

**FOREIGN POLICY CHANGE UNDER  
AUTHORITARIAN LEADERS:  
ANALYSIS OF UZBEKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY  
IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA**

**By**

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## **ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

### **Foreign policy change under authoritarian leaders: analysis of Uzbekistan's foreign policy in the post-Cold War era**

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*The purpose of this research is to explain foreign policy change under authoritarian settings. Analyzing the case of Uzbekistan's foreign policy, this research proposes a model to explain why and how foreign policy change takes place under authoritarian leaders. The model suggests that leaders' perceptions of their environment become a decisive factor inducing authoritarian leaders to (re)consider their regime survival strategy. Concern with regime survival, in turn, shapes foreign policy goals which then manifest into a distinctive foreign policy behavior of a leader. Ultimately, the behavior of a leader translates into certain foreign policy outcomes.*

*Despite the abundance of case studies on foreign policy making in non-democracies, the literature, being empirical in nature, lacks conceptual explanations of foreign policy change in authoritarian regimes. Whereas, existing models of foreign policy change presuppose decentralized decision-making, which is more relevant to democratic regimes than authoritarian ones. By providing advancements in the conceptual understanding of foreign policy change in authoritarian regimes the model proposed in this research contributes to the literature on foreign policy change. It also contributes methodologically to the understanding of perceptions by offering a Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) as a method to operationalize perceptions of the leaders.*

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Foreign policy change: overview

What makes authoritarian governments change their foreign policies? How exactly does foreign policy change take place under authoritarian leaders? These are the questions this research will answer.

Speaking of foreign policy change in *authoritarian regimes*, one may think of Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent aggressive foreign policy behavior amid the Russia-Ukraine War. Or one may think of the increasingly assertive foreign policy behavior of China and its increasing proactivity in international affairs. Since Russia and China are the two big powers ruled by strong authoritarian leaders, foreign policies of these countries are widely discussed by scholars and political experts.

In the case of Russia, studies delve into the history of relations between Russia and the West in order to better explain an increasingly fierce Russia-West confrontation that has manifested in the armed conflict in Ukraine<sup>1</sup>. Thus, during the first term of Putin's presidency (2000-2004), Russia pursued foreign policy of the "Great Power pragmatism."<sup>2</sup> Putin adhered to building good relations with the EU the US to achieve economic growth and modernization, as well as to prevent the US

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<sup>1</sup> Stefan Meister, "A Paradigm Shift: EU-Russia Relations After the War in Ukraine," Carnegie Europe - Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 29, 2022, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2022/11/29/paradigm-shift-eu-russia-relations-after-war-in-ukraine-pub-88476>; Yoichi Funabashi, "History Repeats Itself with Russia-Ukraine War," The Japan Times, November 7, 2022, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2022/11/07/commentary/world-commentary/russia-ukraine-war-history/>; Jeffrey Mankoff, "Russia's War in Ukraine: Identity, History, and Conflict," Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 22, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-war-ukraine-identity-history-and-conflict>; Steven Pifer, "The Russia-Ukraine War and Its Ramifications for Russia," Brookings, December 8, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-russia-ukraine-war-and-its-ramifications-for-russia/>; Oliver Stuenkel, "The War in Ukraine and the Emergence of the Post-Western World: A View from Brazil |," Institut Montaigne, September 29, 2022, <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/analysis/war-ukraine-and-emergence-post-western-world-view-brazil>; Oksana Myshlovska, "Understanding the Roots of the Russia-Ukraine War and the Misuse of History," IHEID, April 25, 2022, <https://www.graduateinstitute.ch/communications/news/understanding-roots-russia-ukraine-war-and-misuse-history>.

<sup>2</sup> Fenghua Liu, "Russia's Foreign Policy Over the Past Three Decades: Change and Continuity" 2, no. 1 (2022): 86–99.

containment policy.<sup>3</sup> However, during Putin's second term (2004-2008), relations between Russia and the West strained amid the color revolutions which erupted across the former Soviet republics, including Ukraine. These revolutions were seen by Russia as the West attempting to undermine Russia's political stability and its geopolitical interests in the CIS region.<sup>4</sup> Following the wave of revolutions, Russia became more cautious about the West. Putin adopted a strategy of diplomatic cooperation with the US, while vehemently countering it in the areas of vital interests to Russia. Despite maintaining cooperation with the EU in economic, trade and energy sectors, political relations between Russia and the EU became stagnant. After 2008, with president Dmitriy Medvedev taking the office, Russia resumed cooperation with the EU and reset the Russia-US relationship. During Medvedev's rule, Russia pursued "Stability and Cooperation Diplomacy," pursuing a more cooperative foreign policy towards the West and other nations.<sup>5</sup> There are two reasons behind Medvedev's foreign policy. First, Medvedev sought a full-scale modernization of Russia in terms of infrastructure, economy, technology and institutions.<sup>6</sup> In addition, Russia needed to engage in economic cooperation with other countries in light of economic globalization and the global financial crisis.<sup>7</sup> However, some experts claim that Medvedev's foreign policy goals did not change much. Russia was still led by the idea of preserving its sphere of influence and achieving great power status through economic development. What

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<sup>3</sup> Andrei Tsygankov, *Vniêchniaia Politika Rossii Ot Gorbacheva Do Putina: Formirovânie Natsionalnogo Interessa* (Moscow: Nauchnaia Kniga, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Fenghua Liu, "The Foreign Strategy of Medvedev-Putin Tandem," *China Social Sciences Press*, 2002, 42-45; Tatiana Zakaurtseva, "The Current Foreign Policy of Russia," n.d., [http://srch.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no16\\_1\\_ses/05\\_zakaurtseva.pdf](http://srch.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no16_1_ses/05_zakaurtseva.pdf); Olga Oliker et al., "Russian Foreign Policy in Historical and Current Context: A Reassessment," *RAND Arroyo Center Santa Monica*, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Liu, "Russia's Foreign Policy Over the Past Three Decades: Change and Continuity."

<sup>6</sup> Liu.

<sup>7</sup> "Russian Foreign Policy under Dmitry Medvedev's Presidency (2008-2012)," CESRAN International, accessed February 4, 2023, <https://cesran.org/russian-foreign-policy-under-dmitry-medvedevs-presidency-2008-2012.html>.

really changed, however, was the style or approach of the new president to foreign policy making. It was argued that the return of Putin to office would bring back Putin's "inimitable personal style, sardonic commentary and frequent outbursts... which would replace the calmer working environment of the Medvedev presidency."<sup>8</sup> Indeed, following Putin's return to office in 2012, Russia's relationship with the US and EU became confrontational again. The escalating geopolitical and military rivalry between Russia and the West was explained by Russia's fear of NATO's eastward expansion, highlighted by the West's efforts to drag Ukraine into its geostrategic orbit.<sup>9</sup> To demonstrate to the West that Ukraine is a red line, Russia annexed Crimea. The relations between Russia and the West completely deteriorated after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. The Russian government justified the invasion by "demilitarization" and "denazification" of Ukraine, to protect ethnic Russian minorities there. Yet political experts believe that the 2022 invasion is similar to the case of Crimea in 2014. The core reason for both cases is Russia's attempt to topple Ukraine's Western-aligned government in order to prevent it aligning with Western institutions, including NATO and the EU.<sup>10</sup>

As for China, one of the widely discussed topics is the transformation of Chinese foreign policy under Xi Jinping's leadership and its effect on international system.<sup>11</sup> For decades Chinese foreign policy was guided by Den Xiaoping's strategy

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<sup>8</sup> Alexander Osipovich, "Putin, Not Medvedev, Remains Master of Russian Foreign Policy," Eurasianet, May 7, 2010, <https://eurasianet.org/putin-not-medvedev-remains-master-of-russian-foreign-policy>.

<sup>9</sup> Fenghua Liu, "From Economic Diplomacy to Power Diplomacy: President Putin's Diplomatic Strategy in His Third and Fourth Terms," *Foreign Theoretical Trends* 4 (2019): 95–105; Dmitri Trenin, "20 Years of Vladimir Putin: How Russian Foreign Policy Has Changed," *The Moscow Times*, August 27, 2019, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/08/27/20-years-of-vladimir-putin-how-russian-foreign-policy-has-changed-a67043>; Paul Kubicek, "Russian Foreign Policy and the West," *Political Science Quarterly* 114, no. 4 (1999): 547–68, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2657783>.

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Masters, "Ukraine: Conflict at the Crossroads of Europe and Russia," *Council on Foreign Relations*, October 11, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/background/ukraine-conflict-crossroads-europe-and-russia>.

<sup>11</sup> Mikael Weissmann, "Chinese Foreign Policy in a Global Perspective: A Responsible Reformer" Striving For Achievement," *Journal of China and International Relations* 3, no. 1 (2015); Yan

of “keeping a low profile.”<sup>12</sup> This strategy advocated a cautious approach to foreign affairs in order to refrain from any conflicts and let China concentrate on its primary goal: economic growth and development. China made it clear that there was no reason for other countries to be afraid of China’s rapid economic growth since China was not “searching for expansion” and would “never take the lead.”<sup>13</sup> However, with Xi Jinping coming to power, China started moving away from the strategy of “keeping a low profile” to the strategy of “striving for achievement.” Scholars emphasize that Xi’s strategy enabled China to adopt a more active and aggressive stance in regional and international affairs.<sup>14</sup> Some scholars claim that China seeks great power status both in regional and international affairs.<sup>15</sup> Others, following a realist logic, claim that “externally derived threats to China’s development and threats to China’s access to overseas resources and goods upon which its economy is increasingly dependent” serve as the drivers behind Xi’s strategy.”<sup>16</sup> National interests are another argument explaining Chinese foreign policy. Along with security, territorial integrity and

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Xuetong, “From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7, no. 2 (2014): 153–84; Camilla TN Sørensen, “The Significance of Xi Jinping’s “Chinese Dream” for Chinese Foreign Policy: From “Tao Guang Yang Hui” to “Fen Fa You Wei,”” *Journal of China and International Relations* 3, no. 1 (2015); Angela Poh and Li Mingjiang, “A China in Transition: The Rhetoric and Substance of Chinese Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping,” *Asian Security* 13, no. 2 (2017): 84–97; Rumi Aoyama, “Structural Changes in Chinese Foreign Policy: From ‘Prosperous Nation Diplomacy’ to ‘Strong Nation Diplomacy,’” *Japan Review* 4, no. 2 (2022): 79–90; Susan L. Shirk, “China in Xi’s ‘New Era’: The Return to Personalistic Rule,” *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 2 (April 2018): 22–36, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/china-in-xis-new-era-the-return-to-personalistic-rule/>; Son Daekwon, “Xi Jinping Thought Vs. Deng Xiaoping Theory,” *The Diplomat*, October 25, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/10/xi-jinping-thought-vs-deng-xiaoping-theory/>; Elizabeth C. Economy, “China’s New Revolution: The Reign of Xi Jinping,” *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 3 (2018): 60–74.

<sup>12</sup> Xuetong, “From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement.”

<sup>13</sup> Xuetong.

<sup>14</sup> Xuetong; Weissmann, “Chinese Foreign Policy in a Global Perspective: A Responsible Reformer” Striving For Achievement”; Sørensen, “The Significance of Xi Jinping’s “Chinese Dream” for Chinese Foreign Policy: From “Tao Guang Yang Hui” to “Fen Fa You Wei.”

<sup>15</sup> Robert Sutter, “China’s Recent Approach to Foreign Affairs—Is There a Durable Strategy? (2009): 1-13.,” *American Journal of Chinese Studies*, 2009, 1–13; Aoyama, “Structural Changes in Chinese Foreign Policy: From ‘Prosperous Nation Diplomacy’ to ‘Strong Nation Diplomacy’.”

<sup>16</sup> Timothy R. Heath, “What Does China Want? Discerning the PRC’s National Strategy,” *Asian Security* 8, no. 1 (2012): 54–72.

sovereignty, national unification is argued to be China's core interest.<sup>17</sup> Some scholars claim that Chinese foreign policy is driven by China's goal to achieve domestic political stability and ensure regime through economic development and nationalism.<sup>18</sup> The shift in foreign policy is also attributed to the personality of Xi Jinping who is seen as a leader "strong enough to push through a rethinking of China's foreign policy strategy."<sup>19</sup>

While numerous studies have delved into the foreign policies of Russia and China, the existing literature heavily leans towards empirical investigation, leaving a notable void in the development of comprehensive conceptual frameworks that thoroughly explore the complex processes of foreign policy change.

The common narratives explaining the changes in foreign policies of Russia and China are 1) striving for a great power status through economic development and 2) having control over the crucial territories (Ukraine and Taiwan). However, these narratives are not applicable to the cases of other middle or small size authoritarian states. One example is Uzbekistan, which is classified as a consolidated authoritarian regime.<sup>20</sup>

Uzbekistan's foreign policy has undergone two major changes. The first took place in the early 2000s when former president Islam Karimov altered the country's foreign policy from openness to a more isolationist stance, placing a priority on security issues. The other change occurred in 2016 after former prime minister Shavkat Mirziyoyev took office following Karimov's death. Mirziyoyev transformed

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<sup>17</sup> Weissmann, "Chinese Foreign Policy in a Global Perspective: A Responsible Reformer" Striving For Achievement."

<sup>18</sup> Weissmann; Xuetong, "From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement."

<sup>19</sup> Poh and Mingjiang, "A China in Transition: The Rhetoric and Substance of Chinese Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping"; Sørensen, "The Significance of Xi Jinping's" Chinese Dream" for Chinese Foreign Policy: From" Tao Guang Yang Hui" to" Fen Fa You Wei."

<sup>20</sup> "Uzbekistan: Freedom in the World 2022 Country Report," Freedom House, 2022, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/uzbekistan/freedom-world/2022>.

Uzbekistan's foreign policy from isolation and defensive self-reliance to openness at the regional and international levels. Under Mirziyoyev, the focus of foreign policy changed from security to economic issues. Both foreign policy changes were manifested in the two leaders' distinctive foreign policy behaviors. In the 1990s, Karimov was open to cooperation and attempted to achieve compromise-based solutions. As a result, Uzbekistan achieved some successes in establishing friendly relations with Central Asian neighbors. Despite the existence of transborder conflicts with neighboring countries, Karimov still maintained good political relations with other leaders. However, after 2005, Karimov's foreign policy behavior drastically changed. He became uncompromising on national interests, taking a tough stance towards neighboring countries. Thus, with an escalation of problems, Karimov tended to close the borders, erect walls and mine areas around crossings. Consequently, relations with neighbors deteriorated, resulting in more hostile policies. Under Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan improved relations with neighbors and created a stable and friendly environment in the Central Asian region. Due to Mirziyoyev's soft power approach and ability to compromise even on the most sensitive issues, the problems which could not be solved for decades, were solved within the first years of Mirziyoyev's presidency.

The majority of literature addressing Uzbekistan's foreign policy has mainly focused on the Karimov era.<sup>21</sup> Emphasizing volatile nature of Uzbekistan's foreign

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<sup>21</sup> Luca Anceschi, "Integrating Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy Making: The Cases of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan," *Central Asian Survey* 29, no. 2 (2010): 143–58; Bernardo da Silva Relva Teles Fazendeiro, "Keeping Face in the Public Sphere: Recognition, Discretion and Uzbekistan's Relations with the United States and Germany, 1991–2006," *Central Asian Survey* 34, no. 3 (July 3, 2015): 341–56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2015.1015229>; Bernardo Teles Fazendeiro, "Uzbekistan's Defensive Self-Reliance: Karimov's Foreign Policy Legacy," *International Affairs* XCIII, no. 2 (2017): 409–27; Matteo Fumagalli, "Alignments and Realignments in Central Asia. The Rationale and Implications of Uzbekistan's Rapprochement with Russia," *International Political Science Review* XXVIII, no. 3 (2007): 253–71; Leila Kazemi, "Domestic Sources of Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy, 1991 to the Present," *Journal of International Affairs* LVI, no. 2 (2003): 205–16; Vadim Romashov, "Uzbekistan's Balancing Act: A Game of Chance for Independent

policy, previous studies have predominantly examined internal and external factors as the main influencers on foreign policy. The dominant narratives explaining foreign policy change under Karimov are the threat narrative, security issues, national interests, independence and sovereignty.<sup>22</sup> Whereas academic literature on Uzbekistan's foreign policy in the post-Karimov era is relatively scarce.<sup>23</sup> A large number of works on Mirziyoyev's foreign policy mostly comprise descriptive articles, which compare foreign policies of the two presidents and analyze their impact on Uzbekistan's relations with other actors. Nevertheless, all political experts agreed that the new leader's personality, pragmatism and soft power approach became the major factors of foreign policy change.<sup>24</sup>

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External Policies,” in *The Regional Security Puzzle around Afghanistan* (B. Budrich, 2016), 161–90; Dina Rome Spechler and Martin C. Spechler, “Uzbekistan among the Great Powers,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* XLII (2009): 353–73; Dina Rome Spechler and Martin C. Spechler, “The Foreign Policy of Uzbekistan: Sources, Objectives and Outcomes: 1991-2009,” *Central Asian Survey* XXIX, no. 2 (2010): 159–70.

<sup>22</sup> Volker Jacoby, “If Only It Was Only Water... The Strained Relationship between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan,” *The George Washington University. Central Asia Program*, no. 9 (2013).; S Frederick Starr, “Change and Continuity in Uzbekistan, 1991-2016,” 2018, 23, <http://silkroadstudies.org/resources/pdf/Monographs/1809-Starr-UZ.pdf>; Bernardo Teles Fazendeiro, “Spirituality and Anti-Western Rhetoric in Uzbekistan in the Early 2000s: The Consequences of International Misrecognition,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 34, no. 4 (July 4, 2018): 228–45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2018.1468686>; Tugce Varol Sevim and Alexander Rozanov, “Ups and Downs in Foreign Policy of Uzbekistan towards Security Approach of Russia\*,” *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 17, no. 3 (October 2014): 18–33, <https://doi.org/10.5782/2223-2621.2014.17.3.18>.; Farkhod Tolipov, “Flexibility or Strategic Confusion? Foreign Policy of Uzbekistan,” no. 2 (2014), <https://www.centralasiaprogram.org/flexibility-strategic-confusion-foreign-policy-uzbekistan>.; Annette Bohr, *Uzbekistan: Politics and Foreign Policy* (The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1998); Starr, “Change and Continuity in Uzbekistan, 1991-2016.”

<sup>23</sup> Timur Dadabaev, “The Chinese Economic Pivot in Central Asia and Its Implications for the Post-Karimov Re-Emergence of Uzbekistan,” *Asian Survey* 58, no. 4 (August 1, 2018): 747–69, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2018.58.4.747>; Timur Dadabaev, “Uzbekistan as Central Asian Game Changer? Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy Construction in the Post-Karimov Era,” *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 4, no. 2 (June 2019): 162–75, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2057891118775289>; Timur Dadabaev, “De-Securitizing the ‘Silk Road’: Uzbekistan's Cooperation Agenda with Russia, China, Japan, and South Korea in the Post-Karimov Era,” *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 11, no. 2 (July 2020): 174–87, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1879366520943896>; Adam Saud, “Changing Dynamics of Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy under Shavkat Mirziyoyev: Prospects for Central Asian Regional Economic Integration,” *Central Asia Journal* LXXXII (2018): 1–35.

<sup>24</sup> Russel Martin, “Water in Central Asia” (European Parliament, 2018), [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/625181/EPRS\\_BRI\(2018\)625181\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/625181/EPRS_BRI(2018)625181_EN.pdf); Dadabaev, “The Chinese Economic Pivot in Central Asia and Its Implications for the Post-Karimov Re-Emergence of Uzbekistan.”; Starr, “Change and Continuity in Uzbekistan, 1991-2016.”

## **1.2. Definition of research problem and research purpose**

Despite the abundance of case studies on foreign policy making in non-democracies, the literature lacks conceptual explanation of foreign policy change in authoritarian regimes. Existing models of foreign policy change represent a sort of classification of change, meticulously examining the sources (agents) and extent (type) of foreign policy change. By focusing on such categorization, these models fail to provide the underlying causes of foreign policy shifts and to trace the process of change.

Furthermore, the models cannot fully explain why and how foreign policy change takes place in authoritarian regimes. They overemphasize the internal factors of decision-making by studying how institutions, bureaucratic structures, societal groups, political parties, as well as public opinion produce or hinder foreign policy change. However, these influences on foreign policy making tend to be stronger in democracies rather than in authoritarian regimes. Therefore, advancements in the conceptual understanding of foreign policy change in authoritarian regimes are still needed.

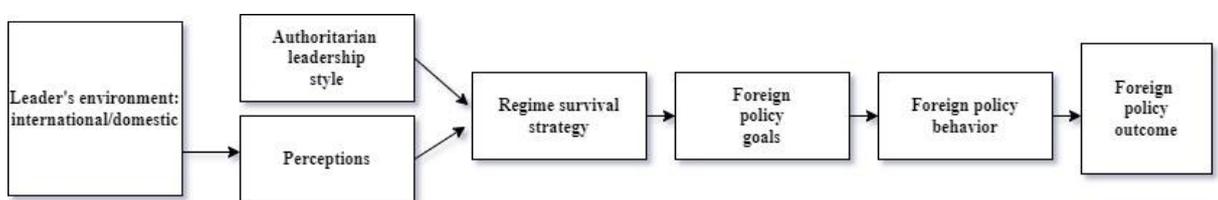
Besides that, there is no single conceptual framework which can explain why and how foreign policy change takes place in authoritarian regimes. Explanations of foreign policy change in authoritarian regimes are based on cases and applicable to a particular country. For example, such narratives as a strive for a great power status, keeping a sphere of influence or achieving national unification explain foreign policies of Russia and China. However, they cannot be applied to the cases of smaller states like Uzbekistan. Similarly, the threat narrative used in the case of Russian foreign policy does not have enough explanatory power for the shift in Chinese foreign policy strategy. Thus, the explanations of foreign policy change in authoritarian regimes are fragmented, based on cases and are mostly applicable to a particular country.

The purpose of this research is to explain foreign policy change under authoritarian settings. Addressing the case of Uzbekistan’s foreign policy, *this research proposes a single model to explain why and how foreign policy change takes place under authoritarian leaders*. Using different levels of analysis, the study examines how external factors, domestic political systems and cognitive aspects of foreign policy behavior resulted in the two major transformations in Uzbekistan’s foreign policy.

### 1.3. The model of foreign policy change under authoritarian leaders

The model proposed in this research (Figure 1) suggests that authoritarian leaders tend to be sensitive to the context since they are concerned with power maintenance. Therefore, the leaders’ environment and changes in it can (re)shape the leaders’ perceptions, which become an important factor contributing to foreign policy change. The detailed model is described in the section 2.2. of Chapter 2.

*Figure 1. Foreign policy change under authoritarian leaders.*



### 1.4. Research question

In pursuit of the research purpose, I set out to answer the following question:

- Why and how foreign policy change takes place under authoritarian leaders?

To address the case of Uzbekistan’s foreign policy, two sub questions are set as follows:

- Why did foreign policy changes take place in the post-Cold War Uzbekistan?
- How did the Uzbek leaders' perceptions about their environment influence different foreign policy courses taken by respective governments?

### **1.5. Case study: methodology and data**

This research is a case study of Uzbekistan's foreign policy. The case is chosen due to the following reasons.

First, Uzbekistan is a consolidated authoritarian regime that has a strong and stable government with limited political opposition. Compared to other authoritarian Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan stands out as the most consolidated authoritarian regime where the government exercises control over all aspects of society.<sup>25</sup> In addition, in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, political opposition parties face challenges in securing seats in parliament, but they enjoy the freedom to register their parties and participate in the political process. For example, there are 240 registered parties in Kyrgyzstan, while four opposition parties (Alliance, United Kyrgyzstan, Light of Faith, People's Party) are represented in the parliament. In 2023, the first opposition party of Kazakhstan (National Social Democratic Party) has also secured a seat in parliament.<sup>26</sup> However, in Uzbekistan, the situation is starkly different. Opposition parties encounter significant obstacles, with registration requests often being declined, making it impossible for them to gain any representation in the

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<sup>25</sup> According to Freedom House 2023 Index, Kyrgyzstan scored 27/100, Kazakhstan – 23/100, Uzbekistan – 12/100, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/uzbekistan/freedom-world/2023>

<sup>26</sup> "Nachalo Polojeno - Oppozitsiya Prorvalas v Parlament," New Times, March 27, 2023, <https://newtimes.kz/vybory-2023/166537-nachalo-polozheno-oppozitsiya-prorvalas-v-parlament>.

country's parliament.<sup>27</sup> Whereas, the existing five parties in Uzbekistan are pro-governmental and rather execute orders from the government.

Second, compared to Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, which did not experience notable changes in their foreign policies, Uzbekistan has experienced foreign policy changes both under the same and the new leaders. Such change is inconsistent with the argument that foreign policy change takes place when the new leader comes to power. Thus, Uzbekistan's case helps to analyze the two types of change and create a generalized model for foreign policy change under authoritarian leaders.

Third, Uzbekistan is a medium size authoritarian state. There is an abundance of studies examining the foreign policies of China and Russia. Since these are two great powers, some of the narratives do not have enough explanatory power for smaller authoritarian states. Thus, addressing the case of Uzbekistan, this research offers a model which can explain in general how foreign policy change takes place under authoritarian leaders.

Lastly, the case of Uzbekistan derives from empirical considerations. Conceptual explanations of Uzbekistan's foreign policy remain limited due to fragmentation in the literature. A major part of literature covers foreign policy in the Karimov-era: from 1991 to 2016. Whereas, the studies of foreign policy change under the new leader, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, are empirical and lack theoretical explanations. Thus, internal and external factors influencing Karimov's foreign policy cannot explain why Uzbekistan, being under the same geopolitical conditions; having the same national interests; and with sovereignty and independence as essential elements of Uzbekistan's foreign policy, changed its foreign policy course under Mirziyoyev.

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<sup>27</sup> Catherine Putz, "New Opposition Party in Uzbekistan Denied Registration, Again," *The Diplomat*, June 22, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/06/new-opposition-party-in-uzbekistan-denied-registration-again/>.

Whereas the change of leadership gives insight into the second foreign policy shift, but does not explain why a foreign policy shift took under Karimov. In addition to that, while many scholars and political experts acknowledge that Uzbekistan's foreign policy is heavily leader-driven, there is a notable gap in research pertaining to the psychological aspects of the country's foreign policy formulation. Thus, underrepresentation of Uzbekistan in psychological research presents an opportunity to explore and contribute to the understanding of how cognitive factors, such as personality traits, play a role in shaping Uzbekistan's foreign policy trajectory. Overall, literature on Uzbekistan's foreign policy fails to comprehensively explain the two foreign policy changes in the country.

### ***Methodology***

The study utilizes a combination of quantitative and qualitative analytical methods to examine the foreign policy of Uzbekistan.

A quantitative approach, specifically Margaret Hermann's Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) was employed to develop comprehensive leadership profiles of the Uzbek leaders and to examine the influence of personal traits on the formulation of Uzbekistan's foreign policy. In particular, LTA was used at the main method to measure to variables presented in the model: 1) leadership styles of the Uzbek presidents and 2) their perceptions (see Chapter 2 for the detailed methodology).

The scholars on Uzbekistan's foreign policy agree that foreign policy of Uzbekistan is heavily leader driven, however there are no studies which have tested this argument. Therefore, scrutinizing the Uzbek leaders' personalities helps to examine the role of cognitive factors on foreign policy making, and demonstrate that

the decision-making process under authoritarian leaders is different from the one under democratic leaders.

Subsequently, qualitative analysis was utilized to substantiate the findings of the LTA and identify other factors (variables) which contributed to foreign policy change. The data, excluding the presidents' speeches and interviews, mostly comprises news on contemporary issues. This type of source spotlights the actions of the government in response to certain issues, which in turn, help to reveal the foreign policy behaviors of the two leaders.

### ***Data***

Leadership Trait Analysis of the two presidents was conducted through Profiler Plus software, which automatically codes for traits based on the assumption that frequently used words, phrases, and actions demonstrate how important certain issues are for a leader.

Profiler Plus is a child of Social Science Automation (SSA), which was created in 1997. It sought to meet the challenges of labor-intensive manual coding. Compared to other existing content analysis tools, which relied on the list of words and phrases, SSA was the first coding engine to harness machine learning. According to Levine and Michael Young, "SSA approached the problem of slow and unreliable content analysis by implementing a rule-based general-purpose text coding engine and used it for fully automated text coding."<sup>28</sup>

After the two presidents' scores for each trait were generated by the software, they were then compared with the average scores of 284 world leaders to attribute

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<sup>28</sup> Nick Levine and Michael Young, "Leadership Trait Analysis and Threat Assessment with Profiler Plus," in *Proceedings of ILC 2014 on 8th International Lisp Conference* (ILC '14: 2014 International Lisp Conference, Montreal QC Canada: ACM, 2014), 50–59, <https://doi.org/10.1145/2635648.2635657>.

whether the traits of the leader under study were high or low. A leader is considered to be high in particular trait if their score is one standard deviation above the mean for the sample of leaders, and low if their score is one standard deviation below the mean. If the leader's score falls within the range of standard deviation, they are considered moderate in that particular trait. It is worth noting that the LTA studies are continually updated, with recent scores being the benchmark for each trait. The latest study classifies leaders according to region. The results include 53 leaders from Western Europe, 78 leaders from Eastern Europe, 46 leaders from the Middle East and Northern Africa, 79 leaders from the Pacific Rim, 15 leaders from Anglo-America and 13 leaders from Latin America. The results also provided average scores for all 284 world leaders used in the study (see Appendix B).

Data used for LTA mainly comprises interviews of the two presidents in the mass media, as well as speeches delivered at the United Nations General Assembly and other regional platforms. The speeches were mainly selected based on the principle of relevance to ensure the data is directly pertinent to the subject of foreign policy. Therefore, all speeches are related to foreign policy issues and addressed to an international audience (see Appendix A). This relevance helps in drawing accurate conclusions about a country's foreign policy objectives, strategies, and priorities. For example, leaders addressing the UNGA summarize the state's official stance on key topics, demonstrate its positioning on the world stage and displays the state's plan of action. The speeches delivered during the regional meetings also demonstrate the state's agenda within the regional cooperation, sensitive regional issues and the state's stance on those issues.

At the same time, it is worth noting that leaders, addressing international audiences, often adjust their speeches due to diplomatic considerations. They may use

more conciliatory language and avoid provocative statements to improve their country's global image and reputation, enhance cooperation or to achieve economic goals. In order to ascertain the validity of such speeches and accuracy of LTA scores, the study additionally employs qualitative analysis of the Uzbek leaders' foreign policy behaviors in order to ascertain how accurately the LTA scores conformed to behavioral patterns suggested by LTA studies.

Three data sets were analyzed separately in order to trace the change in the leaders' perceptions at different periods of time. For Karimov, the speeches before and after 2005 were separated, as this year marked the change from an outward foreign policy to an isolationist one.

#### **1.6. Scope of research and limitations**

The study is comparative and analyzes three major periods of Uzbekistan's foreign policy. The first period covers foreign policy of Islam Karimov in the 1990s. The second period analyzes Karimov's foreign policy after 2005, which was the year when the former president redirected the course of Uzbekistan's foreign policy from openness to isolation. The third period looks into the foreign policy of Uzbekistan under Mirziyoyev, who came to power in 2016 following the death of Karimov.

The main limitation of the study is the data used for conducting LTA of the two presidents. It is preferable to collect the leaders' spontaneous interview replies since they can better reveal the leaders' genuine traits. However, Uzbekistan's political system tightly controlling the media, makes it extremely difficult to obtain spontaneous interview replies from the president. Therefore, the amount of spontaneous interview replies of the Uzbek presidents is limited in this research. To

address this limitation, the research also relied in the speeches delivered at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and other regional platforms.

Even though some formal speeches are written by speechwriters, they are still valid for LTA for the following reasons. First, leaders maintain the final say over their speeches, and LTA provides a window into a leader's public personality. This matters more since it interprets the policy making process and foreign policy choices better than private personality.<sup>29</sup>

Second, it has been argued that the validity of prepared speeches can be proved by empirical evidence.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, validity was tested empirically by combining LTA profiles with case studies in order to examine if traits are reflected in the decision-making process in the way they were theoretically expected to. The results proved the "effectiveness of using prepared speech acts as psychological indicators."<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, Winter and Suedfeld argued that the impact of speechwriters is insignificant. First, the speechwriters are selected and reviewed by the leaders. Second, the speechwriters consider the leaders' preferences when organizing their content.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Brian Dille and Michael D. Young, "The Conceptual Complexity of Presidents Carter and Clinton: An Automated Content Analysis of Temporal Stability and Source Bias," *Political Psychology* 21 (2000): 587–95; B. G. Marfleet, "The Operational Code of John F. Kennedy During the Cuban Missile Crisis: A Comparison of Public and Private Rhetoric," *Political Psychology* 21, no. 3 (2000): 545–58; Mark Schafer, "Issues In Assessing Psychological Characteristics At a Distance," *Political Psychology* 21 (2000): 511–27; Mark Schafer and Robert Scott Crichlow, "Bill Clinton's Operational Code: Assessing Source Material Bias," *Political Psychology* 21 (2000): 559–71; Jonathan Renshon, "Stability and Change in Belief Systems: The Operational Code of George W. Bush from Governor to Second-Term President," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 52 (2008): 820–49; Jonathan Renshon, "When Public Statements Reveal Private Beliefs: Assessing Operational Codes at a Distance," *Political Psychology* 30 (2009): 649–61; David G. Winter, "Leader Appeal, Leader Performance, and the Motive Profiles of Leaders and Followers: A Study of American Presidents and Elections," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 52, no. 1 (1987): 196.

<sup>30</sup> Stephen Benedict Dyson, *The Blair Identity: Leadership and Foreign Policy*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009a) (Manchester University Press, 2009); Esra Cuhadar et al., "Personality or Role? Comparisons of Turkish Leaders Across Different Institutional Positions: Personality or Role?," *Political Psychology* 38, no. 1 (February 2017): 39–54, <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12333>; Mark Schafer and Robert Scott Crichlow, *Groupthink versus High-Quality Decision Making in International Relations* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010).

<sup>31</sup> Schafer, "Issues In Assessing Psychological Characteristics At a Distance."

<sup>32</sup> Peter Suedfeld, "President Clinton's Political Dilemmas: A Cognitive Analysis," *Political Psychology* 15, no. 2 (1994): 337–49; David G. Winter, "Measuring the Motives of Political Actors,"

Upon comparing the content analysis scores of speeches written by political leaders and speechwriters, both studies conclude that there is no discernible difference between the speechwriters and leaders' written content.

Most importantly, the case of Uzbekistan demonstrates that bureaucracy and the presidents' subordinates tend to reflect and adjust to the leader's attitudes and behaviors. For example, the Foreign Affairs Minister of Uzbekistan, Abdulaziz Kamilov, declared that Uzbekistan "adheres to the strong position of unacceptability of construction of the dam" in Tajikistan.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, when Mirziyoyev came to power, Kamilov stated that Tajikistan "can build the dam when taking into consideration the interests of other countries."<sup>34</sup> Thus, the case demonstrates that the same person within bureaucracy not only reflected opposite behaviors of the two leaders, but also adjusted the tone of speech. This implies that even speechwriters in Uzbekistan may have had to tailor their speeches to align with the shifting attitudes and behaviors of the presidents they served.

