

# Foreign Policy Change Under Authoritarian Leaders: Analysis of Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era

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**Abstract.** The growing study of foreign policy change offers various explanations of change and continuity in foreign policy. By focusing on the actors of foreign policy decision-making, past scholarship has mainly concentrated on the role of institutional and noninstitutional factors in foreign policy change. However, decentralized decision-making is more relevant to democratic regimes than authoritarian regimes. Despite the abundance of case studies on foreign policy making in nondemocracies, advancements in the conceptual understanding of foreign policy change in authoritarian regimes are still needed. Addressing Uzbekistan's foreign policy, this article proposes an advanced framework to explain why and how foreign policy change takes place under authoritarian leaders. A leader's perception of the external environment is argued to be a decisive factor inducing authoritarian leaders to (re)consider their regime survival strategy. Concern with regime survival, in turn, shapes foreign policy goals which are manifested in distinctive foreign policy behavior of a leader. Ultimately, the behavior of a leader translates into certain foreign policy outcomes.

**Keywords:** Foreign policy change, leadership trait analysis, perceptions, leadership style, authoritarian leader, Uzbekistan.

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## Autoritarinių lyderių užsienio politikos pokyčiai:

### Uzbekistano užsienio politikos po Šaltojo karo pabaigos analizė

**Santrauka.** Gausėjančios užsienio politikos pokyčių analizės siūlo skirtingus užsienio politikos kaitos ir tęstinumo aiškinimus. Susitelkdami į užsienio politikos sprendimų priėmėjus, ankstesni tyrėjai daugiausia dėmesio skyrė instituciniams ir neinstituciniams užsienio politikos pokyčių veiksniams. Tačiau decentralizuotas sprendimo priėmimas yra būdingesnis demokratiniais, o ne autoritariniams režimams. Nepaisant atvejų studijų, skirtų nedemokratinėms užsienio politikai analizuoti, gausos, postūmis geriau konceptualizuoti autoritarinių režimų užsienio politikos pokyčius vis dar aktualus. Analizuodamas Uzbekistano užsienio politikos atvejį šis straipsnis siūlo modelį, kodėl ir kaip užsienio politika keičiasi esant tam pačiam autoritariniam lyderiui. Teigiama, kad tai, kaip lyderis suvokia išorinę aplinką, yra esminis veiksnys, skatinantis autoritarinį lyderį permąstyti savo režimo išgyvenimo strategiją. Savo ruožtu rūpestis režimo išgyvenimu suformuoja užsienio politikos tikslus, kurie atsiskleidžia išskirtiniu lyderio elgesiu užsienio politikos srityje. Būtent ši elgsena ilginiui tampa matoma kaip pagrindinis užsienio politikos rezultatas.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** užsienio politikos pokytis, lyderystės bruožų analizė, percepcija, lyderystės stilius, autoritarinis lyderis, Uzbekistanas.

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## *Introduction*

By discovering a range of factors affecting foreign policy making, existing scholarship on foreign policy change has established various frameworks explaining continuity and change in foreign policy. Despite such advancements, the field of foreign policy change remains understudied, leaving further avenues to explore.

Existing models on foreign policy change have overemphasized 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. This narrow focus on institutional influence frequently overlooks foreign policy making in authoritarian states, where decision-making power is often concentrated in the hands of a leader. Despite classifying leaders as one of the drivers of foreign policy change, previous models have largely sidestepped in-depth examination of leaders and failed to explain how other factors interact with leaders and affect their decisions.

This article addresses a notable gap in the literature by proposing advancements into existing frameworks on foreign policy change.

Addressing the case of Uzbekistan's foreign policy, it proposes a more holistic and nuanced framework of foreign policy change in an authoritarian environment. Uzbekistan's foreign policy has undergone two major shifts. The first took place under former president Islam Karimov, who turned the country's foreign policy inwards into a more isolationist stance. The other occurred in 2016 when former prime minister Shavkat Mirziyoyev came to power and introduced a set of domestic and foreign policy reforms.

The case of Uzbekistan stands out as an intriguing subject for investigation. Compared to other Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan is the most consolidated authoritarian regime where the government exercises control over all aspects of society.<sup>1</sup> For example, despite struggling to secure seats in parliament, opposition parties in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan enjoy the freedom to register their parties and participate in the political process. In Kyrgyzstan, four opposition parties out of 240 registered ones are represented in the parliament. Kazakhstan's political landscape has also experienced a significant shift as one of the opposition parties (National Social Democratic Party) successfully secured a seat in the parliament, signifying a notable step forward in the country's democratic evolution.<sup>2</sup> However, opposition parties in Uzbekistan encounter significant obstacles, with registration requests being declined, making it impossible for them to gain any representation in the country's parliament.<sup>3</sup> This political landscape provides an ideal backdrop for examining the influence of personality on foreign policy decision-making. Furthermore, compared to Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, which have not experienced any notable foreign policy shift,

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<sup>1</sup> According to Freedom House 2023 Index, Kyrgyzstan scored 27/100, Kazakhstan – 23/100, Uzbekistan – 12/100.

<sup>2</sup> “Nachalo Polojeno – Oppozitsiya Prorvalas v Parlament,” *New Times*, March 27, 2023, <https://newtimes.kz/vybory-2023/166537-nachalo-polozheno-oppozitsiya-prorvalas-v-parlament>.

<sup>3</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/>.

Uzbekistan has experienced changes both under the same and the new leaders. Such change is inconsistent with the argument that the 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 framework for foreign policy change under authoritarian leaders. At the same time, 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. This presents an opportunity to explore psychological aspects of Uzbekistan's foreign policy, thus, going beyond traditional explanations, which were mainly based on geopolitical and domestic considerations.<sup>4</sup>

The study utilizes a combination of quantitative and qualitative analytical methods to examine the foreign policy of Uzbekistan. A quantitative approach, specifically 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. Subsequently, qualitative analysis was utilized to substantiate the LTA scores and identify other factors (variables) which contributed to foreign policy change. Based

<sup>4</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); Richard Weitz, "Uzbekistan's New Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity under New Leadership," Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 2018, <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/resources/pdf/SilkRoadPapers/1801Weitz.pdf>; S Frederick Starr, "Change and Continuity in Uzbekistan, 1991–2016," *Silk Road Studies*, 2018, <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): 228–245, <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."

on the results of quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis, the study proposes an advanced framework of foreign policy change under authoritarian leaders.

