

# KYRGYZ & UZBEK FOREIGN POLICIES (2005-10) A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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## **Abstract:**

The domestic and foreign policies of the post-Soviet Central Asian States are co-related. However, they operated their foreign policies amid heavy odds, say for instance, infrastructural, technological and human capital deficiency obviously for being transitional economies. Subsequently, they evolved independent and transparent foreign policies keeping in view fastly transforming regional and global geo-political and geo-economic relations. After 9/11/2001 World Trade Tower tragedy, they took a bold step by joining the US in her war against global terror in Afghanistan and elsewhere, and thus became known to the world at large.

For limitation of time and space, the present paper seeks to compare the foreign policies of only two Central Asian states: Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan after Spring 2005. Robert Putnam's model of two-level game approach has been used to explain this comparison within their national and international paradigms.

## **Keywords:**

Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Akayev, Bakiev, Otunbayeva, Karimov.

## **Introduction:**

An effective way of understanding the foreign policy process is to identify the levels of analysis. These levels refer to general areas from which certain foreign policy behaviours are generated at the state and interstate levels. Given this, we can differentiate between two distinct approaches to explain the foreign policy process of a state: the role of internal and external factors and actors. Such approaches are needed to identify the genesis and nature of a certain foreign policy of a given country/countries.

When a state decides to respond to a set of factors (location, military capability, economic power, natural resource, etc.), its leaders as actors take certain measures to shape a foreign policy in response to the foreign policies of their neighbouring, near-neighbouring and the far off countries. However, before conducting inquiries into the internal and external factors, one needs to first conceptualize the mechanism: why

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after all foreign policy-related actions are initiated and how they respond to another state's action.<sup>1</sup>

As argued above, there are primarily two distinct sources of foreign policy: internal and external. Internal sources refer to domestic factors that generate a foreign policy approach, and these include the form and nature of internal power structure and its policies vis-a-vis different sectors of society. External sources refer to areas that fall beyond a state's boundaries in terms of regional and international political settings/systems/sub-systems.

The factors influencing foreign policy-making processes of the Central Asian states have evolved differently from strong states like Russia and the United States. These factors are the result of political instability, weakening state systems, power scramble among different political groups, and economic deprivation. Such factors have shaped the orientation and implications of foreign policy in the Central Asia states. For example, since the spring 2005, the Kyrgyz and Uzbek governments struggled to control, govern, and contain the political elites and security threats within their respective borders. Demonstrations and protests against such regimes had triggered bloody clashes in Uzbekistan and regime change in Kyrgyzstan. In the mean time, changes in the global, political and economic order, created new regional complications as well as opportunities.

Since geography, history, and political culture of a certain state has a role in foreign policy making, the aforementioned two states constructed their state institutions, political structures, and their relations with other states in the backdrop of their historical legacies. For example, both the Soviet and Russian legacies remain important in the Central Asia states because of their shared identity and experiences within the Soviet Union. As William Faulkner rightly argues "the Past is never dead. It's not even past." This makes one to question as to "How the legacy of the past, current state structures and ruling political elites contributed to shaping foreign policy options in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan?" and, "To what extent was the ruling elite of these states able to direct their state relations with Russia and other important external players, *per se*, the United States?"

### **Theoretical Framework:**

Robert Putnam's renowned article identifying two-level games, portrayed leaders as positioned between two tables of international

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<sup>1</sup> J. Wilkenfeld, et al., *Foreign Policy Behavior: The Interstate Behavior Analysis Model*, Beverly Hills, Sage Publications, 1980, 21.

negotiation and the pressures of domestic political forces.<sup>2</sup> However, bureaucracy and its allied structures are likely to be less prominent in the foreign policies of the new states, because bureaucracy is weak and small, than in states like the United States, China, and Russia. In other words, the roles of large departments/ministries and their routine administrative procedures have a relevance to the foreign policy of major countries than that of the weak states. Thus the insights of bureaucratic and organizational models of foreign policy-making of new weak states, are limited.

