



# LINKING NATIONAL ROLE CONCEPTIONS TO FOREIGN POLICY BEHAVIOR: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF KAZAKHSTAN AND UZBEKISTAN

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**ABSTRACT.** *Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, two pivotal Central Asian states with broadly similar geopolitical contexts, have pursued markedly different foreign policy trajectories since independence. This article asks whether leadership-defined national role conceptions (NRCs) - the self-ascribed roles articulated in elite discourse - help explain these divergences under comparable structural conditions. Grounded in Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis, the study treats NRCs as mid-range, intervening frameworks that link systemic constraints and domestic politics to concrete choices, complementing realist and constructivist explanations rather than replacing them.*

*Empirically, the article employs a most-similar cases design and a content analysis of 100 presidential speeches and interviews by Nursultan Nazarbayev and Islam Karimov (1991-2016), coded using Naomi Wish's refinement of Kalevi Holsti's NRC typology. The resulting role profiles are then read against patterns of foreign policy behavior, including engagement with regional organizations and partnerships with Western institutions, as well as unilateral initiatives.*

*The findings show that Nazarbayev constructed and performed a "Eurasian Bridge" role, emphasizing multilateralism, mediation, civilizational dialogue, and cooperative regionalism, reflected in Kazakhstan's multi-vector diplomacy and activism in regional and global fora. Karimov, by contrast, cultivated an "Independent Actor" role centered on sovereignty, regime security, and defensive self-reliance, manifested in Uzbekistan's selective, often reversible institutional commitments and guarded response to external influence. The article argues that these NRCs function as relatively stable scripts that mediate leaders' responses to common geopolitical, economic, and regime-security pressures, rather than as mere post-hoc legitimation.*

*The conclusion highlights the theoretical and methodological value of Role Theory for Central Asian foreign policy analysis. Then briefly traces how Nazarbayev's and Karimov's roles have been adapted, rather than abandoned, under Presidents Tokayev and Mirziyoyev, pointing to a shift toward "cautious bridging" and "cooperative independence".*

**KEYWORDS:** *national role conceptions, foreign policy analysis, Kazakhstan's "Eurasian Bridge", Uzbekistan's "Independent Actor" roles.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Explaining why governments behave as they do in the international system is a complex task, as foreign policy outcomes result from the interplay of external pressures, domestic conditions, and leaders' perceptions (George, 1980; Holsti, 1970; Jervis, 1976). Foreign policy analysis has long noted that even under similar structural constraints, states can respond differently because decision-makers interpret threats and opportunities through distinct cognitive and normative lenses (Holsti, 1970; Hudson, 2007). While classic theories of international relations have largely centered on great powers, smaller and medium-sized states in regions such as Central Asia also demonstrate agency that challenges structural predictions (Isaacs, 2010; March, 2003; Busygina, 2019; Bauyrzhankyzy, 2020).

From a realist perspective, weak states in insecure environments should either balance against threats or bandwagon with stronger powers (Waltz, 1979; Walt, 1987). By this logic, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, mid-sized, landlocked states situated between Russia and China, would be expected to align with a dominant patron for security and regime survival (Bohr, 1998; Olcott, 1996). Yet their foreign policies have not followed a single, convergent pattern. Despite broadly comparable geographic and political contexts, the two post-Soviet republics have pursued markedly different strategies: Kazakhstan has joined Russia-led alliances while initiating regional cooperation projects and cultivating Western partnerships, whereas Uzbekistan has maintained selective engagement and frequent realignments, avoiding deep integration with any bloc (Cummings, 2005; Fumagalli, 2007; Spechler & Spechler, 2010; Pikalov, 2014; Ambrosio & Lange, 2014). Kazakhstan has branded itself as a proactive, multi-vector "Eurasian" actor, while Uzbekistan has often preferred a low-profile, sovereignty-first stance (Cummings, 2005; Fumagalli, 2007).

This article takes these divergent trajectories as its central puzzle. It does not presume that the foreign policies of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan must be identical; rather, it asks why such differences emerge under broadly similar structural conditions (Fumagalli, 2007). Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are selected as cases not simply because they differ, but because they are widely recognized as the region's two most populous, politically and economically influential republics - the principal "poles" around which Central Asian regional order has been negotiated since independence (Bohr, 2004; Laruelle, 2018). Their post-independence rivalry and occasional accommodation have shaped attempts at regional integration and security cooperation, distinguishing them from structurally more vulnerable neighbors such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, or the inward-oriented Turkmenistan (Cummings, 2005; Bohr, 2004). In this sense, the smaller Central Asian republics function as a regional baseline: they exemplify what highly dependent, sovereignty-defensive behavior looks like under similar systemic pressures, against which the more autonomous and differentiated policies of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan can be contrasted (Costa-Buranelli, 2014; Toktomyshev, 2016).

Role Theory offers a useful mid-range framework for addressing this puzzle. Derived from social psychology and introduced into foreign policy analysis by Holsti (1970), it conceptualizes states as actors performing roles based on leaders' perceptions of appropriate functions, orientations, and commitments in the international system.

National role conceptions (NRCs) capture how policymakers define their country's mission, status, and obligations, “scripts” about what their state is, whom it represents, and what it ought to do (Holsti, 1970; Wish, 1980). NRCs are shaped by domestic variables (historical experiences, ideology, leadership traits) and external ones (regional power dynamics and international expectations), and they tend to generate patterned, relatively stable foreign-policy behavior over time (Holsti, 1970; Wish, 1980; Thies, 2012). In this respect, the analysis has clear affinities with what Waltz (1959) termed the “first image”, in that it foregrounds leaders’ beliefs and worldviews. But rather than treating individuals in isolation, it embeds them in a multi-level framework where national roles mediate between structure and domestic politics and operate as intervening filters through which material constraints are interpreted (Harnisch, 2011; Hudson, 2007).

Applying Role Theory to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, this study argues that each country's leadership constructed a distinct NRC that has guided foreign-policy choices under shared structural conditions: Kazakhstan as a “Eurasian Bridge” and Uzbekistan as an “Independent Actor”. Both states emerged from the Soviet Union in 1991 as authoritarian presidential regimes located between Russia and China, concerned with sovereignty, territorial integrity, and regime survival (Olcott, 1996; Cornell, 2000). Under President Nursultan Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan pursued a multi-vector and cooperative diplomacy, branding itself as a bridge between East and West and an advocate of Eurasian integration, peace, and dialogue (Nazarbayev, 1997; Hanks, 2009; Ayazbekov, 2013; Gnedina, 2015; Contessi, 2015). By contrast, under President Islam Karimov, Uzbekistan followed a sovereignty-first path, frequently recalibrating ties to maintain autonomy and emphasizing non-alignment, security, and self-reliance (Fumagalli, 2007; Spechler & Spechler, 2010; Fazendeiro, 2017). These role conceptions were not only articulated in elite discourse; they were also performed through concrete policies, Kazakhstan's deep engagement in Russian- and Chinese-led institutions alongside Western partnerships and nuclear disarmament activism, and Uzbekistan's selective, often reversible alignments and guarded regional cooperation (Fumagalli, 2007; Spechler & Spechler, 2010).

The study's theoretical contribution is twofold. First, it conceptualizes NRCs as mid-range, leadership-defined frameworks that are neither reducible to material interests nor mere post-hoc legitimization devices. Drawing on recent role-theoretical work, it treats roles and behavior as mutually constitutive. Leaders draw on established role vocabularies to interpret constraints and justify choices, while repeated enactment of certain behaviors reinforces or adapts those roles over time (Harnisch, 2011; Breuning, 2011; Thies, 2012). Second, it extends Role Theory to an understudied regional context. Much scholarship on Central Asia remains descriptive or framed by great-power rivalry and “New Great Game” metaphors, with limited application of psychological or ideational tools such as leadership trait analysis, operational code, or role analysis (March, 2003; Isaacs, 2010; Busygina, 2019; Bauyrzhankyzy, 2020). By reconstructing the NRCs of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and reading them against observable behavior, the article shows how leadership-driven ideas structure foreign-policy options and strategies under the same Russia-China security complex (Buzan, 1991), thereby broadening the empirical scope of role theory beyond traditional great-power cases (Harnisch, 2011; Cantir & Kaarbo, 2012).

Empirically, the analysis is based on a systematically constructed corpus of 100 speeches and interviews (50 by Nazarbayev, 50 by Karimov) from 1991 to 2016, in which the presidents speak in their own voice on foreign-policy matters (Bauyrzhankyzy, 2020). These texts are coded using a refinement of Holsti's and Wish's role-analytic framework to identify the dominant NRCs and motivational orientations of each leader (Holsti, 1970; Wish, 1980). The discursive findings are then compared with foreign-policy behavior and with secondary (Anceschi, 2014; Fumagalli, 2007; Kassenova, 2022). Finally, the article briefly sketches how these roles have been adapted, rather than abandoned, under Presidents Tokayev and Mirziyoyev, using the early post-succession period as a plausibility probe for role continuity and change.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

The study's central proposition is that the foreign policies of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are guided by distinct, leadership-defined national role conceptions. Specifically, it aims to: (a) Identify and analyze the NRCs of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan as articulated by Nursultan Nazarbayev and Islam Karimov; (b) Determine the factors underpinning these roles - ideological narratives (Kazakhstan's "Eurasian Bridge" vs. Uzbekistan's "Independent Actor") and contextual influences; and (c) Examine the relationship between NRCs and observable foreign-policy behavior to assess correspondence between role and external conduct under shared structural conditions.

From these objectives, the following hypotheses are formulated:

**H1a:** Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan maintain distinct national role conceptions, observable in leadership rhetoric and policy justification.

**H1b:** The "Independent Actor" NRC is positively correlated with non-aligned and unilateral foreign-policy behavior.

**H1c:** The "Mediator/Bridge" NRC is positively correlated with cooperative and multilateral foreign-policy behavior.

Confirmation of H1a-H1c would support the broader argument that leadership-defined national role conceptions significantly shape and help explain the divergent trajectories of foreign policy in Central Asia. While operating alongside and mediating economic interests, great-power pressures, and regime-security concerns.

Following this logic, the article is structured as follows: it begins with a review of the existing literature, outlines the theoretical framework, then details the methodology, and presents the main findings. The final sections include the discussion and the conclusion, highlighting implications for further research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE FOREIGN POLICIES OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN STATES

A large body of work explains Central Asian foreign policies through power distribution, security dynamics, and great-power competition (Olcott 1996; Abazov 1998; Gleason 2001; Fumagalli 2007; Gleason 2001; Deyermund 2009; Spechler & Spechler 2010; Cooley 2012; Contessi 2015; Gnedina 2015). "Great Game" analyses emphasize interactions with Russia, China, and the United States and their feedback on local strategies (Gleason 2001; Deyermund 2009; Spechler & Spechler 2010; Cooley 2012; Tolipov 2014). Within this paradigm, perceived security balances and regional

geopolitics are central drivers (Abazov 1998; Gleason 2001; Idan & Shaffer 2011; Ambrosio & Lange 2014). Early studies stressed dependence on Russia, demography, energy transit, and the regional security complex (Olcott 1996; Abazov 1998; Bohr 1998; Roy 2000; Allison & Jonson 2001).

Landlocked position and transit dependence are linked to limited maneuverability and specific alignment choices (Kuzio 2016; Idan & Shaffer 2011; Kassen 2018). Ambrosio & Lange (2014) combine geopolitics with leadership codes; Kassen (2018) extends the geography lens with “transcontinental nation,” multi-vectorism, exit strategies, and soft power. Deyermond’s (2009) “Matrioshka hegemony” posits layered hegemonies (U.S., Russia, China, Uzbekistan), while Tolipov (2014) argues Central Asian states also play “small games,” challenging simple hierarchical logics; Cooley (2012) similarly shows great-power competition opening room for local agency.

Another stream highlights nationalism, elite politics, identity, and nation-building (Abazov 1998; Olcott 2010; Kazemi 2003; Cummings 2005; Deyermond 2009; Anceschi 2010; Laruelle 2010). Hybrid patrimonialism and regime legitimation shape external choices (Cummings 2005; Laruelle 2010; Contessi 2015; Anceschi 2010, 2014). Foundational myths and state ideologies underpin foreign policy narratives (von Soest & Grauvogel, 2016). Uzbekistan’s Timurid heritage and sovereignty narrative (von Soest & Grauvogel 2016) and Kazakhstan’s nomadic/Eurasian “bridge” identity (Nazarbayev 1994; Hanks 2009; Cummings 2005; Laruelle 2017) map onto external postures. Some caution that economic interests, threats, and regime concerns remain primary (Gleason 2001; Starr 2006), but acknowledge leader-filtered perceptions (Cornell 2000).

