmental threats downstream (Kuchins, Mankoff, Kourmanova, and Backes 2015). Because of this conflict the Uzbek closed its borders, implemented a strict visa regime for Tajik citizens, abolished direct air flights to Dushanbe, and in 2013, Tashkent stopped supplying gas to Tajikistan.

At the global level, Uzbekistan has constantly made retractions in its relations with great powers. From the beginning of its independence, the country was resistant to many Russian foreign policies. In 1999 the country quit the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to join the pro-Western Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM) alliance, which consists of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova, however, it suspended its activities with GUAM in 2002 and officially left in 2005 (Cornell 2007, 287). Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States, Uzbekistan approved US request to station 1,500 US troops at the Karshi-Khanabad airfield (K2) in exchange for security guarantees and assistance with Uzbekistan's internal terrorism. The year of 2005 was a point of nadir in US-Uzbekistan relations, where the upheaval in Andijan city of Fergana valley was cracked down by the Uzbek government. Thousands of protesters angrily wanted Karimov to resign. This event led to growing criticism from the West, along with sanctions and demands for an international investigation imposed on Uzbekistan pushed the Uzbek government to break the 2002 strategic partnership treaty with the United States (*Ibid.*, 288). On July 29, Uzbekistan required the US troops to leave the K2 airbase and this, in turn, was strategic to Russia's interests. Karimov viewed the United States' criticism as a threat to his political survival since the narrative from the United States did not match what Karimov viewed as a domestic threat, however, Uzbekistan and Russia "found a common ground in despising 'colored revolutions' and Western attempts to democratize the post-Soviet space" (Burnashev and Chernykh 2007, 72). Karimov was heavily agitated by US pressure to allow investigations and an international probe of the Uzbek government due to the Andijan unrest (Wright and Tyson 2005). Russia and Uzbekistan signed an alliance treaty on November 14, which comes after seven days when Uzbekistan lowered the US flag from the K2 base (Cornell 2007, 288). In the following months, Tashkent acceded to the two most important Russian-led multilateral organizations in the region, joining the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) in January 2006 and the CSTO in June of the same year (Weitz 2012). The government in Uzbekistan also opened the country to Russian

investments.

US-Uzbekistan relations significantly cooled due to the 2003 “Rose Revolution” in Georgia, the 2004 “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine, and the March 2005 “Tulip Revolution” in Kyrgyzstan (Tolipov 2007). The Uzbek government sought to limit the influence of the United States and other foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on civil society, political reform, and human rights inside the country (Uzbekistan: Country Study Guide 2015, 33). Russia manufactured anti-American propaganda that accuses the United States of providing funds to local NGOs in initiating the “color revolutions,” which in turn, immensely convinced the Central Asians. However, in 2012, Uzbekistan decided to withdraw from the CSTO alliance (Kilner 2012), and in January 2015 another dramatic shift from the earlier relationship between Washington and Tashkent occurred. The US military sent a large-scale donation of hardware to Uzbekistan. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Central Asia, Daniel Rosenblum, confirmed that the United States had concluded a deal with Uzbekistan on the provision of a considerable amount of military equipment (Kucera 2015).

Uzbekistan has also avoided participation in multilateral projects, such that it will unilaterally decide how to behave and what friends and foes to have. Tashkent is wary of Russian-led integration projects, as it does not participate in Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) or CSTO. Also, Uzbekistan had been a member but then abandoned organizations such as EurAsEC, GUAM, and Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO). The only membership that seems to be stable is in the Chinese-led initiative the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Such an approach allowed Karimov a high degree of flexibility by emphasizing bilateral cooperation with other states rather than multilateral relations.