One of the underlying reasons of poor systems and structures in the above two states is the unceasing political instability, and also that their respective state structures/institutions do not develop systematic institutional and organizational patterns for bargaining with each other and also with their neighbours. In a way, because of the lack of strong bureaucratic institutions, the two newly born states are handicapped to formulate a desired model of foreign policy. In addition, because such states are not by themselves capable to address external threats and take to opportunities, their foreign policy actions are neither systematic nor transparent. After all, states are legal entities comprising of people no matter only the ruling elite conducts their affairs.

Therefore, in the weak states, identity (individual or institutional), power (state strength) and interests (good or bad), must be theorized internally as well as externally. Thus, the foreign policy of a weak state is shaped by domestic threats, and the national interests become hostage to the interests of the ruling elite. This sort of study of identity, power and state, therefore, requires to analyze as to how state strength affects foreign policy, decision-making and nation-building.

A two-pronged analysis can address some critical questions, since international threats and opportunities are often ambiguous and since domestic processes are crucial to explaining the foreign policy of the weak states. This model is based on the traditional understanding of the limited resources and power of weak states. The central theoretical point is to indicate that theorists have mistakenly assumed that bandwagoning, balancing and omnibalancing are opposite behaviours pertaining to regime security in the weak states. While balancing and bandwagoning suggest resistance against external threats, omnibalancing explains predicament due to the internal threats. Thus, omnibalancing is the best way to explain weak states and their leadership behaviour and vulnerability to internal threats .

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<sup>2</sup> R. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization*, 42(3), 1998, 427-461.

It is true that the security of weak states does “suffer” from greater sensitivity and vulnerability;<sup>3</sup> hence, subjects them to dependence on the immediate regional and wider international environment. This warrants them to evolve a well-thought out foreign policy for a sustainable future in terms of security and development. Otherwise their role in the regional and international systems would be insignificant. Moreover, major states shall feel no external threat from them; hence, care least about it. Thus this two-step analysis requires scholars to understand foreign policy sources and decision-making processes.<sup>4</sup>

Miriam Elman suggests that internal factors (domestic politics, domestic institutional choices, etc.) are more important than external factors (international and regional systems, etc.) in explaining weak state foreign policy.<sup>5</sup> Domestic institutions play important roles because they shape and provide possible options which a government implements. Thus, the weaker the state, the more likely it will respond to external challenges and balance against rising hegemons. Because of their diminished capabilities relative to others, weak states lack a margin for time and error: they must be closely integrated and linked to the external environment because if they isolate themselves, their survival will be at stake and costs of being exploited high, as was true of Karimov’s Uzbekistan in 2001. Therefore, because of the nature of the threat, governments of weak states experiencing internal threats will have different foreign policy behaviours to end internal threats.<sup>6</sup>

Another factor to explain foreign-policy behaviour is beliefs and interests of leaders. The leaders can easily exploit the linkage between their own security and that of the state in order to increase their leverage over domestic politics. For instance, Karimov dealt with deadly challenge in Andijan and Bakiev became the leader of Kyrgyzstan after political crisis and coup in Spring 2005. They accumulated power and

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<sup>3</sup> Sensibility means that actors are sensitive to the other actors or developments in parts of the system. The degree of sensitivity depends on how quickly a change in one actor brings about changes in another and how great the effect is. Vulnerability means that actors may be vulnerable to the effects of those changes. Vulnerability is measured by the costs imposed on a state or other actors by external events: For further details, see R. O. Keohane and J. S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Boston: Little, Brown, 1977.

<sup>4</sup> C. Elman, “Horses for Courses: Why not Neorealist Theories of Foreign Policy,” *Security Studies*, 6(1), 1997, 31-32.

<sup>5</sup> M. F. Elman, “The Foreign Policies of Small States: Challenging Neorealism in Its Own Backyard,” *British Journal of Political Science*, 1995, 25(2), 171-217.

<sup>6</sup> The threat could be based on internal power struggles, like in Kyrgyzstan, or where ethnic minority either strives to reassert their identity or else refuses recognition to the majority-held central authority state which is established and governed by their kin, like Karabagh Armenians in Azerbaijan and Abkhazians in Georgia.

authority and became a sole authority in their respective countries. In conclusion, in the garb of threats, leaders can increase their powers and use them against domestic opponents.<sup>7</sup>

**Case Study:**

Policy decisions are generally made in accordance with two important institutional constraints. First, the president makes decisions on major foreign policy. Second, government, primarily the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, implements these decisions. For example, under constitution and the “Law on the Diplomatic Service” in Kyrgyzstan, the state institutions shape and execute foreign policy processes. However, such laws are ambiguous at times to understand the foreign policy directions. In addition, there are unwritten rules which go beyond legal documents.

