

**INDEPENDENT KAZAKHSTAN AND THE 'BLACK BOX' OF
DECISION-MAKING : UNDERSTANDING KAZAKHSTAN'S
FOREIGN POLICY IN THE EARLY INDEPENDENCE PERIOD
(1991-4)**

Anuar Ayazbekov

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
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**Independent Kazakhstan and the 'Black Box' of Decision-Making:
Understanding Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy in the Early Independence
Period (1991-4)**

Anuar Ayazbekov

Thesis submitted to the School of International Relations at the University of St. Andrews
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD

16 December 2013

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I, Anuar Ayazbekov, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

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To Yermek and Raushan

Abstract

This thesis presents a foreign policy decision-making analysis of Kazakhstan's foreign relations in the initial post-independence period. The study applies a neoclassical realist theoretical framework in order to provide the understanding of Kazakhstan's external behaviour. The thesis conceptually assumes that the integration of the presidential decision-making element in the analysis of the republic's foreign policy is essential to account for Kazakhstan's foreign strategies, which would otherwise appear to be anomalous from the deterministic perspective of the structural theories of international relations. The set objective of the work is to produce a theoretically informed historical narratives of Almaty's policymaking during three episodes in the republic's diplomatic history – the elaboration of a distinct balancing strategy; the relinquishment of the nuclear arsenal; and the Nagorno-Karabakh peace mission.

The reconstruction of events behind the decisions made by president Nursultan Nazarbayev and his key advisors through the assessment of primary materials sourced from the archives of Kazakhstani foreign policy demonstrates that foreign decision-making process played a crucial role in the identification of national interests and development of appropriate policy responses in each of the episodes under examination. Chapter IV illustrates how the nation's policymakers developed a unique balancing strategy to ascertain the country's sovereignty and eliminate security risks under overwhelming geopolitical pressures that emanated from Russia and China. Chapter V discusses the episode when Nazarbayev was subjected to direct international pressure to surrender the inherited Soviet nuclear arsenal on the terms imposed by the USA, in response to which Nazarbayev devised a deliberately ambivalent and protracted strategy in regard to the republic's nuclear status. Chapter VI reveals the adaptability of the republic's policymaking to the changing international context as the regression of the Nagorno-Karabakh peace initiative demonstrates. The exposition of intricate policy planning and profound diplomatic endeavours reflected in archival documents reinforces the thesis's premise about the non-deterministic nature of Kazakhstan's foreign policy.

Table of contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Acknowledgements..... | III |
| Abstract..... | V |
| Table of contents..... | VI |
| List of illustrations..... | IX |
| List of abbreviations..... | X |
| Chapter I: Introduction | 1 |
| Empirical and conceptual context of the research..... | 1 |
| Research objectives and contribution..... | 10 |
| Research methods and design..... | 12 |
| <i>Research approach</i> | 12 |
| <i>Research design and case selection</i> | 15 |
| Research instruments and data collection..... | 16 |
| <i>Archival documents</i> | 16 |
| <i>Triangulation</i> | 19 |
| <i>Interviews</i> | 20 |
| <i>Participant observation</i> | 21 |
| Challenges and limitations..... | 22 |
| <i>Note on reflexivity</i> | 22 |
| <i>Fieldwork challenges</i> | 23 |
| <i>Research limitations</i> | 26 |
| Thesis outline..... | 27 |
| Chapter II: Conceptualization, operationalizaiton, and explanation of Kazakhstan’s foreign policy..... | 30 |
| Republic of Kazakhstan as a ‘black box’: structural perspectives and the Great Game narratives..... | 32 |
| Foreign policy of Kazakhstan in the focus of analysis..... | 40 |
| Multivectorism as an academic concept..... | 43 |
| <i>Innenpolitik</i> and foreign policies of the Central Asian states..... | 46 |
| Building a nation under Russia’s shadow..... | 56 |
| Foreign policy decision-making process and structure in a glimpse..... | 59 |
| Conclusion..... | 69 |
| Chapter III: Bridging neoclassical realism and foreign policy analysis..... | 70 |
| Neoclassical realist framework..... | 70 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>Systemic imperatives</i> | 75 |
| <i>Non-unitary and irrational state</i> | 77 |
| <i>Decision-making variable</i> | 84 |
| Foreign policy decision-making perspective..... | 87 |
| Presidential foreign policymaking..... | 92 |
| Conceptual framework..... | 100 |
| Chapter IV: Evolution of the foreign policy and institutionalization of the policymaking apparatus..... | 105 |
| Euphemistic foreign policy concept..... | 108 |
| External challenges of independence..... | 114 |
| Planning the defensive balancing..... | 117 |
| Institutionalization of the foreign policymaking apparatus..... | 126 |
| Nazarbayev’s personal diplomacy and diplomatic manoeuvring..... | 136 |
| <i>Eastern approaches</i> | 136 |
| <i>Northern vector</i> | 140 |
| Conclusion..... | 144 |
| CHAPTER V: Nuclear decision-making..... | 147 |
| Issue overview..... | 149 |
| <i>Deliberately ambivalent nuclear policy</i> | 149 |
| <i>Nuclear geopolitics</i> | 153 |
| <i>Trilateral nuclear diplomacy</i> | 156 |
| Nuclear deliberations..... | 162 |
| <i>Issue novelty</i> | 162 |
| <i>Alternative nuclear discourses</i> | 164 |
| <i>Obscure foreign policymaking</i> | 166 |
| The ad hoc decision-making group..... | 169 |
| <i>Instructions on the nuclear policy development</i> | 171 |
| <i>Letters on the START membership</i> | 178 |
| <i>Nuclear policymaking circle</i> | 184 |
| Conclusion..... | 186 |
| Chapter VI: Nagorno-Karabakh peace initiative..... | 188 |
| Historical background..... | 189 |
| <i>Minsk Group</i> | 191 |
| <i>Russian mediation mission</i> | 192 |
| <i>CIS mediation</i> | 193 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Kazakhstani peace initiatives..... | 194 |
| <i>President of the KazakhSSR as a peacemaker</i> | 194 |
| <i>Republic of Kazakhstan’s peace mission</i> | 197 |
| Changing international context..... | 204 |
| <i>Almaty peace process</i> | 204 |
| <i>Unexpected reaction of the West</i> | 205 |
| <i>Russia-West rivalry</i> | 207 |
| The endgame..... | 210 |
| Conclusion..... | 212 |
| Chapter VII: Conclusion..... | 214 |
| Reconstructing foreign policy decision-making..... | 215 |
| Shifting conceptual paradigm..... | 223 |
| Appraising neoclassical realism..... | 226 |
| Opportunities for future research..... | 228 |
| Bibliography..... | 230 |
| 1. Archival sources..... | 230 |
| 2. Secondary sources..... | 234 |
| Appendix I: List of interviews..... | 249 |
| Appendix II: Ethical considerations and UTREC letter..... | 250 |
| Appendix III: Note on transliteration..... | 252 |

List of illustrations

Images

| | |
|---|-----|
| 1.1: Nazarbayev's instruction to Zhukeyev, 28 March 1992. | 172 |
| 1.2: Zhukeyev's instruction to Suleymenov, 30 March 1992. | 173 |
| 1.3: Nazarbayev's instruction to Abykaev, 14 April 1992. | 174 |
| 1.4: Abykaev's instruction to Kasymov, 15 April 1992. | 175 |
| 1.5: Nazarbayev's instruction to Suleymenov, 20 April 1992. | 176 |
| 1.6: Nazarbayev's instruction to Zhukeyev, 6 April 1992. | 177 |

Figures

| | |
|--|-----|
| 1.1: Neoclassical realist causal chain | 75 |
| 2.1: Balancing strategy elaboration | 219 |
| 2.2: Nuclear decision-making | 219 |
| 2.3: Nagorno-Karabakh decision-making | 219 |

Tables

| | |
|---|-----|
| 1.1: Official public and internal foreign policy planning documents (and drafts), produced between 1992 and 1995. | 119 |
|---|-----|

List of abbreviations

AP – Apparatus of the President
APRK – *Arkhiv Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan* (Archive of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan)
CICA – Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia
CIS – Commonwealth of the Independent States
COBR – Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms
CSCE – Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
CSS – Centre for Strategic Studies
CST – Collective Security Treaty
CSTO – Collective Security Treaty Organization
DSP – *Dlia Sluzhebnoho Pol'zovaniia* (for official use only)
ExComm – Executive Committee of the National Security Council
FSU – Former Soviet Union
ID AP – International Department of the Apparatus of the President
IR – International Relations
Kazakh SSR – *Kazakhskaiia Sovetskaia Socialisticheskaia Respublika* (Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic)
KGB – *Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti* (State Security Committee)
KNB – *Komitet Natsional'noi Bezopasnosti* (National Security Committee)
MFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MID – *Ministerstvo Innostrannikh Del* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
MVD – *Ministerstvo Vnutrennikh Del* (Ministry of Internal Affairs)
MVES – *Ministerstvo Vneshneekonomicheskikh Sviazei* (Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations)
NATO – Northern Atlantic Treaty Organization
NKAO – *Nagorno-Karabakhskaiia Avtonomnaia Oblast'* (Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region)
NPT – Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
OSCE – Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PfP – Partnership for Peace program
PRC – People's Republic of China
RSFSR – *Rossiiskaia Sovetskaia Federativnaia Socialisticheskaia Respublika* (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic)
SSR – *Sovetskaia Socialisticheskaia Respublika* (Soviet Socialist Republic)
START I – Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty I
UN – United Nations
US – United States
USA – United States of America
USSR – Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics
V-CHe – *Visokaia Chastota* (High-Frequency, government and military communication line used in Soviet Union)

Introduction

Metaphorically speaking, our republic's spaceship has launched successfully. This gives confidence that our Kazakhstan, despite all the difficulties, will be able to elevate itself on the historical orbit and will occupy a decent place in the civilized world community. For this wonderful goal we live and work today.

President of the Kazakh SSR Nursultan Nazarbayev,
Speech at the ceremonial gathering on the occasion of the Republic's Day, Almaty, 4 October 1991.

Empirical and conceptual context of the research

Imagine a nuclear-armed nation with a vast underpopulated territory, that shares disputed and scantily guarded borders with two global powers, internally deeply troubled with long-going economic and social crises, without an established political regime and institutionalized governmental apparatus, and a weak national identity of an ethnically diverse population. And having no developed strategy of dealing with the outside world that was itself undergoing fundamental changes in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse. This is the reality the leadership of the Republic of Kazakhstan faced on 16 December 1991, the day the nation, the last of the fifteen Union republics, reluctantly proclaimed its independence.¹ Because of such a peculiar combination of historical and geopolitical circumstances under which Kazakhstan began to conduct its foreign policy, the republic's behavioural model on the international arena was destined to be unique.²

The foundation of Kazakhstan's foreign policy model was grounded in these earlier years of independence when major strategic and civilizational choices were made. Kazakhstan's leader – president Nursultan Nazarbayev and his associates had to think and act expediently and with

¹ Hereafter, the thesis will use definitions "Kazakhstan," "the republic," and "Almaty" interchangeably to connote the Republic of Kazakhstan. Almaty was the capital of Kazakhstan until December 1997, when it was moved to Aqmola, later renamed Astana. Unless indicated otherwise, reference to Almaty indicates Kazakhstani policymaking in the studied historical period.

² Cohen and Harris define foreign policy as "a set of goals, directives or intentions, formulated by persons in official or authoritative positions, directed at some actor or condition in the environment beyond the sovereign nation state, for the purpose of affecting the target in the manner desired by the policymakers." See Bernard C. Cohen, and Scott A. Harris, "Foreign Policy," in *Handbook of Political Science*, eds. Fred I. Greenstein, and Nelson W. Polsby (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1975), 385.

vision if they were to meet these exceptional challenges. Nazarbayev recalls the republic's situation:

The country fac[ed] all these sophisticated [foreign policy] problems without a single diplomatic mission abroad, without any even elementary foreign affairs strategy plans, not to mention foreign policy traditions, and with no qualified diplomatic personnel. The situation in which we found ourselves was not as much as absurd as it was distressing.³

The agents of Kazakhstan's entrance to the new international environment – Nazarbayev and his key foreign policy and security advisers – instituted an effective decision-making apparatus able to manage the overwhelming diplomatic and policymaking tasks imposed on the republic.

Yesterday's Union *apparatchiks*, whose personal and professional socialization happened in the Soviet corridors of power and whose worldviews were entirely moulded within the cold war paradigm, proved to be highly adaptable to the sudden international changes. The leadership was able to devise a prudent and pragmatic model of external behaviour that resulted in remarkable foreign policy achievements. To be sure, Kazakhstan's diplomatic history was not a thorough success story, some compromises had to be made and some concessions had to be given. Nevertheless, in just a few years the republic had consolidated its statehood without antagonizing any of the local ethnicities, gained long-term political and military security guarantees of its independence from global nuclear powers, justly regulated border dispute with China, and became actively engaged in the affairs on the post-Soviet space.

However, the greatest puzzle of the initial period of Kazakhstani foreign policy comes not from the republic's remarkable ability to ascertain its national interests under pressing domestic and international conditions, but from its distinctive foreign policy behaviour that appears to be anomalous from the perspective of the mainstream systemic theories of international relations – Kenneth N. Waltz's structural realism and its derivatives.⁴ Kazakhstan's foreign policy record presents a researcher with a paradox where the leadership clearly had perceptions of the surrounding international environment as hostile and threatening (leadership's

³ Nursultan Nazarbayev, *Na poroge XXI veka*. 2nd. ed. (Almaty: Atamura, 2003a), 192.

⁴ This theoretical delineation, adopted in the thesis, follows Jennifer Sterling-Folker, "Realist Environment, Liberal Process, and Domestic-Level Variables," *International Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (1997): 2, n.2.

views generic to systemic theories), however, had not yet followed any predicted models of external behaviour conceptualized within the systemic theoretical framework. Two cases in the republic's diplomatic history in particular confound systemic presumptions: Kazakhstan's decision to denuclearize by accession to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1992 and realization of the unique foreign strategy vis-à-vis Russia and China that featured neither balancing nor bandwagoning actions with or against either power.

The resolution of the nuclear dilemma by Almaty easily confuses the neorealist logic. Kazakhstan inherited from the USSR the fourth largest nuclear arsenal in the world. From the neorealist perspective this was an excellent historical chance for the state's leadership to securitize the nation. Nuclear weapons would have provided Kazakhstan with almost absolute deterrence capacity – an opportunity particularly attractive given the sense of external vulnerability and unclear fate of conventional forces stationed in the republic. Nevertheless, instead of utilization of the abundant Soviet strategic and tactical nuclear arsenal for the purposes of internal balancing, the republic's leadership opted to relinquish nuclear arms in exchange for security guarantees from several nuclear powers. Although other states also are known to have made decisions to denuclearize, Kazakhstan's case of deliberate proclamation of non-nuclear status presents an interesting instance of defiance of the neorealist reasoning.

Another theoretical predicament stems from the character of foreign policy strategy employed by Kazakhstan to secure itself from perceived Russian and Chinese hegemonic aspirations. Although this essentially survivalist stratagem is titled in the Kazakhstani official discourse in Russian language as the strategy of balancing (*strategiia balansirovaniia*), the empirical evidence suggests that it had little in common with the neorealist principles of external or internal balancing. A plethora of geostrategic and political challenges and constraints in bilateral relations with Kazakhstan's two largest neighbours predisposed the republic's leadership to develop a sense of susceptibility towards Moscow and Beijing. In the course of charting a foreign policy course, Almaty policymakers identified a number of specific threats to

the republic's sovereignty and territorial integrity emanating from the North and East, and devised a strategy that they believed was the only possible option under those circumstances. As recalled by Murat Laumulin, a prominent Kazakhstani expert who participated in the foreign policy decision-making during the studied period:

The internal and external politics of Kazakhstan in the first post-independence decade were formed in the rigidly determined conditions; often it was a choice between a lesser and a larger evil, between bad and worse. In the conditions of geopolitical, economic, and political chaos of the beginning of 1990s, the logic of survival and maintenance of stability forced Kazakhstan to create a behavioural model, which would allow resolving with the minimum loss those complex situations created by geopolitics and differently vectored interests of large powers.⁵

As it was unequivocally demonstrated with the signing of the Lisbon Protocol to the NPT treaty in 1992, Kazakhstan's leadership did not attempt to employ internal balancing as an instrument to respond to the perceived security threats. Surprisingly, Almaty did not engage in external balancing either. Nazarbayev's intra-regional cooperation initiatives in Central Asia did not constitute an attempt to form a defensive alliance against Russia and China, especially considering the participation of the region's nations in the supra-regional collective security arrangement with Russia under the Collective Security Treaty signed in May 1992. The latter point, however, does not mean that Kazakhstan bandwagoned or "passed the buck" to Russia to manage the republic's national interests. On the contrary, Russian hegemony was considered in Almaty to be no "lesser evil," to articulate Laumulin's metaphor, than China.

These two cases effectively demonstrate that mainstream neorealist theories' presumptions do not correlate with Kazakhstan's external behaviour in the beginning of the 1990s. Even though the logic of survival underpinned strategic foreign policy goals, the Kazakhstani leaders have opted for choices not derivable from systemic realism theorizing. Moreover, while Nazarbayev's unilateral effort to reconcile peace in Nagorno-Karabakh in the summer-autumn 1992 could not be compared in its salience to such problems as the nuclear dilemma or the Chinese territorial peril, it may also attract scholarly curiosity. This foreign policy act was not imposed by systemic considerations of security or sovereignty. Nevertheless,

⁵ Laumulin, *Tsentrāl'naia Aziia v Zarubezhnoi Politologii i Mirovoi Geopolitike. Vol.3.* (Almaty: KISI, 2009), 257.

in the highly complicated internal and external circumstances the leadership in Almaty found itself in 1992, severely limited diplomatic resources were contributed to this peace initiative. The dynamics of this episode are also puzzling. Kazakhstan at first decided to help Azerbaijanians and Armenians to solve the Nagorno-Karabakh problem, but then quickly withdrew from the peace process. An examination of the leadership's motives to join the international peace process and its reasoning to exit it without much progress have remained unexplained.

The limited explanatory power of neorealism to account for these seemingly irrational Kazakhstani foreign policies is reflected in the lack in the existing literature of a single work attempting to systematically apply the neorealist paradigm to the study of the republic's foreign relations. Although the importance of geopolitical systemic constraints is recognized in the manner of the Great Game narratives, the theoretical foundation under these studies is only constructed implicitly. An alternative approach taken by scholars is to rely on non-structural variables affecting the republic's foreign policy while also accounting for geopolitical factors. In this regard, statehood consolidation or regime survival considerations are found to interplay with the external pressures resulting in the specific policy choices by the Kazakhstani leadership. At the same time, the introduction of domestic variables acts against the fundamental assumption of neorealism to view a state as a unitary and rational actor, operating in the interests of its own security and survival.

From the positions of the existing literature on Kazakhstan, the republic's foreign policy can be explained as a combination of mutually reinforcing international and domestic factors, which precondition and accentuate the structural deterministic logic behind the development of major foreign policy strategies and orientations. In discussions of Kazakhstan's international affairs, the deterministic character of the nation's foreign policy is imposed by virtue of its geostrategic location and domestic political considerations. The majority of Kazakhstan scholars have chosen this research avenue.⁶ Kazakhstani foreign policy is seldom viewed of from the

⁶ The literature on Kazakhstan's foreign relations is reviewed in Chapter II.

agency's perspective. The republic's leaders are rarely endowed in the literature with the ability to devise strategies aimed at manipulating the strategic environment for the nation's benefit; instead they are depicted, to use one metaphor, as "surrogates or fiduciaries for the well-being of the state and all of its citizens," having to react to external pressures in a mechanistic fashion.⁷ As observed by Goertz and Levy, "Structural explanations almost by definition downplay the importance of individuals. In the most extreme position the international or structural constraints are so strong that the leadership *has no choice*."⁸

Hitherto, the nature of the analysis of Almaty's foreign policy has usually been implicit because this analysis is often embedded in the larger regional studies of Central Asian or domestic Kazakhstani politics. To be sure, Kazakhstan's foreign relations have never been subjected to the examination within the foreign policy decision-making analysis tradition in which the foreign policy output is studied as the distinct dependent variable affected by the peculiarities of state's policymaking processes and structures. As Sally N. Cummings comments: "few studies [of Central Asian states' external relations] have as yet provided in-depth understandings of how elites make foreign policies and what sort of factors and processes go into that decision-making."⁹ While it has been shown that the introduction of decision-making elements to the analysis may approximate a general understanding of a particular foreign policy choice of a state, thus far this approach has not been employed in the study of Kazakhstan and the decision-making element thus remained unexplored.¹⁰

One possible reason for these shortcomings in the existing literature lays in the fact that Kazakhstan's case bears several conceptual and methodological obstacles for a researcher. An

⁷ Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, "Domestic Politics and International Relations," *International Studies Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (2002): 7.

⁸ Gary Goertz, and Jack S. Levy, "Causal Explanation, Necessary Conditions, and Case Studies," In *Explaining War and Peace: Case Studies and Necessary Condition Counterfactuals*, eds. Gary Goertz and Jack S. Levy (London: Routledge, 2007), 33. Emphasis in original.

⁹ Cummings, *Understanding Central Asia: Politics and Contested Transformations* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 60.

¹⁰ For the overview of the foreign policy decision-making subfield see Alex Mintz, and Karl R. DeRouen, *Understanding Foreign Policy Decision-Making* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), and Douglas Stuart, "Foreign Policy Decision-Making," in *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, eds. Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 576-594.

initial issue is how does one analyze a foreign policy of a newly emerged state? The conceptualization of a state's foreign policy seems to be a challenging task if the policy itself had just incepted. A foreign policy without pre-existing historical record leaves a researcher with no opportunity to introduce to the analysis some sort of reference framework based on temporal dyadic divisions. Notable works from the foreign policy analysis subfield implicitly or explicitly buttress their research on operational notions of continuity and change in the diplomatic history of a given state. For example, historical analogies drawn by American leaders from the "lessons of history" have been found to influence the decisions to go to war; in other works fundamental redirections in a nation's foreign policy are due to the regime or leadership change or deliberate governmental strategies; whilst another study explored the dynamics of trust and mistrust developed by several generations of the US and Soviet leaders.¹¹ In contrast to these research strategies, Kazakhstan's short historical record lacks such necessary reference points as developed preconceptions of the leadership towards a specific foreign nation or changes of the political regime or ruling elites.¹² While there have been attempts to analyze Kazakhstan's foreign policy within the context of postcolonial studies, the applicability of this approach is left open to discussion due to dramatic differences in historical experiences and the political circumstances of under which independence was attained.¹³

¹¹ Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992); K. J. Holsti, *Why Nations Realign: Foreign Policy Restructuring in the Postwar World* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982), and Jerel A Rosati, Joe D. Hagan, and Martin W. Sampson, *Foreign Policy Restructuring: How Governments Respond to Global Change* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1994); Deborah W. Larson, *Anatomy of Mistrust: U.S.-Soviet Relations During the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

¹² The thesis's solution of this problem is in contrasting and comparing particular episodes in history of foreign affairs of Kazakhstan. It is conceptually feasible to isolate separate episodes and reconstruct internal processes behind them if there is a specific timeframe and situational context. This approach makes it possible to analyze the interplay of international and domestic factors during specific historical periods. For example, Patrick Jude Haney uses the conceptually relevant term of "the empirical window" which refers to the "historical example of the strategies that presidents use to organize and manage a group of advisers and an empirical record of how the advisory groups do the work of making decisions." See Haney, *Organizing for Foreign Policy Crises: Presidents, Advisers, and the Management of Decision Making* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 1.

¹³ For example, the postcolonial argument, as part of the explanation of Kazakhstan's foreign policy, is put forward by Daniela Passolt, "Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy Towards Russia, China and Central Asia (1991-2001): International and Domestic Factors" (PhD diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 2007). The assessment of the viability of her approach is given in Chapter II.

Furthermore, Kazakhstan's brief history of existence as an independent state presents challenges for a foreign policy analysis research from a methodological point of view. The principal obstacle here is the deficiency of primary sources. The foreign policy of any state is usually an oblique empirical phenomenon due to its sensitivity and direct relevance to matters of national security. In Kazakhstan's case the problem is aggravated by the difficulties in obtaining first-hand information about governmental decision-making. Hitherto, materials from the archives of Kazakhstani foreign policy have never been introduced to scholarly discussion on the subject matter. Certainly, the need for such information has not always been justified by the purposes of research agenda for a specific study. However, such documents as, for example, a foreign ministry analytical memorandum or minutes of a high-level negotiations could illuminate many intimate elements of policymaking, exposing leadership's reasoning behind a particular foreign policy act or strategy, thus approximating the understanding of a foreign policy in general. Any focused research on Kazakhstani foreign policy that does not consult primary material would resemble a desk exercise prone to producing an interpretation obscured by imperfections generic to secondary sources.

One distinguishable ramification of the limited scholarly discussion of Kazakhstan's foreign affairs from a foreign policy analysis perspective is reflected in the ambiguity of the current understanding of Nazarbayev's contribution to the policymaking, which leads to a certain empirical controversy. Although Nazarbayev's role features prominently in the accounts of Kazakhstan's politics, his psychological and decision-making milieus are for the most part left unexposed.¹⁴ This shortcoming blurs general understanding of Kazakhstani foreign policymaking. Without examining the presidential decision-making element it is impossible to draw a conceptual divide between *Nursultan Nazarbayev* and *the Republic of Kazakhstan*. Kazakhstan thus remains "black boxed" and it therefore becomes unnecessary to highlight the

¹⁴ For example, former Kazakhstani foreign minister in his memoirs presents a very general depiction of Nazarbayev's work and deliberations. See Kassym-Zhomart Tokaev, *Pod Stigom Nezavisimosti. Ocherki o Vneshnei Politike Kazakhstana (Almaty: Bilim, 1997)*. The concept of decisional milieus in foreign policymaking was introduced by Harold Hance Sprout, and Margaret Tuttle Sprout, *The Ecological Perspective on Human Affairs: With Special Reference to International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).

president's role, since Nazarbayev's calculations and actions are seen as identical to those of the state. In what ways president's personality, leadership style, or his weltanschauung have steered the course of Kazakhstan's foreign policy remains unknown.

More generally, in the studies of historical cases of strategies devised and realized by Kazakhstan in the 1990s it seems useful to include the variable of decision-making by president Nazarbayev and his advisors in order to make the foreign policy of the republic a more comprehensible phenomenon. Neoclassical realism asserts that, in instances of deviances between the perceived constraints and challenges imposed by the international environment on one causal end and nation's foreign policy responses on the other, it is the state-level variables that intervene and distort the systemic signals.¹⁵ The attribution of this model to the puzzling episodes in the republic's diplomatic history appears to be an analytically potent strategy since neoclassical theoretical variables on both ends of the causal link bear striking resemblance to the empirical evidence. Of a particular interest here is the Almaty's presidential policymaking apparatus that was responsible for recognition and interpretation of threats to the nation's interests and devising the appropriate foreign policy strategies for neutralizing the risks and maximizing the benefits for the young republic.

The examination of policymaking processes across different cases can additionally indicate agency behind foreign policy behaviour of the state and support the claim that this behaviour was not a mere reflexive reaction to systemic pressures. Kent Calder, in the discussion of Japan's foreign economic policy, provides a useful definition of a reactive state as one where "the impetus to policy change is typically supplied by outside pressure, and that reaction prevails over strategy in the relatively narrow range of cases where the two come into conflict."¹⁶ For Calder, a reactive state has two principal characteristics: first, the state is unable to pursue major

¹⁵ Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Steven E. Lobell, and Norrin M. Ripsman, "Introduction: Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy," In *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, eds., Steven E Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1-42.

