

City University of New York (CUNY)

## CUNY Academic Works

---

Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone Projects

CUNY Graduate Center

---

2-2023

### Finding Autonomy Under the Russian Bear: Explaining Central Asia's Response to the Invasion of Ukraine

Ryan Hitch

*The Graduate Center, City University of New York*

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: [https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc\\_etds/5180](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/5180)

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

---

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).

Contact: [AcademicWorks@cuny.edu](mailto:AcademicWorks@cuny.edu)

**FINDING AUTONOMY UNDER THE RUSSIAN BEAR:  
EXPLAINING CENTRAL ASIA'S RESPONSE TO THE INVASION  
OF UKRAINE**

By

RYAN HITCH

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2023

© 2023  
Ryan Hitch  
All Rights Reserved

APPROVAL

**Finding Autonomy Under the Russian Bear: Explaining Central Asia's  
Response to the Invasion of Ukraine**

By

Ryan Hitch

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in  
satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

Approved: January 2023

George Andreopoulos, Thesis Advisor

Jack Jacobs, Executive Office

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK  
THE GRADUATE CENTER

## ABSTRACT

Finding Autonomy Under the Russian Bear: Explaining Central Asia's Response to the Invasion of Ukraine

By

Ryan Hitch

Thesis Advisor: George Andreopoulos

The Russian invasion of Ukraine was one of the most important geopolitical events of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which will have lasting effects on the international community. While the responses of the United States and Europe to Russia's invasion have been extensively covered, the response of Central Asia has received relatively less attention. Russia's extensive investments in multilateral regional organizations and Central Asia's heavy reliance on Moscow for security and economic assistance should predict that Central Asian states would bandwagon with Russia. However, the region has thus far remained officially neutral towards the war and certain states are openly antagonizing Russia by refusing to support Moscow's political goals in Ukraine. What then explains the different responses of Central Asian states to the war in Ukraine? This thesis investigates this question by drawing on disaggregationalist and institutional approaches to international relations to conduct a case study that examines a range of actions taken by the five Central Asian countries, including votes in United Nations General Assembly resolutions, statements in meetings of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, and other political and symbolic actions. The case study finds that Central Asia must balance two conflicting interests:

the desire to maintain security ties with Russia, and maintaining the freedom to pursue multivector foreign policies. These conflicting interests explain that the entire region has maintained a policy of official neutrality towards the war. However, Kazakhstan's response stands out from that of the rest of the region, displaying a defiance of Russia's geopolitical goals and an open strategy to cultivate ties with Russia's rivals. Overall, this thesis suggests that Russia's war in Ukraine disrupted the post-Soviet security framework in Central Asia and presented new opportunities for the states in the region to enhance their strategic autonomy by strengthening ties with a range of external actors.

**Keywords:** Central Asia, Russian invasion of Ukraine, foreign policy, Russian-Central Asian relations, CSTO, multivectorism, regional security organizations

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While graduate studies often feel like a solitary endeavor, it is an undertaking that would be impossible without the support of my family and the GC community. I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge several people who supported and enriched my time at the Graduate Center.

I would like to thank several GC faculty members who have been particularly influential to my development as a scholar. First, to Kosal Path, whose class on Asian Security was a pleasure to attend, who graciously dedicated significant time to help me develop my research interests, and who was a significant influence on my development as a scholar. Also, to Michael Sharpe, who was kind enough to share his knowledge and unique experience as I contemplate the next steps in my career. Finally, I would like to thank George Andreopoulos for his time and support as a teacher and as my thesis advisor; his standards have driven me to set higher expectations for myself and make the most of my graduate studies.

To my parents, who supported and made possible my decision to return to graduate school.

Most importantly, to my wife Lisa, for always seeking growth, for always being ready to take another adventure with me, for everything.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
History of Russian-Central Asian Relations .....	4
Literature Review and Theoretical Framework .....	9
Post-Soviet Era Foreign Policymaking in Central Asia .....	10
Theories of Multilateral Cooperation .....	15
Methodology .....	23
Regional Security in Central Asia.....	24
Peacekeeping Capabilities and Operations .....	33
The CSTO and Counterterrorism .....	36
Foreign Policy Priorities of the Central Asian States.....	38
Turkmenistan .....	38
Kyrgyzstan.....	40
Tajikistan .....	43
Uzbekistan .....	46
Kazakhstan.....	49
Case Study .....	53
CSTO Summits and Statements .....	53
Votes in UN Bodies.....	55
Symbolic/Political Actions.....	58
Response to Russia’s Political Aims in Ukraine.....	59
Domestic Responses.....	62
Kazakhstan’s Unique Responses to the Russian Invasion .....	69
Discussion .....	72
Future Scenarios in Central Asian Regional Security.....	79
Conclusion .....	83
Bibliography .....	85



## LIST OF TABLES

Comparison of China and Central Asian countries' votes on UNGA resolutions relating to Ukraine .....	57
Summary of the five Central Asian states' key actions following the war in Ukraine.....	78

## Introduction

On February 24, 2022, the armed forces of the Russian Federation invaded Ukraine, marking the return of large-scale warfare to the European continent. The responses of the US, Europe, and some East Asian allies were swift and united, enacting waves of sanctions targeted at Russia and sending billions of dollars' worth of military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine. On March 2, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) passed a resolution condemning the invasion, demanding that Russia "immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders."<sup>1</sup> The resolution was passed overwhelmingly with 141 countries voting in favor, 35 abstentions, and only five against.

Scholars have examined the responses of several actors to invasion during the ensuing months of the war in Ukraine. Notably, the war sparked debate over whether the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) enlargement policies after the breakup of the Soviet Union contributed to Russia's aggression towards Ukraine. John Mearsheimer, for example, argued that the fault for the invasion indeed lies with NATO. Overall, most attention has been paid to Western countries' reactions to the war since these countries have openly supported Ukraine.

A region that has received far less attention is Central Asia. The five countries that make up this region—Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan—are all former Soviet states, and all of these countries are heavily reliant on Russia for economic and security aid. Of the five countries, several are members of Russian-dominated security or regional economic organizations. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan are all members of the Collective

---

<sup>1</sup> "General Assembly resolution demands end to Russian offensive in Ukraine ", *UN News* 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1113152>.

Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are members of the Eurasian Economic Union. However, despite Russia's close security and economic ties with the region, no Central Asian state has directly expressed support for the invasion of Ukraine. While all Central Asian states outwardly appear to follow a neutral approach to the war, there are subtle differences between their strategies. On the one hand, countries such as Turkmenistan and Tajikistan have remained completely silent, refusing to either criticize or even comment on Russia's invasion. On the other hand, Kazakhstan has taken a more confrontational approach towards Russia, taking several actions that have infuriated Russian officials, such as cancelling its annual May 9<sup>th</sup> victory day parade and seeking investments from Western countries that can no longer conduct business in Russia. Why, then, has Russia failed to gain explicit support from any Central Asian state for its invasion of Ukraine? Furthermore, what explains the varied responses from the five Central Asian countries?

Central Asia has historically been and continues to be a nexus among several competing great powers. While Central Asia holds historical ties to Russia through its shared Soviet history, and China has been rapidly expanding its influence in the region through its Belt and Road Initiative and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), an organization that facilitates dialogue on security among Eurasian states. Additionally, the United States expanded its ties with Central Asia during its 2001 invasion of Afghanistan and the global war on terror, and the European Union released a new Central Asian strategy in 2019 that recognized the critical importance of the region.<sup>2</sup> While there are many converging external interests in Central Asia, the region itself displays a strikingly low degree of integration.<sup>3</sup> An annual summit between the five

---

<sup>2</sup> Murat Laumulin, "The EU's Incomplete Strategy for Central Asia," 2019, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/80470>.

<sup>3</sup> See: Alexander Cooley, "Central Asia's inside-out foreign economic relations," in *Oxford handbook of the international relations of Asia*, ed. John Ravenhill Saadia M Pekkanen, Rosemary Foot (Oxford: Oxford

leaders of Central Asia was resurrected in 2018 to improve cooperation on resource sharing and regional trade. This summit was made possible by Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who has attempted to shift away from the divisive stance that his predecessor, Islam Karimov, took towards his neighbors. However, this development is quite recent, and it is not clear whether this will lead to lasting regional integration that is independent of the great powers.

Currently, Russia and China are the major power players in the region, with Russia providing security support to all Central Asian states, and China becoming a major economic partner to all states in the region.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, Russia's security guarantees through the CSTO aid against not only external threats but also internal threats. Most recently, in January 2022, the Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, called for CSTO troops to quell mass unrest in response to rising gas prices.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, the Belarusian President, Alexander Lukashenko, became dependent on Russia following mass unrest in 2020, and many predicted that Kazakhstan would become similarly dependent following Russia's intervention to protect the regime.<sup>6</sup>

Even with Russia's heavy investments in Central Asia, both through regional organizations and bilaterally, the region has not outwardly expressed support for the war, and Russia has failed to convince members of the CSTO beyond Belarus to support a joint statement of support for the invasion.<sup>7</sup> While no Central Asian state has been particularly outspoken against the invasion,

---

Handbooks, 2014). Xu Zhengyuan, "In the shadow of great powers: a comparative study of various approaches to regionalism in Central Asia," *Connections* 9, no. 4 (2010).

<sup>4</sup> Marcel De Haas, "Relations of Central Asia with the Shanghai cooperation organization and the collective security treaty organization," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 30, no. 1 (2017).

<sup>5</sup> Ivan Nechepurenko Valerie Hopkins, "Russia-Allied Forces to Intervene as Unrest Sweeps Kazakhstan," *New York Times* 2022 <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/world/europe/kazakhstan-protests-gas-prices.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Maximilian Hess, "How Russia's Invasion of Ukraine has Affected Kazakh Politics," *Foreign Policy Research Institute* 2022 <https://www.fpri.org/article/2022/06/how-russias-invasion-of-ukraine-has-affected-kazakh-politics/>.

<sup>7</sup> While the CSTO statement does address NATO's buildup of forces in Eastern Europe and condemned "unilateral sanctions", the statement does not directly acknowledge or support the invasion of Ukraine. See: "Meeting of the leaders of the CSTO member States dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Collective Security

continuing Russian defeats—first in Kyiv and later in Kharkiv and Kherson—may portend an increasing detachment of the region from Russia. This is a major change from earlier in 2022, when Putin appeared to consolidate power by expanding and solidifying the presence of the CSTO, including through the intervention in Kazakhstan. Additionally, the withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan seemed to signal the end of serious American engagement with Central Asia, leaving the region with few options outside Russia for security partnerships.

Despite Central Asia's apparent reliance on Russia, the countries in the region have responded to the war in a variety of ways, ranging from silence to hostility. What factors best explain these different responses? And to what degree has the Russian-led CSTO effectively constrained the independent foreign policies of Central Asian states? To investigate these questions, this thesis examines the regional security network that emerged after the end of the Cold War and the foreign policies of Central Asian states following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Using a case study approach, I examine to what degree, if any, Central Asia's response has been conditioned by the Russian-led post-Soviet security framework.

## **History of Russian-Central Asian Relations**

The following section briefly discusses the history of Central Asian-Russian relations, noting major flashpoints between Russia and the peoples of Central Asia. Relations between Russia and Central Asia stretch back to the medieval era when the early Kievan Rus encountered the primarily nomadic Turkic peoples. Relations between the Slavic Rus and Central Asian tribes remained sporadic for several centuries until the Mongol Empire conquered both Russia and

---

Treaty and the 20th anniversary of the CSTO," *Collective Security Treaty Organization* 2022 <https://en.odkb-csto.org/session/2022/vstrecha-liderov-gosudarstv-chlenov-odkb-posvyashchennaya-30-letiyu-podpisaniya-dogovora-o-kollektiv/#loaded>.

Central Asia, placing them under similar administrative systems.<sup>8</sup> By the eighteenth century, the Russian Empire began a push to claim Central Asia, which was completed by 1881. The conquest was also made easier for Russia because Central Asian tribes frequently disputed with each other and were thus unable to present a united front against the invasion.<sup>9</sup>

According to Keller, Russia's claim of Central Asia had an important impact on the region's cultural complex; namely, Russia removed Central Asia from a Mongol-Turkic cultural complex and placed them in a European-Slavic complex.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Russian rule began orienting Central Asian trade west towards Europe and away from the east. While Central Asian peoples have preserved their unique languages, the added proximity to Russia's cultural complex has helped shape Central Asian culture away from neighbors like Iran and China.

A major flashpoint in Russian and Central Asian history began during World War I, which set in motion the events leading to the Bolshevik revolution and the overthrow of the Russian Tsar. While the war's main fronts were far from Central Asia, its effects contributed to worsening tensions between ethnic Slavs and Muslim Central Asians. Before the war, Tsarist Russia had settled land populated by nomadic people deemed surplus to Slavic settlers, who often acted abusively towards locals. By 1916, the Tsar's forces had suffered massive casualties and desertions in the war, leading to the imposition of a draft in Turkistan. With the government failing to explain the purpose of the draft and the nature of the war, ethnic Central Asians reacted harshly, resulting in mass riots and the lynching of Russian officials. The response of the Tsarist government was equally harsh, with Russian troops wiping out villages and livestock. The swift crushing of

---

<sup>8</sup> Shoshana Keller, *Russia and Central Asia: Coexistence, Conquest, Convergence* (University of Toronto Press, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Dilip Hiro, *Inside Central Asia: A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran* (Abrams, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> Keller, *Russia and Central Asia: Coexistence, Conquest, Convergence*, 9-10.

resistance led to hundreds of thousands of displaced people fleeing to China during the winter, leading to the deaths of approximately 200,000 Kyrgyz.<sup>11</sup>

Tensions in Tsarist Russia culminated in early 1917, when widespread riots broke out in Petrograd (modern St. Petersburg). Soon after, Tsar Nicholas II relinquished his rule under pressure from two entities competing for the control of a new government: the Provisional Government and the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.<sup>12</sup> As the year progressed, Vladimir Lenin, leader of the Bolshevik party, played at popular unrest from hunger and discontent over the government's continued involvement in the war in Europe to build support for the Bolsheviks. Capitalizing on the growing popularity of the Bolshevik party, Lenin called for the removal of the Provisional Government from power, helping to trigger the Bolshevik revolution and later the Russian Civil War.

Despite the initial hostility between the Soviets and Central Asia, Muslim citizens began to support the Bolsheviks against the opposing "White Guards." A catalyst for this shift was the leader of the White Guards, Alexander Kolchak, who proclaimed his intention to return the Russian Tsar to power and rejected the possibility of autonomous governments in Central Asia.<sup>13</sup> This alienated Muslim leaders and caused many of them to side with the Bolsheviks by late 1918, helping to turn the tide in the Civil War.

Following the Civil War, the newly established Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) faced with challenge of delimiting the borders of Central Asia. The central government in Moscow chose to develop these borders along ethnic-linguistic lines to prevent potential pan-

---

<sup>11</sup> Keller, *Russia and Central Asia: Coexistence, Conquest, Convergence*.

<sup>12</sup> Keller, *Russia and Central Asia: Coexistence, Conquest, Convergence*, 143.

<sup>13</sup> Hiro, *Inside Central Asia: A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran*, 37-38.

Turkic movements from emerging.<sup>14</sup> While Central Asian cultures were based on complex tribal structures, the Soviets identified five groups—Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, Tajiks, and Uzbeks—with significant linguistic and cultural distinctions and created national boundaries along these lines.<sup>15</sup>

The Soviet government also implemented mass farm collectivization with the objective of disrupting the traditional power of local landlords. This drive was also accompanied by a literacy campaign aimed at peasants, which also Over the next decade, Soviet farm collectivization had a particularly devastating impact on Kazakhs, who confiscated cattle deemed to be in excess of their needs. By 1931, the situation in Kazakhstan had deteriorated into a massive famine, resulting in approximately 1.5 million people dead, most of whom were Kazakhs.<sup>16</sup> Overall, about one-third of Kazakhstan’s population perished during the famine.

It was not until the onset of World War II that Central Asia began to substantially integrate with the Soviet Union. As a result of the German invasion of the USSR, the Soviet Union transferred factories into Central Asia, improving the region’s industrialization and providing new employment opportunities for non-Russians, including women. The war also became a new prism for the people in the Soviet Union to understand the hardships of collectivization: “as harsh but necessary measures that enabled the USSR to re-build and start pushing the Germans back in 1943.”<sup>17</sup> In this way, the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany was understood not in terms of communist ideology, but rather in terms of nationalism. Keller argues that the war created a Soviet

---

<sup>14</sup> Hiro, *Inside Central Asia: A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran*, 48.

<sup>15</sup> Pauline Jones, *The transformation of Central Asia: States and societies from Soviet rule to independence* (Cornell University Press, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> Elena Volkava, "The Kazakh Famine of 1930-33 and the Politics of History in the Post-Soviet Space," *Kennan Institute* (2012), <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-kazakh-famine-1930-33-and-the-politics-history-the-post-soviet-space>.

<sup>17</sup> Keller, *Russia and Central Asia: Coexistence, Conquest, Convergence*, 204.



identity “centered on a Russian national victory over fascism rather than an international proletarian victory over capitalism.”<sup>18</sup> This left Central Asians on the periphery of the Union; some of the region’s contributions to the war were celebrated, but not to the same extent as those of Russians.

By the early 1980s, Central Asia had become well integrated within the Soviet Union and appeared stable. However, this stability came undone under Mikhail Gorbachev, who became General Secretary in 1985. Gorbachev implemented a series of reforms known as *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness).<sup>19</sup> These reforms began to create tensions in Central Asia, as evidenced when Kazakh students in Alma-Ata protested the replacement of the First Secretary of the Kazakh Communist Party with a Russian. Despite some agitation, the Central Asian republics remained relatively passive during this period, failing to generate significant nationalist movements. Instead, the most prominent nationalist movements took place in the Baltic republics, whose “popular front” movements were mobilizing for autonomy.<sup>20</sup> These movements spread across the USSR, leading Gorbachev to open negotiations for a new “Union Treaty” between the 15 Soviet Republics, which was attended by only nine of the republics. This in turn led to a failed coup by hardliners in the KGB, sealing the end of the Soviet Union.

Overall, Central Asian leaders were not supportive of Gorbachev’s reforms, yet most hoped to avoid the collapse of the Union, and all five Central Asian republics participated in the new Union Treaty negotiations. In a large part, this was driven by economics. The Central Asian republics were the poorest in the Soviet Union and depended heavily on subsidies from Moscow,

---

<sup>18</sup> Keller, *Russia and Central Asia: Coexistence, Conquest, Convergence*, 204.

<sup>19</sup> RG Gidadhubli, "Perestroika and Glasnost," *Economic and Political Weekly* (1987).

<sup>20</sup> Keller, *Russia and Central Asia: Coexistence, Conquest, Convergence*.

in contrast with the Baltic republics, which were some of the richest Soviet Republics per capita.<sup>21</sup> With the steep challenges posed to the newly independent Central Asian states, most leaders were guided by Soviet practices, and those from wealthier Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan chose to cement Soviet-style authoritarian governments, while Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan entered periods of recurring unrest or civil war.<sup>22</sup>

## **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

The aim of this section is to outline the major theoretical approaches utilized in this thesis. Initially, I will discuss the theories that may best explain Central Asian foreign policymaking in the post-Soviet era. Later, the section will examine different theoretical lenses that explain the role of international organizations and why states engage in them. This thesis is critical of the neo-realist school of international relations because it fails to consider how the unique domestic structures of Central Asian governments drive their foreign policies. Instead, this thesis relies on disaggregationalist approaches to explain Central Asian foreign policy and the institutionalist school to explain how and why Central Asian states engage in regional institutions such as the CSTO. I argue that these approaches can adequately consider the domestic contexts in Central Asia, where leaders are primarily driven by short-term calculations of regime security rather than longer-term goals associated with the national interest, which might include providing benefits to non-elites or engaging in regional integration.

---

<sup>21</sup> Keller, *Russia and Central Asia: Coexistence, Conquest, Convergence*, 242.

<sup>22</sup> Keller, *Russia and Central Asia: Coexistence, Conquest, Convergence*, 247.

## Post-Soviet Era Foreign Policymaking in Central Asia

When the Soviet Union collapsed, Central Asian statehood brought the novel challenge of foreign policymaking. As part of the USSR, Central Asian republics did not have the ability to shape their own foreign policies, as this was the preservation of the centralized government in Moscow. Having responsibility for their own foreign policies entailed that the states collect new knowledge, train new foreign policymakers, and begin institutionalizing these new procedures.<sup>23</sup> These processes also emerged in the larger context of great power interest in the region that resulted from the collapse of the USSR. This context of great power competition has caused much scholarly work on Central Asia to utilize a top-down “New Great Game” model that highlights the agency and influence of great powers on the region but grants limited agency to and influence on the relatively smaller and weaker states of Central Asia. By contrast, Sally Cummings argues for a lens which assumes that “Central Asian states are not pawns but actors who operate strategically and according to local rules. Central Asian elites devise and seek to fulfill their own agendas”.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Martha Olcott notes that regional actors in Central Asia have matured, becoming more “competent and confident.”<sup>25</sup>

This thesis also accepts Cummings’ premise that Central Asian states have a certain degree of influence and autonomy independent of great powers. Great powers can successfully constrain and influence Central Asian states, but these states still retain degrees of autonomy that are related to the contexts of each country. Such a view would predict that states with more favorable

---

<sup>23</sup> Sally N Cummings, "A Synthetic Approach to Foreign Security Relations and Policies in Central Asia," in *Oxford Handbook of the International Relations of Asia*, ed. John Ravenhill Saadia M Pekkanen, Rosemary Foot (Oxford: Oxford Handbooks, 2014), 482.

<sup>24</sup> Cummings, "A Synthetic Approach to Foreign Security Relations and Policies in Central Asia," 482.

<sup>25</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, "Central Asia: The End of the “Great Game”," *International Relations of Asia*: 267.

economic and geographic conditions are better positioned to oppose great powers when national interests are at stake.