These are political complex organizational routines, bargaining process among different bureaucratic institutions, traditions and customs. As for Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, like other Central Asian states, these traditions and customs have not existed yet. Therefore, institutional designs for their foreign policies are missing. The reason is the overwhelming political leadership of ruling elite, who control the state mechanism over all organized source of power within the political system. In other words, within the Central Asian states, the domain of foreign policy is normally preserved for a few trusted individuals and, in some cases, effective decisions are made only by one individual rather than the individuals. Such practices have become increasingly common within the region. For instance, Karimov and Bakiev wield considerable authority to formulate their foreign policies with little accountability to their institutional, constitutional, political, and administrative organisations/mechanism.

Kyrgyz and Uzbek ruling elites implemented different foreign policies to reach the same goal, i.e., the use of foreign policy in order to maintain internal political order and possess a critical external support for their domestic positions. Indeed, many external relationships established by governments in Central Asia reflect balancing power to contain internal challenges and threats. In other words, the Kyrgyz and Uzbek foreign policies frequently rise out of a need to strengthen the domestic political order.

Moreover, since independence, the post-Soviet Central Asian states have been characteristic of political disorder, ethnic identity conflict, economic shocks and minority issues. One of the reasons is that

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<sup>7</sup> B. Buzan, *People, States, and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1983, 89.

both the administrative structure and borders of the Central Asia states were determined in the Stalinist era. Therefore, in the Central Asia states, boundaries and ethnic composition lacked correspondence with titular nationalities.

However, the foreign policy issues in the Central Asia are also shaped by domestic factors. Once at the crossroads of empires, the Central Asian states remain at the geographic point of competition among major powers. External factors are also critical to any analysis of the post-Soviet Central Asian states' foreign policies. For example, after September 11, 2001 incident, Central Asia became the focus of the competing interests of major powers; this development provided opportunities for self-interest oriented leaders like Kerimov to shift foreign policy orientation from the regional hegemon, Russia to great power, the United States. Under these circumstances, when the region has assumed more significance in global terms, foreign policy behaviour of the Central Asian states has been linked more with external politics. Moreover, the opposite is also true. When the region has assumed a lesser significance in international arena, foreign policy behaviour of the Central Asian states has been linked more with domestic politics.

### **Kyrgyz –Uzbek Foreign Policy Processes & Russo-US Factor:**

Russian foreign policy was said to be divided between the “Atlanticists and the Eurasianists.” In 1990s, Russia employed a policy that addressed the ex-Soviet republics as the “Near Abroad.” This mental make was guided by a core desire to exploit and trade in vast Central Asian energy resources, protect the Russian minorities, and keep the influence of other major powers at bay.<sup>8</sup> For this purpose, Russia initiated and inked agreements with the post-Soviet Central Asian states. A significant shift occurred with Primakov's becoming Foreign Minister in January 1996.

Since then, Russia upholds its influence on former Soviet republics of the Central Asia, despite Western reaction in the ‘Near Abroad.’ While all these factors played a role in the formulation of various Russian policies in the region, Russian perceptions of regional security threats to her interests is the most important variable to explain Russian policies.<sup>9</sup> In fact, Russia's role was visible because of weakening state systems, poorly-integrated societies, and very small militaries in Soviet

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<sup>8</sup> R. Menon, “After Empire: Russia and the Southern Near Abroad,” *The New Russian Foreign Policy*, Ed. M. Mandelbaum, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1998, 103.

<sup>9</sup> See, L. Jonson, *Vladimir Putin and Central Asia: The Shaping of Russian Foreign Policy*, London, I. B. Tauris, 2005 and M. F. Goldman, *Rivalry in Eurasia: Russia, the United States, and The War on Terror*, Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2009.