The proposed framework suggests that the external environment plays a critical role in shaping authoritarian leaders' perceptions, often compelling them to reassess their regime survival strategies. Consequently, the concern with regime survival shapes foreign policy goals which are manifested in distinctive foreign policy behavior of a leader and lead to certain foreign policy outcomes.

This study holds significant scientific importance in several ways. First, it addresses the gaps in the existing literature on foreign policy change, advancing prevailing models of foreign policy change. In addition, by employing LTA as a method to examine the leaders, the study incorporates the cognitive aspects of foreign policy making, which were often overlooked in mainstream literature on foreign policy change. Lastly, the study contributes to the literature on foreign policy of Uzbekistan, going beyond traditional explanations of Uzbekistan's foreign policy.

## ***1. Explaining foreign policy change***

### *1.1. Models of foreign policy change*

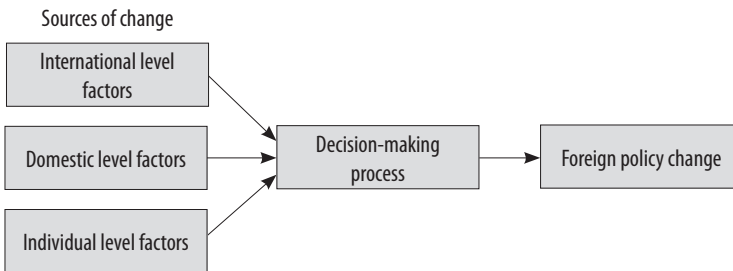
Past scholarship on foreign policy change has developed a wide range of models explaining change and continuity in foreign policy.

Almost all existing models of foreign policy change incorporate external triggers and decision-makers to examine how the external factors activate decision-making process, which in turn, results in various types of change ranging from small to big ones. Figure 1 below represents a simplified version of the foreign policy change models developed by Hermann, Holsti, Goldmann, Yvonne and Mayer.<sup>5</sup> In

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<sup>5</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>; Kalevi Holsti, "Restructuring Foreign Policy: A Neglected

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. Similarly, Goldmann 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. Kleistra and Mayer also identify four levels of change: international system, national political system, organizational system and individual policy makers. The major shortcoming of these models is that the sources of change are viewed in isolation, and interaction between them is not considered. For example, Hermann's model does not elaborate on factors triggering the leader to change foreign policy.



*Figure 1. Simplified models of foreign policy change*

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; Kjell Goldmann, “Change and Stability in Foreign Policy: Detente as a Problem of Stabilization,” *World Politics* 34, no. 2 (1982): 230–266, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2010264>; Kleistra Yvonne and Igor Mayer, “Stability and Flux in Foreign Affairs: Modelling Policy and Organizational Change,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 36, no. 4 (2001): 381–414, <https://doi-org.www3.iuj.ac.jp/10.1177/00108360121962515>.

Addressing this issue, Gustavsson (1999) proposed a framework which suggests that international and domestic factors should be, first, perceived by key decision-makers (Figure 2). 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.

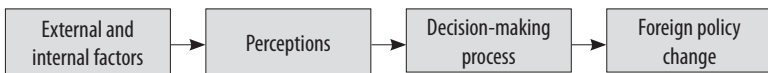


Figure 2. *Gustavsson's model of foreign policy change*

Whilst this article's main argument deals with perceptions, Gustavsson's model focused more on "pulling and hauling" – the process key decision-makers have to go through in order to bring about foreign policy change.<sup>6</sup> However, foreign policy change under authoritarian governments is more likely to be swift and face little resistance. For example, in the case of Uzbekistan, all initiatives are leader-driven. Institutional structures defend a leader's political regime and function as policy implementation machines, while president's subordinates maintain their position in the government by conforming to the leader's line of action.

Furthermore, despite the notion of perceptions being widely used in the literature, 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."<sup>7</sup> Talking about the second decision-maker's perceptions, he further adds: "Although there is no quoted evidence, Jigme Dorji must have perceived the Chinese activities as an acute threat to

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<sup>6</sup> Jakob Gustavsson, "How Should We Study Foreign Policy Change?" *Cooperation and Conflict* 34, no. 1 (1999): 73–95, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00108369921961780>.

<sup>7</sup> Kalevi Jaakko Holsti, *Why Nations Realign: Foreign Policy Restructuring in the Post-war World* (Routledge, 2015).

Bhutan's continued independence.”<sup>8</sup> Whereas, this study offers the Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) as a method to operationalize the leaders' perceptions and trace the change in them.

### *1.2. Limitations of the existing models*

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 agents and types of 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, Hermann's 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 focuses on foreign policy continuity due to the so-called stabilizers, 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. Relatively weak institutions and restricted civil liberties in Belarus enable President Aleksandr Lukashenko to redirect the foreign policy without the need for public

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<sup>8</sup> Holsti.



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 framework for foreign policy change under authoritarian leaders. The framework was developed by combining different levels of foreign policy making: international system dynamics, the domestic political system and cognitive aspects of foreign policy making. 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, while bureaucracy and presidents' subordinates tend to reflect and adjust to the state 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."<sup>9</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>10</sup> The case demonstrates that the same person within bureaucracy reflected opposite behaviors of the two leaders. Therefore, in-depth examination of the Uzbek leaders becomes imperative to comprehend the reasons of foreign policy change. Moreover, despite mentioning perceptions of the key decision-makers, the previously developed models avoided scrutinizing the leaders' perceptions. Hence, the developed framework fills that gap by including cognitive aspects of foreign policy making.

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<sup>9</sup> "Uzbekistan s Tribuni OON Vistupil Protiv Stroitelstva Krupnikh GES v Regione," *Central Asia*, September 26, 2015, <https://centralasia.media/print:1100011>.

<sup>10</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>.

## 2. Conceptual framework

The framework for foreign policy change under authoritarian leaders (Figure 3) suggests that authoritarian leaders tend to be sensitive to external context since they are concerned with power maintenance. Therefore, external environment and changes in it can (re)shape the leader's perceptions, which become an important factor contributing to foreign policy change.

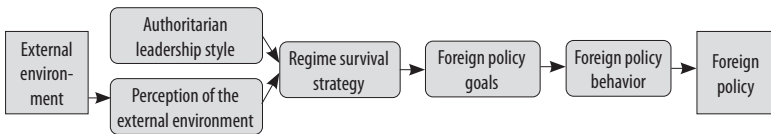


Figure 3. *Authoritarian leaders and foreign policy change*

External environment is an independent variable that influences the leader's perceptions. In this framework, external environment has a complex meaning and implies an external context in which the leaders are placed. Thus, external environment can be: 1) a certain event which alters or confirms a leader's perception; 2) actions of other states; 3) systemic changes or 4) zeitgeist in which the leaders turn out to be.