## **1.7. Findings**

The Uzbek leaders' perceptions of their environment became a decisive factor, which induced the two presidents to (re)consider their regime survival strategy. Concern with regime survival, in turn, shaped foreign policy goals which were manifested in distinctive foreign policy behaviors of the two leaders. Ultimately, different behaviors of the two leaders translated into different foreign policy outcomes.

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in *The Psychological Assessment of Political Leaders: With Profiles of Saddam Hussein and Bill Clinton* (The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 153–77.

<sup>33</sup> "Uzbekistan s Tribuni OON Vistupil Protiv Stroitelstva Krupnikh GES v Regione," Central Asia, September 26, 2015, <https://centralasia.media/print:1100011>.

<sup>34</sup> "Tajikistan: Roghun to Begin Producing Power on President's Day," EurasiaNet, February 1, 2018, <https://eurasianet.org/tajikistan-roghun-to-begin-producing-power-on-presidents-day>.

### **1.8. Significance of the research**

Theoretically, this research contributes to the literature on foreign policy change by providing advancements in the conceptual understanding of foreign policy change under authoritarian leaders. Particularly, this study suggests some advancements to the existing models by proposing a more holistic and nuanced model for foreign policy change in an authoritarian environment.

The model was developed by combining different levels of foreign policy making: international system dynamics, the domestic political system and cognitive aspects of foreign policy making.

The existing models of foreign policy change consider the decision-makers' perceptions in order to understand the motives standing behind the leaders' decision to redirect foreign policy of their countries. Yet, despite mentioning perceptions of the key decision-makers, the previously developed models avoided scrutinizing the leaders' perceptions. Hence, the model developed in this study fills that gap by including cognitive aspects of foreign policy making. Therefore, special attention was paid to individual level of analysis (cognitive aspects) since in authoritarian countries the leaders, their personalities, beliefs and perceptions come to forefront.

Empirically, this research contributes to the literature on Uzbekistan's foreign policy. As mentioned above, the literature is fragmented and a major part of it has focused on the Karimov era. Whereas academic literature on Uzbekistan's foreign policy in the post-Karimov era is relatively scarce and lacks theoretical explanations for Uzbekistan's foreign policy change under Mirziyoyev. Therefore, this research provides up-to-date analysis of Uzbekistan's foreign policy by applying a single model which explains why and how foreign policy change changes took place in Uzbekistan both under the same leader and under the new one.

Lastly, the research contributes methodologically to the understanding of perceptions. Despite the notion of perceptions being widely used in the literature, there are no studies which measure perceptions. A causal relationship between perceptions and foreign policy change was only assumed. For example, explaining Bhutan's foreign policy reorientation, Holsti claimed that "it is difficult to reconstruct in detail the Druk Gyalpo's perceptions of the external environment in 1959 or thereafter."<sup>35</sup> Talking about perceptions of the second decision-maker, he further adds: "Although there is no quoted evidence, Jigme Dorji must have perceived the Chinese activities as an acute threat to Bhutan's continued independence."<sup>36</sup> Similarly, the studies on foreign policy change in China also mention perceptions of Xi Jinping, but do not scrutinize or measure his perceptions. Whereas this research offers a method which makes it possible to measure perceptions of the leaders and trace the change in their perceptions. Employing LTA to measure perceptions, this research explains why the Uzbek leaders perceived the environment the way they did and why their perceptions resulted in different foreign policy behaviors.

### **1.9. Chapter outline**

*Chapter two* comprises the literature review and a model of foreign policy change under authoritarian leaders. First, it reviews plausible explanations of foreign policy change. Then, it determines the gaps in the existing literature. Lastly, the chapter addresses the gaps in the literature by providing a model for foreign policy change under authoritarian leaders.

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<sup>35</sup> Kalevi Jaakko Holsti, *Why Nations Realign: Foreign Policy Restructuring in the Postwar World* (Routledge, 2015).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

*Chapter three* focuses on methodology. It explains how the two presidents' leadership styles and perceptions were measured through Leadership Trait Analysis. The chapter provides a step-by-step methodological explanation of measurement. Each methodological explanation is then followed by an empirical application of the method to the case of the Uzbek leaders.

*Chapter four*, applies the model proposed in this research and analyzes Karimov's foreign policy in the 1990s. It examines how the leader's environment in the 1990s and Karimov's perceptions of it manifested into a proactive foreign policy.

*Chapter five* traces the change in Karimov's perceptions and, applying the model, analyzes why and how the change in the leader's environment and Karimov's perceptions of it eventually led to a foreign policy of isolation.

*Chapter six* explains the 2016 foreign policy shift through examining how the leader's environment shaped Mirziyoyev's perceptions and influenced the foreign policy course chosen by the new government.

*Chapter seven* concludes and summarizes the findings.

## **Chapter 2. Literature review and the model of foreign policy change under authoritarian leaders**

This chapter reviews existing literature on foreign policy change and identifies gaps in it. It fills this gap by proposing a model to explain why and how foreign policy change takes place under authoritarian leaders.

### **2.1. Definition of foreign policy and foreign policy change**

According to Hermann, foreign policy is “a goal-oriented or problem-oriented program by authoritative policymakers (or their representatives) directed towards entities outside the policymakers’ political jurisdiction.”<sup>37</sup> However, other scholars like Goldmann and Holsti claim that foreign policy implies not only an officially declared line of action, but also non-verbal patterns of foreign policy behavior that can shift even without the adoption of an official strategy.<sup>38</sup> The same notion was reflected in the Morin and Paquin’s definition of foreign policy. According to them, foreign policy is “a set of actions or rules governing the actions of an independent political authority deployed in the international environment.”<sup>39</sup> The case of the 2016 foreign policy change in Uzbekistan supports this argument demonstrating that Mirziyoyev’s foreign policy did not diverge from Uzbekistan’s guiding foreign policy principles: openness, pragmatism and national interests. What has changed, however, is the leadership’s foreign policy behavior and the means used to achieve foreign policy goals.

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<sup>37</sup> Charles F. Hermann, “Changing Course: When Governments Choose to Redirect Foreign Policy,” *International Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (March 1990): 3, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600403>.

<sup>38</sup> Kjell Goldmann, “Change and Stability in Foreign Policy: Detente as a Problem of Stabilization,” *World Politics* 34, no. 2 (1982): 230–66.; Kalevi Holsti, “Restructuring Foreign Policy: A Neglected Phenomenon in Foreign Policy Theory,” in *Kalevi Holsti: A Pioneer in International Relations Theory, Foreign Policy Analysis, History of International Order, and Security Studies* (Springer, Cham, 2016), 103–19.

<sup>39</sup> Jean-Frédéric Morin and Jonathan Paquin, *Foreign Policy Analysis: A Toolbox*. (Springer, 2018).

This case also precisely fits into Volgy and Schwartz' definition of foreign policy change: "a comprehensive change in the foreign policy orientation of a nation, over a brief period of time, as manifested through major behavioral changes encompassing a broad range of activities in the nation's interactions with other actors in international politics."<sup>40</sup>

It is argued in the research that foreign policy behavior is an important variable since the behavior of authoritarian leaders does not often match their announced line of action. This can be seen, for example, in the case of China. The government of China stresses the importance of building good and friendly relations with other states. However, its increasing number of military exercises in the South-China Sea demonstrates its aggressive foreign policy behavior. Similarly, during the first days of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Putin declared that the special operation would be conducted only at military sites. However, in March 2022, hundreds of civilians were killed by Russian forces in the Bucha massacre. In the case of Uzbekistan, Karimov, pursuing an isolationist foreign policy, tended to declare that Uzbekistan adhered to building good relations with its neighbors. In reality, political relations between Uzbekistan and its neighbors were strained, while cooperation among the states was very limited and sometimes even stagnant. These cases demonstrate that behavioral patterns of authoritarian states might often contradict an officially-announced line of action.

Therefore, the further research is conducted with two definitions in mind. The first is Morin and Paquin's definition of foreign policy. They define foreign policy as a set of actions considered to be behavioral patterns of the state. The second is the

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<sup>40</sup> Thomas J. Volgy and John E. Schwartz, "Foreign Policy Restructuring and the Myriad Webs of Restraint," in *Foreign Policy Restructuring: How Governments Respond to Global Change*. (Columbia: SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 22–42.

definition of foreign policy change offered by Volgy and Schwartz, who incorporate behavioral patterns into their definition of foreign policy change.

## **2.2. Literature review on foreign policy change**

### **2.2.1. Levels of analysis and their limitations**

The literature on foreign policy change provides a wide range of explanations with different analytical levels.

**At the international level,** systemic shifts in the balance of power (e.g., the end of Cold War) are argued to be the source of change.<sup>41</sup> Thus, some scholars draw on realist logic to argue that the change in systemic conditions makes states re-conceptualize their security threats and challenges, changing their foreign policy objectives and means used to achieve these objectives.<sup>42</sup> Changes in foreign policy can be also influenced by a state's position within the global system. Thus, change is unlikely to happen in states satisfied with the status quo.<sup>43</sup> Skidmore supports this argument, arguing that internationally weak states (middle level powers) are more likely to initiate change than internationally strong states (hegemonic powers).<sup>44</sup> Change can also be triggered by international events such as external shocks, policy failures, or certain foreign policy actions taken by major allies / rivals.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Jakob Gustavsson, "How Should We Study Foreign Policy Change?," *Cooperation and Conflict* 34, no. 1 (1999): 73–95; Volgy and Schwartz, "Foreign Policy Restructuring and the Myriad Webs of Restraint."

<sup>42</sup> Blavoukos Spyros and Dimitris Bourantonis, "Identifying Parameters of Foreign Policy Change: An Eclectic Approach," *Cooperation and Conflict* 49, no. 4 (2014): 483–500.

<sup>43</sup> Volgy and Schwartz, "Foreign Policy Restructuring and the Myriad Webs of Restraint."

<sup>44</sup> David Skidmore, "Explaining State Responses to International Change: The Structural Sources of Foreign Policy Rigidity and Change," in *Foreign Policy Restructuring: How Governments Respond to Global Change*, 1994.

<sup>45</sup> Hermann, "Changing Course"; Holsti, "Restructuring Foreign Policy: A Neglected Phenomenon in Foreign Policy Theory."; Yong Wook Lee, "Synthesis and Reformulation of Foreign Policy Change: Japan and East Asian Financial Regionalism," *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 4 (2012): 785–807.;

Volgy and Schwartz, "Foreign Policy Restructuring and the Myriad Webs of Restraint."

Others follow the liberal institutionalist logic. They argue that international regimes, laws and norms provide incentives for change.<sup>46</sup> Thus, change takes place either because of the socialization process, i.e., when states have to replace existing norms under the pressure of international regimes, or when states desire to join regional / international organizations, which involves fulfilling certain requirements.

**At the domestic level,** change in government is considered to be the major source of foreign policy change.<sup>47</sup> Domestic political realignments, redistribution of power among ruling elites, or alterations in societal demands are also relevant sources of change. Hermann defines them as domestic restructuring - where a certain segment of society whose support is needed become agents of change.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Pierce and Hicks, applying the Advocacy Coalition Framework, demonstrate how actors work together to establish coalitions and internationally translate their opinions into a policy.<sup>49</sup> Bureaucratic advocacy is also considered as a source of change when “a group within the government becomes an advocate of redirection.”<sup>50</sup> For example, Holsti explains that the decision of Canada to move away from the US in the early 1970s stemmed from two subdivisions in the Department of External Affairs and the Cabinet.<sup>51</sup> Yet, domestic factors have been mainly thought of as a source of foreign policy continuity.<sup>52</sup> Hagan and Rosati argue that “opponents of change often occupy

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<sup>46</sup> Thomas Risse and Kathryn Sikkink, “The Socialization of International Human Rights Norms into Domestic Practices: Introduction,” in *Domestic Politics and Norm Diffusion in International Relations* (Routledge, 2016), 117–49.

<sup>47</sup> Volgy and Schwartz, “Foreign Policy Restructuring and the Myriad Webs of Restraint.”

<sup>48</sup> Hermann, “Changing Course.”

<sup>49</sup> JJ Pierce and KC Hicks, “Foreign Policy Applications of the Advocacy Coalition Framework,” in *Foreign Policy as Public Policy? Promises and Pitfalls* (Manchester University Press, 2019), 65–90.

<sup>50</sup> Holsti, *Why Nations Realign: Foreign Policy Restructuring in the Postwar World*, 39.; Hermann, “Changing Course.”

<sup>51</sup> Holsti, *Why Nations Realign: Foreign Policy Restructuring in the Postwar World*.

<sup>52</sup> Jerel A. Rosati et al., “Emerging Issues in Research on Foreign Policy Restructuring,” in *Foreign Policy Restructuring: How Governments Respond to Global Change* (Reaktion Books, 1994), 265–79; Joly Jeroen and Friederike Richter, “Punctuated Equilibrium Theory and Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Policy as Public Policy*, 2019, 41–64; David Welch, *Painful Choices A Theory of Foreign Policy Change* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press., 2005).

political positions in the policy-making process within the government and throughout society, and can block and resist initiatives flowing from either changed international circumstances or domestic political realignment.”<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Joly and Richter argue that the states with strong bureaucracies tend to be resistant to changes.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, under democratic systems, their conceptualization implies that change is likely to happen in a single-party government, where the prime minister dominates decision making. This is in line with Skidmore’s argument that centralized states are more responsive to the need for policy modification than the more societally influenced, decentralized.<sup>55</sup>

**At the individual level,** leaders are argued to be the main source of change. Existing scholarship on leadership has provided substantial evidence that leaders play a leading role in foreign policy. A number of scholars have conceptualized the personalities of leaders by employing interdisciplinary approaches such as psychohistory, psychoanalysis and psychobiography.<sup>56</sup> For example, looking at US presidents, Barber employed a psycho biographical approach, following how three personality traits were developed through a president’s life: childhood, adolescence and adulthood.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Rosati et al., “Emerging Issues in Research on Foreign Policy Restructuring.”

<sup>54</sup> Jeroen and Richter, “Punctuated Equilibrium Theory and Foreign Policy.”

<sup>55</sup> Skidmore, “Explaining State Responses to International Change: The Structural Sources of Foreign Policy Rigidity and Change.”

<sup>56</sup> H. W. Gatzke, “Hitler and Psychohistory,” *The American Historical Review* 78, no. 2 (1973): 394–401.; David G. Winter et al., “The Personalities of Bush and Gorbachev Measured at a Distance: Procedures, Portraits, and Policy,” *Political Psychology* 12, no. 2 (June 1991): 215, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3791463>.; Raymond Birt, “Personality and Foreign Policy: The Case of Stalin,” *Political Psychology* 14, no. 4 (December 1993): 607, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3791377>.; Stanley A. Renshon, “Psychoanalytic Assessments of Character and Performance in Presidents and Candidates: Some Observations on Theory and Method,” *The Psychological Assessment of Leaders*, 2005, 105–36.; James David Barber, *The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House* (Routledge, 1985).

<sup>57</sup> Barber, *The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House*.

Many scholars build upon the cognitive theory of psychology by studying the cognitive side of leaders and its impact on their decision-making.<sup>58</sup> For example, Jervis, tracing how decision makers process information, provides explanations for deterrence theory and security dilemma.<sup>59</sup> Janis and Mann also explore the psychological sources of decision making, choosing to focus on the impact of stress and anxiety.<sup>60</sup>

A number of scholars focus on the leaders' belief systems and their impact on foreign policy. Operational code analysis is one of the most prominent approaches to study the leaders' political behavior. It analyzes their belief systems about the world. Constructing operational codes of the leaders, scholars have scrutinized the belief systems of Politburos and such leaders as Saddam Hussein, John Dulles, Vladimir Putin, John F. Kennedy, Henry Kissinger, Woodrow Wilson, Jimmy Carter, as well as other US presidents and secretaries of state.<sup>61</sup> For example, Nathan Leites examined the operational code of Politburos to study the political strategy of Bolshevism and to understand the values and attitudes of Bolshevik political elites toward the outside world.<sup>62</sup> Later on, Alexander George simplified the operational code, dividing it into

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<sup>58</sup> Alexander L. George, "Presidential Decision-Making in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice.," 1980.; Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton University Press, 2017).; Irving L. Janis and Leon Mann, "Emergency Decision Making: A Theoretical Analysis of Responses to Disaster Warnings," *Journal of Human Stress* 3, no. 2 (1977): 35–48.

<sup>59</sup> Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*.

<sup>60</sup> Janis and Mann, "Emergency Decision Making: A Theoretical Analysis of Responses to Disaster Warnings."

<sup>61</sup> N. Leites, *The Operational Code of the Politburo*, Rand Note (McGraw-Hill, 1951), [https://books.google.co.jp/books?id=3ca\\_QdGCCFEC](https://books.google.co.jp/books?id=3ca_QdGCCFEC).; Stephen G Walker and L. S. Falkowski, "The Operational Codes of U.S. Presidents and Secretaries of State: Motivational Foundations and Behavioral Consequences," *Political Psychology* 5 (1984): 237–66.; Ole R. Holsti, "The 'Operational Code' Approach to the Study of Political Leaders: John Foster Dulles' Philosophical and Instrumental Beliefs," *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne de Science Politique* 3, no. 1 (1970): 123–57.; Stephen Benedict Dyson, "Personality and Foreign Policy: Tony Blair's Iraq Decisions," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 2, no. 3 (July 2006): 289–306, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-8594.2006.00031.x>.; Marfleet, "The Operational Code of John F. Kennedy During the Cuban Missile Crisis: A Comparison of Public and Private Rhetoric."

<sup>62</sup> Leites, *The Operational Code of the Politburo*.

philosophical beliefs (world view about the nature of politics) and instrumental beliefs (response strategies to the political world).<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, he developed a set of questions which help to identify philosophical and instrumental beliefs.

On the contrary, Stanly A. Renshon argued that beliefs and attitudes are “only a small part of the total personality system.”<sup>64</sup> Therefore, in his theory of character, he argues that the character of the leader provides better understanding of the leader’s psychology. According to him, beliefs and attitudes are involved in “limited areas of functioning.” On the contrary, character serves as the personality system’s basis, from which the operation and development of personality structures are grounded on.

### ***Limitations***

When viewed in isolation, international, domestic and individual levels of analysis are not able to explain foreign policy change in Uzbekistan.

At the international level, systemic changes explain the foreign policy of Shavkat Mirziyoyev. He saw the world’s multipolarity as an opportunity for cooperation. However, systemic conditions cannot explain why Karimov was hesitant to relinquish his isolationist foreign policy under the same multipolar world. Similarly, events in Andijan, where the protesters demanded an end to government corruption, acted as an external trigger for Karimov’s isolationist foreign policy. However, external triggers cannot provide insight into the foreign policy of Mirziyoyev.

At the domestic level, change in the government provides rationale for the 2016 foreign policy change, but not for the 2005 change which took place under the same president.

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<sup>63</sup> Alexander L. George, “‘The Operational Code’: A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making,” *International Studies Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (1969): 190–222.

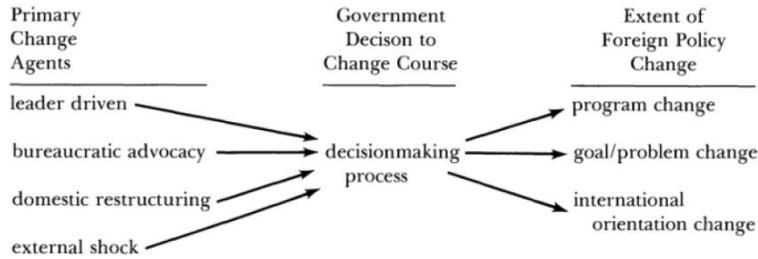
<sup>64</sup> Renshon, “Psychoanalytic Assessments of Character and Performance in Presidents and Candidates: Some Observations on Theory and Method.”

At the individual level, leaders' personalities and their beliefs are argued to be the main sources of change. For example, operational code scrutinizes decision making based on the internal world of an actor but downplays situational analysis. In other words, it does not explain how environmental pressures can change the belief system of the leaders and how this shift leads to foreign policy change. Although previous studies emphasize the fact that in centralized governments, the personality factor greatly influences foreign policy change, no attempts have been made to conceptualize foreign policy change under non-democratic leaders.

### **2.2.2. Existing models of foreign policy change and their limitations**

Almost all existing models of foreign policy change incorporate levels of analysis to examine how the external factors activate the decision-making process, which in turn, results in various types of change ranging from small to big ones. In these models, agents or so-called sources of change have to go through decision-making to usher in foreign policy change. For example, Hermann identified four agents (sources) of change. They are leaders, bureaucratic advocacy, domestic restructuring and external shock(s). Decision-making here acts as an intervening variable, affecting what type of foreign policy change follows: adjustment, program change, goal/problem change or international orientation change (Figure 2).

*Figure 2. The mediating role of decision processes between change agents and degree of policy change*

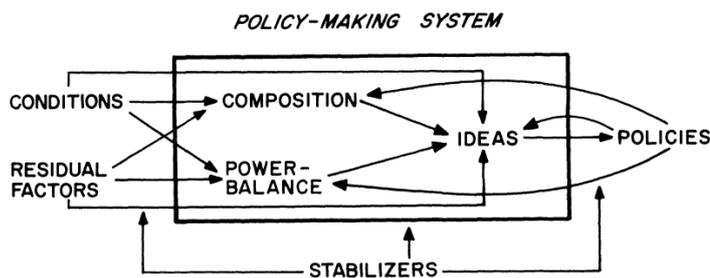


\* Source: Charles F. Hermann (1990)

Similarly, Goldman identifies four sources of change: international, cognitive, political and administrative. However, he focuses more on the decision-making variable as a source of foreign policy stability. Presenting his framework (Figure 3) Goldman says:

“A change in policy has sources, but sources do not produce policy changes directly. Sometimes pressure for change does produce change, but sometimes it does not. That is the problem of stability to be considered here. Our concern is not with the sources of change in foreign policy, but with its stabilizers.”<sup>65</sup>

**Figure 3. Kjell Goldman’s model of foreign policy change**



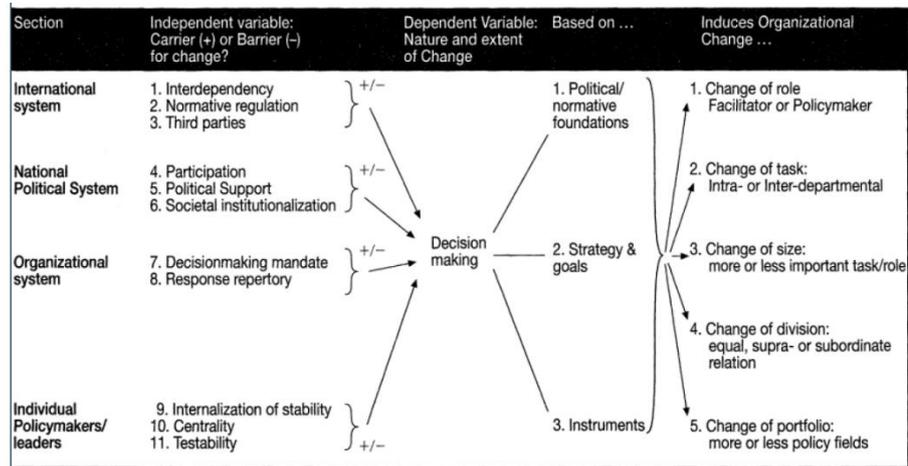
\* Source: Kjell Goldman (1982)

Kleistra and Mayer also identify four levels of change: international system, national political system, organizational system and individual policy makers (Figure

<sup>65</sup> Goldman, “Change and Stability in Foreign Policy: Detente as a Problem of Stabilization.”

4). They outline 11 carriers (incentives) and barriers for change at four levels of analysis. These carriers and barriers explain three types of foreign policy change: political/normative foundations, strategy and goals, as well as change in foreign policy tools.

**Figure 4. Model of foreign policy and organizational change**

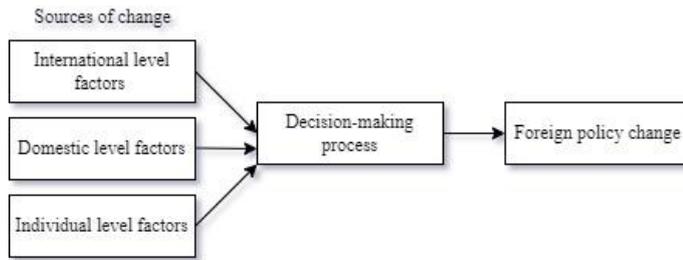


\* Source: Yvonne Kleistra and Igor Mayer (2001)

The major shortcoming of these models is that the sources of change are viewed in isolation. The interaction between them is not considered. For example, in Hermann’s model, leader driven source of change is an independent variable. Hermann does not elaborate on what factors trigger the leader to change foreign policy. He only mentions that foreign policy change can result from the persistent efforts of a powerful decision-maker who imposes his own vision of the redirection necessary in foreign policy. Therefore, “the leader must have conviction, power, and energy to compel his government to change course.”<sup>66</sup> Figure 5 below represents a simplified version of the foreign policy change models developed by C. F. Hermann, K. Holsti, Goldmann, Yvonne and Mayer.

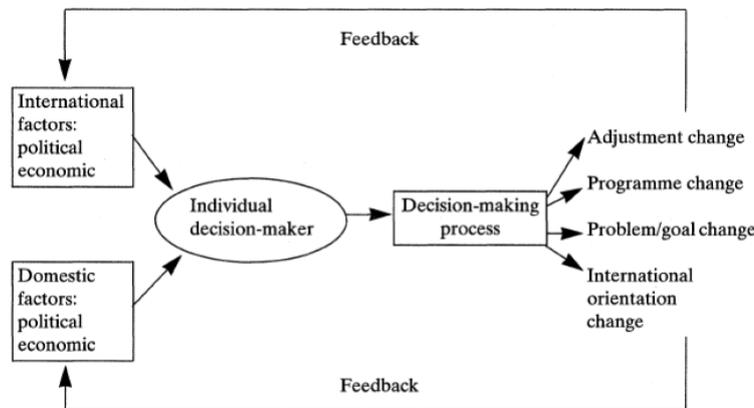
<sup>66</sup> Hermann, “Changing Course.”

**Figure 5. Simplified models of foreign policy change**



Addressing this issue, Gustavsson proposed a framework (Figure 6) which suggests that international and domestic factors should be, first, perceived by key decision-makers. Then, the decision-maker has to go through the decision-making process within established institutional structures in order to bring about a foreign policy change.

**Figure 6. The causal dynamic of foreign policy change**



\* Source: Jacob Gustavsson (1999)

Whilst the main argument of this research deals with perceptions, Gustavsson’s model focused on “pulling and hauling” – the process key decision-makers have to go through in order to bring about the change in policy.<sup>67</sup> However, foreign policy change under authoritarian governments is more likely to be swift and face little resistance due to the absence of this process. For example, in Uzbekistan, all initiatives are leader-

<sup>67</sup> Gustavsson, “How Should We Study Foreign Policy Change?”

driven. Institutional structures defend a leader's political regime and function as policy implementation machines. Furthermore, subordinates of the president maintain their position in the government by conforming to the leader's line of action. Therefore, Gustavsson's model cannot be fully applied to the case of authoritarian governments which rarely face institutional constraints.

### ***Limitations***

In addition to the aforementioned shortcomings, existing models of foreign policy change share similar limitations. First, these models represent a sort of classification of foreign policy change, meticulously examining the sources (agents) of change and extent (type) of foreign policy change. By focusing on such categorization, the abovementioned models fail to provide the underlying causes of foreign policy shifts and to trace the process of change. For example, if we attempt to apply Hermann's model to the case of Uzbekistan, the model suggests that the 2005 foreign policy change in Uzbekistan refers to international orientation type of change, while the primary agent of change was the leader. Yet, this model fails to shed light on the motivations behind Karimov's decision to isolate Uzbekistan.

Another common limitation of existing models is their overemphasis on institutional influence on decision-making process. For example, Goldmann's model suggests that external pressure for change does not necessarily produce a policy change because of the so-called stabilizers – intervening variables, which may either “block policy change, reduce the scope of policy change or delay policy change.” Similarly, Gustavsson's model alleges that foreign policy change can take place only after consensus within institutional structures is reached. By focusing on the phases and actors of the decision-making process, these models fail to account for foreign policy

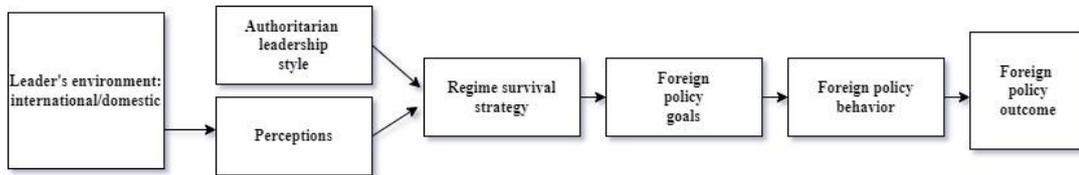
change in authoritarian regimes, where institutional influence is less pronounced. Belarus is a case in point. In 2020 it underwent a foreign policy shift, marked by an aggressive stance towards Western nations following the country's contentious presidential elections. In Belarus, where democratic institutions are weak and civil liberties are restricted, President Aleksandr Lukashenko exercises an extraordinary degree of personal authority, which enables him to redirect the foreign policy without the need for public consensus or legislative approval. Similarly, Putin's decision to invade Ukraine did not require reaching a consensus with public opinion, while the legal framework in Russia was easily modified to align with Putin's foreign policy objectives. These examples demonstrate that existing models of foreign policy change cannot be fully applied to the case of authoritarian states.

In light of the abovementioned limitations, this study suggests some advancements to the existing models by proposing a model for foreign policy change under authoritarian leaders. The model was developed by combining different levels of foreign policy making: international system dynamics, the domestic political system and cognitive aspects of foreign policy making.

### **2.3. The model of foreign policy change under authoritarian leaders**

The model for foreign policy change under authoritarian leaders (Figure 7) suggests that non-democratic leaders tend to be sensitive to their context, since they are concerned with regime survival. Therefore, a leader's environment and changes in it can shape and reshape the leader's perceptions, which become an important factor contributing to foreign policy change.

*Figure 7. Foreign policy change under authoritarian leaders*



**The leader's environment** is an independent variable that influences a leader's perceptions. In the proposed model, a "leader's environment" has a complex meaning and implies a context in which the leaders are placed. Drawing from an extensive literature review on the triggers of foreign policy change, this study posits that the term "leader's environment" comprises a spectrum of influences, encompassing either international triggers, domestic triggers, or the intricate interplay between both. Thus, a leader's environment can be:

1) A certain event, whether international or domestic, that alters or confirms a leader's perception. For example, international events encompass geopolitical shifts, international conflicts, international crises, global economic downturn, etc. On the other hand, domestic triggers include mass protests and civil unrest, economic crisis, internal power struggles, natural disasters, etc.;

2) Actions of other states. International relations and the behavior of neighboring countries can heavily influence the decision-making process of authoritarian leaders. For instance, a neighboring state adopting a more aggressive stance or forming alliances against the leader's regime could dramatically alter the leaders' perceptions;

3) Systemic changes. For example, the end of the Cold War marked a systemic change in the international system, leading to shifts in power dynamics, the emergence of new actors, and changes in the nature of conflicts;

4) The zeitgeist in which the leaders turn out to be also form an integral part of their environment. Social, cultural and ideological trends that shape the collective

mindset can influence the decisions and policies of authoritarian leaders. For instance, a rising global movement advocating for democratic reforms can create an environment that authoritarian leaders must navigate.

It is essential to highlight that, within the scope of this research, which delves into foreign policy making in authoritarian regimes, the emphasis is specifically placed on authoritarian leaders and their perceptions. Considering that in authoritarian regimes the leaders assume a prominent role, it becomes necessary to examine not only their cognitive constructs, but also the contextual backdrop, referred to as a “leader’s environment”. Understanding the intricacies of an authoritarian leader’s environment is crucial for a comprehensive analysis of their perceptions and decision-making processes.

Under authoritarian leaders, **changes in perceptions lead to a *swift* foreign policy change**. This is related to the governing structure of the state. In democratic systems, foreign policy shifts often require more extensive negotiations, consultations, and consensus-building among various branches of government and political stakeholders, making the process inherently slower and more deliberative. Compared to democracies, where decision-making processes often involve multiple layers of check and balances, authoritarian leaders can exercise greater autonomy in changing the foreign policy course without the need for extensive deliberations or approvals.

Scholarship on political psychology has empirically contributed to understanding how a leader’s decision-making style associates with governing structure. For example, under democratic leaders, the change might either be hindered or blocked. According to domestic level explanations, this might happen because of bureaucratic constraints. Whilst empirical studies on political psychology suggest that democratic leaders:

“...remain highly attuned to contextual information since they do not necessarily trust their first response to an event... To understand a situation and plan what to do, one must gather a large array of information and seek out others’ opinions on what should be done...Such leaders often take their time in making decisions.”<sup>68</sup>

On the contrary, foreign policy change under authoritarian leaders might be swift, since bureaucratic constraints are minimal. Political psychologists also suggest that authoritarian leaders exercise control over all political issues. These leaders are less likely to tolerate any resistance and have a propensity to suppress local opposition. Considering this, the term “leadership style” in this study refers to “authoritarian leaders.”

The leader’s environment and authoritarian leaders’ perceptions about it determine their **regime survival strategy** (performance-based legitimacy, cooptation, or repression). This argument is built on the concept of legitimacy from comparative politics. Thus, the leaders might sustain their regime through performance (e.g., economic progress, social stability) for maintaining power. Meanwhile, some leaders opt for cooptation, incorporating strategically important actors into the regime through patronage, corruption, etc. The leaders also use repression, relying on security forces to block resistance to their power.

Regime survival strategy, being a primary goal of any leader, plays an important role in non-democratic regimes. Empirical evidence suggests that authoritarian leaders tend to be more concerned with maintaining their power, and as a result, are more sensitive to external triggers.<sup>69</sup> Compared to democratic leaders who have to build consensus over the new foreign policy course in order to get support, authoritarian leaders tend to prevent resistance to their policies by suppression.

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<sup>68</sup> Margaret G Hermann, “Assessing Leadership Style: A Trait Analysis,” Social Science Automation, 2002, <https://socialscience.net/docs/LTA.pdf>.

<sup>69</sup> Hermann.

Therefore, the change in the leaders' perceptions might result in the change of regime survival strategy.

In turn, the regime survival strategy gets reflected into **foreign policy goals**, which shape the leaders' behavior. Ultimately, the change in behavior leads to different foreign policy outcomes.

The model suggests that **foreign policy behavior** is an essential element of foreign policy change under authoritarian leaders. The assumption is based on the definition of foreign policy change offered by Volgy and Schwartz who argue that foreign policy change is a "comprehensive change in the foreign policy orientation of a nation, over a brief period of time, as manifested through major behavioral changes encompassing a broad range of activities in the nation's interactions with other actors in international politics." The case of Uzbekistan also demonstrates the importance of behavior since a leader's behavior often contradicts officially announced actions.

### **Chapter 3. Methodology: operationalizing the leadership style and perceptions**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, this research employs Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) to define the leadership styles of Uzbek leaders and operationalize their perceptions about their environment. This chapter provides a step-by-step methodological explanation of how the two variables (*leadership style* and *perceptions*) presented in the model were measured. Each methodological explanation is followed by an empirical application of this method to the case of the Uzbek leaders.