Central Asia. They are, as such, exposed to the influence of the regional states and fundamentalist groups. This is why Uzbek government invoked foreign support to ward off the threat of *Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan* (IMU) during 1999-2000, maintain national and territorial sovereignty and marginalize American and Chinese influence. Russia was unwilling to see the post-Soviet Central Asian states escape its “sphere of influence.” Despite Russia’s relative weakness, her inherited Tsarist and Soviet legacies represent dominant state status in the region. Specifically, the experience of the political and security institutions during the Russian and Soviet empires provided necessary skills for the Russian involvement to the Central Asian states.<sup>10</sup>

Newly independent post-Soviet states were divided into two groups, pro-Russian and pro-Western in 1990s. However Russia was dealing with many political and economic problems in 1990s and needed foreign assistance to manage them. Western countries, including the United States, had supported Russia in its initiatives. Russia still considered itself as the hegemon in its “Near Abroad” and refused to recognize any major powers to become active in the region. Except hydrocarbon rich countries Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, the United States and the other western powers, mostly neglected the region until the September 11 tragedy. They attached more importance to Moscow than to the Central Asian states, and recognized the region under the Russian sphere influence. This policy clearly indicated that the United States’ policy was to dilute Russian fears of a major American foreign policy in the region. The American involvement in the region was restricted with economic, humanitarian aids and projects related to democratization in 1990s. Only a few post-Soviet states developed strong relations with the United States, Georgia and Azerbaijan which were rewarded with economic benefits for their allegiance to US through opposition to Russian feelings. Economically Kazakhstan and the others preferred close ties with Russia. Contrarily, Kyrgyzstan choose very flexible foreign policy and Uzbekistan avoided Russian domination and sought the support of the United States to balance Russian influence in the region after the September 11.

Therefore, the Central Asian states’ foreign policies are, using Rajan Menon’s turn of phrase, “in the shadow of the bear.”<sup>11</sup> Russia foresaw security issues in Central Asia as a means to manipulate or expand its influence in what it considered its “near abroad” or sphere of influence. In the early 1990s, there were two trends of the Central Asian

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<sup>10</sup> *Rivalry in Eurasia: Russia, the United States, and The War on Terror*, 4-6.

<sup>11</sup> R. Menon, “In the Shadow of the Bear: Security in Post-Soviet Central Asia,” *International Security*, 20(1), 1995, 149-181.

states' foreign policies vis-à-vis Russia. First, the foreign policies of Central Asia states were based not on scaling down Russia but rather to obtain Russian support against internal opponents or rival neighbouring states. Secondly, the Central Asian states tried to find other major power/s to restrict growing Russian influence in the region.

To explain the foreign policies of the Central Asian states, one must understand the broad effects of the collapse of the Soviet Union, which changed and reshaped security and economic patterns in the region. The emergence of these new patterns was not just the Soviet disintegration but rather its cumulative effect throughout the post-Soviet space. One could say that the political behaviour of the Central Asian leaders was based on making use of competing regional and outside interests.

### **Kyrgyzstan:**

Kyrgyzstan, like other post-Soviet Central Asian states, faced many problems during nation building and economic restructuring. Nonetheless, it had to be a part of the international system through its designated foreign policy notwithstanding political and ethnic complications. Akayev and his advisors understood that both international and regional systems provide opportunities of growth to Kyrgyzstan. Therefore, Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy was determined by two factors. One, the country was too small and too poor to be economically viable without external assistance. Second, it was located in a volatile corner of the globe, and was vulnerable to a number of threats around: "both impacted her foreign relations with major powers and its immediate neighbors."<sup>12</sup> However, it met with a certain criticism. For instance, former Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Muratbek Imanaliev, believed that Kyrgyzstan being a small country cannot afford multi-vector foreign policy. It should, as such, develop strong partnership not with all but those who matter in the region.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, Kyrgyz foreign policy was formulated in three phases. First, in early 1990s, Kyrgyzstan was among few post-Soviet states which chose radical economic and political reforms: issued its own currency, *som*, in 1993 and became a member of *World Trade Organization* (WTO) in 1998. Politically, it opted for a democratic model and was termed as "an island of democracy" in Central Asia.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Foreign Relations, <http://countrystudies.us/kyrgyzstan/32.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia region in Modern Conditions: Perspectives and Possible Risks, [http://www.open.kg/ru/thema\\_discus/blics\\_archive\\_2005/thema\\_15](http://www.open.kg/ru/thema_discus/blics_archive_2005/thema_15).