¹⁶ Calder, "Japanese Foreign Economic Policy Formation: Explaining the Reactive State," *World Politics* 40, no. 4 (1988): 518.

independent policy initiatives when it has the power and national incentives to do so; second, it responds to outside pressures erratically, unsystematically, and usually incompletely.¹⁷

Based on this formulation, one can consider a hypothetical model of a foreign policy response. Had the leadership of a state acknowledged an issue to be worth paying attention and responding to, then the organizational manifestation of such a reaction would be the occurrence of some form of decision-making structure, tasked with identification of the issue and formulation of strategies to deal with it. Had these decision-making processes exhibited elements of careful calculations and complex policy planning, and the devised strategy been realized in a consistent manner, then this could have signalled that there was a certain measure of strategic intent present and the state was not just mechanistically (re)acting externally.

Research objectives and contribution

This thesis presents the first foreign policy decision-making analysis of Kazakhstan's foreign affairs in the initial post-independence period. Awareness of the existing conceptual lacunas and methodological hurdles, manifestly reflected in the scholarly assessments of the republic's foreign policy, encouraged the author to employ a specific research strategy integrating both international and domestic factors in a theoretically sound manner and to examine the empirical evidence with the assistance of primary sources.

This study seeks to answer the research puzzle as to *why Kazakhstan did not ally with or balance against any particular great power after independence?* This question concerns specific choices made by the republic's leadership in regard to the fate of the inherited Soviet nuclear arsenal, the logic behind elaboration and realization of a distinctive foreign policy strategy, and an inconsistent policy towards the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, all of which cannot be adequately explained by the system-level neorealist theories. The argument is advanced that the integration of the decision-making variable is necessary for building a plausible understanding of

¹⁷ Ibid.

Kazakhstan's foreign behaviour in the 1990s. The underlying assumption is that the republic's leadership foreign policy choices were not entirely (pre)determined by geopolitical factors and that an element of agency was present in the republic's diplomatic record. Observations by Brooks and Wohlforth regarding the collapsing Soviet Union and Mikhail Gorbachev's leadership strategy of managing the crisis seems appropriate: "Although the crisis that opens the policy window may be a necessary condition of change [of a strategy], the response is a creative, fundamentally intellectual act that switches history onto new rails and whose explanation requires specific models."¹⁸ The thesis's objective is therefore to expose the presidential decision-making processes and structures in order to understand how Nazarbayev's policymaking had impacted a foreign policy output in each specific case it brings under examination.

Guided by the general research goal of approximating a better understanding of the republic's foreign policy this research contributes to the existing body of the literature on Kazakhstan's politics on number of theoretical and empirical positions. First, this is an original attempt to construct a theoretically informed study of Kazakhstan's foreign affairs that in a systematic manner examines the links between the independent variable – the international environment; the intervening variable – Nazarbayev's foreign policymaking; and the dependent variable – the specific foreign policy strategy. Such an approach is an alternative to the existing literature that tends to be idiographic and descriptive in its accounts of the subject.¹⁹ Furthermore, application of international relations theory premises to the instances of Kazakhstani foreign strategy benefits general theoretical research scholarship as it provides

¹⁸ Stephen Brooks, and William Wohlforth, "Power, Globalization, and the End of the Cold War: Reevaluating a Landmark Case for Ideas," in Goertz and Levy, eds., *Explaining War and Peace*, 198.

¹⁹ See, for example, Omurserik Kasenov, *The main results of foreign policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan and its priorities* (Almaty: KISI, 1994); Tokaev, *Pod Stigom*, Kassym-Zhomart Tokaev, *Vneshniaia Politika Kazakhstana v Usloviakh Globalizatsii* (Almaty: SAK, 2000); Konstantin Zatulin, Andrey Grozin, and Vitalii Khliupin, *Natsional'naia Bezopasnost' Kazakhstana: Problemy i Perspektivy* (Moscow: Institut Stran SNG, 1998); Andrei Retivikh, *Ispytanie Nezavisimost'iu: Gepoliticheskaia strategiya Respubliki Kazakhstan kak uslovie vizhivaniia natsii i gosudarstva* (Almaty: Gylym, 2004); Reuel R. Hanks, "'Multivector Politics' and Kazakhstan's Emerging Role as a Geo-Strategic Player in Central Asia," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 11, no. 3 (2009). The literature on Kazakhstan's foreign affairs is further reviewed in Chapter II.

scholars with additional cases in the empirical universe when conceptual assumptions are tested and verified.

Second, the utilization of foreign policy analysis methods in the examination of Kazakhstani foreign policy brings additional knowledge about inner workings of Almaty's policymakers thus supplementing the plausibility of arguments made in favour of the significance of Nazarbayev's role in development of the republic's foreign posture.

Third, this thesis introduces primary information from the archives of Kazakhstan's foreign ministry and presidential administration, which have hitherto not been accessed and assessed by scholars. These archival documents made a substantial contribution to this research as they exposed motives, beliefs, and perceptions held by the leadership during various policy planning sessions, as well as Kazakhstan's foreign policymaking process and structure in general. This empirical information will be useful for future research on Kazakhstani politics of the initial period of independence.

Fourth, the extended fieldwork in the country provided the author with an opportunity to gather large amount of empirical materials through interviews with high-ranking policymakers (e.g. ex-foreign minister) and consultation of Russian language secondary sources. Here, the author's intimate knowledge of the country in general and governmental policymaking in particular allowed a more insightful interpretation of the empirical evidence. The knowledgeable exposition of the Kazakhstani state apparatus's decision-making practices can potentially benefit a wider community of scholars beyond the international relations school.

Research methods and design

Research approach

This thesis aims to construct a plausible narrative of foreign policy decision-making processes and mechanisms that existed in Kazakhstan in 1991-1994.²⁰ The study is underpinned by the

²⁰ Narrative is understood here as "the organization of material in a chronologically sequential order, and the focusing of the content into a single coherent story, albeit with subplots." See Lawrence Stone, *The Past and the Present Revisited* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), quoted in Jack S. Levy, "Too Important to Leave to

conceptual perspective framed in the previous section and foremost seeks to determine whether and how the presidential decision-making element mattered in the course of the history of the republic's foreign relations. The nature of the thesis's research question concerns the degree of agency as opposed to the degree of determinism in Kazakhstan's actions in the international milieu so it necessarily entails an ontological implication pertaining to the agent-structure debate.²¹ To this end, Geoffrey Roberts advocates the usefulness of historical approach in identifying the role of agency in the creation of historical phenomena, in particular when it comes to "rational, purposive, intentional actions."²² Roberts further notes the applicability of a historical narrative method to studies of foreign policies since this approach can provide a detailed account from the agency's perspective: "the story of action in narrative exemplifies and demonstrates the power and autonomy of agency and the actual effects of structures on action," so he finds it to be "the great strength and contribution of diplomatic history within IR."²³ More generally, several authors, both in the history and international relations domains, have advocated the use of the historical approach in order to yield theoretically meaningful results in studies of foreign policy.²⁴ For example, Alexander L. George specifically states that blending of historical and political science approaches is needed to study how and why policymakers make their decisions in the conduct of foreign affairs for "it is necessary to study what goes on in the

the Other: History and Political Science in the Study of International Relations," *International Security* 22, no. 1 (1997): 27, n.15.

²¹ As Christopher Hill notes on the interplay of actors and structures: "Foreign policymaking is a complex process of interaction between many actors, differentially embedded in a wide range of different structures. Their interaction is a dynamic process, leading to the constant evolution of both actors and structures." See Hill, *The Changing Politics of Foreign Policy* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 28. On the general agent-structure discussion see the seminal article by Alexander E. Wendt, "The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory," *International Organization* 41 (1987): 335-370; and Walter Carlsnaes, "The Agency-Structure Problem in Foreign Policy Analysis," *International Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (1992): 245-270.

²² Roberts, "History, Theory and the Narrative Turn in IR," *Review of International Studies* 32, no. 4 (2006): 708.

²³ *Ibid.*, 711.

²⁴ See, for example, Colin Elman, and Miriam Fendius Elman, eds., *Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists, and the Study of International Relations* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2001), and Hidemi Suganami, "Narrative Explanation and International Relations: Back to Basics," *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 37, no. 2 (2008): 327-356.

‘black box’ of decision-making and strategic interaction, and not simply make assumptions about them, as do rational choice and game theories.”²⁵

Thus, the research approach for this thesis will employ a cross-disciplinary perspective in a sense that it will be a theory informed empirical study of specific episodes in the history of Kazakhstan’s foreign policymaking. As such, this work will focus more on the “understanding” of the phenomenon in question, rather than on its “explanation.”²⁶ *Understanding* in Ngaire Woods’s epistemological classification refers to the study of a historical case as a narrative, search for its meaning and appreciating its origins, evolution, and consequences, while also permitting to draw conclusions about the occurring causal patterns.²⁷ Jack S. Levy argues for a similar view on a historical narrative, suggesting that the purpose of such research is in description, understanding, and interpreting historical events or episodes.²⁸

Constructing a narrative around the decision-making aspect and its effects over the republic’s foreign policy output is somewhat comparable in its purpose to the process-tracing technique that focuses on the examination of “the decision process whereby initial conditions are translated into outcomes.”²⁹ King et al. also note that a close study of the decision-making process, facilitated by the process-tracing method, is useful because it allows differentiating causal mechanisms most plausibly at work in a particular case.³⁰ The narrative approach facilitates reconstructing the Kazakhstani policymaking through expositions of individual, institutional, and organizational aspects of decision-making processes, as well as approximating

²⁵ George, “Knowledge for Statecraft: The Challenge for Political Science and History,” *International Security* 22, no. 1 (1997): 44.

²⁶ Ngaire Woods, “The Use of Theory in the Study of International Relations,” in *Explaining international relations since 1945*, ed. Ngaire Woods (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 9-31. Woods draws on Hollis and Smith’s division of an “inside” story telling and “outside” explanation. See Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991).

For Woods, the purpose of *understanding* is to capture meaning rather than its cause, while the concept of *explanation* is to rigorously assert that “change in *x* caused *y*,” Woods, “The Use of Theory,” 11. This epistemological divide reflects on a general debate between a historical approach and a natural scientific approach.

²⁷ Woods, “The Use of Theory,” 11.

²⁸ Jack S. Levy, “Explaining Events and Developing Theories: History, Political Science, and the Analysis of International Relations,” in Elman and Elman, eds., *Bridges and Boundaries*, 41.

²⁹ Alexander L. George, and Timothy J. McKeown, “Case Studies and Theories of Organizational Decision Making,” *Advances in Information Processing in Organizations* 2 (1985): 35, quoted in Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 226.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 227.

a general understanding of the role of the foreign policymaking factor in the conduct of Kazakhstan's international affairs. After all, a narrative is a "story that ideally is also an explanation of why the event occurred."³¹ Certainly, causality in a chronological narrative can only be inferred and the sequence of events may have developed due to other factors than those presumed in the model. Nonetheless, a narrative appears to be an effective method to study how and under what conditions a particular historical episode evolved.

Research design and case selection

The events of history are a laboratory in which to test assumptions about the interrelations of variables.³² The Kazakhstani diplomatic record, albeit not very long in historical perspective, provides a researcher with a variety of events for examination. The research design is organized around three case studies of such episodes of foreign policymaking.³³ The three episodes – the balancing strategy elaboration; the nuclear dilemma resolution; and the Nagorno-Karabakh peace mission – were selected because they had varying degrees of salience for Almaty's policymakers. The events in Kazakhstan's diplomatic history are chosen on the basis of the importance of the issue, in response to which a particular foreign policymaking process has evolved in each instance. Two episodes when the republic's leadership dealt with existential, strategic matters are investigated along with the case where political and security stakes were significantly lower, if existent at all.

In this regard a typology of decisional situations, developed by Charles F. Hermann, serves as an operationalization guide for differentiating between foreign policy issues depending on their salience for policymakers.³⁴ Hermann's typology ranges from crisis situations to administrative situations based on the following criteria: high or low threat to national values;

³¹ Gary Goertz, and Jack S. Levy, "Causal Explanation, Necessary Conditions, and Case Studies," in Goertz and Levy, eds, *Explaining War and Peace*, 23.

³² Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, "The Benefits of a Social-Scientific Approach to Studying International Affairs," in *Explaining International Relations*, ed. Ngaire Woods (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 53.

³³ "A case study is a detailed examination of an event (or series of events) which the analyst believes exhibits (or exhibit) the operation of some identified theoretical principle." See Clyde J. Mitchell, "Case and situation analysis," *Sociological Review* 31, no. 2 (1983): 192.

³⁴ Hermann, *Crises in Foreign Policy: A Simulation Analysis* (Indianapolis: Center of International Studies, Princeton University, 1969).

short or long time to make a decision; and, the extent of surprise or anticipation of a policy issue.³⁵ Through application of the above criteria to the episodes of the Kazakhstani diplomatic history it is possible to render cases of nuclear disarmament and of the development of nation's geopolitical strategy as the highest salience crisis decisional situations since they touched upon the existential matters for the republic; they were not and could not be anticipated (similarly as the collapse of the Soviet Union that brought these problems to existence was not anticipated); and because an immediate policy planning was required in both cases. Meanwhile, the Nagorno-Karabakh peace initiative can be considered as a polar, administrative situation, wherein it was not a surprise development for Almaty and it did not pose a threat to the republic, although the timing for policymaking was short due to the fast deterioration of the situation on the ground in the conflicting region. The former two stand out as problems of equal salience. Their similarity allows for a measure of control when compared against the latter case of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, which was deemed relatively less important by Nazarbayev.³⁶

Research instruments and data collection³⁷

Archival documents

A research project dealing with a foreign policy of a country can be significantly enriched through the use of primary sources from this country.³⁸ Primary sources indicate the original source material on a historical event, including all contemporary evidences about the event;

³⁵ Depending on the configuration of the above criteria the foreign policy issue may represent a crisis situation, innovative situation, inertia situation, reflexive situation, deliberative situation, routinized situation, and administrative situation. Ibid, 415.

³⁶ The method of "controlled comparison" calls for comparison of "most similar" cases that are comparable in all respects except for the independent variable, whose variance may account for the cases having different outcomes on the dependent variable. Alexander L. George and A. Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 2005), 81.

³⁷ This section draws in large part from Deborah Welch Larson's 2001 work "Sources and Methods in Cold War History: The Need for a New Theory-Based Archival Approach," in Elman and Elman, eds., *Bridges and Boundaries*, 327-350. Her work is selected for its close correspondence with the research aim of this thesis. Another guide on the use of archival resources in foreign policy research is Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History: A Guide to Method* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

³⁸ See George, "Knowledge for Statecraft"; also Larson, "Sources and Methods."

secondary sources refer to any other materials written in the subsequent time.³⁹ In reference to primary sources Deborah Welch Larson presents compelling cases for the use of archival documents in identification of policymaking processes underlying historical events.⁴⁰ Larson's main argument is that the documentary evidence allows a researcher to examine the world through the eyes of policymakers and to reconstruct their calculations and deliberations.⁴¹ It is possible to expose the issues that most alarmed policymakers since it is often in the reaction to concerns and threats that many documents are produced. Such reconstructions can help to better understand how various factors continually influenced policy formation thus revealing causal mechanisms behind foreign policy decisions.

In contrast to secondary sources, primary evidence provides a more veracious account of events: "private remarks are more revealing than ghostwritten speeches; and diaries are more reliable than memoirs written many years later."⁴² Douglas Stuart notes: "One of the greatest challenges for scholars interested in systematic study of foreign policy decision-making is to distinguish between self-serving memoirs by former political insiders and reliable source of information about high-level decision-making."⁴³ To this end, memoranda and letters relatively accurately reflect policymakers' perceptions and interpretations of the world around them that they had held at the time of writing, while not being affected by hindsight.⁴⁴ Another point can be made that the study of official internal documents, which remained undisclosed for some time after being written, allows a researcher to possibly reveal what policymakers were really

³⁹ Cameron G. Thies, "A Pragmatic Guide to Qualitative Historical Analysis in the Study of International Relations," *International Studies Perspectives* 3, no. 4 (2002): 356.

⁴⁰ See Larson, *Anatomy of Mistrust*, 37-38; and "Sources and Methods," 337-343.

⁴¹ Larson encourages analysts to conduct their own archival research instead of referring solely to secondary historic accounts in order to mitigate the effects of selectivity and bias in historian's works. See Larson, "Sources and Methods," 337-343. Whereas this suggestion makes sense in reference to the US diplomatic history, professional historical monographs on Kazakhstani diplomatic history remain unwritten.

⁴² *Ibid*, 338.

⁴³ Stuart, "Foreign Policy Decision-Making," 578.

⁴⁴ Larson, "Sources and Methods," 339-340. Consider also the following observation about Soviet leadership's perceptions: "The fact that political actors during or after the event claim to have acted in response to changes in material pressures might conceivably reflect earlier changes in ways of thinking that led them to see these pressures in a new light. Or, even if their preferences did not change, Soviet decision-makers' beliefs about the world may have changed in other ways that relatively quickly led them to reevaluate which material things really mattered to them." See Brooks and Wohlforth, "Power, Globalization," 227.

thinking on a subject matter and what ideas they were sharing with each other as compared to rhetoric and discussions on occasions when they were exposed to public.⁴⁵

Larson directs analysts at the type of documentation they should look for in search of primary sources contemporaneous to the policymaking episodes: “At the decision-making level, the causal mechanisms include beliefs, explanations, calculations, deductions, predictions, motivations which have observable indicators such as memos, speeches, and the minutes of meetings.”⁴⁶ Kazakhstan’s foreign policymaking establishments produced official documents quite analogous to the American ones in Larson’s description. These are currently stored in the Archive of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan (*Arkhib Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan-APRK*), which was formed in 1994 on the basis of the Central State Archive of the Newest History and is located in Almaty.⁴⁷ It stores documents sourced from the top state institutions of the Soviet and post-Soviet eras. The filing system used in the APRK is identical to the systems in Soviet and Russian archives, basic archival categories in Russian are *Fond*, *Opis*, *Delo*. The majority of archival material of the studied period is written in Russian, other documents are in Kazakh and various foreign languages. The following descriptions by Patricia Kennedy Grimsted are attributed to the archival terms used in Russia and correctly define the corresponding terms in the Kazakhstani archival system: 1) *Fond* designates an integral group of records from a single office or source, usually arranged as they were created in their office of origin; 2) *Opis* is a numbered hierarchical subdivisions within a fond that list all of the files or storage units; 3) *Delo* is a reference to a file or a storage unit.⁴⁸

The bulk of official documentation that relates to the Kazakhstani diplomatic history is stored in the following *fonds*: *Fond 7* – the President of the Kazakh SSR; *Fond 5N* – the Apparatus of the President and the Cabinet of the Ministers of the Republic of Kazakhstan; *Fond*

⁴⁵ Larson, *Anatomy of Mistrust*, 37.

⁴⁶ Larson, “Sources and Methods,” 335.

⁴⁷ For the reflections about the work of a foreign researcher in the APRK see Steven A. Barnes, “Hits and Misses in the Archives of Kazakhstan,” in *Adventures in Russian Historical Research: Reminiscences of American Scholars from the Cold War to the Present*, eds. Samuel H. Baron and Cathy A. Frierson (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 255-264.

⁴⁸ Grimsted, *Archives of Russia Five Years After: “Purveyors of Sensations” or “Shadows Cast to the Past”?* (Amsterdam: International Institute of Social History, 1997).

75N – the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, *Fond 166N* – the Centre for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. In addition, personal *fonds* of high-ranking diplomats Kassym-Zhomart Tokaev and Mikhail Isinaliev contain highly relevant information.⁴⁹ In general, it is a relatively uncomplicated procedure to obtain permission to work in the APRK with only few necessary documents relating to the professional affiliation of a researcher and the research subject needing to be submitted to the Archive’s office.⁵⁰

*Triangulation*⁵¹

Though documentary evidence from the archives is considered as a basis of empirical data for this thesis, it is advisable to corroborate the archival material with other primary and secondary sources. As Larson notes: “it is important to interpret documents within their historic, situational, and communication context. We need to understand the purpose of a document and the events leading up to it in order to interpret its meaning correctly.”⁵² Non-archival materials are helpful in establishing such context – after all, “you reach a judgment...the same way you make any historical judgment: namely, by looking at as much evidence as you can.”⁵³ For this reason, the author of this thesis has also consulted contemporaneous news reports and public speeches, examined memoirs of politicians and conducted interviews with persons who held high and medium level positions in Almaty’s foreign policymaking establishments in the 1990s.

Kazakhstanskaia Pravda and Egemen Qazaqstan are the two government newspapers, in Russian and Kazakh correspondingly, which have published official speeches, news releases, and commentaries. The *Nexis UK* service was used to source English-language news and

⁴⁹ Russian letter N designates independence in Russian (*Nezavisimost’*) and indicates *fonds* of the post-Soviet period. Whereas holders of general admission cards are permitted to access official *fonds*, they need to secure permission to access personal *fonds* from the source person himself or, in case of his death, of his immediate relatives. This thesis contains documents from Mikhail Isinaliev’s personal fond (175NL), access to which was kindly granted by his widow, Mrs. Maia Isinalieva.

⁵⁰ For detailed information on access to the APRK see “Reading room rules,” *APRK*, accessed 5 June 2011, <http://www.aprk.kz/en/general/reading-room>.

⁵¹ Triangulation is “a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation.” Norman K. Denzin, and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 2000), 443. This method actuates the use of different data sources and may involve both inter-method and intra-method triangulation of data.

⁵² Larson, “Sources and Methods,” 343.

⁵³ Trachtenberg, *Craft of International History*, 155.

broadcasts. Such information acknowledged the open, public positions of the republic's state bodies on specific foreign policy issues. The most voluminous collection of president Nazarbayev's speeches from 1990 till present can be found online at his personal webpage under the rubric "The Chronicles of the Activities of the President," which was set up in 2013.⁵⁴ This collection made possible to content analyze president's public declarations in order to identify which internal official documents, now stored in the archives, have been used in the preparation of these texts and correspondingly identify policy institutions which had prepared them. Because of the nascence of the independent Kazakhstan, memoirs and autobiographies have not yet become a popular genre and are generally scarce. Books by Nursultan Nazarbayev, Kassym-Zhomart Tokaev, Mikhail Isinaliev, and Salim Kurmanguzhin are possibly the only few available memoirs of foreign policymakers in Kazakhstan at the time of writing.⁵⁵ Fragmented recollections of other decision-makers of the time, occasionally found in media and other secondary sources, complemented the information from the abovementioned memoirs. Historical accounts of decision-makers contain many details important for reconstructing policymaking episodes; they can also reflect decision-maker's views (at least public ones) on a particular international issue.

Interviews

Interviewing is an effective method for understanding the perceptions of participants of events or learning how participants come to attribute a particular meaning to a phenomenon or event.⁵⁶ For this thesis, the interviews were arranged in a semi-standardized format where an interview is guided by the set of predetermined questions and topics but an interviewee has the opportunity to

⁵⁴ See "The Chronicles of the Activities of the President," *Nursultan Nazarbayev' personal website*, http://personal.akorda.kz/ru/category/hronika_deyatelnosti.

⁵⁵ Nazarbayev, *Na poroge XXI veka* (Almaty: Oner, 1996), *Epitsentr Mira* (Astana: Elorda, 2001), *Kriticheskoe Desiatiletie* (Almaty: Atamura, 2003); Tokaev, *Pod Stigom, Preodolenie* (Almaty: SAK, 2003), *Svet i Ten'* (Astana: Astana poligrafiiia, 2007); Isinaliev, *Zapiski Diplomata* (Almaty: Atamura, 1998); Kurmanguzhin, *45 let na Diplomaticheskoi Sluzhbe* (Almaty: Zhibek Zholy, 2003).

⁵⁶ Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. 6th ed. (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2007), 97.

elaborate beyond given answers.⁵⁷ Only written notes were taken at the interviews, as audio/video recording devices are usually not welcomed at tête-à-tête meetings in Kazakhstan. Interviewees were divided in two groups: one group consisted of persons (including several high-ranking officials of the presidential administration and the foreign ministry) who have either personally been involved in policymaking during the studied period or have worked in foreign policymaking bodies; the second group consisted of experts on Kazakhstan's foreign affairs matters who have published extensively on the topic.⁵⁸ Personal and professional acquaintance with prospective interviewees, career record in the president's administration, and a doctoral affiliation with a well-known UK university have facilitated access to knowledgeable individuals.

Participant observation

An in-depth understanding of the state of affairs in the studied nation's political establishments facilitates a more sophisticated interpretation and analysis of the obtained primary and secondary material. For example, George and Bennett's dictum suggests:

In studying the outputs of a complex policymaking system, the investigator is well advised to work with a sophisticated model or set of assumptions regarding ways in which different policies are made in that system. For example, which actors and agencies are the most influential in a particular issue are? To whom does the leader turn for critical information and advice on a given type of policy problem? How do status differences and power variables affect the behaviour of different advisers and participants in high-level policymaking?⁵⁹

However, given the sensitivity attached to policymaking practices in Kazakhstan this is a challenging task.⁶⁰ To this end, the author's personal experience of working in the analytical department of the presidential administration for one and a half years immediately prior to commencing doctoral study was utilized as a valuable additional research instrument similar in essence to the participant-observation technique. The participant-observer assumes different

⁵⁷ Ibid, 93-95.

⁵⁸ In total 16 interviews were conducted. See Appendix I.

⁵⁹ George and Bennett, *Case Studies*, 100.

⁶⁰ The implications of treatment of the topic with caution are elaborated below.

roles within a case study situation and may participate in the events being studied.⁶¹ Although the author did not participate in the decision-making episodes under examination, the work experience in the top policymaking organization provided many insights about inner workings of the state. In particular, the author gained an insider's knowledge about the unofficial political and bureaucratic hierarchies; formal and informal information and communication flows; operational and organizational norms and codes adopted in Kazakhstan. The practical familiarity with formal and informal processes and mechanisms relevant to foreign policymaking enhanced the author's general understanding of the topic and allowed to assess archival documents in a more informed way.

Challenges and limitations

Note on reflexivity

Considering the fact that the author comes from the studied region and has worked in the institutions which are examined in the thesis, certain perceptual biases have inevitably surfaced whilst undertaking this research and could have adversely affected the inquiry. This effect is because "a researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions."⁶² Therefore, in order to minimize the potential impact of the element of subjectivity it was important to acknowledge its presence and consider in what ways the author's preconceptions could have affected the research.

The author was born in the KazakhSSR and after the Union's fall lived, was educated, and worked in the independent Kazakhstan for most of his life. Moreover, for several years the author was a state employee in governmental institutions, including the president's administration, working on foreign policy and security analysis. Such circumstances of the

⁶¹ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (London: Sage, 2008), 111-112.

⁶² Kirsti Malterud, "Qualitative Research: Standards, Challenges, and Guidelines," *Lancet* 358, no. 9280 (2001): 483-484.

author's personal, academic, and professional socialization have left a particular imprint on his mentality and worldviews. Therefore, the subjectivity element could manifest at different stages of the work on this dissertation and consequently obscure the research. First, the inclination towards the *inside-out perspective* in approaching Kazakhstan's foreign policy can be partially related to the author's professional habit developed in the presidential administration, where policy analysis had to be made from the point of view of the republic's interests. Second, the author's sense of national self-identification with the young republic and patriotic sentiments could induce sympathetic or even apologetic normative treatment of Kazakhstan's foreign policy record. Third, the author's subconscious association with fellow countrymen in policymaking structures of the beginning of the 1990s and solidarity feelings with some of these senior colleagues, which had developed during work in the state institutions, could also affect the objectivity in assessment of their actions and deliberations.