Integrative works stress the interplay of sovereignty fears, regime survival, and great-power pressures (Fumagalli 2007; Anceschi 2010; Ayazbekov 2013). On Uzbekistan’s shifts, Fumagalli (2007) uses omni-balancing to foreground regime survival; Pikalov (2014) blends balance-of-power/threat with internal politics and geostructure. Differences in elite perceptions and worldviews matter (Ayazbekov 2013).

Despite frequent reference to presidents, leadership-centered studies are fewer (March 2003; Isaacs 2010; Ayazbekov 2013; Busygina 2019; Anceschi 2020). Psychological approaches, Leadership Trait Analysis, and Operational Code show leadership styles and traits can systematically affect policy (George 1969; Hermann 1987; Çuhadar et al. 2017). Research on charisma/populism and legitimation underlines leader agency (March 2003; Isaacs 2010; Busygina 2019). For Uzbekistan, March (2003) argues a nationalist content in Leninist form; for Kazakhstan, Anceschi (2014; 2020) and Cummings (2005) show regime-driven identity deployment.

Kazakhstan-specific literature spans regime/institutions (Luong 2004; Cummings 2005; Laruelle 2010; 2017), identity/nation-building (Laruelle 2010; Omelicheva 2010; Anceschi 2010; 2014), and social themes (Dave 2007; Kudaibergenova 2013). Identity as a policy filter is prominent (Cummings 2005), with Eurasianism and multi-vectorism framed as pragmatic statecraft under Nazarbayev (Idan & Shaffer 2011; Ambrosio & Lange 2014; Ayazbekov 2013; Anceschi 2020).

Uzbekistan-specific literature focuses on drivers (Kazemi 2003; Fumagalli 2007; Anceschi 2010; Fazendeiro 2013; Tolipov 2014), policy swings (Heathershaw 2007,

Cornell 2000), and identity (Anceschi 2010; Fumagalli 2007). Explanations include regime insecurity, Islamist threats, Russian hegemony, and socioeconomic constraints (Melvin 2000; Kazemi 2003; Starr 2016; Fazendeiro 2017). Role-conception work suggests cooperation/conflict aligns with role (in)compatibility (Walker 1987; Fazendeiro 2013). Kobilov (2025) looks at Uzbekistan's post-2016 foreign policy under Mirziyoyev shifted from Karimov's "geopolitical pendulum" toward a regionalism-based strategy.

Coined by Nazarbayev (Hanks 2009; Contessi 2015), multi-vectorism is variously read as cost-benefit rationality (Hanks 2009), bargaining by small states (Gnedina 2015), co-alignment/issue-splitting (Contessi 2015), or balancing variants (Pikalov 2014). Critics find it vague or incoherent (Kuzio 2016); most agree it denotes trade-offs across security-autonomy and issue areas (Aris 2010; Gnedina 2015; Contessi 2015; Pikalov 2014). Kassenova (2022) argues that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has unsettled Kazakhstan's long-standing multi-vector diplomacy, compelling Astana to recalibrate its relationships with Russia, China, the West, and regional partners and search for a new geopolitical equilibrium that preserves sovereignty and stability (Kassenova, 2022).

The literature skews toward systemic geopolitics and domestic regime logics; leadership-centred, decision-process, and role-analytic studies remain limited (Ayazbekov 2013; Fazendeiro 2013, Stanko 2024). The most recent application of Role theory is found in Stanko's (2024) study, which integrates role theory with soft power analysis, demonstrating that a state's foreign policy role conception shapes how it experiences and manages non-coercive influence. Comparative, theory-testing work is sparse. Hence, this study addresses these gaps by using Role Theory (NRCs) and tracing how leader-defined roles shape Kazakhstan's and Uzbekistan's foreign policy behaviors.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### *From Systemic International Relations theories (IR) to Agent-Centred Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA)*

Foreign policy can be understood as the overall framework that directs how a sovereign state behaves within the international arena. It encompasses the variety of ways a government interacts beyond its borders through diplomacy, coalition-building, strategic doctrines, and participation in international institutions, as well as the choices it makes to act, respond, or deliberately remain inactive in world affairs (Holsti, 1970; Morin & Paquin, 2018).

Theories that study foreign policy vary according to their preferred level of analysis and their assumptions about what drives state behavior. Mainstream IR approaches privilege systemic pressures. Realism links state behavior to survival under anarchy and the distribution of capabilities (Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979).

Liberalism highlights interdependence, institutions, and domestic preferences (Keohane, 1984; Moravcsik, 1997). Constructivism stresses identities and norms that shape interests (Wendt, 1999), while the English School adds society-of-states logics (Bull, 1977). For small and medium-sized states, these systemic accounts typically



predict strategies such as balancing, bandwagoning, hedging, or omnibalancing (Walt, 1987; David, 1991). Yet, as the Central Asian cases show, similar systemic conditions can yield divergent policies. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan confront the same Russia-China security complex, but have adopted different alignments and degrees of institutional engagement, complicating purely structural predictions.

While this analysis takes leadership and elite perceptions seriously, it does not adopt a strictly first-image, Waltzian model in which state behavior is explained solely by individual leaders' characteristics (Waltz, 1959). Instead, it follows Carlsnaes' (1992) multi-level conception of foreign policy as purposive action by leaders, filtered through their beliefs and role conceptions, yet embedded in domestic institutions and systemic constraints (Carlsnaes, 1992; Hudson, 2007). In this sense, national role conceptions function as an intervening ideational layer that links structural pressures and regime-security imperatives to concrete foreign policy choices (Holsti, 1970; Harnisch, 2011).

Domestic-level theories foreground how internal structures condition foreign policy. Regime type, selectorate incentives, and societal competition are seen as key drivers (Hey, 1995; Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003; Goertz & Levy, 2007). Bureaucratic politics and organizational process models emphasise intra-state bargaining and rule-based routines (Allison, 1969), while two-level-game arguments link international bargaining to domestic ratification constraints (Putnam, 1988). Small-state literatures suggest role specialisation, niche diplomacy, and reliance on rules and institutions as typical strategies (Hey, 2003; Thorhallsson, 2012). These approaches capture important aspects of Kazakhstan's and Uzbekistan's behaviour - such as regime-security concerns, elite networks, and bureaucratic weakness - but do not, on their own, explain why similarly authoritarian regimes construct different self-images and external profiles.

Neoclassical realism retains systemic primacy but inserts *Innenpolitik* "filters" - state power, leadership perceptions, and ideas - through which external pressures are translated into foreign policy (Rose, 1998; Schweller, 2004; Ripsman, Taliaferro, & Lobell, 2016). It illuminates, for example, why regime insecurity and lower state capacity in Uzbekistan discouraged the delegation of authority to regional bodies, whereas Kazakhstan's relatively stronger bureaucracy and resource base facilitated outward engagement and multi-vector diplomacy (Melvin, 2008; Cooley, 2012). Still, when ideas are treated primarily as intervening variables that "distort" or "amplify" systemic signals, identity-laden role conceptions often remain under-specified, and the historically constituted "self" of the state is analytically thin (Krotz, 2015).

Constructivism reverses the explanatory direction, arguing that identities and norms shape interests, "anarchy is what states make of it" (Wendt, 1999). In Central Asia, it has been used to show how Kazakhstan cultivated a civic, multi-ethnic Eurasian identity to legitimise external partnerships and regional leadership, while Uzbekistan mobilized Timurid heritage and the rhetoric of "independence" to justify sovereignty-first, low-integration policies (Cummings, 2005; Dave, 2007; March, 2002). Related concepts such as ontological security highlight the need of political communities to maintain a consistent self-narrative amid uncertainty (Mitzen, 2006; Steele, 2008). These approaches help explain why leaders care about status, recognition, and "proper" conduct, but they offer fewer tools for linking specific belief systems to recurring

decision patterns and for specifying why one identity narrative, e.g. “Eurasian Bridge” versus “Independent Actor”, becomes dominant in a given polity at a given time.

Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) responds to these limitations by placing human decision-makers at the core of explanation. It treats foreign policy as the outcome of actor-specific perceptions and choices situated within institutional and structural contexts (Hudson & Vore, 1995; Hudson, 2007). Foundational work by Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin (1962), Rosenau (1966), and Sprout & Sprout (1956) already insisted that foreign policy is best understood as what officials do and decide under particular constraints, rather than as the automatic “output” of the system. Subsequent middle-range programmes have examined misperception (Jervis, 1976), images of self and other (Hermann, 1987; Cottam, 1977), bounded rationality and heuristics (Simon, 1985), operational code beliefs (George, 1969), leadership trait profiles (Levy, 2003), and poliheuristic decision-making (Mintz, 2004), among others. This literature justifies an actor-centred, multi-level methodology that traces how leaders interpret their environment and how those interpretations become embedded in state behaviour across time (Breuning, 2007; Hudson, 2007).

Although Waltz’s (1959) First Image attributes foreign policy primarily to individuals, it offers limited tools for systematically linking leader psychology to patterned state behaviour. Role Theory builds on First Image insights by specifying how belief systems, identity narratives, and perceptions of “appropriate” conduct are translated into recurrent foreign-policy choices. Rather than treating leadership as idiosyncratic “noise”, it conceptualises leaders’ understandings of their state’s role as structured, shared, and, in principle, observable. In this sense, Role Theory is employed here not as a competitor to First-Image analysis, but as its elaboration and operationalisation within FPA. By focusing on national role conceptions as the cognitive-normative link between leaders and systemic structures, it provides a tractable way to model how agency and structure interact in producing the divergent foreign policies of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

### ***Role Theory as a bridge between structure and agency***

Role Theory bridges structure and agency by treating national role conceptions (NRCs) as policymakers’ own definitions of appropriate functions and commitments for their state (Holsti, 1970; Wish, 1980; Walker, 1987; Tewes, 1998; Harnisch, Frank, & Maull, 2011; Thies, 2012). NRCs link identity to patterned behaviour through internal and external role expectations and the possibility of role conflict (Cantir & Kaarbo, 2012).

In his seminal article, Holsti (1970) argued that decision-makers construct role definitions such as regional leader, faithful ally, or mediator that act as normative frameworks guiding their foreign policy behaviour. These roles emerge through the interaction of two key dimensions:

***Domestic factors:*** internal elements such as state capability, ideology, leadership style, public opinion, and historical experience.

***External cues:*** expectations and pressures from the international environment, including allies, adversaries, and systemic norms.



Holsti (1970, pp. 245-246) described national role conceptions as the ways in which policymakers define what kinds of actions, responsibilities, and patterns of behaviour are appropriate for their state, including the ongoing roles or functions it should play within the international or regional system.

In addition to guiding how leaders interpret external pressures, national role conceptions also serve as legitimization tools, providing the rhetorical vocabulary through which elites justify policy choices to domestic and international audiences (Cantir & Kaarbo, 2016; Harnisch, 2011).

Role Theory thus serves as an analytical framework rather than a deterministic predictive model. It assumes that states, much like individuals, act according to the expectations attached to their “positions” within a broader social structure (Grossman, 2003). The framework employs a theatrical analogy, viewing international politics as a stage where states perform assigned or self-ascribed roles (Biddle & Thomas, 1966; Grossman, 2003).

Policymakers’ perceptions of capabilities, values, and constraints determine which roles are deemed appropriate (Walker, 1987). These conceptions guide commitments and actions (Holsti, 1970; Hermann, 1987), while role performance depends on the congruence between internal and external expectations. External “role cues” arise from the international environment and other actors’ perceptions (Holsti, 1970; Harnisch & Maull, 2011; Egelström & Smith, 2006; Harnisch, 2011). When self-perceived roles and external expectations diverge, “role conflict” may occur (Cantir & Kaarbo, 2016). For roles to be identified, the international system must be seen as a social structure composed of actors occupying hierarchically stratified positions based on power and capability (Holsti, 1970; Walker, 1987; Grossman, 2003). This hierarchy influences both perceived status and feasible role choices (Singer & Hudson, 1992). Leaders are aware of their state’s relative rank, superpower, great, middle, or small state, and act within those constraints (Brecher, Steinberg, & Stein, 1969; Wilkinson, 1969).