<sup>14</sup> D. Lewis, *The Temptations of Tyranny in Central Asia*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2008, 123; G. Gleason, A. Kerimbekova and S. Kozhirova,

These policies affected its foreign relations with other countries too. During the first decade of her independence, Kyrgyz leaders traveled around the world to establish diplomatic ties with other states. At the same time, Kyrgyzstan became a member of many international organizations such as the UN, OSCE, World Bank, IMF and some of regional organizations like *Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)*, *Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)*, and *Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)*. In the fall of 1998, Kyrgyzstan was the first Central Asian state, which was accepted as a member to WTO. During this period, major goals of Kyrgyz foreign policy were consolidating the seeds of independence, maintaining internal and external sovereignty, securing national interests by political and diplomatic methods, and creating favorable conditions for political and economic reforms in the country. However, the Batken terror attack in 1999-2000, indicated her inability to resist the international terrorist groups and the urgency of Central Asian states to unite for a common threat perception.

Subsequently, Kyrgyzstan approached the US and the western world for financial assistance to build democratic institutions and carry out radical reforms in other fields. She did not even distance herself from her historical partner, Russia. Most of Kyrgyz political elite were either educated in Moscow or Saint Petersburg or worked in Russia for sometimes, and Akayev was one among them. However, Russia did not take a serious notice of her cordial relations with Kyrgyzstan owing to her own domestic problems or else due to the West-oriented foreign policy during Kozyrev's time. In the process of balancing her foreign policy, Kyrgyzstan developed bilateral ties with China, her neighbourly country. Thus China became the largest non-CIS (*Commonwealth of Independent States*) trade partner of Kyrgyzstan through bilateral cooperation.

The second phase of Kyrgyz foreign policy was shaped after 9/11/ 2001 terror attack on USA. Kyrgyzstan joined war against global terror with US, and offered strategic air basis for facilitating military supplies to US mission in Afghanistan. Additionally, US intended using Kyrgyzstan as an outlet to import Central Asian energy for South Asia across Afghanistan.<sup>15</sup>Naturally, Kyrgyzstan became geo-politically significant, and because of which, she re-shaped her foreign policy to balance west and eastern countries: to come close to the US while not

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“Realism and the Small State: Evidence from Kyrgyzstan,” *International Politics*, 2008, 45(1), 47.

<sup>15</sup> Bakyt Beshimov's public speech “The Great Game and Central Asia: Opportunities and Challenges,” [http://www.src.auca.kg/b\\_beshimov.html](http://www.src.auca.kg/b_beshimov.html)

distancing herself from her traditional mentor Russia.<sup>16</sup> Such a policy ensured foreign investment in the country and Manas airbase became an important source of revenue to the Kyrgyz government. In this entire gamut, US was supportive to both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan during Batken oblast in 1999 and 2000 of *Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan* (IMU). However, Russia and China were indifferent to US military base in Kyrgyzstan. Russia did not want to lose its influence in the region including Kyrgyzstan, whereas China considered the presence of American airbase near its borders as a threat to its national security. To counter the same, Russia instituted its own airbase in Kant, fifty kilometers, away from Manas with the consent of Kyrgyz government and its foreign policy framework. While each country has its own individual agenda in the region, there is, however, a commonality of interests among them: to stop drug trafficking, extremism, and multi-ethnic conflicts.

Couple of months before his dethronement, Akayev was pushing for further cooperation with Russia and China, unmindful of its impact on Kyrgyz-US relations. The reason, Akayev believed, was US Embassy's purported involvement in fuelling anti-Akayev upheaval in the country, and even his ousting is assumed to have taken place with US support. Pursuant to these development, experts assumed that the new government's foreign policy would be west-oriented, which can be understood from the third phase of Kyrgyz foreign policy beginning from 25 March 2005 with Bakiev's take over of power.

The fact of the matter is that his foreign policy proved to be a continuation of his predecessor Akayev. The reason again was that Bakiev and his ruling party had their origin in Soviet elite group; hence, were oriented to Russian Federation. Obviously, without changing the foreign policy, the new government focused on domestic issues. First statement concerning Kyrgyz foreign policy was made by acting foreign minister, Rosa Otunbaeva, who said that "not only would there be no fundamental change in foreign policy, that there will be no change at all in foreign policy."<sup>17</sup> Thus Kyrgyz foreign policy was guided by the principles of strengthening developmental relations and cooperation with Russia, China, US etc. At the same time, she promotes her ties with European Union and Asian giants, especially Japan and Korea.