Following independence, states in Central Asia initially articulated similar foreign policy priorities. First, the five states aimed to solidify their sovereignty by “cementing their international recognition and now independent borders.”<sup>26</sup> Additionally, they sought to lessen their reliance on Russia by pursuing new partnerships and combat the growing threat of terrorism. From here, however, their foreign policies diverged, with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan pursuing their own forms of multivectorism, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan initially forming close relations with Russia, and Turkmenistan opting for isolationism.<sup>27</sup>

To best explain Central Asia’s foreign policies, Alexander Cooley argues that disaggregationalist approaches to international relations are a fruitful lens to examine the region.<sup>28</sup> Such approaches challenge the view that states are unitary actors in international affairs and dispute the neorealist conceptualization of states as “billiard balls of varying sizes.”<sup>29</sup> This realist position is derived from Kenneth Waltz’s conception of an anarchic international system, who sees the only meaningful analytical difference between states to be their respective military and economic capabilities.<sup>30</sup> By contrast, domestic approaches argue that the various actors that make up states—leaders, other elites, or citizens—can affect how states interact with each other.<sup>31</sup> For example,

---

<sup>26</sup> Cummings, "A Synthetic Approach to Foreign Security Relations and Policies in Central Asia," 483.

<sup>27</sup> Cummings, "A Synthetic Approach to Foreign Security Relations and Policies in Central Asia."

<sup>28</sup> Cooley, "Central Asia’s inside-out foreign economic relations."

<sup>29</sup> It is important to note that not all realist schools of international relations view the state as a unitary actor. Unlike neorealism, neoclassical realism makes use of disaggregationalist approaches by considering both structural and domestic factors in international relations. See: Michiel Foulon, "Neoclassical realism: challengers and bridging identities," *International Studies Review* 17, no. 4 (2015). John J Mearsheimer, "The false promise of international institutions," *International security* 19, no. 3 (1994): 48. See also: José E Alvarez, "Governing the World: International Organizations as Lawmakers," *Suffolk Transnat'l L. Rev.* 31 (2007): 32.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, "Explaining and understanding international relations," (1990): 109.

<sup>31</sup> Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith, "Domestic explanations of international relations," *Annual Review of Political Science* 15 (2012).

Robert Putnam's seminal work on two-level games modeled how international negotiations involve both foreign and domestic interests. In this piece, he argued that:

At the national level, domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government to adopt favorable policies, and politicians seek power by constructing coalitions among those groups. At the international level, national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments. Neither of the two games can be ignored by central decision-makers, so long as their countries remain interdependent, yet sovereign.<sup>32</sup>

To understand Central Asian states' foreign policies and engagement with regional and international organizations, it is necessary to understand the domestic structures that constrain and constitute foreign policymaking. Central Asian governments have been frequently characterized as having patrimonial systems, which Kathleen Collis defines as "an entire system of authoritarian rule defined by a concentration of power in a personalistic leader and his ties, rather than formal institutions and legality."<sup>33</sup> In place of formal institutions, patrimonial regimes commonly practice corruption, bribery, and rent-seeking, which constitute "the mechanisms by which individuals or groups gain access to power and public resources, especially when formal institutions are weak."<sup>34</sup> Critically, such regimes prioritize their survival, seek opportunities to enrich themselves, and extract resources to reward domestic clients. Cooley notes that this primary interest in personal enrichment can conflict with the pursuit of national interests (benefitting classes beyond political elites) or of regional integration and cooperation; this in turn has resulted in a region that is "selectively integrated with the world economy."<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Collis argues that patrimonial regimes prioritizing their regime survival and personal enrichment leave little room for regional

---

<sup>32</sup> Robert D Putnam, "Diplomacy and domestic politics: the logic of two-level games," *International organization* 42, no. 3 (1988): 434.

<sup>33</sup> Kathleen Collis, "Economic and security regionalism among patrimonial authoritarian regimes: The case of Central Asia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 2 (2009): 255.

<sup>34</sup> Collis, "Economic and security regionalism among patrimonial authoritarian regimes: The case of Central Asia," 255.

<sup>35</sup> Cooley, "Central Asia's inside-out foreign economic relations," 242.

economic integration, although there is room for limited security cooperation when all parties agree on a shared threat.<sup>36</sup>

Regarding relations between Central Asia and Russia, Stefan Meister argues that many Central Asian states have pursued contestation strategies against Russia to bolster their sovereignty.<sup>37</sup> However, it is also important to consider that Central Asian leaders seek to extract benefits from Russia and are “driven by rent-seeking options, short-term gains, and geopolitics and balance of power calculations.”<sup>38</sup> The two interests of maintaining sovereignty and extracting benefits from Russia are contradictory and require a deft balance between the two to maintain the overall goal of regime security. For Meister, neither neorealism nor domestic explanations adequately explain the fact that countries such as Kazakhstan oscillate between supporting and countering Russian influence.<sup>39</sup> Instead, he argues that the concept of strategic hedging, with its origins in neoclassical realism, is better suited to explaining this puzzle. Strategic hedging differs from neorealist concepts of balancing and bandwagoning in that hedging “is considered less confrontational than traditional balancing, less cooperative than bandwagoning, and more proactive than neutrality”.<sup>40</sup> Balancing and bandwagoning often explained the behavior of states during the Cold War, an era marked by a binary choice between the US and the Soviet Union. However, after the Cold War, states—particularly small and middle powers—often avoided aligning with a single great power. As Ciorciari and Haacke note, “rather than taking clear sides

---

<sup>36</sup> Collins, "Economic and security regionalism among patrimonial authoritarian regimes: The case of Central Asia."

<sup>37</sup> Stefan Meister, "Hedging and wedging: Strategies to contest Russia's leadership in post-Soviet Eurasia," in *Regional powers and contested leadership* (Springer, 2018).

<sup>38</sup> Meister, "Hedging and wedging: Strategies to contest Russia's leadership in post-Soviet Eurasia," 302.

<sup>39</sup> Meister, "Hedging and wedging: Strategies to contest Russia's leadership in post-Soviet Eurasia."

<sup>40</sup> Meister, "Hedging and wedging: Strategies to contest Russia's leadership in post-Soviet Eurasia," 305.

to address ascertained threats or ride the coattails of a surging great power, many states' behavior suggested efforts to mitigate risk in uncertain strategic conditions."<sup>41</sup>

While hedging seems to be a promising concept to describe many Central Asian states' foreign policy strategies, I argue that this concept is not contradictory to domestic approaches to international relations. Indeed, the particular regime structure common in Central Asia—neopatrimonial authoritarianism—helps explain why these states sometimes cooperate and sometimes compete with Russia. On the one hand, the legitimacy of Central Asian leaders depends on maintaining and bolstering their country's sovereignty, which requires resisting Russian attempts to establish hegemony in the region. On the other hand, the informal power networks that sustain authoritarian leaders pressure those leaders to extract utilities in the short term, providing an incentive to pursue ties with Russia, China, and other powers. The concept of hedging has also been described as too broad, and scholars have used this term in a variety of ways.<sup>42</sup> In the context of this thesis' research question the concept of hedging provides little predictive power beyond, perhaps, the broad prediction that Central Asia will neither completely align with nor completely reject Russia's decision to invade. Instead, I argue that explaining Central Asian states' different responses requires both an understanding of the unique domestic factors that drive the ruling elites and the extent to which Russian multilateral security institutions effectively constrain Central Asian states' strategic autonomy.

---

<sup>41</sup> John D Ciorciari and Jürgen Haacke, "Hedging in international relations: an introduction," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 19, no. 3 (2019): 368.

<sup>42</sup> For an extensive critique of the concept of hedging, see: Jürgen Haacke, "The concept of hedging and its application to Southeast Asia: A critique and a proposal for a modified conceptual and methodological framework," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 19, no. 3 (2019).

## Theories of Multilateral Cooperation

Moving from Central Asia's foreign policy approaches, the following section addresses the growing role of regional security organizations in coordinating security policies. Currently, the two main regional security organizations are the SCO and the CSTO. The CSTO is particularly important to understand Russian-Central Asian relations since other major Eurasian powers such as China and India are not members. This results in a major power imbalance between Russia and all other CSTO members, who rely heavily on Russia for security assistance. The CSTO is also a major vehicle for Russia's strategic and political goals in Central Asia. However, it is also critical to consider the role of the SCO—which includes China as a member—as a vehicle for Central Asia to develop relations with additional Eurasian powers and undermine Russia's predominance in the region. Before discussing these regional security organizations, I will first discuss several theories that seek to explain why states engage in multilateral security organizations and what purposes these organizations serve.

Of all the major schools of international relations, neorealism is the most suspicious of the capacity of international organizations (IOs) to improve prospects for cooperation between states. According to Mearsheimer, neorealism accepts five basic assumptions that contribute to this pessimistic view of international organizations: (1) the international system is anarchic because it lacks centralized authority; (2) states have the capability to destroy one another; (3) states cannot know the intentions of other states; (4) states are motivated to survive and maintain their sovereignty; and (5) states are instrumentally rational as they pursue their survival.<sup>43</sup> Based on these assumptions, Mearsheimer derives three patterns of state behavior: states are fearful and

---

<sup>43</sup> Mearsheimer, "The false promise of international institutions," 10.



suspicious of other states; states cannot depend on others for security, making international politics a self-help system; and states aim to increase their own power relative to other states.<sup>44</sup> Considering these assumptions and the resulting behavior of states, realists see a world where cooperation is possible between states only under limited conditions. Such cooperation is also transient; if circumstances change, states will swiftly abandon their partners. Neorealists claim that states cooperate on the basis of balance of power. More specifically, if a state were to rapidly increase its economic and military capabilities, neorealism would predict that this state's neighbors would become fearful of its newfound power and cooperate with other states to balance against the more powerful state. Since the balance of power between states can change suddenly and swiftly, alliances will shift to reflect the new balance.

Unlike other schools of international relations theory, realists are skeptical that multilateral security organizations independently contribute to greater security cooperation. Instead, regional organizations merely reflect the balance of power between rivals, making them epiphenomenal.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, security organizations such as NATO exist only to counter a clearly defined threat that motivates all members to remain in the organization. Because of this assumption, realist theory struggles to explain why NATO continued to exist after the fall of the Soviet Union, especially during the 1990s and early 2000s, when Russian-NATO relations were not contentious.

Davidzon argues that realist theory does not provide a strong explanation for the existence of the CSTO because the members lack a commonly perceived threat that would motivate all members to join the alliance.<sup>46</sup> From the assumption that security organizations are merely a

---

<sup>44</sup> Mearsheimer, "The false promise of international institutions," 11-12.

<sup>45</sup> Mearsheimer, "The false promise of international institutions."

<sup>46</sup> Igor Davidzon, *Regional Security Governance in Post-Soviet Eurasia: The History and Effectiveness of the Collective Security Treaty Organization* (Springer Nature, 2021), 17.

reflection of the balance of power, realists see no convincing reason for states to join an alliance unless they are balancing against a common threat. However, the members of the CSTO do not share a common adversary. All Central Asian members of the CSTO are members of NATO's partnership for peace, and Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan have taken part in annual joint military exercises called the "Steppe Eagle" since 2003.<sup>47</sup> Davidzon also notes that realist theory does not consider other purposes that security organizations can serve, including as a means to promote internal security within member states.<sup>48</sup>

The constructivist school departs significantly from neorealism in significant ways and was influenced by an increasing interest in how ideational factors such as norms and identity impact international relations. Unlike realism, which takes state interests to be exogenous and fixed, constructivism sees interests as social constructions constituted by norms. This position was famously articulated by the early constructivist, Alexander Wendt, when he argued that "anarchy is what states make of it."<sup>49</sup> Wendt did not dispute the realist claim that the international system presents as an anarchic and self-help system, but he disputed that this is the fundamental nature of international politics. Instead, anarchy should be viewed as an intersubjective social construction. Focusing on how practices and processes constitute the structure of international politics, Wendt claimed that "it is collective meanings that constitute the structures which organize our actions", and that actors acquire identities-relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self-by participating in such collective meanings".<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> "U.S. Security Cooperation With Central Asia ", U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-central-asia/>.

<sup>48</sup> Davidzon, *Regional Security Governance in Post-Soviet Eurasia: The History and Effectiveness of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*.

<sup>49</sup> Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics," *International organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 395.

<sup>50</sup> Wendt, "Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics," 397.

After the end of the Cold War, constructivist literature examining the role of international organizations began to proliferate widely. Unlike institutionalist theories, which see IOs as rational solutions to collective action problems, constructivists focus on the role of IOs in shaping social reality and orienting action.<sup>51</sup> Constructivists have also studied the role of collective identity in determining the success or failure of regional security organizations. For example, Hemmer and Katzenstein examined how different collective beliefs of US foreign policy makers towards Europe and Asia led to different degrees of institutionalization in each region.<sup>52</sup> While the US successfully developed a multilateral security framework in Europe through NATO, similar attempts in Asia, such as the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), failed to develop significant support. Other scholars such as Ji-Young Lee, argued that SEATO was undermined by joint efforts from China and India that invoked anti-colonial collective beliefs in Southeast Asian countries.<sup>53</sup>

The constructivist theory may not adequately apply to the CSTO because the six members lack a shared collective identity or ideology that binds the organization together.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, the diverse regimes of the six members, which include the relatively open societies of Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, as well as more repressive regimes like Tajikistan and Belarus, make cooperation on the basis of shared values unlikely. Similarly, Kropatcheva argues that the CSTO is too new of an organization to exert significant socialization effects on its member.<sup>55</sup> Lastly, authoritarian

---

<sup>51</sup> Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, *Rules for the World* (Cornell University Press, 2012).

<sup>52</sup> Christopher Hemmer and Peter J Katzenstein, "Why is there no NATO in Asia? Collective identity, regionalism, and the origins of multilateralism," *International organization* 56, no. 3 (2002).

<sup>53</sup> Ji-Young Lee, "Contested American hegemony and regional order in postwar Asia: the case of Southeast Asia Treaty Organization," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 19, no. 2 (2019).

<sup>54</sup> Davidzon, *Regional Security Governance in Post-Soviet Eurasia: The History and Effectiveness of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*.

<sup>55</sup> Elena Kropatcheva, "Russia and the collective security treaty organisation: Multilateral policy or unilateral ambitions?," *Europe-Asia Studies* 68, no. 9 (2016).

regimes may be less likely to cooperate based on values than democratic regimes. With all its members (excluding perhaps Armenia) being partially or fully authoritarian states, CSTO members seem unlikely to cooperate on the basis of shared values.<sup>56</sup>

Finally, we turn to institutionalist theories, which I argue best explain the emergence of the CSTO. Institutionalism holds many of realism's core assumptions, including that states are the main actors in international politics, that of an anarchic international system, and that states rationally pursue their own self-interest. However, unlike realism, institutionalism sees international organizations as significantly improving the prospect of cooperation between states. More specifically, institutionalism argues that IOs improve multilateral cooperation by reducing transaction costs, facilitating issue-linkages, and increasing the quality and symmetry of the information that states receive. Alvarez summarizes the rational-instrumental assumptions of institutionalism by noting:

IOs are simply agencies called into being by states, sustained by states, and actually or potentially directed by states on the supposition that the organization's existence and operation are useful to themselves. States, not utopian dreams intent on creating a 'world government,' are credited with the rise of modern IOs, which, after all, are as much the product of state needs as are the laws of sovereign immunity or of war.<sup>57</sup>

This rational and instrumental use of multilateral organizations to solve collective action problems is a strong explanation for the emergence of the CSTO for several reasons. First, unlike the prediction of neorealism, the CSTO was not created with the sole purpose of collective defense, but to solve coordination problems between many of the post-Soviet states.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the fact that the members each have different salient threats makes the existence of the CSTO difficult for

---

<sup>56</sup> Davidzon, *Regional Security Governance in Post-Soviet Eurasia: The History and Effectiveness of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*.

<sup>57</sup> Alvarez, "Governing the World: International Organizations as Lawmakers," 25.

<sup>58</sup> Davidzon, *Regional Security Governance in Post-Soviet Eurasia: The History and Effectiveness of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*.

neorealism to explain. By contrast, institutionalist theory accepts that states will have different priorities and interests, leading them to create organizations that can improve cooperation despite these differences.

Rational choice theory outlines several patterns of cooperation that can be present in regional organizations: collaboration, coordination, suasion, and assurance.<sup>59</sup> Collaboration occurs when members of an alliance see defection, which provides an immediate payout, as the optimal outcome. This barrier to cooperation may be present in cases where several members hold conflicting interests and goals; in such cases, states may prefer bilateral agreements to multilateral agreements. To promote collaboration, organizations can provide long-term counterincentives to offset the likelihood of defection. By contrast, coordination patterns occur when the interests of alliance members are aligned to the degree that defection is not a concern but where disagreements exist on what specific strategy is optimal to promote cooperation. NATO's response to Russia's annexation of Crimea is an example of a coordination problem; all NATO members agreed that Russia posed a threat to NATO's collective defense but disagreed on what strategies were needed to counter the threat.<sup>60</sup> Suasion problems exist in alliances created by a more powerful state and include other relatively weaker states. In such an alliance, the weaker states have an incentive to free ride while the powerful state seeks to compel cooperation from all members. A commonly cited example of free-riding is Europe's underinvestment in defense because it can rely on the US to ensure its security.<sup>61</sup> To prevent free riding, the powerful state may threaten to reduce the security benefits it provides to weaker states or even threaten to leave the alliance entirely (causing

---

<sup>59</sup> Davidzon, *Regional Security Governance in Post-Soviet Eurasia: The History and Effectiveness of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*.

<sup>60</sup> Davidzon, *Regional Security Governance in Post-Soviet Eurasia: The History and Effectiveness of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*.

<sup>61</sup> Xinru Ma and David C Kang, "Toward Measuring Free-Riding: Counterfactuals, Alliances, and US–Philippine Relations," *Journal of Global Security Studies* 8, no. 1 (2023).

its collapse).<sup>62</sup> Lastly, assurance patterns occur when all members of an alliance see cooperation as the optimal goal, but are concerned that other members will defect. This, in turn, can lead to the preemptive defection of members. A security organization can mitigate this problem by increasing the transparency between members, thereby reducing the uncertainty surrounding the members' intentions and commitment to cooperation.<sup>63</sup>

A key cooperation problem in the CSTO is that members have diverging interests, which has hampered the organization's ability to respond to regional security challenges.<sup>64</sup> Aynur Kurmanov, a pro-Russian politician from Kazakhstan, underscored this by arguing that "many CSTO members constantly violate their obligations as members of the alliance but at the same time constantly demand that Russia maintain peace and stability—without giving it anything in return except for formal assurances of friendship."<sup>65</sup> This situation may appear to be a suasion problem, with Russia providing security goods and weaker members having a clear incentive to free-ride. However, it is not clear that Russia, which contributes half of the CSTO's budget<sup>66</sup>, actively seeks to increase burden sharing among CSTO members but rather seeks to prevent defection in the form of political and military ties between Russia's neighbors and the West. This aim underscores the fact that the CSTO does not exist as a counterbalance to NATO, a point that has also been stressed by the CSTO leadership.<sup>67</sup> To prevent cooperation with adversaries of Russia, Article 1 of the Collective Security Treaty forbids members from joining other military

---

<sup>62</sup> Davidzon, *Regional Security Governance in Post-Soviet Eurasia: The History and Effectiveness of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*.

<sup>63</sup> Davidzon, *Regional Security Governance in Post-Soviet Eurasia: The History and Effectiveness of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*.

<sup>64</sup> Richard Weitz, "Assessing the collective security treaty organization: Capabilities and vulnerabilities," *United States Army War College Press* (2018).

<sup>65</sup> Paul Goble, "Will the CSTO Go the Way of the Warsaw Pact," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 19, no. 156 (2022), <https://jamestown.org/program/will-the-csto-go-the-way-of-the-warsaw-pact/>.

<sup>66</sup> Polina Beliakova, "How a Russian-Led Alliance Keeps a Lid on Central Asia," *War on the Rocks* 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/02/how-a-russian-led-alliance-keeps-a-lid-on-central-asia/>.

<sup>67</sup> Beliakova, "How a Russian-Led Alliance Keeps a Lid on Central Asia."

alliances, preventing them from joining an organization like NATO, but not from joining the SCO, which does not stipulate any collective defense obligation.<sup>68</sup> With this in mind, the CSTO more likely presents a collaboration problem, where members can potentially receive long-term benefits from cooperation, but diverse interests create an incentive to limit cooperation in the pursuit of short-term benefits. Adding to the collaboration problem, the CSTO is comprised of members from three distinct regions: Eastern Europe (Belarus), the South Caucasus (Armenia), and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan), with Russia having interests in all three regions. However, Russia is the only country with interests in all three regions. In contrast, the remaining members have limited interests in regions outside of their own and are simply not likely to use military force to protect or secure other regions unless they follow Russia's lead.<sup>69</sup>

Considering the two main theoretical frameworks that I have discussed—domestic approaches and institutionalism—what predictions can be made regarding the response of Central Asia to the Russian invasion of Ukraine? I have argued that Central Asian members of the CSTO do not see the organization's utility as providing collective defense to protect against external threats, but rather as a means to prevent terrorism and reduce tensions between members such as Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which ultimately protects the security of the regime. Since regime security is the most important priority of Central Asian governments, membership in the CSTO should predict a choice not to openly side with Ukraine or the West. There is tension, however, between the benefits that integration with Russian-led organizations provides and the benefits

---

<sup>68</sup> "Collective Security Treaty ", (1992). [https://en.odkb-csto.org/documents/documents/dogovor\\_o\\_kollektivnoy\\_bezopasnosti/#loaded](https://en.odkb-csto.org/documents/documents/dogovor_o_kollektivnoy_bezopasnosti/#loaded).

<sup>69</sup> A good example is Kazakhstan's refusal to send peacekeeping troops to aid its treaty ally, Armenia, when the latter triggered the mutual defense clause of the CSTO following attacks on its sovereign territory by Azerbaijan. See: Assel Satubaldina, "Kazakh President Urges Swift Resolution to Armenia-Azerbaijan Border Conflict at CSTO Extraordinary Session," *Astana Times* 2022, <https://astanatimes.com/2022/09/kazakh-president-urges-swift-resolution-to-armenia-azerbaijan-border-conflict-at-csto-extraordinary-session/>.

provided by multivector foreign policies. Multivectorism increases the legitimacy of Central Asian regimes by evidencing leaders' independence from a single great power patron and reduces economic dependence on Russia. These two factors taken together should predict that all Central Asian governments would attempt to not choose sides in the conflict to continue their multivector policies.