Leaders’ perceptions of others also matter. Cottam (1977) found that leaders classify other states as enemy, ally, imperial, or colonial, based on perceived threat levels. Similarly, Hermann (1987) proposed typologies such as barbarian, degenerate, or dependent. These images help explain how role expectations and role conflicts arise, such as during the Cold War rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States. The role approach thus assumes that states enact roles envisioned by their leaders (Holsti, 1970; Krotz, 2015; Harnisch, 2012). These roles evolve through the interaction of domestic and international determinants, including motivation, regime type, decision-making style, and the dynamics of leadership perception (Holsti, 1970; Walker, 1987). Leaders’ cognitive assessments of national capability and external context are especially crucial (Grossman, 2003).

Drawing from Holsti (1970), Le Prestre (1997a), and Grossman (2003), the determinants of NRCs include:

- (a) *policymakers’ definitions of appropriate commitments and behaviour;*
- (b) *geography and territory;*
- (c) *resources and capabilities;*

- (d) economic and technological development;
- (e) traditional policies;
- (f) domestic socio-economic pressures;
- (g) ideology and national values;
- (h) identity and self-perception; and
- (i) external expectations and constraints (Le Prestre, 1997a; Grossman, 2003).

Subsequent scholarship expanded and refined Holsti's typology (see Table 1), emphasising that roles are socially embedded but historically resilient. Material constraints (e.g., geography, power, economy) limit feasible roles, yet once established, national roles often persist due to institutional inertia and regime-legitimation needs (Walker, 1987; Harnisch, 2012). Still, leadership turnover or ideological shifts can trigger role adaptation or redefinition (Thies, 2012; Cantir & Kaarbo, 2016).

**Table 1.** National Role Conceptions Identified by K.J. Holsti (1970)

Type of Role	Definition
<b>Active Independent</b>	Emphasizes self-determination, potential mediation, and active programs to expand diplomatic and commercial relations globally.
<b>Regional Leader</b>	Involves perceived duties or responsibilities toward other states in a region or subsystem.
<b>Mediator-Integrator</b>	Focuses on reconciling conflicts between states or groups of states.
<b>Regional-Subsystem Collaborator</b>	Entails deep commitment to cooperative regional efforts to build wider communities.
<b>Bridge</b>	Acts as a translator or connector between states or cultures.
<b>Independent</b>	Pursues self-determination without a specific international mission.
<b>Internal Development</b>	Directs primary efforts toward domestic economic and social development.
<b>Isolate</b>	Seeks minimal external contact or international involvement.

*Source: Holsti, K. J. (1970). National role conceptions in the study of foreign policy. International Studies Quarterly, 14(3), 233-309.*

However, Holsti's (1970) formulation remains the foundational conceptual baseline for NRCs. Yet, contemporary Role Theory has evolved to integrate insights from constructivism (role contestation, socialization, norm diffusion) and socio-psychological approaches (leader cognition, belief systems, operational codes). These expansions are reflected in the work of Harnisch (2012), Cantir and Kaarbo (2012), Thies (2012), Hudson (2007), and Hermann (1987, 1999), all of whom conceptualize roles as intersections of cognitive schemas, institutionalized narratives, and public discourse.

At the same time, Role Theory has faced sustained criticism for its conceptual ambiguity and methodological weaknesses. Kuzma (1998) described it as a "noble attempt with a brief life", while Thies (2009) noted that efforts to revitalise the theory have often stalled and that applications remained fragmented (Le Prestre, 1997; Wehner & Thies, 2014). In response, more recent work has clarified key concepts such as role conception, role enactment, and role contestation and has developed systematic coding schemes and mixed-methods designs to study roles across time and cases (Harnisch, Frank, & Maull, 2011; Breuning, 2011; Cantir & Kaarbo, 2016).

Despite earlier scepticism, Role Theory retains strong potential as a multi-level analytical bridge linking individual, state, and systemic dimensions of foreign policy. Its application to diverse contexts, including small and non-democratic states, can illuminate how leaders' cognitive and psychological milieus shape external behaviour (Holsti, 1970; Hermann, 1999).

For Central Asia in particular, where foreign policy is closely tied to identity-based roles such as “Bridge” or “Independent Actor”, Role Theory offers a valuable lens for examining how leadership style and regime dynamics interact in shaping state behaviour (Korany, 1986; Wehner & Thies, 2014; Bauyrzhankyzy, 2020). In this study, NRCs are thus treated as mid-range constructs that both reflect and structure Kazakhstan's and Uzbekistan's foreign policies, mediating between structural constraints and leadership agency.

While NRCs provide interpretive structure, they operate alongside material and political determinants. Economic dependence, transit constraints, Russian and Chinese leverage, and domestic crises (such as Andijan) shape the menu of feasible options. NRCs explain how leaders interpret these pressures and choose among them, not why constraints exist. Thus, NRCs are treated as explanatory cognitive frameworks rather than alternative causes.

Thus, NRCs are best understood as an ideational layer that interacts with, rather than overrides, material interests and regime-security imperatives, shaping how leaders interpret and prioritize economic, security, and status concerns (Holsti, 1970; Hudson, 2007).

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research design and case selection*

The study employs a comparative, most-similar-cases design that integrates content analysis of leadership discourse with analysis of foreign-policy behavior (George & Bennett, 2005). It is designed as a plausibility probe (George & Bennett, 2005), not a full causal test. The brief discussion of Presidents Tokayev and Mirziyoyev is therefore treated as a plausibility probe of role continuity and adaptation rather than as a full second generation of case studies.

As outlined in the introduction, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are treated as “most-similar” pivotal cases: post-Soviet, authoritarian presidential regimes of comparable size and geopolitical location whose sharply divergent foreign-policy paths call for explanation beyond structural factors. This design controls for background variables while isolating NRCs as the explanatory factor shaping variation in foreign-policy behavior.

These cases were not chosen ex post simply because they exhibit divergent foreign policy behaviors. Rather, they were selected ex ante as structurally similar, medium-sized regional pivots that, under neoclassical realist and regime-security assumptions, would be expected to converge on broadly similar patterns of accommodating great powers and defending sovereignty (Snyder et al., 1962). The persistent divergence between Kazakhstan's relatively institution-building, “bridging” strategy and Uzbekistan's more

sovereignty-defensive, “independent actor” posture, therefore, presents a theoretically meaningful puzzle under shared regional constraints.

Importantly, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were selected because they are the only two Central Asian states that simultaneously display:

- (a) *sufficiently dense and coherent national role narratives,*
- (b) *long-term, stable leadership, allowing NRCs to be articulated and institutionalised; and*
- (c) *the material state capacity required for sustained role performance.*

Other regional states (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan) lack comparable “role density” and exhibit fragmented or inconsistent role signals (Anceschi, 2020; Laruelle, 2017; Kassenova, 2022), making them theoretically less suitable for an NRC-centred comparison. Historically entrenched leadership contestation between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, symbolised by the Kunayev-Rashidov rivalry in the late Soviet period (Roy, 2000; Collins, 2009), also created two competing political centres of gravity in Central Asia, providing fertile ground for divergent role conception development.

Within Central Asia, smaller and more structurally dependent states such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan tend to align more predictably with Russian and Chinese preferences, displaying less foreign policy autonomy than Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (March, 2003; Isaacs, 2010). This broader regional pattern functions as a de facto background control, underscoring that the Kazakh and Uzbek trajectories are not simply the default outcome of shared structural pressures but rather reflect leadership-defined role conceptions. At the same time, the study does not “control for” economic structure, demography, or domestic crises in a strict econometric sense. As a qualitative, theory-probing design, it instead holds regime type, region, and broad structural context constant and then traces how different NRCs are associated with distinct foreign policy paths over time (George & Bennett, 2005).

Methodologically, the study follows a two-step strategy - reconstructing NRCs from leadership discourse and then comparing them to foreign-policy behavior under shared structural constraints.

### ***Data collection and sampling***

To reconstruct NRCs, a corpus of 100 speeches and interviews (50 by Nursultan Nazarbayev, 50 by Islam Karimov) from 1991-2016 was compiled (see Appendices 2-3). Texts were drawn from LexisNexis, BBC Monitoring, Interfax, Xinhua, and official presidential and foreign ministry archives, as well as such Uza and international press reports. The time frame captures the entirety of both leaders’ overlapping tenures and thus allows observation of both initial role definition and subsequent adaptation.

Leadership traits and cognitive research support the assumption that core belief systems and role orientations are relatively stable over an adult leader’s career (Hermann, 1987; Kaarbo, 1997). The sampling strategy, therefore, prioritises breadth across time and issue areas rather than concentration on short “crisis windows”.

To minimise selection bias, the textual corpus was constructed using explicit inclusion criteria. A document was retained if it:

- was authored directly by the president* (speech, interview, statement) rather than a journalistic paraphrase;
- contained explicit foreign-policy content* (references to external partners, organisations, regional/global order, security, or economic diplomacy);
- exceeded 150-200 words*, to ensure sufficient discursive density; and
- addressed at least one, and preferably several, of the core issue domains* (security, economy, diplomacy, identity/status).

Within these constraints, all publicly available items meeting the criteria in the specified period were included. The sample is therefore not “cherry-picked” for particularly clear statements of “bridge” or “independent” roles, but represents the complete accessible set of foreign-policy relevant presidential texts.

### ***Coding scheme and reliability***

The discursive analysis follows Naomi Bailin Wish’s (1980) coding framework, which refines Holsti’s (1970) NRC typology. Each text was coded for three families of indicators (see Table 2).

Table 2 summarizes the main coding categories used in the analysis, while Appendix 1 provides the full list of role codes, along with the corpus of 100 presidential speeches and interviews (dates, venues, and sources). This allows readers to see precisely how the textual corpus was constructed and how the NRC profiles were generated (Wish, 1980; Holsti, 1970).

**Table 2.** Coding Framework for National Role Conceptions

Dimension	Category	Description
<b>Status</b>	Capabilities	<i>References to human, economic, military, or cultural resources.</i>
	Position toward Others	<i>Perceived relative position- equal, superior, or subordinate.</i>
<b>Motivational Orientation</b>	Wish to Expand	<i>Desire to extend engagement internationally.</i>
	Competitive/ Cooperative	<i>Orientation toward rivalry or partnership.</i>
	Desired Change	<i>Degree of change envisioned domestically or internationally.</i>
<b>Substantive Issue Areas</b>	Economic	<i>Development, reform, or resource management.</i>
	Security	<i>Defense, threats, or national security.</i>
	Political	<i>Governance, democracy, rule of law, institutions.</i>
	Universal Values	<i>Human rights, justice, equality.</i>
	Cultural / Historical	<i>Heritage, national identity, education, religion.</i>
	Unilateral	<i>Nationalist or zero-sum interests.</i>
	Multilateral	<i>Cooperation, integration, or partnership.</i>

Source: Wish, 1980; Holsti, 1970

Multiple categories could be coded within a single paragraph or speech. Coding was performed at the paragraph level to balance sensitivity to context with feasibility. Coded frequencies were then aggregated to generate leader-specific NRC profiles (see Appendix 1), indicating, for each president, the relative weight of different status perceptions, motivations, and issue emphases across the 1991-2016 period.

### ***Linking discourse to behavior***

Because role conceptions are expressed in discourse but enacted through behavior, the second empirical step traces discursive NRC profiles in foreign-policy behavior. For each state, a set of behavioral indicators was compiled for the 1991-2016 period, focusing on:

- *Regional organization participation and depth/consistency of engagement;*
- *Security alignments and basing agreements with Russia, the United States, and other external powers;*
- *Patterns of multilateral versus bilateral diplomacy (e.g., hosting summits, mediation initiatives, participation in international organizations);*
- *Major foreign-policy decisions illustrating self-reliance, non-alignment, or cooperative integration (e.g., Kazakhstan's nuclear disarmament, Uzbekistan's withdrawals from and re-entries into regional organizations).*

These behaviors were then read against the NRC profiles using a structured, focused comparison: for each hypothesized role (e.g., "Bridge/Mediator-Integrator" vs. "Independent/Active Independent"), the analysis asks whether we observe the expected patterns of cooperation, multilateralism, and mediation, or of self-reliance, non-alignment, and unilateralism. Where possible, process-tracing is employed for key episodes (for example, Kazakhstan's early 1990s nuclear decisions, Uzbekistan's post-Andijan realignment) to examine temporal sequencing between changes in role discourse and shifts in behaviour.

This two-step strategy addresses a central methodological criticism of role-analytic work, the alleged gap between "rhetoric" and "reality", by explicitly pairing discourse analysis with behavioural evidence rather than inferring behaviour from language alone.