Under authoritarian leaders, changes in perceptions lead to a swift foreign policy change. 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. Empirical studies on LTA suggest that authoritarian 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.

Authoritarian leaders' perceptions determine their regime survival strategy (performance-based legitimacy, cooptation, repression). This argument is built on the concept of legitimacy from comparative

politics and empirical evidence, which suggests that authoritarian leaders tend to be more concerned with maintaining their power, and as a result, are more sensitive to external triggers.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the leaders might sustain their regime through performance (e.g., economic progress, social stability). 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.

Based on qualitative analysis of Uzbekistan's foreign policy at different periods of time, this study assumes that regime survival strategy, being a primary goal of any leader, plays an important role in nondemocratic regimes and gets reflected into foreign policy goals. In turn, the goals shape the leader's behavior, which becomes an important indicator of foreign policy change.

The framework also suggests that foreign policy behavior is an essential element of foreign policy change under authoritarian leaders. The assumption is in line with the argument of Volgy and Schwartz who claim that foreign policy change is always "manifested through major behavioral changes encompassing a broad range of activities in the nation's interactions with other actors in international politics."<sup>12</sup> The case of Uzbekistan also demonstrates the importance of behavior since it often happened that a leader's behavior contradicted with officially announced actions.

### **3. Methodology**

Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) is applied to measure perceptions and identify leadership styles of the two presidents.

LTA has been employed to study the personalities of British prime ministers, leaders of sub-Saharan Africa, US presidents, heads of in-

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<sup>11</sup> Margaret G. Hermann, "Assessing Leadership Style: A Trait Analysis," *Social Science Automation*, 2002, <https://socialscience.net/docs/LTA.pdf>.

<sup>12</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.

ternational organizations, and Soviet leaders, etc.<sup>13</sup> It is a groundbreaking framework that has evolved over more than four decades, drawing upon robust empirical evidence from the studies, which have proved the relationship between personal traits and foreign policy behavior.<sup>14</sup>

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.

Studying leaders' personalities, LTA employs a personality-at-a-distance technique (PAD), examining the leaders through what they say. PAD is widely used in the literature since it is impos-

<sup>13</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>; 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>; Hermann and Kegley; Hermann and Kegley; Hermann and Kegley.

<sup>14</sup> Dyson, "Personality and Foreign Policy"; 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); Baris Kesgin, "Tansu Ciller's Leadership Traits and Foreign Policy," *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* 17, no. 3 (2012): 29–50; 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>; Stephen Benedict Dyson, "Theresa May and Brexit: Leadership Style and Performance," *British Politics*, March 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41293-023-00230-5>; 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>; Colin Edward Zubaruk, "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/>; 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; Abigail White, "Profiling the President: Explaining Donald Trump's Nationalistic Foreign Policy Decisions Using Leadership Trait Analysis and Operational Code Analysis," *Contemporary Voices: St. Andrews Journal of International Relations* 4, no. 1 (2022): 5–48, <https://doi.org/10.15664/jtr.1569>.

sible to conduct a series of interviews or “give a battery of psychological tests” to leaders.<sup>15</sup> 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.

Leadership trait analysis of the two presidents was conducted through Profiler Plus software, which *automatically* codes for traits and provides scores for each trait. The two presidents’ scores for each trait were compared with the average scores of 284 world leaders to attribute whether certain traits 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.<sup>16</sup>

## **Data**

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 (UNGA) and other regional platforms. The speeches were mainly selected based on the principle of relevance to ensure that 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. This relevance helps in drawing accurate conclusions about a country’s foreign policy objectives, strategies, and priorities.

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<sup>15</sup> Margaret G. Hermann, “ASSESSING LEADERSHIP STYLE: A TRAIT ANALYSIS,” *Social Science Automation, Inc.*, 2002, 1, <https://socialscience.net/docs/LTA.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> The studies on LTA are kept being updated and the results of the recent study provide means and standard deviations for each trait, classifying leaders according to region. Comparison with 284 political leaders was chosen in order to determine distinctive traits of Karimov and Mirziyoyev.

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 to improve their country's global image, enhance cooperation or to achieve economic goals. In order to ascertain the accuracy of LTA scores, the study additionally employs qualitative analysis of the Uzbek leaders' foreign policy behaviors to confirm if behavioral patterns suggested by LTA conform to the LTA scores.

In this study, LTA was conducted through Profiler Plus software, which coded a total of 48 speeches and interviews. Three data sets were analyzed separately in order to trace the change in the leaders' perceptions at different periods of time. The first data set comprised 17 speeches delivered by Karimov prior 2005. The second set included 16 speeches delivered after 2005, as this year marked the change from an outward foreign policy to an isolationist one. The third data set contained 17 speeches delivered by Mirziyoyev from 2016 to 2022.

The study also took into account the impact of speechwriters in shaping the content. Even though some formal speeches are written by speechwriters, they are still valid for LTA for the following reasons. First, it was proved that the impact of speechwriters is insignificant since speechwriters are selected and reviewed by the leaders.<sup>17</sup> Second, several studies have revealed "the effectiveness of using prepared speech acts as psychological indicators"<sup>18</sup> through combining LTA profiles with case studies to examine if traits are reflected in the decision-making process in the way they were theoretically expected.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</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," in *The Psychological Assessment of Political Leaders: With Profiles of Saddam Hussein and Bill Clinton* (The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 153–177.

<sup>18</sup> Mark Schafer, "Issues in Assessing Psychological Characteristics at a Distance," *Political Psychology* 21 (2000): 511–527.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Benedict Dyson, *The Blair Identity: Leadership and Foreign Policy*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009a) (Manchester University Press, 2009);

Most importantly, the case of Uzbekistan demonstrates that bureaucracy and the president's subordinates tend to reflect and adjust to the leader's attitudes and behaviors.

### 3.1. Operationalization of perceptions

This section provides a step-by-step methodological explanation of measurement. Each explanation is then followed by an empirical application of the method to the case of Uzbek leaders.

In this study, *ingroup bias* and *distrust* were used to measure perceptions of the leaders. *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. Low ingroup biased leaders are also patriots, but less prone to see the world as us vs them, and less likely to use scapegoats to deal with opposition.