In addition to being cognizant about biases and preconceptions, in order to lessen their impact, the author sought to closely follow the methods of scientific inquiry and observe the principles of academic integrity. This was particularly important for selection of data on Kazakhstan's foreign policy. With primary sources, all efforts were taken to access and integrate all relevant documents into the analysis. With secondary sources, the majority of the literature consulted in this dissertation was of the Western origin, which has provided for a more balanced and holistic assessment of the subject matter.

Fieldwork challenges

The main challenging and limiting factors of the fieldwork component arose from the fact that topics of foreign policy and governmental policymaking are considered to be sensitive in Kazakhstan and, much in the Soviet fashion of not disclosing information related to politics or security, are not always freely discussed in depth.⁶³ As one interviewee, a former state employee,

⁶³ In particular, collecting data on the nuclear disarmament episode was a challenging endeavour in terms of gaining primary information.

told the author: “if the West knows how decisions are arrived at in the republic then it becomes possible to influence these decisions.”⁶⁴ A possible explanation of this situation is that most of the knowledgeable persons and actual participants of policymaking events have been professionally socialized in such organizations of the USSR governmental apparatus like the Kazakhstan Communist Party Central Committee or the Union foreign ministry, and continue to practice the Soviet bureaucratic culture of closeness, especially to the outsider affiliated with a foreign institution.

Such treatment of the subject under examination resulted in several repercussions for data collection, oral testimonies in particular. First, some of the prospective interviewees have declined continuous requests for interviews stating a variety of reasons for refusal. The justifications for not being able to meet were never grounded on the sensitivity of the topic. Instead, such neutral reasons as schedule conflicts or cancelled trips on Astana-Almaty route were sounded. Second, many interviewees who have agreed to meet, particularly those who held high-ranking positions in Kazakhstan in the 1990s, would refrain from sharing a personal vision and interpretation of policy issues, and prefer to replicate the official positions and accounts of the events, or, occasionally, sharing the information with the provision that it will not be shared in any form, even anonymously. To overcome this suspiciousness the author explicitly presented the research project as an academic exercise, and not a journalist investigation.

The sensitivity of the topic has also impaired the ease of access to primary information. For example, all versions of the official concepts of foreign policy of Kazakhstan, first endorsed in 1995, remain state secrets. Moreover, although the APRK provides an invaluable opportunity to work with the original state documentation, some reservations concerning accessibility and completeness of archival materials have to be made. In general, researchers encounter certain difficulties in gaining access to and working with government and personal documents, which relate to the initial period of the republic's independence and stored in the archive. Access may

⁶⁴ High-ranking government official, name withheld by request, interview with author, Astana, 25 October 2011.

only be gained to the selected documents that do not remain classified as secret, for “official use only” (the stamp for such documents is the abbreviation in Russian *DSP – dlia sluzhebnogo pol’zovaniia*), or “not for publication in the open literature” (the stamp for such documents in Russian is *ne podlezhit oglasheniiu*).⁶⁵ Although remaining accessible documents are relatively well systematized and the APRK’s staff is efficient in assisting researchers, many documents were not included in the files by sourcing government institutions. George and Bennett warn researchers about the degree of evidentiary value of archival documents and advise them that accessible documents may represent only a part of the whole picture.⁶⁶ Often only selected documents from the entire “paper trail” relating to a policymaking episode are opened to the public. Moreover, the meaning of the content of the available documents can be intentionally distorted by their authors for various self-serving reasons.⁶⁷ Marc Trachtenberg makes a similar remark:

The most damaging material might not appear in the published diplomatic documents, no matter how important in historical terms. Key documents might be withdrawn before particular files are made available to the public. Or documents might be released in what is called ‘sanitized’ (i.e., redacted) form. The heart of the problem here is that since we are interested above all in the government behaviour, we have to rely mainly on the sort of material that helps us understand why governments did what they did, namely, documents produced by, and thus controlled by, the governments themselves.⁶⁸

These observations, made largely in reference to the US and European archives, can be extrapolated to the situation with the Kazakhstani archives. Researchers who choose to study Kazakhstan’s diplomatic history are left with narrow and sometimes random selection of archival documents. For example, the author of the thesis often encountered a situation where a follow-up document and appendix, expected to be included in the same *delo* with the original

⁶⁵ *De facto* any policy document produced in the president’s administration and not stored in the archive is at minimum kept to the standards of the *DSP* classification. For guidelines on restriction categories used to handle documents in Kazakhstan see “Formal and Informal Restrictive Information Categories in the FSU/Russian Federation,” Susan L. Maret, Federation of American Scientists, accessed 10 October 2013, <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/russia/maret.pdf>.

⁶⁶ George and Bennett, *Case Studies*, 99-105.

Apart from the scarcity of documentary evidence, other authors raise the issue of nonverbal communication of key individuals that may steer the decision-making: “Silence on the part of a leader may be interpreted as consent by one member of a decisional unit and as lack of support by someone else in the group. The ‘real’ decision may be made after the meeting was adjourned, or it may have been made before the meeting even started.” See Stuart, “Foreign Policy Decision-Making,” 587.

⁶⁷ George and Bennett, *Case Studies*, 99-105.

⁶⁸ Trachtenberg, *Craft of International History*, 157.

document, was found in a different *delo* or even *fond*, or not found at all. It was therefore a necessary practice to cross-examine files sourced from different departments of the president's administration and the foreign ministry. Meanwhile, until spring 2013, researchers in the APRK were not allowed to use copying devices or computers in the reading room, and could only take handwritten notes, which had to be checked in daily to a member of the staff. This rule led to technical difficulties in processing what was often an undersystematized collection of documents from various *fonds* and *delos*. Considering abovementioned difficulties and a sheer volume of original documents, the work in the APRK comprised the major part of the field work for this thesis and was conducted for five months in 2012, and for five months in 2013.

An important factor that facilitated the author's access to both primary and secondary information was the relative temporal remoteness of the studied episodes. For example, more relevant archival documents would have been impossible to access in the APRK. De jure, a 15 years non-access time period rule for the disclosure of government documents is enforced in the APRK. De facto, the "access embargo" is even longer – non-secret internal official documents are declassified at the end of a 15-20 year time period. As such, in spring 2013, only documents produced before 1995 in the foreign ministry and the president's administration were available for general researchers.

Research limitations

To conclude, the amount of available primary information on the Kazakhstani foreign policymaking in the 1990s remains limited, rendering historical reconstructions to be somewhat fragmented.⁶⁹ Currently, it seems impossible to reach the level of data saturation comparable to the US cases of Cuban missile crisis decision-making or the British Cabinet foreign policies

⁶⁹ It is nearly impossible to obtain certain information, such as Nazarbayev's appointment log. This document would have supplemented the analysis of the president's advisory teams. Stalin's appointment log, for example, was used extensively in the historical literature. See Anatolii Chernobaev, *Na prieme u Stalina: tetradi (zhurnaly) zapisei lits, priniatykh I.V. Staliny 1924-1953 gg.* (Moscow: Novii Chronograph, 2010).

during the 1940s.⁷⁰ Even in cases where primary information seems to be sufficient and comprehensive it is not possible to reconstruct a fully accurate picture of the decision-making process. To be sure, such a goal often seems unattainable even for policymakers themselves. Recall John F. Kennedy's statement: "The essence of ultimate decision remains impenetrable to the observer – often, indeed, to the decider himself.... There will always be the dark and tangled stretches in the decision-making process – mysterious even to those who may be most intimately involved."⁷¹ Therefore, this thesis does not entertain any ambition to make a full and detailed portrayal of policymaking episodes; instead it aims to explore theoretically relevant decisional patterns in order to forge an understanding of the role of presidential decision-making in the course of realization of the republic's foreign strategy.

Thesis outline

The preceding section of the introductory chapter explained and justified research approach and design employed in the thesis. In particular, it explicated the rationale for integrating the historical narrative approach to a theory based study of foreign policymaking, explained selection criteria for cases, advocated the necessity to use primary resources, reported data collection methods, and discussed the research project's limitations.

The next chapter assesses the state of the current scholarly discussion of the phenomenon of Kazakhstan's foreign policy in order to situate this research in a larger context of the growing body of literature on Kazakhstan. Given the limited amount of works devoted specifically to the topic, the chapter consults the broader literature that analyzes the republic's foreign affairs from tangential perspectives, including regional matters and *Innenpolitik* factors.

⁷⁰ While studying the latter subject, Christopher Hill commented: "The archives teem with relevant sources, both in the great store of public records and the private papers of innumerable former Cabinet ministers. The evolution of policy can often be studied on a day-by-day, even an hour-by-hour, basis." See Hill, *Cabinet Decisions on Foreign Policy: The British Experience, October 1938-June 1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), xvii.

⁷¹ Graham T. Allison used Kennedy's quotation as an epigraph that inspired the title of his work. See Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971).

Chapter III constructs theoretical guidelines for the thesis and develops an inquiry model in order to approach the main argument of this thesis, which holds that the Kazakhstani foreign policy was not solely (pre)determined by international systemic pressures and that domestic factors, particularly the presidential decision-making element, have to be incorporated in the understanding of the phenomenon. The chapter's main objective is to find theoretical grounds to synthesize main conceptual presumptions of neoclassical realism with the presidential decision-making component elaborated by the foreign policy analysis school.

The focus then shifts to the presentation of empirical material gathered during the fieldwork in Kazakhstan. Chapter IV reveals the meaning and rationale used by Nazarbayev and his advisory team behind notions of multivectorism and balancing. In doing so, the chapter also enquires whether an argument commonly found in the secondary literature, that the republic's foreign policy was driven by the defensive rationale, holds its merits. A subsequent section of the chapter follows a story of bureaucratic competition among foreign policymaking establishments that took place in 1993. The third section on Nazarbayev's personal commitment to resolution of problems with China and diplomatic manoeuvring with Russia elucidates operational and analytical aspects of the president's foreign policymaking.

Chapter V examines nuclear decision-making in the December 1991 – May 1992 period. It reviews situational variables affecting Nazarbayev's course of action and discusses policy options articulated during the period. Empirical evidence is examined against the premise that Nazarbayev's evasive denuclearization policy, the product of group decision-making by president and his advisory team, was an intricate strategy aimed at maximizing the republic's interests under pressing international conditions. The inference is primarily supported by the analysis of archival documents produced in Almaty during this episode.

Chapter VI studies a small-scale, non-strategic foreign policy issue of the involvement of Kazakhstan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution process in 1992. It reconstructs the dynamic situational context for Almaty policymakers conditioned by the growing pressure from

the CSCE Minsk group. The chapter illuminates decision-making for a low-salience issue and examines if it is procedurally different from a process for high-salience issues.

The concluding chapter discusses the thesis's findings against the backdrop of the existing empirical material on Kazakhstan and theoretical frameworks designed to study countries' foreign policies. This chapter draws generalizations about foreign policymaking apparatus of the republic on the basis of the materials from the case studies. It also assesses the accuracy of the estimates of other observers on Kazakhstani foreign policy in the light of the presented empirical evidence and evaluates the applicability of the neoclassical realist conceptual lens to the study of Kazakhstan. Some suggestions are made on possible future directions of the research on Kazakhstan and, more broadly, on politics of the post-Soviet Central Asia.

Chapter II: Conceptualization, operationalization, and explanation of Kazakhstan's foreign policy

One established Kazakh scholar poses a question: “Well, multivectorism – is it a blessing or the forced necessity, a freewill choice or an astute strategy?”⁷² The answer, as elusive as it may come, is fundamental to understanding Kazakhstan's foreign policy. In the existing literature on Central Asia and Kazakhstan there seems to be a consensus in conceiving Kazakhstan's foreign policy as a rational and pragmatic strategy devised by state's leadership as a reaction to the challenges imposed by international and domestic environments. This consensus in effect implies a “forced necessity” discourse. At the same time, although the phenomenon of Kazakhstan's foreign policy has been the focus of research interest for as long as such a policy existed, there is a surprisingly low number of academic works that produce empirically detailed and theoretically grounded examinations of the subject.

In general, the literature dealing exclusively with the analysis of Kazakhstani foreign policy is fragmented and scarce. Reuel R. Hanks, in a September 2009 article that examines the nature of Kazakhstan's multivectorism, notes that he was unable to find a single scholarly work that would provide a detailed analysis of the evolution of multivectorism or assess it from the geopolitical viewpoint.⁷³ A collateral indicator of the scarcity of sources on the republic's foreign policy is virtual absence of a comprehensive literature review on the subject. While there are reviews on Central Asian security and geopolitics, debate on Kazakhstan's foreign policy has not been thoroughly synthesized and analyzed.⁷⁴ For example, a doctoral dissertation by Daniela Passolt on the republic's foreign strategies towards Russia, China, and Central Asia does not include a separate assessment of the literature on Kazakhstan's foreign policy.⁷⁵ Secondary data on the subject is integrated into the body of the dissertation instead. The scarcity of the literature

⁷² Murat Laumulin, “Triumf mnogovektornosti,” *Kontinent* 15, no. 176 (2006): 25.

⁷³ Hanks, “Multi-Vector Politics’ and Kazakhstan's Emerging Role as a Geo-strategic Player in Central Asia,” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 11, no. 3 (2009): 257.

⁷⁴ For general reviews of studies of regional geopolitics see Laumulin, *Tsentral'naia Aziia. Vol.3*; and Murat Laumulin, *Tsentral'naia Aziia v Zarubezhnoi Politologii i Mirovoi Geopolitike. Vol. 1* (Almaty: KISI, 2005).

⁷⁵ Passolt, “Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy.”

is nonetheless also recognized by Passolt: “Due to the limited number of sources dealing with Kazakhstan's foreign policy, a large part of the data in this thesis was gathered from primary source materials such as government publications.”⁷⁶

Existing works are centred on several preconceptions that may entail unnecessary restrictive understandings of Kazakhstan's foreign policy. Firstly, the majority of authors “black box” the issue in the neorealist tradition by treating Kazakhstan as a rational, unitary actor mechanistically responding to constraints in the international system. Thereby the republic's policies are deemed as ideal responses to the challenges and opportunities imposed by the international environment. Under this view Kazakhstan has never initiated or pursued anomalous or flawed strategies. The republic's foreign policy model has been optimal throughout and closely tracked the structural constraints and opportunities. Here, the conceptualization of Kazakhstan as a unitary actor implies that the republic is anthropomorphized in the analysis. Such an approach simplifies the explanation, as there is no need to examine the policymaking properties of the state.⁷⁷ The second preconception, analytically interrelated with the previous, is that Kazakhstan, in formulating and implementing its foreign policy, is not perceived as an actor, but rather as an “acted upon” unit in a wider context of Central Asian regionalism and Great Game stratagems. Thirdly, a large volume of literature that does look below the state-unit level, explains the republic's policy from the *Innenpolitik* perspectives on state-building, examining the processes of consolidation of national identity and statehood. This focus, although justifiable in many respects, leaves a reader with the idea that main determinants of Kazakhstan's foreign policy are found domestically and that international considerations of the republic's leadership have secondary importance. The *Innenpolitik* analyses also prevail in the studies of other Central

⁷⁶ Ibid, 44.

⁷⁷ As John A. Vasquez warns: “It is obviously an anthropomorphic error to speak of a state's perceptions, as in ‘France perceived.’ One usually takes this to mean that the official foreign policy decisionmakers ‘perceived.’ However, it may be the case...that different domestic decisionmakers have different perceptions....This can result in a very idiographic analysis, and once one goes in that direction, then a potentially large body of ad hoc propositions is available to save an explanation from discrepant evidence.” See Vasquez, “Kuhn vs. Lakatos? The Case for Multiple Frames in Appraising IR Theory,” in *Progress in International Relations Theory: Appraising the Field*, eds. Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2003), 437.

Asian nations' foreign policies as a brief assessment below will demonstrate. Fourthly, rare studies that do scheme foreign policymaking actors and institutions do not pass beyond a descriptive portrayal of governmental institutions and leave the question of how exactly the properties of the republic's policymaking processes may affect specific foreign policy outputs underexplored.⁷⁸ In general, with the exception of Passolt's work,⁷⁹ the integration of the policymaking variable into the analysis of Kazakhstan's foreign relations has not been attempted in the existing literature thus far. Neither does there exist literature that examines, in detail, the structure and process of Kazakhstan's presidential foreign policy decision-making by itself.

Taking abovementioned points as a guide through the existing literature, this chapter follows the academic discussion on what constitutes Kazakhstan's foreign policy – what is the scholarly consensus or debate on the policy's rationale and aims; what international and domestic factors are believed to have impacted the most on the republic's external strategies; in what instances the aspect of Nazarbayev's foreign policymaking could have added the explanatory value to the analysis, yet has been left overlooked.

Republic of Kazakhstan as a “black box”: structural perspectives and the Great Game narratives

System-level interpretations of Kazakhstan's foreign policy imply its reactive and deterministic nature. As such, structural models may provide plausible conceptual frameworks to study major foreign policy orientations of the republic. The neorealist logic explaining a state's external behaviour underscores the importance of relative power capabilities under the conditions of the anarchical structure of the international system. The principal interrelated assumption is made that states put the highest premium on security matters since they, “at a minimum, seek their own

⁷⁸ Omurserik Kasenov, “The Institutions and Conduct of the Foreign policy of the Postcommunist Kazakhstan,” in *The Making of Foreign policy in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, eds. Adeed Dawisha and Karen Dawisha (Armonk: M.E.Sharpe, 1995), 263-285; Rafis Abazov, “Practice of Foreign Policymaking: The formation of post-Soviet politics in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan,” *NATO Research Fellowships Programme 1996-1998* (1998), <http://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/96-98/abasov.pdf>; and *Foreign Policy Formation in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan: Perceptions and Expert Assessments* (Victoria, Australia: Contemporary Europe Research Centre, 2000); and Passolt, “Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy.”

⁷⁹ Passolt, “Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy.”

preservation and, at a maximum, drive for universal domination.”⁸⁰ Therefore, structural models hold major explanatory power when foreign policies in question concern “high politics” – security, sovereignty, power and other elements of national interest. Seen this way, Kazakhstan’s foreign policy was predetermined by the need to search for opportunities to maximize its interest and to balance in order to ensure its survival in the hostile international environment formed in the post-cold war world.

A great portion of the existing literature on Kazakhstan’s foreign policy has focused on precisely these fundamental national interests: sovereignty and security.⁸¹ The geostrategic location of Kazakhstan, which at the inception of independence found itself landlocked between Russia and China, is seen as the principal factor that could potentially threaten national interest. Omurserik Kasenov, one of Nazarbayev’s key advisers, who directly contributed to foreign policymaking in the 1990s, unambiguously described main strategic concerns of Kazakhstan: “At the apex of Kazakhstan's threat hierarchy are two geographically proximate states, Russia and China. Each possesses great economic and military potential, including nuclear weapons. If one of these states should put forward territorial claims on Kazakhstan, serious defence problems would arise.”⁸² Echoing Kasenov’s concerns, S. Frederick Starr elaborates on these “formidable security challenges” from Russia and “grave threats” from China that Kazakhstan faced in the

⁸⁰ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1979), 118.

⁸¹ See, for example, Kasenov, *Main Results and “Institutions and Conduct”*; Vitalii N. Khliupin, “Natsional’naia Bezopasnost’ i Geopoliticheskoe Polozhenie Respubliki Kazakhstan: Analiz Vneshnepoliticheskikh Faktorov” (PhD diss., Kazakh National University, 1996); Nazarbayev, *Na Poroge*. 2nd. ed.; Tokaev, *Pod Stigom*; Murat Laumulin, *Kazakhstan v Sovremennikh Mezhdunarodnikh Otnosheniakh: Bezopasnost’, Gepolitika, Politologiiia* (Almaty: KISI, 1999); Marat Tazhin, “Natsional’naia bezopasnost’ Kazakhstana: Novoe ponimanie, Novye Podkhody,” *Analytic* 1 (October, 2000): 7-10; Maulen Ashimbayev, *Bezopasnost’ Kazakhstana na Sovremennom Etape. Stat’i, Interv’iu, Vistupleniia* (Almaty: KISI, 2002); Erlan Karin and Burkhanov Kamal, *Vneshniaia politika Kazakhstana: Vyrabotka novykh prioritetov* (Almaty: APR, 2002); Robert Legvold, ed., *Thinking Strategically: The Major Powers, Kazakhstan, and the Central Asian Nexus* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003); William C. Wohlforth, “Revisiting Balance of Power Theory in Central Eurasia,” in *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*, eds. Thazha V. Paul, James J. Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004); Nargis Kassenova, “Kazakhstan's National Security: Conceptual and Operational aspects,” *Central Asian Survey* 24, no. 2 (2005): 151-164; Marat Shaikhutdinov, *Geopolitika, Globalistika i Teoriia Natsional’noi Bezopasnosti: Metodologicheskie i Prikladnye Aspekty* (Pavlodar: EKO, 2005); S. Frederick Starr, “Kazakhstan’s Security Strategy: A Model for Central Asia?,” *Central Asia Affairs* 3, no. 15 (2006): 12-18; Svante E. Cornell, “Finding Balance: The Foreign Policies of Central Asia’s States,” in *Domestic Political Change and Grand Strategy*, eds. Ashley J. Tellis, Michael Wills, and Nick Bisley (Seattle, WA: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2007), 266-300; Hanks, ““Multivector politics””; and Gregory Gleason, “Russia and Central Asia’s Multivector Foreign Policies,” in *After Putin's Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*, eds. Stephen K. Wegren and Dale R. Herspring (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010).

⁸² Kasenov, “Institutions and Conduct,” 263.

1990s.⁸³ In Starr's observation, the northern neighbour presented a security problem because of the long un-delineated border; concentration of the Slavic majority population in the adjoining areas; a tradition of perceiving Kazakhstan as "an extension of Slavic heartland"; and anticipated Kremlin's neo-imperial ambitions.⁸⁴ Meanwhile the eastern neighbour caused Almaty's distress because of the understanding in Kazakhstan that Beijing was concerned about possible secession moves of the large ethnic Kazakh and Turkic majority residing in bordering Xinjiang region; the recollections of the Sino-Soviet conflict; the Lob Nor nuclear tests; and the illegal immigration of Hans.⁸⁵ Hence, if viewed from the structural perspective, the Russian and Chinese factors have been found to form the pillars of the international configuration exerting great pressures on the external behaviour of the republic in the 1990s.

The inherited nuclear arsenal, which was one of the largest in the world, had provoked interest of Washington in Kazakhstan, bringing "the United States in early as an important foreign actor in the country."⁸⁶ The US interference in Kazakhstan's and, more broadly, in region's affairs, prompted scholarly discussion of the revival of Sir Halford John Mackinder's Great Game narratives of great powers' competition over Central Asia.⁸⁷ This is understandable since the Central Asian region constitutes the larger part of the Heartland, whilst it was argued by Mackinder that the one "who rules the Heartland commands the World."⁸⁸ In the new version of the Great Game the USA, China, and the Russian Federation have substituted the Russian and British empires as competitors for "influence, power, hegemony and profits."⁸⁹

⁸³ Starr, "Kazakhstan's Security Strategy," 12.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Martha Brill Olcott, *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002), 44. Kazakhstan's nuclear policy is examined in detail in Chapter V.

⁸⁷ Sir Halford John Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," *Geographical Journal* 23 (1904): 421-437; and *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction* (New York: Holt, 1919).

On the US involvement in Central Asia, see, for example, Graham E. Fuller, *Central Asia: The New Geopolitics* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1992); and S. Neil Macfarlane, "The United States and Regionalism in Central Asia," *International Affairs* 80, no. 3 (2004): 447-461.

⁸⁸ Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals*, 186.

⁸⁹ Matthew Edwards, "The New Great Game and the New Great Gamers: Disciples of Kipling and Mackinder," *Central Asian Survey* 22, no. 1 (2003): 85.

From the *New Great Game* perspective Kazakhstan's leadership had to practice "a triangulation exercise between the three great powers."⁹⁰ From this angle, Kazakhstan, being one of the five Central Asian fragments of the fallen USSR, was compelled together with four other regional states to adopt reactive policies to the emerging strategic challenges imposed by the new structural configuration of regional geopolitics. The need to maintain balance among interests of competing great powers was imprinted in all regional nations' foreign policies.⁹¹ This kind of structural determinism of Central Asian nations is a usual theme in a substantive volume of the literature on the politics of Central Asia and regional security dynamics.⁹² The interrelated tendency here is to present regional states as objects of Great Powers' games by taking an "outside-in" and "statist" approaches towards the study of regional security politics.⁹³ In words of one American observer: "The Eurasian states have to adjust to the new rules of the game as the real balance of power in the region shifts."⁹⁴ The overall prevalence of the focus on overdeterministic influence of external factors in the regionalism literature on Central Asia led Stina Torjesen to conclude in 2007:

Rather than calling Central Asia a 'peripheral zone' in a globalizing world, it seems more accurate to say that Central Asia is a peripheral zone in global academic security research. Little in-depth research or analysis has been conducted on intra-regional political and security issues in Central Asia. This lack, in turn, may have allowed analytical priority to be apportioned to more familiar factors, like the involvement of Russia and the US in the region.⁹⁵

Illustrative to this approach is a volume edited by Robert Legvold.⁹⁶ Contributors analyzed security and geopolitical challenges that Kazakhstan and Central Asia may present

⁹⁰ Ariel Cohen, *Kazakhstan: The Road to Independence, Energy Policy and the Birth of a Nation* (Washington, D.C.: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2008), 249.

⁹¹ Cornell, "Finding Balance," 266.

⁹² See, for example, Roy Allison and Lena Jonson, *Central Asian Security: the New International Context* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2001), and R. M. Alimov, et al., *Tsentrlnaia Aziia. Geoekonomika, Geopolitika, Bezopasnost* (Tashkent: Shark, 2002). A comprehensive overview of the literature on Central Asian geopolitics and great powers engagement is written by Laumulin, *Tsentrlnaia Aziia. Vol.1*, and *Tsentrlnaia Aziia. Vol.3*.

⁹³ Passolt, "Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy," 268; Tor Bukkvoll, "Astana's Privatized Independence: Private and National Interests in the Foreign Policy of Nursultan Nazarbayev," *Nationalities Papers*, 32, no. 3 (2004): 632.

⁹⁴ Cohen, *Kazakhstan: Road to Independence*, 251.

⁹⁵ Torjesen, "Understanding Regional Co-Operation in Central Asia 1991-2004" (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2007), 84.