In summary, the methodology integrates content analysis of leadership discourse with historical foreign policy analysis. By coding what each leader says and comparing it to what the state does, the study can draw conclusions about the influence of national role conceptions on foreign policy. The next section will present the findings from this empirical analysis.

## **FINDINGS**

### ***Kazakhstan's "Eurasian Bridge" Role Conception***

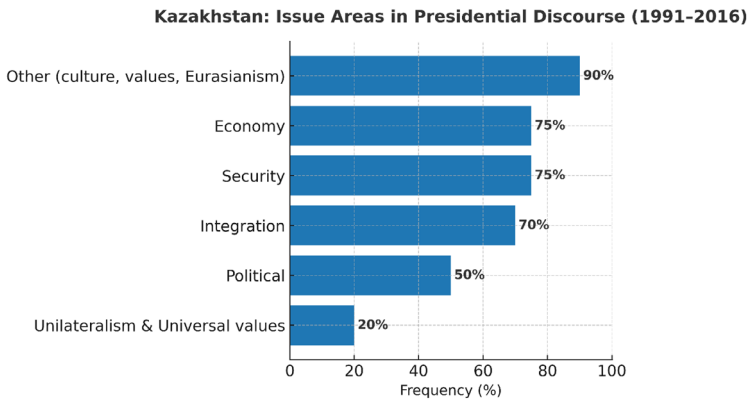
According to the results, the dominant category in Nazarbayev's rhetoric was "other" (~90%), encompassing discussions on culture, history, traditional values, and Kazakhstan's Eurasian identity. This aligns with the "bridge" metaphor used to portray Kazakhstan as a mediator between East and West. The frequent use of terms such as peace, dialogue, friendship, and harmony emphasized Kazakhstan's pacific and cooperative image, distinct from power-based narratives.

Behaviorally, this "Eurasian Bridge" self-conception is reflected in Kazakhstan's consistent efforts to position itself as a mediator and institutional entrepreneur. However, the 'Eurasian Bridge' role does not imply equidistance between all partners on every issue. In critical security crises such as the Ukraine conflict and Russia's annexation of Crimea, Kazakhstan has refrained from directly challenging Moscow and has



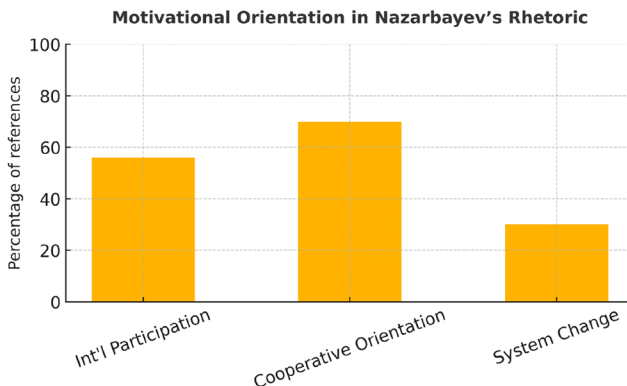
often prioritized its strategic partnership with Russia, while simultaneously stressing principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference (Kassenova, 2022). Rather than contradicting the “bridge” NRC, this pattern underscores its sovereignty-protecting and regime-security dimension. Nazarbayev’s discourse frames Kazakhstan as a mediator and promoter of dialogue, but within a hierarchy of interests in which maintaining stable relations with Russia on core security questions is central. In this sense, the Eurasian Bridge NRC both guides policy preferences and provides a post hoc justificatory frame for foreign policy choices made under asymmetric power constraints (Holsti, 1970).

**Figure 1.** Distribution of Issue Areas in Nazarbayev’s Discourse



*Source: These are the results of the coding, percentages represent the proportion of total coded paragraphs (Bauyrzhankyzy, 2020). Based on Naomi Wish’s (1980) methodology, see Appendix 1*

**Figure 2.** Distribution of motivational orientation in Nazarbayev’s Discourse



*Source: These are the results of the coding, percentages represent the proportion of total coded paragraphs (Bauyrzhankyzy, 2020). Based on Naomi Wish’s (1980) methodology, see Appendix 1*

Economic and security issues ranked second (~75%), reflecting Kazakhstan’s oil-dependent economy and regional vulnerabilities. Yet, these were consistently framed

within a cooperative and multilateral discourse, signaling support for integration and dialogue rather than confrontation.

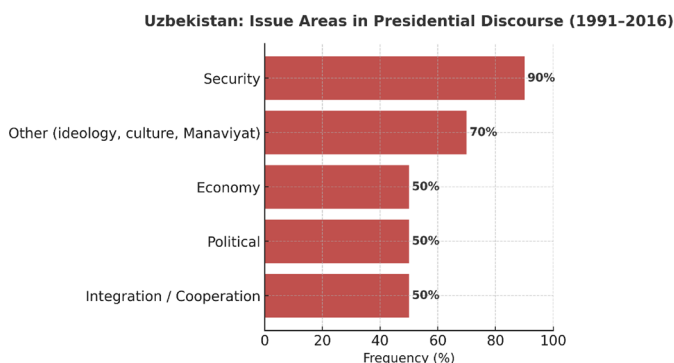
*The motivational orientation results* (Figure 2) show that ~56% of Nazarbayev's statements expressed willingness to participate in global affairs, while ~70% reflected a cooperative stance. Only ~30% mentioned the desire for systemic change, indicating that Kazakhstan sought incremental, not revolutionary, adjustments in the regional order. Nazarbayev's emphasis on *constructive dialogue, conflict mediation, and integration* demonstrates a preference for non-aggressive engagement. These findings show that Kazakhstan positioned itself as a connector, mediator, and regional collaborator - roles described by Holsti (1970) as *bridge, mediator-integrator, and regional subsystem collaborator*. The narrative was reinforced domestically through cultural rhetoric and externally through multilateral diplomacy. While Mostafa (2013) contends that Kazakh Eurasianism lacked a coherent theoretical foundation and reflected a subordinate "bridge" status, the data suggest that Nazarbayev consciously used this narrative to elevate Kazakhstan's international standing and legitimize his leadership as a promoter of peace and cooperation.

In sum, Kazakhstan's discourse consistently emphasized cultural diplomacy, multilateralism, and integrative rhetoric, confirming Hypothesis 1a, that its foreign policy behavior reflects a *bridge-type* role conception rooted in cooperative engagement and legitimizing national identity construction.

### ***Uzbekistan's "Independent Actor" Role Conception***

The results show that "security" dominated Karimov's discourse (~90%), reflects the primacy of regime protection and national sovereignty. Frequent mentions of external and internal threats- terrorism, extremism, and "color revolutions" indicate a perception of a hostile environment. The "other" category (~70%) captures themes such as *national ideology, Uzbekness, and cultural revival*, revealing how Karimov fused nationalism with defensive state-building. Economy, political issues, and integrational processes showed around ~50% marks.

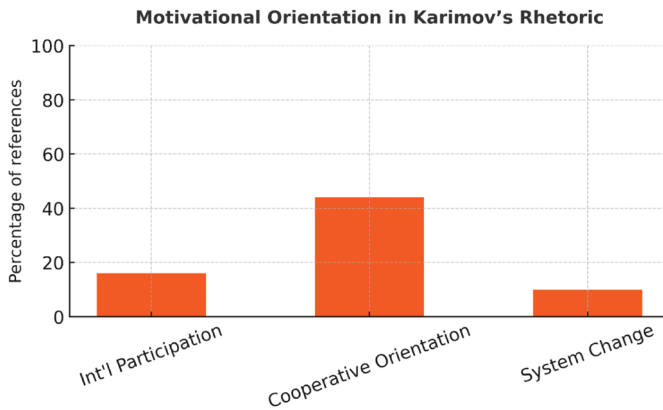
**Figure 3.** Distribution of Issue Areas in Karimov's Discourse (1991-2016)



*Source: These are the results of the coding, percentages represent the proportion of total coded paragraphs (Bauyrzhankyzy, 2020). Based on Naomi Wish's (1980) methodology, see Appendix 1*

Motivational orientation analysis shows that only 16% of Karimov’s statements expressed willingness to participate internationally, compared to 56% for Nazarbayev. In 6% it showed a reluctant attitude, which can also be traced in the foreign policy of Uzbekistan. The category of “Competitiveness and Cooperation” illustrated that Uzbekistan (around 44% assertions) tended to act cooperatively. However, this wording depended on issues under consideration. The last categories of “Willingness to expand” (78 % no reference) and “Systemic changes” (70% no reference) indicated that Uzbekistan was less interested in the change of international order. Yet, 8% of assertions expressed by Islam Karimov referred to the need for internal reforms. This reflects a preventive and reactive foreign policy style, consistent with Uzbekistan’s limited institutional integration and intermittent withdrawal from regional bodies (Fazendeiro, 2013).

**Figure 4.** Distribution of Issue Areas in Karimov’s Discourse



*Source: These are the results of the coding, percentages represent the proportion of total coded paragraphs (Bauyrzhankyzy, 2020). Based on Naomi Wish's (1980) methodology, see Appendix 1*

Karimov’s discourse operationalized the “Independent Actor” role (Holsti, 1970), emphasizing autonomy, sovereignty, and non-alignment. His 1993 and 2012 Foreign Policy Concepts codified principles of neutrality, de-ideologization, non-interference, and the primacy of national interests (Tolipov, 2014). Uzbekistan’s avoidance of collective frameworks such as the CSTO or the Eurasian Economic Union further demonstrates this pattern. This corresponds with his tendency for abrupt foreign policy reversals, e.g., the expulsion of U.S. forces from Karshi-Khanabad in 2005 and oscillations in relations with Russia and the West.

In sum, Uzbekistan’s rhetoric and behavior reveal a sovereignty-protective orientation. Its security-driven, independence-focused role conception confirms Hypothesis 1b, showing how Karimov’s leadership reinforced a self-image of defensive self-reliance grounded in historical and ideological constructs.

**Table 2.** Coding Framework for National Role Conceptions

Dimension	Kazakhstan (Nazarbayev)	Uzbekistan (Karimov)
Dominant Issue	Culture / Integration	Security / Sovereignty

<b>Motivational Orientation</b>	Cooperative (70%), System-change modest (30%)	Competitive-cooperative (44%), 8% of assertions referred to the need for internal reforms.
<b>Willingness to Engage</b>	High (56%)	Low (16%)
<b>Role Type (Holsti, 1970)</b>	Bridge / Mediator-Integrator	Independent Actor
<b>Policy Expression</b>	Kazakhstan's NRC ("Eurasian Bridge") emphasized cooperation, integration, and identity legitimation through multilateral diplomacy	Uzbekistan's NRC ("Independent Actor") centered on security, sovereignty, and regime protection through defensive isolation

Source: These are the results of the coding, percentages represent the proportion of total coded paragraphs (Bauyrzhankyzy, 2020). Based on Naomi Wish's (1980) methodology, see Appendix 1

The comparison confirms Hypothesis 1c: despite similar structural and regional contexts, differences in *national role conceptions*, filtered through leadership perceptions, produced divergent foreign policy paths.

## DISCUSSION

### *Congruence between Kazakhstan's "Eurasian Bridge" role and its organizational behavior*

The empirical analysis of Nazarbayev's speeches (1991-2016) shows a high degree of congruence between Kazakhstan's articulated "Eurasian Bridge" NRC and its foreign-policy behavior. *Ideational themes* dominated his discourse, while "*economy*" and "*security*" appeared less frequently as standalone frames. Concepts such as "*Eurasian state*", "*civilizational dialogue*", and "*peaceful coexistence*" were most emphasized, signaling a self-image as a culturally grounded, peace-oriented connector rather than a hard-balancing power. Kazakhstan's unilateral foreign-policy behavior closely reflected the notions of (a) *peaceful development*, (b) *confidence-building*, and (c) *civilizational dialogue* (Starr 2016, pp. 13-19).

The image of a "*peace developer*" was reinforced by Kazakhstan's decision to dismantle its inherited nuclear arsenal and close the Semipalatinsk Test Site, where Soviet tests had been conducted between 1949-1989 (Nazarbayev 2001, pp. 11-13; Starr 2016, p. 14). By signing the 1993 Lisbon Protocol and renouncing nuclear weapons, Kazakhstan secured early international recognition and bolstered Nazarbayev's reputation as a responsible global actor. As he famously stated, "*I'm the first president in the world that, by force of his own decree, bans the testings on the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing grounds*" (Nazarbayev 2001). This decision is fully consistent with a "bridge/mediator" NRC that privileges status through moral leadership rather than military power.