Empirical studies have demonstrated that the way the leaders approach the world directly influences the confrontational / cooperative nature of the country.<sup>20</sup> The table below summarizes the leaders' worldviews and provides behavioral patterns for each case.

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Esra Cuhadar et al., "Examining Leaders' Orientations to Structural Constraints: Turkey's 1991 and 2003 Iraq War Decisions," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 20, no. 1 (2017): 29–54, <https://doi.org/10.1057/jird.2014.31>; Mark Schafer and Robert Scott Crichlow, *Groupthink versus High-Quality Decision Making in International Relations* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> Robert A. Levine and Donald T. Campbell, *Ethnocentrism: Theories of Conflict, Ethnic Attitudes, and Group Behavior* (John Wiley & Sons, 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): 277–293; 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): 511–533.

Table 1. *Motivation toward world*

Ingroup bias	Distrust of others	
	Low	High
Low	<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 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>	<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, 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>
High	<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>	<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>

Source: Hermann (2002)

### *Measuring Uzbek leaders' perceptions*

The LTA results (Table 2), particularly low scores for distrust and ingroup bias, suggest that Islam Karimov's perceptions in the 1990s were quite optimistic: he saw the world as an opportunity for cooper-



ation and believed in the power of international institutions. Whereas after 2005, the levels of his distrust and ingroup bias increased. In other words, his perceptions changed, making him see other countries as a threat which needed confronting. As for Mirziyoyev, his perceptions are similar to the ones of Islam Karimov in the early 1990s, who viewed the environment as an opportunity for cooperation.

Table 2. *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)	0.1026 (leans low)	Mean = .15 SD = .05

### 3.2. *Defining leadership style.* *Methodological explanation*

The interrelation of the four traits (*conceptual complexity, self-confidence, belief in ability to control events, and need for power*) have been found to be related to leadership styles<sup>21</sup> and were used to define the leadership styles of the Uzbek leaders. In LTA, leadership style is determined by the leader’s propensity for processing information and responding to certain constraints.

**Processing information.** The interrelation of *conceptual complexity* and *self-confidence* demonstrates whether a leader is open or closed to outside information.<sup>22</sup> *Conceptual complexity* is the cognitive ability

<sup>21</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>22</sup> Peter Suedfeld, “Cognitive Managers and Their Critics,” *Political Psychology* 13, no. 3 (1992): 435–453; 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): 243–263, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0890-4015\(98\)00023-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0890-4015(98)00023-4).

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.

The interrelation of *conceptual complexity* and *self-confidence* can tell whether a leader is open or closed to outside information.<sup>23</sup>

Table 3. *Trait interrelation indicating openness/closeness 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 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 are wrong

\* Source: Hermann (2002)

**Responding to constraints.** The interrelation between *belief in ability to control events* and *need for power* can tell whether the leaders will be influential and forceful in political maneuvering, or yield to institutional restraints and external influences.<sup>24</sup> *Belief in ability to*

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.

<sup>23</sup> Suedfeld, "Cognitive Managers and Their Critics"; Kaarbo and Hermann, "Leadership Styles of Prime Ministers"; Ziller et al., "Self-Other Orientations and Political Behavior."

<sup>24</sup> Margaret G. Hermann and Thomas Preston, "Presidents, Advisers, and Foreign Policy: The Effect of Leadership Style on Executive Arrangements," *Political Psychology* 15,

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 4. *Trait interrelation indicating response to 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
<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 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

\* Source: Hermann (2002)

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 Respecters, Constraint Challengers, and Crisis Decision Making in Democracies: A Case Study Analysis of Kennedy versus Reagan,” *Political Psychology* 26, no. 6 (2005): 835–867, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2005.00447.x>

Thus, a leader’s propensity for processing information and responding to certain constraints have been found to be related to the leadership styles. Table 5 below summarizes the leadership styles classified by LTA.

Table 5. 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

### *Leadership style of the Uzbek leaders*

Leadership styles can determine the way the leaders behave in the political environment, while behavioral patterns associated with each style have impact on the political system of the nation.<sup>25</sup> The results of the two presidents’ LTA (Table 6) classify them as advocates. Both

<sup>25</sup> Hermann, “Assessing Leadership Style: A Trait Analysis.”

leaders are closed to information and challenge constraints. Research suggests that the 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>26</sup>

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>27</sup>

Table 6. Leadership trait analysis scores

Traits	Islam Karimov (before 2005)	Islam Karimov (after 2005)	Shavkat Mirziyoyev	LTA scores of 284 political leaders
Conceptual complexity	0.5032 (low)	0.5029 (low)	0.4814 (low)	Mean = .59 SD = .06
Self-confidence	0.3119 (moderate)	0.5147 (high)	0.2235 (low)	Mean = .36 SD = .10
Need for power	0.3128 (high)	0.3469 (high)	0.3871 (high)	Mean = .26 SD = .05
Belief in ability to control events	0.3277 (moderate)	0.4058 (high)	0.2996 (low)	Mean = .35 SD = .05

The results of LTA of the Uzbek leaders reveal their leadership styles as *advocate*. Such leaders tend to build a system centered on themselves, eliminating possible constraints. From the early years of independence, Karimov established an autocratic regime,<sup>28</sup> where

<sup>26</sup> Hermann, “How Decision Units Shape Foreign Policy.”

<sup>27</sup> Azamat Sakiev, “Presidential Leadership Styles and Forms of Authoritarianism in Post-Soviet Central Asia” (PhD dissertation, United States, Syracuse University, 2011).

<sup>28</sup> Anthony Hyman, “Post-Soviet Central Asia: Contemporary Political Setting,” in *Challenges for the Former Soviet South* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1996).

he subjected opposition to systemic eradication<sup>29</sup> 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>30</sup> Even parliament initially challenging Karimov’s authority, quickly lost its status due to Karimov’s leadership style.<sup>31</sup>

Mirziyoyev also became known as a constraint challenger.<sup>32</sup> Coming to power with support of the head of the security service Rustam Inoyatov, he later delicately removed Inoyatov, completing the transition and consolidating power in his hands.<sup>33</sup>

Removing institutional and noninstitutional constraints helps authoritarian leaders to bypass the “pulling and hauling” process. Therefore, leaders themselves and their perceptions come to forefront and have greater influence on foreign policy making.