⁹⁶ Legvold, *Thinking Strategically*.

from the point of view of the external powers. For example, the Chinese perspective in Xing Guancheng's chapter reads:

Finally, while China recognizes Russia's traditional strategic influence in the region and values its special role in maintaining stability there, it does not approve of Russia seeing Central Asia as its 'back yard'. For both China and Russia, Kazakhstan, like Mongolia, now serves as a strategic buffer.⁹⁷

S. Neil McFarlane, examining in this volume the European strategy towards the region, writes that Kazakhstan incapacity to control its own borders and defend its territory made it "a focal point for external economic and political engagement in the region."⁹⁸ Although a chapter on Kazakhstan's foreign policy towards the abovementioned Great Powers is also included, the overall logic of the volume is underpinned by the deterministic approach to Kazakhstan's and other regional nations' policies.⁹⁹

Naturally, the *outside-in* perspective makes the Great Game narrative fit well into the structural neorealist framework.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, neorealism seems a useful theoretical framework to study both Central Asian regional security and Kazakhstan's role in it. It provides explanatory grounds for the failure of security multilateralism in the region, since neither of the regional states have motivation to promote and develop multilateral security organizations in the absence of an immediate common external threat. The predominant role played by external powers in the establishment of regional security structures can also be explained from neorealist positions, where multilateral security organizations, created with the participation of external countries (be it China for the SCO or Russia for the CSTO), serve as Beijing's and Moscow's instruments to balance the US and European influence in the region and exert more power over regional countries.

At the same time, the Great Game perspective has been criticized for this *outside-in* approach, primarily because it "neglects the considerable agency demonstrated by the Central

⁹⁷ Guancheng, "China's Foreign Policy Toward Kazakhstan," in Legvold, ed., *Thinking Strategically*, 111.

⁹⁸ McFarlane, "European Strategy Toward Kazakhstan," in Legvold, ed., *Thinking Strategically*, 142.

⁹⁹ Bulat Sultanov, and Leila Muzapparova, "Great Power Policies and Interests in Kazakhstan," in Legvold, ed., *Thinking Strategically*, 187-216.

¹⁰⁰ Cummings, *Understanding Central Asia*, 158-159.

Asian states in dealing with their geopolitical suitors.”¹⁰¹ One of the earliest critiques of the application of the Great Game analytical framework to the post-Soviet regional affairs was made by Roland Dannreuther, who warns that:

At a more fundamental level, there was also the mistaken assumption that Central Asia was necessarily a strategic vacuum which had to be filled by some external foreign imperial power. In reality, the Central Asian states have been determined to be master of their own fates. They have strongly defended their rights to define the nature, timing and extent of their relations with the outside world. Their net has been cast widely and they have exhibited few prejudices, pragmatically judging any new relations for their prospective advantages.¹⁰²

Therefore, in Dannreuther’s assessment, it is important not to ignore “the independent identity and power of the Central Asian states,” which are found to “have proved to be adept at international diplomacy, balancing alliances and foreign relations in a carefully calibrated exercise to bolster their economic and political independence.”¹⁰³ Meanwhile, the utilization of the Great Game framework can make a researcher discount the roles of the Central Asian states and to view their policies as simply reactions to great powers’ activities in the region, thus undermining the analytical power of the approach.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, examining the utility of the Great Game perspective, Alexander Cooley observes that not only have the times changed since the confrontation between the British and Russian empires, thus allowing for the emergence of local sovereign states which can “neither be formally conquered nor dissolved by foreign powers,” but the whole concept seems “deeply blinding” as local elites were able to utilize the external actors’ interests in the region, playing them off one another in order to consolidate their political regimes and gain economic benefits.¹⁰⁵ The unique regional structural configuration of post-Soviet Central Asia, where there are three competitive great powers, allowed local leaders to “shrink their individual commitments to any one patron, weakening the overall control of these

¹⁰¹ Alexander Cooley, *Great games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest in Central Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 9.

For the counterarguments in favour of geographical determinism in contemporary global affairs see Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate* (New York: Random House, 2012).

¹⁰² Dannreuther, *Creating New States in Central Asia: The Strategic Implications of the Collapse of Soviet Power in Central Asia* (London: Brassey’s for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1994), 51.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 5.

¹⁰⁴ Cummings, *Understanding Central Asia*, 30.

¹⁰⁵ Cooley, *Great games*, 5.

objectively more powerful actors.”¹⁰⁶ The understanding in which local leaderships are deploying specific strategies aimed at leveraging external pressures in order to maximize their own benefits allows treating Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states not as “passive pawns in the strategic manoeuvring of the great powers,” but rather, as Cooley continues, as “important actors in their own right.”¹⁰⁷ Consider also Starr’s observation he made in the seminal article *Rediscovering Central Asia*:

The challenge to their [Central Asian nations’] international partners is to treat the regional states as sovereign countries, not as culturally inert objects to be shoved around on a chessboard. It is not enough to view them simply as a ‘zone of [our] special interest,’ as Vladimir Putin’s government does; as a source of raw materials, as the Chinese do; or as a fuelling stop en route to Kabul, as the United States does. The better alternative is to acknowledge that somewhere in the DNA of these peoples is the capacity to manage great empires and even greater trading zones, to interact as equals with the other centres of world culture, and to use their unique geographical position to become a link and bridge between civilizations. Such an awareness will raise expectations on all sides, and encourage the region’s international partners to view it as more than the object of a geopolitical game.¹⁰⁸

Roy Allison’s works are notable exceptions in the line of primarily deterministic explanations of regional security politics.¹⁰⁹ While accounting for external pressures exerted by great powers, Allison argues that regional leadership’s interests and strategies, emanating from these interests, had contributed to the regional dynamics as well. Allison’s work on regionalism explains the reasons for the failure of endemic regional multilateral security structures. Here the author examines how “the competitive dynamics between major powers in the security field” interplay with local leaders’ concerns regarding safeguarding national sovereignties.¹¹⁰ In his later work that assesses local elite’s motivation for forging regional structures, Allison probes the possibility of the existence of coordinated foreign policies of Central Asian states, seeking, through the participation in regional multilateral security organizations, to secure their domestic regimes and to insulate themselves from democratic pressures.¹¹¹ Allison integrates domestic and international agendas, particularly through his focus on how “virtual regionalism” is, above

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 9.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 8.

¹⁰⁸ S. Frederick Starr, “Rediscovering Central Asia,” *The Wilson Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (2009): 43.

¹⁰⁹ Allison, “Regionalism, Regional Structures and Security Management in Central Asia,” *International Affairs*. 80, no. 3 (2004): 468-483; and “Virtual Regionalism, Regional Structures and Regime Security in Central Asia,” *Central Asian Survey*. 27, no. 2 (2008): 185-202.

¹¹⁰ Allison, “Regionalism, Regional Structures,” 467.

¹¹¹ Allison, “Virtual regionalism.”

all, explained by the states' goal of regime maintenance and survival. Allison's works are an uncommon example of the studies that allocate agency to local states and permit the possibility where "a great deal still depends on the political commitment of state leaders."¹¹²

An article by Annette Bohr also combines structural and domestic factors in the explanation of the failure of regional cooperation dynamics.¹¹³ The author first applies a neorealist perspective where Uzbekistan's hegemonic aspirations caused regional nations to perceive it "as perhaps their greatest external threat" driving them to balance against Tashkent through engagement in different regional structures with the backing of outside actors, primarily Russia.¹¹⁴ Two phenomena matter from a domestic perspective. First, regional leaders' inclination towards building nationalistic states precluded them from "the pooling of sovereignty and the formation of supranational structures."¹¹⁵ Second, the nature of authoritarian political regimes led Central Asian presidents to be reluctant to enter any regional structures that might jeopardize their ability to rule their countries single-handedly.

Cumming's observation that the structural perspective has "obscured other sometimes more important and mainly domestically produced factors behind the content of the foreign policies of these states" suggests that the focused analysis of Kazakhstan's foreign policy per se can produce a more holistic picture of the subject matter.¹¹⁶ At the same time, as Passolt notes, "the domestic component of Kazakh foreign policy and the linkage between systemic and domestic sources of foreign policy remain under-explored."¹¹⁷

Epistemologically, such an examination necessitates switching from structural conceptual frameworks to unit-level foreign policy analyses, which would allow for determining the elements of agency and intent in operation behind Kazakhstan's political interactions vis-à-vis

¹¹² Allison, "Regionalism, Regional Structures," 481.

¹¹³ Annette Bohr, "Regionalism in Central Asia: New Geopolitics, Old Regional Order," *International Affairs*, 80, no. 3 (2004): 485-502.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 494.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 495.

¹¹⁶ Cummings, *Understanding Central Asia*, 160.

¹¹⁷ Passolt, "Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy," 268.

great powers. Doing so would improve the understanding of the republic' foreign policy behaviour.

Foreign policy of Kazakhstan in the focus of analysis

Passolt's 2007 doctoral thesis is likely to be the most voluminous monograph devoted to analysis of Kazakhstani foreign policy in the English language to the date.¹¹⁸ Chronologically, it covers the first decade of independence from 1991 until 2001; thematically it examines Kazakhstan's relations with Russia, China, and Central Asian neighbours. Passolt asks herself a rather broadly positioned research question: "What main international and domestic factors explain Kazakhstan's foreign policy with Russia, China, and Central Asia between 1991 and 2001?"¹¹⁹ To reach an answer, Passolt starts from the operationalization of Kazakhstan as a postcolonial state similar to Asian and African colonies freed from metropolitan rule in the 1960s and 1970s. This conceptual point of departure allows Passolt to position the research in the context of postcolonial theories in a part related to domestic determinants of a foreign policy and in the context of neorealist and liberalist schools in a part related to the behaviour of weaker states in the international system.

Yet, addressing the subject from the postcolonial perspective may not necessarily be a viable approach. Other observers of Central Asian affairs consider the absence of anti-colonial fight to be of principal importance.¹²⁰ As summarized by Abazov:

The [Central Asian] republics became independent not because of a long lasting national liberation struggle or a mass political movement, as happened in the Baltic republics, but due to a political occurrence, a short lasting political struggle between the centre and Republics, and an unexpected decision of the three Slavic States to dissolve the USSR.¹²¹

Here, Bhavna Dave finds "the conditions in which a sense of nationhood was forged and independence was achieved" to be fundamental in distinguishing between postcolonial

¹¹⁸ Passolt, "Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy."

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 16.

¹²⁰ The development which Passolt admits not to have happened in Kazakhstan's case. Ibid, 252-253.

¹²¹ Abazov, "Practice of Foreign Policymaking," 11. On Kazakh's nationhood formation see Shirin Akiner, *The Formation of Kazakh Identity: From Tribe to Nation-State* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, Russian and CIS Programme, 1995).

experiences of African and Asian nations and the post-Communist experience of Central Asian countries.¹²² The latter “owe their present territorial framework and conception of nationhood to Soviet border demarcation and nation-building policies, which sought to eliminate the potential for national mobilization aimed at separate statehood.”¹²³ Another principal difference Dave notes is the level of states’ internal development. Whereas the majority of postcolonial countries resembled “quasi-states or weak states, unable to transform their juridical statehood into an empirical reality,” the Central Asian countries possessed “strong economic and institutional infrastructure, a high degree of centralization and bureaucratization, a well-educated citizenry and possessed all the trappings and paraphernalia of statehood” as a result of development under the Soviet rule.¹²⁴ Dannreuther, reminding that the independence was gained not as the result of “a popular anti-Russian uprising,” asserts that the rulers of the newly independent states of Central Asia were instinctively interested in “protecting rather than destroying the old links [with Moscow]” partly because of the structural dependencies from Russia and partly due to their subconscious habit of subordination to the “elder brother.”¹²⁵ The circumstances of the “catapult to independence,” so dissimilar from the African and Asian experiences, are substantial and cannot be ignored if an attempt is made to position Central Asian countries in the postcolonial context.¹²⁶

Overlooking these reservations, Passolt develops a conceptual model of an analysis of Kazakhstan’s foreign policy based on the assumption that the main goal of a (postcolonial) foreign policy is to respond to domestic needs rather than to the needs of the external environment. Explicating the point, Passolt writes that a foreign policy should serve internal political purposes of a postcolonial leadership. Linking this premise to the post-Soviet Kazakhstan, Passolt presumes that the republic’s foreign policy should have been guided by the

¹²² Dave, *Kazakhstan: Ethnicity, Language and Power* (London: Routledge, 2007), 21.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 162

¹²⁵ Dannreuther, *Creating New States*, 52-53.

¹²⁶ The expression “catapult to independence” is coined by Martha Brill Olcott and used in the title of her work “Central Asia’s Catapult to Independence,” *Foreign Affairs* 71, no. 3 (1992): 108-130.

four following principles: 1) foreign policy as a tool for the continuation of the revolution against colonial rule; 2) as an effort to establish the identity and integrity of the new state; 3) as a means to keep the in-group in power; and, 4) as means of reducing foreign influence at home.¹²⁷ While she demonstrates in her work how the three last presumptions hold their merits, Passolt expectedly finds the first point not to be relevant, therefore at least partly undermining the strength of the overall argument – as she concludes that “at no point was 'anti-colonialism' an explicit element in Kazakhstan's foreign policy.”¹²⁸

Passolt’s empirical investigation of relations vis-à-vis Russia, China, and Central Asia lead her to the principal finding that Kazakhstan’s foreign policy is best comprehended by the application of: 1) realist theory in understanding the republic’s security links with Russia; 2) liberal theory in understanding the economic relations with China; and, 3) domestic-based theories in understanding of the country’s activities in the regional arena.¹²⁹

Passolt’s work is a welcome addition to the still slim body of literature on Kazakhstan’s foreign policy. She was able to find a unique conceptual angle that combined in its approach international and domestic variables, assessed through the employment of different theories of international relations and political science. Nevertheless, the chosen framework seems to involve certain drawbacks. One possible reservation can be made about this broadly set research puzzle is that it purports an ad hoc inclusion of many voluntarily selected variables that would seem suitable for an answer. Moreover, the author’s research design is admittedly reflecting this point. Passolt describes her research design in the following manner:

The methodology chosen for the analysis in this thesis is not based on a set of strict variables and no single theory is selected as a conceptual framework. Because the utilization of simply one general concept is considered to fail ultimately to capture the complexities and specifics of Kazakh foreign policy, the thesis instead combines several different perspectives.¹³⁰

To produce an explanation, Passolt in a fairly patchwork fashion selects postcolonial studies as the source of domestically found explanations, a realist rationale to elucidate

¹²⁷ Passolt, “Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy,” 251-260.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 253.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 266.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 16.

Kazakhstan's policies in the security area, and liberalist imperatives to account for the external economic policy. Given the scope of explanatory variables, Passolt expectedly concludes that neither domestic nor international factors alone suffice in explaining Kazakhstan's foreign policy: "The two environments interact with and influence one other and thereby constitute Kazakhstan's complex foreign policy context."¹³¹ The voluntaristic employment of different theories applied to different cases leads the thesis to rely on idiosyncratic factors restricting the possibility of parsimonious generalizations of the findings.¹³² Passolt's work is a well-researched paper containing a large volume of empirical material. However, the controversial research design, limitations of the "domestic" element pertaining to postcolonial theoretical premises and, as discussed below, the under-examined decision-making component certainly leave space for additional theoretical and empirical research on the topic.

Multivectorism as an academic concept

Passolt's selection of case studies is illustrative of the geopolitical diversity of Kazakhstan's foreign policy orientation, which has become the trademark of the republic's foreign office. The locus communis for conceptualization and operationalization of such omnidirectional external behaviour is the principle of multivector foreign policy.¹³³ Despite its ubiquity, the exact

¹³¹ Ibid, 3.

¹³² Passolt suggests that "this thesis does not intend to identify simple mono-causal factors of Kazakhstan's international interaction... Instead, it is concerned with offering a better understanding of the *complexities* of Kazakhstan's foreign policy and the intricate array of influences and forces that impinge on it." Ibid, 251. By claiming that her thesis is not a "simple mono-causal explanation" the author implies that a *multi-causal* explanation is advanced instead. But the research design is not multi-causal either. Studies, using this strategy, are those that "involve several explanatory paths, combinations, or sequences leading to the same outcome." See George and Bennett, *Case studies*, 20. This is clearly not the case with Passolt's work. In general, this research design seems to be an ad hoc frame that provided the author with the opportunity to write a historical narrative on Kazakhstan's foreign policy development from different, if not contending, perspectives.

¹³³ One reservation has to be made before the discussion continues. As Gregory Gleason rightly suggests "the idea of a 'multivector' foreign policy merits more than mere academic consideration because it has very real policy implications." (See Gleason, "Russia and Central Asia's Multivector Foreign Policies," 244). Indeed, there is a difference between what the term multivector foreign policy signifies for scholars and for Kazakhstani policymakers. For the former, multivector foreign policy is first of all an *academic concept* that denotes external foreign policy orientation of Kazakhstan aimed at balancing between great powers' interests and securing domestic interests. For the latter, this policy is a *strategy* elaborated by the republic's leadership in the series of official documents to guide the republic's actions on the international arena in real life. Multivectorism as an academic notion is analyzed in this chapter. The strategy of multivectorism and its evolution as an operational foreign policy principle is reviewed in Chapter IV. Hence, policymakers' discourse and analysis of multivectorism as an official policy blueprint is mostly omitted from the discussion in this chapter.

formulations or explanations of the notion are rarely found in the literature. One of the few descriptions is provided by Gregory Gleason, who argues that this principle is generic to Central Asian countries and explains it thus:

A multivector policy is a complex stratagem. In practice, multivector foreign policies are essentially risk-avoidant lines of action, emphasizing multiple partners, multiple dimensions, and multiple issues, and relying largely on diplomatic hedging against unreliability, threat, and hard-to-calculate advantage. Multivector foreign policies assign low importance to ideological considerations and high importance to instrumental alliances and calculated advantage.¹³⁴

The understanding of multivectorism as a policy based on non-ideological and pragmatic grounds with the principal goal of securing Kazakhstan's interests is also found in Hanks, where:

The character of government and internal policies of potential partners, and their geopolitical relationship with other states are not variables that direct or even inform the multivector approach. The basis of the relationship resides exclusively in the potential costs and benefits to Kazakhstan as an inter-state actor.¹³⁵

Gleason and Hanks therefore view the multivector strategy as essentially a (neo)realist policy to the extent it is motivated by national interests and a survival rationale. And while Hanks implicitly views the policy as deterministic: "the thrust of the discussion here is policy analysis in the context of Kazakhstan's geopolitical challenges and goals," Gleason states the underlying principle of the multivector policy explicitly, as "the idea of multivector relations, technocratic and clinical in its euphemistic expression of diplomatic relationships, is in actuality moved by a profound respect for historically based realism."¹³⁶

In his analysis of Kazakhstani foreign policy Hanks highlights three major rationales for such strategy to be developed. First, the republic's policy was seen as a means of balancing out Russia's influence without alienating Kremlin: "The greatest challenge facing independent Kazakhstan since 1991 has been to articulate and implement a foreign policy that allows the country to escape the confines of the 'Russian sphere' as far as history and geography will permit, yet also maintain a functional relationship with the Russian Federation."¹³⁷ Secondly, in Hanks view, Nazarbayev used his foreign policy to consolidate the nation. Here, the author refers

¹³⁴ Gleason, "Russia and Central Asia's Multivector Foreign Policies," 244.

¹³⁵ Hanks, "Multivector Politics," 259.

¹³⁶ Ibid; Gleason, "Russia and Central Asia's Multivector Foreign Policies," 245.

¹³⁷ Hanks, "Multivector Politics," 265.

to Cummings' work and echoes her argument that Kazakhstan's foreign policy was intended to promote a multi-ethnic identity, a task particularly important given the large Russian community living in the country and an immediate geographical proximity of this great power.¹³⁸ Third, the republic needed diversification of its external economic relations. In a checklist fashion, where the perceived goals are compared against historical achievements, Hanks positively assesses the success of Kazakhstan's diplomacy. In his view all major tasks were accomplished – Russian hegemony was circumvented; the nation did not fragment; economic diversification was secured; and international status as a key Central Asian nation was elevated. While successfully providing an extensive overview analysis of the evolution of the nation's diplomacy, Hanks still lacks a precise formulation of the Kazakhstani multivector strategy.

The difficulty in formulating the operational definition of multivector foreign policy comes from the fact that for many observers the concept lacks significance or peculiarity.

Illustrative here is the Cummings' review of the *tous azimuth* foreign policy:

In substance, Kazakhstan's foreign policy direction has embraced multilateralism. First, it has aimed at co-operation with states in all directions....Second, simultaneously, the elite has emphasized relations with Russia over relations with other states, and has here prioritized their economic and military dimensions....Third, Kazakhstan has indicated its desire to join the international economic community, according high priority to economic security. Fourth, it has endeavoured to cast its security net more broadly, attempting to integrate itself in a number of security regimes, some regional, some global. Nazarbayev has signed major agreements with states in all directions.¹³⁹

Consider also Ariel Cohen's rather broad formulation of the concept: "Since 1991, Kazakhstan's 'multivector' foreign policy has meant that Astana built bilateral relations with each geopolitical actor, and avoided sacrificing one vector for the sake of the other."¹⁴⁰ Kazakhstan's multivector foreign policy thus becomes a list of all possible bilateral and multilateral vectors of the republic's external affairs. Cummings is therefore correct in calling the multivector foreign policy a self-serving one.¹⁴¹ It is possible to add that such an omnidirectional foreign policy would in fact fit, with the *correction to azimuth*, virtually any contemporary state. On an

¹³⁸ See Cummings, "Eurasian Bridge or Murky Waters Between East and West? Ideas, Identity and Output in Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy," *The Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 19, no. 3 (2003): 139-155.

¹³⁹ Cummings, "Eurasian Bridge," 142.

¹⁴⁰ Cohen, *Kazakhstan: Road to Independence*, 250.

¹⁴¹ Cummings, "Eurasian Bridge," 140.

empirical note, Cummings recognizes this predicament, stating “A multivector foreign policy carries in-built contradictions.... Seeking multiple, often contradictory partners not only prevents a strong foreign policy direction but also dilutes the already weak Kazakhstani identity. The overall impression is that the country is floating between, rather than anchoring, East and West.”¹⁴²

Laumulin’s commentary is relevant here:

For how long could we conduct a multivector foreign policy? Is there a need in it? Thinking rationally, the necessity in multivectorism as the foreign policy doctrine will disappear by itself as time will pass. This is because the policy of any established state is multivector by its nature.¹⁴³

The universality of the concept presented many scholars with similar operationalization problems. It can be noted that due to its ambiguity, the versatile concept of multivectorism is suitable for explaining a wide range of foreign policy choices Kazakhstan’s leadership has made both vis-à-vis external contingencies and at home. It is natural, then, that studies of foreign policy of the republic have hitherto often incorporated both system level and state level factors.

***Innenpolitik* and foreign policies of the Central Asian states**

Cummings, in her discussion of the application of the neoclassical realist framework to the foreign policies of Central Asian states, constructs a cursory model of states’ external behaviours, attributing explanatory weight both to domestic and international variables.¹⁴⁴ As such, Uzbekistan’s policy of self-reliance and Turkmenistan’s isolationism could possibly be explained by accounting for their bureaucratic politics, ideologies, and leaders’ psychological profiles.¹⁴⁵ In a similar vein, *Silk Road policies* practiced by Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan appear not as security bandwagoning tools, but rather as the products of these countries’ geographical, economic, and cultural idiosyncrasies.¹⁴⁶ As the literature assessed below in this chapter reveals,

¹⁴² Ibid, 152.

¹⁴³ Laumulin, “Triumpf,” 25.

¹⁴⁴ Cummings, *Understanding Central Asia*. Neoclassical realism is discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 158.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

a combination of *Innenpolitik* and structural explanations is a prominent feature of the studies of foreign policies of all regional nations.

It is helpful to first consult the works on foreign policies of neighbouring Central Asian states with which Kazakhstan shared a common pre- and post-Soviet fate. As summarized by Gleason:

The states had similar and in some cases common cultural traditions and shared a common lingua franca, the Russian language. All of the states had specialists trained in similar intellectual traditions and bureaucracies accustomed to working in similar ways. All of the states had economies specialized to the production of primary commodities. All of the five states underwent a wrenching withdrawal from the Soviet system of trade and commerce.¹⁴⁷

Of main interest here are the possibilities to explore links between external systemic factors and internal considerations as well as to determine which particular international and domestic factors were found by scholars to matter most for each regional nation. A comparative survey is also useful for this research methodologically, by learning how scholars have approached the subject matter, and empirically, by examining the ways Kazakhstan's neighbours have conceived and implemented their international strategies.

Among all other regional neighbours, Kyrgyzstan comes closest to Kazakhstan by merits of its relative ease of the political regime. The matters of regime survival and maintenance are therefore less manifest in its foreign policy agenda if compared to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.¹⁴⁸ At the same time, the distinctiveness of Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy and the dissimilarity of its *Silk Road strategy* from Kazakhstan's *Eurasian Bridge* have to be noted. This difference lays in the fact that Kyrgyzstan, due to its small dimensions, has neither been subjected to the same amount of great powers' pressure as its regional neighbours, nor has it been able to assertively project its interests in the international domain. Therefore, Kyrgyz

¹⁴⁷ Gregory Gleason, "Foreign Policy and Domestic Reform in Central Asia," *Central Asian Survey* 20, no. 2 (2001): 168.

¹⁴⁸ The importance of political regimes to foreign policymaking has been noted elsewhere: "Not only does a particular regime indicate who can participate in decision making and with what degree of authority, but the structure of a regime determines in important ways the extent to which leaders' personalities and attitudes will impact on the decision." See Philip D. Stewart, Margaret G. Hermann and Charles F. Hermann, "Modeling the 1973 Soviet Decision to Support Egypt," *The American Political Science Review* 83, no. 1 (1989): 38.

leadership had an entirely different set of ideational and material considerations that steered its foreign policy.

Thomas J. C. Wood depicts Kyrgyzstan as a small but resilient nation in his doctoral dissertation on the evolution of Kyrgyzstan foreign policy.¹⁴⁹ The author conceptualizes Bishkek's foreign relations as a policy of a small state. His main argument being that Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy is an original product developed by Kyrgyz foreign policy establishment reflecting several principal points relevant to the republic's development: the multi-ethnic composition of the state; the unwillingness of Kyrgyz elite to accept externally imposed ideologies (e.g. Pan-Turkism); and a general awareness of the place of the country in the geostrategic game between Russia, China and the USA. The original idea Wood defends is that Kyrgyzstan foreign policy has not been totally predetermined by the international geostrategic environment and domestic needs; in the author's words, the republic "*does* possess a foreign policy."¹⁵⁰ Wood asserts that Kyrgyzstan, in conducting its international relations, was consistently following a deliberately elaborate and well thought-out strategy, and not merely responding to the contextual challenges arising before its leadership. The author also attempts to open the "black box" of policymaking and explores the decision-making apparatus of the country, whilst distilling elites' modus operandi from the content of official policy papers. Wood then uses these findings to defend his point about the originality of Kyrgyz foreign policy. The uniqueness of the policy is signified for the author by the fact that it is rooted in the leadership's worldview about Kyrgyzstan's self-sufficient role and place: "It [foreign policy] is anchored not in American, Russian or Chinese influence, nor the phantasmagoric export ideologies of Pan-Turkism or Pan-Islamism, but has a direct relationship to elite thinking about the construction of civic nationalism within Kyrgyzstan."¹⁵¹

On another dimensional extreme is the regional giant – the Republic of Uzbekistan. This state has been often viewed as Kazakhstan's regional rival during and after the Soviet period due

¹⁴⁹ Wood, "The Formation of Kyrgyz Foreign Policy 1991-2004" (PhD diss., Tufts University, 2005).