## **Methodology**

This thesis will primarily utilize a case study approach to analyze the factors that explain the different responses of the five Central Asian states. The foreign policy responses analyzed in this case study include a range of state actions, including discourse from state leaders, UN General Assembly votes, and polling data. Therefore, this necessitates a range of methodological approaches to analyze and interpret the data considered in the case study.

Regarding statements made by foreign policymakers, I will employ discourse analysis to interpret the statements while considering the interpretive context from which the discourse emerged. Rather than considering it as an epiphenomenal aspect of foreign policy, this case study assumes that discourse is an important action in and of itself. As Neumann argued:

Because a discourse maintains a degree of regularity in social relations, it produces preconditions for action. It constrains how the stuff that the world consists of is ordered, and so how people categorize and think about the world. It constrains what is thought of at all, what is thought of as possible, and what is thought of as the 'natural thing' to do in a given situation.<sup>70</sup>

Therefore, the discourse of Central Asian leaders in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine is not merely a correlate of official state positions but can constrain future actions of foreign policymakers and direct the changing relations between Central Asian states and Russia.

---

<sup>70</sup> Iver B Neumann, "Discourse analysis," in *Qualitative methods in international relations* (Springer, 2008).



Beyond discourse analysis, this case study also analyzes polling data from multiple sources to investigate how Central Asian publics perceive the war in Ukraine. Polling data is a crucial element to consider because this thesis employs a theoretical framework that considers domestic factors to be important variables to explain foreign policies. More specifically, I will analyze polling data to show that public perceptions of Russia and consumption of Russian media sources are important indicators of whether a state has taken a more or less antagonistic approach towards Russia. It is important to note, however, that reliable polling data in Central Asia is rare, and many of the organizations that surveyed public opinions only conducted a single poll on the war. Therefore, the polls examined do not measure possible changes in public opinion over the course of the war in Ukraine. Because of the rarity of polling data and the fact that the war between Russia and Ukraine is an ongoing event, this thesis will not test a hypothesis. Instead, the case study is exploratory in nature and aims to identify key factors that may have influenced the foreign policies of Central Asia in response to the war in Ukraine.

## **Regional Security in Central Asia**

This section traces the history of the regional security architecture that emerged following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The focus will be on the Collective Security Treaty (CST) and its evolution into the CSTO. The CSTO will also be primarily examined through the lens of Russia's strategic interests. This section will also consider the SCO, which serves a different purpose than that of the CSTO but provides significant opportunities for its Central Asian members to develop their multivector foreign policies and hedge against Russia, as this organization includes several powerful nations, most important of which is China.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent independence of the five Central Asian countries, Russia faced the challenge of coordinating security policies in a region it considers to be its traditional sphere of influence. Most importantly, the end of the USSR opened the region to Chinese, American, and to a lesser extent, European influences. Russia's main strategic goals in Central Asia are the following: (1) the preservation of its primary role in the region, (2) the maintenance of pro-Russian regimes, and (3) the limitation of Western and Chinese influence.<sup>71</sup>

Throughout the 1990s, Russia coordinated security policies in Central Asia on a bilateral basis. However, this approach shifted to relying on multilateral frameworks by the early 2000s. Russia engages through two primary security organizations: the CSTO and the SCO. The latter arose as a Chinese initiative that included Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan as a means to resolve border disputes between China and Central Asia.<sup>72</sup> As a Chinese-dominated organization, the SCO runs counter to Russia's attempt to limit Chinese influence in the region. However, at present, the SCO does not provide the same degree of integration that the CSTO does. Beyond Russia's interest in maintaining its primacy in the realm of security, the SCO may be limited by a broad agenda and a diverse and expanding membership, which checks the domination of any member.<sup>73</sup> This situation has only grown as both India and Pakistan joined the organization in 2017, and Iran joined in September 2022.

---

<sup>71</sup> Alexander Frost, "The Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Russia's Strategic Goals in Central Asia" (paper presented at the China & Eurasia Forum Quarterly, 2009), 85.

<sup>72</sup> Frost, "The Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Russia's Strategic Goals in Central Asia."

<sup>73</sup> De Haas, "Relations of Central Asia with the Shanghai cooperation organization and the collective security treaty organization."

The SCO has been criticized for a variety of shortcomings, often stemming from its marked differences from Western-dominated organizations such as NATO and the EU. A common criticism often made by American scholars is that the SCO is an “autocrats club,” as the organization consists of mostly authoritarian regimes with poor human rights records.<sup>74</sup> Additionally, the SCO has been labeled as simply a “talking shop” because of the members’ diverse interests and lack of a formal and binding decision-making process. According to Article 16 of the SCO Charter, decisions can only be made through consensus, allowing any member to veto propositions.<sup>75</sup> Adding to the institutional informality of the SCO, decisions are made not by votes but through discussion. Finally, many Western commentators argue that the SCO is designed to be a counterweight to American predominance. While this may be an aim of China and Russia, such a purpose has not been overtly expressed in joint SCO statements, in large part because neither India nor the Central Asian members approve of turning the SCO into an anti-Western bloc. This was clearly expressed by Uzbekistan’s president Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who hosted and chaired the 2022 SCO summit. He argued that it was crucial for the SCO to maintain its non-bloc status and instead to focus on countering emerging threats to Eurasian security.<sup>76</sup>

While the SCO differs from the institutionalized and legalized nature of Western organizations, it plays a critical role in Central Asia’s relations with Russia and China and supports the region’s multivector approach by integrating important players such as India and Iran. Most importantly, however, the organization provides an important opportunity for Central Asian

---

<sup>74</sup> Stephen Aris, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: 'Tackling the three evils'. A regional response to non-traditional security challenges or an anti-Western bloc?," *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 3 (2009).

<sup>75</sup> Stephen Aris, "Eurasian Regionalism," *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization. New York, Estados Unidos de Norte America: Palgrave* (2011).

<sup>76</sup> Fozil Mashrab, "Uzbekistan Grapples With the Specter of Anti-Western Tropes in SCO," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 19, no. 125 (2022), <https://jamestown.org/program/uzbekistan-grapples-with-the-specter-of-anti-western-tropes-in-sco/>.

countries to hedge against Russia by strengthening ties with China. This approach was displayed during the 2022 SCO Summit, when Xi Jinping declared his support for Kazakhstan:

No matter how the international situation changes, we will continue our strong support to Kazakhstan in protecting its independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, as well as firm support to the reforms you are carrying out to ensure stability and development, and strongly oppose to the interference of any forces in the internal affairs of your country.

That such a statement was made in the context of a summit that included Russia clearly alluded to increasing tensions between Russia and Kazakhstan, driven by the latter's lack of support for Russia's political goals in Ukraine.<sup>77</sup> A demonstration of solidarity between China and Kazakhstan through the platform of the SCO provided Beijing with the opportunity to expand its influence in Central Asia and facilitated Kazakhstan's omni-enmeshing strategy, which attempts to attach all the major powers "in complex exchanges and positive-sum relations with the region."<sup>78</sup>

One of the clearest examples of the balancing role that the SCO plays in Central Asia was the Russian invasion of Georgia in the summer of 2008. Russia's support for the separatist self-proclaimed republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia put several SCO members in a difficult position. Coming off the heels of mass unrest in Tibet in March 2008, China was especially concerned about legitimizing separatism. Furthermore, the SCO issued joint statements that affirmed Tibet to be an unalienable part of China and that the unrest was solely a matter of Chinese internal affairs. Many Central Asian countries have faced similar threats of separatism and aimed to avoid legitimizing breakaway republics. While fear of separatism motivated Central Asia to remain neutral regarding the Russian invasion of Georgia, the SCO as a vehicle for Chinese

---

<sup>77</sup> Margarita Assenova, "Kazakhstan in the Diplomatic Spotlight," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 19, no. 136 (2022), <https://jamestown.org/program/kazakhstan-in-the-diplomatic-spotlight/>.

<sup>78</sup> Paradorn Rangsimaporn, "Southeast Asia in Kazakhstan's Omnidirectional Hedging Strategy," *Problems of Post-Communism* (2021): 3.

backing made neutrality possible.<sup>79</sup> As a result, Frost argued that China significantly improved its standing relative to Russia in Central Asia, solidifying itself as a stable partner committed to non-interference and anti-separatism.

While the SCO may provide Russia with certain benefits, the danger for Moscow is that the growing importance of the organization could potentially undermine the primacy of the CSTO. Frost argues that the SCO risks Russia's long-term position as a power pole in Central Asia.

While the CSTO is an effective tool for military and political integration and coordination between Moscow and the Central Asian states, if the SCO's security and political roles grow in importance it threatens to supersede the CSTO and damage Moscow's integrationist agenda. Potentially the CSTO could become a sort of West European Union, which becomes secondary to NATO and then eventually pales into insignificance, leaving the CSTO as nothing more than a vehicle for training and cheap military hardware. Similarly in a cascading effect, if the SCO security component grows then its importance as a forum for regional political coordination will also grow and the Central Asians will be able to distance themselves further from Moscow's political positions. The effect of the CSTO-SCO co-existence on this Russian goal is therefore negative.<sup>80</sup>

Overall, the SCO is a critical tool for Central Asian states to maintain their multivector foreign policies even as relations between Russia and the West have reached the lowest point since the collapse of the Soviet Union. These deteriorating ties would predict that countries in Russia's orbit would be under increasing pressure to align themselves more strongly with Moscow. Moreover, with the American withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, the United States' influence in Central Asia is low, considering that a great deal of American-Central Asian security cooperation took place under the framework of the war on terror. Considering these factors, the role of the SCO in facilitating Central Asia's neutrality cannot be understated. Finally, Xi Jinping's

---

<sup>79</sup> Frost, "The Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Russia's Strategic Goals in Central Asia."

<sup>80</sup> Frost, "The Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Russia's Strategic Goals in Central Asia," 92.

affirmation of Kazakh territorial integrity showcases China's eagerness to present itself as a stable guarantor of regime security and sovereignty for Central Asian countries.

In contrast to the SCO, the CSTO arose in response to pressing security challenges faced by many post-Soviet countries. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Central Asia faced the threat of Islamic opposition groups, notably in Tajikistan during its civil war. Additionally, many Islamic opposition groups that formed in Central Asia sought haven in neighboring Afghanistan.<sup>81</sup> Beyond the threat of Islamist groups, the Soviet Union's collapse created a novel problem for the nascent Central Asian governments: How should the former Soviet armed forces be managed? More pressingly for Kazakhstan, how should it manage the more than 1400 nuclear warheads left in its territory? These problems surpassed the capabilities of Central Asian states and required significant cooperation, leading to the signing of the Collective Security Treaty in 1992 by Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The following year, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Georgia joined the treaty. The remaining post-Soviet states did not sign onto the CST to either pursue integration with Europe and the West (the Baltic states) or to pursue an official policy of neutrality (Moldova, Turkmenistan, and Ukraine). The CST aimed to establish a mechanism of collective defense through its Article 4, which stated:

In case of aggression commission (armed attack menacing to safety, stability, territorial integrity and sovereignty) to any of the Member States, all the other Member States at request of this Member State shall immediately provide the latter with the necessary help, including military one, as well as provide support by the means at their disposal in accordance with the right to collective defence pursuant to article 51 of the UN Charter.<sup>82</sup>

The CST also aimed to ease tensions between member states, calling on all signatories to "abstain from use of force or threat by force in the interstate relations. They shall undertake to

---

<sup>81</sup> Davidzon, *Regional Security Governance in Post-Soviet Eurasia: The History and Effectiveness of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*.

<sup>82</sup> "Collective Security Treaty".

settle all disagreements among themselves and other states by peaceful means.” These proclamations notwithstanding, Igor Davidzon argues that the CST failed to significantly improve cooperation between its members as it was beset by tensions between Russia and Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.<sup>83</sup> Due to the CST’s ineffectiveness, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan all pulled out of the treaty. The Uzbek president, Islam Karimov, cited the inability of the CST to prevent Islamic fighters from crossing from Tajikistan into Uzbekistan

In 2002, the remaining CST members established the CSTO as a means to “create favorable conditions for cooperation, a stable situation in the region, [...] help the participating countries to solve problems among themselves in a spirit of cooperation, taking into account each other’s interests.”<sup>84</sup> The CSTO Charter aimed to institutionalize several joint forces, including coalition forces that encompassed the entire alliance (Collective Rapid Reaction Forces), and three regional forces based in Central Asia (CRDF), the South Caucasus (JGF-CR), and Belarus and West Russia (JGF-EER). Additionally, the Charter called for the creation of peacekeeping forces, which was later established in October 2007.<sup>85</sup>

The CSTO’s institutional design reflects a tension “between the allies’ desire to preserve their national independence and sovereignty and the interest to maintain security ties.”<sup>86</sup> Indeed, all members besides Russia are wary that Moscow will use the CSTO as a tool to interfere with and constrain their governments’ freedom. This tension is also reflected in the CSTO’s operating principles and control over the collective forces of the organization. Article 5 of the CSTO Charter

---

<sup>83</sup> Davidzon, *Regional Security Governance in Post-Soviet Eurasia: The History and Effectiveness of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*.

<sup>84</sup> Davidzon, *Regional Security Governance in Post-Soviet Eurasia: The History and Effectiveness of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*, 79.

<sup>85</sup> Davidzon, *Regional Security Governance in Post-Soviet Eurasia: The History and Effectiveness of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*.

<sup>86</sup> Davidzon, *Regional Security Governance in Post-Soviet Eurasia: The History and Effectiveness of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*, 102.

provides that “[t]he Organization shall operate on the basis of strict respect of independence, voluntariness of participation, equal rights and duties of the Member States, non-interference into the affairs falling within the national jurisdiction of the Member States.”<sup>87</sup> The CSTO’s built-in sensitivity to smaller members’ concerns about sovereignty extends to the collective forces of the organization. Specifically, Article 11 of the Agreement on the Procedure for the Formation and Functioning of Forces and Means of the Collective Security System of the CSTO provides the following:

Military contingents and formations of special forces, pending a decision on the deployment and use of a coalition and/or regional (combined) grouping of troops, as well as joint military systems, are under national jurisdiction at the points of permanent deployment and remain directly subordinate to the relevant ministries and departments of the Parties, which ensure the necessary degree of their readiness to perform the assigned tasks.<sup>88</sup>

This provision leaves the CSTO forces under national control until a decision is made regarding their deployment. Considering that decisions on the use of CSTO forces must be made by consensus, the collective defense clause in Article 4 can be described as “non-committal”, and thus the decision for members to activate the clause is tied to national interests.<sup>89</sup> This assessment is further supported by the recent unwillingness of many CSTO members to assist fellow member Armenia in its recent flare-up of hostilities with Azerbaijan, who is not a CSTO member. The unwillingness of members like Kazakhstan to deploy CSTO forces was likely tied to its growing

---

<sup>87</sup> "Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization," ed. Collective Security Treaty Organization (2002). [https://en.odkb-](https://en.odkb-csto.org/documents/documents/ustav_organizatsii_dogovora_o_kollektivnoy_bezopasnosti_/#loaded)

[csto.org/documents/documents/ustav\\_organizatsii\\_dogovora\\_o\\_kollektivnoy\\_bezopasnosti\\_/#loaded](https://en.odkb-csto.org/documents/documents/ustav_organizatsii_dogovora_o_kollektivnoy_bezopasnosti_/#loaded).

<sup>88</sup> Davidzon, *Regional Security Governance in Post-Soviet Eurasia: The History and Effectiveness of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*, 104.

<sup>89</sup> Davidzon, *Regional Security Governance in Post-Soviet Eurasia: The History and Effectiveness of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*, 104-05.



economic partnership with Azerbaijan.<sup>90</sup> Overall, the CSTO's institutional structure allowed members to avoid being compelled to pick sides in the Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict.

The structure of the CSTO reflects its members' unwillingness to delegate authority to the centralized body of the organization. States often transfer authority to a centralized authority in an organization through either delegation or pooling.<sup>91</sup> Delegation occurs when states grant authority to an independent body, such as a secretariat, which is granted a degree of agency to carry out its mandate. This design is less common in organizations in which the members' interests are more varied. In contrast, pooling occurs when states are directly involved in a collective decision-making body, such as a council of presidents, which can make binding decisions on members and is often majoritarian in nature.<sup>92</sup> In the case of the CSTO, there is virtually no meaningful delegation of authority to a centralized secretariat. While the organization has a secretariat led by the Secretary-General, this office does not have the authority to either initiate policy or pursue its own agenda. Instead, decisions that are binding can only be made by the Collective Security Council, which includes the heads of government of each member, based on consensus. Therefore, Davidzon concluded that the CSTO is structured with "little to no" delegation or pooling of authority to a centralized body.<sup>93</sup> This reflects the unwillingness of the smaller members to sacrifice their independent foreign policies in order to improve the CSTO's capability to facilitate greater security cooperation.

---

<sup>90</sup> Assem Assaniyaz, "Tokayev, Aliyev Sign Key Agreements to Boost Kazakhstan-Azerbaijan Strategic Cooperation," *The Astana Times* 2022, <https://astanatimes.com/2022/08/tokayev-aliyev-sign-key-agreements-to-boost-kazakhstan-azerbaijan-strategic-cooperation/>.

<sup>91</sup> Davidzon, *Regional Security Governance in Post-Soviet Eurasia: The History and Effectiveness of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*.

<sup>92</sup> Davidzon, *Regional Security Governance in Post-Soviet Eurasia: The History and Effectiveness of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*.

<sup>93</sup> Davidzon, *Regional Security Governance in Post-Soviet Eurasia: The History and Effectiveness of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*, 102.

## Peacekeeping Capabilities and Operations

When the CSTO was first created in 2002, Article 7 of the Charter called for the creation of a unified peacekeeping force. However, this would only begin to be developed by President Putin in 2007, the same year he gave an infamous speech at the Munich Security Conference that marked a hostile turn in Russian-NATO relations.<sup>94</sup> On October 7, 2007, the CSTO established a legal framework to create a peacekeeping force, allowing for the deployment of peacekeeping operations both inside and outside the CSTO members' territory. Putin's primary rationale for developing peacekeeping within the former Soviet Union was to protect ethnic Russians living outside of Russia. Putin first implemented this rationale in his invasion of Georgia in 2008, which was claimed to be a peacekeeping operation.<sup>95</sup> Russia also initially used the label of peacekeeping to justify the invasion of Ukraine when it first announced the operation in February 2022. Both operations were conducted unilaterally by Russia, without the backing of the CSTO, and neither operation was internationally legitimized as a peacekeeping operation. Indeed, Russia's justification of the invasion of Ukraine as peacekeeping was forcefully rejected by the UN Secretary-General António Guterres, who called the invasion a perversion of peacekeeping. Russian peacekeeping operations have also been criticized for failing to align with UN standards. Gaye Christoffersen notes that "Russian peacekeepers do not maintain neutrality, and end up being a party to the conflict. In contrast to traditional UN peacekeeping, Russian peacekeepers rely on heavy artillery, forcefully separating the opposing sides, and forcefully pressuring combatants to come to an agreement."<sup>96</sup>

---

<sup>94</sup> Gaye Christoffersen, "Russian Thinking about CSTO Peacekeeping: Central Asia, China, and the Ukraine War," *The Asian Forum* 2022, <https://theasanforum.org/russian-thinking-about-csto-peacekeeping-central-asia-china-and-the-ukraine-war/>.

<sup>95</sup> Christoffersen, "Russian Thinking about CSTO Peacekeeping: Central Asia, China, and the Ukraine War."

<sup>96</sup> Christoffersen, "Russian Thinking about CSTO Peacekeeping: Central Asia, China, and the Ukraine War."

The only peacekeeping operation officially carried out by the CSTO was its intervention in Kazakhstan in January 2022, responding to President Tokayev's call for CSTO assistance to quell unrest, which he claimed was being instigated by foreign actors. The operation in Kazakhstan lasted only a few days, and the CSTO troops primarily guarded important facilities. Despite many Russian officials proclaiming the success of the mission, Christoffersen characterized the operation as a "careful and well-choreographed performance, rather than genuine peacekeeping."<sup>97</sup> Russia then followed up on its intervention in Kazakhstan with efforts to build UN legitimacy for CSTO peacekeeping. On February 16, Russia organized a debate in the UN Security Council on CSTO peacekeeping cooperation with the UN.

The CSTO's development as a peacekeeping organization appears to be welcomed by the organization's Central Asian members, considering that Kazakhstan's government called for assistance, which was then unanimously approved. The CSTO contingent in Kazakhstan also included troops from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. For Kyrgyzstan, the willingness of Russia to use the CSTO to quell unrest may have gone far to restore trust that Russia would support its own regime, in contrast to Moscow's previous unwillingness to interfere with the Kyrgyz revolutions of 2006 and 2010. The Kazakh President Tokayev also expressed pleasure with the outcome of the peacekeeping operation at an emergency meeting of the CSTO:

The CSTO has demonstrated its relevance and effectiveness as a political and military organization. It is a real working mechanism for ensuring the stability and security of our states. In fact, the events that have taken place have become a turning point in the development of the organization, which has acquired a new quality as a strong international institution.<sup>98</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup> Christoffersen, "Russian Thinking about CSTO Peacekeeping: Central Asia, China, and the Ukraine War."

<sup>98</sup> Assel Satubaldina, "CSTO Peacekeepers Complete Their Mission, Withdraw from Kazakhstan," *The Astana Times* 2022, <https://astanatimes.com/2022/01/csto-peacekeepers-complete-their-mission-withdraw-from-kazakhstan/>.