## 4. Case study

### 4.1. Karimov’s foreign policy in the early 1990s

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

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<sup>29</sup> 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>30</sup> 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): 162–175, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2057891118775289>.

<sup>31</sup> Sakiev, “Presidential Leadership Styles and Forms of Authoritarianism in Post-Soviet Central Asia.”

<sup>32</sup> Chatham House, “Uzbekistan’s New President Steps Towards Ambitious Reform with Security Chief Sacking,” Chatham House, February 18, 2018, <https://www.chatham-house.org/2018/02/uzbekistans-new-president-steps-towards-ambitious-reform-security-chief-sacking>.

<sup>33</sup> Chatham House.

By then, Karimov's perceptions about external environment were quite optimistic. With the Cold War over, Karimov believed that the world was no longer a dangerous place. At the same time, he was aware that Uzbekistan, as a newly established state, would face challenges. 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. Karimov was aware of those challenges stemming from 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>34</sup>

Nevertheless, he perceived them as context-specific and believed that existing problems could be solved by collective actions.

At the same time, Karimov's rule was challenged domestically by opposition parties “Erk” (prodemocratic) and “Birlik” (nationalist). Karimov realized that he needed to mobilize domestic support to his regime in order to maintain his grip on 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.

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<sup>34</sup> Islam Karimov, “Uzbekistan – a State with a Bright Future,” in *National Independence: Economy, Politics, Ideology* (Uzbekiston, 1993).

As a result, improving the economy and stabilization became the main foreign policy goals. Since Karimov believed that international organizations operate in accordance with rules and norms, he was convinced that cooperation within institutions would help Uzbekistan to solve existing problems.

“The 21st 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>35</sup>

To achieve his foreign policy goals, Karimov sought recognition from the international community and tried to attract foreign investments.

“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... 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>36</sup>

To attract attention, Karimov had to behave proactively. On the international stage, he put forward a number of important initiatives aimed at strengthening stability and security in the Central Asian region. Speaking at the UNGA, Karimov initiated creation of a Nuclear Free Zone in Central Asia, the formation of “6+2” coalition to negotiate on Afghan issues, as well as the establishment of a permanent regional conference on regional security.<sup>37</sup> He also signed a Collective Security Treaty in 1992. Uzbekistan also actively participated

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<sup>35</sup> Islam Karimov, *Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century: Challenges to Stability and Progress* (Uzbekiston, 1997), 288.

<sup>36</sup> Commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, No. A/50/PV.40 (October 24, 1995).

<sup>37</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>.



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>38</sup> After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Karimov was the first president in Central Asia to lend support to the US 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 US and Uzbekistan signed a declaration on strategic partnership, which led to cooperation in political, economic, military, humanitarian and other fields. 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.

At the regional level, Uzbekistan initially took a leadership role and promoted cooperation and integration. Karimov believed that "Tashkent has an exceptional position" in the region and undertook several initiatives in regional affairs.<sup>39</sup> Uzbekistan introduced the concept of "*Turkestan – our common home*" which was supposed to promote regional unity and institutionalize the process of regional integration. 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, 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>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Bruce Pannier, "OSCE: Central Asian Leaders Stress Security," RFE/RL, November 9, 1999, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1092709.html>.

<sup>39</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>40</sup> Islam Karimov, "To Globalism through Regionalism. Speech at the International Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark," in *Homeland Is Sacred to Everyone* (Uzbekiston, 1995).

Since Uzbekistan has the largest population in the region and is the only state sharing borders with all Central Asian countries and Afghanistan, very few regional initiatives could 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>41</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 aimed to prepare for participation in international peacekeeping and humanitarian missions. Consequently, 500 US soldiers along with 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>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> UNCCD Knowledge Hub, "Joint Communiqué 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).

<sup>42</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).

When he diversified Uzbekistan’s foreign policy, Karimov 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 developed West, thus, promising “a bright future” to the Uzbek people.<sup>43</sup> In turn, Karimov’s proactive foreign policy helped Uzbekistan attract investments and overcome economic crisis, while cooperation with Central Asian neighbors brought about relative stability in the region. As a result, this legitimized Karimov’s regime and strengthened his position domestically.

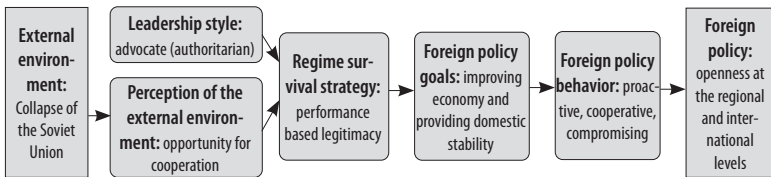


Figure 4. *Islam Karimov’s foreign policy in the 1990s*

#### 4.2. Foreign policy of Karimov after 2005

Karimov’s openness and proactivity at the regional and international levels was evident throughout the 1990s, but shifted to quasi-isolationism and self-reliance at the beginning of the 2000s.

The turning point in Uzbekistan’s foreign policy was the year 2005. On May 13, domestic protests broke out in Andijan city. Thousands of people flocked to the “Babur” square in front of the city office. They accused the president of authoritarianism, demanded civil liberties and the eradication of corruption, poverty and social inequality. Following the demonstrations, Karimov dispatched troops who opened fire on protestors.<sup>44</sup> According to the former major of the

<sup>43</sup> Karimov, “Uzbekistan – a State with a Bright Future.”

<sup>44</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/>.

National Security Service, Ikrom Yakubov, 1500 people were killed in Andijan, with Karimov personally ordering troops to open fire on protestors.<sup>45</sup> This day went down in history as the Andijan massacre. As a result of the events in Andijan, human rights advocates labeled Islam Karimov one of the most brutal dictators.<sup>46</sup>

The events in Andijan changed Karimov's perceptions, making him see the world as a threatening place. The LTA results of Islam Karimov after 2005 suggest that Karimov had high levels of distrusts and ingroup bias. The research suggests that the leaders high in both of these traits tend to see international politics as "a set of adversaries that are viewed as 'evil' and intent on spreading their ideology or extending their power at the expense of others."<sup>47</sup>

To understand why Karimov's perceptions were altered after events in Andijan, we need to look at how the external environment looked like in the early 2000s. It was a time when "color revolutions" erupted all over post-Soviet Republics: Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), Kyrgyzstan (2005). These anti-regime or pro-democracy protests resulted in the resignation or toppling of authoritarian leaders. Thus, the demonstrations were perceived by authoritarian countries as a serious threat to national security since they believed that the protests were the result of the US and Western powers' manipulation and interference.<sup>48</sup> Karimov perceived those revolutions the same way.