#### **3.1. What is a Leadership Trait Analysis?**

Leadership Trait Analysis is a commonly-used framework for studying leaders. It has been employed to study the personalities of British prime ministers, leaders of sub-Saharan Africa, US presidents, heads of international organizations, Soviet leaders, etc.<sup>70</sup> LTA employs an assessment-at-a-distance or the so-called personality-at-a-distance (PAD) technique, examining the leaders through what they say. PAD is widely used in the literature since it is impossible to conduct a series of interviews or “give a battery of psychological tests” to leaders. Considering the dearth of information on Karimov and Mirziyoyev, LTA enables a study of the leaders without conducting any interviews, and makes it an attractive method for the analysis of foreign policy change in Uzbekistan.

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<sup>70</sup> Dyson, “Personality and Foreign Policy,” July 2006; Margaret G. Hermann and Charles W. Kegley, “Rethinking Democracy and International Peace: Perspectives from Political Psychology,” *International Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (December 1995): 511, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600804>; Thomas Preston, *The President and His Inner Circle* (Columbia University Press, 2001), <https://www.proquest.com/intermediateredirectforezproxy>; Kent J. Kille, *From Manager to Visionary: The Secretary-General of the United Nations* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Winter et al., “The Personalities of Bush and Gorbachev Measured at a Distance.”

LTA is a groundbreaking framework that has evolved over more than four decades, drawing upon robust empirical evidence connecting personal traits to foreign policy behavior.

LTA has been widely applied in various domains within the fields of political psychology and international relations. In one of her initial researches on personal traits, Hermann examined the personality traits of 80 leaders through manual content analysis, comparing them to more than 12,000 events of foreign policy actions. She discovered statistically significant relationships between various personal traits and foreign policy outcomes. For example, it was discovered that leaders exhibiting high levels of distrust towards others were more inclined to make decisions autonomously.<sup>71</sup> The recent contributions by Foster and Keller have revealed that distrust, conceptual complexity, self-confidence, belief in ability to control events are correlated with “leaders’ willingness to engage in diversionary strategies.”<sup>72</sup>

In an alternative study focused in assessing the influence of personal traits on the quality of decision-making among political leaders, researchers identified several traits directly impacting the quality of leadership decision-making.<sup>73</sup> For example, Schafer and Crichlow discovered that the leaders’ high belief in ability to control events and low need for power tend to result in poor decision-making process, while the decisions made by such leaders are more likely to produce outcomes diverging from national interest.

Leadership Trait Analysis has been widely used to explain certain foreign policy decisions made by the leaders. For example, Dyson’s study of British Prime

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<sup>71</sup> Hermann, 1980

<sup>72</sup> Dennis M. Foster and Jonathan W. Keller, “Leaders’ Cognitive Complexity, Distrust, and the Diversionary Use of Force,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 10, no. 3 (July 2014): 205–23, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24910829>.

<sup>73</sup> Schafer and Crichlow, *Groupthink versus High-Quality Decision Making in International Relations*.

Minister Tony Blair demonstrates the effect of a leader's personality on foreign policy outcomes. In his study "Personality and foreign policy: Tony Blair's Iraq decisions," Dyson discovered that Blair's personality, particularly, high need for power, high belief in ability to control events and low conceptual complexity affected his distinctive decision-making style. This, in turn, made Dyson conclude that "Blair's personality is a crucial factor in understanding why the British went to war."<sup>74</sup> Likewise, in his study on the influence of personality in foreign policy, Sun Yifung Sun discovered that personalities of presidents Bush and Obama played a significant role in shaping their decisions to sustain the Afghanistan War. Their war orientations were influenced by their inherent distrust of others and ingroup bias.<sup>75</sup> The study of Turkey's former prime minister, Tansu Ciller, also relates personal traits to Ciller's hawkish policies during the Kardak crisis with Greece.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, Shin Yon's study of South Korean 'Sunshine Policy' also suggests that the positive developments in inter-Korean relations (1998-2003) were the direct product of Kim Dae-Jung's personality and leadership characteristics. Particularly, it was revealed that Kim's high need for power and task orientation affected the decision-making process, thus, facilitating swift and consistent advancements in inter-Korean relations.<sup>77</sup>

Besides that, LTA was frequently employed as a valuable method to elucidate and understand specific behaviors exhibited by leaders.<sup>78</sup> For example, Dyson

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<sup>74</sup> Stephen Benedict Dyson, "Personality and Foreign Policy: Tony Blair's Iraq Decisions," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 2, no. 3 (July 2006): 289–306, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-8594.2006.00031.x>.

<sup>75</sup> Yifang Sun, "Personality and US Presidential Choices: A Study of the Protracted Afghanistan War" (The University of Edinburgh, 2023), [https://era.ed.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/1842/40888/SunY\\_2023.pdf](https://era.ed.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/1842/40888/SunY_2023.pdf).

<sup>76</sup> Baris Kesgin, "Tansu Ciller's Leadership Traits and Foreign Policy," *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* 17, no. 3 (2012): 29–50.

<sup>77</sup> Shin Yon Kim, "Presidential Personality and Foreign Policy Decision-Making: The Sunshine Policy under Kim Dae-Jung (1998–2003)," *Pacific Affairs* 96, no. 3 (September 2023): 493–530, <https://doi.org/10.5509/2023962493>.

<sup>78</sup> Stephan Fouquet and Klaus Brummer, "Profiling the Personality of Populist Foreign Policy Makers: A Leadership Trait Analysis," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 26 (September 2022): 1–29; Abigail White, "Profiling the President: Explaining Donald Trump's Nationalistic Foreign Policy Decisions Using Leadership Trait Analysis and Operational Code Analysis,"

employed Leadership Trait Analysis to explain Theresa May's actions during the Brexit negotiations. He concluded that May's personal traits, particularly high level of belief in ability to control events and extremely low level of conceptual complexity, made her adopt a series of "red lines that positioned her as seeking a comparatively hard Brexit."<sup>79</sup> Similarly, creating the LTA profiles of Boris Johnson and Nicola Sturgeon, Thiers and Wehner compared and traced the two leaders' different types of behavior in response to the COVID-19 health crisis.<sup>80</sup> Susan and Gallagher constructed Donald Trump's profile to elucidate the unique characteristics in Trump's leadership that set him apart from other US presidents.<sup>81</sup>

Other studies utilizing LTA have attempted to explain the widely known concepts existing in the fields of International Relations and Foreign Policy Analysis. For example, Czubaruk explored the connection between LTA and a state's National Role Conception (NRC). Comparing the cases of Boris Yeltsin's reaction to NATO expansion and Vladimir Putin's policies towards Ukraine, he demonstrates how personalities of individual leaders can shape NRC and state's "foreign policy ambition."<sup>82</sup> Similarly, Hermann and Kegly offer LTA as a fresh perspective to explaining the Democratic Peace Theory.<sup>83</sup> The study on the Kenya – International Criminal Court relations (2013-2017) employs LTA to explain state's compliance and non-compliance with legal regimes and treaties.

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*Contemporary Voices: St. Andrews Journal of International Relations* 4, no. 1 (2022): 5–48, <https://doi.org/10.15664/jtr.1569>.

<sup>79</sup> Stephen Benedict Dyson, "Theresa May and Brexit: Leadership Style and Performance," *British Politics*, March 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41293-023-00230-5>.

<sup>80</sup> Consuelo Thiers and Leslie Wehner, "Britain's COVID-19 Battle: The Role of Political Leaders in Shaping the Responses to the Pandemic," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 25, no. 3 (2023): 517–34, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/13691481231159021>.

<sup>81</sup> Susan H. Allen and Maryann E. Gallagher, "Is He Speaking Our Language? Donald Trump's Leadership Traits in Comparison with Previous Presidents," *Political Science Quarterly* 137 (November 2022), <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/polq.13385>.

<sup>82</sup> Colin Edward Czubaruk, "A Grasp for Global Dominance? Analyzing Russian Leaderships' Impact on Russia's National Role Conception," The College of Wooster, 2023, <https://openworks.wooster.edu/independentstudy/10665/>.

<sup>83</sup> Hermann and Kegley, "Rethinking Democracy and International Peace."

Some scholars employed LTA to illustrate the role of personality on interstate relations. Comparing leadership style of Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Kutlu et. al demonstrated the sustainability of the Turkey-EU relations “against all odds.”<sup>84</sup>

Overall, the empirical findings of the conducted research provide robust evidence affirming that personal traits exert a significant influence on the decision-making processes of the leaders, intricately shaping their behaviors and foreign policy outcomes.

### **3.2. Leadership Trait Analysis: introducing personal traits**

In LTA, seven traits are used to create a profile of a leader: 1) the belief in ability to control events; 2) need for power; 3) conceptual complexity; 4) self-confidence; 5) task orientation; 6) distrust of others; and 7) in-group bias. Based on Margaret G. Hermann’s “Assessing Leadership Style: A Trait Analysis,” Table 1 below provides a brief description of traits, examples of prescribed vocabulary particular to each trait and behavioral patterns.

In this analysis, the first four traits (*conceptual complexity, self-confidence, belief in ability to control events, and need for power*) were used to determine leadership style. *Distrust* and *ingroup bias* were used to operationalize the leaders’ perceptions.

There exists an abundance of empirical studies which construct leaders’ profiles by determining their leadership styles, and examine how their leadership styles impact foreign policy. Whereas, there is a dearth of systemic LTA studies which pay

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<sup>84</sup> Erdi Kutlu, Çağdaş Cengiz, and Emir Ozeren, “Understanding the Role of Leadership Styles of Erdogan and Merkel in Sustainability of Turkey-European Union Relations: A Leadership Trait Analysis,” *Sustainability*, August 2021.

attention to the perceptions per se. Although Hermann claims that the interrelation between distrust and ingroup bias “provides us with evidence concerning whether the leader is driven by the threats or problems he or she perceives in the world or by the opportunities to form cooperative relationships,”<sup>85</sup> *existing studies largely neglect the measurement of leaders’ perceptions through LTA*. Instead, LTA studies focus on the relationship between ingroup bias, distrust and foreign policy behavior. For instance, Shannon and Keller examined how ingroup bias and distrust affect the leaders’ propensity for norm violation; Kesgin analyzed how distrust affects leaders’ hawkish and dovish behavior; Wesley scrutinized how George W. Bush’s high level of distrust affected his belief about Iraq possessing weapons of mass destruction; Foster and Keller concluded that leaders with high levels of distrust are more prone to starting armed conflicts when the economies decline.<sup>86</sup>

By measuring perceptions through LTA, this study provides a valuable contribution to the empirical study of Leadership Trait Analysis. At the same time, the study contributes to the understanding of perceptions by offering LTA as a method for measuring perceptions.

**Table 1. Summary of traits in Leadership Trait Analysis**

\* Source: drawing on Hermann (2002)

<i>LTA trait</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Coding</i>	<i>Behavioral patterns</i>
Belief in ability to	A sense of ability to exercise influence or	Verbs indicating actions proposed or taken by the leader	<b>High belief</b> – active policy-making, control over decision-making, less likely to delegate authority for tasks, initiate activities, uncompromising

<sup>85</sup> Margaret G Hermann, “Assessing Leadership Style: A Trait Analysis,” *The Psychological Assessment of Political Leaders* 7, no. 2 (2005): 178–212.

<sup>86</sup> Baris Kesgin, “Features of Foreign Policy Birds: Israeli Prime Ministers as Hawks and Doves,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 55, no. 1 (2020): 107–26; Shannon Vaughn P. and Jonathan W. Keller, “Leadership Style and International Norm Violation: The Case of the Iraq War,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 3, no. 1 (2007): 79–104; Wesley Renfro, “Man Hears What He Wants to Hear and Disregards the Rest. George W. Bush and Iraqi WMD,” *Psicologia Politica* 47 (2013): 19–38; Dennis M. Foster and Jonathan W. Keller, “Single-Party Government, Prime Minister Psychology, and the Diversionary Use of Force: Theory and Evidence from the British Case,” *International Interactions* 46, no. 2 (2020): 227–50.

control events	control over certain events	(e.g., <i>I will use all necessary means to restore order</i> )	<b>Low belief</b> – more reactive to situations, less likely to take initiatives, shift the blame when something goes wrong, fear of failure
Need for power	Desire to establish, retain or restore power	Verbs indicating assertion, attempts to regulate behaviors of others, accusation, endeavors to impress	<b>High need</b> – manipulate the environment to appear as a winner, seek conformity to own ideas, other people are viewed as instruments for the leaders' ends, abruptly change rules if the leaders' goals and interests change, test the limits <b>Low need</b> – sense of justice, deal with people based on norms, intend to build trustful relationship with followers, sense of shared responsibility
Conceptual complexity	Ability to distinguish complexities of political life	Words indicating that the leader is able to see different perspectives (e.g., <i>approximately, possibility, trend, for example</i> )	<b>High complexity</b> – attuned to contextual information, take time in making decisions, involve other actors in the decision-making process <b>Low complexity</b> – follow their intuition, action overrides thinking, planning and searching for more information, interpretation and consistency are key to behavior
Self-confidence	Sense of self-importance	Words/phrases indicating centrality of self (e.g., <i>I will do, Let me explain why I am right here, My idea was accepted</i> )	<b>High confidence</b> – immune to incoming information, consistent in behavior, information is filtered and reinterpreted based on their high sense of self-worth <b>Low confidence</b> – seek out information from outside order to know what to do, input from others about what they are thinking
Ingroup bias	Tendency to place their group at the center, drawing a line between us and them	Words indicating group's uniqueness ( <i>great, successful, prosperous</i> ), its strength ( <i>powerful, has boundless resources, powerful</i> ) or the group's identity and honor ( <i>must maintain our own interpretation, decide our own policies, defend our borders firmly</i> )	<b>High bias</b> – attachment to the in-group, importance of culture, interested in maintaining identity, see the world as us and them, are likely to use external scapegoats, mobilize support, view politics as a zero-sum game <b>Low bias</b> – patriots interested in maintenance of their group, but are less prone to see the world as black-and-white-, less likely to use scapegoats as a means of dealing with opposition, deal with domestic discontent through interactions such as summit conferences and positive diplomatic gestures
Distrust of others	Feeling of uncertainty, unease and doubt about the actions of other people	Nouns and noun phrases which project a leader's predispositions to suspect intentions and actions of others	<b>High distrust</b> – the actions of others are perceived as hidden motives, rely only on themselves, loyalty from subordinates is a must, sensitive to criticism <b>Low distrust</b> – less likely to be concerned by the actions of others, subordinates are chosen based on other considerations rather than loyalty
Task orientation	Focus on achieving goals vs. building relationships	Words indicating working on a task (e.g., <i>achieve, plan, recommendation, proposal, accomplishment, tactic</i> ) vs. words	<b>High task</b> (solving problems) – push a group to work on solving problems, view people as instruments, constantly check on progress, seek followers who share their interests <b>Low task</b> (group maintenance) – sensitive to what the people want and try

		indicating group maintenance (e.g., <i>collaboration, disappoint, forgive, harm, suffering</i> )	to provide it, mobilizing and empowering members, build teams and share leadership
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### 3.3. Determining leadership style

#### 3.3.1 Methodological explanation

In LTA, leadership style is determined by the leader’s propensity for processing information and responding to certain constraints. The interrelations of *conceptual complexity* and *self-confidence* reflect the way the leaders process information. Whereas, the interrelation between *belief in ability to control events* and *need for power* reveals how the leaders respond to constraints.

#### Step 1. Processing information.

The interrelation of *conceptual complexity* and *self-confidence* demonstrates whether a leader is open or closed to outside information.<sup>87</sup> *Conceptual complexity* is the cognitive ability to distinguish the complexities of political life. High-complexity leaders are attuned to contextual information, involve others in the decision-making process and take their time in making decisions. Whereas low-complexity leaders tend to respond quickly, follow their intuition and rely on their own interpretation. *Self-confidence* refers to the sense of self-importance. Leaders scored high on this trait tend to be immune to incoming information, while leaders scored low in confidence seek out information from the outside and listen to others’ opinion.

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<sup>87</sup> Peter Suedfeld, “Cognitive Managers and Their Critics,” *Political Psychology* 13, no. 3 (1992): 435–53; Juliet Kaarbo and Margaret G. Hermann, “Leadership Styles of Prime Ministers: How Individual Differences Affect the Foreign Policymaking Process,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (September 1998): 243–63, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843\(98\)90029-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(98)90029-7); Robert C. Ziller et al., “Self-Other Orientations and Political Behavior,” in *Psychological Examination of Political Leaders* (New York: Free Press., 1977), 174–204.

**Table 2. Processing information (open/close to information)**

<i>Conceptual complexity</i>	<i>Self-confidence</i>	
	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>Low</i>	Relatively <b>closed</b> to contextual information; can become defensive and uncompromising if told they are wrong	<b>Closed</b> to contextual information; have a well-defined sense of what is right and wrong
<i>High</i>	<b>Open</b> to contextual information; interested in listening to a variety of perspectives	Highly <b>open</b> or sensitive to contextual information; want to make sure to cover all bases in making decisions; can tolerate being told they are wrong

\* Source: Hermann (2002)

If the leader has a higher score for conceptual complexity, and lower score for self-confidence, then he or she is considered to be open to information. This type of leader tends to be more sensitive to the environment and try to engage other people into decision-making. Leaders open to information are:

...generally, more pragmatic and responsive to the interests, needs, ideas, and demands of others.... They are sensitive to situational cues and act based on what they sense is acceptable under current conditions... These leaders deal with problems on a case-by-case basis.<sup>88</sup>

On contrary, leaders who have a lower score for conceptual complexity and higher score for self-confidence are considered to be closed to information. Such leaders frequently rely on themselves to make decisions. They are also relatively immune to suggestions and influences from the outside. Leaders closed to information are more likely to have an agenda and think independently. They usually:

...know what is right and what should happen and set about to persuade others of the appropriateness of their course of action. Such leaders are fairly unresponsive or insensitive to cues from the environment... Moreover, they are not above using coercive or devious tactics to ensure that their views are adopted by a group... These leaders are more likely to organize the decision-

<sup>88</sup> Margaret G Hermann et al., "Who Leads Matters: The Effects of Powerful Individuals.," *International Studies Review* 3, no. 2 (2001): 18.

making process in a hierarchical manner in order to maintain control over the nature of the decision.<sup>89</sup>

**Step 2. Responding to constraints.**

The interrelation between *belief in ability to control events* and *need for power*, indicates whether leaders will be influential and forceful in political maneuvering, or yield to institutional restraints and external influences.<sup>90</sup> *Belief in ability to control events* refers to a leader’s sense of agency in influencing certain issues that arise. Leaders scored high for this trait tend to be active in policy-making, take control over decision-making and are less likely to delegate authority for tasks. *Need for power* indicates the leader’s desire to establish or retain power. Leaders scored high in this trait tend to seek conformity to their ideas, change rules if their goals or interests change and manipulate the environment to appear as a winner. Whereas leaders scored low in need for power have a sense of shared responsibility and attempt to build trustful relationships with followers.

**Table 3. Responding to constraints (challenge/respect constraints)**

<i>Need for power</i>	<i>Belief in ability to control events</i>	
	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>Low</i>	<b>Respect</b> constraints; work within parameters toward goals; compromise and consensus-building are important	<b>Challenge</b> constraints but do so directly; less able to read how to manipulate people and settings from behind the scenes so may signal use of power and have less than desired effect

<sup>89</sup> Hermann et al., 18.

<sup>90</sup> Margaret G Hermann and Thomas Preston, “Presidents, Advisers, and Foreign Policy: The Effect of Leadership Style on Executive Arrangements,” *Political Psychology* 15, no. 1 (1994): 75–96; Kaarbo and Hermann, “Leadership Styles of Prime Ministers”; Stephen G. Walker, “The Motivational Foundations of Political Belief Systems: A Re-Analysis of the Operational Code Construct,” *International Studies Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (June 1983): 179, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600545>; David G. Winter and Abigail Stewart, “Content Analysis as a Technique for Assessing Political Leaders,” in *Psychological Examination of Political Leaders* (New York: Free Press., 1977); Jonathan Keller, “Constraint Challengers, Constraint Respecters, and Foreign Policy,” *International Studies Quarterly* 48 (2004).

<i>High</i>	<b>Challenge</b> constraints but more comfortable doing so in an indirect fashion; good at being “the power behind the scenes” where they can pull strings but are less accountable for results	<b>Challenge</b> constraints; are skillful at both direct and indirect influence, moving between the two types of influence depending on the context
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\* Source: Hermann (2002)

Leaders who believe in their ability to control events and exhibit a desire for power tend to challenge constraints, testing the situations and pushing the limits of what is possible. On the other hand, leaders who do not exhibit the need for power and lack the belief in ability to influence events are more likely to respect boundaries. These leaders would rather follow the established rules and behave in accordance with their position. When the leaders tend to be moderate in both traits, this indicates that the leaders have the ability to adapt to the situation and change course if necessary.<sup>91</sup> Table 3 shows that there are also cases when the leaders can score high for one trait and low for another. For example, if the leader’s need for power is high, while *belief in ability to control events* is low, he or she will acknowledge limitations and find indirect, “behind the scenes” ways to overcome the constraints. In contrast, a leader who scores high for the *belief in ability to control events*, but low on need for power, tends to be involved in direct confrontation, taking an antagonistic approach to removing obstacles. Lastly, leaders who received high scores for both traits are more skilled at overcoming limitations. They cope better with constraints since they can use both direct and indirect methods for dealing with limitations.

### Step 3. Defining leadership style.

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<sup>91</sup> Margaret G Hermann, “Using Content Analysis to Study Public Figures,” in *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

A leader's propensity for processing information and responding to certain constraints relate to the leadership styles. LTA classifies leadership styles into four types: advocate, strategist, pragmatist and opportunist, as summarized in the Table 5 below.

**Advocate** leaders are those closed to information and challenging constraints. These leaders tend to be autonomous and insensitive to context. They have their own agenda and exercise control over all political issues. Advocates are less likely to tolerate any resistance and have a propensity to suppress opposition. These leaders are often associated with authoritarian governments.

The opposite of advocates, **opportunist** leaders are those open to information and respectful of constraints. They are rational actors who focus on situational cost-benefit analysis and tend to adapt to any environment. They are extremely responsive to context and unlikely to be characterized by independence or unilateralism. These leaders are often associated with democratic governments.

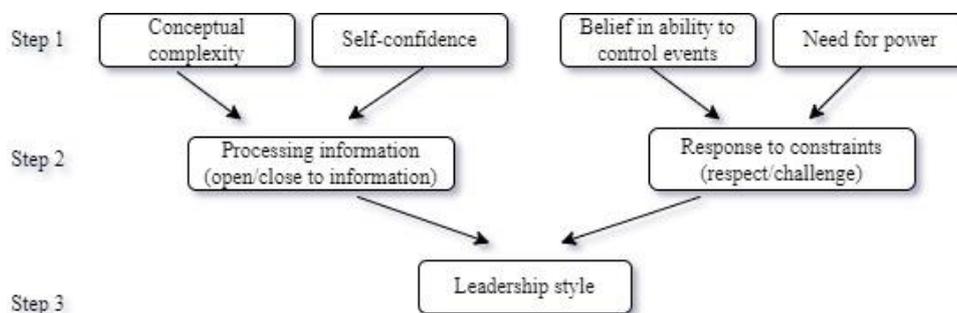
**Strategic** (open to information and challenge constraints) and **pragmatic** (closed to information and respect constraints) leaders are in between. Strategic type leaders have goals but are flexible on implementation. They set the agenda but are attentive to others' views in deciding how best to achieve goals. Pragmatists tend to represent and channel the interests of their constituents. Pragmatists try to forge alliances and come up with solutions that are acceptable to the groups who help maintain their power. Therefore, compromise is vital for pragmatic leaders. Table 5 below summarizes the leadership styles providing behavioral patterns for each type of style.

***Table 4. Leadership styles***

<i>Leadership style</i>	<i>Function of:</i>	<i>Behavioral implication</i>
<i>Advocate</i>	Challenges constraints Closed to information	Importance of the self; confronts issues head-on; achieves quick resolution to issues; decisive and forceful in dealing with problems; set own goals and pushes own agenda; seeks conformity based on own ideas; disregards dissenting evidences and opinions
<i>Strategic</i>	Challenges constraints Open to information	Importance of interaction with relevant constituents in looking toward goals; sets own agenda but attentive to others' views in deciding how best to achieve goals; attentive to interaction and process
<i>Pragmatic</i>	Respects constraints Closed to information	Formulate agenda and goals based on important constituents' desire; likely to seek conformity by steering toward compromise within set (allowed) parameters
<i>Opportunistic</i>	Respects constraints Open to information	Sensitive to context; open to bargaining, trade-offs and compromise; inclined to undertake what is deemed possible in the current situation; likely to focus on events on a case-by-case basis

In sum, the process of defining leadership style can be presented as follows:

**Figure 8. The process of determining leadership style**



\* Source: drawing on Hermann (2002)

### 3.3.2. Islam Karimov’s leadership style

Leadership styles can determine how leaders behave in the political environment, while behavioral patterns associated with each style influence the nation’s political system.<sup>92</sup>

The results of the LTA analysis for Islam Karimov reveal his leadership style as *advocate*. According to the results of leadership trait analysis before 2005 (Table 6), Islam Karimov’s score for conceptual complexity is higher than the score for self-confidence. This indicates that the leader is closed to information from outside. Research suggests that leaders closed to information:

“...are fairly unresponsive or insensitive to cues from the environment...Moreover, they are not above using coercive or devious tactics to ensure that their views are adopted by a group...These leaders are more likely to organize the decision-making process in a hierarchical manner in order to maintain control over the nature of the decision.”<sup>93</sup>

A higher score for need for power and lower score for belief in ability to control events (Table 6) indicates that Karimov challenges constraints. The leaders challenging constraints, according to empirical studies, “tend to be daring in their actions, test situations, and push the limits of what is possible.”<sup>94</sup>

**Table 5. Islam Karimov’s leadership trait analysis scores**

<i>Traits</i>	<i>Islam Karimov (before 2005)</i>	<i>Islam Karimov (after 2005)</i>	<i>LTA scores of 284 political leaders</i>
<i>Conceptual complexity</i>	0.5032 (low)	0.5029 (low)	Mean = .59 SD = .06
<i>Self-confidence</i>	0.3119 (moderate)	0.5147 (high)	Mean = .36 SD = .10
<i>Need for power</i>	0.3128 (high)	0.3469 (high)	Mean = .26

<sup>92</sup> Hermann, “Assessing Leadership Style: A Trait Analysis,” 2005.

<sup>93</sup> Margaret G. Hermann, “How Decision Units Shape Foreign Policy: A Theoretical Framework,” *International Studies Review* 3, no. 2 (September 2001): 47–81, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1521-9488.00234>.

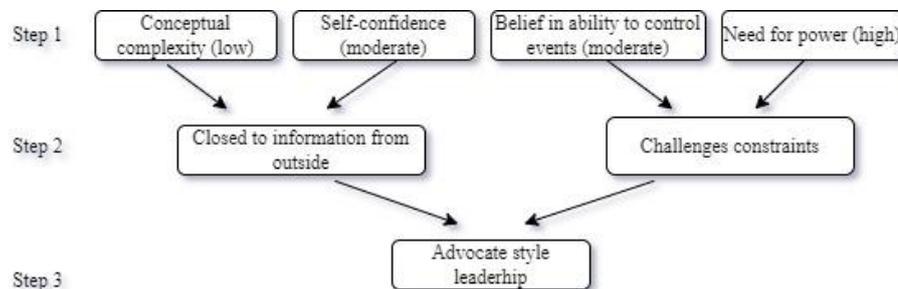
<sup>94</sup> Azamat Sakiev, “Presidential Leadership Styles and Forms of Authoritarianism in Post-Soviet Central Asia” (PhD dissertation, United States, Syracuse University, 2011).

SD – .05

*Belief in ability to control events*    0.3277 (moderate)    0.4058 (high)    Mean = .35  
SD – .05

Being closed to information and challenging constraints, Karimov falls into the category of advocate leaders, which are often associated with authoritarian governments. Figure 9 illustrates how Islam Karimov’s leadership style was determined.

**Figure 9. LTA results and Karimov’s leadership style**



Advocate leaders tend to take an aggressive, hands-on approach to achieving their political objectives. These leaders make decisions based on their personal beliefs and ideals. They are likely to do that by challenging constraints, crossing the lines and engaging in other aggressive political behavior.<sup>95</sup> The decision-making procedures and policies adopted are completely under the control of advocates.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Margaret G Hermann, “Personality and Foreign Policy Decision Making: A Study of 53 Heads of Government,” in *Foreign Policy Decision Making: Perception, Cognition, and Artificial Intelligence*, Eds. Donald Sylvan and Steve Chan (New York: Praeger, 1984), 53–80; Philip E. Tetlock, “An Integratively Complex Look at Integrative Complexity,” 1991; Suedfeld, “Cognitive Managers and Their Critics.”

<sup>96</sup> Hermann and Preston, “Presidents, Advisers, and Foreign Policy: The Effect of Leadership Style on Executive Arrangements”; Hermann and Kegley, “Rethinking Democracy and International Peace”; Paul Kowert and Margaret G Hermann, “Who Takes Risks?,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 5 (1997): 611–37.

From the early years of independence, Karimov established an autocratic regime, where he systemically eradicated the opposition.<sup>97</sup> He expelled opposition and built a hierarchical system of decision-making where institutions “served at the pleasure of Karimov’s government and aimed to defend his political regime.”<sup>98</sup> Although parliament initially challenged Karimov’s authority, it quickly lost its status because of Karimov’s leadership style.<sup>99</sup>

Karimov’s dominance over institutions was apparent from his early days as president. He intervened in the drafting process of Uzbekistan’s constitution.<sup>100</sup> Karimov’s proposals called for a presidential republic, with a wide range authority assigned to the president – including the ability to dissolve the parliament. The parliament, however, lacked authority to remove the president. Karimov’s draft also prevented the president from impeachment, a common check on the executive branch. According to Karimov’s constitution, the president would be given a permanent membership in the Constitutional Court after the two terms of presidency expired. This would provide immunity for Karimov once he left the office. Yet, instead of leaving office later on, Karimov extended his presidential term three times: in 2000, 2007 and 2015. In 2000, Karimov introduced amendments to constitution, changing the presidential term from five to seven years. As a result, the previous two terms were nullified (1991-1996 and 1996-2000). This meant that Karimov could rule the country

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<sup>97</sup> Anthony Hyman, “Post-Soviet Central Asia: Contemporary Political Setting,” in *Challenges for the Former Soviet South* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1996).; Martha Brill Olcott, *Central Asia’s New States: Independence, Foreign Policy, and Regional Security* (United States Institute of Peace, 1996); N.I. Petrov, “Political Stability in the Conditions of the Command-Administrative Regime.,” in *Central Asia: Political and Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, 2001; David Lewis, *The Temptations of Tyranny in Central Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

<sup>98</sup> Dadabaev, “Uzbekistan as Central Asian Game Changer?”

<sup>99</sup> Sakiev, “Presidential Leadership Styles and Forms of Authoritarianism in Post-soviet Central Asia.”

<sup>100</sup> Sakiev.

until 2014. However, in 2011, the constitution was amended, reverting the presidential term back to five years.

Karimov ruled with an iron-fist. During the first years of independence, the stalemate between supporters of the president and members of the political opposition escalated into street fights. One of the examples was the crackdown on student demonstrations in January 1992. Students from Tashkent University protested in the streets after price liberalizations. The students' demands were dealt with militarily, resulting in hundreds of injuries. The president's harsh response to the students' protest served as a stern warning to his opponents criticizing the government and demanding the regime change.<sup>101</sup>

The main constraints to Karimov's power were two opposition parties: Erk (Freedom) and Birlik (Unity). They heavily criticized both parliament and Karimov during the constitution drafting process. After several confrontations the opposition groups were compelled to carry out its activities from exile. Erk's leader, Muhammad Salih, was arrested. However, following public discontent, he was released. In summer 1992, he left for Turkey. Meanwhile Abdurahim Pulat, leader of Birlik, fled to the United States. Political opposition in Uzbekistan was defeated "even before it could emerge."<sup>102</sup>

Table 6 illustrates that after 2005 Karimov's scores for need for power, belief in ability to control events and self-confidence increased. This indicates that Karimov's authoritarianism strengthened. After 2005, even minor resistance to Karimov's rule resulted in harsh repressions. People criticizing Karimov's government along with human rights activists and journalists were sent to Jasliq Prison, dubbed the

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<sup>101</sup> Musuraliev and Sorokina, "Firm Hand As Lever of Perestroika," *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, July 21, 1991.

<sup>102</sup> Sakiev, "Presidential Leadership Styles and Forms of Authoritarianism in Post-Soviet Central Asia."

“house of torture” by Human Rights Watch.<sup>103</sup> Among them were civil society activists, such as Gaibullo Jalilov (member of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan), Sanjar Umarov (leader of the Sunshine Coalition), Farkhod Mukhtarov (member of Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan).

The government has also taken actions to suppress activists who challenged official corruption and power abuse. An independent journalist, Dilmurod Saidov, was sentenced to twelve and a half years in prison on false charges of extortion and forgery. According to local activists, Saidov was imprisoned due to his investigations into official corruption in the Samarkand region and his support for farmers’ rights. Another human rights defender, Ganihon Mamatkulov was arrested on false charges of fraud and bribery. He advocated the farmers who have been victims of illegal land confiscation.<sup>104</sup>

Human Rights Watch also reported that there were incidents in which the members of the Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan were subjected to attacks, threats and detentions. For example, it was reported that in May 2009, three members of the Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan – Elena Urlaeva, Salomat Boimatova and Inur Abdulov were stopped by the police while on their way to the UN office in Tashkent. They were supposed to deliver a report on human rights defenders in Uzbekistan. The police requested that they accompany them to the police station, but the alliance members refused, resulting in the police officers beating Abdulov and forcing all three members into a police car. Urlaeva was forced to sign an agreement

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<sup>103</sup> Hugh Williamson, “Shuttering Notorious Jaslyk Prison A Victory for Human Rights in Uzbekistan,” Human Rights Watch, August 27, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/08/27/shuttering-notorious-jaslyk-prison-victory-human-rights-uzbekistan>.

<sup>104</sup> “World Report 2010: Uzbekistan,” Human Rights Watch, 2010, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2010/country-chapters/uzbekistan>.

not to participate in any human rights activities until June 10, the day of the EU-Uzbekistan Human Rights Dialogue.<sup>105</sup>

Overall, Karimov’s advocate leadership style fostered a political environment in which leader dominated matters in all spheres of life.

### 3.3.3. Shavkat Mirziyoyev’s leadership style

The results of LTA analysis for Mirziyoyev revealed that the president has an advocate leadership style. Mirziyoyev scored low in *conceptual complexity* and *self-confidence* (Table 7). Leadership trait analysis suggests that leaders who scored low in both traits tend to be closed to information. He also scored high in the *need for power* and low in the *belief in ability to control events*. This suggests that Mirziyoyev is a leader who challenges constraints.