While the CSTO may have been well placed to continue developing its peacekeeping capabilities and building its legitimacy through cooperation with the UN, Russia's invasion of Ukraine may have permanently precluded its peacekeeping ambitions. Considering that Russia's claim that the invasion of Ukraine was a peacekeeping operation was soundly rejected, any peacekeeping project that includes Russia is unlikely to hold international legitimacy. More importantly, the goal of integrating CSTO peacekeeping into the UN system appears dead. As Christoffersen argued:

Russian style peacekeeping with numerous crimes against Ukrainian civilians called into question Russian concepts of civil-military relations and peacekeeping. Russian PKO [peacekeeping operations] in the post-Soviet states using the CSTO had lost its legitimacy. The sanctions placed on Russia following the Ukraine invasion guaranteed that the CSTO would never be part of the UN PKO system.<sup>99</sup>

If the Central Asian members of the CSTO were pleased with the growing legitimacy and capabilities of the organization's peacekeeping forces, Russia's invasion of Ukraine was an unwelcome event. Indeed, a future CSTO operation like the intervention in Kazakhstan would certainly be perceived differently after Russia's invasion. A hypothetical CSTO peacekeeping operation in a country like Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan would likely garner significant international scrutiny and skepticism. Moreover, such an intervention could ruin the reputation of the regime that benefited from peacekeeping forces. In short, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has completely precluded the possibility of the CSTO developing a legitimate peacekeeping force that is recognized by the UN. Assuming that the primary benefit of an organization like the CSTO to Central Asian states is its capacity to provide regime security, Russia's invasion has significantly reduced the overall utility of the CSTO.

---

<sup>99</sup> Satubaldina, "CSTO Peacekeepers Complete Their Mission, Withdraw from Kazakhstan."

## The CSTO and Counterterrorism

The CSTO has been particularly influential in harmonizing the counterterrorism policies of its Central Asian members, highlighting the important role the organization plays in aligning the internal security policies of its members. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Islamic faith experienced a strong revival, which was also accompanied by the emergence of extremist elements. Terrorist attacks conducted by groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) along with the strategic importance of Central Asia during the “global war on terror” made counterterrorism a particularly salient issue in the region. However, as the threat of terrorism began to emerge in Central Asia, many governments differed in their approach to counterterrorism. While Tajikistan and Uzbekistan proclaimed the dangers of radical Islam and adopted repressive and often violent measures to prevent terrorism, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan had a lower perception of the threat of terrorism and did not enact the strict counterterrorism measures of their neighbors.<sup>100</sup> This changed when Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan began to perceive religious expression as a manifestation of radicalism and adopted measures to repress groups that were labeled as extreme. To explain why Central Asia’s counterterrorism policies converged, Mariya Omelicheva argues that “the magnitude of Islamist violence and the volume of support for radical Islamic groups are insufficient for explaining the Central Asian governments’ perspectives on security threats and their counterterrorism responses.”<sup>101</sup> Instead, she argued that external actors like Russia and the major regional organizations acted as a “reference group” that changed how countries like Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan perceived the threat of terrorism.<sup>102</sup>

---

<sup>100</sup> Mariya Y Omelicheva, *Counterterrorism Policies in Central Asia* (Routledge, 2010), 17.

<sup>101</sup> Omelicheva, *Counterterrorism Policies in Central Asia*, 17.

<sup>102</sup> Omelicheva, *Counterterrorism Policies in Central Asia*, 4.

In Kyrgyzstan, the major barriers to developing a national strategy to counter terrorism were a lack of experience in carrying out counterterrorism operations and a lack of resources. Therefore, Kyrgyzstan relied on treaties and agreements made under organizations like the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the CSTO, and the SCO to develop its own national counterterrorism laws.<sup>103</sup> While Kyrgyzstan received significant direct military aid from Russia, the CSTO provided an important platform for Kyrgyzstani law enforcement and armed forces to conduct joint counterterrorism exercises. Additionally, Russia chose Kyrgyzstan to house rapid-deployment CSTO forces, which Kyrgyz leaders saw as a critical tool to prevent terrorist incursions into Kyrgyzstan.

Similar to Kyrgyzstan, the newly independent Kazakhstan in the early 1990s had neither the legal framework nor the capability to counter terrorism effectively. By the late 1990s, Kazakhstan had begun to implement national laws against terrorism that mostly copied Russian legislation. After 9/11, the United States entered the picture, seeking to enhance ties with Central Asian states to support the war on terror. Kazakhstan's relative importance to the United States increased after the Andijan unrest in Uzbekistan, which led to the collapse of Uzbek-Western relations and caused the US to groom Kazakhstan as its key partner. While Kazakhstan briefly moved towards the West in its relations, several revolutions in post-Soviet states such as Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan caused President Nazarbayev to realign with Russia. As Omelicheva argues, "Moscow assured extensive support in suppressing the opposition, a strategy presented under the guise of counterterrorism. The Nazarbayev government was compelled to re-evaluate its

---

<sup>103</sup> Agreements made under the CIS included the 1999 Treaty on Cooperation between the CIS Members in Combating Terrorism, the Program of CIS Member States to Combat International Terrorism and Other Forms of Extremism up to the Year 2003, the Program to Combat International Terrorism and Other Forms of Extremism for 2005–7; and an important agreement made under the SCO was 2001 Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism. See Omelicheva, *Counterterrorism Policies in Central Asia*, 85.

security partners and change its discourse on terrorism to fit the Kremlin's assessments and interpretations."<sup>104</sup> Owing to its close alignment with Russia, Kazakhstan frequently participated in joint exercises under both the CSTO and SCO.

Overall, Russian-led regional organizations had a significant impact on Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, the two Central Asian countries that originally had the most lenient approach to counterterrorism. While there was a clear imperative for both countries to prioritize their security relationship with Russia, the CIS and the CSTO were critical in harmonizing counterterrorism policies in the region. The CIS provided Central Asian states with a legal framework to institute national counterterrorism laws, and the CSTO harmonized practical approaches to counterterrorism through joint exercises. The CSTO's rapid deployment force was also perceived as an important guarantor of security, especially in poorer countries like Kyrgyzstan, which lacked the resources to effectively safeguard its borders alone.

### **Foreign Policy Priorities of the Central Asian States**

In the following section, I will briefly examine the individual foreign policy strategies and interests of each of the five Central Asian states, focusing on the development of each state's foreign policy priorities, their economic dependencies, and their relations with great powers.

#### ***Turkmenistan***

From the outset of its independence, Turkmenistan chose to adopt an isolationist policy that began with its first President, Saparmurat Niyazov. This isolationism was characterized as "permanent neutrality" and was enshrined by UN General Assembly Resolution 50/80.<sup>105</sup> Owing

---

<sup>104</sup> Omelicheva, *Counterterrorism Policies in Central Asia*, 131.

<sup>105</sup> United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), Permanent Neutrality of Turkmenistan, (1996) UN Doc A/RES/50/80

to its neutrality, Turkmenistan is not a member of any regional security organizations, including the Russian-dominated CSTO, although it sends a high-level representative to the SCO as a guest attendee. Turkmenistan's isolationism also extends to the economic sphere, and unlike other Central Asian states like Kazakhstan, it chose not to liberalize its economy. Turkmenistan was able to adopt its preferred foreign policy strategy largely because of its significant gas resources. However, the Soviet-era pipelines were entirely controlled by the Russian company Gazprom and its status as a landlocked country gave Russia a great deal of control over the Turkmen economy. Russia exercised its influence by reserving the European market for itself, leaving Turkmenistan the much less lucrative markets of Central Asia. Turkmenistan gained significant economic freedom in 2009 when China completed a new pipeline, thus breaking Russian domination over its gas markets.<sup>106</sup>

Turkmenistan, more than any of the other Central Asian states, is characterized by a type of personalistic authoritarianism where the mechanisms of the state and the regime are virtually indistinguishable, and where successive leaders have been bolstered by a cult of personality.<sup>107</sup> This phenomenon is also present in the state's foreign policymaking, where the president exercises total control without a semi-independent foreign ministry. This contrasts sharply with many developed nations that bureaucratized foreign ministries, leading to institutions with different interests from others in an executive branch.<sup>108</sup> Luca Anceschi notes that this structure emerged out of the Soviet context, which utilized "the logic of centralized diplomacy" and did not provide

---

<sup>106</sup> Cooley, "Central Asia's inside-out foreign economic relations."

<sup>107</sup> Luca Anceschi, "Integrating domestic politics and foreign policy making: the cases of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan," *Central Asian Survey* 29, no. 2 (2010).

<sup>108</sup> One example of this can be found in the intense debates within the Bush administration over the decision to invade Iraq in 2003. The US Department of State under Colin Powell lobbied heavily to build international support for the invasion, including from the UN Security Council, but was eventually overruled by other elements of the administration. For a personal account of the inter-departmental debate over the invasion, see: William J Burns, *The Back Channel: A Memoir of American Diplomacy and the Case for Its Renewal* (Random House, 2019).



autonomy to peripheral foreign ministries in Central Asia.<sup>109</sup> The struggle to institutionalize foreign policymaking after independence led both Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to fuse the interests of the regime with foreign policy institutions.

Turkmenistan's regime built significant domestic legitimacy and enjoys certain benefits owing to its neutral and isolationist stance. Charles Sullivan has noted that its stance allows Turkmenistan to maintain its sovereignty in the face of great power contests.<sup>110</sup> By cementing its permanent neutrality through the UN, Turkmenistan has avoided the label of "rogue state" that so many insular authoritarian nations were given. Additionally, Turkmenistan has chosen to not "antagonize a contemporary foreign power to legitimate their claim to rule", and consistently avoids disputes between great powers.<sup>111</sup> For example, Turkmenistan remained absent during the vote on UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/68/262, affirming the territorial integrity of Ukraine.<sup>112</sup> Such a strategy allows Turkmenistan to avoid international pressure to open its economy and to loosen its tight grip on civil society. Considering Turkmenistan's foreign policy of isolationism, the merged nature of state and regime institutions, and the clear benefits for the regime, it should be predicted that Turkmenistan would avoid taking any stance on Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

### ***Kyrgyzstan***

Unlike several other Central Asian states, Kyrgyzstan is not endowed with the natural resources or primary commodities to support highly isolationist policies. Indeed, the first Kyrgyz president, Askar Akayev, quickly took a pro-Russian stance, positioning Moscow as its central

---

<sup>109</sup> Anceschi, "Integrating domestic politics and foreign policy making: the cases of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan."

<sup>110</sup> Charles J Sullivan, "NEUTRALITY IN PERPETUITY: FOREIGN POLICY CONTINUITY IN TURKMENISTAN," *Asian Affairs* 51, no. 4 (2020).

<sup>111</sup> Sullivan, "NEUTRALITY IN PERPETUITY: FOREIGN POLICY CONTINUITY IN TURKMENISTAN," 782.

<sup>112</sup> Sullivan, "NEUTRALITY IN PERPETUITY: FOREIGN POLICY CONTINUITY IN TURKMENISTAN."

security and economic partner. This position was supported by the fact that most Kyrgyz elites had a positive view of past relations with Russia under the USSR.<sup>113</sup> Additionally, during the Soviet period, USSR subsidies amounted to 75% of Kyrgyzstan's budget. After the Soviet Union collapsed, the Russian Federation under Boris Yeltsin continued to provide subsidies.<sup>114</sup> Furthermore, unlike Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan engaged with the international system soon after independence and attempted to depict itself as the most reform-minded Central Asian state, including through participation in an International Monetary Fund stabilization program. This also led Kyrgyzstan to be the first Central Asian country to enter the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1998.<sup>115</sup> Despite its post-independence reforms, Kyrgyzstan faced significant political instability, which culminated in the ousting of two presidents: Akayev in 2005 and Bakiyev in 2010. Today, the Kyrgyz Republic has moved away from its early liberalization, and presidential power has been heavily consolidated since the 2021 election of President Sadyr Japarov.<sup>116</sup> Additionally, external funds likely support authoritarian control in Kyrgyzstan. Alexander Cooley has noted that more than 90% of capital flow into Kyrgyzstan has gone to the government sector, which has solidified its "distribution networks and political control".<sup>117</sup> Kyrgyzstan is also heavily reliant on remittances from labor migrants, mostly working in Russia. In 2021, remittances totaled over \$2.7 billion—\$2.1 billion of which came from Russia—equaling 31.1% of the Kyrgyz gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>118</sup> Additionally, about half of these remittances go to the poorest 20% of

---

<sup>113</sup> Cummings, "A Synthetic Approach to Foreign Security Relations and Policies in Central Asia."

<sup>114</sup> Hiro, *Inside Central Asia: A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran*.

<sup>115</sup> Cooley, "Central Asia's inside-out foreign economic relations."

<sup>116</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the World: Kyrgyzstan* (2022), <https://freedomhouse.org/country/kyrgyzstan/freedom-world/2022>.

<sup>117</sup> Cooley, "Central Asia's inside-out foreign economic relations," 254.

<sup>118</sup> "Personal remittances, received (% of GDP)", ed. World Bank (2022).

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=TJ-KG-UZ-KZ-TM>.

the Kyrgyz people.<sup>119</sup> Without these remittances, economic and social instability would certainly increase, resulting in even more reliance on Russia for security.

Currently, Kyrgyzstan is the poorest Central Asian state with a GDP of \$8.54 billion in 2021, making Kyrgyzstan highly dependent on external support through international financial organizations. To solidify its support from international actors, Kyrgyzstan hosted the military facilities of foreign powers, including a Russian air base in Kant and the Manas Transit Centre, an air base in the north of the country that hosted the US Air Force until 2014. Kyrgyzstan also relies on Russian security guarantees through membership in the CSTO. The CSTO charter provides a security guarantee against external threats; however, in practice, several events have raised questions regarding the organization's reliability to ensure Kyrgyzstan's security. First, on June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010, conflicts broke out between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the south, which escalated swiftly. By June 14<sup>th</sup>, 420 people had been killed and 300,000 were internally displaced.<sup>120</sup> The interim president called for military assistance from Russia; however, the CSTO declined to intervene, citing the unrest as a purely domestic affair. This event raised concerns about whether Russia, acting through the CSTO, was a reliable guarantor of regime security in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>121</sup> More recently in September 2022, Kyrgyzstan and its neighbor Tajikistan clashed over a shared undemarcated border. While the countries have skirmished over their borders in the past, this recent clash was particularly devastating, with Kyrgyz officials claiming 36 deaths and 136,000 internally displaced.<sup>122</sup> Additionally, this clash may have been a case of aggression by Tajikistan,

---

<sup>119</sup> Ayzirek Imanaliyeva, "Kyrgyzstan National Bank predicts 20% decline in remittances," *Eurasianet* 2022, <https://eurasianet.org/kyrgyzstan-national-bank-predicts-20-decline-in-remittances>.

<sup>120</sup> Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, "Populations at Risk: Kyrgyzstan," (2019), <https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/kyrgyzstan/>.

<sup>121</sup> De Haas, "Relations of Central Asia with the Shanghai cooperation organization and the collective security treaty organization."

<sup>122</sup> Aijan Sharshenova, "More than a 'Border Skirmish' Between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan," *The Diplomat*, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/09/more-than-a-border-skirmish-between-kyrgyzstan-and-tajikistan/>.

who Kyrgyzstan claimed committed an act of war. Despite this, the CSTO refused to intervene.<sup>123</sup> Adding to tensions between Kyrgyzstan and the CSTO, in October 2022, Kyrgyzstan canceled joint CSTO military exercises set to take place on Kyrgyz territory.<sup>124</sup>

Considering Kyrgyzstan's particularly weak position in Central Asia, it must prioritize balancing its security relationship with Russia with receiving international aid and cultivating a range of partners. Indeed, if external funds strengthen the capacity of government control, then they are critical to regime survival, in addition to promoting development. These priorities have led to the adoption of a multivector foreign policy in the past, with periods of both cooling and warming towards Russia.<sup>125</sup> Kyrgyzstan's priorities necessarily require a degree of balancing. While Russia remains the primary partner, especially in the security realm, Kyrgyzstan cannot afford to alienate Western countries. These constraints predict that Kyrgyzstan would attempt to avoid taking sides in the Russian-Ukrainian war.

### ***Tajikistan***

Tajikistan faces many of the same challenges as its neighbor Kyrgyzstan, including a lack of natural resources, a history of political instability, and a heavy dependence on foreign aid. Unlike Kyrgyzstan, however, Tajikistan quickly spiraled into a civil war less than a year after its independence from the USSR. The war lasted five years until a peace was brokered by Russia between the president Emomali Rahmon (formerly Rakhmonov) and rebel leader Said Abdullo Nuri. Unlike the cases of unrest in Kyrgyzstan, Russia eventually took a side in the conflict,

---

<sup>123</sup> Asel Doolotkeldieva and Erica Marat, "Why Russia and China Aren't Intervening in Central Asia," *Foreign Policy* 2022 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/10/04/tajikistan-kyrgyzstan-russia-china-intervention-central-asia/>.

<sup>124</sup> "Kyrgyzstan cancels Russian-led military drill on its land," *AP News* 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-asia-kazakhstan-central-tajikistan-8bd4550ca3831c25990165685a92cac6>.

<sup>125</sup> Cummings, "A Synthetic Approach to Foreign Security Relations and Policies in Central Asia."

supporting the Rahmon regime.<sup>126</sup> While there were questions about Rahmon's ability to stay in power after the peace deal, his regime has now heavily consolidated power, abandoning key components of the peace agreement along the way. In contrast to Kyrgyzstan, which has ousted several presidents, Tajikistan's authoritarian regime has proven to be resilient after almost 30 years in power.

As with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan is heavily reliant on external powers to maintain security and is a member of the Russian-led CSTO as well as the SCO. Tajikistan also shares a long border with Afghanistan, which has been a consistent source of insecurity, both from threats of terrorism and from the illegal drug trade. Additionally, the withdrawal of American forces in Afghanistan in September 2021 could potentially heighten these security threats and make Tajikistan even more reliant on Russia for security. Tajikistan also hosts numerous military bases from foreign powers: the Russian 201<sup>st</sup> military base, Russia's largest foreign base; a Chinese outpost near the Afghan border; and two air-force bases, Farkhor and Ayni, jointly run by India. In 2013, Tajikistan agreed to extend Russia's 201<sup>st</sup> base until 2024, and in 2015, Russia drew up plans up to increase the size of the base to hold 9000 troops and to expand its military aid to Tajikistan. However, these plans were rolled back the following year.<sup>127</sup> While threats have undoubtedly arisen from instability in Afghanistan, Marcel de Haas argued that Tajikistan exaggerated the threat of incursions from the Taliban and the Islamic State (ISIS) as a means of attracting cash and weapons from Russia.<sup>128</sup>

---

<sup>126</sup> Ben Partridge, "Tajikistan: Civil War Challenged Russian Policy " *Radio Free Europe* 1999, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1090432.html>.

<sup>127</sup> De Haas, "Relations of Central Asia with the Shanghai cooperation organization and the collective security treaty organization."

<sup>128</sup> De Haas, "Relations of Central Asia with the Shanghai cooperation organization and the collective security treaty organization," 7.

Tajikistan's economic situation also closely compares with that of Kyrgyzstan, having similar reliances on foreign aid and remittances. Tajikistan's remittances as a percentage of GDP have dropped significantly since the early 2010s, and currently, remittances amount to 26.9% of the Tajik GDP. However, Tajikistan has historically relied much more on remittances, accounting for as much as 44.1% of the GDP in 2008.<sup>129</sup> After the 2008 crisis, Russia cut its visa-free program by 50%, leaving many undocumented Central Asians to suffer from exploitation and abuse. According to Cooley, Russia has also shown "signs of using the presence of undocumented workers as an instrument of leverage with the Central Asian states, particularly with Tajikistan."<sup>130</sup>

Considering Tajikistan's similar structural position in Central Asia with Kyrgyzstan, both countries likely share similar goals of maintaining security aid from Russia, while not being drawn into broader competition between Moscow and the West. However, currently it appears that Tajikistan's president, Rahmon, enjoys a closer personal relationship to Russian President Vladimir Putin than does Kyrgyzstan's president, Japarov. This relationship may be bolstered by Rahmon's relatively secure authoritarian regime.<sup>131</sup> Lastly, Tajikistan's closer proximity to Afghanistan may have led the regime to feel greater insecurity. Therefore, Tajikistan can be predicted to avoid overtly angering Moscow while leaving the door open for engagement with alternative partners. Additionally, both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are likely to follow cues from larger regional powers like Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, as well as great powers like China.

---

<sup>129</sup> "Personal remittances, received (% of GDP) ".

<sup>130</sup> Cooley, "Central Asia's inside-out foreign economic relations," 246.

<sup>131</sup> Marat, "Why Russia and China Aren't Intervening in Central Asia."

## *Uzbekistan*

During its time as a Soviet Republic, Uzbekistan was considered to be the regional leader in Central Asia, due in part to the Soviet-era conception that Kazakhstan was not part of Central Asia.<sup>132</sup> Following its independence, Uzbekistan took a different path from many other Central Asian states under its first president, Islam Karimov. Rather than centering relations with Russia in its foreign policy, Karimov's Uzbekistan stoked popular discontent against Moscow's past exploitation.<sup>133</sup> This policy helped to serve Uzbekistan's desire for autonomy,<sup>134</sup> but it also served to reduce the ethnic tensions that were brewing between the Uzbeks and Tajiks.<sup>135</sup>

Uzbekistan has also had a tumultuous relationship with Russian-led security agreements, having entered and left twice. In 1992, Uzbekistan first signed the CST along with nine post-Soviet states. However, in 1999 following a series of bomb explosions in Tashkent, Uzbekistan left the CST after the alliance deemed the apparent terror attack to be a purely domestic affair and did not provide support.<sup>136</sup> Furthermore, Karimov cited the ineffectiveness of the CST in preventing Islamists from infiltrating Uzbekistan through Tajikistan, and he also suspected that Tajikistan itself had encouraged terrorists to enter Uzbekistan.<sup>137</sup> Leaving the CST also gave Karimov the room to develop close security ties with the US, especially during the administration of George W. Bush. Developing a close relationship with the US during its invasion of Afghanistan served the Uzbek regime's goal of quelling its own domestic Islamist movement. Bush's discourse on the

---

<sup>132</sup> Cummings, "A Synthetic Approach to Foreign Security Relations and Policies in Central Asia."

<sup>133</sup> Hiro, *Inside Central Asia: A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran*.

<sup>134</sup> Cummings, "A Synthetic Approach to Foreign Security Relations and Policies in Central Asia."

<sup>135</sup> Hiro, *Inside Central Asia: A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran*.

<sup>136</sup> Hiro, *Inside Central Asia: A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran*.