"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

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<sup>45</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>46</sup> Stroehlein, "Beyond Samarkand," Human Rights Watch, March 8, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/08/beyond-samarkand>.

<sup>47</sup> Hermann, "Assessing Leadership Style: A Trait Analysis."

<sup>48</sup> Vladimir Putin, "Zapad Ispolzuet v Kachestve Instrumenta Tsvetniye Revolyutsii i Perevoroti," Riama, 2022, <https://riama.ru/article/593930/putin-zapad-ispolzuet-v-kachestve-instrumenta-tsvetnye-revoljutsii-i-perevoroty-xl>.

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>49</sup>

Karimov did not blame the U.S. and West directly. Instead, he mentioned that the attempts to artificially force democratization in the states, which are not culturally prepared for it, can be taken as an advantage by the third parts, such as radical Islam. He added then that “democratic processes should evolve evolutionary.”<sup>50</sup> However, when the U.S. and Western governments called for investigation to the events in Andijan, Karimov retaliated by closing the U.S. Karshi-Khanabad Airbase (K2) on Uzbekistan’s territory.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, Uzbekistan drastically reduced its participation in PfP after NATO accused Uzbekistan of using excessive force, and from 2006 prohibited NATO forces from utilizing Uzbekistan’s territory as a transit route for operations in Afghanistan. Calls for international investigations, sanctions imposed by the West prompted a significant change, making Uzbekistan favor closer ties with autocratic countries, such as Russia and China.<sup>52</sup>

Concerned with maintaining power, Karimov strengthened domestic security, choosing the way of repressions. Restrictions to opposition were tightened through the law on political parties. He also reformed the traditional institution of civil society “Makhalla” by creating armed units called “Makhalla guards.” They 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. People criticizing Karimov’s government along with human rights activists and journalists were

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<sup>49</sup> Islam Karimov, “Uzbek People Will Never Depend on Anyone,” in *Uzbek People Will Never Depend on Anyone* (Uzbekiston, 2005).

<sup>50</sup> Karimov.

<sup>51</sup> Gregory Gleason, “The Uzbek Expulsion of US and Realignment in Central Asia,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 53, no. 2 (2006): 49–60, <https://doi.org/10.2753/PPC1075-8216530205>.

<sup>52</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, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euras.2013.10.001>.

sent to Jaslyk prison, dubbed the “house of torture” by HRW.<sup>53</sup> HRW 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>54</sup>

To justify the expel of international NGOs and economic sanctions imposed by the West, Karimov used foreign policy as a tool to maintain legitimacy domestically. He started scapegoating external enemy to mobilize public support. Karimov’s high ingroup bias was reflected in attempts to promote sovereign-state building, which is economically and politically independent from others. He criticized the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), saying that institutions of this type undermine political independence by stunting economic independence.<sup>55</sup> 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>56</sup>

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<sup>53</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>54</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>.

<sup>55</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>56</sup> *Islam Karimov’s Speech at the Press-Conference*, 2006, <https://m.facebook.com/groups/2080052715596982?view=permalink&id=2192297847705801>.

Promoting the idea of a self-reliant nation to maintain the support of the citizens, Karimov set up a new foreign policy goal: security and independence at all costs.

Perceiving the world as a zero-sum game, and attempting to maintain power domestically, Karimov changed his behavior. Internationally, Karimov became passive, pursuing an open seat policy.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, Uzbekistan left regional and international organizations such as the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Istanbul Process on Afghanistan and the UN Special Program for Economies of Central Asia. Along with distancing itself from regional organizations, Uzbekistan moved away from multilateral cooperation frameworks, favoring bilateral cooperation.

Regionally, Karimov was passive. 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 even ratify the agreement.<sup>58</sup> Uzbekistan stopped positioning itself as a center of regional unity, becoming more inward-looking. Hence, Karimov's foreign policy behavior became uncompromising on the issues of security and national interests. Consequently, relations with its neighbors deteriorated amid border and water issues, resulting in more hostile policies. For example, Karimov was uncompromising on the issue of constructing the Rogun Dam in Tajikistan, which would leave Uzbekistan without fresh water. He claimed that construction could "spark not just serious confrontation, but even wars."<sup>59</sup> Uncompromising behavior on national interests led to hostile personal relations between

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<sup>57</sup> Beishenbek Toktogulov, "Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy under Mirziyoyev: Change or Continuity?" *Eurasian Research Journal* 4, no. 1 (January 15, 2022): 49–67, <https://doi.org/10.53277/2519-2442-2022.1-03>.

<sup>58</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>59</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>.

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. Despite Tajikistan requesting feasibility studies from the World Bank to demonstrate the safety of the Rogun Dam construction, Uzbekistan remained distrustful.<sup>60</sup> As a result, 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>61</sup>

Additionally, the absence of political dialogue between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan made border conflicts more frequent. After interethnic clashes between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Osh (June 10–15, 2010), Karimov closed the borders between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Diplomatic contacts between the two countries shrank, while the mutual visits of the leaders were completely terminated. Despite Karimov claiming that “Uzbekistan practices good neighborliness and peacefully solves disputes,”<sup>62</sup> his actions diverged from his words. With an escalation of problems, Karimov tended to close the borders, erect walls and mine areas around crossings.

Eventually, in 2012, Uzbekistan adopted a new Foreign Policy Concept, which officially determined a new direction: isolationism and defensive self-reliance.

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<sup>60</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>.

<sup>61</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>.

<sup>62</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>.



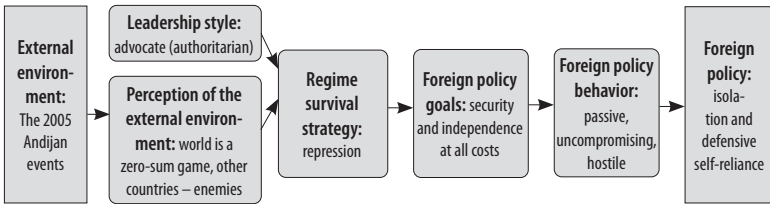


Figure 5. *Islam Karimov's foreign policy after 2005*

### 4.3. *Back to cooperation: foreign policy under Shavkat Mirziyoyev*

The year 2016 marked a set of drastic changes in Uzbekistan. Mirziyoyev took office following the death of Islam Karimov. Mirziyoyev's reforms altered the country's domestic politics and foreign policy. Uzbekistan's foreign policy transformed from defensive self-reliance to openness at the regional and international levels, as well as a prioritization of economic issues over security ones. The change was unexpected. Mirziyoyev had served as prime minister under Karimov for 13 years, being known as a "very tough authoritarian leader."<sup>63</sup> At the time of Karimov's death, all political experts agreed that Mirziyoyev would sustain Karimov's policy.