Since the death of Karimov in 2016, new President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has continued the balanced multi-vector policy of his predecessor beyond the region, seeking improved relations with both Moscow, with which he has agreed to expand trade to \$5 billion a year, and the West, in which the West is no longer focusing on Karimov’s brutal crackdown in Andijan. However, Mirziyoyev has moved in significant ways to end the often cantankerous relationships between Tashkent and the other Central Asian capitals that had characterized Karimov’s time in office, which the political shocks in the domestic and international realms made Karimov sensitive regarding regime survival. This is evident from the restored communication links between Tashkent and Dushanbe, where they resumed direct flights in April 2017 from their 1992 suspension, and the willingness of Uzbekistan to resolve issues related to previously disputed territories with its neighbors, particularly with Kyrgyzstan (Zhunisbek 2017). In addition, Mirziyoyev has launched the “Mirziyoyev Model,” which constitutes

comprehensive reforms that address corruption, economic liberalization, and promotion of Uzbekistan's image, and other issues that respect current needs (Akromov 2017).

KAZAKHSTAN

Since 1991, Kazakhstan has been eager to portray its self-image as peace-loving, generous, secular and Eurasian. In general, Kazakhstan's foreign policy direction has embraced multilateralism and aimed to cooperate with states in all directions. In Nazarbayev's words, Kazakhstan as a Eurasian state seeks "mutually advantageous" and "good neighborly relations of confidence on the whole of the Eurasian continent" and this has been at the root of the regime's construction of a "multi-vector" foreign policy (Clarke 2015). Also, taking into consideration the multi-ethnic nature of the Kazakh population, the foreign policy of Kazakhstan focused particularly on the integration of "a reconstructed Kazakhstani identity—pacified, economically liberal and internationalist" with "regional and multilateral institutions and identities" to placate the country's ethnic Russians, maintain a necessary and "special" relationship with Moscow, and "anchor" sovereignty vis-à-vis Russia and China (Cummings 2003, 151).

Similar to their ancestors, Kazakhs also tend to favor pragmatic short-term thinking. This pragmatism manifested in Kazakhstan's foreign policy in a myriad of ways, particularly in the president's statements that expressed that the policy is self-serving rather than arising from a philosophical worldview. Olcott (1997, 557) points out: "In carving out a foreign policy for his new state, Nazarbayev has stressed repeatedly that Kazakhstan will be neither eastern nor western, neither Islamic nor Christian; rather the state should be a bridge between both." Nazarbayev pragmatically saw to it to eliminate any negative elements juxtaposed with his country by removing its damaging association with nuclear weapons, Islam, and state-sponsored terrorism associated with the Middle East; a responsibility he played up by claiming that Kazakhstan was now "in the epicenter of world politics" (Jones 2004, 140).

Unlike Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan achieved its balancing act between external powers without abrupt shifts. It began its course as an independent state by relying on relations with Moscow first. Under the leadership of long-time foreign minister Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev, however, Kazakhstan established a policy based on the Uzbek model of balancing against Russian dominance to safeguard and consolidate independence (Cornell 2007, 290). But, Kazakhstan did so in a less confrontational manner than Uzbekistan. It gradually began to develop relations with China as a way to offset Russian ambitions. Nazarbayev did not want to neglect its relations with Russia but explained this need for rebalancing

by stating: “Kazakhstan welcomes the policy pursued by China for it is aimed against hegemonism and favors friendship with neighboring countries” (Embassy of Kazakhstan to the United States and Canada 2012).

Moreover, despite continuing involvement in the CSTO and the SCO, Kazakhstan was also the only Central Asian state to develop a relationship with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to the point of submitting an Individual Partnership Action Plan, accepted in January 2006 (McDermott 2007). Kazakhstan also supported US-sponsored efforts to advance trade and transportation through Afghanistan in a North-South direction and the United States in its turn actively provided Comprehensive Threat Reduction (CTR) assistance to its counterpart (Cornell 2007, 292). The color revolutions raised alarms in Astana and Tashkent; however, Kazakhstan chose to react differently to the events. Instead of cutting its relations with the United States, Nazarbayev decided to make the relations even stronger. In other words, there were a series of reciprocal visits right after the revolutions: then US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited Astana in October 2005, Foreign Minister Tokayev visited the United States in early September 2006, US Vice President Dick Cheney visited Astana in May 2006, and Nazarbayev visited Washington in September 2006 (*Ibid.*, 293).