<sup>137</sup> Davidzon, *Regional Security Governance in Post-Soviet Eurasia: The History and Effectiveness of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*.

war on terror as a conflict between civilization and barbarity mirrored Karimov's own rhetoric on Islamists in Uzbekistan and gave a green light to repress political Islam in the country.<sup>138</sup> Uzbekistan's cooperation with the US' war on terror extended as far as supporting the CIA's extraordinary rendition program that shipped suspected terrorists through Uzbek territory on route to black sites.<sup>139</sup> Uzbekistan's relationship with the US soured in 2005, however, after American and European officials criticized the harsh repression of unrest in the Andijan region. This led to Uzbekistan returning to the Russian sphere and rejoining the CSTO in 2006. Again, Uzbekistan left the CSTO in 2012, citing its opposition to foreign troops on Uzbek soil. Currently, Uzbekistan continues to balance ties with all great powers, and maintains its membership in the SCO. Tashkent has also tried to avoid many of the anti-Western sentiments that are popular with many members of the SCO.<sup>140</sup>

Similar to Turkmenistan, power over Uzbekistan's foreign policy has historically been highly concentrated on the president. Soon after independence, Uzbekistan's regime approved a constitution that afforded "the office of the president virtually unlimited powers in relation to foreign policymaking."<sup>141</sup> This power allowed the Uzbek presidency to merge the regime and foreign policy institutions by recruiting foreign policy professionals on the basis of loyalty to the regime. Additionally, Anceschi argues that personnel shortages of trained foreign policy

---

<sup>138</sup> Hiro, *Inside Central Asia: A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran*.

<sup>139</sup> Amrit Singh, *Globalizing Torture: CIA Secret Detention and Extraordinary Rendition* (Open Society Foundation, 2013), <https://www.justiceinitiative.org/uploads/655bbd41-082b-4df3-940c-18a3bd9ed956/globalizing-torture-20120205.pdf>.

<sup>140</sup> Fozil Mashrab, "Uzbekistan Grapples With the Specter of Anti-Western Tropes in SCO," *Eurasia Daily Monitor: Jamestown Foundation* 19, no. 125 (2022), <https://jamestown.org/program/uzbekistan-grapples-with-the-specter-of-anti-western-tropes-in-sco/>.

<sup>141</sup> Anceschi, "Integrating domestic politics and foreign policy making: the cases of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan."



professionals in both Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan helped to facilitate the emergence of a diplomatic corps that accepted the interests and goals of the regime.<sup>142</sup>

Being the second largest economy in Central Asia, Uzbekistan is supported by moderate wealth from minerals and the largest population in the region, with more than 31 million inhabitants.<sup>143</sup> In contrast to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan maintained tight restrictions over its economy and limited the extent of reform in areas like privatization and financial liberalization.<sup>144</sup> Additionally, the country has maintained strict public control over cotton, one of its key exports. Only after expanding trade with Russia, China, the US, and Turkey in the late 2000s did Uzbekistan experience consistent GDP growth. Overall, Uzbekistan has attempted to diversify its partners and promote self-reliance as a means to maintain independence and regime security.<sup>145</sup>

Uzbekistan fears the threat of separatism in the autonomous region of Karakalpakstan, which has a constitutional right to secede. The region is quite ethnically diverse with a large population of Karakalpaks, who have linguistic and cultural similarities with Kazakhs.<sup>146</sup> In 2022, current president Shavkat Mirziyoyev announced plans to remove Karakalpakstan's autonomous status and its right to secede, which triggered mass protests and a resulting government crackdown, leading to 18 dead and 243 wounded. The harsh response notwithstanding, Mirziyoyev dropped the plans to abolish Karakalpakstan's autonomy.

---

<sup>142</sup> Aneschi, "Integrating domestic politics and foreign policy making: the cases of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan," 146.

<sup>143</sup> Cummings, "A Synthetic Approach to Foreign Security Relations and Policies in Central Asia."

<sup>144</sup> Cooley, "Central Asia's inside-out foreign economic relations."

<sup>145</sup> Paradorn Rangsimaporn, "Uzbekistan and Southeast Asia: Exploring the Opportunities for Strengthening Relations," *Silk Road: A Journal of Eurasia Development* 3, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.16997/srjed.1274>.

<sup>146</sup> Patrick Jackson & Simon Fraser, "Uzbekistan Karakalpakstan: At least 18 killed in unrest over right to secede," *BBC* 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-62032801>.

Uzbekistan's relative economic prosperity, demographic advantage, and military strength provides the country with more flexibility and less reliance on Russia than Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. For decades, Uzbekistan has balanced its relationship between Russia and the West. This strategy has existed since the start of Uzbekistan's independence, as Tashkent has always been wary of taking part in Moscow's attempts to integrate Central Asia into Russian-dominated multilateral organizations.<sup>147</sup> There are no signs that this approach will change in the near future, even as US-Russian relations deteriorated in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. An interesting facet of Uzbekistan's interest in relation to Russian efforts in Ukraine lies in the autonomous region of Karakalpakstan. Russia has repeatedly justified its intervention in Ukraine on the basis of supporting the Russian-speaking population and is actively supporting separatist movements in Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova. This sets a complicated precedent for Uzbekistan, which would doubtless wish to avoid legitimating separatism in a region populated by an ethnic minority. These considerations would predict that Uzbekistan will also seek to balance between Russia and the West, while possibly pushing back against Russian attempts to annex the Russian-speaking regions of Ukraine.

### ***Kazakhstan***

Of all the Central Asian states, Kazakhstan is the most well-known for its pursuit of a multivector foreign policy, making direct use of the term in its foreign policy concept for 2020-2030.<sup>148</sup> This policy has been defined by Paradorn Rangsimaporn as seeking to "maintain good relations with all the major powers, especially its powerful neighbors—Russia and China. Good

---

<sup>147</sup> Anceschi, "Integrating domestic politics and foreign policy making: the cases of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan," 149.

<sup>148</sup> "Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan," *Office of the President of Kazakhstan* 2020 [https://www.akorda.kz/en/legal\\_acts/decrees/on-the-concept-of-the-foreign-policy-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-for-2020-2030](https://www.akorda.kz/en/legal_acts/decrees/on-the-concept-of-the-foreign-policy-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-for-2020-2030).

relations with other major players such as the US, the EU [...] are also important to provide greater balance and strategic space in its foreign relations.”<sup>149</sup> However, other commentators see Kazakhstan as unofficially backing Russia.<sup>150</sup> The former President Nursultan Nazarbayev also centered relations with Russia when he claimed that Kazakhstan is the “closest and most reliable neighbor of the Russian Federation.”<sup>151</sup> Kazakhstan is a member of both the CSTO and the SCO, and, as discussed earlier, President Tokayev relied on CSTO peacekeeping troops to suppress mass unrest against the regime in early 2022.<sup>152</sup>

Despite the apparent ties between itself and Russia, Kazakhstan has perceived several threats arising from Russian dominance of Central Asia, leading it to pursue ties with China and other powers. First, Kazakhstan is the only Central Asian state that shares a border with Russia, and there is a large ethnic Russian population living in the northern region of Kazakhstan.<sup>153</sup> Adding to this, Russian commentators and lawmakers have questioned Kazakhstan’s sovereignty as a nation independent of Russia. Most strikingly, former Russian President and Prime Minister, Dmitry Medvedev, questioned Kazakhstan’s status as an independent nation in a social media post that was soon deleted (Medvedev later blamed the post on hackers). In the post, Medvedev called Kazakhstan an “artificial state” and alluded to a potential genocide of ethnic Russians.<sup>154</sup> Such discourse is doubtless a cause of concern for Kazakhstan, especially because similar themes have been frequently used to justify Russian interventions in Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova.

---

<sup>149</sup> Rangsimaporn, "Southeast Asia in Kazakhstan’s Omnidirectional Hedging Strategy," 3.

<sup>150</sup> Cummings, "A Synthetic Approach to Foreign Security Relations and Policies in Central Asia."

<sup>151</sup> Malika Rustem, "Putin’s State Visit Reconfirms Kazakh-Russian Strategic Partnership," *The Astana Times* 2015, <https://astanatimes.com/2015/10/putins-state-visit-reconfirms-kazakh-russian-strategic-partnership/>.

<sup>152</sup> Joshua Kucera, "CSTO agrees to intervene in Kazakhstan unrest," *Eurasianet* 2022, <https://eurasianet.org/csto-agrees-to-intervene-in-kazakhstan-unrest>.

<sup>153</sup> Lyailya Nurgaliyeva, "Kazakhstan's economic soft balancing policy vis-à-vis Russia: From the Eurasian Union to the economic cooperation with Turkey," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 7, no. 1 (2016).

<sup>154</sup>

Kazakhstan also made significant efforts to reduce its economic dependency on Russia during the post-Soviet period. As a landlocked nation, Kazakhstan was initially dependent on Russia to export its significant oil resources, a fact that Moscow took advantage of in order to leverage prices and supply volumes from Kazakhstan.<sup>155</sup> This led Kazakhstan to bypass Russian routes through the Kazakhstan-China and Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) pipelines, significantly increasing Kazakhstan’s economic independence and lessening Moscow’s leverage. Today, Kazakhstan is the largest economy in Central Asia owing to its natural resources and early economic reforms. Of all Central Asian states, Kazakhstan most aggressively pursued privatization and financial liberalization.<sup>156</sup> These efforts have contributed to the relatively high living standards of Kazakhs compared to the rest of the region. With a GDP per capita of \$10,042 in 2021, Kazakhstan is economically closer to Russia than the rest of the region.

With a foreign policy that claims to promote friendly relations with all countries, Kazakhstan’s active multivector foreign policy may become increasingly difficult to balance as competition between Russia and the West becomes more hostile. In recent decades, China has established itself as the primary economic partner of Central Asian states, and Kazakhstan has emerged as a key partner in China’s Belt and Road Initiative. In some ways, this situation in Central Asia mirrors what John Ikenberry described as a “dual hierarchy” that has emerged in East Asia in the context of increasing US-China competition.<sup>157</sup> This dual hierarchy is marked by the US’s enduring dominance in the security realm, while China has established itself as the “economic center” of Asia with an advantage in trade and investment.<sup>158</sup> Therefore, middle powers

---

<sup>155</sup> Nurgaliyeva, "Kazakhstan's economic soft balancing policy vis-à-vis Russia: From the Eurasian Union to the economic cooperation with Turkey."

<sup>156</sup> Cooley, "Central Asia’s inside-out foreign economic relations."

<sup>157</sup> G John Ikenberry, "Between the eagle and the dragon: America, China, and middle state strategies in East Asia," *Political Science Quarterly* 131, no. 1 (2016).

<sup>158</sup> Ikenberry, "Between the eagle and the dragon: America, China, and middle state strategies in East Asia," 10.

in East and Southeast Asia have a strong incentive to sustain this dual hierarchy, which means that these states avoid choosing sides, as this would result in the loss of either security or economic benefits. This situation is not entirely paralleled in Central Asia because Russia (the primary security partner) and China (the primary economic partner) are not engaging in the same level of “comprehensive competition” that marks contemporary US-China relations.<sup>159</sup> However, the fact that several great powers offer a variety of benefits provides a strong incentive for Central Asian states to maximize their gains and not alienate any major powers.

The incentive to balance relations between Russia and other partners likely applies most strongly to Kazakhstan, since its wealth and resources can better support an independent foreign policy. Kazakhstan has also openly pursued as many partnerships as possible, compared with the more insular Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. For example, Kazakhstan under former President Nursultan was the only Central Asian state to seriously pursue greater ties with Southeast Asian states.<sup>160</sup> Therefore, Kazakhstan may have the strongest interest in avoiding picking a side between Russia and the West. This suggests that Kazakhstan will continue to hedge between Russia and the West. Furthermore, Kazakhstan has the greatest threat of future invasion by Russia, due to the large proportion of Russian-speakers in its northern territories. This likely means that Kazakhstan will push back strongly against Russian attempts to annex Ukrainian territories on the basis that they are populated by ethnic Russians.

---

<sup>159</sup> See: David Shambaugh, *Where Great Powers Meet: America and China in Southeast Asia* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2020).

<sup>160</sup> Rangsimaporn, "Southeast Asia in Kazakhstan's Omnidirectional Hedging Strategy."

## **Case Study**

The following case study provides an overview of the responses of Central Asian countries to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This case study focuses on three areas: the response of Central Asia through the CSTO, votes in UN General Assembly Resolutions relating to Russia's invasion, and other political/symbolic actions and discourse. Regarding the CSTO, particular attention will be paid to any demands that Russia made of Central Asia through the CSTO and any joint statements made by the organization, which would have needed approval from Central Asian governments before being issued. The section on UN voting patterns examines three resolutions approved in the 11<sup>th</sup> Emergency Session of the United Nations General Assembly: A/RES/ES11/1, A/RES/ES11/2, and A/RES/ES11/3. Additionally, I will compare votes on these resolutions to how Central Asian countries voted on A/RES/68/262, which affirmed the territorial integrity of Ukraine and condemned the Russian annexation of Crimea following a sham referendum. Then, I will examine Central Asia's responses to Russia's political goals regarding Ukraine, particularly Russia's attempted annexation of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson oblasts. Finally, I will examine public opinion polls in Central Asia. While reliable public opinion polling is rare in Central Asia, there are also important indicators of how the public in Central Asia views Russia's invasion, including public demonstrations.

### **CSTO Summits and Statements**

On May 16, 2022, the leaders of the CSTO met at a summit held in Moscow, which was scheduled to coincide with the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CST's signing and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CSTO's establishment. Of the six leaders in attendance, only the Russian and Belarusian presidents mentioned the "special military operation" in Ukraine. Belarusian President Alexander

Lukashenko urged his counterparts to present a united front, claiming that a joint CSTO response would have prevented Western sanctions.<sup>161</sup> In contrast to Lukashenko's speech, Kazakh President Tokayev praised the growing peacekeeping capacity of the CSTO and urged the organization to focus on integrating these capacities into the UN. Ignoring the war in Ukraine, Tokayev drew attention to typical Central Asian security threats like terrorism, drug and weapon trafficking, illegal migration, and the tenuous situation in Afghanistan.<sup>162</sup>

Following the summit, the six leaders issued a joint statement that conspicuously left out the situation in Ukraine. Instead, the statement listed many of the same issues highlighted by Tokayev, although it included several implied criticisms of the West: First, the statement criticized the selection application of norms and an unwillingness to take into account "sovereign states' legitimate interests."<sup>163</sup> While this section did not explicitly name actors like the US or NATO, it mirrored several criticisms that Russia has made, particularly in UN debates, against the West. Ironically, the statement also condemned "the tendency to intervene by force in crisis situations in circumvention of universally recognized international legal norms and principles and to use or threaten to use force to resolve conflicts in violation of the United Nations Charter."<sup>164</sup> Most interestingly, however, was the claim that "the Organization is firmly convinced that there is no

---

<sup>161</sup> "Russia's war in Ukraine discussed 'behind closed doors' at CSTO summit in Moscow," *Meduza* 2022, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2022/05/16/russia-s-war-in-ukraine-discussed-behind-closed-doors-at-csto-summit-in-moscow>.

<sup>162</sup> "Speech by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev ", *Collective Security Treaty Organization* 2022, [https://en.odkb-csto.org/news/news\\_odkb/v-moskve-16-maya-proydet-vstrecha-glav-gosudarstv-chlenov-odkb-posvyashchennaya-30-letiyu-podpisaniya/#loaded](https://en.odkb-csto.org/news/news_odkb/v-moskve-16-maya-proydet-vstrecha-glav-gosudarstv-chlenov-odkb-posvyashchennaya-30-letiyu-podpisaniya/#loaded).

<sup>163</sup> "Statement of the Collective Security Council of the Collective Security Treaty Organization on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Collective Security Treaty and the 20th anniversary of the Collective Security Treaty Organization," *The Kremlin* (2022), <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/5800>.

<sup>164</sup> "Statement of the Collective Security Council of the Collective Security Treaty Organization on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Collective Security Treaty and the 20th anniversary of the Collective Security Treaty Organization."

alternative to solving existing international problems by political and diplomatic means.”<sup>165</sup> Overall, these arguments align with Russia’s criticism of the West as hypocritical, exhibiting double standards, and selectively using international norms only when they suit them. However, the decision to not explicitly name the US or NATO as the target of these accusations is undoubtedly due to a veto of some or all Central Asian states. The speech from Lukashenko during the May 2022 summit—not to mention the countless speeches from Vladimir Putin— shows that Russian and Belarusian leaders have no qualms about naming the West explicitly. Only the Central Asian governments wish to avoid Western sanctions and retain the possibility of furthering ties with the West. Moreover, the norms elucidated in the statement, such as the prohibition on the use of force, serve the Central Asian governments’ aim to guard their sovereignty without explicitly bandwagoning on Russia’s geopolitical goals.

### **Votes in UN Bodies**

In response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) convened its eleventh emergency session, which adopted four resolutions over the course of 2022. The first resolution (ES-11/1) condemned the Russian invasion, called for the full and unconditional withdrawal of Russian troops and reaffirmed Ukraine’s territorial integrity.<sup>166</sup> The second resolution condemned Russian attacks on civilian populations and pressed Russia to protect humanitarian workers and journalists. Both ES-11/1 and ES-11/2 passed overwhelmingly; however, no Central Asian state took a position on these resolutions, with all five states abstaining or being absent from the vote. In April 2022, the UNGA adopted a new resolution that suspended

---

<sup>165</sup> "Statement of the Collective Security Council of the Collective Security Treaty Organization on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Collective Security Treaty and the 20th anniversary of the Collective Security Treaty Organization."

<sup>166</sup> "General Assembly resolution demands end to Russian offensive in Ukraine ", *UN News* 2022  
<https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1113152>.



Russia from the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in response to human rights violations in Ukraine. While this resolution passed by a large margin—93 in favor and 24 against—it was more controversial in that it took tangible steps beyond a condemnation against Russia in response to human rights abuses. Russia’s suspension was only the second case in which UNGA suspended a member of the UNHRC. The first case was Libya’s removal from the human rights body in 2011, in a vote taken by consensus. While Central Asian countries did not raise objections against Libya’s removal, ES-11/3 was a step too far for most of Central Asia, where all states except Turkmenistan voted against the resolution. Lastly, in October 2022, the UNGA emergency session reconvened and adopted ES-11/4 in response to Russia’s annexation of four Ukrainian oblasts: Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia. This resolution was adopted by the largest margin of the four resolutions and called on Russia to reverse its claims of Ukrainian territory and for all other states to reject the annexation. As with the first two resolutions, no Central Asian state took a position on the vote, either abstaining or being absent.

Overall, Central Asia’s voting behavior in the General Assembly showcased the region’s unwillingness to anger Russia through outright condemnation. The votes have been presented by some as evidence of the region’s close ties with Russia.<sup>167</sup> More surprisingly though, despite Central Asia’s high economic and/or military dependency on Russia, no country in the region has explicitly backed Moscow through the UN. It is also important to note that except for Turkmenistan, all Central Asian countries mirrored China, which abstained from the first, second, and fourth resolutions, and a vote against the third. This further underscores the cautious approach

---

<sup>167</sup> Shannon Tiezzi, "How Did Asian Countries Vote on the UN’s Ukraine Resolution? ," *The Diplomat* 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/03/how-did-asian-countries-vote-on-the-uns-ukraine-resolution/>.

that the region’s states are taking, preferring to follow the lead of a powerful neighbor who has also tread cautiously in the wake of Russia’s invasion.

Lastly, Central Asia’s neutral stance regarding Russia’s aggression towards Ukraine is not a new development. In March 2014, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution that condemned Russia’s annexation of Crimea and affirmed Ukraine’s territorial integrity. While Russia received support from fellow CSTO members, Armenia and Belarus, all Central Asian states were either absent or abstained from that vote. As discussed in the previous section, many Central Asian governments are particularly concerned about domestic separatist movements and are careful to avoid legitimizing similar movements abroad. As with the Russian invasion of Georgia, Central Asia is able to present a unified position of neutrality that is backed by a similar position from China. It is notable that Central Asian countries quite closely mirrored China’s positions in the General Assembly, which likely helped prevent Russia from singling out any specific Central Asian country for failing to support the Russian position. A summary of China and Central Asia’s votes on Ukraine-related UNGA resolutions can be found in the table below.

<b>Country</b>	<b>ES-11/1</b>	<b>ES-11/2</b>	<b>ES-11/3</b>	<b>ES-11/4</b>	<b>68/262</b>
<b>China</b>	Abstain	Abstain	Against	Abstain	Abstain
<b>Kazakhstan</b>	Abstain	Abstain	Against	Abstain	Abstain
<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	Abstain	Abstain	Against	Abstain	Absent
<b>Tajikistan</b>	Abstain	Abstain	Against	Abstain	Absent
<b>Turkmenistan</b>	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	Absent	Abstain	Against	Abstain	Abstain

Table 1: Comparison of China and Central Asian countries’ votes on UNGA resolutions relating to Ukraine.

## Symbolic/Political Actions

Central to Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a broader foreign policy that aimed to maintain a sphere of influence in the former Soviet Union. This foreign policy clearly relies on military and economic influence and power but is also accompanied by symbolic and ideological foundations. With this in mind, it is critical to assess the symbolic actions taken by Central Asian states, as these can be crucial indicators of the region's attitudes towards the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

In April 2022, Kazakhstan announced that it would not participate in the annual Victory Day Parade, set to take place on May 9. The event became a major event in Russia under President Putin, and Central Asian nations traditionally held their own smaller celebrations. In recent years, Putin has also used Victory Day celebrations to legitimize aggressive foreign policies and frame these policies as anti-Nazi efforts. As the Victory Day celebrations have become more politicized, fewer foreign leaders took part in the celebrations in Moscow, to the point that in 2021, only Tajik President Rahmon attended the parade in Moscow, and no Central Asian leader attended in 2022. In this context, Kazakhstan's announcement to cancel celebrations on May 9 was considered by many to be an implicit denunciation of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The government's decision contained only a brief explanation, saying that the cancellation was due to budgetary reasons. Beyond the parade, Kazakhstan also cancelled marches from the "Immortal Regiment" in several regions. The Immortal Regiment consists of a series of marches that commemorate war veterans and have traditionally taken place in Russia and cities worldwide.<sup>168</sup> Parades were also quietly cancelled in other Central Asian countries, although marches from the Immortal Regiment, often sponsored by Russian embassies, were allowed in the rest of the region. While it allowed the

---

<sup>168</sup> Zhar Zardykhan, "Central Asia celebrated Victory Day amid Russian pressure," *Global Voices* 2022, <https://globalvoices.org/2022/06/02/central-asia-celebrates-victory-day-amid-russian-pressure/>.

marches, Kyrgyzstan banned participants from displaying the “Z” symbol.<sup>169</sup> Tajikistan was the only Central Asian country that held both a parade and Immortal Regiment marches.