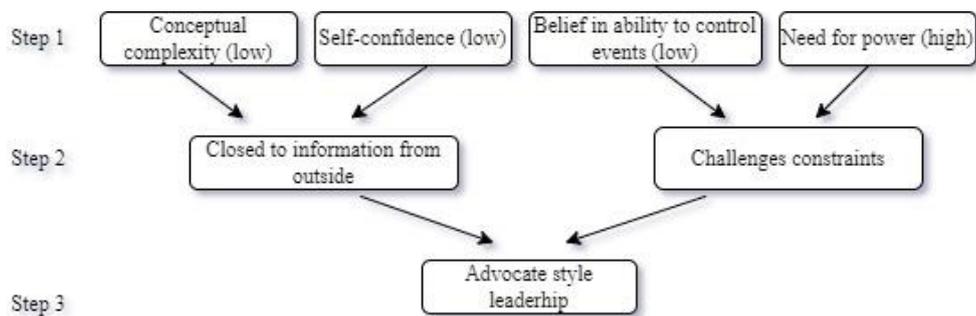
**Table 6. Shavkat Mirziyoyev’s leadership trait analysis scores**

<i>Traits</i>	<i>Shavkat Mirziyoyev</i>	<i>LTA scores of 284 political leaders</i>
<i>Conceptual complexity</i>	0.4814 (low)	Mean = .59 SD = .06
<i>Self-confidence</i>	0.2235 (low)	Mean = .36 SD = .10
<i>Need for power</i>	0.3871 (high)	Mean = .26 SD = .05
<i>Belief in ability to control events</i>	0.2996 (low)	Mean = .35 SD = .05

Similar to Karimov, Mirziyoyev, being closed to information and challenging constraints, falls in the category of advocate leaders. Figure 9 illustrates how Shavkat Mirziyoyev’s leadership style was determined.

<sup>105</sup> “World Report 2010: Uzbekistan.”

**Figure 10. LTA results and Mirziyoyev’s leadership style**



A former official from the Cabinet of Ministers shared his experience in working with Shavkat Mirziyoyev, when the former was prime minister of Uzbekistan:

“Shavkat Mirziyoyev respected only those people who carried out all his orders without asking any questions. He did not tolerate any explanations of why the things could not be done. Nor did he tolerate any excuses for why implementation failed.”<sup>106</sup>

Mirziyoyev’s tendency to make most decisions on his own, especially the ones in domestic politics, is explained by the fact that, being a prime minister for thirteen years, he knew the system from inside and was aware of existing problems in Uzbekistan.

“For many years I have held responsible positions at all levels of government, including being a member of Oliy Majlis [Parliament of Uzbekistan]. Therefore, I can say with full confidence that I know all the shortcomings of the old system of governance and, more than others, I know the problems that bother the population of Uzbekistan.”<sup>107</sup>

For example, during a video conference on healthcare issues, Mirziyoyev admitted that “we have completely killed the healthcare system” and the problems in the medical

<sup>106</sup> Interview by the author with the former official of the Cabinet of Ministers, January 4, 2022.

<sup>107</sup> Shavkat Mirziyoyev, “Yangi Uzbekiston Demokratik Uzgarishlar, Keng Imkoniyatlar va Amaliy Ishlar Mamlakatiga Aylanmoqda,” PrezidentUz, August 17, 2021, <https://president.uz/uz/lists/view/4547>.

field were the result of corruption under the former minister of healthcare, Anvar Alimov, whom Mirziyoyev had supervised.<sup>108</sup> Talking to the new minister of healthcare, Mirziyoyev warned him to be aware of lobbies and not to fall under their influence.<sup>109</sup>

Mirziyoyev, being a part of Karimov's system and knowing what kind of information was delivered to the president, prefers to verify all the information rather than blindly relying on the reports of government officials. "My tragedy is that I know everything about you all,"— said Mirziyoyev during the video conference with government officials.<sup>110</sup> There were several occasions when Mirziyoyev asked staff to organize a trip to a certain region of Uzbekistan. However, on the day of the trip he unexpectedly "changed his plans" asking the staff to take him to a place not on the itinerary. He did this to surprise local governors and to see real problems. For example, during a visit to the Ishtikhan district of the Samarkand region, Mirziyoyev said: "I know very well what is going on there. Should the president come here? Yes. Because I don't trust anyone. I walk myself and I want the other officials to do the same."<sup>111</sup>

Leaders closed to information tend to have an agenda. They "know what is right and what should happen and set about to persuade others of the appropriateness of their course of action."<sup>112</sup> Thus, Mirziyoyev attempts to change the attitude of government officials. He urges them to solve citizens' problems by talking directly to the people rather than writing reports. With this in mind, Mirziyoyev also ordered the creation of the People's Virtual Reception Offices of the President of the Republic of

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<sup>108</sup> YouTube, "Shavkat Mirziyoyev Raspekaet Chinovnikov Minzdrava," YouTube, January 5, 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnQzROAbPKI&ab\\_channel=%D0%A4%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B3%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%84%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%82%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%BE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnQzROAbPKI&ab_channel=%D0%A4%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B3%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%84%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%82%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%BE).

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Shavkat Mirziyoyev, "Mirziyoyev: Ya Ne Doveryayu Nikomu," UPL 24, March 18, 2018, <https://upl.uz/president/5775-news.html>.

<sup>112</sup> Hermann et al., "Who Leads Matters: The Effects of Powerful Individuals.," 18.

Uzbekistan all over the country. This office arranges direct dialogue with the population. Following the president, ministries have also created reception offices for collecting people's complaints. This case demonstrates once again that decision-making power is largely concentrated in the hands of the president, while ministries, being responsible for implementation of presidential policies, try to please Mirziyoyev by following his lead.

As for the leader's attitude to constraints, Mirziyoyev scored high in the *need for power* and low in the *belief in ability to control events*. His scores suggest that Mirziyoyev is a leader who challenges constraints. But he prefers to do so indirectly, using the behind-the-scenes-tactics. The biggest constraint to Mirziyoyev's power was the head of security service Rustam Inoyatov - the "most feared man" in Uzbekistan. A former KGB colonel, he had been in charge of the security service for more than twenty years.<sup>113</sup> Diplomats and political experts have long referred to him as the "gray cardinal" of Uzbek politics who has a say even in issues outside of his field of responsibility.<sup>114</sup> Speaking to *The Diplomat*, Human Rights Watch researcher Steve Swerdlow remarked that Inoyatov was "one of the most ruthless figures in all of the post-Soviet space, responsible for building up the most feared and notorious security services agencies in the whole former Soviet region."<sup>115</sup> He also added that "without any legislation governing it, Inoyatov's SNB operated literally above the law of Uzbekistan, employing a sprawling apparatus of security agents who spied on the population and the government itself."<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> "Rustam Inoyatov: The Most Feared Man in Uzbekistan," Open-source investigations, 2017, <https://www.opensourceinvestigations.com/uzbekistan/rustam-inoyatov-feared-man-uzbekistan/>.

<sup>114</sup> Catherine Putz, "Uzbekistan Dismisses Long-Serving and Much-Feared Security Service Chief," *The Diplomat*, February 1, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/02/uzbekistan-dismisses-long-serving-and-much-feared-security-service-chief/>.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

In early 2017, Mirziyoyev attempted to introduce visa-free regime for 27 countries to open up the country to tourists. However, he was met with strong resistance from Inoyatov, who opposed the policy since the security services typically monitored all foreigners. Faced with such internal pressure, the president u-turned on a policy announced three weeks earlier.<sup>117</sup> Inoyatov was also against the return of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to Uzbekistan since EBRD insisted on liberalizing the foreign exchange market. It was widely believed that the SNB was involved in the black money market, which would have been hampered with liberalization.

Mirziyoyev was aware that the National Security Service could hinder reforms aimed at pulling the country out of isolation and attracting foreign investment.<sup>118</sup> Although he came to power with the support of Inoyatov, Mirziyoyev later discretely removed Inoyatov and consolidated power in his hands.<sup>119</sup> First, Mirziyoyev replaced the leadership of the presidential security service, appointing his son-in-law Otabek Shakhanov as a deputy head of the presidential guard.<sup>120</sup> He also became close to one of the largest Russian oligarchs, Alisher Usmanov, who provided the new president with economic support and contact with Moscow.<sup>121</sup> Later, Mirziyoyev fired Inoyatov's successor Shukhrat Gulyamov for accusations of weapons smuggling,

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<sup>117</sup> Beate Eschment, "All Obstacles Removed?," Center for East European and International Studies, February 14, 2018, <https://www.zois-berlin.de/en/publications/zois-spotlight/archiv-2018/all-obstacles-removed>.

<sup>118</sup> "Uzbekistan's New President Steps Towards Ambitious Reform With Security Chief Sacking," Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank, February 2018, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2018/02/uzbekistans-new-president-steps-towards-ambitious-reform-security-chief-sacking>.

<sup>119</sup> Chatham House, "Uzbekistan's New President Steps Towards Ambitious Reform With Security Chief Sacking," Chatham House, February 18, 2018, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2018/02/uzbekistans-new-president-steps-towards-ambitious-reform-security-chief-sacking>.

<sup>120</sup> Radio Ozodlik, "Prezident Mirziyoyev Poruchil Svoyu Lichnuyu Okhranu Mladshemu Zyatyu," Radio Ozodlik, March 31, 2017, <https://rus.ozodlik.org/a/28401629.html>.

<sup>121</sup> Radio Ozodlik, "Prezident Mirziyoyev Arendoval Samolyot u Oligarha Usmanova," Radio Ozodlik, October 15, 2017, <https://rus.ozodlik.org/a/28794813.html>.

money laundering and having links with organized crime.<sup>122</sup> In December 2017, Mirziyoyev, in his address to Parliament, criticized SNB's activities, stating that "we should not allow the concentration of all powers and resources in the hands of a single body and we have to prevent the violation of the principle of checks and balances."<sup>123</sup> He also added that "the National Security Service had been operating on the basis of a 26-year old Regulation," a time when "any problems were assessed as a threat to national security, which led to an unreasonable expansion of powers."<sup>124</sup> In January, the minister of Internal Affairs Adkham Akhmadbaev was arrested. Then General Prosecutor Ikhtiyor Abdullayev, who was later appointed as Chief of National Security Service, personally gave the arrest order. Minister Akhmedbayev was not detained by the members of National Security Service, but by ones from the Presidential Guard, Ministry of Internal Affairs and the General Prosecutor's Office.<sup>125</sup> This served as a warning to Inoyatov should he decide to resist the will of the president. Finally, on January 31, 2018 Mirziyoyev dismissed Inoyatov and appointed him to the post of advisor to the president – as a symbolic position for retired officials.

Political experts agree that Mirziyoyev would not have become president without the support of Inoyatov, who, along with the finance minister Rustam Azimov, was also touted as a possible candidate for replacing Karimov.<sup>126</sup> A political expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace says:

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<sup>122</sup> Fergana News, "Obnarodovano Vistupleniye Mirziyoyeva s Kritikoy 'Nechisti' i 'Predateley' v Ryadah SNB," Fergana News, February 8, 2018, <https://fergananews.com/news/28289>.

<sup>123</sup> "Poslaniye Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan Shavkata Mirziyoyeva Oliy Majlisu," Uza.Uz, December 12, 2017, <https://uza.uz/ru/posts/poslanie-prezidenta-respubliki-uzbekistan-shavkata-mirziyeev-23-12-2017>.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Radio Ozodlik, "V Tashkente Arestovan Eks-Ministr MVD Uzbekistana," Radio Ozodlik, January 29, 2018, <https://rus.ozodlik.org/a/29004607.html>.

<sup>126</sup> Jack Farchy, "New Uzbekistan President's Conciliatory Tack Brings Hope of Change," Financial Times, December 6, 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/92a19386-baf0-11e6-8b45-b8b81dd5d080>; Rafael Sattarov, "Konets Tranzita. Kak Ukhod Glavnogo Silovika Izmenit Uzbekistan," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 1, 2018, <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/75398>; Chatham House, "Uzbekistan's New President Steps Towards Ambitious Reform With Security Chief Sacking," Chatham House, accessed November 2,

“Rustam Azimov, then-finance minister, was to take over as prime minister, with Inoyatov playing the role of arbitrator, making sure that the rivalry between Mirziyoyev and Azimov would not threaten stability in Uzbekistan. Back then no one imagined that Mirziyoyev would soon be able to get rid of both of his co-rulers.”<sup>127</sup>

Ultimately, the interrelation of Mirziyoyev’s traits, *belief in ability to control events* and *need for power*, demonstrates that Mirziyoyev is not so sensitive to the political context.

According to Hermann, “in the decision-making process such leaders’ positions are likely to prevail as they take charge and work to control what happens.”<sup>128</sup> Indeed, Mirziyoyev was able to challenge constraints in the face of Inoyatov. The decision to open up the country and bring in investors has prevailed. One of the most significant regulatory initiatives introduced by Mirziyoyev was currency liberalization, which led to a complete abolition of the black money market. After ten years of absence, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) also resumed its activity in Uzbekistan. Nowadays, citizens from 85 countries can travel to Uzbekistan visa-free.<sup>129</sup>

Being closed to information and challenging constraints, Mirziyoyev is also considered an advocate style leader. Advocate leaders mostly lead by their own agenda and goals. In order to push through his agenda, Mirziyoyev often disregards the opinions of his subordinates and tolerates people who conform with his own ideas. For example, Mirziyoyev requires his subordinates to collect information through visiting regions, just as he does.

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2022, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2018/02/uzbekistans-new-president-steps-towards-ambitious-reform-security-chief-sacking>.

<sup>127</sup> Sattarov, “Konets Tranzita. Kak Ukhod Glavnogo Silovika Izmenit Uzbekistan.”

<sup>128</sup> Hermann et al., “Who Leads Matters: The Effects of Powerful Individuals.,” 96.

<sup>129</sup> AdvanTour, “Uzbekistan Visa Regulations,” AdvanTour, 2022, <https://www.advantour.com/uzbekistan/visa.htm>.

“It is necessary to define by law that the Parliament and the Council of People’s Deputies are obliged to consider initiatives put forward by citizens. A special web-page “My Opinion” should be created on the internet. A smart deputy would love that. And it will be easier for you. People will have the opportunity to express their opinions on the issues related to state and society.”<sup>130</sup>

This shows that Mirziyoyev not only suggests certain policies, but forcefully requires his subordinates to conform with his decisions and proposed policies.

Furthermore, in 2022, Mirziyoyev’s government proposed amendments to constitution that change the presidential term from five to seven years. The proposed amendments were put to a referendum on April 30, 2023.<sup>131</sup> In July 2023, Mirziyoyev extended his presidential term through snap elections. The extension of his presidential term was carried out through a highly controversial and orchestrated referendum. The changes to Uzbekistan’s constitution were approved by an overwhelming majority, raising suspicions of electoral manipulation and a lack of transparency. The move effectively allowed Mirziyoyev to remain in power for an extended period, undermining the principles of democratic governance and the notion of peaceful and orderly transfer of power. This, in turn, once again indicates Mirziyoyev’s attempt to retain power and illustrates the authoritarian nature of the president.

### **3.4. Operationalization of perceptions**

#### **3.4.1. Methodological explanation**

In this study, ingroup bias and distrust were used to measure the perceptions of the leaders.

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<sup>130</sup> Uza.Uz, “Poslaniye Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan Shavkata Mirziyoyeva Oliy Majlisu,” Uza.Uz, December 23, 2017, <https://uza.uz/ru/posts/poslanie-prezidenta-respubliki-uzbekistan-shavkata-mirziyeev-23-12-2017>.

<sup>131</sup> RFE/RL’s Uzbek Service, “Uzbekistan To Hold Referendum On New Constitution That Would Allow President To Run Again,” RFE/RL’s Uzbek Service, March 10, 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbekistan-referendum-mirziyoyev-constitution-terms/32311624.html>.

*Ingroup bias* indicates the leader’s tendency to place their own group at the center. High ingroup biased leaders are interested in maintaining a group’s identity, see the world as a zero-sum game and tend to use external scapegoats to mobilize support of their group. Leaders who scored low for this trait are also patriots, but less prone to see the world as us vs them, and less likely to use scapegoats to deal with opposition.

*Distrust* indicates the leader’s doubts about the actions of others. Leaders with a high distrust perceive the actions of others as hidden motives and require loyalty from subordinates, whereas leaders scored low for distrust are less likely to be concerned by the actions of others.

Empirical studies suggest that the interrelation between the two traits indicates whether the leaders perceive the world as a threat or opportunity for building cooperative relationships. Previous research demonstrates that the way the leaders approach the world directly influences the confrontational / cooperative nature of the country.<sup>132</sup> Table 8 below summarizes the leaders’ worldviews and provides behavioral patterns for each case.

**Table 7. Four types of the leader’s motivation toward world**

<b>Ingroup bias</b>	<b>Distrust of others</b>	
	<b>Low</b>	<b>High</b>
	<i>World is not a threatening place; conflicts are perceived as context-specific and are reacted to on a case-by-case basis; leaders recognize that</i>	<i>World is perceived as conflict-prone, but because other countries are viewed as having constraints on what they can do, some flexibility is possible; leaders,</i>

<sup>132</sup> Robert A. Levine and Donald T. Campbell, *Ethnocentrism: Theories of Conflict, Ethnic Attitudes, and Group Behavior*, 1972; Herbert C. Kelman, “Conversations with Arafat: A Social–Psychological Assessment of the Prospects for Israeli–Palestinian Peace,” *American Psychologist* 38, no. 2 (1983): 203; John A. Vasquez, “Why Do Neighbors Fight? Proximity, Interaction, or Territoriality,” *Journal of Peace Research* 32, no. 3 (1995): 277–93; Mark Snyder, Margaret G Hermann, and Charles W. Kegley, “Rethinking Democracy and International Peace: Perspectives from Political Psychology,” *International Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (1995): 511–33.

<b>Low</b>	<p><i>their country, like many others, has to deal with certain constraints that limit what one can do and call for flexible responses; moreover, there are certain international arenas where cooperation with others is both possible and feasible. (Focus is on taking advantage of opportunities and building relationships.)</i></p>	<p><i>however, must vigilantly monitor developments in the international arena and prudently prepare to contain an adversary's actions while still pursuing their countries' interests. (Focus is on taking advantage of opportunities and building relationships while remaining vigilant)</i></p>
<b>High</b>	<p><i>While the international system is essentially a zero-sum game, leaders views are bound by a specified set of international norms; even so, adversaries are perceived as inherently threatening and confrontation is inevitable; leaders work to limit the threat and enhance their countries' capabilities and relative status. (Focus is on dealing with threats and solving problems even though some situations may appear to offer opportunities.)</i></p>	<p><i>International politics is centered around a set of adversaries that are viewed as "evil" and intent on spreading their ideology or extending their power at the expense of others; leaders perceive that they have a moral imperative to confront these adversaries; as a result, they are likely to take risks and to engage in highly aggressive and assertive behavior. (Focus is on eliminating potential threats and problems.)</i></p>

Source: Hermann (2002)

### 3.4.2. Perceptions of the Uzbek leaders

The leadership trait analysis of Karimov in the 1990s revealed that Karimov scored low for distrust and ingroup bias (Table 9). Empirical evidence suggests that the leaders who have low levels of distrust and ingroup bias do not see the environment as a dangerous place. Leaders with low distrust and ingroup bias perceive the conflicts in the context and respond to them based on a specific case. These leaders acknowledge the existence of limitations, which constrain the actions of the states. Trying to work within the limitations, the leaders with low distrust and ingroup bias tend to be flexible in their responses. The leaders also perceive the international environment as a platform which provides possibility for cooperation. Therefore, the leaders with low ingroup bias and distrust focus on utilizing opportunities provided by the international environment and build relationships.

In the 1990s Karimov saw the environment as an opportunity for cooperation. Despite domestic and transborder instabilities following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Karimov attempted to build friendly relations with the neighboring Central Asian republics and other states, including the US, Russia and China. Cooperation covered economic, political, security and ecological areas. Pursuing his foreign policy, Karimov relied on diplomatic tools.

“If there are any disagreements between the two states, then they must compromise, find a solution to the problem. It turns out that diplomacy is not a simple task. To do it, you need to find touch points, make a call for understanding, try to convince them, to reassure them.”<sup>133</sup>

Karimov also believed in the power of international organizations, which operate in accordance with rules and norms. He believed that integration of Uzbekistan into the international environment would provide Uzbekistan more opportunities for cooperation, thus, helping Uzbekistan to solve its domestic problems.

“The 21<sup>st</sup> century will be the century of globalization in international relations. Therefore, integration and participation of sovereign states in international institutions must be considered not only as a historic inevitability, but also as a powerful factor in stability.”<sup>134</sup>

This explains Karimov’s initiatives at the regional and international levels, as well as the proactivity of his foreign policy.

Leadership trait analysis of Karimov after 2005 demonstrated the increase in Karimov’s distrust and ingroup bias. In other words, Karimov’s perceptions changed, making him see other countries as a threat which needed to be confronted. Empirical evidence suggests that the leaders who scored high in the two traits, tend to perceive the environment as a dangerous place where the states have to struggle in order to

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<sup>133</sup> Islam Karimov, “To Globalism through Regionalism. Speech at the International Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark,” in *Homeland Is Sacred to Everyone* (Uzbekiston, 1995).

<sup>134</sup> Islam Karimov, *Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century: Challenges to Stability and Progress* (Uzbekiston, 1997), 288.

remove potential dangers. The leaders tend to see other states as “evils” who seek expansion at the expense of other or intend to spread their ideology. Therefore, the leaders with high distrust and ingroup bias tend to take risks and act more aggressively and assertively. These leaders focus their attention on removing potential dangers and problems. This explains the hostile foreign policy behavior of Karimov after 2005. He became uncompromising on national interests, taking a tough stance towards the neighboring countries.

Leadership trait analysis of Mirziyoyev demonstrated that the president scored low for the ingroup bias and distrust. Mirziyoyev’s perceptions are similar to Karimov in the 1990s. Positive views about the international environment explain Mirziyoyev’s approach to foreign policy making. Similar to Karimov in his early presidential years, Mirziyoyev seeks regional and international cooperation. Believing that cooperation is the only way to achieve foreign policy goals, Mirziyoyev has initiated the first steps toward building trust in the Central Asian region. He believes that trust is an important condition for cooperation and building good relationships with other countries. Compared to Karimov, who chose isolation in order to distance Uzbekistan from perceived external threats, Mirziyoyev is more flexible in response and believes that there are always other ways to deal with existing problems.

**Table 8. Perceptions of the Uzbek leaders**

<i>Traits</i>	<i>Islam Karimov (before 2005)</i>	<i>Islam Karimov (after 2005)</i>	<i>Shavkat Mirziyoyev</i>	<i>LTA scores of 284 political leaders</i>
<i>Distrust</i>	0.0726 (low)	0.2435 (high)	0.0465 (low)	Mean = .13 SD = .06
<i>Ingroup bias</i>	0.1001 (low)	0.2404 (high)		Mean = .15 SD = .05



## Chapter 4. Islam Karimov's foreign policy in the 1990s

### 4.1. Openness and proactivity of Uzbekistan's foreign policy

Uzbekistan's foreign policy in the 1990s was marked by openness and proactivity in regional and international affairs.

At the regional level, Uzbekistan's proactivity was reflected in its attempts to promote regionalism in Central Asia. Uzbekistan initially led the calls for greater cooperation and regional integration.

“Our republic plays a significant role in Central Asia and the future of the region depends on Uzbekistan. The path of growth chosen by the people of Uzbekistan determines the possibility that our neighboring states would choose the same path.”<sup>135</sup>

Karimov believed that “Tashkent has an exceptional position”<sup>136</sup> in the region and undertook several initiatives in regional affairs. He introduced the concept of “*Turkestan – our common home*” – which was supposed to promote regional unity and institutionalize the process of regional integration. The concept molded the Turkic-speaking nations together under their common culture and history. Karimov claimed that such commonalities would foster the institutionalization processes within the region.

“The peoples living in this region are united by a common history, culture, language, and religion. The historical roots of our people are intertwined with each other... We will work together, in close cooperation... We will collectively decide how to use our natural resources.”<sup>137</sup>

The integration processes within the framework of “*Turkestan – our common home*” started in 1994 when Uzbekistan along with Kazakhstan signed an agreement on the

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<sup>135</sup> Islam Karimov, “Way to Independence: Problems and Plans,” in *Uzbekistan: National Independence, Economy, Politics, Ideology*, Uzbekitan, 1993.

<sup>136</sup> Islam Karimov, “Press Conference for Journalists of International Association of Foreign Correspondents, Accredited in the CIS,” in *National Independence, Economy, Politics, Ideology* (Uzbekistan, 1996).

<sup>137</sup> Karimov, “Way to Independence: Problems and Plans.”

creation of a Common Economic Space (CES). Following the inclusion of Kyrgyzstan and, later, Tajikistan, Karimov proposed creating the Organization of Central Asian Cooperation (OCAS). As such, CES was transformed into OCAS in 1998. OCAS became a platform where members could discuss joint economic and security issues, maintain political dialogue, as well as promote regional cooperation. Bilateral and multilateral agreements achieved within OCAS covered issues such as promoting investments, tax reduction, migration management, limiting drug trafficking, ecological issues, water management, etc. Uzbekistan was also a member of other multilateral frameworks such as Central Asian Bank for Cooperation and Development, International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) and Central Asian Battalion (CENTRASBAT).

Along with cooperation within multilateral frameworks, Karimov adhered to building stable relationships with neighboring countries on a bilateral basis. It is notable that the initial years following the collapse of the Soviet Union were marked by economic and political instability in the Central Asian region. A bloody civil war erupted in Tajikistan, radical Islam became problematic in Afghanistan; arms smuggling, drug trafficking, transborder ethnic clashes, territorial disputes came to the forefront and threatened the development of the Central Asian region. On the top of that, the newly established Central Asian republics had to deal with economic problems domestically. Despite such instability, Karimov attempted to build friendly relations with neighbors: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

The relations between **Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan** prior to the dissolution of the USSR were tense. In June 1990, an ethnic clash conflict between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz took place in Southern Kyrgyzstan cities of Uzgen and Osh. Disputes arose over the land of the former “kolkhoz” (collective farm), and became known as the Osh

riots. More than 300 people perished during the riots. Despite this, Kyrgyzstan was the first country to sign an Agreement on Eternal Friendship with Uzbekistan in 1992. This bilateral agreement sought to enhance economic and political collaboration between the two countries and was founded on the principles of cooperation, mutual trust, non-interference in internal affairs, as well as respect for independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. The treaty encouraged cooperation in various sectors, such as trade, investments, security, education, environment, etc. It also emphasized the importance of negotiations and increased interparliamentary communication. In 1993, the two governments took a significant step towards strengthening their bilateral relationship by signing a Statement on the Development of Economic Integration. The statement created a framework for cooperation in various economic sectors, such as trade, investment, and transportation. The main goal was to cultivate a favorable environment for trade and investment by removing barriers to trade, including tariffs, customs duties, and other restrictions. The statement laid the foundation for a closer economic relationship between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. In 1995, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan signed a Free Trade Agreement. In December 1996, the presidents of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan reinforced bilateral relations between the two states by signing a Treaty on Eternal Friendship.

**Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan** also had territorial disputes in areas inhabited by ethnic Kazakhs, but controlled by Uzbekistan. In the 1990s Karimov displayed willingness to compromise the border issues. In 1998, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan signed an Agreement on Eternal Friendship. The agreement called for the full-scale cooperation “on the basis of equality, mutual understandings... and mutual trust.”<sup>138</sup> Following that, the presidents of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan met in Tashkent in 2000

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<sup>138</sup> “Agreement on Eternal Friendship between the Republic of Uzbekistan and Republic of Kazakhstan,” October 31, 1998, <https://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx?rgn=6978>.

to delimitate the boundaries between the two states. During a subsequent visit by Karimov to Kazakhstan, a treaty was signed that resulted in 96 percent of the borders being delimited. In 2002 Karimov again visited Kazakhstan, reaching an agreement on separate sections of the state borders.

The diplomatic relations between **Uzbekistan and Tajikistan** were established in 1992. During that time Tajikistan was drawn into a bloody civil war. Initially, the government of Uzbekistan did not intervene, calling for peaceful resolution to the conflict. However, with tensions escalating, Karimov came to the aid of Tajikistan. In October 1994, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan signed a Cooperation Agreement which set up greater coordination between the two states in the areas of security and foreign policy. According to the agreement, Uzbekistan would provide political and military support to Emomali Rakhmon's government in the fight against the United Tajik Opposition.<sup>139</sup> Relations between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan got closer in 1998 following the end of the civil war. In January 1998, the leaders of the two states signed a joint communiqué and an Agreement on Settlement for Cargo Transportation and Supply of Gas, as well as on Settlement of Tajikistan's public debt. Despite progress, however, Uzbekistan still had some disputes with Tajikistan. The main thorn in relations was Tajikistan's attempt to build the Rogun Dam. Karimov opposed the construction because of Uzbekistan's reliance on the cotton industry. Karimov feared that construction of the dam would restrict Uzbekistan's access to water and damage Uzbekistan's water-intensive industry.<sup>140</sup> Despite tensions, Karimov saw Tajikistan as a part of Central Asia, stating that Uzbeks and Tajiks are the one nation speaking in different languages. In 2001, following the 2000 Agreement

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<sup>139</sup> United Tajik Opposition comprised democratic, nationalist and Islamist forces

<sup>140</sup> Alexander Sodiqov, "The Rogun Dam Controversy: Is Compromise Possible?," Tajikistan Monitor, May 11, 2012, <https://tjmonitor.wordpress.com/2012/05/11/rogun/>.

on Eternal Friendship, the leaders of each country signed a Joint Statement that sought to pursue constructive solutions to problems in Uzbek – Tajik relations.

Regarding **Turkmenistan**, it is a state with a pronounced neutral position, striving to distance itself from participation in any sorts of blocs and alliances as much as possible. At the same time, Turkmenistan is a closed country with a strong authoritarian regime, where any demonstrations of dissent are routinely suppressed. Turkmenistan's foreign policy along with the nature of its regime stymied relations following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 1990s Turkmenistan established a visa regime. Under this regime, even residents living near the border in neighboring countries needed to obtain a visa to visit their relatives and friends. Despite this, Karimov extended an olive branch to Turkmenistan. In 2000, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan signed a Treaty on Border Delimitation. Four years later, the leaders of both countries met in Bukhara to sign additional agreements on the same matter. The same year, the two presidents made general statements of friendship and cooperation.

Most importantly, Karimov harnessed diplomatic tools, open dialogue and compromise to solve regional problems with Central Asian neighbors.

“If there are any disagreements between the two states, then they must compromise, find a solution to the problem. It turns out that diplomacy is not a simple task. To do it, you need to find common points, make a call for understanding, try to convince them, to reassure them.”<sup>141</sup>

At the international level, Uzbekistan emerged as a proactive player in the global arena, with a commitment to promote regional cooperation, especially in the area of security, which was important in providing much needed stability and economic development. One of Uzbekistan's major initiatives was the proposal at the United Nations General Assembly to establish a Nuclear Free Zone in Central Asia. The treaty mandated the

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<sup>141</sup> Karimov, “To Globalism through Regionalism. Speech at the International Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark.”

signatories to refrain from developing, testing, or acquiring nuclear weapons and prohibited the stationing of such weapons on their territories. It also called for the destruction of existing weapons and the conversion of nuclear facilities into peaceful purposes. This initiative demonstrated Uzbekistan's commitment to global disarmament and non-proliferation. Karimov also became the first president to seek solutions to the troubles in Afghanistan, initiating the "6+2" coalition. The coalition comprised Iran, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and China along with Russia and the US. It addressed the growing concern over the Taliban's rise and their potential to destabilize the region. The main goal of the Afghan initiative was to find a peaceful solution to the conflict and prevent the spread of extremist ideologies. Furthermore, Karimov proposed the establishment of a permanent regional conference on regional security in order to provide a platform for discussing a range of issues including border security, terrorism, drug trafficking, etc.<sup>142</sup> In 1999, at the OSCE Istanbul Summit, Karimov proposed creating an international center for combating terrorism.<sup>143</sup> Being open to cooperation with all countries, Uzbekistan pursued a multi-vectoral foreign policy. Particularly, Karimov attempted to build balanced relations with the great powers: Russia, China and the United States. Thus, Uzbekistan became a member of China-led Shanghai Cooperation organization (SCO), Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), as well as the US-led Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM).

In sum, looking at Karimov's foreign policy in the 1990s, several features are evident in Karimov's foreign policy behavior. First, Karimov built good, or at least,

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<sup>142</sup> UN ODS, "UNGA Official Records. United Nations General Assembly Forty-Eighth Session," UN ODS, 1993, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N93/866/17/PDF/N9386617.pdf?OpenElement>.

<sup>143</sup> Bruce Pannier, "OSCE: Central Asian Leaders Stress Security," RFE/RL, November 9, 1999, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1092709.html>.

non-confrontational relations with the Central Asian neighbors despite the existence of tensions. Second, Karimov was eager to display leadership and unite the Central Asian region. Lastly, in the 1990s Karimov balanced Uzbekistan's relationships with the great powers.

Several questions arise in regards to Uzbekistan's foreign policy of the 1990s. Why was Uzbekistan open to cooperation? Why was Karimov, to certain extent, open for compromise and dialogues? Since foreign policy decision-making was centralized in the hands of the president (see Chapter 3), it is necessary to look at the leader's environment of the 1990s and Islam Karimov's perceptions of it. This provides a better understanding of why the Uzbek government decided to pursue an open and proactive foreign policy despite domestic and regional instabilities stemming from the collapse of the Soviet Union.

#### **4.2. The leader's environment in the 1990s**

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War presented a chance for the previously controlled Central Asian states to take control of their own political, economic, and social development. Under Soviet rule, Central Asia had strategic importance. Competing with the "free world" ideology, the Soviet Union attempted to "demonstrate its own democracy at work, first and foremost in Central Asia and the Caucasus."<sup>144</sup> To do that, the Chair of the Supreme Soviet of the Uzbek SSR, Sharaf Rashidov, suggested that the Soviet Union should showcase its Islamic cultural heritage and demonstrate that religious practice was allowed and respected. Rashidov emphasized the need to display religious freedom of Muslims by demonstrating "to

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<sup>144</sup> Artemy M. Kalinovsky, "Central Asia and the Global Cold War," Wilson Center, August 8, 2018, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/central-asia-and-the-global-cold-war>.

international delegations the freedom of Muslims to practice their religion in our country, to show mosques, mazars, seminaries and religious monuments.”<sup>145</sup> Central Asia was also used by the Soviet Union to demonstrate its “achievements in turning poor agricultural societies into modern, industrialized ones.”<sup>146</sup> Furthermore, the Soviet Union involved the Central Asian states in its invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. It sent Central Asian soldiers to Afghanistan and relied on Central Asian translators, intelligence officials and advisers.<sup>147</sup>

Overall, the Soviet Union invested heavily in the development of the Central Asian states, focusing on agriculture (mostly cotton production), mining, and manufacturing sectors. The purpose was to strengthen the region’s economic and military capabilities, which were important in the context of the Cold War.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 resulted in the emergence of five republics in Central Asia: Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. On the one hand, the collapse of the USSR presented a chance for these states to free and to take control of their own political, economic, and social development. On the other hand, the leaders of the Central Asian states were neither prepared for independence nor wanted it.<sup>148</sup> Nevertheless, being thrown into independence, the five republics had little chance but to establish independent economies, domestic policies, state institutions, while also deciding their foreign policy direction. However, “independence has not been kind to Central Asia.”<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Artemy M. Kalinovsky.