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 337. Emphasis in original.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 338.

to its central location, strong military and demographic potential, as well as Kunaev-Rashidov and Nazarbayev-Karimov personal rivalries. According to Leila Kazemi, who examines domestic factors in order to explain a peculiar nature of Uzbekistan's foreign policy in the 1990s, the isolationist authoritarian regime endorsed by the Uzbek president Islam Karimov made it necessary to subordinate the nation's foreign policy to the needs of regime survival.¹⁵² Kazemi argues that Uzbekistan's external strategy "cannot be readily explained by traditional systems-level theories of international relations" because forces at domestic level played a principal role in the evolution of Uzbek foreign policy.¹⁵³ For Kazemi, Tashkent's often inconsistent foreign policy vis-à-vis Russia, regional neighbours, and the West, could be understood in terms of the three "strategic pillars" indicated by Starr: pursuit of sovereignty, domestic political stability and economic reform.¹⁵⁴ These state building goals, as perceived by Karimov, "have provided the basis for a wide and shifting set of cooperative and conflictual relationships with the outside world."¹⁵⁵ The consolidation and protection of sovereignty in many aspects was related to goals of diminishing Russian influence, diversification of external relations, and the creation of a strong military. Political stability was achieved by suppressing domestic secular and Islamic opposition. This, in turn, led to a greater involvement of Tashkent into the affairs of its immediate neighbours, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which were seen as the routes and sources of the import of the radical Islam. The need to eradicate the radical Islamic groups from Tajikistan prompted Uzbekistan to seek security cooperation with Russia. A heavy-handed suppression of political opposition also complicated Tashkent's relations with the West, and in particular with the USA. Finally, the isolationist development model greatly impeded its economic relations with regional neighbours and foreign investors. Kazemi's work ultimately shows how the logic behind many of Karimov's foreign moves could be better understood if domestic variables are included in the explanation.

¹⁵² Kazemi, "Domestic Sources of Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy, 1991 to the Present," *Journal of International Affairs* 56, no. 2 (2003): 205-216.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 205.

¹⁵⁴ S. Frederick Starr, "Making Eurasia Stable," *Foreign Affairs* 75, no 1 (1996): 86.

¹⁵⁵ Kazemi, "Domestic Sources," 205.

Turkmenistan's "positive neutrality" is perhaps one of the most peculiar foreign policy strategies found not only in Central Asia but also in the entire world. The concept of "positive neutrality" comes in striking contrast to Kazakhstan's multivectorism due to the implicit isolationist nature of the former. Luca Anceschi presents a comparative analysis of the foreign policies of two of the "Central Asia's most repressive political landscapes" – Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.¹⁵⁶ Through the analysis of both regimes' successful efforts to monopolize the foreign policymaking apparatus, the author concludes that "the political priorities of the regimes became the forces driving the external policies implemented by Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan."¹⁵⁷ Of particular interest here is the author's approach to the analysis of the extent to which the external environment had affected the two states' foreign policies, given the presumed prominence of domestic political considerations. For Anceschi, Russia and USA, as "Great Powers," have "exerted the most substantial influence on Central Asia since 1992."¹⁵⁸ This relationship is viewed from the prism of regimes' perceptions on these two powers' influence on domestic politics:

In this context, a direct correlation has to be established between regime survival – intended here as the ensemble of regime responses to perceived stability threats – and the intensity of international support surrounding the Niyazov/Berdymukhammedov and Karimov regimes at various junctures.¹⁵⁹

Therefore, Anceschi argues, both Ashgabat and Tashkent sought to construct a strategy that would balance between excessive external influence and extreme international isolation. Thus, Anceschi's central argument is that domestic imperatives, and regime survival in particular, have been instrumental in foreign policy development in both nations.

Looking at the Turkmen foreign policy from the different conceptual angle, Sébastien Peyrouse argues that the republic's foreign outlook depended on a single person who was

¹⁵⁶ Anceschi, "Integrating Domestic Politics and Foreign Policymaking: The Cases of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan," *Central Asian Survey* 29, no. 2 (2010): 143. Main arguments of this work originate from Anceschi's work entirely devoted to Turkmenistan's foreign policy, see Anceschi, *Turkmenistan's Foreign Policy: Positive Neutrality and the Consolidation of the Turkmen Regime* (London: Routledge, 2009).

¹⁵⁷ Anceschi, "Integrating Domestic Politics," 146.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

devising a foreign policy.¹⁶⁰ The author contrasts chaotic relations of Ashgabat with Russia during the tenure of Niyazov, who wanted to counterbalance Moscow's dominance in energy sector, with the critical turn in attitude towards Russia occurring "with the change of regime in Ashgabat" and a new ruler Berdymukhammedov coming to the presidency.¹⁶¹

The underlying tendency in the analyses of Central Asian countries is the allocation of causal weight to peculiar internal factors through reference to domestic political considerations of regional policymakers. In case of Kyrgyzstan, Wood argues that the local elite's thinking about a special place the republic should take on the global map had contributed much to the formation of the nation's foreign policy outlook.¹⁶² Karimov's obsession with preservation of his authoritarian regime plays a definitive role in the case of Uzbekistan.¹⁶³ Peyrouse's observation of changes in Ashgabat's behaviour correlative to the personalities in charge of policymaking exemplifies the domestic reasoning as well.¹⁶⁴ Notwithstanding the importance of domestic factors, the foreign policies of these nations were found to be tracking, with varying degrees of conformity, the systemic pressures of great powers. And, whereas internal factors had varied across the region depending on the nature of political regime, all authors recognized the influence of the three external actors: Russia, China, and USA.

Svante Cornell explores this interplay of the system and unit level variables and assumes that a political dilemma lies at the nexus of international and internal politics.¹⁶⁵ This dilemma originated from the desire of regional leaders to balance against domination by Russia and China in their strategic relations with the world, while also seeking to ensure internal stability and regime security (the two latter tasks found to be perceived by elites as identical).¹⁶⁶ In Cornell's opinion, Moscow and Beijing clearly preferred not to interfere in internal political matters of the Central Asian states while maintaining an interest in minimizing the West's influence and

¹⁶⁰ Peyrouse, *Turkmenistan: Strategies of Power, Dilemmas of Development* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2012).

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 197.

¹⁶² Wood, "The Formation of Kyrgyz Foreign Policy."

¹⁶³ Kazemi, "Domestic Sources," also Anceschi, "Integrating Domestic Politics."

¹⁶⁴ Peyrouse, *Turkmenistan*.

¹⁶⁵ Cornell, "Finding Balance."

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 289.

welcoming such an attitude from the nations of the region.¹⁶⁷ The West, in turn, provided a counter-balance against domination of the two immediate great powers while endangering the security of local non-democratic regimes.¹⁶⁸

Cornell furthers his analysis on the consequences of this dilemma for Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In Cornell's view Tashkent's inconsistent foreign policy record that oscillated between pro-Russian and pro-Western strategies stemmed from the interests of Karimov's ruling regime, which at various junctures (particularly the spring 2005 Andijan events) steered the nation's orientation counter to whichever external actor the regime perceived as threatening.¹⁶⁹ For Karimov, his personal political interests were that of the entire nation, thereby "this conflation of national and regime interests explains a great deal of Uzbek foreign policy in this period."¹⁷⁰ As a result, Tashkent developed a model of negative balancing, where the "pursuit of good relations with any one great power for Tashkent has come at the expense of relations with another."¹⁷¹

In Kazakhstan's case the configuration of internal and external threat perception was completely different. The perception of an external threat emanating from the Russian factor was high among the Kazakhstani leadership: "The double threat of a bifurcated society and the Russian 'shadow' forced Kazakhstan to walk a tightrope to ensure survival and sovereignty."¹⁷² Kazakhstan was therefore determined to seek an alignment with Russia to avoid Moscow-induced alienation. With time, a booming oil economy allowed Nazarbayev to raise confidence in the prospects of his regime's sustainability as it "reduced frustration and apprehension among the ethnic Russian minority and weakened the increasingly marginalized political opposition."¹⁷³ In turn, the growing economic capabilities and internal political stability provided grounds for a more confident external balancing act. A good political and economic record made it possible for

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 268-269.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 287-290.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 289

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 293.

¹⁷² Ibid, 274.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 275.

Nazarbayev to not perceive the USA as a source of a potential risk to his ruling. This discernment made Astana's policy more flexible and accommodating, whereby "Kazakhstan [...] built ties with the United States in tandem with, rather than at the expense of, ties with Russia."¹⁷⁴ The principal conclusion is drawn that it is the elites' preferences that ultimately steered foreign outlooks of the two republics, as Cornell concludes:

Domestic and foreign policies are interlinked to varying degrees in all of the states of Central Asia. The considerable economic interests and the perceptions of the aims of foreign powers of the various elite groups shape these groups' priorities and the foreign policy decisions of the states themselves.¹⁷⁵

Tor Bukkvoll also studies the relationship between the external and the domestic milieus in Kazakhstan's foreign policy course.¹⁷⁶ The author examines this relationship from an angle of the personal interests of Nazarbayev. Bukkvoll challenges traditional systemic and unitary assessments of Kazakhstan's external policies, where scholars have "taken a positively statist approach in analyzing this foreign policy, and basically ignored the self-interest of Nazarbayev himself or factions of the Kazakh elite as explanatory factors."¹⁷⁷ Bukkvoll contends that it is not sufficient to use these systemic theories, namely Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism, to explain Kazakhstan foreign policy since all of them proceed from an assumption that a state's foreign policies are driven (only) by national interests in the way these interests are identified by the policymaking elite. In contrast, the author argues, other scholars have elaborated on theories in which leaders' desire to stay in power is the primary motivator for foreign policies in semi-democratic or authoritarian states.¹⁷⁸ In Bukkvoll's assertion, this interest had a prevailing impact on Nazarbayev's strategies towards Russia and USA. Whereas, in Bukkvoll's interpretation, relations with Russia were driven by political regime preservation needs, relations with the USA can be explained through the prism of Nazarbayev's aspirations for gaining

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 293

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 286.

¹⁷⁶ Bukkvoll, "Astana's Privatized Independence."

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 632.

¹⁷⁸ Bukkvoll, "Astana's Privatized Independence," 632. One example of such work provided by Bukkvoll is Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and James Lee Ray, "The National Interest Versus Individual Ambition: Two Level Games and International Conflict," (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, 30 August–2 September 2001).

personal prestige for himself and the international status for Kazakhstan, where the international recognition reinforces Nazarbayev's internal political standing as a wise independent statesman. As Bukkvoll argues, "Nazarbayev probably wants both to remain in power, and to be seen by himself and others as a respected international politicians and a symbol of independent political leadership."¹⁷⁹ Nonetheless, regime survival is the prime interest for Nazarbayev, according to Bukkvoll, noting that "there are few indications that Nazarbayev has ever been willing to risk his political survival for the pursuit of a foreign policy goal even if it would have served his desired image of great statesmanship."¹⁸⁰

Bukkvoll draws a dynamic causal model where the influence of domestic factors on Nazarbayev's policies vis-à-vis Russia and USA was indirect and conditioned by the context of relations with these external actors. Domestically, Bukkvoll distinguishes two groups that primarily influenced the republic's foreign policy: the old bureaucratic *nomenklatura* and the Young Turks. The author argues that each of these groups have affected Kazakhstan's foreign policy orientation depending on their intrinsic political and business interests. The *nomenklatura* were resenting closer links with the West, as they believed that the democratic norms of political and economic management could jeopardize their corruptive practices. Bukkvoll suggests "Nazarbayev would hardly be able to stay on as leader or even effectively rule the country if he got the entire bureaucratic *nomenklatura* against him."¹⁸¹ Hence, for Bukkvoll, the *nomenklatura* had steered Almaty's initial contacts with the USA in some way, as "continued *nomenklatura* support for Nazarbayev's power has probably entailed some caution on his side in rapprochement with the USA."¹⁸²

The Young Turks informed Nazarbayev's balancing between Moscow and Washington because they were a viable alternative political force both in the eyes of the Russians and Americans. For example, if Nazarbayev was "to provoke Moscow by using close relations with

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 646.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 637

¹⁸² Ibid, 637-638.

the USA as a balancer against Russian power in Central Asia” this could encourage Russia to support the Young Turks instead.¹⁸³ Therefore, awareness of this possible undesirable reaction of Moscow imposed certain constraints upon Nazarbayev in cooperating with the USA. Similar logic is reversely applied to the possible US reaction to closer relations with Russia, where the probable risk of the substitution of Nazarbayev with the Young Turks made him “more accommodative to USA interests.”¹⁸⁴

Internationally, according to Bukkvoll, Nazarbayev in the early 1990s relied heavily on Moscow both in terms of maintaining his power and ensuring the republic’s sovereignty. Furthering Olcott’s argument about Nazarbayev’s readiness to surrender sovereignty in exchange “for Kazakh domination of a territorially integral Kazakhstan,” Bukkvoll speculates that “Nazarbayev was willing to sell [to Russia] some of the independence of the Kazakh state in order to secure the private interest of staying in power.”¹⁸⁵ This reliance led Kazakhstan to seek close ties with its Northern neighbour. At the same time, Moscow’s support inflicted certain political and economic compromises on Nazarbayev. In Bukkvoll’s assessment, Russian corporate business could seize some control of the Kazakh energy sector thus depriving “him of his ability to pay for the elite support necessary to stay in power.”¹⁸⁶ Different motives formed the basis of Nazarbayev’s relations with the USA, where the president’s main interests were to gain prestige and recognition for him and for the country. Bukkvoll contends that “in terms of prestige, seeking partnership with the US might enhance this both in Nazarbayev’s own eyes and in the eyes of others, because such a policy is likely to strengthen the image of independent political leadership.”¹⁸⁷ The author’s key conclusion drawn from his inquiry is that “Nazarbayev’s ability to maintain power is dependent on his relations with both domestic and foreign actors, and that he has and continues to be interested in remaining in power.”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ Ibid, 639

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Olcott, *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled promise*, 24; Bukkvoll, “Astana’s Privatized Independence,” 641.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 643

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 646.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 634.

Despite the fact that all four leaders of Central Asia have been pursuing similar tasks of regime consolidation and state-building, there were notable nuances in their external and internal environments, leading, as shown above, to varied foreign strategies. Cornell's work in particular convincingly demonstrates how the differences in elites' perceptions and worldviews, originating from differences from the identified environments, impact states' foreign policies.¹⁸⁹

From the inception of independence Kazakhstan's elite faced challenges of its own, both internationally and domestically. In contrast to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the zero-sum regime survival logic was not a principal domestic determinant for Kazakhstan. At the same time its geostrategic location and the Russian factor are found to have significantly affected the republic's foreign policy outlook. The uniqueness of the latter aspect comes from the fact that Russia was exerting both an external geopolitical pressure and a pressure of a domestic kind through the presence of a large Slavic population. In the 1990s, this population was not only matching Kazakhs in numbers, but also, as Starr reminds, was concentrated in the regions adjoining Russia where it greatly outnumbered the Kazakhs.¹⁹⁰ As assessed below, the Russian factor, straddling both domestic and international milieus in the case of Kazakhstan is the recurrent theme in research on the subject matter.

Building a nation under Russia's shadow

Kazakhstan's foreign policy is rarely treated as a *thing in itself* in a sense that it is usually embedded in explanations of larger phenomena of Kazakhstan's post-independence development. In this sense, two interrelated factors loom large – the state-building processes and Russia's external influence. The construction of a sovereign Kazakhstani nation-state is believed to be the principal concern for the Kazakhstani regime with all external policies being subordinated to this goal. Meanwhile, the Russian Federation, a *primus inter pares*,¹⁹¹ is considered to extend major constraints on the ways the Kazakhstani leadership perceived its

¹⁸⁹ Cornell, "Finding Balance."

¹⁹⁰ Starr, "Kazakhstan's Security Strategy," 12.

¹⁹¹ Cummings, *Understanding Central Asia*, 60.

foreign choices due to its geostrategic importance and large Slavic population. At the same time, however, the overwhelming power of the great northern neighbour “does not imply that Russian foreign policy determines Central Asian foreign policies; even less so does Russia determine the internal politics of the Central Asian countries,” as Gleason observes.¹⁹² The relationship between the two factors appears to be non-linear. Russia remains important in both the external and internal domains, but does not directly steer the republic’s foreign strategy. Gleason adds: “Central Asian leaders determine their own objectives using their own resources and at their own direction, but they typically do so in relation to their expectations, fears, and hopes regarding Moscow’s designs.”¹⁹³

Cummings argues that national identity is a nexus between the international environment and a state’s interests through tracing the actual effect of the idea of Eurasianism on Kazakh-Russian relations.¹⁹⁴ This work is a convincing example of usefulness of integration of domestic and international variables to the understanding of the subject. The author highlights the importance of internal political factors, national identity construction in particular, and links them to foreign policy. The peculiarity of the ethnic composition of the state, particularly the presence of large ethnic Russian population, she argues, gave a domestic incentive for Kazakhstan to diversify its relations with outside powers in order to ensure stable state- and nation-building progress. The ruling regime sought domestic and international legitimization by promoting the self-proclaimed multilateral and multiethnic *Eurasian* identity of its population, which effectively backed multilateralism in the foreign policy. The subsequent articulation of the Kazakhstani *nation* concept has helped to further consolidate the population socially and politically, maintaining the reciprocal relationship between domestic and foreign policies.¹⁹⁵ The

¹⁹² Gleason, “Russia and Central Asia’s Multivector Foreign Policies,” 244.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Cummings, “Eurasian Bridge.”

¹⁹⁵ On the contemporary ethnic policy of the republic see “Doctrine of Kazakhstan National Unity,” *Permanent Mission of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the UN*, accessed 10 January 2011, <http://kazakhstanun.org/press-releases/the-doctrine-of-national-unity-of-kazakhstan.html>.

importance of this inquiry is not that it alternates the neorealist rationale discussed by Hanks (which it does not) but that it shows the impact of domestic politics over foreign politics.

Olcott contends that Kazakhstan's foreign policy orientation was greatly influenced by the vulnerability Nazarbayev was sensing from Russia due to the large Russian population, great military imbalance, and a landlocked position.¹⁹⁶ Kazakhstan's foreign policy was thus initially influenced by the president's desire to solve this security dilemma without antagonizing Russia. Olcott claims that the salience of the problem was so high, that at the earlier stage of nation building Nazarbayev was even contemplating the likelihood of trading some sovereignty for Kazakh domination over a territorially integral country.¹⁹⁷ The solution sought to the problem was the reintegration with Russia in a multilateral format. Nazarbayev advocated a multilateral format of relations over a bilateral one for a particular reason. Nazarbayev felt that a bilateral format gave Russia more leverage over Kazakhstan. Therefore initially he strongly supported an equal union among the post-Soviet states on the grounds of the falling Soviet Union.¹⁹⁸ Then, according to Olcott, Nazarbayev successfully redefined the CIS by inclusion of all the ex-Soviet republics and not just the "Belovezhskaya troika."¹⁹⁹ Olcott argues further, "If Kazakhstan were still a part of a larger whole, then it would be less important to many of Kazakhstan's citizens just how the new state defined itself."²⁰⁰ The integration with Russia was also an instrument of consolidating the large Russian population. Here, Olcott makes an important point on the intersection of domestic and international impacts within the context of Kazakhstan's relations vis-à-vis Russia: "Although president Nazarbayev understood that he had to maintain the support of the ethnic Kazakhs, he was also aware that Kazakhstan's security depended upon the continued quiescence of the country's large Russian population, as well as the more formal

¹⁹⁶ Olcott, *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled promise*.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 24.

¹⁹⁸ The so-called "Novo-Ogarevo Process" during which Gorbachev, in cooperation with other Union leaders including Nazarbayev, drafted a new treaty to transform the USSR to the new "Union of the Sovereign States." See, for example, Dmitrii Volkogonov and Harold Shukman, *Autopsy for an Empire: The Seven Leaders who Built the Soviet Regime* (New York: Free Press, 1998), 484.

¹⁹⁹ Olcott, *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled promise*, 19.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 36.

support of Kazakhstan's independence by Russia's leaders."²⁰¹ By pursuing an integrationist policy Nazarbayev ensured public support of his presidency: "integration meant that those who were most disgruntled with Kazakhstan could still take comfort from their identification with the supranational entity that Nazarbayev hoped to form."²⁰²

Cummings' constructivist and Olcott's (neo)realist analyses of Kazakhstan's foreign relations informed by the Russian factor both exemplify a "two-level game" framework where the republic's leadership actions are attuned both by the domestic (large Russian minority) and international (Russia's interests) pressures and constrains.²⁰³ At the same time, if examined from a different conceptual angle, both authors underscore the importance of the republic's leadership and its perceptions in their explanations. This point actually applies to all assessed works that touch upon Kazakhstan's foreign policymaking. The literature on the topic implicitly or explicitly emphasizes the prominence of Nazarbayev's or, more broadly, the ruling elite's impact. As observed by Gleason: "the Central Asian states may be described as 'top heavy' in the sense that leadership predominates in the politics of the countries; the style and even psychological orientation of the leaders and their close entourages overshadow other factors."²⁰⁴ Analytically, then, the next step in the advancement of a comprehensive account of Kazakhstan's foreign policy would be the investigation of how the policy is generated among the leadership. That is, through unpacking the "black box," to illuminate how decisions were reached by Nazarbayev and his key advisers.

Foreign policy decision-making process and structure in a glimpse

Kasenov, who served in the beginning of 1990s as the advisor to president Nazarbayev for foreign policy and national security, and the head of the Centre for Strategic Studies (later

²⁰¹ Ibid, 43.

²⁰² Ibid, 36.

²⁰³ Cummings, "Eurasian bridge," Olcott, *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled promise*. On the two-level game analysis see the seminal article by Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: the Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988): 427-460.

²⁰⁴ Gleason, "Russia and Central Asia's Multivector Foreign Policies," 245.

renamed Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies-KISI), was the first to plan out Nazarbayev's decision-making apparatus.²⁰⁵ In Kasenov's scheme the president was unambiguously the ultimate decision maker as he was "constitutionally and practically the one who [had] 'supreme responsibility' in foreign and defence matters and personally implement[ed] policy in these fields."²⁰⁶ Apart from the president, policymaking authority was nested in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the President's Apparatus (later transformed to the Administration of the President), and the Security Council. Here, the foreign ministry was in a privileged position as it provided the core of the foreign policy information and advice while the president's apparatus mainly conducted organizational functions. Kasenov offers the following depiction of Almaty's decision-making hierarchy:

He [Nazarbayev] has his own foreign policymaking staff within the presidential apparatus to help him in conducting current, day-to-day foreign policy moves and activity. Of course, this staff relies on the foreign ministry and on other governmental bodies associated with foreign affairs.²⁰⁷

The third principal institution, the Security Council, headed by the president, was in charge of handling all matters of national security. Its main purpose was the coordination of external and internal policies relating to state's security and defence matters. At the same time Kasenov was sceptical about the Supreme Soviet's influence on foreign policy agenda. This exclusion of the legislature is explained by the author as being due to the parliament's political subservience to the president and lack of specialists on international affairs among the deputies' corps. To illustrate the subordinated position of the Supreme Soviet, Kasenov notes that the accession to the NPT treaty was ratified in 1993 without any parliamentary debate.²⁰⁸ Kasenov's Institute was also taking part in devising a foreign policy agenda by participating in "preparing, drafting, and evaluating the most important documents, programs, and moves in the areas of foreign policy and national security."²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ Kasenov, "Institutions and Conduct."

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 268.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 267.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 268.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 269.

Kasenov draws a rather introductory portrayal of Kazakhstan's foreign policymaking apparatus. His professional background did not allow him to elaborate on the subject, since he had access to confidential information, and certain legal restriction that applied as to what he could openly discuss, could possibly explain this fact. However, two remarks by Kasenov are noteworthy. First, the author notes the irregular and non-systemic character of foreign policymaking, suggesting that there was still an element of improvisation and ad hoc arrangements. Second, Kasenov claims that the "president is *usually* the key actor in the foreign policy decision-making process."²¹⁰ These two interrelated points imply that the policy process in the 1990s was not in fact as direct and bureaucratically organized as it may appear, leaving room for informal and behind the scenes decisional patterns.

Rafis Abazov provides a more detailed analysis of Kazakhstan's foreign policy decision-making structures in two works.²¹¹ The author based his works on the results of the survey of local experts (scholars, journalists, students, diplomats, and parliamentary deputies) and follows the formation of foreign policymaking in the Central Asian states, where he draws a relatively comprehensive picture of earlier institutions and actors involved in the process.²¹²

Kazakhstan's decision-makers were all part of the Soviet elite and this influenced organizational and ideational settings in which foreign policy was generated: "It is important to note that the experience of these [late Soviet] years positively influenced the establishing and functioning of the independent foreign policy institutions of the CAR [Central Asian Region] and accumulating the expertise."²¹³ Kazakhstan's cadre training in diplomatic affairs under Soviet rule was the result of the Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze's new policies which liberalized the republics' international economic affairs and provided the opportunity for the Central Asians to occupy positions in the central apparatus of the Soviet foreign ministry and

²¹⁰ Ibid, 263. Emphasis added.

²¹¹ These are: "Practice of Foreign Policymaking," and *Foreign Policy Formation*.

²¹² See Abazov, "Practice of Foreign Policymaking," 37-40.

²¹³ Ibid, 39.

diplomatic missions abroad, which were previously reserved only for diplomats from Slavic republics.²¹⁴

Ideationally, one of the positive effects was that the regional elites' identity was more inclined towards technocratic political and economic views and much less to pan-Islamic or pan-nationalist. The consequent ideas of the *Eurasian Bridge* or the *Great Silk Road* have taken prevalence as self-identification markers in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan respectively.²¹⁵ Here, the discussion on the “model of development” greatly effected the course of the debate on the external orientation of Kazakhstan:

The ‘model of development’ debate also became a useful tool in changing the self-identity of the Central Asians in the international arena and in preserving self-confidence in their painful dilemma of choosing between the Asia and Europe (within the Soviet Union they perceived themselves as the part of Europe).²¹⁶

Organizationally, the author observes that foreign policy decision-making configuration was in a larger part modelled after the Soviet one. For Abazov, there were three main institutions that played a major role in the process in Kazakhstan: 1) the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as an implementation body charged with everyday activities and coordination of the foreign missions' work; 2) the International Department of the President's Apparatus (ID AP), as another influential institutional actor; and, 3) the academia, as the third pillar of policy generation.²¹⁷

Abazov makes an intriguing assumption about Almaty inter-institutional processes. In his assertion, the foreign ministry and the International Department were competing with each other and the president himself encouraged this contestation.²¹⁸ Another inference is made that the MFA did not possess enough expertise and was therefore incapable of generating policy advice without the assistance of academics.²¹⁹ The high mobility between these three institutions created a “dynamic and democratic” policymaking environment: “There was quite an intensive exchange between the foreign policy experts from academic institutions and the government and

²¹⁴ Ibid, 38

²¹⁵ Ibid, 10-11.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 22.

²¹⁷ The Supreme Soviet's role is considered to be minimal. See Abazov, “Practice of Foreign Policymaking,” 40.