Since independence, Nazarbayev was an enthusiastic promoter of extensive integration with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In May 1992, Nazarbayev (1992) articulated that the creation and maintenance of the CIS ultimately meant the “assurance of the transit of [Kazakhstan’s] freight to Europe and the Near East.” Kazakhstan has demonstrated its quest for security within the post-Soviet space by its charter membership in the CSTO, the CIS’ core security mechanism (Clarke 2015). On the economic front, Nazarbayev was a major supporter of the development of a “common economic space” within the CIS, although when Moscow rebuffed Nazarbayev’s approach, Kazakhstan shifted its focus to regional economic integration within Central Asia (Kubicek 1997, 643). In 1998, this led to the establishment of the Central Asian Economic Community (CAEC) among Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Nazarbayev was also a driving force behind another attempt at a CIS customs union in 2000, the EurAsEC, with Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

The peculiarity of the openness of the nomadic culture and pragmatism, in fact, goes hand in hand with Kazakhstan’s foreign policy. The Kazakh leadership has carefully taken into account the country’s internal situation and geopolitical environment. Due to its multi-ethnic population and geostrategic position the Kazakhstan ruling elite was conscious of the limits of the country’s independence

when it decided not to follow Uzbekistan's approach. Kazakhstan has been the most active proponent of regional engagement and integration. Even though all of Nazarbayev's regional initiatives have not been fully implemented, due to complicated relations among Central Asian states, Astana still has tried to play a bigger role in the region and has developed tools for the promotion of regional cooperation. One piece of such effort is the newly formed Kazakhstan Agency for International Development, which will have a budget of about 10-20 million US dollars directed toward education, health, and human trafficking issues in Central Asia (Kuchins et al. 2015). Another innovative idea of Kazakhstan is the Green Bridge Partnership Program aimed at fostering regional cooperation and assisting Central Asian states in addressing tensions over energy, water, food, and environmental issues.

CONCLUSION

The main aim of this article was to explain the reasons for the divergent policies of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. The existing mainstream literature mostly emphasized the roles of the international structure and the external security environment. The near absence of the roles of ideas, identities, and symbols might represent omissions in exchange for parsimony in some way, but the analysis presented in this research indicates that theories that include identity-based domestic-level variables can help us better comprehend some puzzling cases. The constructivist approach applied here proposes that the recognition of the centrality of demographics, historical narratives, and national identities are keys to evaluating the conditions for cooperation or conflict. The Uzbek government has chosen an image of an independent and unilateral "Great state," while Kazakhstan has skillfully promoted the state's reputation as a strategic "bridge" between Europe and Asia by embracing multilateralism.

Uzbekistan's homogeneous demographics allowed Karimov to promote an ethnonational identity by adopting the historical narrative of Tamerlane's legacy. Even though Uzbekistan pursued a pragmatic, multi-vector approach at certain times, due to the regional clan tensions of the incongruent homogeneous demographics, Tashkent was in every aspect sensitive about regime security. Thus, Uzbekistan's foreign policy behavior exhibited inconsistent unilateralism going through a drastic flux of cooperation and realignment with various international powers to secure political survival. On the other hand, Kazakhstan's heterogeneous demographics stymied the Nazarbayev regime to fully implement an ethnonational identity, due to the sizable ethnic Russian

population. Fearing negative consequences, Kazakhstan had no choice but to implement a civic-national identity and keep close ties with Russia by adopting a multi-ethnic friendly historical narrative. The adoption of such civic-national identity resulted in Kazakhstan going for a multilateral foreign policy approach.

To conclude, this article demonstrates that an emphasis on demographics, historical narratives, and national identities can provide significant leverage in understanding state behavior; this highlights the implication that future research is applicable to states and regions where anomalies exist. The cases of the different foreign policy orientations of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan appear to be puzzling if analyzed solely from the perspective of materialist lens; but the findings of this article suggest that a more detailed analysis of prevalent ideas in foreign policy formation is needed and that such analysis can reveal the important role of narratives of national identities.

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