<sup>146</sup> Artemy M. Kalinovsky

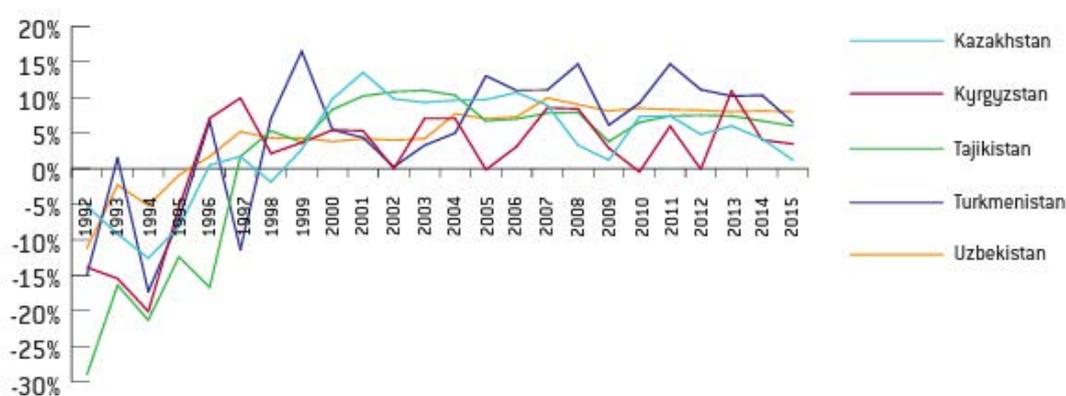
<sup>147</sup> Artemy M. Kalinovsky, “Central Asia and the Global Cold War.”

<sup>148</sup> Farangis Najibullah, “Watching The Soviet Coup From Central Asia,” RFE/RL, August 19, 2011, [https://www.rferl.org/a/central\\_asia\\_soviet\\_coup\\_anniversary/24301711.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/central_asia_soviet_coup_anniversary/24301711.html).

<sup>149</sup> Fiona Hill, “The United States and Russia in Central Asia: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran,” The Brookings Institution, August 15, 2002, <https://www.brookings.edu/on-the-record/the-united-states-and-russia-in-central-asia-uzbekistan-tajikistan-afghanistan-pakistan-and-iran/>.

The process of moving away from the Soviet-controlled economy and political structure appeared to be more challenging and intricate than anticipated. Being the poorest and least developed states in the Soviet Union, the newly established Central Asian republics had to start their development from scratch. In the past, the five states heavily relied on the Soviet Union for trade and economic support. The loss of Moscow as the center of gravity resulted in a severe economic crisis (Figure 11). This, in turn, resulted in high unemployment rates and inflation, causing economic instability across the region.

**Figure 11. GDP growth rate in the Central Asian republics**



\* Source: Bruegel based on World Bank WDI

Economic instability led to widespread popular discontent and political instability in the Central Asian states. Tajikistan experienced a brutal civil war from 1992 to 1997. The conflict was sparked by a coalition of opposition groups: liberal democratic reformers and Islamists, which later formed into the United Tajik Opposition. The war had severe consequences for civilians, with around 60,000 people

being killed.<sup>150</sup> The civil war had significant effect not only on Tajikistan, but also its Central Asian neighbors. The conflict caused a refugee crisis as a large number of refugees fled to neighboring countries, putting a strain on their already fragile economies. Furthermore, damaged infrastructure stymied economic development and trade in the region.

Uzbekistan also experienced political instability with opposition groups criticizing the government for the slow pace of reforms and a lack of political freedoms. Along with opposition groups Erk and Birlik, which were banned by the government in the 1990s, Karimov had to deal with a more violent opposition group, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). IMU rejected policies of the Karimov's government and sought to establish an Islamic state through violent means. Working with Taliban in Afghanistan, IMU made several attempts to attack the government and security forces. In February 1999, six bombs exploded in Tashkent, targeting mainly the government buildings. Following the bombings, Karimov's government named the people responsible for the explosions: leader of IMU, Tohir Yuldosh and its military commander, Juma Namangoni. In response, the IMU called for the overthrow of the Uzbek government. The group announced a holy war (jihad) against the Uzbek government in August 1999. Short after that, IMU militants entered the Batken region in southern Kyrgyzstan, with the intention to reach Uzbekistan's territory and instigate an Islamic rebellion there. On August 5, 2000, several clashes took place in the southern mountainous regions of Uzbekistan between the government forces and Islamic militants, resulting in approximately fifteen deaths and numerous injuries.

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<sup>150</sup> Shirin Akiner and Catherine Barnes, *Accord. Politics of Compromise. The Tajikistan Peace Process* (London: Conciliation Resources, 2001), [https://rc-services-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/Politics\\_of\\_compromise\\_The\\_Tajikistan\\_peace\\_process\\_Accord\\_Issue\\_10.pdf](https://rc-services-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/Politics_of_compromise_The_Tajikistan_peace_process_Accord_Issue_10.pdf).

IMU announced its responsibility for the operation. A week later, the fighting took place in a mountainous area not far from Tashkent.<sup>151</sup>

In addition, ethnic clashes erupted in the region following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The region experienced several ethnic conflicts due to the arbitrary borders that were created by the Soviet Union. These borders did not consider the ethnic groups and their respective territories. For example, there are four enclaves along the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border: one Kyrgyz enclave (Barak) sat in Uzbekistan's territory and four Uzbek enclaves (Sokh, Shokhimardon, Jhangail and Qalacha) located in the territory of Kyrgyzstan. Two Tajik enclaves (Vorukh and Kairragach) are situated in the Batken region of Kyrgyzstan. During the Soviet years, ethnic groups "maintained their structure, cohesion and loyalty" despite their geographical location.<sup>152</sup> However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, various groups found themselves living in different countries or areas dominated by other ethnic groups, which fueled a sense of nationalism. These circumstances often led to violence and confrontations between the ethnic groups. The hotspot of ethnic conflicts was Fergana Valley – an area shared between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Just prior to the Soviet Union collapse, the Osh riots took place in Kyrgyzstan in June 1990. The conflict stemmed from a dispute between the Kyrgyz nationalist groups, who wanted to seize land for building houses, and ethnic Uzbeks, who were already farming on 'kolkhoz.' The situation quickly escalated as the ethnic groups began attacking each other, destroying the police and public buildings. It took around 3000 troops to bring the situation under control and prevent a group of 15000 Uzbeks from seeking revenge

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<sup>151</sup> Turat Akimov, "Batken Conflict Returns," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, February 21, 2005, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/batken-conflict-returns>.

<sup>152</sup> Francisc Serra Massansalvador, "The Process of Nation Building in Central Asia and Its Relationship to Russia's Regional Influence," *Jean Monnet/Robert Schuman Paper Series* 10, no. 5 (2010): 1–13.

in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>153</sup> Kazakhstan experienced ethnic clashes between Chechen and Kazakh diasporas. In 1992, Chechen groups killed four Kazakhs in Ust-Kamenogorsk, giving rise to demonstrations in Kazakhstan, which demanded the expulsion of Chechens from the territory of Kazakhstan.<sup>154</sup>

Along with economic, political instability, border disputes and ethnic clashes, Central Asia had to deal with neighboring Afghanistan, which was involved in the civil war (1992-1996). Despite its strategic location and proximity to Afghanistan, Central Asia “was low down the priorities of the United States and other governments” being largely ignored in favor of other regions.<sup>155</sup> The situation changed after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which brought the region into the spotlight. Due to the region’s close proximity to Afghanistan, the international community was compelled to pay attention to the region and help Central Asia address the security risks.

#### **4.3. Islam Karimov’s perceptions**

On August 31, 1991, Uzbekistan declared its independence from the Soviet Union, becoming one of the first Central Asian republic to do so. By then, Karimov’s perceptions about the environment were quite optimistic. The leadership trait analysis of Karimov in the 1990s revealed that Karimov scored low for distrust and ingroup bias (Table 8). Empirical evidence suggests that the leaders who have low levels of distrust and ingroup bias do not see the environment as a dangerous place. Leaders with low distrust and ingroup bias perceive the conflicts in the context and respond to them based on a specific case. These leaders acknowledge the existence of limitations,

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<sup>153</sup> “Osh Conflict of 1990,” GlobalSecurity.org, accessed March 15, 2023, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/osh-conflict.htm>.

<sup>154</sup> “Chechens Reportedly Ordered Out of Region,” Los Angeles Times, October 20, 1992, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-10-20-mn-408-story.html>.

<sup>155</sup> Hill, “The United States and Russia in Central Asia: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran.”

which constrain the actions of the states. Trying to work within the limitations, the leaders with low distrust and ingroup bias tend to be flexible in their responses. The leaders also perceive the international environment as a platform which provides possibility for cooperation. Therefore, the leaders with low ingroup bias and distrust focus on utilizing opportunities provided by the international environment and build relationships.

Indeed, with the Cold War over, Karimov believed that the world was no longer a dangerous place. He perceived the collapse of the USSR as a major opportunity for nation building.

“And, finally, at the end of the century, at the behest of history, the largest and the last empire in the world, the USSR, collapsed... The people who lived in conditions of uncomplaining obedience in a huge country, which occupied one-sixth of the earth’s land, freed themselves from the shackles of slavery. A century-old dream of the people of Uzbekistan came true. Our dear Motherland raised high the proud flag of independence”<sup>156</sup>

At the same time, Uzbekistan found itself facing a number of challenges. As mentioned above, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, each of the newly established republics in the Central Asian region faced similar challenges such as domestic political instability, terrorist attacks, ethnic clashes, economic problems, and religious extremism. Karimov was aware of those challenges stemming from economic and political instability in the region.

“It is clear that the processes of renewal and economic reforms in Uzbekistan are taking place in very difficult conditions, when the totalitarian system has collapsed and economic ties have been interrupted. The economic crisis in all the republics of the former Soviet Union is getting worse... Interethnic relations have become aggravated... There are still many problems ahead.”<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Islam Karimov, “Uzbekistan - a State with a Bright Future,” in *National Independence: Economy, Politics, Ideology* (Uzbekiston, 1993).

<sup>157</sup> Karimov.

Nevertheless, he perceived them as context-specific and believed that existing problems could be solved by collective actions. Expressing his concerns about regional problems, Karimov aimed to build good relationships with other Central Asian republics.

“If we act together in overcoming the difficulties afflicting the newly established states, in the search for a way out of the economic crisis, then this will be a policy that meets the interests of all peoples.”<sup>158</sup>

Karimov also believed in the power of international institutions, which would help Uzbekistan to solve domestic and regional problems.

“The participation of the republic in the activities of international organizations serves as the basis for its economic rapprochement with the countries across the world... Such participation, with the mobilization of the forces and resources of the partner countries, makes it possible to jointly implement a number of major transnational projects and solve interregional problems.”<sup>159</sup>

Overall, despite the domestic and regional problems, Karimov viewed the dissolution of the Soviet Union as an opportunity to create a strong and prosperous nation free from the constraints and limitations imposed by the Soviet regime.

“We intend to create a democratic state governed by the rule of law, a civil society based on a civilized and stable market economy, as well as an open foreign policy.”<sup>160</sup>

#### **4.4. Regime survival strategy and foreign policy goals**

At the same time, a transition from a Soviet-style government to a market-oriented economy fraught with difficulties. This required a significant restructuring of economic and political institutions. Many were dissatisfied with this process. The

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<sup>158</sup> Karimov.

<sup>159</sup> Islam Karimov, “Foreign Economic Activity - Integration into the World Economy,” in *National Independence: Economy, Politics, Ideology* (Uzbekistan, 1993).

<sup>160</sup> Karimov, “Uzbekistan - a State with a Bright Future.”

unstable domestic situation led to Karimov's presidency being challenged by opposition groups.

Karimov's rule was challenged domestically by opposition parties "Erk" (prodemocratic) and "Birlik" (nationalist). The opposition criticized Karimov's handling of the economy. Despite being one of the largest producers of gold, cotton, and natural gas in the region, Uzbekistan's economy struggled in the 1990s. Inflation ran rampant, unemployment was rife, and poverty was widespread. Opponents of the government accused it of mismanaging the economy and failing to address the needs of ordinary citizens.<sup>161</sup> There was discontent at the pace of political and economic reforms in the country. After gaining independence, Karimov promised that the country would move towards a more democratic and open society. Yet, Karimov's government was slow to implement reforms and unwilling to tolerate political opposition. There were also concerns about the rising corruption and cronyism. The president and his inner circle were accused of using their positions of power for personal gain, rather than working for the benefit of the country and its people.<sup>162</sup>

Karimov's response to such criticism was harsh. Political activists and opposition leaders were arrested, imprisoned and subjected to torture. Some of the well-known opposition figures who were imprisoned include the leader of the opposition party "Erk", Muhammad Salih; the leader of the Islamic movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Tohir Yuldashev; a human rights activist and the member of

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<sup>161</sup> Pamela Blackmon, "Back to the USSR: Why the Past Does Matter in Explaining Differences in the Economic Reform Processes of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan," *Central Asian Survey* 24, no. 4 (2005): 391–404; Akbarzadeh Shahram, *Uzbekistan and the United States: Authoritarianism, Islamism and Washington's Security Agenda* (Zed Books, 2005).

<sup>162</sup> Resul Yalcin, *The Rebirth of Uzbekistan: Politics, Economy and Society in the Post-Soviet Era* (Ithaca Press, 2002); Martin C. Spechler, "Authoritarian Politics and Economic Reform in Uzbekistan: Past, Present and Prospects," *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 2 (2007): 185–202; Kathleen Collins, "Clans, Pacts, and Politics in Central Asia 13, No. 3 (2002): 137-152.," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 3 (2002): 137–52; Human Rights Watch, "Persecution of Human Rights Defenders in Uzbekistan" (Human Rights Watch, May 1, 2003), <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/eca/uzbek050103-bek.htm>.

“Birlik” opposition group, Yusuf Juma. The government tightly controlled the media and placed restrictions on freedom of assembly and speech, making it difficult for opposition groups to organize rallies and protests.<sup>163</sup>

Karimov justified suppression of opposition parties by claiming that they undermined the stability and security of the country by opposing reforms introduced by the government. Karimov claimed that they did nothing but criticize. Stressing that “our people do not need empty promises, but a concrete, well-defined program of action,” Karimov publicly expressed his concerns about the real motives of opposition groups.

“Do they [opposition groups] have a clear program, clear to everyone, understandable to people? They do not have any positive proposals that make the people’s life easier... Is there a path along which they are going to lead the people of Uzbekistan? How to strengthen the economy of republic, how to ensure that Uzbekistan is not seized by the lawlessness of crime?... Silence”<sup>164</sup>

Karimov argued that opposition groups had no course of action for the future development of Uzbekistan, which made him think that there was support from foreign governments and organizations intended to undermine his regime.

The results of the LTA analysis for Islam Karimov reveal his leadership style as *advocate*. According to the results of leadership trait analysis before 2005 (Table 6), Islam Karimov’s score for conceptual complexity is higher than the score for self-confidence. This indicates that the leader is closed to information from outside. A higher score for need for power and lower score for belief in ability to control events (Table 6) indicates that Karimov challenges constraints. Being closed to information

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<sup>163</sup> Jane Kokan, “Voiceless in Uzbekistan,” *Index on Censorship* 21, no. 5 (1992): 28–29; Jeff L. Brown, “Mass Media in Transition in Central Asia,” *Gazette (Leiden, Netherlands)* 54, no. 3 (1995): 249–65.

<sup>164</sup> Islam Karimov, “I Am Sure - Uzbekistan Has a Bright Future. Answers to the Questions of Foreign Journalists. March 4, 1993,” in *National Independence, Economy, Politics, Ideology* (Uzbekiston, 1996).

and challenging constraints, Karimov falls into the category of advocate leaders, which are often associated with authoritarian governments. Empirical evidence suggests that advocate style leaders are known for their decisiveness and forceful demeanor when addressing problems, often setting personal goals and actively pursuing their own agenda.

Karimov realized that he needed to mobilize domestic support to his regime in order to stay in power. He recognized that the legitimacy of his rule was based on his ability to solve existing problems and deliver tangible results. Therefore, Karimov opted for *performance-based legitimacy* as his main regime survival strategy. The strategy sought to improve economic situation in Uzbekistan and to achieve political stability through solving intraregional issues. This, in turn, would garner support and solidify Karimov's power.

Countering opposition groups, Karimov claimed that “political games must be put aside” and the people's problems should be addressed through certain actions rather than political appeals and slogans. Thus, resolving economic and security became a means to legitimize power. As a result, improving the economy and achieving stabilization became the *main foreign policy goals* of Uzbekistan in the 1990s.

“The path of Uzbekistan lies in preserving peace and tranquility, taking care of the most vulnerable segments of society, creating the necessary conditions for them, and gradually, without haste or fuss, transitioning to a market economy.”<sup>165</sup>

#### **4.5. Foreign policy behavior**

At the same time, Karimov recognized that improving the domestic situation and resolving security issues needed outside assistance. In particular, Uzbekistan needed

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<sup>165</sup> Karimov, “Uzbekistan - a State with a Bright Future.”

the loans which were necessary for satisfaction of the people's basic needs. Therefore, Karimov needed to establish economic cooperation with foreign countries. Foreign policy became the main tool for the Uzbek government to solve domestic problems.

Since Karimov believed that international organizations operate in accordance with rules and norms, he was convinced that cooperation within institutions would be not only possible, but would help Uzbekistan to solve existing problems.

“The 21<sup>st</sup> century will be the century of globalization in international relations. Therefore, integration and participation of sovereign states in international institutions must be considered not only as a historic inevitability, but also as a powerful factor in stability.”<sup>166</sup>

To achieve his foreign policy goals, Karimov sought recognition from the international community and tried to attract foreign investments. Karimov actively sought to build relationships with countries outside of Central Asia, including the United States, China, Russia and the European Union. These relationships were critical in helping Uzbekistan to secure much-needed foreign investment, trade and technology.

“Today the newly independent states in the post-Soviet space are in the process of laying the foundations of their national statehood and advancing towards democratic reform, for which they need the assistance and support of the world community...I mean not only material and financial assistance but also, and above all, the moral and political support we need for our sovereign and independent development.”<sup>167</sup>

To attract attention, Karimov had to behave proactively. On the international stage, he promoted international cooperation and put forward a number of important initiatives aimed at strengthening stability and security in the Central Asian region. Speaking at the United Nations General Assembly, Karimov initiated creation of the Nuclear Free Zone in Central Asia, the formation of “6+2” coalition to negotiate on Afghan issues,

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<sup>166</sup> Karimov, *Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century: Challenges to Stability and Progress*.

<sup>167</sup> Commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, No. A/50/PV.40 (October 24, 1995).

as well as establishing a permanent regional conference on regional security.<sup>168</sup> He also signed a Collective Security Treaty in 1992 with the heads of Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan.<sup>169</sup> Additionally, Uzbekistan actively participated in the NATO *Partnership for Peace* program. In 1999, at the OSCE Istanbul Summit, Karimov proposed the creation of an International Center for combating terrorism.<sup>170</sup> After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Karimov was the first president in Central Asia to lend support to the United States and provided territory for military bases.

As a result, Karimov's proactive behavior helped diversify Uzbekistan's foreign policy and establish friendly relationships with other countries. In March 2002, the United States and Uzbekistan signed a declaration on strategic partnership. The declaration marked a significant improvement in the political relationship between the two countries. The United States recognized Uzbekistan as a strategic partner and expressed support for the country's independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty. The declaration also increased security cooperation, including joint efforts to combat terrorism, extremism, and organized crime. It also emphasized the need for increased economic cooperation, promotion of trade, investment, etc. In addition, the declaration aimed to improve humanitarian and cultural ties between the states through cooperation in the fields of health, education, science and technology.<sup>171</sup> A similar document was signed between Uzbekistan and Russia in 2004. China, Turkey, Japan, South Korea and the European Union also became the strategic partners of Uzbekistan.

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<sup>168</sup> UN ODS, "UNGA Official Records. United Nations General Assembly Forty-Eighth Session."

<sup>169</sup> Azerbaijan, Belarus and Georgia joined the CSTO in 1993

<sup>170</sup> Pannier, "OSCE: Central Asian Leaders Stress Security."

<sup>171</sup> Archive of the U.S. Department of State, "Declaration on the Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework Between the United States of America and the Republic of Uzbekistan" (U.S. Department of State, 2002), <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eur/rls/or/2002/11711.htm>.

Uzbekistan occupies a geo-strategic location. As the state with the largest population in the region, it shares borders with all Central Asian nations and Afghanistan. Very few regional initiatives can be completed without Uzbekistan's involvement. Therefore, Karimov's proactivity and readiness for negotiations resulted in actual policies aimed at regional integration. In January 1993, five Central Asian States met in Tashkent to discuss the political and economic situation in the region.<sup>172</sup> The leaders deliberated on issues related to currency coordination, development of communications and problems of the Aral Sea. They also agreed on the need for annual meetings, where leaders could discuss problems and find solutions. This meeting laid foundations for further integration. In January 1994, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan signed an agreement on the establishment of Common Economic Space (CES) aimed at the free movement of goods. In April 1994, Kyrgyzstan joined the agreement and CES was transformed into the Central Asian Economic Community (CAEC). Following the end of its civil war, Tajikistan has also joined CAEC in 1998. In December 2001, Karimov received support for his proposal to strengthen CAEC by removing any barriers between the Central Asian states. This led to CAEC's transformation into the Organization of Central Asian Cooperation (OCAS).

Regional cooperation went beyond economic issues. In 1995, CAEC members' defense ministers formed a joint Council of Defense Ministers, which led to creation of the tripartite Central Asian Battalion (CENTRASBAT). CENTRASBAT was a multinational peacekeeping force composed of military personnel from Central Asian republics, including Uzbekistan. It aimed to provide stability and security in the region, promote regional cooperation, as well as prepare for participation in international peacekeeping and humanitarian missions in the region, including Afghanistan. One of

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<sup>172</sup> UNCCD Knowledge Hub, "Joint Communique of the Heads of Central Asian States" (CAWaterInfo, 1993), [http://www.cawater-info.net/library/rus/ifas/ifas\\_7.pdf](http://www.cawater-info.net/library/rus/ifas/ifas_7.pdf).

the most successful operations conducted by CENTRASBAT was a training operation, during which 500 US soldiers and 40 Central Asian soldiers departed from North Carolina to Uzbekistan on September 14, 1997. These initiatives, in turn, resulted in economic and military assistance provided by NATO.<sup>173</sup>

Along with multilateral cooperation in the economic and security fields, Karimov fostered close links with neighbors by trying to solve ecological problems caused by the Aral Sea deterioration. In 1992, the leaders of the Central Asian states initiated the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) with headquarters located in Almaty. In January 1993, the first meeting of the Central Asian leaders took place in Kazakhstan. As a result of the meeting, the Interstate Council on problems of the Aral Sea Basin (ICAS) was formed. The Executive Committee of the ICAS was located in Tashkent. The first meeting of the ICAS took place in Tashkent in July 1993. In January 1994, Uzbekistan held the second meeting of ICAS in Nukus. Afterwards, the meetings became routine, taking place in Turkmenistan (1994, 1995, 1999, 2002), Uzbekistan (1995, 1998, 2001), and Kazakhstan (1996, 1997, 2002).

Karimov harnessed diplomacy, claiming that Uzbekistan supports the solution of all conflicts through negotiations. He declared that Uzbekistan strives to “achieve progress only through the development of ties in such fields as economy, culture, trade and education.”<sup>174</sup>

When Karimov diversified Uzbekistan’s foreign policy, he not only acquired economic support from the West, but also legitimized himself domestically, declaring that Uzbekistan is a strong independent country which does not rely on Moscow anymore. He emphasized the importance and attractiveness of Uzbekistan to the West,

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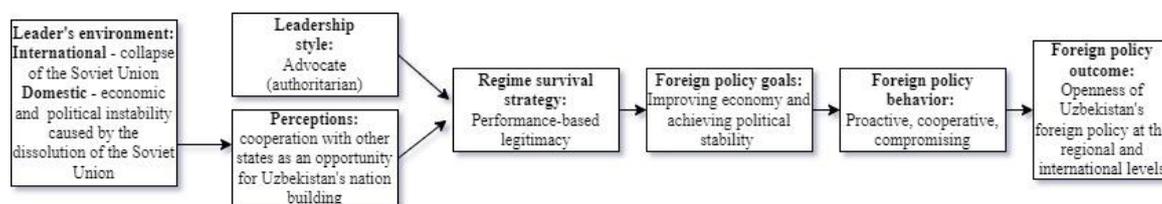
<sup>173</sup> Michael J McCarthy, “The Limits of Friendship: US Security Cooperation in Central Asia” (Air University Press, 2007), [https://www-jstor-org.www3.iuj.ac.jp/stable/resrep13987.10#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www-jstor-org.www3.iuj.ac.jp/stable/resrep13987.10#metadata_info_tab_contents).

<sup>174</sup> Karimov, “Way to Independence: Problems and Plans.”

and "a bright future" to the Uzbek people.<sup>175</sup> Karimov also claimed that Uzbekistan had chosen “a unique path of development” that would fit the country’s cultural, historical, and geographical characteristics. The concept of “Uzbekistan’s own path of development” sought to help Uzbekistan adapt to new realities and build a modern society while preserving the country’s cultural and traditional values. One of the key components of the concept was transforming Uzbekistan into a market-oriented economy through gradual and a step-by-step implementation of reforms. Karimov’s concept was successful in maintaining support from the population to his power.

Coupled with Karimov’s proactive and open foreign policy, the concept of “Uzbekistan’s own path of development” allowed Karimov to demonstrate that his government was taking an active role in representing the interests of Uzbekistan on the global stage. The Uzbek people saw Karimov as a strong leader who was committed to promoting their national identity and preserving their cultural traditions. In addition, his policies aimed at attracting investments led to Uzbekistan’s economic growth. This legitimized Karimov’s regime and strengthened his position domestically. The early foreign policy enabled Karimov to present himself as a strong leader who was able to secure important deals and agreements for Uzbekistan.<sup>176</sup>

**Figure 12. Graphical representation of Islam Karimov’s foreign policy in the 1990s**



<sup>175</sup> Karimov, “Uzbekistan - a State with a Bright Future.”

<sup>176</sup> Andrew F. March, “From Leninism to Karimovism: Hegemony, Ideology, and Authoritarian Legitimation,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 19, no. 4 (2003): 307–36; Anna Matveeva, “Legitimising Central Asian Authoritarianism: Political Manipulation and Symbolic Power,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 7 (2009): 1095–1121.



## Chapter 5. Foreign policy of Karimov after 2005

### 5.1. From cooperation to isolation: the 2005 foreign policy change in Uzbekistan

Throughout the 1990s, Islam Karimov pursued a proactive and open foreign policy, positioning Uzbekistan as a center of regional unity and cooperation. This was demonstrated by Uzbekistan's active participation in regional organizations and its efforts to promote stability in the region. However, the post-2005 is characterized as a period of disintegration.<sup>177</sup> Karimov's foreign policy during that period of time shifted towards a more inward-looking approach, characterized by quasi-isolationism and self-reliance. Being one of the founders of the Central Asian Cooperation organization (CACO), Uzbekistan suggested dissolving the organization in October 2005. Karimov also opposed Kazakhstan's initiative to establish the new Central Asian Union (CAU), which would facilitate free movement of goods, services, capital and people. Giving up the idea of institutionalization in the Central Asian region, Karimov, instead sought to build bilateral relations with Central Asian neighbors.

The shift from multilateral cooperation frameworks towards bilateral relations adversely affected the relationship between **Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan**. Kazakhstan followed a multi-vector policy and has declared its intention to follow a "path to Europe" strategy.<sup>178</sup> Whereas, Uzbekistan after 2005 put a strong emphasis on bilateral approach to its foreign policy. Thus, the relationship between the two countries became strained after Uzbekistan rejected Kazakhstan's proposal on the creation of Central Asian Union (CAU), a political union similar to the one established by the European

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<sup>177</sup> Nurzhan Zhambekov, "Central Asian Union and the Obstacles to Integration in Central Asia," *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, July 1, 2015, <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13116-central-asian-union-and-the-obstacles-to-integration-in-central-asia.html?tmpl=component&print=1>.

<sup>178</sup> Farkhod Tolipov, "Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan: Competitors, Strategic Partners or Eternal Friends?," *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, August 9, 2013, <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/12786-uzbekistan-and-kazakhstan-competitors-strategic-partners-or-eternal-friends>.

Union. Karimov opposed the idea of giving up Uzbekistan's sovereignty to a regional organization. He perceived Nursultan Nazarbayev's initiative as Kazakhstan asserting its regional dominance.<sup>179</sup> He also felt that CAU would obstruct Uzbekistan's ability to carry out its own foreign policy and limit Uzbekistan's ability to address its own national interests.<sup>180</sup>

“Every country defines its attitude to this initiative by asking how it answers the interests of this or that country in the region... I want to say right now that the idea is not acceptable for Uzbekistan, I want to say this once and for all so there is no speculation about this question.”<sup>181</sup>

Disagreements on the regional affairs weakened bilateral cooperation between the two countries, making the resolution of certain problems almost impossible. For example, disagreements emerged regarding the tariff policy on railways transportation. Uzbekistan advocated for lower tariffs to increase trade and economic cooperation, whereas Kazakhstan argued for higher tariffs to protect its domestic industries. Another source of disagreement between the two countries was the issue of water management. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan could not agree on the use of water resources from the shared Syr-Darya River. As a result, there were incidents when the fisherman from Kazakhstan were fired upon by Uzbek border guards.<sup>182</sup>

Uzbekistan's bilateral relationships with other neighbors also deteriorated, largely due to Karimov's changing foreign policy priorities. Uzbekistan's foreign policy after 2005 shifted from economic matters to focusing on security. The shift in priorities resulted in tensions with other Central Asian countries, as Uzbekistan took a more assertive and uncompromising stance on a number of issues affecting its national

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<sup>179</sup> Zhambekov, “Central Asian Union and the Obstacles to Integration in Central Asia.”

<sup>180</sup> Bruce Pannier, “Central Asia: Uzbek Leader Stands Pat On Regional Union,” RFE/RL, April 24, 2008, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1109628.html>.

<sup>181</sup> Pannier.

<sup>182</sup> Tengri News KZ, “Pogranichniki Uzbekistana Zastrelili Jitelya YUKO,” Tengri News KZ, June 29, 2015, <https://tengrinews.kz/events/pogranichniki-uzbekistana-zastrelili-jitelya-yuko-276980/>.

interests. For example, the strained but initially manageable relations between **Uzbekistan and Tajikistan** deteriorated amid the issue of energy resources. Tajikistan has sought to build the Rogun dam aimed at generating electricity for domestic consumption and for export to neighboring countries, including Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan was concerned that the dam would restrict the flow of water to its agricultural lands. Karimov was uncompromising on the issue and has set up all possible barriers to prevent construction. He used diplomatic pressure to discourage other countries and international organizations from supporting the project. Karimov succeeded in drawing the attention of the world community to the problem, and Tajikistan agreed to the international examination. Construction of the dam was halted until the World Bank presented the results of investigation. Karimov also approached Kazakhstan, requesting it not to support the project and claiming that the project might cause the water wars. Uzbekistan also stopped supplying natural gas to Tajikistan. In turn, Tajikistan accused Uzbekistan of weaponizing gas supplies, and deliberately trying to undermine the popularity of the Tajik President Emomali Rahmon.<sup>183</sup> The dispute between the two countries created difficulties for businesses, leading to a decrease in economic cooperation. As a result of all these actions, the trade turnover between two countries fell almost 150 times in seven years – from \$300 million in 2007 to \$2.1 million in 2014.<sup>184</sup>

Karimov's uncompromising stance on border demarcation also put Uzbekistan at odds with Kyrgyzstan and contributed to the strained political relations between the two countries. The absence of political dialogue between the governments of

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<sup>183</sup> Roman Kojevnikov, "Tajikistan Obvinil Uzbekistan a Blokade Radi Davleniya Na Rahmona," Reuters, April 3, 2012, <https://www.reuters.com/article/orutp-tajikistan-uzbekistan-relations-idRURXE8320Z020120403>.

<sup>184</sup> Kapital, "Voda Za Voynu. Tajikistan i Uzbekistan Na Grani Konflikta," Kapital, November 24, 2016, <https://www.capital.ua/ru/publication/79529-voyna-za-vodu-tadzhikistan-i-uzbekistan-na-grani-konflikta>.

**Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan** was one of the factors contributing to the increase of interethnic clashes between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in southern Kyrgyzstan. The events of 2010, when ethnic violence broke out in southern Kyrgyzstan, were seen as a direct result of the absence of political dialogue between the two countries.<sup>185</sup> The inability of the two countries to reach an agreement on border issue has not only led to mutual enmity between the leaders, but made the resolution of conflicts an impossible task until the last days of Karimov's rule. In March 2016, officials from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan have deployed armored vehicles and soldiers near the disputed Ungar Tepa Mountain. Kyrgyz officials regarded Uzbekistan's actions as a breach of their mutual agreement, according to which Tashkent promised not to militarize the area along the disputed border. In response, Kyrgyzstan dispatched dozens of armed border guards. The escalation of tensions even led to a gathering of the CSTO in Moscow.<sup>186</sup>

There was also a shift in Uzbekistan's foreign policy toward the great powers. In the 1990s, Uzbekistan sought to establish a balanced relationship with the great powers. In pursuit of balanced relationships, Uzbekistan adopted a non-aligned foreign policy, seeking to build relationships with multiple countries and avoiding close alignment with one particular power. Yet, after 2005, Uzbekistan pursued a foreign policy that was more closely aligned with Russia and China, as opposed to its earlier balanced relationship with great powers. Thus, Uzbekistan withdrew from several organizations led by the United States and the West, including the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM) and the NATO Partnership for Peace Program.

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<sup>185</sup> Beishenbek Toktogulov, "The Failure of Settlement on Kyrgyz-Uzbek Border Issues: A Lack of Diplomacy?," *Bilge Strateji* 10, no. 19 (2018): 85–106.

<sup>186</sup> Pete Baumgartner, "Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan Deploy Troops In Dispute Over Border Mountain," RFE/RL, March 23, 2016, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-uzbekistan-border-mountain-dispute-military-tensions/27631743.html>.

Overall, Karimov's foreign policy after 2005 shifted from proactivity to passivity. Foreign policy making was done through the prism of security, national interests and perceived threats to Uzbekistan's independence and sovereignty. Eventually, in 2012, Uzbekistan adopted a new Foreign Policy Concept, which officially determined a new direction: isolationism and defensive self-reliance.

What made Islam Karimov redirect the course of his once open foreign policy? Why did the foreign policy goals change? Why did Karimov's foreign policy behavior become less conciliatory, but more suspicious and uncompromising? To understand that, we need to look at the environment after 2005 and Islam Karimov's perceptions about it.