Kazakhstan’s public cancellation of its parade drew heavy criticism from Russian government officials. Nikolai Novichkov, a member of the Russian State Duma, demanded that the Kazakh authorities explain their decision and called on the Russian authorities to pressure Kazakhstan on the issue.<sup>170</sup> In another case, Tigran Keosayan, the Editor-in-Chief of Russian Television, labeled Kazakhstan as “ungrateful” and “sly” for the cancelation of the May 9<sup>th</sup> parade and said “Kazakhs, what kind of ingratitude do you call this? [...] Look carefully at what is happening in Ukraine [...] If you think that you can get away with trying to be so cunning, and imagine that nothing will happen to you, you are mistaken.”<sup>171</sup> This statement was taken as a threat by Kazakhstan’s Foreign Ministry, and Keosayan was subsequently banned from the country. It is interesting that while other Central Asian nations, such as Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, also canceled their May 9th parades, it appeared that Kazakhstan’s cancelation drew the most public criticism from Russia. This indicates that Russian officials may have paid more attention to Kazakhstan than to the other countries in the region. Possible reasons for this include Kazakhstan’s proximity to Russia, its relatively high economic development in Central Asia, its large Russian-speaking minority, or a combination of these factors.

### **Response to Russia’s Political Aims in Ukraine**

A critical aspect of Russia’s invasion is the Kremlin’s political aim to return Ukraine into its own sphere of influence and disconnect Ukraine from further integration with the West. The

---

<sup>169</sup> "Kyrgyzstan Bans 'Z' Symbol Victory Day Celebrations On May 9 ", *Radio Free Europe* 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-bans-z-symbol/31816191.html>.

<sup>170</sup> Kanat Altynbayev, "Kazakhstan's scrapping of Victory Day parade highlights strained Russian ties," *Caravanserai* 2022, [https://central.asia-news.com/en\\_GB/articles/cnmi\\_ca/features/2022/04/28/feature-01](https://central.asia-news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_ca/features/2022/04/28/feature-01).

<sup>171</sup> Christoffersen, "Russian Thinking about CSTO Peacekeeping: Central Asia, China, and the Ukraine War."

Kremlin's strategy has been applied to other countries, although Ukraine appears to have particular importance to Putin as part of a pseudo-historical unity between the Russian and Ukrainian peoples.<sup>172</sup> Putin has gone as far as to say that "modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia or, to be more precise, by Bolshevik, Communist Russia. This process started practically right after the 1917 revolution, and Lenin and his associates did it in a way that was extremely harsh on Russia – by separating, severing what is historically Russian land."<sup>173</sup> Furthermore, a major justification by Putin for the invasion was an effort to protect Russian speakers in the territories of eastern Ukraine. It was in this context that Putin recognized two separatist governments in eastern Ukraine: the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic.<sup>174</sup> This action mirrored Putin's recognition of breakaway regions in Georgia in 2008, and recognition has served as a pretext for Russia to escalate conflicts with countries like Georgia and Ukraine to prevent them from integrating with Western organizations like NATO or the EU. On September 30, 2022, Russia announced the annexation of Donetsk and Luhansk, as well as Zaporizhzhia and Kherson oblasts. Considering the political importance of the Kremlin's recognition and later annexation of Ukrainian regions, it is important to analyze Central Asia's response to these actions.

In the initial months following the invasion, only Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan openly commented on the recognition of Donetsk and Luhansk, with both countries declining to recognize them and affirming the territorial integrity of Ukraine.<sup>175</sup> Kazakh President Tokayev commented

---

<sup>172</sup> This view was on display in Putin's publicized speech titled where he claimed that Russians and Ukrainians are "one people". See: "Article by Vladimir Putin "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians"," *Boris Yeltsin Presidential Library* 2022, <https://www.prlib.ru/en/article-vladimir-putin-historical-unity-russians-and-ukrainians>.

<sup>173</sup> "Address by The President of The Russian Federation," *The Kremlin* (2022), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>.

<sup>174</sup> "Putin recognises independence of Ukraine breakaway regions," *Al Jazeera* 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/21/russia-to-recognise-ukraine-breakaway-region-kremlin-confirms>.

<sup>175</sup> Paul Stronski, "The Common Theme in Central Asia's Response to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/03/30/common-theme-in-central-asia-s-response-to-russia-s-invasion-of-ukraine-pub-86764>.

on the situation in Ukraine "We respect its territorial integrity—as the overwhelming majority of the world does".<sup>176</sup> Another Kazakh official commented:

Of course, Russia wanted us to be more on their side. But Kazakhstan respects the territorial integrity of Ukraine. We did not recognize and will not recognize the Crimea situation and neither the Donbas situation because the UN does not recognize them. We will only respect decisions taken at the level of the United Nations.<sup>177</sup>

Taking a similar position to that of Kazakh officials, the Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Komilov commented that, "The Republic of Uzbekistan recognizes Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. We do not recognize the Luhansk and Donetsk republics".<sup>178</sup> Kyrgyzstan was more indirect in addressing the breakaway regions. The Kyrgyz Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ruslan Kazakbaev, maintained the country's commitment to the UN Charter and the principle of territorial integrity, although he confirmed that the Kyrgyz Republic was not taking a side in the war.<sup>179</sup>

Tajikistan, in contrast, refrained from affirming Ukraine's territorial integrity and remained relatively silent on the conflict. Putin appeared to award Tajikistan's silence by awarding the Tajik President with an award called the Order of Merit for the Fatherland. This action was particularly notable in the context of an ongoing border conflict between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which escalated in September 2022. The border clashes resulted in nearly 100 deaths and displaced some 137,000 Kyrgyz people in the Batken region.<sup>180</sup> While Russia did not officially take a side in the

---

<sup>176</sup> "President Says Kazakhstan 'Respects' Ukraine's Territorial Integrity ", *Radio Free Europe* 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-toqaev-respect-ukraine-integrity/31789173.html>.

<sup>177</sup> Cathernie Putz, "Russian Ambassador to Kazakhstan Says US-NATO Steppe Eagle Exercise Will 'No Longer Fly' " *The Diplomat* 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/02/russian-ambassador-to-kazakhstan-says-us-nato-steppe-eagle-exercise-will-no-longer-fly/>.

<sup>178</sup> "In Break With Moscow, Uzbeks Won't Recognize Separatist 'Republics' In Ukraine ", *Radio Free Europe* 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbekistan-ukraine-separatists-not-recognized/31757881.html>.

<sup>179</sup> "В связи с конфликтом в Украине КР заявила о приверженности принципу территориальной целостности государств," *Radio Azattyk* 2022, <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/31766132.html>.

<sup>180</sup> Alys Davies, "Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border clashes claim nearly 100 lives," *BBC* 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-62950787>.

conflict, the timing of the award given to President Rahmon appeared to signal Russia's favor toward Tajikistan over Kyrgyzstan. Russian-Tajik relations took a dramatic turn, however, in late October 2022, when a speech by President Rahmon aimed at Putin during a Commonwealth of Independent States summit became highly publicized. In the speech, Rahmon criticized Russia for failing to pay sufficient attention or respect to smaller Central Asian countries and lamented the fact that Russia preferred to engage with Tajikistan through multilateral groupings rather than bilaterally. Rahmon called on Putin to not treat Tajikistan as if it was still part of the Soviet Union.<sup>181</sup> While Rahmon's direct and publicized criticism of Putin was an unexpected development, it did not appear to be intended as a rebuke of Russia's invasion, but rather as an attempt to leverage Tajikistan's relative favor with Russia and push for greater Russian investments.

### **Domestic Responses**

Within weeks of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a rally of more than 2000 people gathered in Almaty, Kazakhstan's largest city. Protesters demonstrated for peace, played the Ukrainian national anthem, and chanted anti-Putin insults.<sup>182</sup> News sources even reported on ethnic Russian citizens of Kazakhstan joining the pro-Ukrainian protests, with several protesters expressing fear that Kazakhstan would be the next country that Russia would target. One sign held by a protester read, "Yesterday Georgia, today Ukraine, tomorrow Kazakhstan?"<sup>183</sup> Such a protest is notable as

---

<sup>181</sup> Bethany Dawson, "Putin forced to endure a 7-minute rant from a close ally who appeared to rebuke the Russian leader and demanded he shows respect," *Business Insider* 2022, <https://www.businessinsider.com/putin-endures-long-rant-close-ally-complaining-lack-of-respect-2022-10>.

<sup>182</sup> One news source estimated the crowd to be more than 2000, while another estimated around 3000. "Russia ally Kazakhstan permits large pro-Ukraine rally amid sanctions fears," *France24* 2022 <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220306-russia-ally-kazakhstan-permits-large-pro-ukraine-rally-amid-sanctions-fears>. Ayzirek Imanaliyeva Joanna Lillis, "Ukraine war inspires rival passions in Central Asia," *Eurasianet* 2022, <https://eurasianet.org/ukraine-war-inspires-rival-passions-in-central-asia>.

<sup>183</sup> Joanna Lillis, "Ukraine war inspires rival passions in Central Asia."

an indication of popular suspicion and fear towards Russia, but it is also notable because in authoritarian Kazakhstan, public demonstrations would first need to be approved by the government. That the Kazakh government allowed a public demonstration against Russia less than two months after Russian-led CSTO troops secured President Tokayev's regime is particularly surprising. Furthermore, Kazakh police reportedly cracked down on motorists displaying the "Z" sign, a symbol of support for Russia's actions. Allowing popular support for Ukraine and suppressing support for Russia shows that Tokayev linked his regime's survival not solely on Russian backing but rather on maintaining an image of independence.

Smaller demonstrations were also present outside the Russian embassy in Bishkek, soon after the war began; however, sentiments were split, with some groups supporting Russia and some supporting Ukraine. Hostility was reported between the groups, but the demonstrations did not escalate further. Under pressure from Russia, the Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov soon banned protests in the capital and fined several human rights activists that took part in the demonstrations.<sup>184</sup>

Domestic responses to the war were muted throughout the rest of Central Asia. Uzbekistan's government did not allow any anti-war rallies; however, it did allow small gatherings outside the Ukrainian embassy, and Ukrainian flags were publicly displayed in Tashkent and Samarkand. This limited domestic response is not surprising, considering that the Uzbek government is generally more repressive of civil society than Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. No rallies were reported in Tajikistan, and while it is unlikely that the government would sanction

---

<sup>184</sup> Stronski, "The Common Theme in Central Asia's Response to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine."; "Kyrgyz Activist Fined For Protesting Against Russia's Invasion Of Ukraine ", *Radio Free Europe* 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-protests-russian-invasion/31768949.html>.



anti-war rallies, it is also unclear whether there was any strong public reaction towards the war.<sup>185</sup> Lastly, there were no reports of any public response in Turkmenistan. This is unsurprising considering the country's longstanding policy of permanent neutrality and particularly insular nature.

While reliable polling data on the attitudes of people in Central Asia is rare, a poll that surveyed public opinion in Central Asia towards the war was released by the Central Asian Barometer, an NGO based in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The survey asked participants four questions relating to the conflict: how closely they paid attention to the war, where they received news on the war, who was responsible for the war, and how they believed the conflict would end. It appears that not all of the data from the survey was released to the public, as some countries' responses were not included for certain questions. For questions one and four, attention paid to the war and how the conflict was likely to end, the survey released the data from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. For the question on news sources, the survey released data from all five countries. Finally, the survey only released the responses from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan regarding the question on who is responsible for the war, the question that most directly measured public opinion towards the war.<sup>186</sup>

Overall, the survey showed notable differences between public attitudes on the war in Ukraine. Regarding the first question, the survey showed that 41% of Kyrgyz people, 32% of Kazakh people, and 23% of Uzbek people paid "a great deal of attention" to the war, while 34% of Kyrgyz, 39% of Kazakhs, and 24% of Uzbeks paid "some attention" to the war.<sup>187</sup> These results

---

<sup>185</sup> Stronski, "The Common Theme in Central Asia's Response to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine."

<sup>186</sup> "Russia-Ukraine War: Public Opinion in Central Asia," *Central Asia Barometer* 2022, <https://ca-barometer.org/assets/files/froala/f67ac6f34d17e7e3b51e3be30aedb9ffe60d9ae9.pdf>.

<sup>187</sup> "Russia-Ukraine War: Public Opinion in Central Asia."

underscore the importance of the war for Central Asian publics, even as many of their governments have carefully avoided commenting on or taking sides in the war. However, it appears that the war in Ukraine is more salient for the publics in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan compared to Uzbekistan. This may be explained by Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan's membership in the CSTO, making these publics more aware of their security dependence on Russia.

Regarding the question on news sources, there was a similar pattern in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan where respondents younger than 60 overwhelmingly rely on the internet for news sources, while those older than 60 rely on a combination of national television, Russian television, and the internet. Of these three countries, older people in Kyrgyzstan were much more likely to watch Russian television. National television is also the most popular news source in Uzbekistan, where almost half of older adults use it as their primary news source. Respondents from Tajikistan rely heavily on Russian television, but they also watch national television more and use the internet much less than in Kyrgyzstan. Finally, respondents from Turkmenistan receive news from a variety of sources and rely on the internet the least. In sum, Russian television is most popular with older adults in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and least popular in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Furthermore, the internet is most popular with Kyrgyz and Kazakhs, particularly with younger adults. However, interpreting public opinions on the war in Ukraine from internet usage is impossible, considering that the internet contains an array of sources, both pro-Western/Ukrainian and pro-Russian.<sup>188</sup>

Respondents from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan had mixed opinions on how they believed the war was likely to end. Large percentages in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (42%

---

<sup>188</sup> "Russia-Ukraine War: Public Opinion in Central Asia."

and 44%) were optimistic that negotiations would bring a mutually beneficial outcome, while only 27% of Uzbeks thought this outcome was most likely. 27% of Kazakhs, 36% of Kyrgyz, and 31% of Uzbeks thought that Ukraine will be forced to accept Russian terms. Much smaller percentages in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan—around 5%--thought that Russia will be forced to retreat. However, this percentage was larger in Kazakhstan, where 13% believed that Russia will retreat.

While the results from this question do not illustrate which side participants favor, they largely represent the fact that Russia is still seen as a great power in the region. This view was also underscored by Karolina Kluczevska, who reported on public attitudes in Tajikistan. She quoted a young academic from Dushanbe who commented that “many people here do not know anything other than Russia. They were never exposed to other countries and other ways of thinking. And so they have an impression that Russia is so big and important that it does not need to respect international laws”.<sup>189</sup> This view of Russia is reflected in the large percentage of Central Asians who see a Russian victory as likely and the relatively small percentage who see a Ukrainian victory as likely. It is also important to note that this data was collected between May and June 2022, which took place before Ukraine’s counteroffensive in Kharkiv oblast, a major Ukrainian victory that led to heavy casualties from the Russian armed forces.

On the question of who is responsible for the war, there is a marked difference between public opinion in Kazakhstan compared to Kyrgyzstan. In Kazakhstan, 28% see Russia as responsible, 35% blame either Ukraine, Europe, or the US, and 37% either do not know or blame both sides. In Kyrgyzstan, 14% of respondents blame Russia, 49% blame either Ukraine or the United States, and 31% either do not know or blame both sides. An interesting difference between

---

<sup>189</sup> Karolina Kluczevska, "Tajikistan has a special relationship with Russia. Could war change that?," *Open Democracy* 2022, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/tajikistan-russia--ukraine-war/>.

the two countries is that while Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan both blame the United States at similar levels (10% and 13% respectively), 36% of Kyrgyz blame Ukraine and only 19% of Kazakhs blame Ukraine. While public opinion is certainly mixed in both countries, Kazakhs are much more likely to blame Russia and Kyrgyz are much more likely to blame Ukraine for the conflict.

The differences in public opinion between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan may shed light on the different public responses at the outset of the invasion of Ukraine. Recall that the Kazakh government allowed anti-war rallies where many participants openly displayed solidarity with Ukraine, while demonstrations in Kyrgyzstan were smaller and divided between pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian segments. Considering that soon after the invasion the Kyrgyz prohibited anti-war rallies, Kazakhstan was as the only country in Central Asia to permit pro-Ukrainian rallies. The fact that the public attitudes in Kazakhstan appear to be less supportive of Russia than in Kyrgyzstan may explain why the Kazakh government allowed anti-war rallies to take place.

Another poll that surveyed public opinion in Kazakhstan was released by the Kyiv School of Economics (KSE) under its Research of Democracy and Governance project. Unlike the Central Asian Barometer, this poll compared the different attitudes of ethnic Kazakhs with ethnic Russians in the country.<sup>190</sup> The differences between these groups were striking. While 42% of ethnic Russians support the Russian invasion, only 10% of ethnic Kazakhs have the same view. Ethnic Russians also are more likely to believe that the war amounts to only a “special military operation” (the terminology that the Kremlin uses to describe the war) or that the war is between Russia and NATO, while ethnic Kazakhs are more likely to believe that the war is between Russia and

---

<sup>190</sup> "Kazakhs and Russians in Kazakhstan have different opinion on the events in Ukraine – poll," *Kyiv School of Economics* 2022, <https://kse.ua/about-the-school/news/kazakhs-and-russians-in-kazakhstan-have-different-opinion-on-the-events-in-ukraine-poll/>.

Ukraine.<sup>191</sup> Considering that 70% of Kazakh citizens are ethnic Kazakhs, the low support for Russia among ethnic Kazakhs has likely been noted by the government. The poll also notes that respondents under the age of 35 are much less likely to support Russian intervention in Ukraine. These results suggest an incentive for the Kazakh government to present itself as independent from Russia, since appearing too close to Russia could anger a public that may fear a future intervention by Russia under the guise of protecting the Russian-speaking minority in Kazakhstan.

While the KSE poll may hint at divisions in public attitudes along the lines of ethnicity and age, there are at least three issues with its validity. First, the survey only collected data from participants living in large cities such as Almaty, Astana, or Aktobe, leaving out data from Kazakhs living in rural regions. Second, the survey collected data using a smartphone application, thereby excluding Kazakhs without smartphones, and potentially resulting in a sample that excludes poorer and older residents. Third, the survey only collected data from residents aged 15-54, and it is important to note that the Central Asian Barometer poll estimated that 15% of Kazakhs aged 60 and up prefer Russian television. Therefore, the survey may have underestimated support for Russia by excluding certain segments of the population. However, despite these limitations, the poll still shows that there are significant differences in attitudes towards Russia on the basis of ethnicity. Also, considering that the ethnic Kazakh population is growing relative to the Russian-speaking population provides the government with a strong incentive to favor the attitudes of ethnic Kazakhs over that of ethnic Russians.

---

<sup>191</sup> "Kazakhs and Russians in Kazakhstan have different opinion on the events in Ukraine – poll."

## **Kazakhstan's Unique Responses to the Russian Invasion**

Having considered a range of areas where Central Asia has responded to the invasion of Ukraine, it is necessary to address several unique responses of Kazakhstan, which deserve additional attention for several reasons. First, many of its actions are characterized by a directness and explicitly that stands in contrast to the silent neutrality and quiet references to territorial integrity from other Central Asian states. Second, many Russian commentators have reacted in a particularly harsh and public manner to Kazakh actions, indicating that Russian officials pay especially close attention to Kazakhstan compared to other states in Central Asia. Russia's scrutiny of Kazakhstan has been exacerbated by its lack of sufficient support for the Kremlin's political goals in Ukraine, but it did not begin here. Russian commentators have lamented the growing national identity of Kazakhs, particularly as its Russian-speaking population drastically shrunk in the 1990s while the Kazakh-speaking population has consistently grown at a much faster rate. Furthermore, this demographic change in Kazakhstan has been accompanied by a drive to promote the Kazakh language, which includes an effort to transition the language from the Cyrillic to the Latin script.<sup>192</sup> More recently, interest in the Kazakh language appears to be on the rise among speakers who were educated in Russian but are increasingly identifying with a Kazakh national identity.<sup>193</sup>

Despite an apparent rise of Kazakh national identity, Russia's intervention through the CSTO in January 2022 to secure Tokayev's regime caused many analysts to conclude that Russia's

---

<sup>192</sup> Paul Goble, "Kazakhstan Seeks to Attract Western Companies Leaving Russia, Infuriating Moscow," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 19, no. 108 (2022), <https://jamestown.org/program/kazakhstan-seeks-to-attract-western-companies-leaving-russia-infuriating-moscow/>.

<sup>193</sup> Aibarshyn Akhmetkaliq, "Kazakh Language is Gaining Increasing Popularity, But Needs Greater Support to Sustain Interest, Says Expert," *The Astana Times* 2022, <https://astanatimes.com/2022/08/kazakh-language-is-gaining-increasing-popularity-but-needs-greater-support-to-sustain-interest-says-expert/>.

influence in Kazakhstan had reached new heights. This confidence was on display with a statement made by the Russian Ambassador to Kazakhstan, Alexey Borodavkin, who argued in early February 2022 that the joint US-Kazakh “Steppe Eagle” military exercises would “no longer fly in Kazakhstan”.<sup>194</sup> However, this confidence by Russian officials that the CSTO peacekeeping mission to secure the Tokayev’s regime had crystalized Kazakhstan’s position in Russia’s orbit may be misplaced. Since Russia initiated its war against Ukraine, Kazakhstan has taken several clear steps to reduce economic dependencies on Russia, shore up its military strength, engage with alternative partners, and signal its disapproval with Russian intervention in Ukraine. Taken together, these actions mark a significant shift in Russian-Kazakh relations.