Thus new Kyrgyz leadership chooses Russia as a priority direction in its foreign policy. It views *Shanghai Cooperation Organization* (SCO)

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<sup>16</sup> H. Peimani, *Conflict and Security in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Santa Barbara, ABC-CLIO, 2009, 147.

<sup>17</sup> R. Otunbaeva, "Kyrgyzstan Conducts Multivector Foreign Policy," <http://www.voanews.com/russian/archiev/2005-06/2005-06-15-voa2.cfm>.

and *Collective Security Treaty Organization* (CSTO) as the main regional organizations.<sup>18</sup> Both Russia and China used SCO as a platform and in its July session 2005, urged Kyrgyzstan to ask US to vacate the Manas military base. But following visit of US Defense Minister, Donald Rumsfeld, changed the Kyrgyz stand for some strategic reasons associated with US plan to exit Afghanistan by 2014.

In order to strengthen ties with Russia, Bakiev visited Russia and signed multiple trade and military agreements with Russia. So the new Kyrgyz government was softly inclined to Russia, China and *Shanghai Cooperation Organization* (SCO) and *Collective Security Treaty Organization* (CSTO). Because of volatile domestic condition, Bakiev preferred to have relations with close rather than the distant neighbours, the US.<sup>19</sup>

Consequently, in February 2006, Kyrgyz President demanded increase in rent of Manas airbase from 2 million to 200 million dollars, and on his visit to Moscow on 19 April, 2006, Bakiev threatened: "If new agreement on new conditions of Bishkek will not be signed till June 1, 2006, Kyrgyzstan will stop the bilateral agreement with the US on deployment of American airbase Ganci."<sup>20</sup> He also said that Russia is the eternal friend of Kyrgyzstan and the United States is a partner. However, the definite date for the withdrawal of US military base from Kyrgyzstan was a serious manifesto of the parties in Russia's 2009 elections, suggesting that Kyrgyzstan factored significantly in Russian domestic politics, and thus the said period was the high-water mark in bilateral Kyrgyz-Russia relation.<sup>21</sup> Surprisingly, thereafter, Bakiev signed a new agreement with US and allowed the US military base on revised rental structure perhaps to augment its economic base alone.

But Kyrgyzstan continued bilateral cooperation with Russia on historical and other terms.<sup>22</sup> The cooperation was sought for in the fields of joint plants, loans, credits, and building hydro-energy stations in Kyrgyzstan. Such a policy was visible until 2010. Thus amid

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<sup>18</sup> E. Huskey, "Foreign Policy in a Vulnerable State: Kyrgyzstan as Military Entrepot Between the Great Powers," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, 6(4), 2008, 11.

<sup>19</sup> See, Y. Sari and S. Yigit, "Foreign Policy Re-Oriented & Political Symbolism in Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 14 June 2006.

<sup>20</sup> U. Juraev, "Kyrgyzstan Attacks United States, Relying on Russia and China," April 2006, <http://www.analitika.org/article/php?story=20060425041313997>.

<sup>21</sup> RIA Novosti, "Kyrgyzstan Will Demand US Close the Base Eventually," 20 February 2008, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20080220/99718840.html>.

<sup>22</sup> ITAR-TASS, "Kyrgyzstan's Foreign Policy Priority-Deeper Ties with Russia," 23 January 2007, <http://www.itar-tass.com/eng/level2.html?NewsID=11179844&PageNum=0>.

cooperation, Bakiev resisted Russian pressure as regards the use of Manas base for US military purpose.