## **5.2. The leader's environment in the early 2000-s**

The international environment started changing in the early 2000-s. The 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US changed the foreign policy of this hegemon, having significant impact on global affairs. Following the 9/11 attacks, the US declared a global war on terror, with the aim to confront the threat of Islamist extremism, which was perceived as a significant security challenge to the US and its allies. Promoting democracy around the world became one of key elements in response to the 9/11 attacks.<sup>187</sup>

“They hate what they see right here in this chamber: a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate out freedoms: our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.”<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Gordon Crawford, “Promoting Democracy in Central Asia: What’s Needed and Why It Won’t Happen,” *Sicherheit Und Frieden (S+F) / Security and Peace* 25, no. 3 (2007): 133–38, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24233086>.

<sup>188</sup> “President Bush Addresses the Nation,” *The Washington Post*, September 20, 2001, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress\\_092001.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress_092001.html).

The US and the EU believed that democratization was essential for countering the root causes of terrorism and ensuring long-term stability in the Middle East and beyond. It was believed that promoting democratization would lead to greater political and economic freedoms, resulting in the reduction of poverty and social inequality, and ultimately, the erosion of support for extremist ideologies.<sup>189</sup> The US-led invasion of Iraq was a crucial component of this democratization effort. The removal of Saddam Hussein's regime was thought to pave the way for a democratic government in Iraq. However, the invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq faced intense domestic and international criticism.

Despite the criticisms, the US remained committed to its goal of promoting democracy worldwide. This resulted in the establishment of various initiatives, such as the Middle East Partnership Initiative, which supported democratic reforms in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The US also sought to engage non-state actors in the promotion of democratic values.

The focus of the US foreign policy on the “democratization in failed and authoritarian states” also shone the spotlight on the Central Asian region.<sup>190</sup> The 9/11 attacks and its aftermath enhanced the significance of the five Central Asian republics in the eyes of the US and the EU.<sup>191</sup> The EU started providing assistance to Central Asia with the aim to “foster respect for democratic principles and human rights and to promote transition towards a market economy.”<sup>192</sup> One of the primary funding mechanisms for EU development aid to Central Asia was the Technical Assistance to

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<sup>189</sup> Crawford, “Promoting Democracy in Central Asia: What’s Needed and Why It Won’t Happen.”

<sup>190</sup> Pinar Ipek, “Challenges for Democratization in Central Asia: What Can the United States Do?,” *Middle East Policy* 14, no. 1 (2007): 95–106, <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.www3.iuj.ac.jp/doi/10.1111/j.1475-4967.2007.00287.x>.

<sup>191</sup> Crawford, “Promoting Democracy in Central Asia: What’s Needed and Why It Won’t Happen.”

<sup>192</sup> “Regional Strategy Paper for Assistance to Central Asia for the Period 2007-2013” (European Community, 2007), [https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/central\\_asia/rsp/07\\_13\\_en.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/central_asia/rsp/07_13_en.pdf).

the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) initiative. Additionally, the Institution Building Partnership Program (IBPP) offered assistance for the development of civil society, while democracy promotion was carried out through the European Initiative for Human Rights and Democracy (EIDHR) initiative. EIDHR projects were often implemented in cooperation with the OSCE or Council of Europe. One example of such joint projects was the EU-Central Asian Rule of Law Initiative, executed by the Council of Europe. The project aimed to assist Central Asian nations in developing democratic legislation and practices pertaining to the rule of law.<sup>193</sup>

Pressures to democratize were not just externally enforced either. Various post-Soviet republics, such as Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan sought to break away from the legacy of authoritarianism. These countries saw a rise in civil society movements, which advocated for greater political participation and human rights. In certain cases, a large schism between the general population and ruling governments emerged. For example, Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze initially supported freedom of media, recognized the need for elections and opposition. However, after 2001 “he increasingly entertained the idea of ‘managed democracy,’ which already had become one of the main features of Russian politics.”<sup>194</sup> Liberal freedoms existing under Shevardnadze’s government became “more of a political calculation than a commitment to an open society.”<sup>195</sup> However, this resulted in the formation of a civil society that refused to blindly accept the rules of the elites. In November 2003, Georgia experienced a peaceful political movement called the Rose Revolution, led by opposition leaders, civil society activists and students. The revolution was sparked by

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<sup>193</sup> Nicklas Norling and Cornell Svante, “The Role of the European Union in Democracy-Building in Central Asia and the South Caucasus,” *Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance*, 2016.

<sup>194</sup> Giorgi Kandelaki, “Georgia’s Rose Revolution: A Participant’s Perspective,” Special Report, 167 (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, July 2006),

<https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/sr167.pdf>.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

the fraudulent parliamentary elections and the dissatisfaction of the protesters with the government's leadership under president Shevardnadze. The protesters demanded his resignation and new democratic elections. The movement culminated in a massive demonstration in Tbilisi, where demonstrators carried roses to symbolize their peaceful intentions. The revolution resulted in the formation of a new government led by Mikhail Saakashvili. The Rose Revolution became a crucial event in Georgia's history and a turning point towards a more democratic and pro-Western government.

Similar to Georgia, discontent was rising in Kyrgyzstan. The first wave of demonstrations took place in Jalal-Abad in 2002 after the parliamentarian Azimbek Beknazarov was arrested by Askar Akayev's government who accused Beknazarov of abusing power. Just prior to that, Beknazarov had called for Akayev's impeachment due to the government's decision to cede 125,000 hectares of land to China during border negotiations. He claimed that these lands contained valuable water resources and the graves of people who had died while escaping to China during the 1916 uprising.<sup>196</sup> During the trial of Beknazarov, his supporters started pickets and some even went on hunger strikes. Following the death of one of the fasting demonstrators, tensions escalated with hundreds of people participating in demonstrations. The local police used force to disperse the protestors, resulting in the deaths of seven unarmed people. Ultimately, Akayev's mishandling of the 2002 public demonstration led to nationwide protests, with demands for president's resignation.

The same year, the government proposed holding discussions on amending the constitution. Political activists sought to reduce the authority of the president and increase the independence of the prime minister and cabinet. Instead, a revised version,

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<sup>196</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, "Lessons of the Tulip Revolution," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 7, 2005, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2005/04/07/lessons-of-tulip-revolution-pub-16758>.

created by the president's office, was presented to the public on February 2, 2003. It granted the presidency more power and made it an unimpeachable position. The Kyrgyz government also added several amendments that made it harder for opposition groups to obtain permits for large public gatherings.<sup>197</sup> Just like his Georgian counterpart, Akayev opted for a 'guided' democracy with Russian assistance. Russia's Ministry of Interior (MVD) sent instructors to train Kyrgyz authorities on crowd control. Additionally, pro-Kremlin political experts provided advice to president Akayev's team on how to manipulate elections.<sup>198</sup> Public discontent reached a fervor in 2005 amid the parliamentary elections. Akayev's daughter and son won the seats in the parliament. Supported by thousands of voters, leaders of the opposition demanded the elections be completely annulled.<sup>199</sup> On March 24, 2005, protests took place in Bishkek with people demanding Akayev to step down. The protests became known as the Tulip Revolution.

Ukraine also saw a series of protests throughout 2004-2005 dubbed as the Orange Revolution. The government faced accusations of corruption and unaccountability. This was evident in the 2004 presidential election, which was plagued by allegations of electoral fraud, including ballot stuffing and voter intimidation. Geopolitical forces also influenced the Orange Revolution. Ukraine was seen as a key battleground between Russia and the West. Russia sought to maintain its influence over the country. Meanwhile, the West pushed for greater democratization. The election of Viktor Yanukovich, who was perceived as being closely aligned with

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> "Kyrgyzstan: Elections Held in 2005," Kyrgyzstan Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2005, [http://archive.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2174\\_05.htm](http://archive.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2174_05.htm).

Russia, proved to be a setback for democratization.<sup>200</sup> As a result of the Orange Revolution, the disputed presidential election was nullified, and a new government was established. Viktor Yushchenko, the opposition candidate, was declared the winner of the re-election. The Orange Revolution was a major turning point in Ukraine, making a significant advancement towards greater democracy and transparency in the nation.

Pro-democracy forces, both external and internal, within the post-Soviet states not only represented a move towards democracy and political liberalization, but also challenged the existing authoritarian regimes.

### **5.3. Islam Karimov's perceptions**

The year 2005 marked a turning point in Uzbekistan's foreign policy. On May 13, domestic protests broke out in Andijan city. The protests were closely tied to the trial of 23 local businessmen who had been arrested and charged with "extremism, fundamentalism, and separatism." Family members, friends and defendants of the businessman gathered outside the courthouse, only to find out that the verdict would be postponed to an unknown date. The following day, the National Security Service (SNB) detained and questioned male relatives of the defendants. Early on May 13, unidentified individuals broke into Andijan prison and freed the detainees. The attackers informed them of a meeting on Babur Square, where many of the detainees proceeded. By morning, armed civilians had seized the Regional Administration building on one side of the square, and members of the crowd took hostages throughout the day. At least 20 hostages were held in the building, including the Head of the

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<sup>200</sup> Helmut Kurth and Iris Kempe, *Presidential Election and Orange Revolution Implications for Ukraine's Transition* (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2005), <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/ukraine/02938.pdf>.

Prosecutors Office and the Chief of the Tax Inspection Authority. The entire city quickly learned of the meeting at Babur square through word of mouth.<sup>201</sup> Thousands of people flocked to “Babur” square. They accused the president of authoritarianism, demanded civil liberties, the eradication of corruption, poverty and social inequality. Based on the in-depth interviews with the refugees, the OSCE reported:

“Microphones were installed in the middle of the square at the podium of the Babur monument. People who addressed the crowd spoke about their problems of unemployment, poverty, corruption of local authorities, and injustice linked to the recent arrests and trials.”

The Uzbek government responded with a violent crackdown. Following the demonstrations, Karimov dispatched troops who opened fire on protestors.<sup>202</sup> According to the former major of the National Security Service, Ikrom Yakubov, 1500 people were killed in Andijan, with Karimov personally ordering troops to open fire on protestors.<sup>203</sup> As a result of the Andijan massacre, human rights advocates labeled Islam Karimov one of the most brutal dictators.<sup>204</sup>

The events in Andijan triggered a change in Islam Karimov’s perceptions, making him see the world as a threatening place full of adversaries. Leadership trait analysis of Karimov after 2005 demonstrated the increase in Karimov’s distrust and ingroup bias (Table 8). In other words, Karimov’s perceptions changed, making him see other countries as a threat which needed to be confronted. Empirical evidence suggests that the leaders who scored high in the two traits, tend to perceive the environment as a dangerous place where the states have to struggle in order to remove

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<sup>201</sup> The OSCE report was based on 44 in-depth interviews by the ODIHR team with refugees in the Suzak Camp, near the Uzbek Kyrgyz border. <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/1/15653.pdf>

<sup>202</sup> Amnesty International, “The Andijan Massacre Remembered,” Amnesty International, July 2, 2015, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/07/the-andijan-massacre-remembered/>.

<sup>203</sup> Jeffrey Donovan, “Former Uzbek Spy Accuses Government Of Massacres, Seeks Asylum,” RFE/RL, September 1, 2008,

[https://www.rferl.org/a/Former\\_Uzbek\\_Spy\\_Seeks\\_Asylum/1195372.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/Former_Uzbek_Spy_Seeks_Asylum/1195372.html).

<sup>204</sup> Stroehlein, “Beyond Samarkand,” Human Rights Watch, March 8, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/08/beyond-samarkand>.

potential dangers. The leaders tend to see other states as “evils” who seek expansion at the expense of other or intend to spread their ideology. Therefore, the leaders with high distrust and ingroup bias tend to take risks and act more aggressively and assertively.

“Here [in Central Asia] the geostrategic interests of the world’s largest powers and neighboring countries often converge and clash. The threats of international terrorism, extremism, drug aggression, and other transnational threats to the regional security still remain.”

Back in the 1990s, the Central Asian region faced similar challenges of terrorism, interethnic clashes, and economic and political instability. Despite that, Karimov’s perceptions about the environment remained optimistic. He believed in the power of cooperation claiming that any challenges could be overcome by collective actions. Therefore, other states were seen as allies rather than enemies. However, after the events in Andijan, Karimov began to perceive outside countries, particularly the great powers, as enemies who spread their ideology. For example, he blamed Western NGOs for imposing democracy without considering the cultural makeup of the nation.

“We are deeply convinced that democracy and various so-called ‘open society models’ cannot be exported, just as it is impossible to impose a universal state-building project... Just think how is it possible to transit from a feudal system, where patriarchal and clan interests are dominant, to a democratic state in one leap?”

At the same time, Karimov’s perceived NGOs as a threat to political stability. This is in stark comparison to the 1990s when Karimov welcomed international NGOs, seeing their presence as a way to promote economic development and political stability. After 2005, Karimov claimed that the ultimate goal of NGOs is not to “help the government,” but brainwash people. He believed that the US and the West used NGOs to undermine political stability of Uzbekistan.

“The ultimate goal of all these efforts is to create a situation in the region of the so-called ‘controlled destabilization’, the desire to undermine socio-political stability and to impose their own model of development.”<sup>205</sup>

Karimov believed that the Western world had ulterior motives behind the promotion of democratic values. He perceived that Central Asia’s abundance of natural resources was motivating the great powers to destabilize the domestic situation.

“It has been long noted that for some reason, ‘the ideals of freedom and democracy,’ as a rule, are spread and promoted in the countries and regions where the land is rich in oil and gas... Some countries that unleashed a war in Iraq need to think again and again what methods they use.”<sup>206</sup>

Karimov became increasingly paranoid about perceived external threats after the Andijan events.<sup>207</sup> This begs the question, why did events in Andijan trigger a change in Karimov’s perceptions?

To understand why, we need to look at how the leader’s environment looked like in the early 2000s. It was a time when “color revolutions” erupted all over post-Soviet Republics. “Color revolutions” were a series of peaceful uprisings and protests that took place in the republics of former Soviet Union. The main purpose of those revolutions was to bring about democratic change and political reform in countries that were experiencing authoritarianism. These anti-regime or pro-democracy protests often resulted in the resignation or toppling of authoritarian leaders. Authoritarian leaders viewed these demonstrations as a serious threat to national security since they believed that the protests to be result of the US and Western interference.<sup>208</sup> Karimov perceived those revolutions the same way.

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<sup>205</sup> Islam Karimov, “Uzbek People Will Never Depend on Anyone,” in *Uzbek People Will Never Depend on Anyone* (Uzbekiston, 2005).

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Nick Megoran, “The Critical Geopolitics of Danger in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23, no. 4 (2005): 555–80.

<sup>208</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Zapad Ispolzuet v Kachestve Instrumenta Tsvetnyye Revolyutsii i Perevoroti,” *Riama*, 2022, <https://riama.ru/article/593930/putin-zapad-ispolzuet-v-kachestve-instrumenta-tsvetnye-revolutsii-i-perevoroty-xl>.

“External forces can turn things around so that the power of people’s discontent is directed the way they need. They identify those who can become a leader, and of course, join the new government. You can say, change the elite – the old one leaves, the new one comes. In the process of such a ‘change of scenery’ external forces take the most active part.”<sup>209</sup>

Karimov did not blame the US and West directly. Instead, he stated that third parties, such as radical Islam, could take advantage of the attempts to artificially force democratization in states who were culturally ill-prepared for it. He added that the “democratic processes should evolve evolutionary.”<sup>210</sup> However, when the US and Western government called for an investigation into the events in Andijan, Karimov retaliated by closing the US Karshi-Khanabad Airbase (K2) on Uzbekistan’s territory.<sup>211</sup> Furthermore, Uzbekistan drastically reduced its participation in Partnership for Peace Program after NATO accused Uzbekistan of using excessive force. From 2006, Uzbekistan prohibited NATO forces from using Uzbekistan’s territory as a transit route for operations in Afghanistan.

Karimov’s strong opposition to foreign investigation into events in Andijan is exemplified by the following:

“In what country did you see that foreign prosecutors or investigators were involved in the internal affairs of another country? Uzbekistan is a sovereign, independent state, and will sort out domestic situation on its own... It turns out that if something happens somewhere in our zone – in Central Asia or somewhere in Turkey – you demand that some representatives of Europe or the United States be present. Why are we not present? Don’t we have the right?”

Ultimately, calls for an international investigation and sanctions imposed by the West prompted a significant change, making Uzbekistan take a more isolationist stance in

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<sup>209</sup> Karimov, “Uzbek People Will Never Depend on Anyone.”

<sup>210</sup> Karimov.

<sup>211</sup> Gregory Gleason, “The Uzbek Expulsion of US and Realignment in Central Asia,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 53, no. 2 (2006): 49–60.

foreign affairs and favor closer ties with autocratic countries, such as Russia and China.<sup>212</sup>

#### **5.4. Regime survival strategy and foreign policy goals**

The 2005 events in Andijan became a turning point in Uzbekistan's domestic politics and foreign relations. They marked a major challenge to Karimov's authoritarian rule since a number of opposition groups began calling for greater democratic reforms in Uzbekistan. After the crackdown, several opposition groups merged creating a new united front, forming "Serquyosh Uzbekistonim" (My Sunny Uzbekistan). The coalition demanded democratic reforms either through revolution or radical liberalization.<sup>213</sup>

Table 6 illustrates that after 2005, Karimov, having an advocate style leadership, scored even lower for need for power, while the score in a belief in ability to control events increased. This indicates that Karimov's authoritarianism strengthened. Empirical studies on LTA suggest that, in seeking conformity, advocate style leaders emphasize adherence to their own ideas and perspectives, showing a tendency to disregard dissenting evidence or opinions. This leadership style is marked by a strong individualistic approach, where the leader's vision and goals take precedence, and a confrontational stance is adopted to achieve desired outcomes. Concerned with maintaining power, Karimov strengthened domestic security, choosing the way of *repressions*. As a result, the leaders of the "Serquyosh

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<sup>212</sup> Arif Bagbaslioglu, "Beyond Afghanistan NATO's Partnership with Central Asia and South Caucasus: A Tangled Partnership," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 5, no. 1 (2014): 88–96.

<sup>213</sup> Gulnoza Saidazimova, "Uzbekistan: Opposition Creates Coalition of Democratic Forces," RFE/RL, April 21, 2015, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1058596.html>.

Uzbekistonim” coalition group were arrested.<sup>214</sup> Karimov referred to any opposition parties as enemies which served their own interests.

“Political parties, defending their own interests, may become competitors or opponents, but when it comes to the interests of the Motherland, it is necessary for everyone to unite. Currently, the idea of national independence is considered as such a unifying force in our country.”

To prevent domestic challenges, Karimov tightened restrictions on opposition parties through the law on political parties. The 2007 law required political parties to have at least 40,000 members in order to register.<sup>215</sup> These restrictions made it extremely difficult for opposition parties to gain legal recognition and operate freely in Uzbekistan. It also banned political parties that were based on religion, ethnicity, or gender, and required all parties to recognize the leading role of the state in society.

Karimov also reformed Uzbekistan’s traditional institution of civil society “Makhalla.” He created armed units called “Makhalla guards,” comprising local residents responsible for ensuring security in their neighborhoods. They served as a community policing force, preventing crime, deterring drug use and maintaining social order. Karimov’s government sought to maintain tight control over all aspects of society, including local communities, and the Makhalla became main enforcers of the surveillance system and control over the population.

Media, social, political and economic life in the country were under the total control of the National Security Service (NSS). The NSS monitored and targeted journalists and media outlets that were critical of the government, leading to a climate of fear and self-censorship. People criticizing Karimov’s government along with

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<sup>214</sup> Fergana News, “Lider ‘Solnechnoy Koalicii’ Uzbekistana Sanjar Umarov Arestovan,” Fergana News, October 23, 2005, <https://www.fergananews.com/articles/4038>.

<sup>215</sup> OSCE, “Republic of Uzbekistan: Parliamentary Elections, 27 December 2009: OSCE/ODIHR Election Assessment Mission Final Report” (OSCE/ODIHR, 2010), <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/6/c/67597.pdf>.

human rights activists and journalists were sent to Jasliq prison, dubbed the “house of torture.”<sup>216</sup> Human Rights Watch published numerous reports about the torture of prisoners, urging Uzbekistan to close the prison. In response, Karimov expelled all human rights NGOs such as the missions of the Eurasia Foundation, Freedom House, the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), the American Bar Association, and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). Later, the Office of the UNHCR also closed. Sherzod Gulyamov, the head of the state-run Uzbek Journalists’ Union stated that “destructive forces are deliberately attempting to undermine Uzbekistan’s authority in the eyes of the international community.”<sup>217</sup>

To justify the expulsion of NGOs, repression of political opponents, widespread surveillance and censorship, Karimov used foreign policy as a tool to maintain legitimacy domestically. He started scapegoating external enemies to mobilize public support. Karimov used nationalist rhetoric and portrayed the NGOs as agents of foreign influence seeking to undermine Uzbekistan’s sovereignty. Political opponents were also portrayed as terrorists or foreign agents.

In response to Andijan events, the West imposed sanctions on Uzbekistan. Sanctions, in turn, negatively affected the country’s economy, as it limited foreign investment, trade, and access to international financial markets. In order to reduce the country’s dependence on foreign imports, Karimov implemented the import phase-out policy. Limited competition caused by the policy, in turn, negatively affected Uzbekistan’s economy. The lack of a competitive market led to inefficient allocation of resources and an overreliance on natural resources, particularly cotton and gas, which further limited the country’s economic potential. Additionally, the state-

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<sup>216</sup> Williamson, “Shuttering Notorious Jaslyk Prison A Victory for Human Rights in Uzbekistan.”

<sup>217</sup> The New Humanitarian, “Government Closes Another American NGO.” The New Humanitarian, November 3, 2015, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2006/05/02/government-closes-another-american-ngo>.

controlled economy resulted in the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few individuals, compounding problems related to transparency and accountability, and hindered the development of a strong and diversified private sector. It also increased corruption. In order to justify the transition from market economy to an import phase-out policy, Karimov again appealed to the notion of state sovereignty, emphasizing that Uzbekistan had to be economically and politically independent from others. He criticized the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), saying that this type of institutions undermines political independence by stunting economic independence.<sup>218</sup> At the same time, promoting the identity of an independent state, Karimov justified the transition from market economy principles to an import phase-out policy.

“Tell me one thing – who will spontaneously grant independence to a weak state which bargains away its raw materials?... If tomorrow we have our own gold, our own cotton, all the wealth and all the resources, then you will see that everyone will come to greet us.”<sup>219</sup>

Promoting the idea of a self-reliant nation to maintain the support of the citizens, Karimov outlined a new *foreign policy goal*: security and independence at all costs. He claimed that nobody would protect Uzbekistan if something happens, therefore, “we [the Uzbek nation] have to believe in ourselves and rely on our own power.”<sup>220</sup> He claimed that certain external forces had attempted “to destabilize the situation,

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<sup>218</sup> AKIpress News Agency, “Islam Karimov Criticizes Establishment of Eurasian Economic Union,” AKIpress News Agency, 2014, [https://akipress.com/news:542857:Islam\\_Karimov\\_criticizes\\_establishment\\_of\\_Eurasian\\_Economic\\_Union/](https://akipress.com/news:542857:Islam_Karimov_criticizes_establishment_of_Eurasian_Economic_Union/).

<sup>219</sup> *Islam Karimov's Speech at the Press-Conference*, 2006, <https://m.facebook.com/groups/2080052715596982?view=permalink&id=2192297847705801>.

<sup>220</sup> “Islam Karimov’s Speech at Oliy Majlis,” YouTube, 2005, <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/i9z1r6I1VYA>.

overthrow the constitutional order,” and emphasized that Uzbekistan had to strengthen its security through increasing the defense capability of the Uzbek armed forces.<sup>221</sup>

### **5.5. Foreign policy behavior**

Karimov’s increased threat perception and his desire to maintain power had a significant impact on Karimov’s foreign policy behavior. His behavior during the first years after the events in Andijan was opportunistic. Worsened relations with the West and sanctions nudged Karimov to seek political and economic support from Russia and China. Uzbekistan joined the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) in 2005 and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in 2006. Within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Uzbekistan hosted the East Anti-Terror-2006 exercise, marking the first time that it had participated in SCO military exercises.

On the contrary, Uzbekistan distanced itself from the West withdrawing from the Partnership for Peace program, in which Uzbekistan had been actively participating along with other Central Asian states. It also withdrew from the US-led GUUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development.<sup>222</sup> Furthermore, Karimov expelled the US K2-military base from Uzbekistan’s territory.

Karimov adopted a passive approach to regional affairs, and stopped positioning Uzbekistan as a center of regional unity. Being a member of regional organizations de jure, Karimov often pursued an open seat policy. For example, whilst the country became a member of CSTO in 2006 before leaving it in 2012, Uzbekistan’s presence was nominal; it did not participate in any joint military exercises and did not

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<sup>221</sup> Islam Karimov, “Islam Karimov’s Speech at Oliy Majlis Dedicated to the Day of the Defense Forces of Uzbekistan,” in *Man, His Rights and Freedoms - the Highest Value* (Uzbekiston, 2006).

<sup>222</sup> GUUAM is an acronym derived from the first letter of each member state’s name: Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Moldova

even ratify the agreement.<sup>223</sup> Karimov also refrained from sending troops to participate in the regional military exercises organized by the SCO.<sup>224</sup> Uzbekistan's parliament ratified the 2008 SCO agreement to cooperate in anti-terrorist training exercises, however it restricted sending military staff abroad, thus, limiting Uzbekistan's involvement to observer status.<sup>225</sup>

In addition, Karimov restructured Uzbekistan's relations with external actors. His zero-sum approach to international politics made Karimov more cautious in the international arena and more assertive in promoting national interests: security and independence. Uzbekistan started moving away from multilateral cooperation frameworks, which in Karimov's opinion, could undermine Uzbekistan's independence. Uzbekistan withdrew from EurAsEC and CSTO in order to "free itself from historical Russia domination."<sup>226</sup> Uzbekistan also left the "Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process" (HoA-IP) – a confidence-building measures between Afghanistan and its neighbors. Despite being one of the first countries to raise Afghan issues at the international stage and initiate a number of multilateral frameworks in the 1990s, Uzbekistan reverted to favoring bilateral engagement with Afghanistan.<sup>227</sup>

Uzbekistan's passive and cautious behavior towards the great powers and multilateral cooperation frameworks was mainly driven by Karimov's desire to achieve foreign policy goals: security, independence and sovereignty. On the one hand,

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<sup>223</sup> Farkhod Tolipov, "Uzbekistan Without The CSTO," *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, February 20, 2013, <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/12652-uzbekistan-without-the-csto.html>.

<sup>224</sup> RFE/RL's Tajik Service, "Uzbeks Opt Out Of SCO Exercises Again," RFE/RL, March 13, 2012, [https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbekistan\\_out\\_tajikistan\\_sco\\_military\\_exercises/24513757.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbekistan_out_tajikistan_sco_military_exercises/24513757.html).

<sup>225</sup> UzDaily, "Senate Ratifies SCO Agreement on Military Drills," UzDaily, August 31, 2009, <http://www.uzdaily.uz/en/post/6862>.

<sup>226</sup> Marlène Laruelle, "Factoring the Regional Impact of Uzbekistan's Withdrawal from the CSTO," *German Marshall Fund of the United States*, August 2012, [https://www-jstor-org.www3.iuj.ac.jp/stable/pdf/resrep18654.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Af6ead5575ee61f2d9a7206bba48415e1&ab\\_segments=&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1](https://www-jstor-org.www3.iuj.ac.jp/stable/pdf/resrep18654.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Af6ead5575ee61f2d9a7206bba48415e1&ab_segments=&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1).

<sup>227</sup> Nargis Kassenova, *Relations between Afghanistan and Central Asian States after 2014: Incentives, Constraints and Prospects* (Solna: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2014).

it helped Uzbekistan realize these goals and prevented the country from becoming too dependent on one power. On the other hand, Karimov's obsession with independence and sovereignty reinforced his zero-sum views and made him uncompromising on the issues related to Uzbekistan's national interests. This, in turn, led to tensions and conflicts with Central Asian countries. For example, Karimov refused to compromise on the construction of the Rogun Dam in Tajikistan. He claimed that construction could "spark not just serious confrontation, but even wars."<sup>228</sup> Uncompromising behavior on national interests led to hostile personal relations between Karimov and Tajik president Emomali Rahmon, which were evident and mirrored in their respective foreign policies. The water conflict led to Uzbekistan withdrawing from the United Energy System of Central Asia and stopping the transit of electricity to Tajikistan from Turkmenistan. Later, Uzbekistan stopped supplying natural gas to Tajikistan, introduced a visa regime, abolished direct flights to Dushanbe and mined the borders. In 2010, Uzbekistan started blocking the entry of train freight into Tajikistan. Tajikistan accused the Uzbek government of establishing an economic "blockade."<sup>229</sup> The Tajik government, however, did not relent. It continued to try and convince Uzbekistan that the dam would not undermine Uzbekistan's water security, ordering feasibility studies from the World Bank. Yet, Uzbekistan remained suspicious and refused to budge.<sup>230</sup> Commenting on Uzbekistan's policies towards Tajikistan, political experts described Karimov's foreign policy behavior: "relations between the two countries deteriorated... Uzbekistan is closed like a fortress. Tashkent opens its

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<sup>228</sup> Joanna Lillis, "Uzbekistan Leader Warns of Water Wars in Central Asia," EurasiaNet, 2012, <https://eurasianet.org/uzbekistan-leader-warns-of-water-wars-in-central-asia>.

<sup>229</sup> BBC News, "Tajikistan Accuses Uzbekistan of Economic Blockade," BBC News, April 3, 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-17599930>.

<sup>230</sup> UN News, "Maliye GES - Klyuch k Vodnomu Balansu v Tsentralnoy Azii: Intervyu s Zamministrom Po Vodnomu Hozyaystvu Uzbekistana," UN News, 2013, <https://news.un.org/ru/audio/2013/03/1017241>.

borders whenever it wants.”<sup>231</sup> As a result of these hostilities, diplomatic contacts between the two leaders were cut, while trade turnover between two countries fell almost 150 times in seven years – from \$300 million in 2007 to \$2.1 million in 2014.<sup>232</sup>

Karimov also adopted an assertive stance towards Kyrgyzstan. The two countries were unable to agree on the territory of Fergana Valley – the most populous region in Central Asia with immense strategic value for transportation and water resource management. Fergana’s two rivers, Naryn and Kara Darya, make it one of the most fertile regions. These two rivers originate in Kyrgyzstan and merge with the Syr Darya river in Uzbekistan’s Fergana Valley. Water is precious for Uzbekistan because Uzbekistan is a double landlocked country and possesses the biggest cotton industry in the Central Asian region. Despite Karimov claiming that “Uzbekistan practices good neighborliness and peacefully solves disputes,”<sup>233</sup> his actions diverged from his words. Political experts agreed that despite friendly exchanges in public, “there is little love lost between the leaders of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.”<sup>234</sup> With an escalation of problems, Karimov closed borders, erected walls and mined areas around crossings, which in turn, led to the shrinking of diplomatic contacts between the two countries. The absence of political dialogue between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan made border conflicts more frequent, with frequent accusations of violations of respective territorial sovereignty. After interethnic clashes between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Osh (June 10-15, 2010), Karimov closed the borders between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

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<sup>231</sup> Dilbegim Mavloniy, “Kak Rahmon Posle Draki s Karimovim Kulakami Mahal,” Radio Azattik, December 12, 2009, [https://rus.azattyq.org/a/Rakhmon\\_Karimov\\_Nazarbaev\\_fight/1901763.html](https://rus.azattyq.org/a/Rakhmon_Karimov_Nazarbaev_fight/1901763.html).

<sup>232</sup> Kapital, “Voda Za Voynu.”

<sup>233</sup> Radio Ozodi, “Karimov Ne Pozvolit Vtyanut Stranu v Konflikt s Sosedyami,” Radio Ozodi, 2012, <https://rus.ozodi.org/a/ca-news-uzbek-leader-says-no-conflict-with-neighbors-/24795153.html>.

<sup>234</sup> International crisis group, “Political Murder in Central Asia: No Time to End Uzbekistan’s Isolation,” *International Crisis Group*, February 14, 2008.

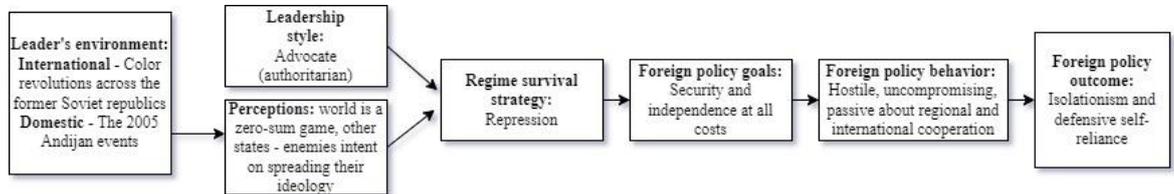
Although Uzbekistan had declared its intentions to establish strong bilateral relations with neighbors, Karimov put little effort in doing so. His primary concern in the aftermath of 2005 was sorting out relations with the great powers.

When the West lifted sanctions, Uzbekistan's relations with the West started improving. In 2009, Uzbekistan joined the NATO Northern Distribution Network (NDN) – a supply route system that was established to transport military cargo and supplies from Europe to Afghanistan via the Central Asian countries. As a transit country, Uzbekistan was interested in the project since it could result in political and commercial gains. Thus, in 2009, Uzbekistan permitted NATO to transport non-lethal cargos to Afghanistan through the Navoi airport. In 2011, Uzbekistan Railways constructed the Hairatan-Mazar-i-Sharif railway line, which became a crucial NDN supply route. Consequently, Uzbekistan revived its strategic partnership with NATO. The support allowed Uzbekistan to free itself from Russia's orbit. Russia had come to be seen as a power which could undermine Uzbekistan's sovereignty. Karimov's pendulum-like behavior stemmed from his threat perceptions coming from the great powers. Karimov perceived them as a potential threat which could undermine Uzbekistan's independence. At the same time, Karimov realized that overreliance on one side could become a source of conflict.

Consequently, Uzbekistan adopted a new Foreign Policy in 2012. It declared its neutrality in security relations; placed a non-bloc strategy as one of its key principles; and banished Uzbekistan from hosting any military bases on its territory. The concept ruled out Uzbekistan returning to the CSTO or any other military alliances. Uzbekistan also announced that the country would not be involved in any peace keeping operations abroad. However, the policy of military neutrality, which was aimed at the economic development, did not bring in significant change in

Karimov's foreign policy behavior, which remained overly cautious about the intentions of other states, and uncompromising on the issues of national interests.

*Figure 13. Graphical representation of Islam Karimov's foreign policy after 2005*



## **Chapter 6. Foreign policy under Shavkat Mirziyoyev**

### **6.1. From isolation to cooperation: the 2016 foreign policy change**

The year 2016 marked a set of drastic changes in Uzbekistan. Former prime minister Shavkat Mirziyoyev took office following the death of Islam Karimov. Since taking office, Mirziyoyev has implemented a number of political, economic and foreign policy reforms. His reforms altered the country's domestic politics and foreign policy. Uzbekistan's foreign policy transformed from defensive self-reliance and isolation to openness at the regional and international levels. This has involved a number of key changes in the country's foreign policy.