Mirziyoyev's perceptions about the world triggered the leader to adopt a different approach to foreign policy making. He does not perceive the world as a threatening place since the international environment has undergone some major changes. First, Mirziyoyev's presidency coincided with the presidency of Donald Trump and his "America first" policy, which prioritized nationalism and noninterventionism. Second, Russia's imperialistic ambitions, which threatened Karimov, faded from 2014 since Russia was coping with sanctions related to the Crimean crisis. Lastly, the rise of BRICS nations

<sup>63</sup> Daniil Kislov, "Mirziyoyev Izvesten Kak Avtoritarniy Lider, Kotoriy Izbival Podchinyonnikh," *Business Gazeta*, December 10, 2016, <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/331384>.

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>64</sup>

While prime minister, Mirziyoyev was known as a person behind the scenes. Despite being the second person in Uzbekistan after Karimov, Mirziyoyev rarely appeared in public, but was known as a tough man. Since Karimov was the first and the only president of independent Uzbekistan, he was remembered as a “father of the nation” whose iron fist character contributed to Uzbekistan’s stability and protected it from descending into Civil War. Whereas Mirziyoyev had to demonstrate that he is not simply Karimov’s protégé, but an independent leader with his own style and visions.

Mirziyoyev’s time as prime minister led him to recognize that the world had changed, and Karimov’s interaction style impeded economic development.<sup>65</sup> However, being a government official who “kicked the wheels,” Mirziyoyev focused only on implementing Karimov’s policies. Yet when he became president, his different outlook led to him taking advantage of the domestic stagnation caused by Karimov’s isolationist policy. He addressed domestic problems to change his image and consolidate his power. Thus, Uzbekistan’s economy, which was not performing well under Karimov, became his major priority. Prioritizing the economy, Mirziyoyev directed all his domestic and foreign policy reforms to the solution of economic problems in Uzbekistan, unlike Karimov, who focused on security issues.

Domestically, the Uzbek government implemented several reforms aimed at economic modernization and attracting foreign in-

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<sup>64</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/ozbekiston-respublikasi-prezidenti-shmirziyoevning-markaziy-va-janubiy-osiyo-mintaqaviy-ozaro-bogliqlik-tahdidlar-va-imkoniyatlar-mavzusidagi-xalqaro-konferentsiyadagi-nutqi>.

<sup>65</sup> Dadabaev, “Uzbekistan as Central Asian Game Changer?”

vestment. The most significant reform was eliminating the black market by returning to a system of official currency convertibility. Along with economic modernization, Mirziyoyev introduced several reforms to enhance the image of Uzbekistan, which would in turn, improve the business and investment climate. For instance, human rights reforms, such as releasing political prisoners, abolishing media censorship and banning forced labor in the cotton sector, were implemented during the first year of Mirziyoyev's presidency. Concerned about Uzbekistan's image, which he believes is vital for attracting foreign investors, Mirziyoyev outlined three clear goals to MOFA and ambassadors: First, "export, export and once again export;" second, attract investments and technologies; third, bolster tourist inflows into Uzbekistan.<sup>66</sup>

Since foreign policy became a means to realize economic goals, Mirziyoyev had to pull the country out of isolation. 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. It is notable that Mirziyoyev's foreign policy did not diverge from Uzbekistan's traditional guiding principles. Uzbekistan's foreign policy principles reject any foreign military bases on its territory, refrain from dispatching troops to military operations abroad and avoid join-

<sup>66</sup> The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the United Nations, "Vistuplenie Prezidenta Uzbekistana Shavkata Mirziyoyeva Na Soveshanii Posvyayonnom 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%BD%D0%BE%D0%BC-%D0%B4%D0%B5%D1%8F%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8>.

ing any military blocs. What changed, however, was the leader's foreign policy behavior and the means used to achieve foreign policy goals. Compared to Karimov, Mirziyoyev's foreign policy is more open and dynamic, favoring multilateral cooperation, prioritizing regional affairs, and relying on soft power.

Mirziyoyev's distinctive foreign policy behavior was evident in regional foreign policy, which under Karimov, existed only on paper. 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>67</sup> This had been nearly impossible under Karimov, who was constantly ready to go to war in order to protect national interests.

From the first days of his presidency, Mirziyoyev emphasized the "mutual trust" in foreign policy. In an interview, Mirziyoyev mentioned that he pays great attention to the notion of mutual trust and 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>68</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>67</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).

<sup>68</sup> Yangi Uzbekiston, "Vistuplenie Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan Sh. M. Mirziyoyeva Na Mejdunarodnoy Konferentsii 'Tsentralnaya i Yujnaya Aziya: Regionalnaya Vzaimosvyazannost. Vizovi i Vozmozhnosti.'"

As for Tajikistan, political experts were skeptical about improving of Uzbek–Tajik relations after Karimov’s passing. Parviz Molodjonov claimed that, despite the role of personal relations, “interstate relations involve interests built up over decades.”<sup>69</sup> However, after taking the office, Mirziyoyev reached out to the Tajik leader to resolve existing problems. After several meetings, a package of documents on cooperation was signed, including the abolishment of the visa regime and a relaunching the road, railway and air services between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, reciprocal visits of government and business delegations intensified through industrial fairs and cultural events. Unexpectedly, Uzbekistan moved beyond compromise on 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>71</sup> A compromise on the most sensitive issues and an emphasis on friendly relations with Tajikistan became “an unchangeable priority of Uzbekistan’s foreign policy.”<sup>72</sup> Mirziyoyev’s trust resulted in peaceful resolutions of interstate disputes.

The same approach was taken towards Kyrgyzstan regarding border disputes. As border issues were the main obstacle to cooperation, 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 Mirziyoyev,” – said Kyrgyzstan president, Almazbek Atam-

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<sup>69</sup> BBC News, “V Tajikistane Zadumalis Mojno Li Naladit Otnosheniya s Uzbekistanom,” BBC News, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-37224374>.