²¹⁸ Ibid. As discussed in Chapter IV, the competition between the two institutions did take place, but the president's reaction to this development was the opposite of Abazov's suggestion.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

the president's foreign policymaking institutions.”²²⁰ Because the circle of policymakers was narrow and policy debates were encouraged, Abazov infers that the experts’ inputs affected the course of foreign policy to a considerable degree. However, as the author warns, the personalities of the president and the heads of the policymaking institutions had the most influence in policymaking.²²¹

In his later work, Abazov elaborates on the interaction between different policymaking institutions and actors. He refers to the challenging policymaking environment where personnel and material resource deficiencies were complicated by the absence of any policy guidelines or principles whatsoever: “Moreover, since these republics were unprepared for independence, they did not have clearly formulated concepts of national interests, a fact that was aggravated further by the absence of historical precedents for their independent statehood, at least in modern times.”²²² The author puts forward an argument that such a challenging policymaking context induced a collective decision-making culture with many domestic actors involved in policy formulation. Information collected from surveys allows Abazov to argue that the phenomenon of the collective formulation of foreign policy led to the situation where the foreign policy output came as a consequence of the interplay between the “internal political factors and... consensus between various actors,” rather than being “a direct reflection of external pressures and inputs.”²²³

While an important point is made about the decentralization of policymaking, there seems to be a missing link in Abazov’s argument, where the author, on one hand, presumes that the fractured policymaking process at the level of the governmental experts and diplomats had impacted the policy output, and, on the other, concludes that decisions on foreign policy orientations were made by republic’s leaders. For example, Abazov writes on the nature of debates:

²²⁰ Ibid

²²¹ Ibid, 48.

²²² Abazov, *Foreign Policy Formation*, 12.

²²³ Ibid, 42.

Debates [amongst the elite] were centred around a number of issues ranging from the priorities that the CAR [Central Asian Region states] should take in their bilateral and multilateral relations, to issues of security and what should be their responses to external and internal threats to the stability and independence of Central Asia.²²⁴

At the same time he finds that the:

Vulnerability to the Kremlin's foreign policy, and the rise of Russian nationalism, have forced Central Asian *leaders* to seek a new security regime that would not rely solely upon Russian security guarantees, but would include guarantees from neighbouring states and some other important international players as well.²²⁵

Here, it remains unclear how the policy debates were translated into the emanation of the new security regime, if they had at all.

Without demonstration of how the region's leaders' foreign orientations, Nazarbayev's specifically, were shaped by the internal debate among his diplomats, by showing, for example, which institution's alternative was chosen by a leader and why, Abazov's argument appears to be incomplete. The finding that "what seems to be the case is that various institutionalized groups and governments are competing for influence in the formation of foreign policy in this or that republic,"²²⁶ does not automatically infer that Kazakhstan's foreign policy output was actually influenced by this competition in any way. This is especially so, given the assumed prevalence of the president's decisional authority and leadership's concern of the external threats.²²⁷

Passolt links the foreign policy decision-making component with Kazakhstan's policies toward Russia, China, and Central Asia.²²⁸ The author is interested in explaining how international and domestic context interplayed in producing the foreign policy: "How Kazakhstan dealt with these international constraints depended on how the issues were perceived and filtered through its leadership, concentrated in the hands of President Nazarbayev."²²⁹ Passolt further shows how the president "perceived and filtered" these external influences by sketching a general illustration of the Kazakhstani foreign policy decision-making apparatus,

²²⁴ Ibid, 43

²²⁵ Ibid, 45. Emphasis added.

²²⁶ Ibid, 42-43.

²²⁷ Ibid, 14-15; 23.

²²⁸ Passolt, "Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy."

²²⁹ Ibid, 267.

borrowed in a large part from Abazov's works.²³⁰ The principal conclusion the author makes from the "investigation into Kazakhstan's conduct of foreign policy" is that president Nazarbayev is the "dominant actor in foreign policymaking," with all other actors and institutions not contributing much to the process.²³¹

To depict policymaking, Passolt "investigates the central foreign policy decision-making actors and institutions in terms of the legal framework in which they are anchored and their actual development."²³² Here, the reference is made to three main documents said to form a basis for a foreign policymaking process: 1) the Declaration on the State Sovereignty (titled by Passolt as the Declaration on State Independence), 25 October 1990; 2) the Declaration of Independence, 16 December 1991; and, 3) the Constitution, 30 August 1995. Passolt refers to the third legal act, the Constitution of 1995, to describe the foreign policymaking structure in place for the period under examination (1991-2001), arguing, "Constitution is the key document that outlines the major foreign policy actors and institutions and their explicit responsibilities."²³³ Naturally, Passolt cites constitutional passages on the principal role of the president who "decides on foreign goals, directions, and priorities, and adopts measures to implement them"; on the role of the Government that "develops measures for the conduct of foreign policy"; and on the role of the foreign ministry that "conducts foreign policy, implements decisions, and supervises the functioning of Kazakhstan's foreign embassies."²³⁴

²³⁰ Ibid, 91-101. Passolt draws on Abazov, "Practice of Foreign Policymaking"; and *Foreign Policy Formation*.

²³¹ Passolt, "Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy," 255-256.

²³² Ibid, 91

²³³ Ibid, 96.

²³⁴ Ibid. There are, however, several concerns related to the use of the Constitution as a "governmental guide." First, this legal act, adopted in 1995, reflected the contemporaneous foreign policymaking structure. Although it remained relevant for the subsequent years, the Constitutional provisions did not correlate to the situation in the 1992-1994 period when the foundations of the republic's foreign policy were formed. Second, the Constitution provides only a general understanding of the policymaking actors. The foreign policymaking provisions, contained in the Constitutions had originated from preceding legal acts such as the 1992 [Regulation on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan" (<http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/U920000831>); the 1994 "Regulation on the Apparatus of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan" (<http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/K940001954>); or the 1994 "Decree on the Structure of the Central Apparatus of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan" (<http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/P940001126>). Consideration of these legal acts would have provided a deeper understanding of the distribution of roles of the president, his administration, the foreign ministry, and other institutions in comparison to general inferences drawn from the text of the Constitution.

While the author does outline further some of the bureaucratic instances where foreign policymaking was conducted in the 1991-2001 period, like the Security Council (titled by Passolt as the National Security Council), or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Passolt overlooks other principal institutions, such as the International Department of the Apparatus of the President, the State Counsellor, or the Centre for Strategic Studies under the President. Moreover, Passolt's illustration does not include such principal elements of decision-making process as a hierarchy of authority among the Kazakhstani leadership below the president, the level of formality of policymaking, or chains of command and execution.

Such an underexposure of decision-making processes and structures may invoke certain aberrations. For example, at one point of the empirical investigation, Passolt comes to the questionable finding that foreign advisers made a principal contribution to the initial foreign policy agenda formulation:

Immediately after independence, Kazakhstan lacked most of the essential foreign policy structures and it did not have competent personnel. As a consequence, Kazakhstan's leadership 'almost naturally' developed a highly proactive, centralized foreign policy role *assisted by foreign advisers*. With the increasing development of institutions and the training of Kazakh foreign policy experts, the role of foreign advisers has declined.²³⁵

Although the attribution of the postcolonial features of policymaking, such as the presence of foreign advisers, to Kazakhstan is understandable in the light of her thesis's conceptual approach, this argument is not backed either by primary or secondary material in the body of Passolt's dissertation.

The principal reservation, however, must be made in relation to the explanatory value the section on the foreign policy decision-making holds in the light of the aim of Passolt's research. It is unclear how the peculiarities of the Kazakhstani policymaking had affected Astana's foreign policy in the studied period. In her work Passolt aims to prove that president's perception of international constraints mattered to the foreign policy of the republic. However, without the detailed description of foreign policymaking mechanisms and processes, this goal seems unattainable. The principal argument followed is that Nazarbayev was the ultimate decision

²³⁵ Passolt, "Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy," 101. Emphasis added.

maker in foreign matters with all other institutions subordinated to his office. Though this finding is a necessary operationalization precursor, it lacks a detailed analysis of a foreign policy processes. In particular, Passolt's cases of Kazakhstan's strategy toward Russia, China, and Central Asia are not followed by examinations of decision-making processes at times of elaboration of specific policies directed along these three vectors. A deeper study would have shown actors and institutions that might have had some input in a particular decision; the deliberations and arguments of the president himself and his closest advisers; or the activities, if any, of interest groups that lobbied a particular foreign policy orientation. Without this analysis, Passolt's decision-making structure is still a "black box" where the president substitutes a state and seems to react to international and domestic factors in a robotic fashion.

Empirical shortcomings noticeable in Bukkvoll's article also exemplify the need to examine the decision-making element in explanations of Kazakhstan's foreign policy.²³⁶ As it is, Bukkvoll's work remains a desk exercise that lacks primary data from the field, the need for which is necessitated by the paper's argument. First, Bukkvoll's central assertion is based on the assumption that Nazarbayev is dependent on interests groups around him and builds his foreign policy accordingly. At the same time, the author assumes that Nazarbayev is the ultimate foreign policy decision-maker: "foreign policy in Kazakhstan to an extreme degree is a one-man affair."²³⁷ Therefore questions arise as to how and under what circumstances these groups' international interests are transmitted into a foreign policy output. In Bukkvoll's interpretation, the influence is indirect and based on Nazarbayev's perception of perceptions and perception of intentions of various actors involved in policymaking. Here, a depiction of an actual decision-making process through which Kazakhstan's foreign policy orientation towards Russia and USA was formed would be quite helpful. Second, the author refers to assessments of a specific group of Kazakhstani and Russian commentators. To expose Nazarbayev's interests and motives Bukkvoll cites only the hard-core critics of Nazarbayev's regime (e.g. Akezhan Kazhegeldin or

²³⁶ Bukkvoll, "Astana's Privatized Independence."

²³⁷ Ibid, 632.

Muzhamedzhan Adilov) whose analyses are based on their own significantly politicized speculations. Equally questionable is Bukkvoll's reference to a testimony of an American businessman, from which the author makes far reaching inferences about Nazarbayev's interests, writing: "If this source [testimony] is to be trusted, Nazarbayev is no stranger to personal gain from political decisions."²³⁸ Again, since there is underlying assumption about the impact of Nazarbayev's perceptions about possible reactions of various actors over foreign policy, a more viable reconstruction of Nazarbayev's profile and worldview seems to be necessary to support the argument.

Whereas the decision-making component has been examined to a relative degree in the current scholarship, it still seems conceptually and empirically possible to draw a more holistic depiction of policymaking processes in Kazakhstan and to integrate this component into the explanatory narrative in a more analytically sound manner. In particular, such elements as the nature of Nazarbayev's interactions with his close associates, the dynamics of bureaucratic politics and policy debate, and the ruling elite's personalities and worldviews appear to be underexplored. An interrelated point can be made that in the absence of primary information about what and how policy options and alternatives were discussed among policymakers any argument about their reflections of external or internal pressures remain speculative. Without such information, it cannot be convincingly demonstrated that the policymaking corps actually perceived a particular issue in the same manner as it was publicly discussed, and that a policy response correlated to the intended strategy and was not entirely informed by externally imposed constraints.²³⁹

²³⁸ Ibid, 631.

²³⁹ The idea to look at the consistency between policymakers' beliefs and their subsequent foreign policy behaviour follows from Andrew Bennett's work on Soviet and Russian foreign policies. See Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition? The Rise, Fall, and Reprise of Soviet-Russian Military Interventionism, 1973-1996* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 1-38.

Conclusion

As argued in William Wohlforth's assessment of the application of the balance of power theory to Central Asian politics, the answer to his argument as to why Kazakhstan had not balanced against, but had instead bandwagoned with Russia lies not in "a general theory," but in "local history and politics."²⁴⁰ This observation appropriately underlines the academic discussion of Kazakhstan's foreign policy behaviour. Indeed, it can be concluded that there is a need to simultaneously consider systemic pressures exerted by the international system and to examine peculiarities of domestic affairs, leadership's interests and policymaking processes. This will not only approximate a more insightful understanding of the nation's foreign policy but would also allow recognition of the intended and complex nature of many of the republic's strategies thereby allocating at least some agency to Kazakhstan. At the same time, without knowing the point and the mechanism at which external and internal structural factors refract through the policymaking apparatus of the republic, policy generation process remains "black boxed" and the argument in favour of the agency remains unsubstantiated.

Straddling international and domestic factors in the explanation of the general phenomenon of Kazakhstan's foreign policy seems to be a more conceptually challenging task than a conceptualization in this manner of specific foreign policy strategies (e.g. towards Russia) or focusing only on the one end of the causal chain (e.g. domestic politics). The neoclassical realist theory, discussed in detail in the following chapter, provides a researcher with the systematic conceptual framework linking both milieus. The analytical appeal of the application of the neoclassical realist theory to this study is reinforced by its epistemological capability for the integration of Nazarbayev's foreign policymaking component, which, as it has been suggested in some of the works on Kazakhstan's politics, has important explanatory power.

²⁴⁰ Wohlforth, "Revisiting Balance of Power," 232. This thesis does not treat Kazakhstan's policy towards Russia as bandwagoning, though. See, in particular, Chapter IV.

Chapter III: Bridging neoclassical realism and foreign policy analysis

The main argument of the thesis is that Kazakhstan's foreign policy was not solely (pre)determined by the international structure and that unit-level factors, specifically the presidential decision-making element, have to be incorporated into the understanding of the phenomenon. Conceptually, this line of inquiry resonates with the central problem of neoclassical realism – how does the interplay of structural and domestic factors affect the foreign policy of a given state. The domestic variable in the focus of this work's analysis is Nazarbayev's foreign policy decision-making process and structure. This chapter will first discuss neoclassical realist theory and review the ways it allows the integration of the decision-making variable into the framework. This discussion will be followed by the exploration of different approaches to the foreign policy decision-making analysis with the particular emphasis on the models of the presidential group decision-making. The conceptual framework applied in this thesis is developed in the concluding part of the chapter.

Neoclassical realist framework

Neoclassical realism is a considerably new theoretical addition to the field of international relations and to the foreign policy analysis school – it provides alternative readings of the mainstream systemic realism through the introduction of various domestic factors to the structural explanations of states' behaviours on the international level. Gideon Rose coined the term, neoclassical realism, for this new theoretical approach in his review article *Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy*.²⁴¹ Having reviewed several works which examined foreign policies of great powers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Rose defined the theoretical model employed in these works as neoclassical realism and described the conceptual framework of this new model in the following way:

²⁴¹ Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politic.* 51, no. 1 (1998): 144-172.

It explicitly incorporates both external and internal variables, updating and systematizing certain insights drawn from classical realist thought. Its adherents argue that the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities. This is why they are realists. They argue further, however, that the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level. This is why they are neoclassical.²⁴²

Neoclassical realism finds its roots in empirical studies that aim to explain cases in the history of international relations when states pursued seemingly irrational or suboptimal foreign policies, which did not correspond to the imperatives of the international system. For example, one of the pioneers of the neoclassical realist approach, Aaron L. Friedberg, shows how Great Britain failed to respond to the relative power decline of the empire at the turn of the twentieth century due to the inadequate policymaking process by the “intellectually and bureaucratically” fragmented leadership.²⁴³ Randall L. Schweller explores the domestic factors behind states’ inability to rationally respond to the existing security threats in the international system.²⁴⁴ Schweller calls this behaviour “underbalancing,” which occurs when a state “either misperceives the intentions of the rising power as more benign than they in fact are or, if it correctly perceives the threat, does not adopt prudent policies to protect itself for reasons of domestic politics.”²⁴⁵ Such underbalancing behaviour is “directly contrary to the core prediction of structural realist school namely, that threatened states will balance against dangerous accumulations of power by forming alliances or building arms or both.”²⁴⁶ The author finds that whether a state balances properly or underbalances is largely determined by domestic political processes and less by systemic factors. Thomas J. Christensen studies the leadership’s attempts to mobilize national support for the realization of national security strategies.²⁴⁷ He argues that policymakers perceive strategic security threats more clearly than the general public. Thus, while leaders see

²⁴² Ibid, 146.

²⁴³ Friedberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895-1905* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988).

²⁴⁴ Schweller, “Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing,” *International Security* 29, no. 2 (2004): 159-201, and *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 2006).

²⁴⁵ Schweller, *Unanswered Threats*, 10.

²⁴⁶ Schweller, “Unanswered Threats,” 159-160.

²⁴⁷ Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

potential long-term risks in the international environment and try to mobilize “nation’s human and material resources behind security policy initiatives,” they are confronted with domestic political “hurdles to mobilization.”²⁴⁸ Policymakers utilize ideological instruments and even wage short-term conflicts to manipulate public opinion to overcome these hurdles and ensure domestic support for costly long-term security strategies. Therefore, although some foreign policies may look deviant, a detailed study of the internal policymaking process may suggest that the security policy was quite understandable from the leadership’s point of view:

By understanding the relationship between the international and domestic pressures leaders face in designing and implementing these sets of policies, we can sometimes expose a deeper rationale behind leaders’ decisions to create or prolong conflicts that might otherwise appear irrational or counterproductive.²⁴⁹

Fareed Zakaria seeks to explain why did the USA not project its power abroad and expand in the years 1865-1889, when its economy was one of the strongest in the world.²⁵⁰ He is guided by the presumption that “a theory of foreign policy must not ignore domestic politics, national culture, and individual decision-makers.”²⁵¹ Zakaria found in his case that the American political leadership’s perception of the state’s (governmental) ability to utilize national resources was more important than the leadership’s perception of the relative power of the USA internationally. Since the US executive was weak during the studied period, America’s relational economic power did not lead to US global expansion.

The logic of the abovementioned works underlines the principal neoclassical realist premise that the foreign policy of a state is necessarily the resultant of both external and internal factors – systemic constraints are channelled through domestic institutions of a state and the output of this process is a particular foreign policy or behavioural pattern that presents “a particular inconsistency in the basic realist model or a specific empirical puzzle.”²⁵² Neoclassical

²⁴⁸ Ibid, 11; 25.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, 7.

²⁵⁰ Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: the Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998).

²⁵¹ Ibid, 16.

²⁵² B.I. Finel, “Black Box or Pandora's Box: State Level Variables and Progressivity in Realist Research Programs,” *Security Studies* 11, no 2 (2001): 204.

realism is thus useful in examinations of cases where “states do not respond ideally to their structural situations,” as Brian Rathbun writes, because it encourages a researcher to “find evidence of domestic politics and ideas distorting the decision-making process.”²⁵³ In this way, the neoclassical realist approach opens the “black box” of the unit (state) and thus identifies appropriate intervening variables that might influence a state’s foreign policy within the set structural parameters of the international system.

The focus on explaining foreign policy is the distinguishing epistemological characteristic of neoclassical realism that sets it apart from the neorealist school – the former is the theory of foreign policy and not the theory of international relations. It has been explicitly stated that the latter is not directed to explain “why state X made a certain move last Tuesday.”²⁵⁴ Neorealism has a more general and parsimonious agenda to “describe the range of likely outcomes of actions and interactions of states within a given system and show how the range of expectations varies as systems change.”²⁵⁵ As to a foreign policy, neorealism explains “the constraints that confine all states,” perception of which “provides many clues to the expected reactions of states, but by itself the theory cannot explain those reactions.”²⁵⁶ Therefore in neorealism “much of the daily stuff of international relations is left to be accounted for by theories of foreign policy.”²⁵⁷

Meanwhile, the neoclassical realist approach aims to achieve this exact objective – to understand, explain and predict the foreign policy behaviour of a state:

For analysis of the neoclassical realist approach see Jennifer Sterling-Folker, “Realist Environment”; Finel, “Black Box or Pandora’s Box”; Randall L. Schweller, “The Progressiveness of Neoclassical Realism,” in Elman and Elman, eds., *Progress in International Relations*, 311-347; Brian Rathbun, “A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism,” *Security Studies* 17, no. 2 (2008): 294-321; and Adam Quinn, “Kenneth Waltz, Adam Smith and the Limits of Science: Hard Choices for Neoclassical Realism,” *International Politics* 50, no. 2 (2013): 159-182. See, in particular, a collective monograph *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, eds., Steven E Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

²⁵³ Rathbun, “A Rose by Any Other Name,” 296.

²⁵⁴ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 121. For the discussion of the inappropriateness of the application of neorealism to the foreign policy analysis, see Colin Elman, “Horses for Courses: Why Not Neorealist Theories of Foreign Policy?,” *Security Studies* 6, no. 1 (1996): 7-53; and Kenneth N. Waltz, “International Politics is Not Foreign Policy,” *Security Studies* 6, no. 1 (1996): 54-57.

²⁵⁵ Waltz, *Theory of international politics*, 71.

²⁵⁶ Waltz, “Anarchic Orders and Balances of Power,” in *Neorealism and Its Critics* ed. Robert O. Keohane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 122.

²⁵⁷ Rose, “Neoclassical Realism,” 145.

Theories of foreign policy answer the question: What will a state faced with these circumstances do? Predictions about aggregate state behaviour, such as the statement ‘states will balance against a threatening concentration of power,’ are not foreign-policy predictions.²⁵⁸

While neoclassical realism asserts the primacy of the systemic factors, its utility for foreign policy analysis depends on the clarity of the systemic imperatives that states face.²⁵⁹ For a state, change in the relative power disposition sets the general parameters for the international behaviour, but cannot explain a “particular foreign policy or a specific historical event.”²⁶⁰ Zakaria makes a similar presumption that neorealism cannot elucidate motives behind states’ international actions; it can only derive these motives from the systemic logic.²⁶¹ On the contrary, a foreign policy theory, such as neoclassical realism, can provide detailed explanations as to “why different states, or the same state at different historical moments, have different intentions, goals, and preferences toward the outside world.”²⁶² Benjamin O. Fordham notes that in contrast to both defensive and offensive neorealist assumptions about either aggressive or status quo security strategies of states these strategies represent only two out of a universe of alternative actual foreign policy orientations: “There have been pathologically aggressive regimes, suicidally passive ones, and virtually everything in between.”²⁶³ Similarly, it was noted that when, with the end of the Cold War, bipolarity was replaced with unipolarity, it was then necessary for the understanding of foreign policies of states to learn not only the “new configuration of power,” but also the “key security dilemma and perceptual variables that interact with polarity in shaping international alignments.”²⁶⁴ In short, neoclassical realism “fills

²⁵⁸ Elman, “Horses for Courses,” 13.

²⁵⁹ Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, “Conclusion: The State of Neoclassical Realism,” in Lobell, Ripsman, Taliaferro, eds., *Neoclassical Realism*, 282.

²⁶⁰ Steven E. Lobell, “Threat Assessment, the State, and Foreign Policy: A Neoclassical Realist Model,” in Lobell, Ripsman, Taliaferro, eds., *Neoclassical Realism*, 45.

²⁶¹ Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power*, 14.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Fordham, “The Limits of Neoclassical Realism: Additive and Interactive Approaches to Explaining Foreign Policy Preferences,” in Lobell, Ripsman, Taliaferro, eds., *Neoclassical Realism*, 255.

²⁶⁴ Thomas J. Christensen, and Jack Snyder, “Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity,” *International Organization* 44, no. 2 (1990): 140.

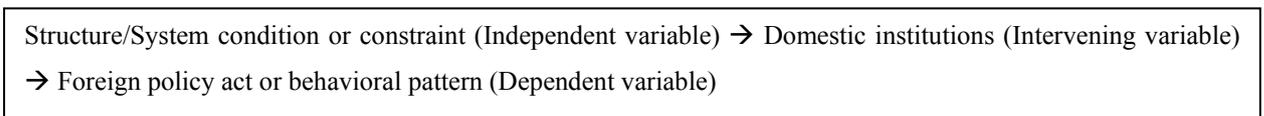
an explanatory gap” by identifying domestic mediating variables between systemic imperatives of structural realism and actual state behaviour.²⁶⁵

The novelty of the neoclassical realist school that sets it apart from both neorealism and liberalist *Innenpolitik* is that it does not shift the causal weight to only one level of analysis, be it the international system or domestic factors, in explaining the foreign policy – it “locates causal properties at both the structural and unit levels.”²⁶⁶ Analytically, the structural imperatives of the international system enter the argument first, which is then supplemented and enhanced by the unit-level variables. However, it is the unit-level that is given the primary focus in neoclassical realism:

The combination of environment and [domestic] process means that the systemic and the domestic can act as simultaneous independent variables in the realist argument. The anarchic environment remains primarily but indirectly causal, while [domestic] process remains secondarily but directly causal.²⁶⁷

The causal link of neoclassical realism can be schemed this way:

Figure 1.1: Neoclassical realist causal chain



Systemic imperatives

Neoclassical realism imports neorealist assumptions concerning the effect that the international structure exerts over states and about the ideal models of states’ behaviour in the international arena. For neoclassical realists, the primary modifiers of states’ foreign policies are the distribution of power in the international system, as well as the decision-makers’ perceptions of these relative power capabilities.²⁶⁸ This is the result of the anarchic nature of world politics in

²⁶⁵ Quinn, “Kenneth Waltz, Adam Smith,” 160.

²⁶⁶ Lobell, “Threat Assessment,” 21.

²⁶⁷ Sterling-Folker, “Realist Environment,” 22.

²⁶⁸ Rose, “Neoclassical Realism,” 146-147.

which “states recognize that...there is no overarching authority to prevent others from using violence, or the threat of violence, to destroy or enslave them.”²⁶⁹

Contrary to offensive and defensive realists, neoclassical realism finds such an international system to be “neither Hobbesian nor benign but murky and difficult to read.”²⁷⁰ Such situation leads to the “pervasive uncertainty and potential threats” that is a common denominator applicable to all units in the international system.²⁷¹ Therefore, states are compelled to be attentive to relative power distribution and their own material capabilities if they are to survive such anarchic conditions of international relations. Thus it is presumed that the aim of survival “is a prerequisite to achieving any goals that states may have, other than the goal of promoting their own disappearance as political entities.”²⁷² The logic of survival in the anarchic international environment lies as “the ‘basis’ for the entire [systemic neorealist] theory and leads to all other realist assumptions, arguments, and predictions.”²⁷³ It is perfectly natural, then, for states to put a high premium on security that is seen as “the most important value in an anarchic international system.”²⁷⁴ Therefore, the foreign policy of a state in the conditions set by the anarchical structure of international system is premised on the need to search for strategies to maximize its security relative to other states. Seen this way, a state’s foreign policy choices will primarily be affected and guided by “military, economic, political and geographical factors” which, combined, result in “hierarchies of power and influence” in the international structure.²⁷⁵ The power capabilities of a state and its relative position within the international system therefore have an enduring effect over states’ interests and motives, “making certain policy

²⁶⁹ Joseph M. Grieco, “Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism,” *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988): 497-498.

²⁷⁰ Rose, “Neoclassical Realism,” 152.

²⁷¹ Lobell, “Threat Assessment,” 28.

²⁷² Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 91-92.

²⁷³ Sterling-Folker, “Realist Environment,” 6.

²⁷⁴ Norrin M. Ripsman, “Neoclassical Realism and Domestic Interest Groups,” in Lobell, Ripsman, Taliaferro, eds., *Neoclassical Realism*, 176.

²⁷⁵ Mark Webber and Michael Smith, *Foreign Policy in a Transformed world* (Harlow, England: Prentice Hall, 2002), 31.

options more attractive to them than others.”²⁷⁶ For example, it is expected for a weaker state to balance against more powerful states by entering into alliances with states of similar material capabilities, bandwagoning with more powerful states, or increasing their own military capabilities. However, neorealism, presuming the logic of survival and self-help behind state’s international actions, “is unconcerned with and cannot account for specific state responses to external stimuli, whether or not such responses are characteristic or anomalous, prudent or reckless,” and “additional assumptions about actors’ rationality in responding to the international system are necessary if we are to argue from the international distribution of capabilities to the security strategies of particular nation-states.”²⁷⁷ The presumed effect of the international system does not automatically tell what states will do, only what they are ought to do – the structure imposes a corridor of constraining and facilitating factors within which states can manoeuvre and act as they wish.