Kazakhstan's "*confidence-builder*" role was similarly expressed through its regional security diplomacy, most notably Nazarbayev's 1992 proposal at the 47th UN General Assembly to establish the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), an OSCE-like platform promoting sovereignty, non-interference, and cooperation across a broad Asian membership (Starr 2016, p. 17). Here again, the behavioral choice, sponsoring a confidence-building architecture, matches the discursive emphasis on dialogue and non-coercive security.

The "*civilizational dialogue-maker*" role drew upon Kazakhstan's multi-ethnic and multi-confessional identity to project itself as a bridge among cultures. This was

institutionalized through the triennial Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions (launched in 2003) and through Turkic-based initiatives such as the Turkic Council, TURKSOY, and TURKPA, which emphasized shared cultural and historical heritage. These initiatives allowed Astana to perform the “bridge” role both symbolically and institutionally, linking domestic identity narratives to external positioning.

In sum, Kazakhstan strategically leveraged its domestic diversity and historical experience to promote *unilateral* and “*minilateral*” initiatives that reinforced its mediating, peace-oriented image. The match between Nazarbayev’s role discourse and these policy choices illustrates how the “Eurasian Bridge” NRC structured both problem definition and instrument selection.

### ***Kazakhstan’s “Integrator/Mediator” role in regional organizations: CIS, CSTO, SCO, EEU/EEC***

Kazakhstan’s participation in post-Soviet regional organizations further demonstrates *role congruence*. Created to ease the Soviet breakup, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) quickly exhibited low vitality and poor compliance, with average policy implementation of roughly 55-56% (Kubicek 1998, p. 15; Molchanov 2015). Early divergences - Ukraine’s resistance to deeper integration, Georgia’s exit after 2008, and downgraded delegations - underscored “failed regionalism”, yet the forum persisted in energy, security, science, and information cooperation (Kubicek 2009; Molchanov 2015). Ineffectiveness reflected weak loyalty, Russia-centric dynamics, institutional incoherence, and sovereignty anxieties prompting members to hedge via other groupings (Molchanov 2015, p. 3; Kubicek 2009, p. 242; Collins 2009, p. 251). Despite these flaws, Kazakhstan consistently supported Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) integration: initially driven by demographic and security-economic needs, and later sustained as part of a stable “*Integrator*” role even as Kazakhization and economic growth advanced (Starr 2016). The persistence of engagement in a low-performing organization demonstrates that the CIS served not only instrumental interests but also role performance as a regional collaborator.

Bilateral alliance ties with Russia and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) membership anchored Kazakhstan’s security policy. Astana contributed substantially to CSTO forces and supported the Collective Rapid Reaction Force (KSOR), framing its priorities as counter-terrorism and peace maintenance in line with national interests (de Haas 2017). Yet the CSTO struggled to develop a shared identity, with Russia perceived simultaneously as a security provider and potential threat. Astana adopted a strict non-interference stance during the Kyrgyz and Andijan crises and avoided automatic alignment on Russia’s more contentious moves (Moldashev & Hassan 2017, p. 16). As Nazarbayev explained:

*“...The CSTO was not set up to meddle in the domestic affairs of sovereign states. The events took place within these countries. We did not see obvious aggression from outside. We did not see even terrorist attacks. And the main thing is these states did not invite us to take any part. When we were invited, we gave political help. For instance, in the case of Kyrgyzstan I had to address the people, talk to politicians, and so on. Therefore we, the CSTO, are not meant to do this. I think therefore that*

*Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan should get down to reforming their economies and political courses in a very serious and profound way. They should draw conclusions from this. The sovereign state of Uzbekistan has the right either to let in international observers or not to (BBC Monitoring, 2005).*

This interpretation, coupled with Kazakhstan's abstentions on Crimea-related UN votes and on a Russia-sponsored Syria resolution (Tskhay & Buranelli 2020), signaled a sovereignty-first reading of collective security, consistent with a "bridge/integrator" role that avoids being locked into coercive behavior by allies.

Within the SCO, a club privileging sovereignty and non-interference - the "Shanghai spirit" - Astana used the organization to protect regime stability amid anxieties about "colour revolutions" and Western normative pressure (Ambrosio 2008, p. 1322; Allison 2018). Kazakhstan championed energy cooperation (SCO Energy Club; Asian Energy Strategy), became a key transit state via the Atasu-Alashankou pipeline, and backed collective transport and energy corridors, while resisting a Chinese-led common market that might erode economic sovereignty (Starr 2016, p. 40; Laruelle & Peyrouse 2013). Nazarbayev's support for the SCO Energy Club - arguing that *"the mechanism of Ministries of Energy meetings...must be organized within the framework of the SCO Energy Club, which from our point of view, would become one of the main elements of Asian Energy Strategy"* - illustrates how Kazakhstan sought to translate its "bridge" narrative into concrete regional frameworks.

The Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) emerged as a merger and deepening of earlier regional bodies, driven by the Eurasian "trio" of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan (Moldashev & Hassan 2017). Eurasian initiatives evolved into the EEU in 2015, institutionalizing selective supranationalism far below EU density and constrained by a weak regional identity (Moldashev & Hassan 2017). Although economists questioned Kazakhstan's net gains relative to Russia's, Astana embraced membership as economic-pragmatic Eurasianism under sovereign equality, with explicit exit rights if independence were threatened (Chatterjee-Doody 2015). As Nazarbayev underlined:

*"...talks about the disadvantages of Kazakhstan's membership in the EEU - is a reflection of dilettantism. The EEU is a purely economic union but not a political one: all member states have equal voting right; everything is resolved via consensus. Besides, Kazakhstan always reserves the right to pull out of this union if there will be a threat to its independence. And on the whole, the union has many advantages, and 'there are no arguments for pessimism'. Moreover, strengthening trade and economic relations with neighboring countries will make it possible to strengthen our security because it is beneficial for trade partners that the situation remains stable in their territories"(BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, 2014).*

Across CIS, CSTO, SCO, and EEU, Astana systematically favored cooperation even when benefits were modest or ambiguous, using participation to safeguard security, economic access, and status while managing sovereignty risks, chiefly Russia's



weight via parallel partnerships with China and Western institutions. This pattern expresses a consistent “*Bridge/Integrator*” role performed through accommodative, prestige-seeking diplomacy and confirms the behavioral relevance of Kazakhstan’s NRC.

Temporal sequencing evidence shows that role conceptions did not merely emerge as post-hoc justifications. In Kazakhstan, Eurasian/bridge rhetoric appears consistently in early 1990s speeches, years before the creation of EurAsEC, CSTO, or the EAEU—indicating that *identity narratives pre-dated* institutional commitments. In this sense, legitimation is not an alternative to *role-driven behavior* but an intrinsic part of role performance. Leaders deployed role narratives to justify and sustain material choices, especially under asymmetric constraints.

### ***Kazakhstan’s “Bridging” partnership with NATO, the EU, and the OSCE***

Kazakhstan’s ties with Western institutions further validate the “Eurasian Bridge” role conception. From the mid-1990s, Kazakhstan joined the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) and the Partnership for Peace (PfP), contributing to NATO’s practical cooperation agenda and, later, to Afghanistan-related priorities after the 2004 Istanbul Summit’s “special focus” on Central Asia (Weitz 2006, p. 163). The EAPC is a multilateral forum for dialogue and cooperation between NATO members and partner countries across Europe and Central Asia, providing a political framework for partnership activities and consultations (NATO, 2025).

The PfP, launched in 1994, is a practical cooperation program that allows non-NATO states, including those in Central Asia, to work directly with NATO on military training, interoperability, peacekeeping, and defense reform according to self-defined partnership objectives (NATO, 2024). Engagement in these frameworks enhanced Kazakhstan’s interoperability and access to Western expertise while avoiding formal alliance commitments or sharp normative confrontation, fitting Astana’s bridge posture.

EU-Kazakhstan ties developed early and, especially after 9/11, shifted toward security and energy within the framework of the 2007 EU-Central Asia Strategy (Melvin 2008, 2009). Energy interdependence, trade, and diversified political contacts made the EU a key Western vector within Kazakhstan’s multi-vector foreign policy, even as persistent gaps over democracy and human rights limited deeper political integration.

Kazakhstan’s Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Chairmanship in 2010, the first by a post-Soviet Central Asian state, aimed to showcase *conflict-mediation* credentials and to foster a Euro-Atlantic/Eurasian dialogue, culminating in the Astana Summit. Assessments note enhanced visibility and signals of increased autonomy, but limited direct impact on democratization or regional reconciliation (Contessi 2015). Kazakhstan’s subsequent non-permanent membership on the UN Security Council (2017-2018) furthered the “*bridging*” script by linking regional organizations and UN agendas, amplifying its status while avoiding overt normative confrontations with major powers.

Overall, Kazakhstan’s Western partnerships (OSCE, NATO, EU, UN) reproduced the same calculus as its regional engagements: use of multilateral forums to project a

responsible, mediating Eurasian middle-power identity, to seek recognition and security, and to insulate regime stability.

### ***UN General Assembly roll-call data***

Another behavioral indicator is the UN General Assembly roll-call data. It strongly supports the view that its foreign policy behavior is both regionally embedded and distinctively multi-vector. Costa-Buranelli (2014) shows that from 1992-2012 Kazakhstan shared the Central Asian pattern of high intra-regional voting convergence and a pluralist normative profile, prioritizing sovereignty, non-interference, international law, and multilateral conflict-management, especially on issues such as development, decolonization, and the Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (ibid).

At the same time, Yuneman's (2023) 2007-22 analysis of more than 1,300 UNGA resolutions demonstrates that Kazakhstan's closest voting partner is China (roughly 76-89% cohesion) rather than its formal ally Russia (about 64-82%, with a clear downward trend), while cohesion with the United States remains persistently low (often below 25%). When Moscow and Beijing opposed each other, Astana sided with China in the majority of cases. When Russia clashed with Western states over conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Syria, Crimea, and Ukraine, Kazakhstan typically abstained, refusing to endorse core Russian positions and even supporting some human-rights and non-proliferation resolutions that Moscow opposed (Yuneman, 2023). Kazakhstan also repeatedly championed nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation resolutions, underlining its self-image as a "*nuclear disarmament champion*." (Yuneman, 2023). Compared to structurally more dependent neighbors like Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, whose S-scores reveal very high, stable affinity with Russia and China, and a sharp, long-term divergence from the United States. Kazakhstan thus might use UNGA voting as a hedging tool. Astana is combining bandwagoning with Moscow in hard-security institutions with a Beijing-leaning voting vector and an autonomous normative profile on disarmament and armed-conflict questions (Yuneman, 2023).

### ***Congruence between Uzbekistan's "Independent Actor" role and its organizational behavior***

The empirical evidence for Uzbekistan reveals a similarly strong, but contrasting, role-behavior congruence. Uzbekistan's "Independent Actor" role conception was rooted in security concerns and sovereignty preservation, encapsulated in a core principle of being "*better alone*" than accepting cooperation perceived as sovereignty-compromising. Shaped by Karimov's leadership style, Uzbekistan's foreign policy emphasized gradualism, flexibility, and regime preservation. His cautious, "*step-by-step*" approach to reforms and his reactive, opportunistic adjustments to external shifts exemplified by repetitive entry-exit behavior in regional organizations reflected a consistent prioritization of domestic stability (Hermann 1999, p. 9; Gleason 2001, p. 178). Karimov's tactics combined "*buying off*" and "*framing threats*" strategies, using state resources to manage internal and external pressures while constructing specific actors as potential dangers (Grove 2007, p. 5).

Uzbekistan's unilateral behavior was consistently framed around "*sovereignty*," "*independent stand*," and "*self-reliance*" (Kazemi 2003; Fazendeiro Teles 2013; 2017). Tashkent's pursuit of economic self-sufficiency and political autonomy served

as a defensive shield against perceived ideological and external threats ranging from religious extremism to renewed Russian influence and regional instability (Karimov 1991). Domestically, Karimov's paternalistic governance promoted the National Independence Ideology, emphasizing national pride, moral upbringing, and regime continuity (Cummings 2005). Internationally, this paternalism translated into defensive self-reliance (Fazendeiro Teles 2013), manifested in Uzbekistan's selective, low-commitment participation in international organizations and its insistence on sovereign equality.