<sup>70</sup> UzReport, “Uzbekistan i Tajikistan Otmenili Vizoviy Rejim,” UzReport, 2018, <https://www.uzreport.news/politics/uzbekistan-i-tadjikistan-otmenili-vizoviy-rejim>.

<sup>71</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-velichilsya-v-30-raz-emomali-rahmon/>.

<sup>72</sup> Sputnik, “Uzbekistan i Tajikistan Namereni Vdvoe Uvelichit Tovarooborot v 2022 Godu,” Sputnik, 2021, <https://uz.sputniknews.ru/20210610/uzbekistan-i-tadjikistan-namereny-vdvoe-velichit-tovarooborot-v-2022-godu-19198961.html>.

bayev.<sup>73</sup> Additionally, the Intergovernmental Commission of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan resumed after an eight-year hiatus. The Uzbek and Kyrgyz prime ministers headed the commission. Notably, 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>74</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>75</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.

Mirziyoyev believes that compromise-based solutions to any issues can be achieved only if there is trust between leaders, while constant political dialogue and personal contacts are crucial in trust

<sup>73</sup> “Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan Open New Chapter in Relations | Eurasianet,” EurasiaNet, 2017, <https://eurasianet.org/uzbekistan-kyrgyzstan-open-new-chapter-in-relations>.

<sup>74</sup> Vesti.Kg, “Shavkat Mirziyoyev Dovolen Tem Kak Skladivayutsya Otnosheniya s Kirgizstanom,” Vesti.Kg, 2018, <https://vesti.kg/politika/item/50264-shavkat-mirzijojev-dovolen-tem-kak-skladyvayutsya-otnosheniya-s-kyrgyzstanom.html>.

<sup>75</sup> Shavkat Mirziyoyev, “Uzbekistandin Prezidenti Shavkat Mirziyoyevdin Mamlakettik 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).

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 acted as a tool for maintaining interpersonal relations. Realizing that the lack of communication between the Central Asian leaders worsened the relations, Mirziyoyev “synchronized” key issues of regional development within consultative meetings.<sup>76</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.

Uzbekistan under Mirziyoyev started demonstrating regional proactivity through organizing international conferences, as well as 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, 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.

Similarly, at the international level, Uzbekistan engages in shaping the global agenda to tackle problems such as terrorism, cross-border crime, climate change and poverty. For example, UN General Assembly adopted a resolution initiated by Mirziyoyev 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

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<sup>76</sup> Executive Committee of CIS, “Intervyu Prezidenta Shavkata Mirziyoyeva Kazahstanskim SMI,” Executive Committee of CIS, 2021, [https://cis.minsk.by/news/21568/intervju\\_prezidenta\\_uzbekistana\\_shavkata\\_mirzijoeva\\_kazahstanskim\\_smi](https://cis.minsk.by/news/21568/intervju_prezidenta_uzbekistana_shavkata_mirzijoeva_kazahstanskim_smi) .

Confidence-building Measures in Asia Mirziyoyev proposed initiatives to preserve inter-religious harmony, as well as enrich education and culture. As a part of the implementation of the proposed plan, Uzbekistan serves as the coordinator for confidence-building measures. Uzbekistan was also elected as a member of UN Human Rights council for the first time in its history.

By pursuing a “balanced, open, constructive and pragmatic foreign policy”<sup>77</sup> Uzbekistan reestablished harmonious relations with all major powers and is actively interacting with China, Russia, the US, the EU, South Asia, the Asia-Pacific region and the Arab world. Thus, 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>78</sup>

Overall, Mirziyoyev’s foreign policy is balanced and nonconfrontational, and its main features are openness, transparency, predictability and a strong focus on economic issues.

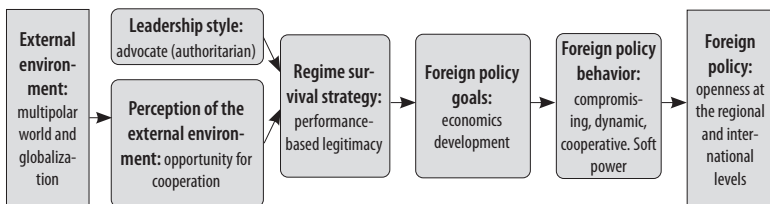


Figure 6. *Shavkat Mirziyoyev's foreign policy*

## Conclusion

This article provides advancements in the conceptual understanding of foreign policy change in authoritarian regimes by addressing the

<sup>77</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>78</sup> UzDaily.



gaps in existing models of foreign policy change. Addressing the case of Uzbekistan's foreign policy, the study proposes a more holistic and nuanced framework for foreign policy change under authoritarian settings.

The developed framework suggests that in authoritarian regimes, a leader's perception of the external environment becomes a decisive factor inducing authoritarian leaders to (re)consider their regime survival strategy. The concern with regime survival, in turn, shapes foreign policy goals which are manifested in distinctive foreign policy behavior of a leader. Ultimately, behavioral patterns of a leader translate into certain foreign policy actions of a state.

Uzbekistan's foreign policy illustrates that the Cold War's conclusion shaped Islam Karimov's perceptions, making him see the world as a nonthreatening place which provided opportunities for cooperation. Facing domestic instability caused by the collapse of the USSR, Karimov had to consolidate his power as a newly elected president. His belief in the power of international organizations and cooperation made Karimov choose 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 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 believe 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, the external environment of the early 2000s reshaped Islam Karimov's perceptions, making him see other countries as enemies intending to spread their ideology. 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, in turn, 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 the former prime minister Shavkat Mirziyoyev was affected by his perceptions about an external environment characterized by multipolarity and globalization. Aspiring to change his tough-leader image and legitimize himself domestically, Mirziyoyev moved away from Karimov's repressive style and addressed the economic problems caused by Karimov's rule. Thus, improving the economy become the main foreign policy goal and molded Mirziyoyev's foreign policy behavior into a more open, dynamic and cooperative one. His behavior, in turn, resulted in a number of domestic and foreign policy reforms which pulled the country out of isolation.

The proposed framework 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 related authoritarian states, which have been often overlooked by the prevailing models of foreign policy change.

It is important to acknowledge that the framework has only been tested on the case of Uzbekistan's foreign policy, and further empir-

ical research is needed to assess its generalizability. Additional case studies should be examined to determine whether the framework 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 Vladimir Putin's changing perceptions about external environment 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. This 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 in authoritarian states. By incorporating the cognitive factors of foreign policy making into the framework, 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.

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