Non-unitary and irrational state

Neoclassical realism, being a theory of foreign policy, sets itself apart from the neorealist conception of a state as a rational unitary actor, whose policymakers accurately perceive the state’s position in the international system and choose foreign policies that correspond to this presumably objective perception. For neoclassical realists such “notion of a smoothly functioning mechanical transmission belt is inaccurate and misleading.”²⁷⁸ This divergence underpins two interrelated points of conceptual disagreement – the problem of rationality of states’ policymakers and foreign outputs produced by them, and the problem of “black boxing” the state and viewing it as a unitary actor. These problems stem from the perception that “anarchy is the driving factor in realism from which unitary actor and rationalism ‘assumptions’

²⁷⁶ Gerry C. Alons, “Predicting a State’s Foreign Policy: State Preferences between Domestic and International Constraints,” *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 3, no. 3 (2007): 219.

²⁷⁷ Schweller, “Progressiveness of Neoclassical Realism,” 334; Christensen, *Useful adversaries*, 12.

²⁷⁸ Rose, “Neoclassical Realism,” 158.

flow, and because anarchy is not determinative, nothing in neorealism leads us to expect the absence of domestic politics or ideas.”²⁷⁹

The concept of rationality implies that a state pursues only those foreign policies that originate from the objective understanding of the anarchic international system “without illusions.”²⁸⁰ Under this concept states should be attentive to their international environments, count only on themselves, and be prepared to be socialized in the international system by imitating the successful practices of the most powerful nations in the system. As Waltz asserts, “those who do not help themselves, or who do so less effectively than others, will fail to prosper, will lay themselves open to dangers, will suffer. If some do relatively well, others will emulate them or fall by the wayside.”²⁸¹ Here the notion of a strict situational determinism of a “straitjacket” and a “single exit” logic that leaves states with no freedom of choice since any action will only lead to the outcomes predicted by the theory comes to mind.²⁸² When states do not act *rationally* then a foreign policy output is considered to suboptimal relative to some normative standard; neorealism predicts that in the long-run such states will be punished by the system and face “fatal results.”²⁸³

As it was noted earlier, it is deviant cases in the history of international affairs when states acted *irrationally*, which are examined through the application of a neoclassical theoretical framework. Rose clearly argues that, although ultimately the systemic pressure will make states conform to the systemic requirements, actual states’ policies in a short- and medium-term do not track objective material constraints.²⁸⁴ Taliaferro et al. advance the point further:

In the short run, anarchy gives states considerable latitude in defining their security interests, and the relative distribution of power merely sets parameters for grand strategy. The actual task of assessing power and the intentions of other states is fraught with difficulty. The calculations and perceptions of leaders can inhibit a timely and objectively efficient response or policy adaptation to shifts in the external environment....Over the long run, however, regimes or

²⁷⁹ Rathbun, “A Rose by Any Other Name,” 306.

²⁸⁰ Ibid, 304-305.

²⁸¹ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 118.

²⁸² Schweller, “Progressiveness of Neoclassical Realism,” 319. On this point Schweller cites Spiro J. Latsis, “Situational Determinism in Economics,” *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, 23 (1972): 207–245.

²⁸³ James D. Fearon, “Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy, and Theories of International Relations,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 1, no. 1 (1998): 289; Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 195.

²⁸⁴ Rose, “Neoclassical Realism,” 147.

leaders who consistently fail to respond to systemic incentives put their state's very survival at risk.²⁸⁵

Neoclassical realist theory is therefore interested in providing plausible explanations of anomalous (from the systemic logic perspective) foreign policies and strategies *ex ante* of their punishment by the system in the long run. Noting the empirical difficulties of tracing long-term repercussion of the *irrational* foreign policy choices and operationalization of penalties imposed by the system, B. I. Finel makes a point that it is impossible to validate or invalidate an argument about the primacy of systemic constraints and opportunities that will manifest over other variables only in the long-run.²⁸⁶ Adam Quinn draws a similar general ontological observation: "After all, if a state can behave in contradiction of the imperatives of a supposedly selective system for an indefinite period without being forced to alter its policy or being overhauled by competitors, then what evidence is there that the systemic imperative actually exists?"²⁸⁷ Therefore, non-optimal foreign policy responses, which go against the systematic imperatives, can be seen not as anomalous, but as regular, consistent and lasting patterns that cannot be expected to conform to systemic requirements over the long run.²⁸⁸

Neoclassical realists do not view a state as a unitary actor and this assumption is at the core of the model that introduces unit-level variables. The model of a unitary state equates calculations and actions of individual or institutional decision-makers with interests of the state and, therefore, treats state's policymaking bodies simply as the uniformed utilitarian instrument reflexively responsive to signals from the international system – hence the concepts of "black boxes" and "billiard balls." States are treated as metaphorical actors endowed with goals and rationality; and scholars have largely "ignored what goes on behind state doors."²⁸⁹ It is natural, then, that within the "black box" concept the causal impact of the unit-level variables is ignored

²⁸⁵ Taliaferro, Lobell, Ripsman, "Introduction," 7.

²⁸⁶ Finel, "Black Box or Pandora's Box," 194.

²⁸⁷ Quinn, "Kenneth Waltz, Adam Smith," 176.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 160.

²⁸⁹ Fearon, "Domestic Politics," 299; Fareed Zakaria, "Realism and Domestic Politics: A Review Essay," *International Security* 17, no. 1 (1992): 178.

or denied.²⁹⁰ Contrary to this perception, neoclassical realism, while acknowledging the influence of the international system, concurrently recognizes the domestic variables below the unit-level of analysis. Neoclassical realism “begins with the premise that ideal state behaviour is that which conforms with the unitary actor and objectivity premises of neorealism but shows that when these conditions are not met empirically, domestic politics and ideas are the culprits.”²⁹¹ Therefore, it is the domestic processes and actors that derail states from the path of conformity to the imperatives of the international structure, as they are not unitary:

States are complex entities that can be empirically demonstrated to be divided along political and bureaucratic lines. In addition, elite competition, public opinion, and historical lessons all play a demonstrable role in defining the policy process. Whether states behave as if they were unitary actors is not at issue. They may or they may not, and this issue will affect the empirical validity of theoretically derived predictions.²⁹²

To rephrase Schweller, the less domestic factors, such as the policymaking process and internal polarity of a state, approximate a unitary actor, the less accurate are the realism predictions.²⁹³ Neoclassical realists rightly ask why is it that among presumably unitary and rational states there is a “variation in the foreign policies of the same state over time or across different states facing similar external constraints”?²⁹⁴ In a similar vein, Christensen and Snyder noted on cold war historical puzzles: “The behaviour of cold war policymakers has sometimes violated these [systemic] prescriptions, but we believe that this had more to do with perceptual or domestic political factors than with the structural properties of bipolarity.”²⁹⁵

Neoclassical realist theory attempts to answer these questions by reaching below the systemic level explanations because “the loose structural factors of international politics – polarity, balance of power, long cycles, borders, regimes – may constrain individual choices, but they do not determine behaviour.”²⁹⁶ Agreeing with neorealists that the features of the international system and the relational parameters of a state establish the general contours of its

²⁹⁰ Sterling-Folker, “Realist Environment,” 16.

²⁹¹ Rathbun, “A Rose by Any Other Name,” 312.

²⁹² Finel, “Black Box or Pandora's Box,” 199.

²⁹³ Schweller, *Unanswered Threats*, 11.

²⁹⁴ Lobell, “Threat Assessment,” 21.

²⁹⁵ Christensen and Snyder, “Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks,” 142.

²⁹⁶ Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and David Lalman, *War and Reason: Domestic and International Imperatives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 11.

foreign policy, neoclassical realism presumes that domestic factors may have significant influence in distorting systemic pressures:

[Neoclassical realism's] theoretical insights have not contradicted the propositions of structural or classical realism but have instead complemented and extended them by specifying and further developing the non-structural arguments, causal processes, and linkages at the domestic and international levels implied by (structural) realist theories of balance of power and hegemonic rivalry.²⁹⁷

What exactly are those non-systemic factors that cause foreign policies to deviate from the presumed systemic imperatives? As posed by Taliaferro et al.: “How and under what circumstances will domestic factors impede states from pursuing the types of strategies predicted by balance of power theory and balance of threat theory?”²⁹⁸ Neoclassical realists find a wide selection of these factors.

Friedberg's study of the British decline led him to conclude that leader's misperceptions and mistakes in calculating power capabilities of other nations combined with fragmented policymaking structure created the situation where the UK's assessment of its own and relative power was not “the product of a single mind or agency” and the response was thus uncoordinated and inefficient.²⁹⁹ Schweller's work concerned instances when states balanced or underbalanced against accumulated power in their international environment. Schweller found that states' responses to these perceived external threats are subject to four intervening variables: 1) decision-makers' consensus about the external threat; 2) decision-making body's internal solidity; 3) decision-makers' sensibility to political pressure from opposition; and, 4) social cohesion.³⁰⁰ Christensen argues that the ability of a state to mobilize domestic political support for implementing “grand strategies” is essential for explaining state's behaviour internationally.³⁰¹ Zakaria finds that stronger the state's ability to extract national resources and the more powerful the presidential executive is in comparison to the legislation, the more likely

²⁹⁷ Schweller, “Progressiveness of Neoclassical Realism,” 336.

²⁹⁸ Taliaferro, Lobell, Ripsman, “Introduction,” 1.

²⁹⁹ Friedberg, *Weary Titan*, 290.

³⁰⁰ Schweller, *Unanswered Threats*, 46-68.

³⁰¹ Christensen, *Useful Adversaries*.

it is that the USA will expand its interests internationally.³⁰² These cases are instructive of how many unit-level variables can be integrated into foreign policy explanations within the neoclassical realist framework. At the same time, these works all are examples of how domestic factors serve a function of the intervening variable between the international context and the foreign policy output. Conceptualized this way,

complex domestic political processes act as transmission belts that channel, mediate, and (re)direct policy outputs in response to external forces (primarily, changes in relative power). Hence, states often react differently to similar systemic pressures and opportunities, and their responses may be less motivated by systemic-level factors than domestic ones.³⁰³

Norrin M. Ripsman's analytical framework illustrates how this "transmission belt" works – how domestic political matters can influence the national security agenda of a state.³⁰⁴ The author makes a case for the involvement of interest groups, public opinion, media, and legislature in the foreign security policymaking process. He argues that these factors, often interlinked in domestic political processes, are found to influence strategic decisions made by the foreign policy executive.³⁰⁵ Domestic political actors may exert certain influence over a foreign policy executive because the latter

is dominated, above all, by individuals who wish to retain their hold on power, and secondarily to pass their preferred policy agendas, they should be most receptive to influence from domestic actors who can provide or deny electoral support or, in non-democratic states, preserve the leader's position or topple him/her.³⁰⁶

At the same time, while a foreign policy executive possesses much of the information on the international level and is driven in its decisions by international constraints and incentives he is well aware of, the domestic actors, such as representatives of the legislature or other political groups, not directly involved in foreign affairs, are motivated mostly by domestic political

³⁰² Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power*.

³⁰³ Schweller, *Unanswered Threats*, 6.

³⁰⁴ Ripsman, "Neoclassical Realism."

³⁰⁵ The "foreign policy executive" is operationalized by the author as being "comprised of the head of government and the ministers and officials charged with making foreign security policy." See Ripsman, "Neoclassical realism," 71. Ripsman notes the similarity of the concept to the "ultimate decision unit," elaborated by Margaret Hermann et al. See Margaret G. Hermann, Charles F. Hermann, and Joe D. Hagan, "How Decision Units Shape Foreign Policy Behavior," in *New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy*, eds. Charles F. Hermann, Charles W. Kegley, and James N. Rosenau (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1987), 309–336.

³⁰⁶ Ripsman, "Neoclassical Realism," 181.

reasons, parochial interests, or even personal considerations.³⁰⁷ Given these presumptions, international systemic constraints are not necessarily translated directly into the national security strategies because these strategies may be shaped according to the interests of and as the result of the activities of these domestic actors. Such an effect, however, is lesser in crisis situations, “when the margin for error is minimal, the national security executive will have powerful incentives to ignore domestic political interests and formulate security policy with the overriding goal of securing the state.”³⁰⁸ The author further presumes a correlation between the influence of domestic actors over national security policy and the character of decision-making employed in a particular state – the more autonomous an environment is in which a foreign policy executive operates, the lesser the degree of influence domestic actors have.³⁰⁹ At the same time, Ripsman finds that even in instances where domestic factors can influence national security policies, these changes are usually minor, for as the national interests and national strategies are a prerogative of a foreign policy executive; domestic actors may only change the “timing and style” of security policies.³¹⁰ Therefore, a state’s interests and strategies are principally shaped by the international systemic environment in which a given state operates, and only tactically adjusted by domestic political forces.³¹¹ Nevertheless, the impact of domestic politics is asserted and tangible.

Contrary to the situation with systemic variables, neoclassical realists do not converge on a single domestic factor that has causal primacy. As Zakaria suggests, “one can locate the reason for national preferences at any level of analysis.”³¹² Here, domestic political settings, national cultural, or individual decision-makers’ preferences play a role.³¹³ Students of neoclassical realism suggest the possibility of introducing various unit-level variables into the theory:

³⁰⁷ Ibid, 171-172.

³⁰⁸ Ibid, 186.

³⁰⁹ Ibid, 189-190.

³¹⁰ Ibid, 192.

³¹¹ This runs parallel to the point made by Joe D. Hagan: “The leadership's core shared beliefs and interests are the primary motivational basis of the *overall* direction of foreign policy. Domestic political debates and grandstanding typically involve the relatively narrow matters of how policy is to be implemented.” See Hagan, “Domestic Political Explanations in the Analysis of Foreign Policy,” in *Foreign Policy Analysis: Continuity and Change in its Second Generation*, eds., Laura Neack, Jeanne A. K. Hey, and Patrick Jude Haney (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1995), 133 (emphasis in original).

³¹² Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power*, 16.

³¹³ Zakaria, “Realism and Domestic Politics,” 198.

political culture, nature of the regime, executive and legislative divide; partisan politics, public opinion, media, bureaucratic politics, interests groups, strong and weak state apparatus dichotomies; state-society relations; regime's interests that run contrary to the state interest; small-group dynamics; leadership's perception and misperception; and domestic political sentiments.³¹⁴ Given the diversity of domestic factors, Robert Gilpin's observation is pertinent here: "It is impossible to formulate in a systematic and exhaustive fashion the domestic determinants of the foreign policies of the states."³¹⁵

Decision-making variable

The importance of the decision-making variable is implicitly recognized in neoclassical realism. Seen in such a way, this variable may play a role in a foreign policy formation mainly in instances when a state's political configuration may widen or narrow the range of opportunities for acting internationally. What is left overlooked, however, is the way the process and the format of the decision-making itself can influence the foreign policy of a state. In particular, the neoclassical realist discussions of foreign policymaking variables do not focus on the roles of presidents and their advisory structures. Despite the findings that, as will be shown below, presidential policymaking has elsewhere been found to be a crucial component in foreign policy output, in neoclassical realism the presidents' roles are attenuated within the broader contexts of state apparatuses' policymaking. Shiping Tang explicitly criticizes the theory for this conceptual lacuna:

Although neoclassical realists unanimously emphasize the role of policymaking executives, the role of leaders has been mostly missing from the discussion. Yet, there is no doubt that individual decision-maker traits, especially their personality and worldview, have all impacted their decisions. After all, it is leaders that construct threat, debate and decide strategies, and order mobilizations.³¹⁶

The importance of the involvement of a state's leadership in foreign policy output through the (mis)perception of challenges and opportunities of the international environment and

³¹⁴ Fearon, "Domestic Politics," 307; Sterling-Folker, "Realist Environment," 2; Lobell, "Threat Assessment," 44-45; and Quinn, "Kenneth Waltz, Adam Smith," 163-164.

³¹⁵ Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 96.

³¹⁶ Tang, "Taking Stock of Neoclassical Realism," *International Studies Review* 11, no. 4 (2009): 802.

devising appropriate policy responses is presumed in neoclassical realism: “State leaders or the FPE [foreign policy executives] occupy critical positions in the administration, and are responsible for long-term grand strategic planning, including the identification of changes in the global or regional balance of power.”³¹⁷ However, examinations of actual decisional and cognitive processes of information interpretation, analysis and strategy elaboration by leaders are omitted from the neoclassical realist agenda.

For example, Christensen presumes that “leaders misperceive the distribution of capabilities, they may stand aside at crucial junctures in a conflict, overreact to insignificant threats, or even assist the wrong side in a war” and that “leaders mistake stronger states for weaker ones, they may even join the side of the mighty, thereby behaving more like bandwagoners than balancers.”³¹⁸ However, Christensen’s work does not aim at exploring decisional processes of how these misperceptions and mistakes occur in leaders’ minds – leaders’ beliefs are taken as given. Consider Christensen’s accounts of Soviet and Western leaders’ miscalculations before the Second World War:

Actually, Stalin apparently misperceived the European security environment on both counts. Not only did he (falsely) believe that defence had the advantage in the western theatre but also he believed that Britain and France combined were much more powerful than Germany.³¹⁹

Additionally:

As early as spring 1938, British analysts made one thing very clear in their strategic assessments: French defence mattered to Britain, even if Belgium fell. Britain wanted France to extend its defences from north-eastern France, where the formal Maginot Line ended, to the sea.³²⁰

Here, the leadership’s perceptions about the surrounding strategic environment are conceptualized as products of either single or collective minds exogenously introduced to the analysis and not related to the internal policymaking processes.

Meanwhile, Schweller recalls that what matters in foreign policy analysis are not only elite’s calculations of “cost and risk” but also which elites’ preferences and perceptions dominate

³¹⁷ Lobell, “Threat Assessment,” 46.

³¹⁸ Thomas J. Christensen, “Perceptions and Alliances in Europe, 1865-1940,” *International Organization* 51, no. 1 (1997): 68.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

through the policymaking process.³²¹ Similarly, Fordham notes: “We cannot know whether a particular international event or condition constitutes a threat, an opportunity, or an irrelevancy until we know who was selected to enter the ranks of the state leaders charged with making decisions about these matters.”³²² Moreover, strategic choices are found to be made because they make sense to political actors not only with reference to the international environment contexts but also with reference to the domestic policymaking process contexts.³²³ This resonates with Rose’s general argument that in “the neoclassical realist world leaders can be constrained by both international and domestic politics.”³²⁴ Rose’s point on domestic politics should not be limited analytically to the nature of political regime or executive-legislature divide in the state under investigation; it may well suggest a broader research agenda, including analyses of the policymaking processes at the top levels of leadership.

Since the neoclassical realist paradigm implicitly provides for the importance of decision-making process as the domestic determinant of a state’s foreign policy, it seems useful to synthesize it with the conceptual constructs from the foreign policy decision-making analysis subfield. In fact, proponents of neoclassical realism encourage such an epistemological strategy: “[neorealist] theory must be cross-fertilized with other theories before it will make determinate predictions at the foreign policy level.”³²⁵ Foreign policymaking structures and processes can serve as important domestic modifiers of foreign policy which can possibly lead to outcomes divergent from systemic prescriptions. This suggests that an examination of these processes can produce closer and more detailed explanations of historical cases within the neoclassical realist analytical framework.

³²¹ Schweller, “Unanswered Threats,” 169.

³²² Fordham, “Limits of Neoclassical Realism,” 255-256.

³²³ Sterling-Folker, “Realist Environment,” 20.

³²⁴ Rose, “Neoclassical Realism,” 152.

³²⁵ Christensen and Snyder, “Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks,” 138.

Foreign policy decision-making perspective

Foreign policy decision-making is an approach to explain a state's foreign policy from the perspectives which are different to systemic theories. This approach is more concerned not with the question of what kind of a foreign policy a state pursues, but rather with the questions of how and why a state has made a specific policy choice.³²⁶ More specifically, it seeks to explain how a specific foreign policy choice was arrived at by the individual, group, or organizational agents involved in the decisional process.³²⁷ Hence, the foreign policy analysis subfield unpacks the "black box" of a state and explores the various unit-level variables and their effect over a foreign policy outcome. Pioneers of the foreign policy decision-making analysis subfield, Snyder et al., provide the following operational formula:

It is also one of our basic choices to define the state as its official decision-makers – those whose authoritative acts are, to all intents and purposes, the acts of the state. *State action is the action taken by those acting in the name of the state.* Hence, the state is its decision-makers. State X as *actor* is translated into its decision-makers as actors. It is also one of our basic choices to take as our prime analytical objective the re-creation of the 'world' of the decision-makers as *they* view it. The manner in which *they* define situations becomes another way of saying how the state oriented to action and why.³²⁸

This principal postulation reflects the neoclassical realist premise that the state is not a unitary and rational actor whose behaviour can satisfactorily be explained through reference to the systemic context. Viewed this way, a primary generator of a foreign policy can be a nation's leader, cabinets of bureaucrats charged with developing a foreign policy course, or the inner circle of a president's trusted advisers who ensemble a group dealing with all security and strategic matters of a state.³²⁹

In the study of US foreign policy, Graham T. Allison challenged the assumption that states should be treated as rational unitary actors, demonstrating that factors below the state level

³²⁶ Walter Carlsnaes, "Actors, Structures, and Foreign Policy Analysis," in *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*, eds. Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield and Timothy Dunne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 88.

³²⁷ Stuart, "Foreign Policy Decision-Making," 576.

³²⁸ Richard C. Snyder, H.W. Bruck, and Burton Sapin, *Foreign Policy Decision-Making Revisited* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 59. Emphasis in original.

³²⁹ For overviews of different approaches within the foreign policy analysis school see Carlsnaes, "Actors, Structures"; Laura Neack, Jeanne A. K. Hey, and Patrick Jude Haney, eds., *Foreign Policy Analysis: Continuity and Change in its Second Generation* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1995); Jean A Garrison, ed., "Foreign Policy Analysis in 20/20: A Symposium," *International Studies Review* 5, no. 2 (2003): 155-202; and Valerie M. Hudson, "Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1, no. 1 (2005): 1-30.

may have a profound effect over a foreign policy outcome.³³⁰ Allison created an analytical framework within which he simultaneously applied three different perspectives or “conceptual lenses” through which to examine Soviet and US decision-making during the Cuban Missile Crisis. In addition to the Rational Actor model, Allison advanced two alternative readings of this historic event – the Bureaucratic Politics model and the Organizational Politics model. His case attempted to provide explanations for the following questions: 1) why did the USSR decide to install missiles in Cuba; 2) why did the USA impose a naval blockade as a response; and, 3) why did Soviets pulled back and dismantled missile sites?

The concept of rationality underpinning the Rational Actor model implies that a government acting in the name of the state pursues foreign policies deemed to maximize its interests and with presumed perfect situational knowledge. It “consists of showing what goal the government was pursuing when it acted and how the action was a reasonable choice, given the nation’s objective.”³³¹ According to this model, the Soviets installed nuclear missiles in Cuba to overcome a shortage of ICBMs and to gain strategic nuclear advantage in the Cold War rivalry. The Americans decided to blockade the island because Kennedy and his advisers believed this move would be a signal to Nikita Khrushchev, compelling him to react, but not allowing the situation escalate to the level of direct military confrontation. The withdrawal of nuclear missiles was the result of the Soviets’ belief that America’s realistic attack on Cuba could instigate a nuclear war, which Khrushchev did not want to start over such cause as offshore nuclear missiles. There were, however, many moments in the Soviet and American behaviour that could not be understood from the rational actor model’s perspective. Thus, two more “conceptual lenses” are employed to the case study.

The Organizational Process model (Model II) treats foreign policy decision-making as a routine process of application of pre-set policy solutions to dealing with incoming foreign policy issues. Within such a process, governmental institutions follow what is called *standard operation*

³³⁰ Allison, *Essence of Decision*.

³³¹ Graham T. Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Longman, 1999), 15.

procedures, where a new foreign policy issue is matched with a foreign policy solution that has been already applied to a similar issue before. The focus of attention is therefore “the organizational structures, procedures and repertoires.”³³² Here, a foreign policy decision is made not by one centralized authority, but is the resultant of outputs of many organizations that each have their own logic and standards. Allison uses this model to explain why the Soviets did not camouflage Soviet military installations from U-2 surveillance planes. Since the military units responsible for building bases had previously worked only on the Soviet territory they did not have a procedure for disguising a base – units “had no routine for camouflage, having never camouflaged construction activity in the Soviet Union.”³³³ Meanwhile, the US Air Force and US Navy operational capabilities shifted Kennedy’s decision in favour of naval blockade rather than air strikes. As for the Soviet leadership, the absence of contingency planning led to the decision to withdraw missiles from the island.

The governmental politics model (Model III) focuses on the way decision-making body’s composition and hierarchy impacts a foreign policy decision. Here, a foreign policy is viewed as the result of “pulling and hauling” between bureaucracies and their representatives who each have their own interests and vision:

To explain why a particular formal governmental decision was made, or why one pattern of governmental behaviour emerged, it is necessary to identify the games and players, to display the coalitions, bargains, and compromises, and to convey some feel for the confusion.³³⁴

This perceptual lens allows Allison to explain Khrushchev’s desire to place missiles in Cuba by reference to the internal political debate in the Soviet Union whereby the First Secretary Khrushchev wanted to strengthen his position in the CPSU Central Committee by this act. For Kennedy, upcoming congressional elections led him to be inclined towards a more decisive response to the Soviet’s move. Meanwhile, the internal debate in the ad hoc group of presidential advisers, the Executive Committee of the National Security Council, which took place shortly

³³² Graham T. Allison, “The Cuban Missile Crisis,” in Smith, Hadfield, Dunne, eds., *Foreign Policy*, 224.

³³³ *Ibid*, 213.

³³⁴ Allison, *Essence of Decision*, 146.

after CIA's humiliation in the Bay of Pigs fiasco, convinced Kennedy to impose a naval blockade instead of air strikes.

The importance of Allison's study is that it theoretically and empirically demonstrates that a full account of a foreign policy can only be achieved by combining the analysis of various domestic actors since the notion of a state as a rational "black box" will not always suffice in explaining all details of a historical case in question.

The bureaucratic politics model, as portrayed by Allison, focuses on the way decision-making organization and structure impacts a foreign policy decision. The fundamental assumption of the bureaucratic politics model can be formulated through the Miles' law: "where you stand depends on where you sit."³³⁵ Here, decision-makers representing or heading bureaus have institutional affiliations with their respective organizations and will pursue the policy that protects and advances the agency's interest, that not always coincides with the perceived national interests. Therefore bureaucracies, as decision-making bodies, are viewed as "hierarchical organizations that jealously protect their own turf by controlling policy in their area of expertise."³³⁶ The bureaucratic politics model similar to Allison's was elaborated by Morton Halperin et.al., who argue that a bureaucracy's mission, capability, influence, and essence are the main institutional interests underlying the interactions of different US federal agencies and determining their impact on foreign policy formulation and implementation.³³⁷ As summarized by Rosati and Scott:

Governmental politics describes a policymaking process that is neither centralized under the president nor rational, but rather is based on a pluralistic policymaking environment where

³³⁵ On the Miles' Law see Rufus E. Miles, Jr., "The Origin and Meaning of Miles' Law," *Public Administration Review* 38, no. 5 (1978): 399-403.

³³⁶ Alex Mintz, and Karl R. DeRouen, *Understanding Foreign Policy Decision-Making* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 71. Several authors notice that this is a simplistic understanding of bureaucrats' policy preferences and that, for example, personal psychological characteristics of decision makers (see Eric K. Stern, ed., "Whither the Study of Governmental Politics in Foreign Policymaking? A Symposium," *International Studies Quarterly* 42 (1998): 206-207), or policymaking processes and structures (see Thomas Preston and Paul T. Hart, "Understanding and Evaluating Bureaucratic Politics: The Nexus Between Political Leaders and Advisory," *Political Psychology* 20, no. 1 (1999):54) also have to be accounted for.