One of the first clear indications that Kazakhstan was charting a more direct approach towards the Russian invasion came from an interview with Timur Suleimenov, the first deputy chief of staff to the president of Kazakhstan, during a trip to Europe. First, Suleimenov made clear that Kazakhstan would “not be a tool to circumvent the sanctions on Russia by the US and the EU”, even though continuing economic ties between Kazakhstan and Russia were necessary. Second, the Ambassador expressly referred to the Russian invasion as a war, saying that “in Kazakhstan, we call it what it is, unfortunately”.<sup>195</sup> This choice was a clear break with the Kremlin’s preferred term of a “special military operation”. Finally, and most strikingly, Suleimenov expressed a desire to improve Kazakh-EU relations and characterized Kazakhstan as a relatively Westernized nation:

Kazakhstan is not part of this conflict. [...] We don’t want and will not risk being placed in the same basket. And we would like to expand our cooperation with the countries of the EU and the EU as a whole. We are the most westernized country in Central Asia. We share

---

<sup>194</sup> Putz, "Russian Ambassador to Kazakhstan Says US-NATO Steppe Eagle Exercise Will ‘No Longer Fly’ ”.

<sup>195</sup> Georgi Gotev, "Kazakh official: We will not risk being placed in the same basket as Russia," *Euractiv* 2022, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/central-asia/interview/kazakh-official-we-will-not-risk-being-placed-in-the-same-basket-as-russia/>.

a lot of values. [...] The reforms that the president has put forward are pro-European, pro-democratic, and hopefully, in three to five years, you will find much more resemblance between us and countries like the Netherlands, France, Poland or other countries of the EU rather than authoritarian Asia.<sup>196</sup>

The fact that Kazakh officials actively construct a cultural and political affinity towards European political values has certainly been noticed by Russia. It is important to recall that Russian conflicts with both Ukraine and Georgia have stemmed in large part from a desire by these countries to integrate with European political institutions, which required significant political reforms. Though it is highly unlikely that Kazakhstan will pursue EU membership in the near future, this discourse is still a significant signal of its independence from a Russian cultural sphere of influence.

Since the Russian invasion began, Paul Goble argues that Kazakhstan has taken a range of moves to shore up its autonomy vis-à-vis Russia.<sup>197</sup> First, Kazakhstan announced that it would refuse to participate in a committee in a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) committee that coordinates and regulates currency and financial issues among members. Second, Kazakhstan is working to bypass Russian routes for its export markets by engaging with China to the east and countries in the Caucasus in the west. More specifically, Tokayev has increased cooperation with Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey and aims to further develop ports in the Caspian Sea to improve Kazakhstan's ability to export its oil through routes that bypass Russia.<sup>198</sup> Third, Kazakhstan has heavily invested in its military in order to defend against a possible Russian invasion of its northern territories.<sup>199</sup> A significant portion of Kazakhstan's military investments have been dedicated to

---

<sup>196</sup> Gotev, "Kazakh official: We will not risk being placed in the same basket as Russia."

<sup>197</sup> Paul Goble, "Despite Moscow Meeting, Kazakhstan Pursues More Independent Course," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 19, no. 179 (2022), <https://jamestown.org/program/despite-moscow-meeting-kazakhstan-pursues-more-independent-course/>.

<sup>198</sup> Goble, "Despite Moscow Meeting, Kazakhstan Pursues More Independent Course."

<sup>199</sup> Goble, "Kazakhstan Seeks to Attract Western Companies Leaving Russia, Infuriating Moscow."



improving its navy in the Caspian Sea, likely as an effort to protect its goal to ship more oil to Europe through the Caucasus.<sup>200</sup>

Another important development emerged as Tokayev made his first foreign visit to Moscow following his reelection on November 20, 2022: a draft security treaty between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. While the treaty does not have a strict mutual defense clause, it does provide that the Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan will cooperate in the event of an armed attack by a third-party state, and it requires that neither party will participate in blocs or undertake hostile actions against the other side.<sup>201</sup> The fact that the treaty mentions attacks from third countries appeared to be a reference to Russia, since there are currently no other states in the region that would plausibly attack Kazakhstan. Overall, Kazakhstan's strategy towards Russia has not reached a level of overt antagonization, as was evidenced by Tokayev choice to visit Russia. However, its multifaceted approach has seen Kazakhstan reduce its economic and security dependence on Russia within a short period, and Kazakhstan's willingness to directly challenge and contradict Russia on its intervention in Ukraine sets it apart from the rest of Central Asia.

## **Discussion**

Having discussed the response of Central Asia to Russia's invasion of Ukraine across several areas, I will return to the predictions made earlier. Considering the contradictory utilities provided by Russian-led organizations on one hand and the benefits of multivectorism on the other, this would predict that Central Asia would remain neutral in response to the war in Ukraine as a means to continue extracting benefits from as many states as possible. Overall, this prediction has

---

<sup>200</sup> Goble, "Despite Moscow Meeting, Kazakhstan Pursues More Independent Course."

<sup>201</sup> "Узбекистан и Казахстан планируют подписать договор о союзнических отношениях ", *KUN* 2022, <https://kun.uz/ru/news/2022/11/28/uzbekistan-i-kazakhstan-planiruyut-podpisat-dogovor-o-soyuznicheskix-otnosheniyax>.

fit well with Central Asia's behavior in international and regional organizations. All five countries have remained neutral in the UN General Assembly, with the exception of the vote to remove Russia from the Human Rights Council, a resolution which all but Turkmenistan voted against. Similarly, the three Central Asian members of the CSTO refused to discuss the war in Ukraine during the organization's summit, despite efforts by Belarusian President Lukashenko to bring it on the agenda. However, there have been important differences between several countries that warrant specific discussion.

The case of Turkmenistan should first be discussed considering its unique position in the region. Since its independence, Turkmenistan has cultivated a policy of "permanent neutrality" that eschews membership in regional security organizations. This policy is made possible by significant natural resources and a successful effort to bypass Russian control over its exports. Having provided lasting regime security, as well as a degree of international legitimacy through UN Resolutions, Turkmenistan's leaders have little incentive to change course in response to a war in Ukraine and the breakdown of relations between Russia and the West. Therefore, Turkmenistan's complete silence regarding the invasion and its absences at relevant UNGA votes do not constitute a puzzle and are well explained by its policy of non-alignment.

The other state that has remained entirely silent on the war in Ukraine has been Tajikistan. However, this silence must be considered in the context of Tajikistan's heavy reliance on Russia through security benefits provided through the CSTO as well as the remittances from labor migrants working in Russia. Adding to this situation is the United States' recent withdrawal from the bordering Afghanistan and the return to power of the Taliban, which has heightened concerns about threats from terrorism and illegal drug trade. Despite its reliance on Russia, Tajikistan has not sided with Russia to the degree that Belarus under Lukashenko has.

Tajikistan's refusal to fully endorse Russia's political goals in Ukraine may be related to its domestic struggle with the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region, which is heavily populated with the Pamiri minority group. Violence between the government and Pamiri demonstrations have flared up intermittently, with a recent clash occurring in May 2022, leaving at least 25 dead.<sup>202</sup> Many Pamiris have called for increased autonomy for Gorno-Badakhshan, making the issue of breakaway regions particularly sensitive for the government in Dushanbe. For these domestic reasons, Tajikistan leaders would likely not wish to provide international legitimacy to Russia's recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Kyrgyzstan's response to the invasion has subtly evolved from a position of support for Russia, evidenced by an early social media statement by President Japarov and crackdowns on pro-Ukrainian demonstrators, to subtle signals of disapproval. While Kyrgyzstan has remained officially neutral, it refused to recognize the breakaway regions or Russia's annexation of Ukrainian territory and cancelled its May 9<sup>th</sup> military parade. For similar reasons as Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan is heavily dependent on Russia for economic and military aid. Furthermore, polling data from the Central Asian Barometer has shown that only a small minority of Kyrgyz blame Russia for war, and Russian television remains quite popular, particularly with older generations. For these reasons, there is little incentive for Kyrgyzstan to openly antagonize Russia. However, both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan rely on international developmental aid, which could be placed in jeopardy by fully aligning with Russia.

The most notable development in Kyrgyz-Russian relations came when Kyrgyzstan pulled out of joint CSTO exercises—which would have included Tajik troops—in an apparent protest

---

<sup>202</sup> Lorenzo Tondo, "Twenty-five ethnic Pamiris killed by security forces in Tajikistan protests," *The Guardian* 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/may/19/twenty-five-ethnic-pamiris-killed-by-security-forces-gorno-badakhshan-tajikistan-protests>.

over the organization's inaction during the earlier border dispute with Tajikistan. Considering that an important role for the CSTO is to protect internal security among members, the organization's inability to prevent conflict between two of its members was met with frustration in Kyrgyzstan, though Kyrgyz officials have not signaled an intention to leave.<sup>203</sup>

Uzbekistan's responses have followed a similar pattern to several other Central Asian states, generally avoiding comment and officially proclaiming neutrality, while still affirming Ukraine's territorial integrity. Uzbekistan is also not a member of the CSTO and has the strongest military in Central Asia, meaning that Tashkent has the least reliance on Russia for security. While Uzbekistan does receive significant remittances from laborers in Russia, the Uzbek economy does not rely on these funds to the same degree as Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Therefore, Uzbekistan, along with Turkmenistan, is likely under much less pressure from Russia to support its goals in Ukraine than much of Central Asia.

Like Tajikistan, Uzbekistan also must contend with the restive region of Karakalpakstan, which exhibited unrest and violence in July 2022 after a proposal from President Mirziyoyev to remove the region's autonomous status.<sup>204</sup> This unrest may have influenced the government's decision to not recognize the breakaway regions in Ukraine and to directly affirm Ukrainian territorial integrity. Overall, Uzbekistan's position of official neutrality has provided a low-risk approach to maintain good relations with the West while not damaging ties with Russia. This approach fits well with the direction of President Mirziyoyev, who has pursued a more friendly and open foreign policy compared to the more insular previous president, Islam Karimov.

---

<sup>203</sup> Chris Rickleton, "Russia's Unhappy Club: The CSTO," *Radio Free Europe* 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-club-csto-ukraine-military-alliance/32079498.html>.

<sup>204</sup> "Uzbekistan imposes regional state of emergency after deadly unrest," *The Guardian* 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/04/uzbekistan-regional-state-of-emergency-deadly-unrest-karakalpakstan-autonomy>.

Clearly, Kazakhstan has stood out from the rest of Central Asia in its relationship with Russia since its invasion of Ukraine. Kazakhstan has angered Moscow by refusing to support its political goals in Ukraine, openly encouraging companies leaving Russia to invest in Kazakhstan, and investing in its military capabilities to defend its northern border. Russian officials and commentators have responded with hostility to these actions, and many consider Kazakhstan's recent hedging actions as a betrayal considering Moscow's intervention in January 2022 to support Tokayev's regime. Indeed, the fact that Kazakhstan has hedged strongly against Russia is striking considering that the CSTO has seemingly proved its utility to Tokayev's regime security. How can Kazakhstan's surprising strategy best be explained?

One explanation could come from Kazakhstan's changing domestic dynamics. Polling data has suggested that Kazakhs are much more likely than Kyrgyz to blame Russia for the war. Furthermore, there appears to be a divide between ethnic Russians and ethnic Kazakhs, with the latter significantly more critical of Russia's intervention in Ukraine. Since the ethnic Kazakh population has been growing, and along with it, a growing national identity built on the Kazakh language, Tokayev may see a domestic advantage in pursuing a foreign policy that is more independent from Russia.

While a changing domestic context is likely playing a role in Kazakhstan's strategy, a realist may point to the growing threat that Russia may turn its expansionist tendencies towards Kazakhstan. Russian officials have frequently questioned Kazakhstan's statehood, including the former president Medvedev, who called Kazakh an "artificial state" and accused it of committing genocide against the Russian population.<sup>205</sup> Such rhetoric has also served as pretexts for the

---

<sup>205</sup> Paolo Sorbello, "Former Russian President Questions Kazakhstan's Sovereignty," *The Diplomat* 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/08/former-russian-president-questions-kazakhstans-sovereignty/>.

invasions of both Georgia and Ukraine. Considering this, most realists would not be surprised that Kazakhstan has sought to lessen its dependence on Russia to export oil to Europe and has heavily invested in its military capabilities to defend its northern border, even if these actions jeopardize continued cooperation with Russia in regional organizations. Furthermore, the recent signs that Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are negotiating a bilateral security agreement could be a nascent effort to balance against Russia's security primacy in Central Asia. The table below provides a summary of key actions taken by Central Asian states following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

<b>Country</b>	<b>Similarities</b>	<b>Differences</b>
<b>Kazakhstan</b>	<p>Official Neutrality</p> <p>Abstains/Absent in most UN Votes</p> <p>Lack of acknowledgement in CSTO meeting</p>	<p>Affirms Ukrainian territorial integrity</p> <p>Attracts Western Companies</p> <p>Cancels Victory Day parade</p> <p>Invests in northern border defense</p> <p>Negotiates bilateral security agreement with Uzbekistan</p>
<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	<p>Official Neutrality,</p> <p>Abstains/Absent in most UN Votes</p> <p>Lack of acknowledgement in CSTO meeting</p>	<p>Bans Anti-War Protests</p> <p>Pulls out of CSTO exercises</p>
<b>Tajikistan</b>	<p>Official Neutrality</p> <p>Abstains/Absent in most UN Votes</p> <p>Lack of acknowledgement in CSTO meeting</p>	<p>Rahmon openly criticizes Putin for not respecting Central Asian countries</p> <p>Seeks greater Russian investment</p>
<b>Turkmenistan</b>	<p>Official neutrality</p> <p>Abstains/Absent in all UN Votes</p>	<p>No Comment on the war</p>
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	<p>Official neutrality</p> <p>Abstains/Absent in most UN Votes</p>	<p>Affirms Ukraine's territorial integrity</p> <p>Negotiating bilateral security agreement with Kazakhstan</p>

Table 2: Summary of the five Central Asian states' key actions following the war in Ukraine.

## **Future Scenarios in Central Asian Regional Security**

How might different outcomes in the war between Russia and Ukraine impact Central Asia's regional security framework? Regardless of the outcome of the war, I argue that Russia's position as the primary guarantor of security in Central Asia has ended. By committing significant military resources to the war in Ukraine, Russia has left a vacuum in Central Asia that is rapidly being filled by China, as evidenced by its newfound willingness to back the territorial integrity of Kazakhstan. Moreover, the conflict has provided opportunities for regional powers like Turkey to expand its influence in the region. Since the invasion began in January 2022, the CSTO has proven to be of little utility to its members as it has failed to prevent or resolve conflicts. The CSTO's unwillingness to intervene in a conflict between two of its members, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and its refusal to side with Armenia in its resurgent conflict with Azerbaijan are two examples of its impotence in promoting security for its members. And the CSTO's inability to intervene in these cases likely stems from the fact that most of Russia's forces are tied down in Ukraine and that other members like Kazakhstan have little appetite to invest in the security of smaller CSTO members.

Still, different results of the war in Ukraine will likely have distinct effects on the future of Central Asian-Russian relations. Here, I will consider three scenarios: a Russian victory that sees the replacement of President Zelensky's government with a pro-Russian regime, a Ukrainian victory that drives Russia back to at least the territory that it had de facto control over before the invasion, and a protracted conflict lasting for the foreseeable future. It should be mentioned, however, that a Russian victory that achieves President Putin's stated goals is highly unlikely considering the massive losses suffered by the Russian armed forces and the apparent momentum of Ukrainian counteroffensives. Having said this, Frederick Kagan has argued that if the West



pressures Ukraine into a premature ceasefire, this could plausibly give Russia the time to reconstitute its forces for a renewed offensive.<sup>206</sup> Moreover, a ceasefire could lead to increasing domestic pressure on Western governments to back off from their financial support to Ukraine, leaving it more vulnerable to a later Russian offensive. Considering this and the inherent unpredictability of armed conflicts, it is appropriate to consider how Central Asia might respond to a Russian victory.

A scenario where Russia meaningfully achieves most of its political and military goals in Ukraine may be the only way for Moscow to reassert its credibility as a security guarantor in Central Asia. As the war has progressed from its early stages, a series of embarrassing retreats in Kyiv, Kharkiv, and most recently in Kherson have put a negative spotlight on the Russian armed forces, undermining its reputation as a capable military. For Russia to maintain its primacy in Central Asian regional security, it must rebuild the image of its armed forces through significant battlefield progress. However, a victory against the Ukrainian military would not be the end of conflict, as Russia could expect an evolving situation marked by costly partisan warfare, which would likely receive at least moderate Western support. Therefore, a victory would necessitate the continued presence of a significant portion of Russia's armed forces, and Russia's capability to ensure security in Central Asia would be less than before the invasion. Nevertheless, a Russian victory may be enough to assuage the concerns of smaller members of the CSTO like Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and prevent them from hedging against Moscow. The situation could be different for Kazakhstan, since a Russian victory could heighten concerns from Kazakhstan that Moscow will turn its attention to Kazakhstan's northern territories. In this case, whether Kazakhstan

---

<sup>206</sup> Frederick W. Kagan, "The Long-Term Risks of a Premature Ceasefire in Ukraine," *Institute for the Study of War* (2022), <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/long-term-risks-premature-ceasefire-ukraine>.

continues to hedge against Russia could depend on the sincerity of China's support of its territorial integrity. While China would prefer to avoid conflict with Russia, Kazakhstan remains an important partner for the Belt and Road Initiative, providing an incentive for Beijing to prevent conflict between Russia and Kazakhstan. In any case, a Russian victory would likely not reverse Kazakhstan's goal to reduce its economic dependence on Russia.

In contrast, how might Central Asia respond to a Ukrainian victory where Russia is returned to at least its pre-2022 occupation? Such an outcome is perhaps the riskiest for Central Asia. A Russian defeat could lead to regime change in Moscow, leading to domestic turbulence. Humiliated military leaders and elites may also lash out in unpredictable ways. Most importantly, the presence of hedging strategies by many Central Asian governments should not be confused with a desire to see the collapse of Russia. Such a scenario would leave all of Central Asia more dependent on China, resulting in less freedom to maneuver. As Stefan Meister argues:

The main interest of Eurasian, post-Soviet elites is to neither follow nor join Russia, China, or the EU, but instead to maintain a neutral position to preserve freedom to maneuver in relation to all actors. [...] Their main goal is to extract as many benefits as possible from external players, while making as few concessions or compromises as possible. This is also a reason why they prefer to preserve the current rules of the game: any substantial change could challenge their power positions at home.<sup>207</sup>

Therefore, a catastrophic defeat for Russia in Ukraine would disrupt the security framework of Central Asia more than any other scenario. Moreover, if Russia lost the capability to project significant force into Central Asia, this may increase the likelihood of significant conflicts between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, as well as between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In a vacuum left by Russia, the influence of Turkey might be significant, particularly through the Organization of Turkic States, which includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan as

---

<sup>207</sup> Meister, "Hedging and wedging: Strategies to contest Russia's leadership in post-Soviet Eurasia."

members. Turkey has also invested in its soft power in Central Asia, including the funding of mosques and schools.<sup>208</sup> Countries like Kazakhstan who have been building a national identity based on language could be motivated to further develop security ties with fellow Turkic-speaking nations. Overall, a Russian defeat could be the most unpredictable outcome for the Central Asia, and the future of the region will heavily depend on how unstable a defeated Russia could become.

Finally, how would a continued protracted conflict between Russia and Ukraine play out in Central Asia? Of the three scenarios, this appears to be the most likely for the near future. Despite many initial predictions that the Russian military would quickly defeat Ukraine, the war has turned into a protracted conflict. Therefore, the responses of Central Asia are indicative of their future responses to a protracted or stalemated conflict. For Central Asia, the war in Ukraine has been highly disruptive to the Russian-led security framework, yet it has presented new opportunities to pursue multivectorism. Considering this, a protracted conflict may be the most advantageous outcome for Central Asia. The war has brought a renewed spotlight to the region, with Russia's diverted attention providing space for actors like China, the EU, the United States, and Turkey to build influence in the region. This situation is favorable for Central Asian elites who seek to extract resources from as many potential partners as possible. However, Russia's absence may also present risks, since Central Asian governments must still contend with threats emanating from Afghanistan, as well as continued border disputes among each other.

---

<sup>208</sup> "Turkey seeks Central Asia inroads with Russia distracted," *Euractiv* 2022, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/central-asia/news/turkey-seeks-central-asia-inroads-with-russia-distracted/>.

## Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to explain the different responses of Central Asian countries to Russia's war in Ukraine. Building on comparative work on Central Asia, I have assumed that regime security remains the preeminent goal of the governments in the region. The goal of regime security necessitates cooperation with Russia, whose investments in regional security support Central Asian governments against threats like terrorism and illegal drug trade. On the other hand, Central Asian regimes have benefited from multivector foreign policies—the cultivation of relations with as many partners as possible—which have helped legitimate their governments to domestic audiences. Overall, all five countries in Central Asia have pursued a strategy of official neutrality and have balanced the goal to continue extracting security benefits from the Russian-led security framework, while still reaping the benefits of multivectorism. Therefore, no Central Asian state has directly supported Russia's invasion nor its political goals in Ukraine, including the annexation of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson oblasts. The response of Kazakhstan is notable among the rest of the region, as it has more openly distanced itself from Russia, courted alternative partners, and invested in its military capabilities to defend its northern territory and assets in the Caspian Sea. This approach was facilitated by Kazakhstan's greater economic independence from Russia compared to smaller states like Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, as well as a domestic population that appears to be wary of Russia.

The Russian invasion has also called into question the continued utility of the CSTO, which has shown itself to be ineffective in preventing conflict between member states. Assuming that Central Asian governments instrumentally engage in regional organizations only when these organizations provide enough utility, the CSTO's ineffectiveness may spur Central Asian states to invest in alternative security frameworks, further reducing their dependence on Russia. Indeed,

there were reports of domestic pressure in both Kyrgyzstan and Armenia to leave the CSTO in response to the organization's supposed inability to protect these countries' security interests. Efforts to prioritize alternative security organizations, such as the SCO, would likely be led by regional leaders like Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, as Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are not strong enough to risk antagonizing Russia alone. However, even if the Central Asian members of the CSTO choose to remain within the organization, these countries may put pressure on Russia to transform the CSTO to better align with their security interests. Furthermore, if Russia emerges from the war in Ukraine with its economy and military severely damaged, Central Asian states may take advantage of a weakened Russia to improve their positions within regional multilateral organizations, including the CSTO. In this way, the CSTO may be of continued utility to Central Asian states, despite current perceptions of its ineffectiveness. Finally, recent negotiations between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan on a security cooperation treaty are an ongoing development that should be closely monitored to understand the future directions Central Asian security.