Karimov's public statements asserting that *"Uzbek people will never depend on anyone"* and *"nobody can turn us away from the chosen way"* (BBC Monitoring Central Asia, 2005) reflected this enduring doctrine of independence. As he explained, Uzbekistan's distinct mentality required its own path of democratic and economic renewal, consistent with national traditions and resistant to external "political games" (BBC Monitoring Central Asia, 2005).

Consequently, the congruence between role conception and performance was reinforced by Karimov's leadership profile, producing a foreign policy defined by non-cooperation, strict non-interference, and an uncompromising defense of state sovereignty. In the interview given to Russian media, Islam Karimov connected the features of Uzbek mentality to the state's developmental way:

*"...In the days of the empire, we were regarded as second-class citizens. They did not realize that our people simply were brought up in a different way and would never stand for many of the things that were happening in other parts of the country. It is a different mentality, do you understand? Nevertheless, this does not mean that we can deviate from the path that was chosen in 1990 - the path of democratic renewal and the construction of civil society. It is just that everyone follows this path in his own way. We believe in the fundamental principles of democracy and we adhere to them unconditionally, but our actions must be consistent with the mentality of our people and with the lifestyle they have practiced for a thousand years"* (BBC Monitoring Central Asia, 2005).

*"We will continue to pursue an independent policy that meets our national interests without being dependent on anybody or dancing to the tune of various political games. First of all, I trust and rely on you, who represent our people, to continue to pursue this policy and I promise you that I will pursue this policy to the end"* (BBC Monitoring Central Asia, 2005).

### ***Uzbekistan's "non-cooperative" behavior in regional organizations: CIS, CSTO, SCO, and GUAM***

Like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan operated in institutions characterized by weak enforcement and sovereignty sensitivities, but its responses diverged sharply. Consensus rules and low ratification rates in the CIS allowed members to cherry-pick cooperation, especially when national or personal interests clashed, and Russia was seen as a sovereignty risk (Kubicek 2009, pp. 242, 249). Uzbekistan doubted the CIS's viability and limited its participation, preferring bilateral arrangements to manage domestic threats (religious

extremism, border disputes) and to hedge against Russian influence. Organizational under-resourcing, sovereignty anxieties, and weak institutionalization compounded CIS failures. Regime-survival incentives pushed Tashkent toward a protectionist, reluctant stance within CIS mechanisms.

Though officially non-aligned, Uzbekistan joined collective security structures (CSTO) in the 1990s as “protective integration” against transnational threats, while seeking to cap Moscow’s dominance (Allison 2018). Sovereignty primacy, however, drove repeated withdrawals and re-entries: concerns about external use of Uzbek troops, resistance to collective deployments, and insistence on non-stationing of foreign forces led Tashkent to leave the CSTO in 1999, rejoin amid post-Andijan and “colour revolution” pressures, curtail participation (for example, limiting involvement in KSOR), and exit again in 2012 (de Haas 2017). The Andijan uprising of May 2005 triggered a rupture with the US and the EU and reinforced a survival-first logic in security alignments. Karimov’s reaction to Andijan is illustrative:

*"Some large and powerful countries, which have large powers, want a nation or a country in the other part of the world to obey them and carry out their policy. What will happen if this is not done? They will put various accusations - which are becoming very common nowadays - against you. So, they say: 'You are against democracy. You do not protect human rights. You oppose certain journalists. You are like this, you are like that, so on and so forth.' And if necessary, it is no bother for them to gather their supporters in a big place as if they are going to deliver a verdict against you. I can provide many examples from our history. For example, the Andijon events [of 13 May 2005], how many fabrications, how many lies, and insults we have been exposed to. Time is the greatest and the justest judge. Now, after two years, everything is getting back normal. They realize themselves that all this was fabrications and the aim was to hold a color revolution here, to overthrow the government, to make people worried, to set them against one another, and if need be, insult our religion, so on and so forth"(BBC Monitoring Central Asia, 2005).*

Within the SCO, the non-interference “Shanghai spirit” aligned closely with Tashkent’s priorities of stability, sovereignty, and gradualism; Russia and China’s own separatism concerns underpinned their acceptance of this stance (Ambrosio 2008; Kazemi 2003). Uzbekistan supported the SCO’s Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) but remained generally passive, periodically downscaling engagement (for example, skipping meetings), even as it signed the SCO Charter and stayed in the organization to balance Russia via China and vice versa. Regional rivalries (with Kazakhstan; tensions with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) and unresolved issues such as water management reinforced Tashkent’s wariness of deeper economic or political integration; it backed SCO activity only insofar as it preserved the regional status quo (Laruelle & Peyrouse 2013; Cummings 2005).

In GU(U)AM (Georgia, Ukraine, (Uzbekistan), Azerbaijan, Moldova), widely seen as a project to limit Russian dominance (Moldashev & Hassan 2017), Uzbekistan briefly experimented with more overt balancing. GU(U)AM’s members already had

problematic relations with Moscow due to conflicts like Nagorno-Karabakh and the crises in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Convinced that GU(U)AM could serve as a hedge against Russia, Uzbekistan joined in 1999 after quitting the CSTO and pivoting westward post-9/11. However, Tashkent announced its withdrawal in 2002 and formally left in 2005 following Andijan. The grouping's regional impact remained limited, but it did help open EU partnership channels for some post-Soviet states. For Uzbekistan, the episode illustrates a short-lived attempt at collective balancing that collapsed once GU(U)AM appeared to entail political commitments incompatible with Karimov's regime-security priorities.

Across CIS, CSTO, SCO, and GU(U)AM, Uzbekistan consistently preferred minimal, selective, or reversible commitments, avoiding alliance-like bindings reminiscent of the Soviet past. Preventive and defensive behavior often traded potential material benefits and regional influence for sovereignty preservation and regime security. Russia functioned as the primary "*alter*" against which Tashkent's "Independent Actor" self-image was constructed (Holsti 1970; Walker 1987).

### *Uzbekistan's partnership with NATO, the EU, and the OSCE*

Uzbekistan's relations with Western institutions reproduced the same pattern of guarded, contingent engagement. Cooperation began in the 1990s through the Partnership for Peace (PFP), the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (later the EAPC), defense-education programs such as Defence Education Enhancement Programme (DEEP)\*, and transit support for Afghanistan-related operations.

However, human-rights concerns, especially after Andijan, prompted aid cuts and restrictions on military cooperation (de Haas 2017; Weitz 2012). While Germany retained limited access, overall, NATO-Uzbek ties were repeatedly recalibrated, mirroring Tashkent's preference for issue-based, reversible commitments rather than long-term alignment (de Haas 2017; Weitz 2012).

Relations with the EU were framed by a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA)\*\*, but the 2005 Andijan events led the EU to impose sanctions, including an arms embargo, visa bans on officials, and the suspension of certain aid and high-level contacts (Schmitz, 2009). These measures effectively froze parts of the PCA's cooperation mechanisms and highlighted the clash between EU conditionality and Uzbekistan's sovereignty-first stance. Subsequent EU engagement was widely seen as contingent on credible reforms that Tashkent was reluctant to undertake (Kassenova 2008; Hasanova et al., 2013; Melvin 2008, p. 147). Cooperation on human rights, military reform, and criminal justice saw little Uzbek uptake and hardened further after critical assessments, encouraging Tashkent to limit Western access (Kassenova 2008; Hasanova et al., 2013; Melvin 2008).

Uzbekistan's sovereignty-first discourse is visible in early post-1991 speeches, preceding later withdrawals from Western frameworks after Andijan. This sequencing strengthens

\*NATO Defence Education Enhancement Programme (DEEP). DEEP involves curriculum development, faculty training, and academic exchanges, improving teaching methods, and aligning military education with democratic standards and NATO best practices.

\*\*PCA - EU-Uzbekistan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement.

the claim that NRCs acted as prior interpretive filters rather than retroactive legitimizing tools.

Overall, Western ties served primarily as hedging tools and as temporary sources of economic and security benefits but were repeatedly constrained, and, at times, ruptured, by regime-stability fears and democratization pressure. This confirms that the “Independent Actor” NRC was not merely rhetorical. It consistently shaped how Uzbekistan evaluated and managed engagement with Euro-Atlantic structures.

### ***UN General Assembly roll-call data***

For Uzbekistan, the UNGA literature is thinner but broadly consistent with portraying it as a sovereignty-defensive state whose behavior is closer to a conventional pro-Russian small-state pattern than Kazakhstan’s China-leaning hedge. Costa-Buranelli’s (2014) study finds that Uzbekistan participates in the same high Central Asian voting convergence on pluralist, Westphalian norms, territorial integrity, non-intervention, international law, equitable economic order, and nuclear-weapon-free-zone initiatives. This indicates that Tashkent’s stance is not normatively revisionist but aimed at defending autonomy within the existing order (Costa-Buranelli, 2014).

This pattern reinforces Costa-Buranelli’s (2014) conclusion that Uzbekistan speaks the same pluralist language as its Central Asian peers in the UNGA, even as it does not frame this convergence within an explicit “Central Asian” regional identity.

Yuneman’s (2030) UNGA study demonstrates how S-score analysis of roll-call votes can serve as a “distant” behavioral test of multi-vector strategies, tracking a state’s voting cohesion with Russia, China, the United States, and the EU. Although focused on Kazakhstan, the study shows that disaggregated UNGA data can complement regional-organizational evidence by revealing whether a Central Asian state behaves as a dependent small state (*high routine alignment with Russia/China*) or as a more autonomous hedger (Yuneman, 2023).

### ***Role conflict, “alters”, and divergent adaptation***

Ultimately, both Kazakhstan’s and Uzbekistan’s self-defined roles were periodically challenged by the presence of their respective “alters” (Holsti 1970; Walker 1987). For Kazakhstan, the primary source of tension concerned the preservation of sovereignty, which risked erosion under Russia’s dominant influence within regional organizations. This anxiety, however, was mitigated through Kazakhstan’s active engagement with Western-oriented institutions and partnerships. By maintaining a balance between East and West, Astana sought to safeguard its autonomy while enhancing its international legitimacy. Still, relations with the Western alter carried inherent risks: external pressure for democratization could threaten the stability of Kazakhstan’s authoritarian regime. Nevertheless, under Nazarbayev’s leadership, Kazakhstan effectively sustained its “bridging” role through calibrated diplomacy within organizations such as the OSCE and NATO, avoiding normative confrontation and minimizing Western criticism of its domestic governance.

In contrast, Uzbekistan’s *self-image* might be constructed in opposition to Russia as the principal “alter”. The components of “sovereignty” and “security” were the most threatened in Uzbekistan’s relations with external actors. Consequently, regional



organizations, perceived as instruments of Russian dominance, were viewed with skepticism and often avoided. Tashkent instead favored a bilateral approach and selective cooperation with China, Türkiye, and/ or Western institutions as a means of balancing Moscow's influence. However, Uzbekistan's engagement with the Western "alter" eventually reached a deadlock. While Western partnerships initially provided an external counterweight to Russian pressure and helped uphold Uzbekistan's sovereign posture, the relationship deteriorated following the 2005 Andijan events. Western insistence on democratic reforms and human rights accountability was interpreted by the Uzbek leadership as an intrusion threatening regime stability. This perception of external pressure as a security risk reinforced Tashkent's defensive orientation, prompting renewed estrangement from the West and consolidation of its *Independent Actor* stance centered on sovereignty and regime survival.

### ***Continuity and Adaptation Under New Leadership***

The post-2016 period suggests that the national role conceptions identified under Nazarbayev and Karimov have been adapted rather than abandoned by their successors. This is consistent with Role Theory's expectation that roles are historically *resilient but open to reinterpretation and incremental change* as leadership and context evolve (Holsti, 1970; Thies, 2012; Cantir & Kaarbo, 2016). In this sense, Nazarbayev's "Eurasian Bridge/Integrator" and Karimov's "Independent Actor" roles function as inherited scripts that Tokayev and Mirziyoyev modify at the margins rather than replace.

In Kazakhstan, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's public discourse outlines a vision of governance and foreign policy grounded in pragmatism, national resilience, and "responsible internationalism", but it does so within the established multi-vector, bridge-oriented framework. At the expanded Government meeting (January 2025), Tokayev emphasized that the "main criterion for evaluating government performance is the well-being of citizens and economic progress, not bureaucratic reporting", calling for greater accountability, responsiveness, and digital transformation across public administration to deliver tangible societal results (Prezident Respubliki Kazakhstan, 2025a). At the fourth session of the National Kuryltai (March 2025), he linked structural reforms in tax transparency, regional equity, cultural renewal, and youth inclusion to the broader goal of building a "just and strong state" capable of fair development, effective governance, and national unity (Prezident Respubliki Kazakhstan, 2025b). These themes shift the emphasis of the role script toward domestic justice and resilience, but they do not alter the underlying assumption that Kazakhstan must remain an active, credible international interlocutor.