At the international level, Uzbekistan actively participates in the United Nations General Assembly. It has addressed a range of issues, such as terrorism, climate change and sustainable development. For example, at the 72<sup>nd</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2017, Mirziyoyev proposed creating a global network of education and research institutions specializing in the study of Islam and preventing extremism. This initiative sought to promote a better understanding of Islam and to counter extremist ideology, which is a growing threat to global security. He also highlighted Uzbekistan's own efforts in countering extremism, including the establishment of the Center for Islamic Civilization in Tashkent. During his speech, Mirziyoyev also emphasized the importance of economic cooperation and regional integration in promoting sustainable development. Initiating the International conference on Central Asia under the aegis of the UN, Mirziyoyev put forward a proposal for the United Nations General Assembly to adopt a special resolution that supports the endeavors of the Central Asian states towards strengthening regional cooperation and ensuring security. Furthermore, during his speech at the 75<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly, Mirziyoyev suggested establishing the

Regional Center for the Development of Transportation and Communication Interconnectedness under the aegis of the UN. The key objective of the center is to ensure regional integration into the global economic and transportation networks.<sup>235</sup> Uzbekistan also sought to raise awareness about combatting climate change and protecting the environment. Thus, at the 76<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly, Mirziyoyev proposed a special resolution designating the Aral Sea as a hub for environmental innovation and technology.<sup>236</sup> He also proposed holding a High-Level International Forum on green energy in the Nukus region in cooperation with the UN, and hosting the Sixth High-Level Assembly under the auspices of the UN in 2023, in order to discuss global environmental policy priorities.

Regionally, Mirziyoyev has pursued a foreign policy that enhances regional cooperation, resolves longstanding disputes and establishes economic partnerships with neighboring countries. One of Mirziyoyev's significant regional foreign policy initiatives was the creation of the Consultative Meeting of the Central Asian leaders on an annual basis. The meeting gathers together leaders to discuss regional issues, without any binding legal commitments. This revitalized approach to regional cooperation in Central Asia has been more successful than previous endeavors to establish formal institutions with binding legal agreements. Thus, in March 2018, leaders of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan convened in Astana to

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<sup>235</sup> The Japan Times, "Interconnectivity of Central and South Asia," The Japan Times, June 24, 2021, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/2021/06/24/special-supplements/interconnectivity-central-south-asia/>.

<sup>236</sup> The Aral Sea is considered one of the most devastating environmental catastrophes. The sea, which was one of the largest lakes globally, has been decreasing in size since the 1960-s due to the excessive water usage from its two primary tributaries, the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers, for irrigation purposes. Consequently, the sea has lost approximately 90% of its water volume, turning into a dusty desert filled with salt. The disaster has had severe repercussions on the local economy, health, and environment. The receding sea has led to the desertification of the surrounding land, causing the formation of toxic dust storms that spread harmful chemicals and pollutants over vast areas, affecting the health of local residents. The dwindling of the sea has also significantly impacted the fishing industry, as well as the flora and fauna of the region. The environmental calamity has resulted in the displacement of communities and has had a substantial influence on the social and economic development of the area.

address regional issues such as trade, transportation and security. This meeting marked the first time in a more than decade that Central Asian leaders had gathered for discussions. During the meeting, the parties signed multiple agreements, including a treaty on long-term cooperation. In December 2019, Tashkent hosted the second meeting, which held more significance because of the participation of the Turkmenistan president, Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov. With its commitment to neutrality, Turkmenistan had been always “an outlier”<sup>237</sup> in the region and refrained from regional integration. However, with Mirziyoyev’s initiatives, the country appears to be moving away from its isolationist stance, and support Mirziyoyev’s regional platform for dialogue and discussions. Political analysts argue that Turkmenistan’s willingness to engage in regional processes can be attributed to “the victory of Uzbek Diplomacy.”<sup>238</sup> The third meeting took place in Turkmenistan (August 2021), while the fourth meeting was held in Kyrgyzstan (July 2022).

Another notable aspect of Mirziyoyev’s regional foreign policy is Uzbekistan’s efforts to enhance the idea of regional connectivity, something Islam Karimov had opposed. In July 2021, Tashkent hosted international conference “*Central and South Asia: Regional Connectivity. Challenges and Opportunities.*” The conference sought to reach agreements that would harness commerce, transportation, and energy ties to connect Central Asian countries and South Asian markets. Furthermore, Mirziyoyev has actively promoted the development of new transport corridors to enhance regional connectivity and increase economic cooperation with neighboring countries. After two

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<sup>237</sup> Paul Stronski, “Turkmenistan at Twenty-Five: The High Price of Authoritarianism,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 30, 2017, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/01/30/turkmenistan-at-twenty-five-high-price-of-authoritarianism-pub-67839>.

<sup>238</sup> Anuar Temirov, “Meeting of the Heads of the Central Asian Countries in Tashkent: For the Sake of Growing Friendship,” CABAR.asia, December 2, 2019, <https://cabar.asia/en/meeting-of-the-heads-of-the-central-asian-countries-in-tashkent-for-the-sake-of-growing-friendship?fbclid=IwAR3yARDYI-7fs1BdSpHkbtIUNgwZSR4w910RE1Sa7m9QKrtGRJRJGaALWBs>.

decades of negotiations and several delays, the Uzbek government has revitalized the CKU (China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan) railway project. This railway will connect China to Uzbekistan through Kyrgyzstan, providing a more efficient transportation route for goods between the two countries.<sup>239</sup> The project was first proposed in the 1990s, but faced some financial and political obstacles.<sup>240</sup> However, under Mirziyoyev's leadership, the project has received renewed attention and support. In September 2022, Uzbekistan's Ministry of Transport, Kyrgyzstan's Ministry of Transport and Communications and the People's Republic of China's State Committee for Development and Reforms signed a trilateral Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation on the CKU railway project. In January 2023, representative of the Ministry of Transport and the "Uzbekistan Temir Yo'llari" railway company arrived in Kyrgyzstan to open a joint project office that would coordinate the CKU project.<sup>241</sup> The CKU project is a part of Uzbekistan's broader efforts to enhance regional connectivity, which include the development of other transport corridors such as Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Oman and Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan.

Additionally, the Uzbek government supported the Central Asia-South Asia power project (CASA-1000), emphasizing that the Uzbek-Afghan Surkhan-Poli-Khomri transmission line "could become part of the CASA-1000 project."<sup>242</sup> In

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<sup>239</sup> Pravesh Kumar and Javier M. Piedra, "China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway Back to Life," *Asia Times*, January 23, 2023, <https://asiatimes.com/2023/01/china-kyrgyzstan-uzbekistan-railway-back-to-life/>.

<sup>240</sup> Sophia Nina Burna-Asefi, "China and Uzbekistan: An Emerging Development Partnership?," *The Diplomat*, May 13, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/05/china-and-uzbekistan-an-emerging-development-partnership/>.

<sup>241</sup> "Otkritiye Sovmestnogo Proektnogo Ofisa Po Koordinatsii Stroitelstva Jeleznoy Dorogi 'Kitay-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan,'" *Kyrgyz Railway*, January 19, 2023, <http://kjd.kg/ru/press-service/news/full/1627.html>.

<sup>242</sup> "Uzbekistan Supports CASA-1000 Project - Kamilov," *Tashkent Times*, November 29, 2018, <http://tashkenttimes.uz/world/3235-uzbekistan-supports-casa-1000-project-kamilov>.

comparison, Karimov's government has opposed the implementation of the project claiming that it "might spark a military conflict in the region."<sup>243</sup>

Uzbekistan's newfound commitment to regional integration has provided a much-needed boost to Central Asia's economic development and has gained more attention from the international community. For example, the European Union has boosted its support for Central Asia through the EU Strategy on Central Asia. In November 2021, the EU-Central Asia Economic Forum took place in Kyrgyzstan,<sup>244</sup> while in November 2022, the conference on "EU-Central Asia Sustainable Connectivity" was hosted by Samarkand. In December 2022, the EBRD and the government of Japan held the Central Asia Investment Forum in cooperation with Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).<sup>245</sup> The United States has also renewed its engagement with the region emphasizing that "new leaders in the region have created new openings for reform-oriented development, intraregional connectivity and cooperation, and greater US engagement."<sup>246</sup> Additionally, Central Asia's efforts towards regional unification and the resolution of border disputes has simplified realization of the Chinese BRI initiatives. In the past, the closure of borders between Uzbekistan and other Central Asian states, including Afghanistan, not only hindered regional cooperation, but also limited the potential benefits of the Central Asia's strategic location, and obstructed the progress of cross-regional infrastructure initiatives like BRI's China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor (CCWAEC).

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<sup>243</sup> P. Stobdan, *Central Asia: Democracy, Instability and Strategic Game in Kyrgyzstan* (Pentagon Press, 2014), [https://idsa.in/system/files/book/book\\_CentralAsia\\_0.pdf](https://idsa.in/system/files/book/book_CentralAsia_0.pdf).

<sup>244</sup> "EU – Central Asia Economic Forum: Bringing Regions Closer," European Commission Press Corner, November 5, 2021, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_21\\_5841](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_5841).

<sup>245</sup> "Central Asia Investment Forum 2022," European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, December 1, 2022, <https://www.ebrd.com/news/events/central-asia-investment-forum-2022.html>.

<sup>246</sup> "United States Strategy for Central Asia 2019-2025: Advancing Sovereignty and Economic Prosperity," U.S. Embassy in Uzbekistan, February 5, 2020, <https://uz.usembassy.gov/united-states-strategy-for-central-asia-2019-2025-advancing-sovereignty-and-economic-prosperity/>.

Another feature of Shavkat Mirziyoyev's foreign policy is prioritization of economic issues over security ones. During the 2022 Samarkand SCO Summit, Mirziyoyev emphasized that "during our chairmanship in the SCO...along with security issues, the priority was given to enhancing trade, economic and humanitarian cooperation."<sup>247</sup> Mirziyoyev's economic priorities in dealing with other actors also had impact on the foreign policy agenda among the Central Asian states. During the Second Consultative Meeting of the Central Asian leaders the term *security* was mentioned only two times, while *cooperation* – seven times. This illustrates the shift in regional agenda from security and stability issues to cooperation and regional opportunities. Mirziyoyev himself has repeatedly emphasized the importance of multilateral frameworks, stating that constructive dialogue and multilateral cooperation are the only ways "out of the dangerous problems in an interconnected world."<sup>248</sup> After a 15-year break, the Uzbek government resumed negotiations on the WTO membership, stating that accession to the WTO is Uzbekistan's "absolute priority."<sup>249</sup> Furthermore, in January 2021, Uzbekistan announced its support for the Abraham Fund. The same month, the country became a member of the Central Asia Investment Partnership.<sup>250</sup>

Uzbekistan's domestic and foreign policy reforms have received the attention of the international community. "The Economist" declared Uzbekistan "country of the year," emphasizing that "no other country travelled as far."<sup>251</sup> Meanwhile, Shavkat

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<sup>247</sup> "Speech of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev at the Meeting of the Council of Heads of the Member-States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," PrezidentUz, September 16, 2022, <https://president.uz/en/lists/view/5542>.

<sup>248</sup> Shavkat Mirziyoyev, "The SCO Samarkand Summit: Dialogue and Cooperation in an Interconnected World," PrezidentUz, November 12, 2022, <https://president.uz/en/lists/view/5495>.

<sup>249</sup> "Uzbekistan Resumes WTO Membership Negotiations," World Trade Organization, July 2, 2020, [https://www.wto.org/english/news\\_e/news20\\_e/acc\\_uzb\\_07jul20\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news20_e/acc_uzb_07jul20_e.htm).

<sup>250</sup> Eric Salzman, "2022 Investment Climate Statements: Uzbekistan," United States Department of State, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-investment-climate-statements/uzbekistan/>.

<sup>251</sup> "Which Nation Improved the Most in 2019?," The Economist, December 21, 2019, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2019/12/21/which-nation-improved-the-most-in-2019>.

Mirziyoyev appeared in the list of “personalities influencing the international affairs.”<sup>252</sup>

The change in domestic politics and foreign policy was unexpected. Mirziyoyev had served as prime minister under Karimov for 13 years, being known as a “very tough authoritarian leader.”<sup>253</sup> At the time of Karimov’s death, political experts believed that Mirziyoyev would maintain Karimov’s policy. Although Mirziyoyev’s foreign policy did not diverge from Uzbekistan’s traditional guiding principles of rejecting any foreign military bases on its territory, refraining from dispatching troops to military operations abroad and avoiding joining any military blocs, the leader’s foreign policy behavior and the means used to achieve foreign policy goals did. Unlike Karimov, Mirziyoyev’s foreign policy is more open and dynamic, favoring multilateral cooperation, prioritizing regional affairs, and relying on soft power. To explain the president’s foreign policy behavior and understand the redirection of Uzbekistan’s foreign policy, a closer look to the leader’s environment and his perceptions about it is needed.

## **6.2. The leader’s environment**

### ***Multipolar world***

By the time Mirziyoyev came to power, the global system had already shifted towards a multipolar configuration, where power is distributed among several nations instead of being concentrated in one country. This change has had important implications for the foreign policies of developing nations like Uzbekistan.

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<sup>252</sup> “Shavkat Mirziyoyev Again in the List of Personalities Influencing the International Affairs,” Uzbekistan National News Agency, February 6, 2018, <https://uza.uz/en/posts/shavkat-mirziyoyev-again-in-the-list-of-personalities-influe-06-02-2018>.

<sup>253</sup> Daniil Kislov, “Daniil Kislov: “Mirziyoyev Izvesten Kak Avtoritarniy Lider, Kotoriy Izbival Podchinyonikh,” Biznes Gazeta, December 10, 2016, <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/331384>.

First, in a multipolar world, developing nations can pursue a diversified foreign policy, allowing a balanced approach to relationships with various global powers and a decreased overreliance on a single country or bloc. This also reduces the risks associated with depending too heavily on a single trading partner or investment source since overreliance on one trading partner or investment source makes developing countries vulnerable to external shocks. These shocks can also affect the economy and political stability of a developing country. Additionally, limited bargaining power during negotiations leads to unfavorable terms of trade or investment, further weakening the country's economic prospects. Moreover, depending too much on a single trading partner or investment source can expose the developing country to political pressure from that country. Sanctions or investment restrictions can be imposed if the developing country does not align with the partner country's political agenda.

On the contrary, multipolarity allows developing nations to diversify their partnerships and investments to reduce their vulnerability and enhance their bargaining power in the global arena. Furthermore, collaboration with multiple nations helps developing nations to advance their interests and strengthen relationships with a range of global powers. This collaboration can focus on shared concerns such as climate change, economic development, poverty reduction, etc. Finally, a multipolar world can promote regional integration among developing nations, which can enhance their collective bargaining power, reduce their vulnerability to external shocks, and create a more stable economic environment.

### ***Increased globalization***

Another feature of the current international environment is increased globalization. Globalization has brought about substantial transformations in the global economic

landscape, creating new opportunities for developing countries to participate in the global economy. One of the most notable benefits of globalization for developing nations is the increase in international trade. By participating in global trade, developing countries can experience economic growth. The increased trade can also help developing nations to diversify their economies and reduce their reliance on a single industry. For example, during the Soviet Union era, Uzbekistan relied heavily on cotton production. This overreliance stunted the economy once the Soviet Union collapsed. However, globalization has helped Uzbekistan diversify its economy and explore alternative industries. One of the most significant developments in Uzbekistan's diversification efforts has been the expansion of the mining sector. Uzbekistan is rich in natural resources such as gold, copper and uranium – all of which have become crucial exports. Manufacturing has also emerged as a key component of Uzbekistan's diversification efforts. Uzbekistan has leveraged its geographical location and low labor costs to attract foreign investment in manufacturing industries such as textiles, food processing and machinery. This has created jobs, boosted economic growth and reduced Uzbekistan's dependence on cotton. Under Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan has seen a nascent tourism industry emerged. Globalization has also increased the flow of foreign investment. This investment brings much-needed capital, technology, and expertise, creating jobs and boosting economic growth.

### ***Domestic political environment***

Mirziyoyev inherited a politically stable country from Karimov. The stability under Karimov's rule was the result of several factors. First, Karimov's past experience made him a skilled politician who could balance the interests of various ethnic groups, which in turn, prevented Uzbekistan from experiencing significant political upheavals. He

also managed his relationships with key political players, such as the military and the security services, which reinforced his grip on power.

Second, Karimov's regime strictly controlled political opposition. His political party, the People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan, held a monopoly on political power, and political opposition was not tolerated. This strict control prevented any significant challenges to his rule. Those who opposed the government were at risk of arrest and imprisonment. Consequently, an environment emerged where it was nearly impossible to coordinate any significant opposition.

Lastly, Karimov's regime established a strong security apparatus that helped to maintain stability. The security services effectively suppressed dissent and kept the population in check through surveillance, intimidation and repression. The regime also invested heavily in the military, which helped to deter external threats.

Human rights violations, suppression, and the use of torture cultivated a politically passive population. Despite being blessed with abundant natural resources, the economic situation in Uzbekistan was dire for many. The country struggled with high unemployment rates, low wages, and the lack of economic opportunities. Corruption was also widespread. But many adopted a sense of powerlessness with little choice but to ignore the aforementioned problems.

Political stability of Uzbekistan meant that there was no significant opposition or resistance from society. This stability allowed Mirziyoyev to focus on other goals, such as economic reforms and improving Uzbekistan's international standing.

### **6.3. Shavkat Mirziyoyev's perceptions**

The leader's environment and Mirziyoyev's perceptions of it meant he adopted a different approach to foreign policy making. Leadership trait analysis of Mirziyoyev

demonstrated that the president scored low for the ingroup bias and distrust (Table 8). Empirical findings of the LTA studies suggest that leaders, who scored low on both traits, tend not to view the environment as inherently dangerous. This explains why Mirziyoyev does not perceive the world as a threatening place. Empirical evidence also suggests that leaders with low ingroup bias and distrust interpret conflicts within a contextual framework and respond to them on a case-by-case basis. This accounts for why Mirziyoyev does not exhibit opportunistic behavior, in contrast to Karimov, but rather adopts a pragmatic approach. Furthermore, leaders with low levels of distrust and ingroup bias perceive the international environment as a platform that offers opportunities for cooperation. Consequently, these leaders prioritize leveraging the possibilities presented by the international environment and establishing collaborative relationships.

His positive outlook can be explained by the international environment which has undergone major changes. Mirziyoyev's presidency coincided with the presidency of Donald Trump and his "America first" policy, which prioritized nationalism and non-interventionism. In comparison, in the early 2000-s, color revolutions across the post-Soviet space made Karimov perceive the United States and the Western world as adversaries that imposed their ideology on others. As a result, Karimov limited cooperation with some countries and distanced Uzbekistan from the great powers. Karimov's uncompromising foreign policy and strong stance towards major powers, caused these powers to likewise keep their distance from Uzbekistan and refrain from any potentially hostile actions. Karimov's authoritarian rule also created a politically stable environment. This, combined with the change in international environment, contributed to Mirziyoyev's perceptions of his environment.

Similarly, Russia's imperialistic ambitions faded from 2014 because of sanctions placed on the country after its invasion of Crimea. Lastly, the rise of the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) gave a way to multipolarity, which along with globalization, creates greater interdependence among states. In his interview, Mirziyoyev acknowledged that "when it comes to foreign policy, in the age of globalization, old approaches are unacceptable."<sup>254</sup>

At the same time, Mirziyoyev acknowledges the existence of other problems, such as ongoing armed conflicts in different parts of the world, terrorism, global climate change, a rising shortage of natural and water resources, etc. However, he believes that "no country alone can hope to avoid or cope with these global risks" and only enhanced cooperation among the states can help the nations overcome existing challenges.<sup>255</sup>

"It is exactly at the time of crisis, when all countries – whether they are large, medium or small by size – must put aside their narrow interests and focus on such mutual interaction, unite and multiply the common efforts and possibilities to counter the threats and challenges to peace, security and sustainable development."<sup>256</sup>

Mirziyoyev, similar to Karimov in the 1990s, believed in the power of cooperation and that it makes the world a less threatening place. Mirziyoyev believed in the power of institutions, which bridges the countries together.

"The international cooperation that lays in the interest of everyone is impossible without multilateral institutions. Despite the certain shortcomings, they continue to serve as the most important agents of interaction between the countries – at the regional and global levels."<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Yangi Uzbekiston, "Vistuplenie Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan Sh. M. Mirziyoyeva Na Mejdunarodnoy Konferentsii " 'Tsentralnaya i Yujnaya Aziya: Regionalnaya Vzaimosvyazannost. Vizovi i Vozmojnosti,'" Yangi Uzbekiston, 2021, <https://yuz.uz/ru/news/uzbekiston-respublikasi-prezidenti-shmmirziyoevning-markaziy-va-janubiy-osiyo-mintaqaviy-ozaro-bogliqlik-tahdidlar-va-imkoniyatlar-mavzusidagi-xalqaro-konferentsiyadagi-nutqi>.

<sup>255</sup> Mirziyoyev, "The SCO Samarkand Summit: Dialogue and Cooperation in an Interconnected World."

<sup>256</sup> Mirziyoyev.

<sup>257</sup> Mirziyoyev.

Mirziyoyev's positive views about the environment makes him concentrate on opportunities rather than perceived threats. Therefore, Mirziyoyev focuses more on relationship building. At the same time, he believes that trust serves as the foundation for relationships. Serving as a prime minister for 13 years, Mirziyoyev observed that distrust in international relations could hinder cooperation among the states. Speaking on previous tensions among the Central Asian states, Mirziyoyev emphasized that the regional stagnation was a direct result of a "period of confrontation and mistrust."<sup>258</sup> Therefore, believing in the importance of mutual trust in international relations, the president emphasizes that trust is essential for building cooperation and partnerships between the countries.

#### **6.4. Regime survival strategy and foreign policy goals**

Mirziyoyev inherited stagnating situation from the former president. Karimov's authoritarian rule, lack of political freedom, violation of human rights, and closed-off approach to the rest of the world made Uzbekistan unappealing for foreign investors. The lack of investments limited the country's economic potential, resulting in a fewer job opportunities and lower living standards for Uzbekistan's citizens. The country also had limited access to foreign technology making it unable to keep up with technological advancements in other part of the world. As a result, Uzbekistan failed to foster new industries or improve existing ones, leading to limited economic growth and diversification. Furthermore, Karimov's repressive regime restricted political freedom and human rights. His tight grip on press freedom and trigger-happy approach to suppression made it difficult for citizens to hold the government accountable. This

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<sup>258</sup> Shavkat Mirziyoyev, "Address by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev at the International Conference «Central and South Asia: Regional Connectivity. Challenges and Opportunities»,” President.uz, July 16, 2021, <https://president.uz/en/lists/view/4484>.

led to apathy and disillusionment among the population, contributing to the country's overall stagnation.

Mirziyoyev's time as prime minister led him to recognize that the world had changed, and Karimov's interaction style impeded economic development.<sup>259</sup> However, being a person behind the scenes and a government official who "kicked the wheels," Mirziyoyev focused only on implementing Karimov's policies. On the top of that, "Mirziyoyev did not merely inherit a system of governance built on tight, often brutal control and suspicious of change. He had an important part in creating and implementing it."<sup>260</sup> Despite being the second person in Uzbekistan after Karimov, Mirziyoyev rarely appeared in public, but was known to be tough. Since Karimov was the first and only president of an independent Uzbekistan, he was remembered as a "father of the nation" whose iron fist contributed to Uzbekistan's stability and protected it from descending into civil war. Mirziyoyev, meanwhile, had to demonstrate that he was not simply Karimov's protégé, but an independent leader with his own style and visions. Therefore, when Mirziyoyev became president, he took advantage of the domestic stagnation to carve out his own unique path.

According to the LTA results (Table 6), Mirziyoyev, being closed to information and challenging constraints, falls in the category of advocate leaders. Empirical evidence suggests that advocate style leaders often set personal goals and actively pursue their own agenda. This, in turn, explains why Mirziyoyev's differing outlook made him opt for *performance-based legitimacy* to shore up support from the population.

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<sup>259</sup> Dadabaev, "Uzbekistan as Central Asian Game Changer?"

<sup>260</sup> "Uzbekistan: The Hundred Days," International Crisis group, March 15, 2017, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/uzbekistan/242-uzbekistan-hundred-days>.

To change his image domestically and consolidate his power, Mirziyoyev started addressing the most criticized problems of the Karimov era: public policy, international relations and economy. The Uzbek government softened its approach towards religious practices, released political prisoners closing the “Jaslyk” prison, abolished forced child labor, etc. Efforts made in the field of human rights did not go unnoticed and Uzbekistan, for the first time in history, was elected as a UN Human Rights Council member. In addition, the 13-year-old international boycott of Uzbek cotton was lifted after the government effectively abolished forced labor in cotton harvesting.

Another area of transformations has been the media. Censorship was abolished, some of foreign websites were unblocked and sensitive topics such as human rights violations and corruption are no longer taboo topics for journalists and bloggers. It is worth noting, that despite the softened approach to the media, only “cautious criticism of the authorities” is allowed.<sup>261</sup> Political experts agree that the new regime is “less repressive,” but the government remains authoritarian.<sup>262</sup> Power is still concentrated in the hand of the president and there is no real political competition among political parties since all of the five existing parties are pro-government ones. Merely, there is a slight difference in the leadership style of Shavkat Mirziyoyev compared to Karimov. Despite both being authoritarian, Karimov was confrontational, while Mirziyoyev avoids confrontations and prefers to navigate behind the scene tactics. For example, the 2005 protests in Andijan met an extremely harsh response from the Karimov government (see Chapter 5). In comparison, the 2022 protests in Karakalpakstan (an

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<sup>261</sup> Yuriy Sarukhanyan, “Reformed or Just Retouched? Uzbekistan’s New Regime,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 10, 2020, <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/82839>.

<sup>262</sup> Edward Lemon, “Mirziyoyev’s Uzbekistan: Democratization or Authoritarian Upgrading?,” *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, 2019.

autonomous region in Uzbekistan) received a different response from the government. The demonstrations, which erupted on July 1, 2022, were provoked by the proposed amendments to Uzbekistan's Constitution. Among the proposed amendments, there was an article which stripped Karakalpakstan's status as an autonomous republic and its right to secede from Uzbekistan through referendum. Mirziyoyev's response to the protest was cautious. He personally flew to the region and allayed their fears, telling the Karakalpak government that Uzbekistan would not amend the article related to Karakalpakstan's sovereignty. The president also called on security forces to de-escalate violence. Additionally, Mirziyoyev tactfully deflected blame onto members of the Karakalpak Parliament for not informing him about public opposition.

Another major domestic problem addressed by Mirziyoyev was the economy, with it becoming his major priority. Significantly, he eliminated the black market by returning to a system of official currency convertibility. This reduced the gap between official and black-market exchange rates and made it easier for businesses and individuals to access foreign currency. The government has also scaled back its involvement in the economy by privatizing state-owned enterprises. The Mission of Uzbekistan to the United Nations reported that 299 state assets totaling 348 billion UZS have been sold as of May 2020.<sup>263</sup> The government has recently agreed to sell off UzAgroExportBank, one of the twelve state-owned banks, "taking it a step closer toward its goal of bringing private sector competition."<sup>264</sup> In addition, Mirziyoyev has

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<sup>263</sup> "Tourism and Public Asset Management Projects Presented | Uzbekistan," The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the United Nations, May 28, 2020, <https://www.un.int/uzbekistan/news/tourism-and-public-asset-management-projects-presented>.

<sup>264</sup> Joanna Lillis, "Uzbekistan Kickstarts Banking Privatization with Sale of Ailing Lender | Eurasianet," EurasiaNet, January 9, 2023, <https://eurasianet.org/uzbekistan-kickstarts-banking-privatization-with-sale-of-ailing-lender>.

approved the 2020-2025 strategy on reforming the banking system, which entails privatization of seven more banks.<sup>265</sup>

Mirziyoyev directed all his domestic reforms at solving the economic woes of Uzbekistan through economic modernization and attracting foreign investment.<sup>266</sup> Reforms such as improvement of human rights, abolishing media censorship, enhancing privatization, as well as liberalizing the national currency, were aimed at reconstructing the image of the country in order to improve the business and investment climate in Uzbekistan. To bolster Uzbekistan's image in the eyes of foreign investors, Mirziyoyev outlined three clear goals to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and ambassadors: First, "export, export and once again export;" second, attract investments and technologies; third, bolster tourist inflows into Uzbekistan.<sup>267</sup> To do that, Mirziyoyev ordered ambassadors to work on improving Uzbekistan's image by "informing the foreign public that Uzbekistan is ready to develop open, constructive and mutually beneficial relations."<sup>268</sup>

As for foreign policy reform, it became a means to attract investors and realize economic goals. To improve Uzbekistan's economic standing, Mirziyoyev had to pull

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<sup>265</sup> "6 State-Owned Banks to Be Fully Privatized," The Tashkent Times, May 13, 2020.

<sup>266</sup> Aru Atibekova, "Uzbekistan Flags Privatization and Other Economic Reforms to Woo Foreign Investors," Caspian Policy Center, April 8, 2022, <https://www.caspianpolicy.org/research/energy-and-economy-program-eep/uzbekistan-flags-privatization-and-other-economic-reforms-to-woo-foreign-investors>.

<sup>267</sup> The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the United Nations, "Vistuplenie Prezidenta Uzbekistana Shavkata Mirziyoyeva Na Soveshanii Posvyashyonnom Deyatelnosti Ministerstva Inostrannih Del i Posolstv Nashey Strani Za Rubejom," The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the United Nations, 2018, <https://www.un.int/uzbekistan/fr/news/%D0%B2%D1%8B%D1%81%D1%82%D1%83%D0%BF%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B7%D0%B8%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%82%D0%B0-%D1%83%D0%B7%D0%B1%D0%B5%D0%BA%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D1%88%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B7%D0%B8%D1%91%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%B0-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D1%81%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B5%D1%89%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B8-%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%81%D0%B2%D1%8F%D1%89%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%BC-%D0%B4%D0%B5%D1%8F%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%B%D1%8C%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8>.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

the country out of isolation and open the country to foreign investment. Recognizing that Karimov's behavior towards the neighbors and international community constrained cooperation and economic development, Mirziyoyev adopted a different approach to foreign policy making. Mirziyoyev's foreign policy became more open and dynamic, favoring multilateral cooperation, prioritizing regional affairs, and relying on soft power.

### **6.5. Foreign policy behavior**

Mirziyoyev's differing approach to foreign policy making was reflected in his distinctive foreign policy behavior, which was especially evident in regional foreign policy. Openness to compromise and reliance on diplomatic tools, which are the main features of Mirziyoyev's foreign policy behavior, existed only on paper in the Karimov-era. During his speech at the United Nations General Assembly, Mirziyoyev declared the Central Asian region to be a major priority for Uzbekistan's foreign policy, stating that Uzbekistan is committed to dialog, constructive cooperation, as well as strengthening neighborly relations with Central Asian countries. The hallmark of foreign policy under Mirziyoyev's administration was Uzbekistan's readiness for compromises "on all issues without exception."<sup>269</sup> This had been nearly impossible under Karimov, who was constantly ready to wage war in order to protect national interests. Despite Karimov claiming Central Asia to be a priority, his actions contradicted his words. With the escalation of conflicts between Uzbekistan and its neighbors, Karimov tended to close and mine the borders, and limit high-level bilateral meetings. For example, the last meeting between Karimov and the Tajik president

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<sup>269</sup> UNGA, "Address by H.E. Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan at the UNGA-72," The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the United Nations, September 19, 2017, [https://www.un.int/uzbekistan/statements\\_speeches/address-he-mr-shavkat-mirziyoyev-president-republic-uzbekistan-unga-72](https://www.un.int/uzbekistan/statements_speeches/address-he-mr-shavkat-mirziyoyev-president-republic-uzbekistan-unga-72).

Emomali Rahmon was in 2000, 16 years before his death. Similarly, Karimov did pay a single visit to Kyrgyzstan after the year 2000. Karimov avoided personal meetings with the Central Asian leaders, meeting them only during regional summits, such as the SCO, the CIS and others. In comparison, Mirziyoyev paid official visits to Kyrgyzstan in 2017, 2018, 2022 and 2023, while the president of Kyrgyzstan visited Uzbekistan in 2017 and 2021. Even the recent conflict at the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border over the Kempir-Abad reservoir did not prevent the two leaders from negotiating and reaching an agreement. The conflict was caused by the decision of the Kyrgyz government on handover of the Kempir-Abad reservoir to Uzbekistan in exchange for other disputed areas.<sup>270</sup> This case demonstrates that Mirziyoyev's behavior, particularly, moving away from mere rhetoric to concrete actions, was the key to improving relations between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

From the first days of his presidency, Mirziyoyev emphasized “mutual trust.” In an interview, Mirziyoyev mentioned that his new Foreign Policy pays great attention to the notion of mutual trust and that it has become a priority for Uzbekistan's foreign policy. During a Central and South Asia conference, Mirziyoyev claimed that, along with cooperation and dialogue, trust is “a driving force”<sup>271</sup> for ensuring stability and sustainable development. Believing that cooperation is the only way to achieve foreign policy goals, and declaring Uzbekistan's readiness to compromise on most issues, Mirziyoyev initiated the first steps toward building trust in the region. Frozen relations with neighbors, particularly with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, quickly thawed.

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<sup>270</sup> “Bishkek People Protest against Transfer of Kempir-Abad Reservoir to Uzbekistan,” Daryo Uz, October 25, 2022, <https://daryo.uz/en/2022/10/25/bishkek-people-protest-against-transfer-ofkempir-abad-reservoir-to-uzbekistan/>.

<sup>271</sup> Yangi Uzbekiston, “Vistuplenie Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan Sh. M. Mirziyoyeva Na Mejdunarodnoy Konferentsii ” ‘Tsentralnaya i Yujnaya Aziya: Regionalnaya Vzaimosvyazannost. Vizovi i Vozmojnosti.’”

As for **Tajikistan**, political experts were skeptical about Uzbek-Tajik relations improving after Karimov's passing. Parviz Mollodjonov claimed that, despite the role of personal relations, "interstate relations involve interests built up over decades."<sup>272</sup> However, after taking the office, Mirziyoyev reached out to the Tajik leader to resolve existing problems. He visited Tajikistan in March 2018, 21 years after Karimov's last visit. Before the visit, officials and citizens deconstructed the so-called "Karimov Wall" which separated a portion of Tajikistan's Sughd area from Uzbekistan's Samarkand province. After several meetings between the two presidents, they signed a package of documents on cooperation. These led to the abolishment of the visa regime and a relaunching of road, railway and air services between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.<sup>273</sup> The Uzbek government also resumed gas supplies to Tajikistan. Furthermore, reciprocal visits of government and business delegations intensified through industrial fairs and cultural events. Unexpectedly, Uzbekistan extended an olive branch in regards to the water issue, expressing an interest in dam construction. Mirziyoyev declared that the two countries had "...reached an agreement for Uzbekistan to start constructing two hydropower stations in Tajikistan."<sup>274</sup> Compromise on sensitive issues and an emphasis on friendly relations with Tajikistan became "an unchangeable priority of Uzbekistan's foreign policy."<sup>275</sup> Mirziyoyev's trust resulted in peaceful resolutions of interstate disputes. This, in turn, led to a steady increase in Uzbekistan's trade turnover with Tajikistan, which reached 674.4 million

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<sup>272</sup> BBC News, "V Tajikistane Zadumalis Mojno Li Naladit Otnosheniya s Uzbekistanom," BBC News, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-37224374>.