## Bibliography

- "Address By the president Of the russian Federation." *The Kremlin* (2022). <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>.
- Akhmetkaliq, Aibarshyn. "Kazakh Language Is Gaining Increasing Popularity, but Needs Greater Support to Sustain Interest, Says Expert." *The Astana Times*, 2022. <https://astanatimes.com/2022/08/kazakh-language-is-gaining-increasing-popularity-but-needs-greater-support-to-sustain-interest-says-expert/>.
- Altynbayev, Kanat. "Kazakhstan's Scrapping of Victory Day Parade Highlights Strained Russian Ties." *Caravanserai*, 2022. [https://central.asia-news.com/en\\_GB/articles/cnmi\\_ca/features/2022/04/28/feature-01](https://central.asia-news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_ca/features/2022/04/28/feature-01).
- Alvarez, José E. "Governing the World: International Organizations as Lawmakers." *Suffolk Transnat'l L. Rev.* 31 (2007): 591.
- Aneschi, Luca. "Integrating Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy Making: The Cases of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan." *Central Asian Survey* 29, no. 2 (2010): 143-58.
- Aris, Stephen. "Eurasian Regionalism." *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization. New York, Estados Unidos de Norte America: Palgrave* (2011).
- . "The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: 'Tackling the Three Evils'. A Regional Response to Non-Traditional Security Challenges or an Anti-Western Bloc?" *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 3 (2009): 457-82.
- "Article by Vladimir Putin "on the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians"." *Boris Yeltsin Presidential Library*, 2022. <https://www.prlib.ru/en/article-vladimir-putin-historical-unity-russians-and-ukrainians>.
- Assaniyaz, Assem. "Tokayev, Aliyev Sign Key Agreements to Boost Kazakhstan-Azerbaijan Strategic Cooperation." *The Astana Times* 2022. <https://astanatimes.com/2022/08/tokayev-aliyev-sign-key-agreements-to-boost-kazakhstan-azerbaijan-strategic-cooperation/>.
- Assenova, Margarita. "Kazakhstan in the Diplomatic Spotlight." *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 19, no. 136 (2022). <https://jamestown.org/program/kazakhstan-in-the-diplomatic-spotlight/>.
- Barnett, Michael, and Martha Finnemore. *Rules for the World*. Cornell University Press, 2012.
- Beliakova, Polina. "How a Russian-Led Alliance Keeps a Lid on Central Asia." *War on the Rocks*, 2022. <https://warontherocks.com/2022/02/how-a-russian-led-alliance-keeps-a-lid-on-central-asia/>.
- Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, and Alastair Smith. "Domestic Explanations of International Relations." *Annual Review of Political Science* 15 (2012): 161-81.
- Burns, William J. *The Back Channel: A Memoir of American Diplomacy and the Case for Its Renewal*. Random House, 2019.
- "Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization." edited by Collective Security Treaty Organization, 2002. [https://en.odkb-csto.org/documents/documents/ustav\\_organizatsii\\_dogovora\\_o\\_kollektivnoy\\_bezopasnosti/#loaded](https://en.odkb-csto.org/documents/documents/ustav_organizatsii_dogovora_o_kollektivnoy_bezopasnosti/#loaded).
- Christoffersen, Gaye. "Russian Thinking About Csto Peacekeeping: Central Asia, China, and the Ukraine War." *The Asian Forum*, 2022. <https://theasianforum.org/russian-thinking-about-csto-peacekeeping-central-asia-china-and-the-ukraine-war/>.
- Ciorciari, John D, and Jürgen Haacke. "Hedging in International Relations: An Introduction." *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 19, no. 3 (2019): 367-74.

- "Collective Security Treaty ". 1992. [https://en.odkb-csto.org/documents/documents/dogovor\\_o\\_kollektivnoy\\_bezopasnosti/#loaded](https://en.odkb-csto.org/documents/documents/dogovor_o_kollektivnoy_bezopasnosti/#loaded).
- Collins, Kathleen. "Economic and Security Regionalism among Patrimonial Authoritarian Regimes: The Case of Central Asia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 2 (2009): 249-81.
- "Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan." *Office of the President of Kazakhstan*, 2020 [https://www.akorda.kz/en/legal\\_acts/decrees/on-the-concept-of-the-foreign-policy-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-for-2020-2030](https://www.akorda.kz/en/legal_acts/decrees/on-the-concept-of-the-foreign-policy-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-for-2020-2030).
- Cooley, Alexander. "Central Asia's inside-out Foreign Economic Relations." In *Oxford Handbook of the International Relations of Asia*, edited by John Ravenhill Saadia M Pekkanen, Rosemary Foot, 241-60. Oxford: Oxford Handbooks, 2014.
- Cummings, Sally N. "A Synthetic Approach to Foreign Security Relations and Policies in Central Asia." In *Oxford Handbook of the International Relations of Asia*, edited by John Ravenhill Saadia M Pekkanen, Rosemary Foot, 481-502. Oxford: Oxford Handbooks, 2014.
- Davidzon, Igor. *Regional Security Governance in Post-Soviet Eurasia: The History and Effectiveness of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*. Springer Nature, 2021.
- Davies, Alys. "Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan Border Clashes Claim Nearly 100 Lives." *BBC*, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-62950787>.
- Dawson, Bethany. "Putin Forced to Endure a 7-Minute Rant from a Close Ally Who Appeared to Rebuke the Russian Leader and Demanded He Shows Respect." *Business Insider*, 2022. <https://www.businessinsider.com/putin-endures-long-rant-close-ally-complaining-lack-of-respect-2022-10>.
- De Haas, Marcel. "Relations of Central Asia with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization." *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 30, no. 1 (2017): 1-16.
- Foulon, Michiel. "Neoclassical Realism: Challengers and Bridging Identities." *International Studies Review* 17, no. 4 (2015): 635-61.
- Fraser, Patrick Jackson & Simon. "Uzbekistan Karakalpakstan: At Least 18 Killed in Unrest over Right to Secede." *BBC*, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-62032801>.
- Frost, Alexander. "The Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Russia's Strategic Goals in Central Asia." Paper presented at the China & Eurasia Forum Quarterly, 2009.
- "General Assembly Resolution Demands End to Russian Offensive in Ukraine ". *UN News*, 2022 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1113152>.
- "General Assembly Resolution Demands End to Russian Offensive in Ukraine ". *UN News*, 2022. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1113152>.
- Gidadhbli, RG. "Perestroika and Glasnost." *Economic and Political Weekly* (1987): 784-87.
- Goble, Paul. "Despite Moscow Meeting, Kazakhstan Pursues More Independent Course." *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 19, no. 179 (2022). <https://jamestown.org/program/despote-moscow-meeting-kazakhstan-pursues-more-independent-course/>.
- . "Kazakhstan Seeks to Attract Western Companies Leaving Russia, Infuriating Moscow." *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 19, no. 108 (2022). <https://jamestown.org/program/kazakhstan-seeks-to-attract-western-companies-leaving-russia-infuriating-moscow/>.
- . "Will the Csto Go the Way of the Warsaw Pact." *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 19, no. 156 (2022). <https://jamestown.org/program/will-the-csto-go-the-way-of-the-warsaw-pact/>.

- Gotev, Georgi. "Kazakh Official: We Will Not Risk Being Placed in the Same Basket as Russia." *Euractiv*, 2022. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/central-asia/interview/kazakh-official-we-will-not-risk-being-placed-in-the-same-basket-as-russia/>.
- Haacke, Jürgen. "The Concept of Hedging and Its Application to Southeast Asia: A Critique and a Proposal for a Modified Conceptual and Methodological Framework." *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 19, no. 3 (2019): 375-417.
- Hemmer, Christopher, and Peter J Katzenstein. "Why Is There No Nato in Asia? Collective Identity, Regionalism, and the Origins of Multilateralism." *International organization* 56, no. 3 (2002): 575-607.
- Hess, Maximilian. "How Russia's Invasion of Ukraine Has Affected Kazakh Politics." *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, 2022. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2022/06/how-russias-invasion-of-ukraine-has-affected-kazakh-politics/>.
- Hiro, Dilip. *Inside Central Asia: A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran*. Abrams, 2011.
- Hollis, Martin, and Steve Smith. "Explaining and Understanding International Relations." (1990).
- House, Freedom. *Freedom in the World: Kyrgyzstan*. (2022). <https://freedomhouse.org/country/kyrgyzstan/freedom-world/2022>.
- Ikenberry, G John. "Between the Eagle and the Dragon: America, China, and Middle State Strategies in East Asia." *Political Science Quarterly* 131, no. 1 (2016): 9-43.
- Imanaliyeva, Ayzirek. "Kyrgyzstan National Bank Predicts 20% Decline in Remittances." *Eurasianet*, 2022. <https://eurasianet.org/kyrgyzstan-national-bank-predicts-20-decline-in-remittances>.
- "In Break with Moscow, Uzbeks Won't Recognize Separatist 'Republics' in Ukraine ". *Radio Free Europe*, 2022. <https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbekistan-ukraine-separatists-not-recognized/31757881.html>.
- Joanna Lillis, Ayzirek Imanaliyeva "Ukraine War Inspires Rival Passions in Central Asia." *Eurasianet*, 2022. <https://eurasianet.org/ukraine-war-inspires-rival-passions-in-central-asia>.
- Jones, Pauline. *The Transformation of Central Asia: States and Societies from Soviet Rule to Independence*. Cornell University Press, 2004.
- Kagan, Frederick W. "The Long-Term Risks of a Premature Ceasefire in Ukraine." *Institute for the Study of War* (2022). <https://www.understandingwar.org/background/long-term-risks-premature-ceasefire-ukraine>.
- "Kazakhs and Russians in Kazakhstan Have Different Opinion on the Events in Ukraine – Poll." *Kyiv School of Economics*, 2022. <https://kse.ua/about-the-school/news/kazakhs-and-russians-in-kazakhstan-have-different-opinion-on-the-events-in-ukraine-poll/>.
- Keller, Shoshana. *Russia and Central Asia: Coexistence, Conquest, Convergence*. University of Toronto Press, 2019.
- Kluczevska, Karolina. "Tajikistan Has a Special Relationship with Russia. Could War Change That?" *Open Democracy*, 2022. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/tajikistan-russia-ukraine-war/>.
- Kropatcheva, Elena. "Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation: Multilateral Policy or Unilateral Ambitions?". *Europe-Asia Studies* 68, no. 9 (2016): 1526-52.
- Kucera, Joshua. "Csto Agrees to Intervene in Kazakhstan Unrest." *Eurasianet*, 2022. <https://eurasianet.org/csto-agrees-to-intervene-in-kazakhstan-unrest>.



- "Kyrgyz Activist Fined for Protesting against Russia's Invasion of Ukraine ". *Radio Free Europe*, 2022. <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-protests-russian-invasion/31768949.html>.
- "Kyrgyzstan Bans 'Z' Symbol Victory Day Celebrations on May 9 ". *Radio Free Europe*, 2022. <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-bans-z-symbol/31816191.html>.
- "Kyrgyzstan Cancels Russian-Led Military Drill on Its Land." *AP News*, 2022. <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-asia-kazakhstan-central-tajikistan-8bd4550ca3831c25990165685a92cac6>.
- Laumulin, Murat. "The Eu's Incomplete Strategy for Central Asia." 2019. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/80470>.
- Lee, Ji-Young. "Contested American Hegemony and Regional Order in Postwar Asia: The Case of Southeast Asia Treaty Organization." *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 19, no. 2 (2019): 237-67.
- Ma, Xinru, and David C Kang. "Toward Measuring Free-Riding: Counterfactuals, Alliances, and Us–Philippine Relations." *Journal of Global Security Studies* 8, no. 1 (2023): ogac033.
- Marat, Asel Doolotkeldieva and Erica. "Why Russia and China Aren't Intervening in Central Asia." *Foreign Policy*, 2022 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/10/04/tajikistan-kyrgyzstan-russia-china-intervention-central-asia/>.
- Mashrab, Fozil. "Uzbekistan Grapples with the Specter of Anti-Western Tropes in Sco." *Eurasia Daily Monitor: Jamestown Foundation* 19, no. 125 (2022). <https://jamestown.org/program/uzbekistan-grapples-with-the-specter-of-anti-western-tropes-in-sco/>.
- . "Uzbekistan Grapples with the Specter of Anti-Western Tropes in Sco." *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 19, no. 125 (2022). <https://jamestown.org/program/uzbekistan-grapples-with-the-specter-of-anti-western-tropes-in-sco/>.
- Mearsheimer, John J. "The False Promise of International Institutions." *International security* 19, no. 3 (1994): 5-49.
- "Meeting of the Leaders of the Csto Member States Dedicated to the 30th Anniversary of the Signing of the Collective Security Treaty and the 20th Anniversary of the Csto." *Collective Security Treaty Organization*, 2022 <https://en.odkb-csto.org/session/2022/vstrecha-liderov-gosudarstv-chlenov-odkb-posvyashchennaya-30-letiyu-podpisaniya-dogovora-o-kollektiv/#loaded>.
- Meister, Stefan. "Hedging and Wedging: Strategies to Contest Russia's Leadership in Post-Soviet Eurasia." In *Regional Powers and Contested Leadership*, 301-26: Springer, 2018.
- Neumann, Iver B. "Discourse Analysis." In *Qualitative Methods in International Relations*, 61-77: Springer, 2008.
- Nurgaliyeva, Lyailya. "Kazakhstan's Economic Soft Balancing Policy Vis-À-Vis Russia: From the Eurasian Union to the Economic Cooperation with Turkey." *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 7, no. 1 (2016): 92-105.
- Olcott, Martha Brill. "Central Asia: The End of the "Great Game"." *International Relations of Asia*: 267-93.
- Omelicheva, Mariya Y. *Counterterrorism Policies in Central Asia*. Routledge, 2010.
- Partridge, Ben. "Tajikistan: Civil War Challenged Russian Policy " *Radio Free Europe*, 1999. <https://www.rferl.org/a/1090432.html>.

- "Personal Remittances, Received (% of Gdp) ". edited by World Bank, 2022.  
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=TJ-KG-UZ-KZ-TM>.
- "President Says Kazakhstan 'Respects' Ukraine's Territorial Integrity ". *Radio Free Europe*, 2022. <https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-toqaev-respect-ukraine-integrity/31789173.html>.
- Protect, Global Centre for the Responsibility to. "Populations at Risk: Kyrgyzstan." (2019). <https://www.global2p.org/countries/kyrgyzstan/>.
- "Putin Recognises Independence of Ukraine Breakaway Regions." *Al Jazeera*, 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/21/russia-to-recognise-ukraine-breakaway-region-kremlin-confirms>.
- Putnam, Robert D. "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games." *International organization* 42, no. 3 (1988): 427-60.
- Putz, Cathernie. "Russian Ambassador to Kazakhstan Says Us-Nato Steppe Eagle Exercise Will 'No Longer Fly' " *The Diplomat*, 2022. <https://thediplomat.com/2022/02/russian-ambassador-to-kazakhstan-says-us-nato-steppe-eagle-exercise-will-no-longer-fly/>.
- Rangsimaporn, Paradorn. "Southeast Asia in Kazakhstan's Omnidirectional Hedging Strategy." *Problems of Post-Communism* (2021): 1-13.
- . "Uzbekistan and Southeast Asia: Exploring the Opportunities for Strengthening Relations." *Silk Road: A Journal of Eurasia Development* 3, no. 1 (2022): 1-21. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.16997/srjed.1274>.
- Rickleton, Chris. "Russia's Unhappy Club: The Csto." *Radio Free Europe*, 2022. <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-club-csto-ukraine-military-alliance/32079498.html>.
- "Russia-Ukraine War: Public Opinion in Central Asia." *Central Asia Barometer*, 2022. <https://ca-barometer.org/assets/files/froala/f67ac6f34d17e7e3b51e3be30aedb9ffe60d9ae9.pdf>.
- "Russia Ally Kazakhstan Permits Large Pro-Ukraine Rally Amid Sanctions Fears." *France24*, 2022 <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220306-russia-ally-kazakhstan-permits-large-pro-ukraine-rally-amid-sanctions-fears>.
- "Russia's War in Ukraine Discussed 'Behind Closed Doors' at Csto Summit in Moscow." *Meduza*, 2022. <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2022/05/16/russia-s-war-in-ukraine-discussed-behind-closed-doors-at-csto-summit-in-moscow>.
- Rustem, Malika. "Putin's State Visit Reconfirms Kazakh-Russian Strategic Partnership." *The Astana Times*, 2015. <https://astanatimes.com/2015/10/putins-state-visit-reconfirms-kazakh-russian-strategic-partnership/>.
- Satubaldina, Assel. "Csto Peacekeepers Complete Their Mission, Withdraw from Kazakhstan." *The Astana Times*, 2022. <https://astanatimes.com/2022/01/csto-peacekeepers-complete-their-mission-withdraw-from-kazakhstan/>.
- . "Kazakh President Urges Swift Resolution to Armenia-Azerbaijan Border Conflict at Csto Extraordinary Session." *Astana Times*, 2022. <https://astanatimes.com/2022/09/kazakh-president-urges-swift-resolution-to-armenia-azerbaijan-border-conflict-at-csto-extraordinary-session/>.
- Shambaugh, David. *Where Great Powers Meet: America and China in Southeast Asia*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2020.

- Sharshenova, Aijan. "More Than a 'Border Skirmish' between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan." *The Diplomat*, 2022. <https://thediplomat.com/2022/09/more-than-a-border-skirmish-between-kyrgyzstan-and-tajikistan/>.
- Singh, Amrit. *Globalizing Torture: Cia Secret Detention and Extraordinary Rendition*. (Open Society Foundation: 2013). <https://www.justiceinitiative.org/uploads/655bbd41-082b-4df3-940c-18a3bd9ed956/globalizing-torture-20120205.pdf>.
- Sorbello, Paolo. "Former Russian President Questions Kazakhstan's Sovereignty." *The Diplomat*, 2022. <https://thediplomat.com/2022/08/former-russian-president-questions-kazakhstans-sovereignty/>.
- "Speech by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev ". *Collective Security Treaty Organization*, 2022. [https://en.odkb-csto.org/news/news\\_odkb/v-moskve-16-maya-proydet-vstrecha-glav-gosudarstv-chlenov-odkb-posvyashchennaya-30-letiyu-podpisaniya/#loaded](https://en.odkb-csto.org/news/news_odkb/v-moskve-16-maya-proydet-vstrecha-glav-gosudarstv-chlenov-odkb-posvyashchennaya-30-letiyu-podpisaniya/#loaded).
- "Statement of the Collective Security Council of the Collective Security Treaty Organization on the Occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the Collective Security Treaty and the 20th Anniversary of the Collective Security Treaty Organization." *The Kremlin* (2022). <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/5800>.
- Stronski, Paul. "The Common Theme in Central Asia's Response to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2022. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/03/30/common-theme-in-central-asia-s-response-to-russia-s-invasion-of-ukraine-pub-86764>.
- Sullivan, Charles J. "Neutrality in Perpetuity: Foreign Policy Continuity in Turkmenistan." *Asian Affairs* 51, no. 4 (2020): 779-94.
- Tiezzi, Shannon. "How Did Asian Countries Vote on the Un's Ukraine Resolution? ." *The Diplomat*, 2022. <https://thediplomat.com/2022/03/how-did-asian-countries-vote-on-the-uns-ukraine-resolution/>.
- Tondo, Lorenzo. "Twenty-Five Ethnic Pamiris Killed by Security Forces in Tajikistan Protests." *The Guardian*, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/may/19/twenty-five-ethnic-pamiris-killed-by-security-forces-gorno-badakhshan-tajikistan-protests>.
- "Turkey Seeks Central Asia Inroads with Russia Distracted." *Euractiv*, 2022. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/central-asia/news/turkey-seeks-central-asia-inroads-with-russia-distracted/>.
- "U.S. Security Cooperation with Central Asia " U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-central-asia/>.
- "Uzbekistan Imposes Regional State of Emergency after Deadly Unrest." *The Guardian*, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/04/uzbekistan-regional-state-of-emergency-deadly-unrest-karakalpakstan-autonomy>.
- Valerie Hopkins, Ivan Nechepurenko. "Russia-Allied Forces to Intervene as Unrest Sweeps Kazakhstan." *New York Times*, 2022 <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/world/europe/kazakhstan-protests-gas-prices.html>.
- Volkava, Elena. "The Kazakh Famine of 1930-33 and the Politics of History in the Post-Soviet Space." *Kennan Institute* (2012). <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-kazakh-famine-1930-33-and-the-politics-history-the-post-soviet-space>.

- Weitz, Richard. "Assessing the Collective Security Treaty Organization: Capabilities and Vulnerabilities." *United States Army War College Press* (2018).
- Wendt, Alexander. "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics." *International organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 391-425.
- Zardykhan, Zhar. "Central Asia Celebrated Victory Day Amid Russian Pressure." *Global Voices*, 2022. <https://globalvoices.org/2022/06/02/central-asia-celebrates-victory-day-amid-russian-pressure/>.
- Zhengyuan, Xu. "In the Shadow of Great Powers: A Comparative Study of Various Approaches to Regionalism in Central Asia." *Connections* 9, no. 4 (2010): 37-52.
- "В Связи С Конфликтом В Украине Кр Заявила О Приверженности Принципу Территориальной Целостности Государств." *Radio Azattyk*, 2022. <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/31766132.html>.
- "Узбекистан И Казахстан Планируют Подписать Договор О Союзнических Отношениях ". *KUN* 2022. <https://kun.uz/ru/news/2022/11/28/uzbekistan-i-kazaxstan-planiruyut-podpisat-dogovor-o-soyuznicheskix-otnosheniyax>.