Tokayev's foreign-policy rhetoric similarly reiterates the core elements of the "Eurasian Bridge" NRC. In his UN General Assembly address (September 2025), he reaffirmed Kazakhstan's commitment to multilateralism and balanced diplomacy, called for comprehensive UN reform to strengthen the voice of mid-sized states, highlighted humanitarian concerns in global crises, and underscored Kazakhstan's nuclear-disarmament legacy as a foundation for global peace (Prezident Respubliki Kazakhstan, 2025c). At the Astana International Forum (May 2025) and in SCO summits, he advocated deeper connectivity, sustainable growth, and cooperative security responses, stressing that global challenges from economic fragmentation to

environmental risks require joint, inclusive solutions rather than unilateralism (Prezident Respubliki Kazakhstan, 2025d; 2022). These positions reproduce Nazarbayev's earlier emphasis on mediation, dialogue, and multi-vectorism, while placing more weight on economic modernization and crisis resilience.

The Ukraine-related crises have tested but not overturned this script. They have compelled Kazakhstan to recalibrate rather than abandon its multi-vector policy by maintaining ties with Russia, China, and the West while expanding regional cooperation to safeguard sovereignty and diversify options amid intensifying great-power rivalry (Wang, 2024). As Pieper (2021) argues, Kazakhstan's strategy continues to reflect a *balancing logic*. Leveraging Chinese infrastructure investments to mitigate landlocked isolation and over-reliance on Russian transit, while resisting excessive dependence on any single external patron. In role-theoretical terms, Tokayev's leadership thus appears to deepen the "bridge/integrator" NRC by fusing it more explicitly with a narrative of a "just and strong" state at home and a responsible, crisis-managing middle power abroad. The core role, Eurasian mediator and connector, remains intact. Its content is updated to reflect new structural pressures and domestic reform agendas.

In Uzbekistan, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's discourse similarly points to adaptation of the "Independent Actor" role rather than its replacement. Since taking office in 2016, he has advanced a *reformist, people-centred, and more cooperative foreign-policy* vision that redefines Uzbekistan's place in regional and global arenas while maintaining a strong emphasis on sovereignty and regime control over the reform process. His early statements, notably the Address at the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly, presented commitments to human rights, economic liberalization, and the rule of law, marking a clear rhetorical break from the previous course (Mirziyoyev, 2017a). Later that year, at the Samarkand International Conference "*Central Asia: One Past and a Common Future*", Mirziyoyev (2017b) framed Central Asia as a community of shared destiny, advocating trust, border settlement, and trade connectivity and thereby laying the foundations for a "*neighbourhood-first*" regional diplomacy. In 2018, he called for the professionalization of Uzbekistan's diplomatic service to align external engagement with domestic reform and investment attraction (Mirziyoyev, 2018), signaling that foreign policy should serve internal transformation rather than merely shield the regime from external influence.

From 2021 onward, his consultative speeches show an evolution from reconciliation to incipient integration. At the Third Consultative Meeting of Central Asian Heads of State, Mirziyoyev (2021) articulated a pragmatic agenda focused on regional value chains and digital connectivity. This agenda deepened at the Fourth Meeting (2022), which stressed institutionalized cooperation in trade, water, and energy security (Mirziyoyev, 2022), and it expanded at the Fifth Meeting (2023) toward proposals for a regional free-trade zone, a unified digital space, and a climate partnership (Mirziyoyev, 2023b). Complementing this regional drive, the Second Tashkent International Investment Forum showcased domestic reforms in taxation, privatization, and judicial transparency as part of an effort to create an investment-friendly economy (Mirziyoyev, 2023a). Collectively, these milestones outline a strategic narrative of internal transformation, regional reconciliation, economic modernization, institutional integration, and global

engagement - a model of foreign policy grounded in openness, sovereignty, and mutual prosperity.

Yet, from a role-theoretical perspective, this does not amount to a wholesale abandonment of the “Independent Actor” NRC. Uzbekistan continues to abstain from joining Russian-led military and economic alliances, carefully guards its decision-making autonomy, and frames cooperation as compatible only with national interests and sovereignty. The shift under Mirziyoyev is better understood as a move from a defensive “Independent” role toward a more outward-looking, economically and regionally engaged variant. It is closer to Holsti’s “active independent” role conception in which Uzbekistan seeks partners and institutions on its own terms, rather than rejecting them by default. Sovereignty and self-reliance remain central, but they are now articulated alongside, rather than against, selective integration and regional institution-building.

Role Theory identifies three main mechanisms of *role transformation*: *leadership change, socialization and external feedback, and domestic contestation*. Uzbekistan under Mirziyoyev demonstrates all three: (1) leadership turnover introduced new cognitive priors and a reformist agenda; (2) external incentives, including regional rapprochement and reduced Russian pressure, encouraged cooperative behavior; and (3) new domestic coalitions aligned foreign policy with economic modernization goals. Together, these conditions explain the shift from defensive “independence” to “cooperative independence”.

Because post-2016 leadership discourse is not subjected to the same systematic coding as Nazarbayev’s and Karimov’s statements, these observations are necessarily more tentative. However, the available evidence suggests that foundational NRCs, “Eurasian Bridge/Integrator” in Kazakhstan and “Independent/Active Independent Actor” in Uzbekistan, continue to structure expectations and provide cognitive scripts for policymakers. Leadership change has produced recalibration and re-interpretation within those roles, rather than abrupt role replacement, reinforcing the argument that NRCs function as historically embedded, yet adaptable, links between structure and agency in Central Asian foreign policy.

## CONCLUSION

This study has applied Role Theory, a mid-range framework that bridges structure and agency, to explain why Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, two post-Soviet authoritarian neighbors exposed to broadly similar external pressures, have pursued markedly different foreign policy paths. By systematically reconstructing leadership-defined national role conceptions (NRCs) from presidential discourse and linking them to patterns of foreign-policy behavior, the analysis shows that NRCs are powerful explanatory variables. They filter how leaders interpret structural constraints and opportunities, and they help to account for divergence where standard systemic theories would predict convergence.

*The comparison challenges reductionist portrayals of Central Asian states as passive objects of great-power politics. Both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan displayed strategic agency through consistent role enactment.*

Kazakhstan's "Eurasian Bridge/Integrator" role - empirically visible in Nazarbayev's emphasis on peace, dialogue, and civilizational mediation, and in its sustained support for multilateral frameworks from CICA and the SCO to the EEU and OSCE - underpinned a cooperative, multi-vector, and status-seeking diplomacy.

Uzbekistan's "Independent/Active Independent Actor" role, grounded in a discourse of sovereignty, threat, and self-reliance and expressed in selective, reversible, and often non-cooperative participation in CIS, CSTO, SCO, and GU(U)AM, legitimized an autonomy-maximizing, defensive orientation. The evidence thus supports the central hypotheses (H1a-H1c): leadership-defined NRCs, rooted in worldviews, historical narratives, and leadership styles, translated into distinct and stable foreign-policy patterns even under analogous regional and systemic conditions.

*A second contribution* of the article is to show that the roles identified for the Nazarbayev–Karimov period have proven resilient but adaptable across leadership transitions. Although the core empirical window ends in 2016, subsequent developments indicate role adjustment rather than replacement. In Kazakhstan, Tokayev has updated and institutionalized his predecessor's multi-vector and bridge-building orientations, while in Uzbekistan, Mirziyoyev has moderated the previous autonomy-focused stance into a more outward-looking and cooperative version. These patterns align with Role Theory's expectation that roles function as historically embedded scripts that can be reinterpreted as contexts change, rather than being discarded entirely.

*Substantively, the study makes three broader contributions to Foreign Policy Analysis and Central Asian studies:*

- a) It highlights the importance of leadership-driven narratives and cognitive lenses as differentiating factors in foreign policy, reinforcing the argument that one cannot predict state behavior from structural conditions alone. The same external environment was read as an opportunity for bridging and institution-building in Kazakhstan, and as a field of threats requiring defensive self-reliance in Uzbekistan.
- b) It extends Role Theory to an understudied regional and regime context, showing that mid-sized, authoritarian states can also be fruitfully analyzed through NRCs, and that they actively interpret, negotiate, and sometimes resist the roles ascribed to them by major powers. Central Asian states emerge not as mere pawns in a "New Great Game", but as role-seeking and role-contesting actors that use invented roles to navigate asymmetric power structures and to manage regime security.
- c) It helps bridge realist and constructivist approaches by demonstrating how material interests and security concerns are filtered through national self-conceptions and leadership traits, which themselves are shaped by historical experiences, domestic coalitions, and identity work. Kazakhstan's and Uzbekistan's external alignments cannot be fully understood without attention to how their leaders defined "who we are", "what we are owed", and "what we must avoid".

At the same time, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the reliance on public discourse constrains access to private deliberations or strategic intentions. Sensitivity around elite decision-making in non-democratic settings limits transparency, and thus, this research interprets rather than reconstructs the full policy-making process. In highly securitized, non-democratic settings such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, access

to genuinely informative elite interviews and internal documents is limited, which constrains the extent to which internal belief systems can be reconstructed directly (Hermann, 1999; Hudson, 2007). For this reason, the present study follows standard role-analytic practice by relying primarily on public speeches and policy documents, while treating interviews and more fine-grained behavioral data as priorities for future research.

*Second*, the qualitative design and small-N comparison constrain strong causal inference and leave open the possibility of reciprocal influence between roles and behavior. Hence, it raises potential endogeneity between rhetoric and behavior. Beach and Pedersen (2013) systematize process-tracing as a rigorous method for studying causal mechanisms, rather than just correlations or narratives. According to this, one must test a hypothesized NRC mechanism (e.g., “Eurasian Bridge” → *multi-vector diplomacy*) in one or more cases to see if evidence for each mechanism step is present.

*Third*, the study focuses on a period of uninterrupted leadership, suggesting that future research could explore role continuity and post-transition change. Although the time frame of this study is limited to 1991-2016, it leaves open important questions about how subsequent leaders reinterpret inherited national roles over time. Yet, these limitations do not undermine the explanatory value of Role Theory as well. Rather, they point to where the framework needs to be complemented by other tools, notably *process-tracing, elite interviews, and alternative data sources*, to further strengthen causal claims.

The analysis also points to clear avenues for future research. First, more fine-grained temporal work on role evolution, using longitudinal discourse analysis and process-tracing across critical junctures such as the Ukraine wars, Andijan, and leadership transitions. This could clarify the mechanisms of role adaptation and role contestation over time.

*Second*, studying “alter-casting” by major powers, how Russia, China, the EU, and the United States project specific roles onto Central Asian states and how these roles are accepted, resisted, contested, or reframed. It would deepen understanding of cooperation and conflict patterns in Eurasian regionalism.

*Third*, applying this framework to Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan would help map a broader “*role ecology*” in Central Asia and illuminate how *inter-role interactions* shape emerging regional identity, integration prospects, and the stability of regional organizations.

*Finally*, integrating Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) with Role Theory offers a promising way to tie leaders’ psychological profiles to their role choices and foreign-policy styles.

Ultimately, this study underscores that “*invented roles*”, the self-ascribed visions leaders develop about their nation’s purpose, remain central to understanding the foreign policies of developing states. The post-2016 trajectories of Tokayev’s Kazakhstan and Mirziyoyev’s Uzbekistan, discussed above, suggest that NRCs have become partially institutionalized. They survive leadership change, but are reinterpreted and adjusted to new preferences and constraints. This supports the article’s broader claim that roles are

neither purely personal nor fixed, but provide a durable repertoire that later leaders can recalibrate. Role Theory thus proves to be a valuable tool for decoding how such states craft agency, identity, and strategy in the shadow of larger powers.

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## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

AB: conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing.

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### Appendix 1. Coding Rules for Content Analysis\*

- A) To avoid journalistic bias, statements must be an ample body of text and not just selected quotations made by reporters. These will not enter the tabulations indicated above but may nonetheless be used to later contextualize and discuss the results.
- B) Analyze the paragraph (P) by filling in the table below and relating it to three variables: Status, Motivational Orientation and Substantial Issue-area. A paragraph may be related to more than one attribute in each given variable.