Finally, one can say that despite the claims of multi-vector foreign policy, Bakiev gave a priority to Russia in the country's foreign policy. He justified this on the basis of historical and cultural legacy, Kyrgyz economic dependence on Russia and great potential for Kyrgyz-Russia bilateral relations and cooperation. When he visited Moscow in February 2009, he signed a Russian financial assistance package, which included waving off of Russian debt of \$300 million low-interest credit loans and \$ 1.7 billion for hydroelectric power projects. At the same time, Kyrgyzstan kept, comparable if not equal, relations with US for economic and strategic ends, and allowed US military base in Manas on lease. His son, Maksim Bakiev, used some of the Russian credit loans with some American businessmen for the development of Asia Universal Bank in the country, no doubt to the great annoyance of Russia, whereupon Russia invited, Temur Sariev, the strong opposition leader to Moscow. On his return, he was arrested by Kyrgyz security forces at the Manas airport. Consequently, opposition mobilized to overthrow Bakiev's regime on 7 April 2010.<sup>23</sup>

Thus Bakiev's faultline was the absence of consistency and failure to balance Russia and US. Chairman of Foundation of Political Research Ishenbay Abdrazakov rightly said: "Foreign policy is to satisfy requirements of our country, contribute to the solution of our internal problems. Since we do have a lot of problems, then our foreign policy has to be very flexible. If we will act such a way giving priority to certain states among many states, if we will lose our face, then our foreign policy, I think, will not achieve needed goals."<sup>24</sup> It is because of this that the country undergoes a great deal of discourse on the country's foreign policy directions in the foreseeable future.

### **Uzbekistan:**

The post-independent Uzbekistan also established its national Parliament, Oliy Majlis, and exercised its right to sovereignty amid free states of the region. However, it did not directly go for democratic transformation. Power remained within the Uzbek Communist Party, *albeit* under a different name: the People's Democratic Party. Prior to the Soviet fall, Islam Karimov wore the cap of the First Secretary of the Communist Party in Uzbekistan, and he continued so after 1991 under

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<sup>23</sup> "Revolution in Kyrgyzstan," *Uchur newspaper*, [http://www.sras.org/kyrgyz\\_press\\_review\\_march\\_2010](http://www.sras.org/kyrgyz_press_review_march_2010).

<sup>24</sup> Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia region in Modern Conditions: Perspectives and Possible Risks, [http://www.open.kg/ru/thema\\_discus/blics\\_archive\\_2005/thema\\_15](http://www.open.kg/ru/thema_discus/blics_archive_2005/thema_15).

the guise of President of the authoritarian regime (in effect one man state). The absence of multi-party democracy was justified in the garb of the security threat from the Islamists.

Since the independence, Uzbek-Russian relations have been fluidly due to the regional issues, though the need of mutual cooperation was not ruled out.<sup>25</sup> In fact, Uzbekistan joined the GUUAM in 1999. But that never meant that Uzbekistan took up an anti-Russian stance. However, the two countries had a different perception about 9/11, US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and its allied US mission of war against global terror. Russian Defense Minister, Sergei Ivanov, in a statement issued on 14<sup>th</sup> September, 2001, showed reservations against the NATO strategy of using Central Asian territory for its military operations. But Uzbek Uzbek Foreign Minister, Kamilov, stated on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2001 that his country was not bound to consult any country for any cooperation with the United States.<sup>26</sup> Soon thereafter, Russia itself supported US war against global terror and gave nod to the use of Khanabad air base by the U.S. Air Force for regional security,<sup>27</sup> though the factor of mutual benefits characterized US-Uzbek relations; US for energy and Uzbekistan for foreign investment.

The US made use of military facilities in the south of Uzbekistan under a strategic Uzbek-west alliance for geo-strategic consideration.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, the Western powers supported authoritarian Uzbek leadership, which would *ipso facto* mean the limiting of Iran's and Taliban influence. Thus, Karimov felt contented with the regime security and, in a way, assumed as the "Israel of Central Asia" for the west. However, first shift in Uzbek foreign policy took place in August 2003 following Putin-Kerimov meeting, which Russia described as "a priority partner."<sup>29</sup> In the State Department Annual Human Rights Report, Uzbekistan was alleged to violate human rights to an appreciable extent. The report accused the Karimov regime of torture, oppression, and denial of religious and democratic rights to its people. The March 2004 terrorist attacks in Tashkent and Bukhara, made Karimov apprehensive of loss of

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<sup>25</sup> M. Fumagalli, "Alignments and Realignments in Central Asia: The Rationale and Implications of Uzbekistan's Rapprochement with Russia," *International Political Science Review*, 28(3), 2007, 253-271.