<sup>273</sup> UzReport, "Uzbekistan i Tajikistan Otmenili Vizoviy Rejim," UzReport, 2018, <https://www.uzreport.news/politics/uzbekistan-i-tadjikistan-otmenili-vizoviy-rejim>.

<sup>274</sup> Avesta, "Tovarooborot Tajikistana i Uzbekistana Za Posledniye Shest Let Uvelichilsya v 30 Raz," Avesta, 2021, <http://avesta.tj/2021/06/10/tovarooborot-tadjikistana-i-uzbekistana-za-poslednie-shest-let-uvelichilsya-v-30-raz-emomali-rahmon/>.

<sup>275</sup> Sputnik, "Uzbekistan i Tajikistan Namereni Vdvoe Uvelichit Tovarooborot v 2022 Godu," Sputnik, 2021, <https://uz.sputniknews.ru/20210610/uzbekistan-i-tadjikistan-namereny-vdvoe-uvelichit-tovarooborot-v-2022-godu-19198961.html>.

USD in 2022 marking a 11.3% increase compared to 2021 (605.6 million USD).<sup>276</sup> Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, the trade turnover between the two countries showed a 2.7% increase from 480.5 million USD in 2019 to 493.1 million USD in 2020.<sup>277</sup>

Out of the 256 documents that make up the legal framework of Uzbek-Tajik cooperation, 153 of them (60%) were adopted during the period of Mirziyoyev's rule.<sup>278</sup> Nowadays, Uzbek-Tajik enhanced cooperation is evident in many areas: economic, tourism, parliamentary diplomacy, transportation, water and energy resources, etc. Observers noted that Mirziyoyev's "warmth and spirit of cooperation"<sup>279</sup> helped remove obstacles between the two states. Central Asian analysts agree that personal relations between the two leaders are important, while Mirziyoyev's first visit to Tajikistan "was epochal... marking the end of the Karimov period, characterized by mistrust and hostility, and the beginning of a new period – the period of Mirziyoyev, aimed at building trust and creating connections."<sup>280</sup>

The same use of soft power was implemented towards **Kyrgyzstan** regarding the main issue of contention between the two countries: border disputes. Mirziyoyev eased tensions by making the first official visit to Kyrgyzstan in 17 years. This resulted in an agreement to delineate 85 percent of the disputed border. "This day, which our peoples have been waiting for 25 years, is a major achievement of president Shavkat

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<sup>276</sup> "Uzbekistan-Tajikistan 2022 Trade Up 11.3%," Silk Road Briefing, January 24, 2023, <https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2023/01/24/uzbekistan-tajikistan-2022-trade-up-11-3/>.

<sup>277</sup> "Infographics: Uzbekistan's Trade with Tajikistan," Review.uz, February 6, 2022, <https://review.uz/en/post/infografika-torgovlya-uzbekistana-s-tadjikistanom>.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Bruce Pannier, "The Most Popular Man In Tajikistan Comes To Visit," RFE/RL, June 11, 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/tajikistan-uzbekistan-warm-relations-mirziyoev-visit-qishloq-pannier/31302621.html>.

<sup>280</sup> "Uzbekistan Leader's Visit to Tajikistan: A Little Less Conversation, a Little More Action," CABAR.asia, June 11, 2021, <https://cabar.asia/en/uzbekistan-leader-s-visit-to-tajikistan-a-little-less-conversation-a-little-more-action>.

Mirziyoyev,” – said Kyrgyzstan’s former president, Almazbek Atambayev.<sup>281</sup> Additionally, the Intergovernmental Commission of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan resumed after an eight-year hiatus. The Uzbek and Kyrgyz prime ministers headed the commission. Uzbekistan has only maintained such high-level commission leadership with Russia and China. A breakthrough occurred in 2019 when Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan mutually exchanged 413 hectares of territory to demonstrate mutual trust. In his message to the president of Kyrgyzstan, Mirziyoyev noted that the two countries were able to lay a solid foundation for mutual trust because of “political will and concrete steps.”<sup>282</sup> The recent visit of Mirziyoyev to Kyrgyzstan in January 2023 was marked as a “historical event.” It came after the two countries had completed the process of delimitation. Mirziyoyev stated that negotiations were held in a “trustful and constructive way, the relationship we never had before [during Karimov era].” He also mentioned that “it was challenging, but these difficult and supposedly unsolvable problems could be resolved by the political will of the two presidents.”<sup>283</sup> Apart from solving border issues, the two governments signed a package of documents in the economic, trade, investment, agriculture, transport and other spheres. It was also agreed that the citizens of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan could travel to the two countries without using passports, severely reducing bureaucracy at the borders. Diplomacy enabled Mirziyoyev to improve Uzbekistan’s economic relations with Kyrgyzstan.

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<sup>281</sup> “Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan Open New Chapter in Relations | Eurasianet,” EurasiaNet, 2017, <https://eurasianet.org/uzbekistan-kyrgyzstan-open-new-chapter-in-relations>.

<sup>282</sup> Vesti.Kg, “Shavkat Mirziyoyev Dovolen Tem Kak Skladivayutsya Otnosheniya s Kirgizstanom,” Vesti.Kg, 2018, <https://vesti.kg/politika/item/50264-shavkat-mirziyoev-dovolen-tem-kak-skladyvayutsya-otnosheniya-s-kyrgyzstanom.html>.

<sup>283</sup> Shavkat Mirziyoyev, “Uzbekistandin Prezidenti Shavkat Mirziyoyevdin Mamlekettik Sapari Ulanuuda,” YouTube, January 27, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOw\\_BxiRgl0&t=1289s&ab\\_channel=%D0%AD%D0%BB%D0%A2%D0%A0%D0%9C%D0%B0%D0%B0%D0%BB%D1%8B%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%82](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOw_BxiRgl0&t=1289s&ab_channel=%D0%AD%D0%BB%D0%A2%D0%A0%D0%9C%D0%B0%D0%B0%D0%BB%D1%8B%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%82).

Trade turnover between the two states reached 599 million USD in 2022, marking a 20 percent increase since 2021 (496 million USD).<sup>284</sup>

Mirziyoyev believes that compromise-based solutions can be achieved only if there is trust between leaders, while constant political dialogue and personal contacts are crucial in trust building. Therefore, he uses this approach not only in bilateral relations, but at the regional level as well. His initiative on consultative meetings among the heads of the Central Asian region act as a tool for maintaining interpersonal relations. Realizing that the lack of communication between the Central Asian leaders had worsened relations, Mirziyoyev initiated regular meetings to “synchronize” key issues of regional development.<sup>285</sup> After disputes reached a resolution, the foreign policy agenda among the Central Asian states shifted from security and stability issues to cooperation and regional opportunities. During the Second Consultative Meeting, the term *security* was mentioned two times, while *cooperation* – seven times.

In March 2017 president Mirziyoyev “surprised” the international community by paying his first foreign visit as president to **Turkmenistan**.<sup>286</sup> In the post – Soviet region, much importance is placed on the first official visit of a president. Usually, leaders choose Russia as a symbol of friendship. This symbolic choice to visit Turkmenistan first demonstrates Mirziyoyev’s pragmatic foreign policy behavior. Turkmenistan possesses significant natural gas reserves, while Uzbekistan is a major consumer. Additionally, Turkmenistan has access to the Caspian Sea, an area of strategic importance for the double-landlocked Uzbekistan. The outcome of the

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<sup>284</sup> Sabir Alizade, “Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Trade Turnover Increases,” *Turkic World*, February 18, 2023, <https://turkic.world/en/articles/kyrgyzstan/67800>.

<sup>285</sup> Executive Committee of CIS, “Intervyu Prezidenta Shavkata Mirziyoyeva Kazhastanskim SMI,” Executive Committee of CIS, 2021, [https://cis.minsk.by/news/21568/intervju\\_prezidenta\\_uzbekistana\\_shavkata\\_mirzijoewa\\_kazahstanski\\_m\\_smi\\_](https://cis.minsk.by/news/21568/intervju_prezidenta_uzbekistana_shavkata_mirzijoewa_kazahstanski_m_smi_).

<sup>286</sup> Paolo Sorbello, “Uzbekistan Puts a Smile on an Economic Blow to Turkmenistan,” *The Diplomat*, March 16, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/03/uzbekistan-puts-a-smile-on-an-economic-blow-to-turkmenistan/>.

meeting was meaningful as both countries reached an agreement on mutual cooperation in the fields of energy and transportation. In particular, Mirziyoyev showed an interest in participating in the TAPI pipeline project (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India).<sup>287</sup> In addition, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov extended an offer that would explore the possibility of Uzbekistan using port infrastructure on the Caspian coast. He mentioned that Turkmenistan is ready to work together in order to create a corridor along the Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Caspian Sea-Southern Caucasus corridor route “with access to both European and Middle Eastern markets.”<sup>288</sup> Within the framework of the state visit of Turkmen president to Uzbekistan, 17 dealing with information and communication technologies, and agriculture were signed, including agreements on opening trading houses and creating a business council.<sup>289</sup>

Mirziyoyev has also demonstrated his pragmatic foreign policy behavior towards Kazakhstan, the biggest country in the region, both physically and economically. In the past, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan were seen as rivals. Karimov possessed a different vision for the Central Asian region, seeing the region through the prism of Turkestanism. Meanwhile, Kazakhstan’s president Nursultan Nazarbayev chose the Eurasian path, attempting to foster Russian cooperation in the region. This generated a competition between the two leaders for the position of regional leadership, souring bilateral relations.<sup>290</sup> However, Mirziyoyev has tried to develop and improve relations with Kazakhstan, seeing it as a major trading partner in the

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<sup>287</sup> Catherine Putz, “Uzbek President Makes First Official Trip Abroad to Turkmenistan,” *The Diplomat*, March 8, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/03/uzbek-president-makes-first-official-trip-abroad-to-turkmenistan/>.

<sup>288</sup> “Uzbekistanu Predloženo Ispolzovat Portovuyu Infrastrukturu Kaspiya,” *GazetaUz*, April 23, 2018, <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2018/04/23/turkmenistan/>.

<sup>289</sup> “Uzbekistan i Tajikistan Dogovorilis’ Utroit’ Obyem Tovaroorota,” April 24, 2018, <https://stanradar.com/news/full/29312-uzbekistan-i-turkmenistan-dogovorilis-utroit-obem-tovaroorota.html?page=1>.

<sup>290</sup> Tolipov, “Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan: Competitors, Strategic Partners or Eternal Friends?”

Central Asian region. The former president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev stated that “recently, our relations have developed in a totally different way... This is thanks to how the new leadership in Uzbekistan has open up all opportunities to trade and lifted barriers.”<sup>291</sup> In December 2022, the two leaders signed the Treaty on Allied Relations and the Treaty on the Demarcation of the Uzbek-Kazakh State border.<sup>292</sup> The former enhances cooperation in the economic, humanitarian, cultural, security and energetic sectors. The latter “completes the international legal registration of the state border of Kazakhstan on its southern borders.”<sup>293</sup> In turn, the rapprochement between the two countries resulted in the mutual economic benefits. In 2022 the trade turnover between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan hit a record high, achieving 4.05 billion USD and marking a 34.7 percent increase compared to 2021 (3.0 billion USD).<sup>294</sup> Nowadays, following China and Russia, Kazakhstan holds the third place in the list of the top ten countries with the largest trade turnover with Uzbekistan.

As well as improving bilateral relations with Uzbekistan’s neighbors, Mirziyoyev demonstrates proactivity at the regional level through organizing international conferences, and various cultural and business forums to enhance regional connectivity. The international conference “*Central and South Asia: Regional Connectivity. Challenges and Opportunities*” aimed to reach agreements on using commerce, transportation, and energy ties to connect Central Asian countries and South Asian markets; the international conference “*Afghanistan – The Way to a Peaceful Future*” became a platform for peace talks on Afghanistan; the city of Khiva,

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<sup>291</sup> Catherine Putz, “Brothers Again: Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan,” *The Diplomat*, March 24, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/03/brothers-again-uzbekistan-and-kazakhstan/>.

<sup>292</sup> “Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan Sign Treaty of Alliance,” *The Tashkent Times*, December 22, 2022, <http://tashkenttimes.uz/national/10236-mirziyoyev-tokayev-sign-treaty-of-alliance>.

<sup>293</sup> “Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan Sign Treaty of Alliance.”

<sup>294</sup> “Record Turnover Between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan,” *Kazakhstan Economic Research Institute*, December 22, 2022, [https://economy.kz/en/Novosti\\_instituta/id=5593](https://economy.kz/en/Novosti_instituta/id=5593).

in cooperation with UNESCO, held an International Cultural Forum “*Central Asia at the Crossroads of Civilizations*” that sought to promote a shared Central Asian culture.

Mirziyoyev demonstrates the similar proactiveness at the international level. Nowadays, Uzbekistan attempts to shape the global agenda in tackling problems such as terrorism, cross-border crime, climate change and poverty. For example, the UN General Assembly adopted a Mirziyoyev-led resolution dealing with the Aral Sea region. Meanwhile Uzbekistan, within the framework of the UN Multi-Partner Human Security Trust Fund (MPHSTF) for the Aral Sea region, initiated activities to mitigate the consequences of environmental damage. During the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building Measures in Asia, Mirziyoyev proposed preserving inter-religious harmony, as well as enriching education and culture. Uzbekistan serves as the coordinator for these confidence-building measures. Uzbekistan was also elected as a member of UN Human Rights council for the first time in its history.

Another key initiative from Uzbekistan has been the high-level international negotiating group to regulate the situation in Afghanistan under the auspices of the UN. Because Uzbekistan has cooperated with the Taliban government, Mirziyoyev offered to coordinate the practical implementation of the Afghan initiative.<sup>295</sup> Mirziyoyev has been at the forefront of bringing about a peaceful settlement of the Afghan issue. Unlike Karimov, who preferred to isolate Uzbekistan from Afghanistan, Mirziyoyev has shown a softer side in dealing with the Taliban government. By engaging in dialogue and cooperation with the Taliban government, Uzbekistan facilitated the establishment of schools for girls in the northern regions of Afghanistan. Additionally, Uzbekistan arranged the transit of goods through Afghanistan to

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<sup>295</sup> “Shavkat Mirziyoyev’s Initiative on Afghanistan Presented at UN Security Council,” Kun Uz, December 22, 2022, <https://kun.uz/en/news/2022/12/21/shavkat-mirziyoyevs-initiative-on-afghanistan-presented-at-un-security-council>.

Pakistani seaports. Throughout 2022, about 600 thousand tons of cargo were transported via this route.<sup>296</sup>

Uzbekistan's relations with Afghanistan and its willingness to promote a peaceful settlement at the international arena again demonstrates Mirziyoyev's pragmatic and cooperative foreign policy behavior. Ultimately, conflicts and tensions in Afghanistan are disadvantageous for Uzbekistan because the country needs access to the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf to make the transit of Uzbek goods to China and Europe.<sup>297</sup>

By pursuing a "balanced, open, constructive and pragmatic foreign policy"<sup>298</sup> Uzbekistan reestablished harmonious relations with all the major powers and routinely interacts with China, Russia, the US, the EU, South Asia, the Asia-Pacific region and the Arab world. Japan's former Deputy Minister of Finance mentioned that "thanks to his efforts, we have witnessed Uzbekistan become a strategically important link in promoting intraregional harmony not only in Central Asia, but also at the global level."<sup>299</sup>

Mirziyoyev's non-confrontational, pragmatic and proactive foreign policy behavior at the regional and international levels have transformed Uzbekistan's foreign policy to one characterized by openness, transparency and predictability. This has also helped Mirziyoyev achieve his domestic goals. In 2022, Uzbekistan's GDP reached 888 341.7 billion UZS, marking a 5.7 percent increase since 2021 (738 425.2 billion UZS).<sup>300</sup> In 2022, Uzbekistan became the top beneficiary of the European Bank for

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<sup>296</sup> "Shavkat Mirziyoyev's Initiative on Afghanistan Presented at UN Security Council."

<sup>297</sup> "The Afghan Issue on the Agendas of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan," CABAR.asia, January 7, 2022, <https://cabar.asia/en/the-afghan-issue-on-the-agendas-of-uzbekistan-and-kazakhstan>.

<sup>298</sup> UzDaily, "A View from Japan: Four of the Five International Initiatives Voiced by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev Have Already Been Implemented," UzDaily, September 14, 2020, <http://www.uzdaily.uz/en/post/59964>.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> "The Production of the Gross Domestic Product (January-December 2022)," Statistics Agency of Uzbekistan, January 26, 2023.

Reconstruction and Development's (EBRD) funding in Central Asia. EBRD is investing almost 900 million USD in 26 projects ranging from renewable energy to banking.<sup>301</sup> In 2022 alone, the total amount of foreign direct investment into the country reached 8 billion USD.<sup>302</sup> Moreover, Uzbekistan was accepted in the EU's Generalized Scheme of Preferences scheme (GSP+) in April 2021. This allows Uzbekistan to export goods to the EU without trade tariffs.<sup>303</sup> In March 2022, Uzbekistan and Pakistan signed a Preferential Trade agreement, decreasing tariffs on the 34 goods. The agreement will also grant Uzbekistan access Pakistan's seaports.

Overall, foreign policy change under former prime minister Mirziyoyev was a result of his perceptions about an environment characterized by multipolarity, globalization and domestic political environment. At the same times, aspiring to change his tough-leader image and legitimize himself domestically, Mirziyoyev moved away from Karimov's repressive style and addressed economic problems. Thus, improving the economy became the main foreign policy goal and molded Mirziyoyev's foreign policy behavior into a more open, dynamic and cooperative one. His behavior resulted in a number of domestic and foreign policy reforms which pulled the country out of isolation

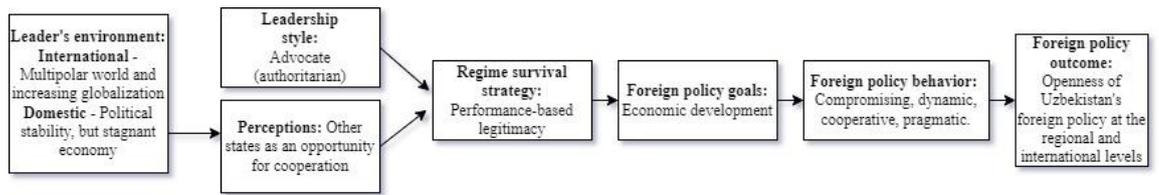
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<sup>301</sup> Anton Usov, "EBRD Invests Record US\$ 900 Million in Uzbekistan," European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, January 26, 2023.

<sup>302</sup> Shavkat Mirziyoyev, "Address by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan H.E. Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev to the Oliy Majlis and the People of Uzbekistan," New Central Asia, December 22, 2022, <https://www.newscentralasia.net/2022/12/22/address-by-the-president-of-the-republic-of-uzbekistan-h-e-mr-shavkat-mirziyoyev-to-the-oliy-majlis-and-the-people-of-uzbekistan/>.

<sup>303</sup> Justinas Liuima, "Uzbekistan to Benefit from EU GSP+ Trade Scheme," Euromonitor.com, May 19, 2022, <https://www.euromonitor.com/article/uzbekistan-to-benefit-from-eu-gsp-trade-scheme>.

**Figure 14. Graphical representation of Shavkat Mirziyoyev's foreign policy**



## **Chapter 7. Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to explain foreign policy change under authoritarian settings. Addressing the case of Uzbekistan's foreign policy, this research proposed a single model to explain why and how foreign policy change takes place under authoritarian leaders.

The period of analysis covered 30 years of Uzbekistan's foreign policy, from 1991 until present. Analysis was divided into three major periods in Uzbekistan's foreign policy. The first period covered the years of Islam Karimov's foreign policy from 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union until the early 2000s. This period was characterized by proactivity and openness of Uzbekistan's foreign policy. The second period, during which Uzbekistan's foreign policy became isolationist, covered Karimov's foreign policy after 2005 until his death in 2016. Lastly, the third period (2016 – present) covered the foreign policy of the new president Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who redirected Uzbekistan's foreign policy from isolation to openness and cooperation.

### **7.1. Foreign policy change under authoritarian leaders: findings**

The model developed in the research suggests that in authoritarian regimes, a leader's environment and their perceptions about it become the decisive factors which induce authoritarian leaders to (re)consider their regime survival strategy. Concern with regime survival, in turn, shapes foreign policy goals which become manifested in the distinctive foreign policy behavior of a leader. Ultimately, behavioral patterns of a leader translate into certain foreign policy actions of a state.

Application of the model to the case of Uzbekistan's foreign policy and Leadership Trait Analysis of Karimov illustrate that conclusion of the collapse of the

Soviet Union and conclusion of the Cold War shaped Karimov's perceptions. The LTA results revealed that Karimov scored low on distrust and ingroup, which in turn, explain Karimov's optimistic perceptions about the world (Table 8). He saw the world as a nonthreatening place which provided opportunities for cooperation. The LTA of Islam Karimov also revealed him as an advocate/authoritarian style leader (Table 5). At the same time, as an authoritarian leader, facing domestic instability caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union, Karimov had to consolidate his power. His belief in the power of international organizations and cooperation made Karimov opt for a performance legitimacy as his main regime survival strategy. Regime survival strategy, in turn, shaped foreign policy goals: economic stability and transborder security. To achieve these goals, Karimov had to be proactive and cooperative in regional and international affairs. Therefore, Uzbekistan's foreign policy of the 1990s was characterized by openness at the regional and international levels. It is worth noting, that Uzbekistan in the 1990s had major security concerns such as regional instability and the rise of Islamist movements in Afghanistan, which in turn, led to a certain extent of securitization of Uzbekistan's foreign policy. Uzbekistan provided territory for military bases, participated in joint military exercises, dispatched troops to military operations abroad and joined the CSTO. However, the security concerns of Karimov in the 1990s represent different dynamics in Uzbekistan's foreign policy. Thus, Karimov's perceptions made him see existing security issues as context specific and believed that existing security problems could be solved by collective actions. Therefore, Uzbekistan's foreign policy in the 1990s was characterized by openness to any kind of cooperation, both economic and security.

However, according to leadership trait analysis of Karimov after 2005, the leader's environment of the early 2000s reshaped Islam Karimov's perceptions.

Karimov's extremely high scores on distrust and ingroup bias (Table 8) explain why he saw other countries as enemies, intent on spreading their ideology. At the same time, the LTA scores related to his leadership style (Table 5) indicated Karimov's willingness to stay in power at all costs. Therefore, triggered by the 2005 events in Andijan, Karimov altered his regime survival strategy to repression. To legitimize his repressive authoritarian regime, Karimov scapegoated external threats. This, thrust security into the limelight. The focus of Uzbekistan's security concerns shifted more towards maintaining domestic stability, countering domestic dissent, and altering international alliances to minimize criticism and support authoritarian rule. This, in turn, affected Karimov's behavior, which became more passive and uncompromising in dealing with international and regional issues. Ultimately, concern with regime survival made Uzbekistan's foreign policy shift from openness to isolation.

Lastly, foreign policy change under former prime minister Mirziyoyev was a result of his perceptions about an environment characterized by multipolarity and globalization. This argument was supported by the LTA scores, which revealed that Mirziyoyev scored low on distrust and ingroup bias (Table 8). The LTA of Shavkat Mirziyoyev revealed him as an advocate/authoritarian style leader (Table 5), proving once again authoritarian nature of foreign policy decision-making in Uzbekistan. Aspiring to change his tough-leader image and legitimize himself domestically, Mirziyoyev moved away from Karimov's repressive style and addressed economic problems. Thus, improving the economy became the main foreign policy goal and molded Mirziyoyev's foreign policy behavior into a more open, dynamic and cooperative one. His behavior resulted in a number of domestic and foreign policy reforms which pulled the country out of isolation.

Margaret G. Hermann's Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) was used to operationalize two variables used in the model: the leadership style and perceptions. The results of the LTA of the Uzbek presidents revealed that the two leaders are classified as *advocate style* leaders. Advocate leaders tend to be autonomous and insensitive to context. They have their own agenda and exercise control over all political issues. These leaders are less likely to tolerate any resistance and have a propensity to suppress opposition. Advocates are often associated with authoritarian governments. Determining the leadership styles of the two presidents demonstrated the authoritarian nature of decision-making process in Uzbekistan.

As for perceptions, the LTA of Islam Karimov in the 1990s revealed that Karimov's perceptions about the world were quite optimistic. He perceived the world as an opportunity for cooperation. However, after 2005 Karimov's perceptions changed. Thus, the LTA of Islam Karimov after 2005 demonstrated that the president saw the environment as a threatening place, while other countries were perceived by Karimov as adversaries to be confronted. Whereas, the results of Mirziyoyev's LTA showed that Mirziyoyev's perceptions of the world were similar to Karimov's in the 1990s. He sees the world in a positive way focusing more on opportunities than threats. Operationalizing the perceptions demonstrated how the Uzbek leaders' perceptions have changed over different periods of time and how they contributed to foreign policy changes.

## **7.2. Contribution of the research**

This research holds significant scientific importance in several ways. First, it provides theoretical contribution to the literature on foreign policy change by proposing a model, which conceptualizes foreign policy making under authoritarian leaders.

Furthermore, the study goes beyond traditional explanations of Uzbekistan's foreign policy, offering an empirical contribution to the existing literature on foreign policy of Uzbekistan. Lastly, the study provides methodological contribution by offering a method to operationalize perceptions of political actors.

Addressing the gaps present in the existing literature, the research developed the model of foreign policy change under authoritarian leaders by. Previous models of foreign policy change take decentralized decision-making for granted and overemphasize the role of institutional and non-institutional factors. However, the decentralized decision-making process is more relevant to democratic regimes than authoritarian ones. At the same time, the majority of existing studies on foreign policy change in authoritarian countries, such as China and Russia, are more empirical in nature. Thus, despite the abundance of case studies on foreign policy making in non-democracies, advancements in the conceptual understanding of foreign policy change in authoritarian regimes were still needed.

The proposed model was developed by combining existing explanations of foreign policy change at different analytical levels: international system dynamics, the domestic political system and cognitive aspects of foreign policy making. It represents an advanced version of existing models and incorporates the factors related to authoritarian states, which have been often overlooked by the prevailing models of foreign policy change.

The case study of Uzbekistan's foreign policy provides empirical contributions. The literature on Uzbekistan's foreign policy is fragmented and a major part of it has focused on the Karimov era. Whereas academic literature on Uzbekistan's foreign policy in the post-Karimov era is relatively scarce and lacks theoretical explanations for Uzbekistan's foreign policy change under Mirziyoyev. Therefore, this

research provided an up-to-date analysis of Uzbekistan's foreign policy by applying a single model which explains why and how foreign policy change changes took place in Uzbekistan both under the same leader and under the new one.

Finally, this research offers a new methodology to operationalize perceptions of political actors. Despite the notion of perceptions being widely used in the literature, there are no studies which measure perceptions. A causal relationship between perceptions and foreign policy change was only assumed. This research adapted the Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) to operationalize perceptions of the leaders. Despite the LTA's ability to measure perceptions, *existing studies employing Leadership Trait Analysis largely neglect the measurement of leaders' perceptions through this method.* Instead, LTA studies focus on the relationship between certain traits and foreign policy behavior. For instance, Shannon and Keller examined how ingroup bias and distrust affect the leaders' propensity for norm violation; Kesgin analyzed how distrust affects leaders' hawkish and dovish behavior; Wesley scrutinized how George W. Bush's high level of distrust affected his belief about Iraq possessing weapons of mass destruction.

By employing LTA to measure perceptions, this research explained why the Uzbek leaders perceived the environment the way they did and why their perceptions resulted in different foreign policy behaviors. This provides a valuable contribution to the understanding of perceptions and to the empirical study of the Leadership Trait Analysis.

### **7.3. Recommendations: testing the model through further inquiry**

This study proposed a model for analyzing foreign policy change under authoritarian leaders. It is important to acknowledge that the model has only been tested on the case of Uzbekistan's foreign policy, and further empirical research is needed to assess its

generalizability. Additional case studies should be examined to determine whether the model can be applied to other contexts.

One of the potential case studies that could be explored is foreign policy of Russia in regards to the recent war in Ukraine. It is suggested that a leader's environment and Vladimir Putin's perceptions about it played a significant role in his decision to invade Ukraine. At the same time, his concern with regime survival led to Putin scapegoating the West and resorting to repressive measures when faced with domestic opposition. His concern with regime survival then, shaped foreign policy goals of Russia: security and national interests at all costs. Ultimately, foreign policy goals translated into aggressive foreign policy behavior. To investigate this case, it is necessary to first measure Putin's perceptions and then conduct a detailed qualitative analysis of Russia's current domestic and foreign policies.

While the article focuses on a single case, its findings can be seen as a valuable contribution to the development of theoretical tools for explaining foreign policy change under authoritarian states. By incorporating the cognitive factors of foreign policy making into the model, the study lays the ground for future research that can build upon these insights and conduct comparative analyses to further refine theoretical frameworks in the field of foreign policy change.

This research also proposes that the developed model is not solely restricted to explanation of foreign policy change. As it was argued in the research, the model explains why and how foreign policy change takes place under authoritarian regimes. The "how" part of the question addresses the process of foreign policy change. That means the model, in general, is also capable to explain foreign policy making under authoritarian leaders. Analysis of Uzbekistan's foreign policy of the 1990s is an apt

illustration of this claim. To test this argument, it is recommended that additional case studies be examined.

#### **7.4. Discussion on the future of Uzbekistan's foreign policy**

The analysis of foreign policy change under Shavkat Mirziyoyev illustrated that the 2016 foreign policy reforms in Uzbekistan were a result of a leader's environment and president's perceptions about it. Mirziyoyev's perceptions along with his aspiration to legitimize himself domestically resulted in a shift of Uzbekistan's foreign policy goals from security to economic issues. This, in turn, molded Mirziyoyev's foreign policy behavior into a more open, dynamic and cooperative one. As a result, Mirziyoyev's reforms, as well as his non-confrontational and pragmatic foreign policy behavior helped the new leader improve the economic situation in Uzbekistan.

However, there were limitations to these reforms, most notable in the political realm. The government remains authoritarian. In July 2023, Mirziyoyev extended his presidential term through snap elections. The extension of his presidential term was carried out through a highly controversial and orchestrated referendum. The changes to Uzbekistan's constitution were approved by an overwhelming majority, raising suspicions of electoral manipulation and a lack of transparency. The move effectively allowed Mirziyoyev to remain in power for an extended period, undermining the principles of democratic governance and the notion of peaceful and orderly transfer of power. This extension of presidential authority not only entrenches the concentration of power in the hands of one individual, but also highlights a broader pattern of authoritarianism in Uzbekistan. There is no open opposition; existing parties in

Uzbekistan are all pro-government; extensive hurdles remain in place for registering new parties.<sup>304</sup>

Mirziyoyev's decision to extend his term in office serves as a stark reminder that the promised reforms may have been more superficial than substantive.<sup>305</sup> Furthermore, the initial excitement over the reforms has started to wane. Whilst, the government has made significant reforms in areas like taxes and privatizations, rigid protectionism remains in force; local monopolies are still given subsidies which hinders competition. Many got concerned about the future of the reforms.

“Mirziyoyev has already solved the most toxic issues for which Karimov was condemned. Now he must tackle the problems that have arisen on his own watch. With every year, it will be harder and harder to pass off symbolic concessions as genuine reforms.”<sup>306</sup>

This raises a new question: how long can Mirziyoyev maintain public support for his reforms? If Uzbekistan seeks further investment, especially from the West, then at some point it would be plausible that political reforms become necessary. In that case, would Uzbekistan choose to democratize? Or would it consider these demands an attempt to intervene in domestic affairs? If it is the latter, how would this affect foreign policy of Uzbekistan?

In addition, the ongoing war in Ukraine raises another question: How might the secondary sanctions, imposed by the West on countries aiding Russia to evade sanctions, affect Mirziyoyev's perceptions, given Uzbekistan's strong ties with Russia and its current emphasis on improving economy? Furthermore, what potential implications could this have for Uzbekistan's foreign policy? Nowadays, Uzbekistan

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<sup>304</sup> Catherine Putz, “Uzbek Authorities Deny Registration to New Political Party With Presidential Ambitions,” *The Diplomat*, May 20, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/05/uzbek-authorities-deny-registration-to-new-political-party-with-presidential-ambitions/>.

<sup>305</sup> Hugh Williamson, “Uzbekistan's Election Highlights Lost Hopes for Reform,” *Human Rights Watch*, July 7, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/07/07/uzbekistans-election-highlights-lost-hopes-reform>.

<sup>306</sup> Sarukhanyan, “Reformed or Just Retouched? Uzbekistan's New Regime.”

takes a neutral stance on Russian aggression in Ukraine, calling for a peaceful resolution of the conflict without pointing at Russia. However, if the West were to impose sanctions on Uzbekistan for its relationship with Russia, Uzbekistan would face a difficult decision.

The implication of this scenario is that Mirziyoyev may need to reconsider Uzbekistan's stance on Russian aggression and reassess its relationship with Russia. This could lead either to a shift in Uzbekistan's foreign policy towards a more pro-Western approach, or it could make the 2005 scenario repeat resulting in Uzbekistan's isolation from the international community.

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## Appendix A. Speeches of the presidents used for LTA

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## Appendix B. Leadership trait analysis scores (means and standard deviations)

Region	BACE	PWR	CC	SC	TASK	DIS	IGB
World Leaders (N=284)	Mn=.35 SD=.05	Mn=.26 SD=.05	Mn=.59 SD=.06	Mn=.36 SD=.10	Mn=.63 SD=.07	Mn=.13 SD=.06	Mn=.15 SD=.05
Western Europe (N=53)	Mn=.33 SD=.07	Mn=.26 SD=.05	Mn=.57 SD=.06	Mn=.32 SD=.13	Mn=.64 SD=.09	Mn=.09 SD=.06	Mn=.17 SD=.05
Eastern Europe (N=78)	Mn=.34 SD=.05	Mn=.24 SD=.05	Mn=.59 SD=.05	Mn=.39 SD=.10	Mn=.68 SD=.07	Mn=.10 SD=.05	Mn=.14 SD=.06
Middle East & Northern Africa (N=46)	Mn=.33 SD=.06	Mn=.27 SD=.06	Mn=.56 SD=.08	Mn=.31 SD=.13	Mn=.58 SD=.06	Mn=.16 SD=.07	Mn=.15 SD=.06
Pacific Rim (N=79)	Mn=.34 SD=.06	Mn=.27 SD=.06	Mn=.59 SD=.08	Mn=.32 SD=.12	Mn=.62 SD=.08	Mn=.14 SD=.08	Mn=.16 SD=.05
Anglo- America (N=15)	Mn=.36 SD=.04	Mn=.24 SD=.04	Mn=.60 SD=.05	Mn=.45 SD=.08	Mn=.62 SD=.06	Mn=.12 SD=.03	Mn=.13 SD=.03
Latin America (N=13)	Mn=.37 SD=.03	Mn=.25 SD=.02	Mn=.60 SD=.05	Mn=.34 SD=.05	Mn=.65 SD=.06	Mn=.19 SD=.06	Mn=.15 SD=.03

\* Source (received from Margaret Hermann, 2022)

BACE – belief in ability to control events

PWR – need for power

CC – conceptual complexity

SC – self-confidence

TASK – orientation toward task

DIS – distrust

IGB – ingroup bias