P	STATUS		MOTIVATIONAL ORIENTATION			SUBSTANTIAL ISSUE-AREAS								
	Capability	Status	Wish to expand	Coop/Comp	Systemic change	Eco	Security	Other	Political Aims		Universal		Unilateral	Integration
									+	-	+	-		
	(0,1,2,3)	(0,1,2,3)	(0,1,2)	(0,1,2)	(0,1,2,3,4)	(0;1)	(0;1)	(0;1)	(0;1)	(0;1)	(0;1)	(0;1)	(0;1)	(0;1)
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
<b>Bi1</b>	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Bi2</b>	0	0	0	2	3	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
<b>(...)</b>	(...)	(...)	(...)	(...)	(...)	(...)	(...)	(...)	(...)	(...)	(...)	(...)	(...)	(...)

Status refers to which domestic endowments or capabilities leadership attributes greater absolute advantage (A) and how it perceives its relative position in the international system (B).

Motivational Orientation corresponds to statements on political and international affairs, meaning if it is willing to expand internationally (C), if it is for being cooperative or competitive in politics (D) and to which degree it wishes to change both its internal and external system (E).

Substantial Issue-area corresponds to the main themes being discussed: economics (F), security (G), others (H), such as culture or history, the defense or dismissal of political ideologies and systems (I,J), the defense or dismissal of universal values (K,L), the pursuit of unilateral goals or own interests (M), the wish to practice bilateral, multilateral or political/economic integration with other partners (N).

\* This description was taken from the analysis of Bernardo Fazendeiro Teles (2013) which has implemented the same technique in his study of UZBEKISTAN'S SELF-RELIANCE 1991-2010: PUBLIC POLITICS AND THE IMPACT OF ROLES IN SHAPING BILATERAL RELATIONSHIPS

## Appendix 2. List of Islam Karimov's interviews

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1. Uzbek president voices concern about CIS restructuring, BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union - Political; London [London]26 Jan 1999, Interfax
2. President Islam Karimov envisions independence, prosperity of Uzbekistan, THE KOREA HERALD August 31, 2001
3. Uzbek leader lauds economic ties with Ukraine, BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union - Economic; London [London]11 Oct 1999

2000s

4. Uzbek leader notes need for neighbourly relations in Centasia, CIS, BBC Monitoring Central Asia; London 26 Aug 2005
5. Uzbek president urges Russia to unite CIS states, BBC Monitoring Central Asia; London [London]16 Sep 2004
6. Uzbek leader defends elections after criticism – fuller, BBC Monitoring Central Asia; London [London]26 Dec 2004
7. Uzbek leader on national TV advocates closer ties with Russia, BBC Monitoring Central Asia; London [London]16 Nov 2005,
8. Uzbek president says maintaining peace is “our sacred duty”, BBC Monitoring Central Asia; London [London]10 Oct 2001
9. Uzbek president calls Shanghai group “authoritative international organization”, BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific – Political, Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, June 10, 2006, Xinhua
10. Russian, Uzbek presidents' opening remarks at Tashkent talks - Kremlin text, BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union – Political, Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, December 10, 2014
11. Karimov's book - mirror of will, expectation of Uzbekistan people, THE KOREA HERALD, March 28, 2006
12. Uzbekistan presents army development strategy, Trend News Agency, Baku, Azerbaijan, Distributed by McClatchy-Tribune Business News, January 14, 2012
13. Uzbek President: Improvement of combat readiness of the armed forces is of particular importance under growing threats, Trend News Agency, Baku, Azerbaijan, Distributed by McClatchy-Tribune Business News, January 12, 2013
14. President Islam Karimov Attends CIS Summit in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan National News Agency (UzA), October 18, 2015
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16. Uzbek head says BBC asked “stupid” questions about Putin's visit: full version, BBC Monitoring Central Asia; London [London]19 May 2000
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20. Uzbek leader says economic interests, security behind joining Eurasian body, BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, January 25, 2006
21. Uzbek leader's interview in parliament intermission - fuller version, BBC Monitoring Central Asia; London [London]03 Dec 2004
22. Uzbek leader rails against Islamic radicals, BBC Monitoring Central Asia; London [London]30 Aug 2001
23. Uzbekistan, Russia agree to set up military cooperation groups – fuller, BBC Monitoring Central Asia; London [London]06 May 2001
24. Uzbekistan, South Korea to Advance Strategic Partnership, Uzbekistan National News Agency (UzA), June 18, 2014

25. Uzbek president gives wide-ranging interview to Russian paper, BBC Monitoring Central Asia; London [London]20 Jan 2005
26. A NATION CHALLENGED: THE ALLIES; Uzbekistan's Leader Doubts Chances for Afghan Peace, The New York Times March 14, 2002
27. Uzbek president's interview on 11 December excerpts from Uzbek TV version, BBC Monitoring Central Asia; London [London]12 Dec 2003
28. Peace and tranquility are the foundation of all our achievements, Uzbekistan National News Agency (UzA) May 9, 2016
29. Uzbek head answers newspaper questions on national ideology, religion, policy, BBC Monitoring Central Asia; London [London]09 June 2000
30. Uzbek leader on military reform, freedom of speech, US presence, BBC Monitoring Central Asia; London [London]31 Aug 2002
31. Uzbek leader urges clerics to work against radical groups, BBC Monitoring Central Asia; London [London]01 Sep 2004
32. "International terrorism regrouping now" - Uzbek president, BBC Monitoring Central Asia; London [London]10 Apr 2004
33. Democratic reforms in Uzbekistan irreversible leader, BBC Monitoring Central Asia; London [London]01 Feb 2003
34. Uzbek president seeks to boost trade with Spain, BBC Monitoring Central Asia; London [London]27 Jan 2003
35. Uzbek leader says Afghan situation "not conducive" to optimism – fuller, BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, May 2, 2006
36. Uzbek president: a "satisfied" Europe takes threat of extremism lightly – more, BBC Monitoring Central Asia; London [London]09 May 2002
37. Uzbek heads stresses need to tackle Afghan issue, access to Iranian port, BBC Monitoring South Asia - Political; London [London]10 June 2000
38. Uzbek president explains move to reduce his authority, BBC Monitoring Newsfile; London [London]24 Apr 2003
39. Uzbek leader says security main aim of Pakistani visit, BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, May 2, 2006
40. Uzbek leader hails Pakistan's potential, military might, BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, May 2, 2006
41. Uzbek head talks up gains from Eurasian bloc entry, BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, June 22, 2006
42. Uzbek leader says "powerful" states realize Andijon accusations "fabricated", BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, May 9, 2007
43. Uzbek leader frets over regional fallout if Iran nuked, BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, May 9, 2006
44. Uzbek leader says politics pursue own goals, BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, December 24, 2007
45. Security, counterterrorism top issues for Shanghai summit - Uzbek leader, BBC Monitoring Newsfile; London [London]29 May 2003
46. Uzbek leader urges closer ties with Russia, BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, January 24, 2006
47. Uzbek leader says treaty with Russia to ward off dangers, BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, May 9, 2006
48. Uzbek leader: Shanghai summit outcomes "unexpected", BBC Monitoring Newsfile; London [London]01 June 2003
49. Terrorists outpacing antiterror coalition, Uzbek leader tells Putin, BBC Monitoring Central Asia: London [London]17 Apr 2004: 1.
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### Appendix 3. List of Nursultan Nazarbayev's interviews

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2. SOVIET TURMOIL: Kazakh Chief, Seeking What Works, Backs Both Order and Free Economy, The New York Times September 8, 1991, Sunday, Late Edition – Final
3. WE WILL COME TO TERMS WITH RUSSIA” (INTERVIEW WITH KAZAKH PRESIDENT NURSULTAN NAZARBAYEV), Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, OCTOBER 8, 1992
4. Kazakh Sets Conditions On A-Arms; Nazarbayev Seeks Powers' Guarantees, The Washington Post, May 6, 1992
5. KAZAKHSTAN LEADER ASKS 'JUSTICE' IN COMPENSATION ON NUCLEAR ARMS “THE DESTRUCTION OF WARHEADS COSTS NO LESS THAN PRODUCING THEM,” NURSULTAN NAZARBAYEV SAID, The Philadelphia Inquirer, February 8, 1994 Tuesday FINAL EDITION
6. KAZAKHSTAN DECLARES ITSELF TEMPORARY NUCLEAR POWER, Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, APRIL 28, 1992
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8. PRESIDENT NURSULTAN NAZARBAYEV: NEITHER DEVELOPMENT, NOR, Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, AUGUST 18, 1992
9. REMARKS BY PRESIDENT NURSULTAN NAZARBAYEV OF KAZAKHSTAN AND KENNETH DERR, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF CHEVRON CORPORATION AT TREATY SIGNING CEREMONY BLAIR HOUSE, Federal News Service, MAY 18, 1992
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11. Kazakh president on foreign investors, Kazakh language, BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union - Economic; London [London]10 June 1999: 1.
12. Interview of Franz Vranitzky, Chancellor of Austria, Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of Kazakhstan, and Ivan Silayev, Chairman of the Inter-Republican Committee on Economic Relations at the Baikonur Space Launching Site on October 2, 1991 (USSR Central Television, October 2, 1991), Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, OCTOBER 2, 1991
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14. Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev Interviewed, CNN February 2, 1994

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15. Kazakh president against “double standards” against Iran, BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, November 19, 2011
16. Kazakh president denies Shanghai group a “military bloc”, BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific – Political, supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring June 8, 2006
17. Kazakh president tells Russian TV he is ready to help Kyrgyzstan, BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union – Political Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, June 27, 2010
18. Kazakhstan has action plan in case oil prices drop to \$40 – Nazarbayev, The Times of Central Asia, December 22, 2014
19. Nazarbayev calls for creation of new world currency under aegis of UN, Central Asia General Newswire, March 10, 2009
20. No Kazakh land to be sold to foreigners – president, BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, December 24, 2009
21. Kazakh leader upbeat on “breakthrough” talks with Putin, BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, May 22, 2006
22. Kazakh president says he will run for another term, BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union; London 03 July 2005
23. Kazakhstan to continue boosting cooperation with European Union – leader, BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, October 1, 2014

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25. An Interview with Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev, Daily Outlook Afghanistan; Kabul [Kabul]21 Nov 2010.
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30. Kazakh president fights protest calls, BBC Monitoring Central Asia; London [London]08 Dec 2003
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32. Kazakh leader hails country's foreign policy, BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, December 30, 2008
33. REMARKS BY KAZAKH PRESIDENT NURSULTAN NAZARBAYEV AND RUSSIAN PRESIDENT DMITRY MEDVEDEV AT THE BEGINNING OF THEIR MEETING, Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, December 19, 2008
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35. Remarks by President Barack Obama and President Nursultan Nazarbayev of the Republic of Kazakhstan Before a Bilateral Meeting (As Released by the White House) Location: Grand Hyatt, Seoul, Republic of Korea Time: 2:27 p.m. KST Date: Monday, March 26, 2012
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37. MEDIA AVAILABILITY WITH SECRETARY OF STATE CONDOLEEZZA RICE AND KAZAKHSTAN PRESIDENT NURSULTAN NAZARBAYEV (AS RELEASED BY THE STATE DEPARTMENT), Federal News Service, October 13, 2005
38. KAZAKH-RUSSIAN RELATIONS AT HIGH LEVEL – NAZARBAYEV, Russia & CIS Presidential Bulletin, March 1, 2006
39. MADELEINE ALBRIGHT HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY WITH THE PRESIDENT OF KAZAKHSTAN; ASTANA, KAZAKHSTAN, FDCH Political Transcripts, April 17, 2000
40. COLIN POWELL HOLDS JOINT NEWS CONFERENCE WITH NURSULTAN NAZARBAYEV, PRESIDENT OF KAZAKHSTAN, FDCH Political Transcripts, December 9, 2001
41. Kazakhstan's waiving nuclear status helped it to revive its economy - President Nazarbayev, ITAR-TASS, July 5, 2015
42. Kazakhstan will not apply non-market measures to support economy, The Times of Central Asia, December 14, 2015
43. Kazakhstan against repetition of Libyan scenario in Syria – president, BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, November 19, 2011
44. REMARKS BY RUSSIAN PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN AT THE BEGINNING OF THE MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT OF KAZAKHSTAN, NURSULTAN NAZARBAYEV, Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, December 20, 2007
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46. Kazakh leader says Shanghai body proved to be strong, promising, BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, June 14, 2006
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48. Shanghai body may become key part of global security - Kazakh leader, BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, June 14, 2006
49. OSCE summit in Kazakh capital to start new chapter – leader, BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, November 26, 2010
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