<sup>26</sup> *Independent*, 19 September 2001.

<sup>27</sup> B. Woodward, *Bush at War: Inside the Bush White House*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002, 199.

<sup>28</sup> G. Gleason, "The Uzbek Expulsion of U.S. Forces and Realignment in Central Asia," *Problems of Post-Communism*, 53(2), March/April 2006, 49-60.

<sup>29</sup> D. Hiro, *Inside Central Asia: A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran*, New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2009, 184-185.

power. The real fear came to fore with the Andijan incident in May 2005, which Karimov felt US had a hand in. Sequentially, he accused the United States of the double role and masterminding Colour Revolution in Uzbekistan on the analogy of Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine. While Karimov asked US to wind up its airbase within six months from Uzbekistan, he allowed Germany to keep a military base at Termez, whereupon Germany disallowed twelve top Uzbek leaders allegedly involved in the Andijan Incident to enter Germany for medical treatment.<sup>30</sup> Thus change in Uzbek foreign policy was the offshoot of the alleged US involvement in anti-Karmov “colorful revolution” in Uzbekistan.<sup>31</sup>

The event had several effects. One, it forged a vacuum which China and Russia strived to exploit to their advantage. Uzbekistan drove closer to them. As a sequence, in July 2005 SCO summit, the member countries including that of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan demanded the US to close its military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.<sup>32</sup> Further, Karimov visited China and Russia and signed a security cooperation treaty in November 2005 for cooperation against potential terrorist threats in the region. These developments enabled Russia to affect change in its foreign place and replace US by Russia. Importantly thereafter, Uzbekistan withdrew from GUUAM, renewed its membership in CSTO and became active member of SCO, though did not completely distance himself from the west.<sup>33</sup> He also visited China in July 2006 for inking several agreements with the Chinese government.<sup>34</sup> Simultaneously, however, Uzbekistan realized that Russia is of no significant value to his country’s economic growth. A shift in Uzbek foreign policy was imminent in the changed scenario. This was facilitated the high level American military visits and the abolition of EU embargo on its tourists to visit Uzbekistan. The change is also perceived to be the result of growing security threat after US exit from 2014 Afghanistan, which Uzbekistan feels would definitely impact her domestic policy. .

In short, it was clear to Uzbek ruling elite that Russia instead of US, would be the key actor in the region though apprehensions to the contrary was not ruled out. To ward of the same, Uzbekistan turned back

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<sup>30</sup> *Guardian*, 6 July 2006.

<sup>31</sup> *Problems of Post-Communism*, 53(2), March/April 2006, 49.

<sup>32</sup> *Inside Central Asia: A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran*, 190.

<sup>33</sup> *Conflict and Security in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 208.

<sup>34</sup> H. Zhao, “Central Asia in China’s Diplomacy,” *Central Asia: Views from Washington, Moscow and Beijing*, Eds., E. Rumer and at el., New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 2007, 137-214.

to the US and the west with all caution and care. For example, even though the Uzbek government asked the US to close its military base, it nonetheless permitted Germany to keep its military base for transportation purpose.

**Conclusion:**

Being newly independent states, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan devised multiple options of cooperation with the outside world. Russia being the central switchboard, was preferred to US for cooperation during 1990s. The Russians believed that their country was the political centre and historic magnet for the Central Asian states. This created a Moscow-centric mindset among Uzbeks and others.

However, 9/11 was a turning point in the above mindset. Both Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan adapted themselves to the new scenario and supported the US mission in Afghanistan, the most immediate neighbourly and fragile country. They provided the air bases to US for military supplies against Taliban in Afghanistan of course on rental basis per-take and landing.

The change of government in Kyrgyzstan and the Andijan events made a dent in the foreign policy of the two countries. They again tilted to Russia and China, their immediate neighbours, for support and cooperation, though did not, at the same time, undermine the relationship with US and other western power to keep a balance in their respective foreign policy constructs.

To be precise, their foreign policy initiatives reveal inconsistency for obvious compulsions: their poor and transitional economies, vulnerability to extremism, failing state system, socio-economic deprivation, and their political immaturity to subscribe to the regional and international system and subsystems.