³³⁷ Morton H. Halperin, Priscilla Clapp, and Arnold Kanter, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1974).

power is diffused and the process revolves around political competition and compromise among the policymakers.³³⁸

In Rosati's view, the nature of the bureaucratic politics depends on the interplay of the decision-making structure (the level of the involvement of the highest ranking authorities) and the decision-making context (the level of criticality of the foreign policy issue).³³⁹ Rosati concludes that bureaucratic politics are most likely to have explanatory power if a foreign policy issue is of moderate importance, making the top decision makers' involvement low and, correspondingly, more mid-level bureaucrats taking charge of a given foreign policy.³⁴⁰ However, Preston and Hart suggest that it is possible to attribute *bureaupolitics* to any level of decision-making and any situational context.³⁴¹ As an example, they refer to Allison's account of CIA and US Air Force leaderships' bureaucratic struggle of who would pilot the U-2 that led to the delay in the US discovery of Soviet installations and intensification of the situation for Kennedy as the result.³⁴²

Allison's description of the bureaucratic political struggle in the ExComm and its consequent impact on US decisions during the event pinpoint the role that small group decision-making may play in foreign policy generation. Irving L. Janis conducted the first study of small group decision-making in relation to foreign policy outcomes through the concept of "groupthink" – which is a "deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing and moral judgment that results from in-group pressures."³⁴³ Janis argued that decision-making in small cohesive groups is detrimental to the quality of a foreign policy. According to Janis, such groups will inevitably produce poor decisions because the inclination towards maintenance of group uniformity and concurrence induces uncritical thinking thereby making an alternative (even if possibly better) policy choice become unnecessary, overlooked or purposefully rejected.

³³⁸ Jerel A. Rosati, and James M. Scott, *The Politics of United States Foreign Policy* (Boston, Mass: Wadsworth, 2011), 267.

³³⁹ Rosati, "Developing a Systematic Decision-Making Framework: Bureaucratic Politics in Perspective," *World Politics: A Quarterly Journal of International Relations* 33, no. 2 (1981): 245-252.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 249.

³⁴¹ Preston and Hart, "Understanding and Evaluating Bureaucratic Politics," 53.

³⁴² Allison, *Essence of Decision*.

³⁴³ Janis, *Victims of Groupthink: A Psychological Study of Foreign-Policy Decisions and Fiascoes* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1972), 9.

Meanwhile, Hart et al. disagree with evaluating any instances of group decision-making in such an uncomplimentary manner, they state that: “It seems eminently reasonable...to treat groupthink as a contingent phenomenon, rather than as a general property of foreign policy decision-making in high-level groups,” arguing that group decision-making has many variations apart from “groupthink.”³⁴⁴

Whereas it is possible to observe cases when foreign policy decisions were reached by a small group of policymakers at the top (e.g. Politburo or COBR committee), it is empirically difficult to differentiate between instances when the group decision-making prevailed, or a single powerful person overran the entire policymaking process. In the latter case, this invites the analytical focus to be shifted onto the individual properties of a leader. Indeed, as Hermann and Hagan comment on the importance of leaders for the foreign policymaking goes:

Leaders define states' international and domestic constraints. Based on their perceptions and interpretations, they build expectations, plan strategies, and urge actions on their governments that conform to their judgments about what is possible and likely to maintain them in their positions.³⁴⁵

Although this is a viable perspective on decision-making, at the same time Burke and Greenstein rightly remark that any leader (president) is not alone in making policy choices and that “the properties of the president's principal associates can be as significant as his own strengths and weaknesses.”³⁴⁶

Presidential foreign policymaking

The presidential foreign policymaking perspective serves as a nexus between small group and leader's policymaking. As George formulates: “Together, a president and his advisers can be said to form a group (or groups) in the sense that they engage in continuing, at least partly

³⁴⁴ Paul T. Hart, Eric K. Stern, and Bengt Sundelius, “Foreign Policy-Making at the Top: Political Group Dynamics,” in *Beyond Groupthink: Political Group dynamics and Foreign Policy-Making*, eds. Paul T. Hart, Eric K. Stern, and Bengt Sundelius (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 11.

³⁴⁵ Margaret G. Hermann, and Joe D. Hagan, “International Decision Making: Leadership Matters,” *Foreign Policy* 110 (1998): 126.

³⁴⁶ John P. Burke and Fred I. Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality: Decisions on Vietnam, 1954 and 1965* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation. 1989), 5.

structured, task-oriented relationships with each other.”³⁴⁷ In particular political systems and under certain conditions, the presidential advisory group becomes the “authoritative decision unit” that makes foreign policy choices and initiates foreign policy actions.³⁴⁸ A president’s advisory group is usually comprised by the members of the presidential administration and any other individuals inside and outside the state bureaucracy whom a president chooses to consult with.³⁴⁹ An examination of the group foreign policymaking adds much to the understanding of international behaviour of a state in circumstances when an advisory group is at the “apex of the policymaking process” and when such a group produces “crucial, formative policy decisions that shape significant part of a country’s foreign policy.”³⁵⁰ Indeed, there is a large volume of literature that studies crucial foreign policy episodes in the history of states, especially the history of the USA, that focuses on decision-making in presidential advisory teams and other types of small decision groups with a leading role for the chief state executive.³⁵¹ The empirical evidence suggests that, depending on the political structure of a state and situational circumstances, these advisory groups can take different forms and pursue different tasks. Such groups may be in place to constantly work on all matters of foreign and defence policy (e.g. Politburo in the USSR), they can be organized ad hoc to deal specifically with a particular foreign policy issue (e.g. ExComm in the US), or they can be engaged only during particular types of international situations (e.g. COBR committee in the UK).

Renshon and Renshon, in the discussion of strategic policymaking by presidents and their advisory teams raise important questions: “Which agencies or individuals will be involved in the decision-making process, and in what ways? Will individuals simply speak their minds, or will

³⁴⁷ Alexander L. George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice* (Boulder, Westview Press, 1980), 82.

³⁴⁸ Margaret G. Hermann, “How Decision Units Shape Foreign Policy: A Theoretical Framework,” *International Studies Review* 3, no. 2 (2001): 60-61.

³⁴⁹ Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 5.

³⁵⁰ Hart, Stern, Sundelius, “Foreign Policy-Making at the Top,” 8.

³⁵¹ For examples see Allison, *Essence of Decision*; Janis, *Victims of Groupthink*; George, *Presidential Decisionmaking*; Haney, *Organizing for Foreign Policy Crises*; Margaret G. Hermann and Thomas Preston, “Presidents, Advisers, and Foreign Policy: The Effect of Leadership Style on Executive Arrangements,” *Political Psychology* 15, no. 1 (1994): 75-96; and David Mitchell, *Making Foreign Policy: Presidential Management of the Decision-Making Process* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2005).

they have predefined 'roles'?"³⁵² George, analyzing the format of interactions between the president and his advisers, outlines the following purposes of the presidential advisory groups: the president uses advisers for information and advice, thus satisfying his *cognitive needs* before a decision is made; *the emotional support* is gained by the president from advisers so that the psychological burden of making important decisions with long-reaching consequences is shared; *the understanding and support* for whatever policy decision is made is mutually important for the president as a recipient, and for advisers, as they are ensured that their views are solicited and considered by their leader; *the political legitimacy* of a foreign policy decision is increased if such a decision was made collectively and responsibility is shared by properly constituted officials.³⁵³

Expanding George's classification of the functions of advisory groups, Hart et al. make an exhaustive overview of the range of possible roles and tasks, which various decision-making groups may perform in the foreign policymaking process.³⁵⁴ From the typology they develop, four group decision-making roles can be attributed specifically to the presidential advisory groups.

1. A notion of a group as a "think tank" encompasses high-level policymaking advisory groups and committees, which produce policy solutions on a wide range of international issues on both regular and ad hoc bases. The main purpose of such groups or teams is to collectively process information and elaborate policy options. The "think tank" metaphor underscores collective decision-making, which is found to be "demonstrably superior" to individual decision-making, especially in dealing with novel, complex, and unstructured problems.
2. A "command centre" group is a well-defined small-scale unit at the top of the state apparatus that has the ultimate decisional authority to make strategic foreign policy

³⁵² Jonathan Renshon and Stanley A. Renshon, "The Theory and Practice of Foreign Policy Decision Making," *Political Psychology* 29, no. 4 (2008): 518.

³⁵³ George, *Presidential Decisionmaking*.

³⁵⁴ Hart, Stern, Sundelius, "Foreign Policy-Making at the Top," 13-24.

choices and to control their implementation by the state bureaucracy. Such groups are usually observable when a high-salience foreign problem, such as international crisis, emerges. In these cases, decisional authority contracts at the highest level of the state apparatus. In presidential systems a “command centre” is a small group of the president’s key advisers who gather both in formal and informal meetings and assist the president in arriving at decisions, and subsequently realize them in practice.

3. A group as a “sanctuary” unit is formed to provide social and emotional support to the leader who has to make fateful decisions, such as, for example, going to war, entering into a disarmament treaty, or joining alliances. These decisions are often a choice between equally unattractive alternatives that lead to immediate repercussions and criticism. A close circle of the president’s most trusted associates and advisers who have similar worldviews, values and beliefs, often serve as a sanctuary from the overwhelming pressures and responsibilities he faces. The existence of such group may not be known to general public as the president often meets with his innermost associates unofficially.
4. A group as a “smokescreen” is the formal, official decision-making forum that the leader uses to legitimize decisions he has come to in other informal groups and settings. This is also useful for concealing actual policymaking processes at the highest level of state bureaucracy.³⁵⁵

Deriving from this typology different functional patterns that decision-making groups demonstrate, Hart et al. conclude that in the empirical reality, which is found to be ambiguous and fuzzy, one such group can perform different functions simultaneously. That is, both “think tank” and “sanctuary” roles may be fulfilled by the same team of president’s advisers working on a particular issue.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Ibid, 24-25.

Patrick Haney provides a more generic understanding of the presidential advisory group's function, which is to assist the president in processing information and provide him with advice and analysis.³⁵⁷ Therefore, what decision the president will make, to a certain extent depends on the type of advice he receives from his advisers. In instances when a president has formal or informal political authority to guide foreign relations of a state, the impact of the advisory group on the foreign policy outcome is noticeable. As noted by George: "all executives rely to some extent on a relatively small number of advisers and staff to ferret out information, make suggestions, develop and appraise policy options, and to monitor the implementation of decisions taken."³⁵⁸ At the same time, the president's personality and leadership style impact the structure of the advisory team, the roles of the advisers, the nature of debate and information processing, and the overall quality of decisions made.³⁵⁹ Here, the internal dynamics of the presidential advisory group is the primary focus of analysis because to "understand foreign policy choices, one needs to study the process by which they are made."³⁶⁰ As Stern and Sundelius contend:

When groups make consequential decisions or when executives depend heavily upon groups for information and advice, small variations in group interaction – assumptions left unchallenged, questions unasked or ignored, dissenters excluded – can have dramatic effects on the choices made (or not made) and, indirectly, even upon 'the fate of nations'.³⁶¹

Generalizations of intrinsic commonalities and differences in structures and procedural dynamics of advisory groups allow for the rendering of a typology of their formats. George's typology remains a basic classification scheme that determines and differentiates the types of the presidential advisory systems.³⁶² The author built upon Richard Johnson's three basic models of presidential administration management – formalistic, collegial, and competitive models of

³⁵⁷ Haney, *Organizing for Foreign Policy Crises*, 2.

³⁵⁸ George, *Presidential Decisionmaking*, 98.

³⁵⁹ Thomas Preston, "Following the Leader": The Impact of US Presidential Style upon Advisory Group Dynamics, Structure, and Decision," in Hart, Stern, Sundelius, eds., *Beyond Groupthink*, 197.

³⁶⁰ Hart, Stern, Sundelius, "Foreign Policy-Making at the Top," 6.

³⁶¹ Eric K. Stern, and Sundelius Bengt, "Understanding Small Group Decisions in Foreign Policy: Process Diagnosis and Research Procedure," in Hart, Stern, Sundelius, eds., *Beyond Groupthink*, 123.

³⁶² George, *Presidential Decisionmaking*.

decision-making – and applied them to the foreign policymaking.³⁶³ *The formalistic model* represents a hierarchical and strongly structured advisory group with the president on top – “well-defined procedures, hierarchical lines of communication, and a structured staff system” can be observed in such groups.³⁶⁴ Bargaining and open conflict is discouraged in such groups; policy advice is screened and channelled to the president by his official staff. Contrary to that model, *the competitive model* is conducive to the “open and uninhibited expression of diverse opinions, analysis, and advice.”³⁶⁵ The president here is in the centre of the information flow, which he receives from multiple sources, the structure of the advisory group is ambiguous, and jurisdictions are overlapping. In such groups advisers have the incentive and possibility to pursue their own vision, which may lead to conflict and the production of contradictory advice. The advisory system modelled as *collegial* has the president in the centre of information flow as well, however here teamwork is encouraged, not a competition as in the previous model. The collegial system attempts to implement the best practices of both formalistic and competitive models by trying to benefit from diversity and competition while avoiding parochialism. At the same time, stress on collegiality and teamwork helps to prevent infighting and bargaining among policymakers.

Haney bases his study of crisis decision-making by American presidents on these three models of advisory group. He follows historical cases of crisis policymaking and specifically looks at the ways the presidents have organized their advisory groups during crisis:

The project goes beyond noting that, for example, Eisenhower organized the White House in a ‘formalistic’ manner. It explores what happens inside the White House when a crisis begins. How does Eisenhower structure and manage a group of advisers for decision-making during a crisis?³⁶⁶

Haney treats models elaborated by George as ideal and abstract, while acknowledging the possible deviations from such ideal types. Thus, hybrids of these advisory models are deemed possible. He has revealed that, for example, Eisenhower employed a hybrid of the formalistic

³⁶³ Richard Tanner Johnson, *Managing the White House: An Intimate Study of the Presidency* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

³⁶⁴ George, *Presidential Decisionmaking*, 148.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 149.

³⁶⁶ Haney, *Organizing for Foreign Policy Crises*, 20.

and competitive models, while Johnson's advisory group was a hybrid of formalistic and collegial models.³⁶⁷ In other words, there are deviations from George's ideal models – such that these models “overlap, [and] share certain characteristics.”³⁶⁸

The variance in types of the advisory groups may be detected not only across presidential administrations but also during the term of the same president.³⁶⁹ Haney shows how presidents have adapted to foreign policy crises by means of making special arrangements in regard to the ways their advisory systems processes and structures were set up. In his study, Haney was able to trace instances when American presidents have actually changed the format of their advisory groups. The author concluded “there is no single model for decision-making that works at all times, for all crises, for all presidents.”³⁷⁰

Following the same logic of contingency of the presidential policymaking style, David Mitchell reveals changes in Bill Clinton's advisory group dynamics during two foreign policy episodes – a trade agreement with China and the Bosnian conflict.³⁷¹ Unlike Haney, Mitchell shows that the format of the presidential advisory group can change as well during non-crisis situations. As Mitchell stipulated in his earlier work on the temporal consistency of advisory group format:

There is the possibility that as the issue begins to evolve the needs of the president may change or the external environment may be altered, forcing a change. At the outset when an early position is being formulated, a president may start out with a more formal system, for example, but as events unfold and the president's attention increases and the need for quick decision-making becomes paramount, the president might change to an informal system.³⁷²

Although in this instance Mitchell refers to changes in the advisory structure corresponding to changes in the circumstances related to one particular issue, the same logic about changing systemic conditions or a president's attention can be applied to different issues that a particular leader is facing during the course of his presidency. In his later study of

³⁶⁷ Interestingly, Burke and Greenstein contend that Johnson (1974) was unable to attribute a particular model to Lyndon B. Johnson's administration. See Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, 6, n.5.

³⁶⁸ Haney, *Organizing for Foreign Policy Crises*, 44.

³⁶⁹ Ibid. See also: David Mitchell, “Does Context Matter? Advisory Systems and the Management of the Foreign Policy Decision-Making Process,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (2010): 631-659.

³⁷⁰ Haney, *Organizing for Foreign Policy Crises*, 39.

³⁷¹ Mitchell, “Does Context Matter?,” 631-659.

³⁷² Mitchell, *Making Foreign Policy*, 42.

Clinton's foreign policymaking Mitchell presumes that the style of presidential management of his advisory group was influenced by a wider range of types of the foreign policy issues a state confronts.³⁷³ The specific variable introduced by Mitchell is the salience of the issue, which he links to the domestic or international contexts of the problems Clinton had faced. Whereas the agreement with China was a high-salience issue for Clinton due to domestic political considerations, the Bosnian conflict was not an immediate focus of the president, which led Mitchell to hypothesize that the president had organized his advisory team differently in these two instances: "If a variance in management style can be found for these cases, then we can, with greater certainty, expect that presidents will alter their management style when confronted with other foreign policy issues that are different in terms of context."³⁷⁴ Although Mitchell was unable to verify his work's hypothesis, he did detect a variance in policymaking dynamics that came from the difference in the level of Clinton's engagement in decision-making in each case. When the president was personally involved, the group resembled a collegial style of decision-making, and when he delegated his authority to his advisers and was only making a final decision, the process approximated a formal group decision-making.³⁷⁵

Both Haney and Mitchell make an important assumption that the same foreign policy advisory team, comprised of the same members and led by the same president, can experience a change in a mode and format of interactions when it is dealing with different types of foreign policy issues. Depending of the situation they face, presidents decide in what format they want the advisory group to be organized and function. If we follow the logic of Haney's and Mitchell's works then it would be safe to presume that under specific circumstances presidents want to have information, advice and analysis organized one way, under other circumstances the other way; and this results in the changed management style of their advisory groups. Thus, George's presumption that the president's leadership style is constant and influences the decision-making structure only in one predictable way has to be challenged. It may be

³⁷³ Mitchell, "Does Context Matter?," 631-659.

³⁷⁴ Ibid, 633.

³⁷⁵ Ibid, 656.

theoretically possible to trace episodes when the variety of foreign policy issues that a nation is dealing with may lead to the variety of models of advisory groups mobilized during each episode.

Conceptual framework

The analysis of presidential policymaking seems to be one of the possible directions to integrate decisional links between the international system and foreign policy outputs within the neoclassical realist tradition. For example, Finel, calling for the integration of domestic-level variables to the (neo)realist explanations, argues that policymaking processes should be studied in more detail in order to link both ends of the causal chain:

Even when decision makers seem to be acting in response to ‘realist’ incentives and constraints, we cannot demonstrate causality. Realists can examine domestic politics to find evidence of systemic pressures at work, but without a theory of foreign policy linking systemic incentives with foreign policy outcomes, this qualitative work provides a very weak test since all sorts of domestic processes might, post hoc, be considered evidence of response to changing systemic incentives.³⁷⁶

Such a theory of foreign policy, which Finel calls “functional realism,” should integrate all variables in one sequential causal argument. In his theoretical model, the transmission belt that converts systemic imperatives to foreign policy outputs is not a set of some idiosyncratic factors in operation in a particular case study, but is a systemic process integrated to the explanation in the consistent and generalizable manner across cases. The explanation of a foreign policy should therefore examine how the state perceives systemic incentives, how these incentives affect policymaking processes, and how these processes impact a foreign policy output.³⁷⁷ The identification of policymaking processes emerged in response to a foreign policy problem should be analytically the first step in Finel’s model: “By asking, for example, how rising power might affect domestic coalitions, we might be able to provide tightly reasoned hypotheses about domestic processes that would allow for rigorous qualitative studies.”³⁷⁸ Finel presents a simplified example of how his theory can be operationalized. Growing relative power

³⁷⁶ Finel, “Black Box or Pandora's Box,” 200.

³⁷⁷ Ibid, 214-215.

³⁷⁸ Ibid, 219.

capabilities of a state may increase the strategic opportunities available to this state as it now can exercise greater influence and control over the international system. This increased influence may bring more potential benefits to domestic elites who are in charge of policymaking.

Therefore, Finel argues, the control of policymaking process should be increasingly tightened and centralized in states that experience growth in their relative power, since elites in these states would have an incentive to project a state's power to gain more benefits from the international system. Hence, change in relative power distribution simultaneously leads to change in domestic policymaking process and converts in a self-reinforcing manner to the foreign policy behaviour of the state.

Finel's assumptions run parallel to Jennifer Sterling-Folker's finding that domestic processes appear to be a dependent variable in the systemic realist theory.³⁷⁹ Sterling-Folker's argument suggests that the foreign policy analysis should at some stage focus on how domestic policymaking processes become transformed by the systemic environment:

Choices are not selected because they are objectively more rational, but because they make sense to actors given their contexts. Domestic process is such a context, but it does not exist in a vacuum. It is, instead, a context within a context, acting as a causal variable within a given environment. The anarchic environment encompasses all processes and exerts pressures on them, yet because domestic processes will engender their own interests and behaviours over time, their attributes will affect the choices actors make as they attempt to deal with the pressures of anarchy.³⁸⁰

Both Finel's and Sterling-Folker's contentions about the need to, at first, treat the policymaking process as a variable dependent on the international structure and then to trace the impact of the former on foreign policy outcomes, resembles the logic of James N. Rosenau's concept of the "issue area," which suggests that the character of the foreign policymaking process transforms depending on the particular international issue policymakers face.³⁸¹ In William C. Potter's interpretation of Rosenau's concept: "different categories of issues are assumed to evoke the participation in the decision-making process of different numbers of actors, who vary in their motivation and ability to act as well as in their readiness to engage in

³⁷⁹ Sterling-Folker, "Realist Environment," 18.

³⁸⁰ Ibid, 20.

³⁸¹ Rosenau, *The Scientific Study of Foreign Policy* (New York: Free Press, 1971).

political bargaining and compromise.”³⁸² Hence, presidential decision-making, incorporated into the neoclassical realist theory in the manner by which policymaking component is not only analyzed for its impact on the final foreign policy output, but also for its adaptation to a particular international situation, can provide a more detailed and conceptually integrated explanation of a foreign policy along the entire causal sequence.

The application of a neoclassical realist framework that straddles structural imperatives with policymaking variable to this empirical study therefore produces a three-fold research agenda. First, there is a need to study the way Kazakhstan’s leadership had identified and interpreted the specific systemic pressures or constraints with which it has become confronted. Strategic considerations of national interests, relative power, security and strategic threat in the ways they were perceived by policymakers enter the discussion. The next step is to examine how Nazarbayev responded to these perceived systemic imperatives in terms of the erection or transformation of the procedural and organizational settings of his advisory group. This task suggests a detailed investigation of policymaking structures and processes, for example, determining whether bureaucratic politics mattered, or assessing a particular manner in which Nazarbayev preferred to manage his advisory team. The final task is to examine how systemic factors were internalized by the republic’s policymaking apparatus, through examining strategies that were created to deal with particular international issues. Of a particular interest at this stage are the policy alternatives and options first discussed and then chosen by the Kazakhstani leadership as they may illuminate the internal dynamics of the policymaking processes and hierarchy of the policymaking apparatus. Combined, answers to these questions can produce a plausible account of why and how a particular foreign policy had been initiated and implemented and, more broadly, approximate the understanding of Kazakhstan’s foreign policy behaviour along some historical continuum.³⁸³

³⁸² Potter, “Issue Area and Foreign Policy Analysis,” *International Organization* 34, no. 3 (1980): 407.

³⁸³ This analytical sequence is similar in logic to Anders Wivel’s suggestion that a “realist foreign policy analysis” (more in the neoclassical realist tradition) needs to “ideally proceed in stages from the parsimonious and highly general starting point in structural realism to the rich case studies allowing us to explain the specific foreign policy

The nature of research tasks framed by this conceptual framework invites the use of multiple foreign policy decision-making analysis perspectives. The principal argument of the thesis concerning the agency-driven Kazakhstani foreign policy will be assessed through the exploration and cross-comparison of Nazarbayev's policymaking in advisory groups in place during the three selected cases in the diplomatic history of the republic. The exploration of a particular role a presidential advisory group had fulfilled in each case according to the classification by Hart et al. – "think tank"; "command centre"; "sanctuary"; "smokescreen" – will improve the understanding of how Almaty dealt with international constraints. The investigation of Nazarbayev's preferred format of advisory teams mobilized to handle each specific international issue along the lines of George's archetypical models of presidential advisory groups – formal, collegial, and competitive – will additionally illuminate the republic's decision-making processes and structures, as well as elucidate Nazarbayev's own role as a foreign policymaker. Furthermore, the possible variance in ways president Nazarbayev had structured and managed his advisory group and in the roles these groups performed during each episode should additionally support the argument that Kazakhstan's foreign policies were, at least to some extent, generated internally by the republic's leadership, rather than entirely externally imposed by foreign powers. Modifications of the policymaking apparatus in reaction to different international issues could be indicative of the fact that Kazakhstan's leadership had carefully planned its foreign policy responses to these issues and thus at least some measure of strategic intent and agency was present.

It so far has been established that the effect over foreign policy can be attributed both to the systemic incentives and the decision-making process through which these incentives are translated into a foreign policy output. Thus, a detailed examination of policymaking during a particular historical episode should assist in rendering factors of primary and secondary

of individual countries." See Wivel, "Explaining Why State X Made a Certain Move Last Tuesday: The Promise and Limitations of Realist Foreign Policy Analysis," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 8, no. 4 (2005): 374.

importance. The next three chapters will examine empirical evidence in order to reveal decision-making practices employed by Almaty policymakers in the 1990s.

Chapter IV: The evolution of the foreign policy and institutionalization of the policymaking apparatus

Life rarely gives such chances. Diplomats present here today are on the threshold of destiny. Maybe one day chronographers will remember those who created a diplomatic service of the independent Kazakhstan. Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Zhomart Tokaev, *Keynote Speech at the Ministerial Collegium, Almaty, 8 February 1994.*

Commencing Kazakhstan's foreign policy ab initio was a challenging and demanding task that the republic's leadership had to manage under critical internal and uncertain external circumstances. Certainly, Kazakhstan's foreign policymakers had envisioned some contours of the republic's international politics even before the republic became independent. They were able to gain intermittent diplomatic exposure during the transitional period between the country's sovereignty and independence.³⁸⁴ Yet, in December 1991, when Kazakhstan proclaimed itself independent, Nazarbayev and other high-ranking authorities faced an entirely different totality of foreign policy issues (and now without Moscow's backing). From the vantage point of Kazakhstan's policymakers, the situation was critical, as they believed that statehood itself was jeopardized by the new international context. Kazakhstan's vulnerable geostrategic position at the juncture of China and Russia, and immediate political and security risks emanating from

³⁸⁴ Kazakhstan's sovereignty within the USSR was declared on 25 October 1990. Kazakhstan's independence was proclaimed on 16 December 1991. The right to practice a foreign policy by sovereign republics within the USSR was planned to be included in the provisions of the "Treaty on the Union of the Sovereign States" that never came to life. For the draft text of the Treaty see *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, 28 June 1991.

Interestingly, the first letter of Nazarbayev as the President of the Kazakh SSR to US State Secretary James A. Baker was sent as early as March 1991, and via the republic's own diplomatic channels. The letter reads: "I confirm the willingness of the Kazakh SSR to expand and deepen political, economic, humanitarian, and cultural links with the USA"; the handwritten remark on the letter states: "communicated via Kazakh SSR's MFA channels (*peredano po kanalami MID KazSSR*)."

APRK, f. 7, op. 1, d. 402, l. 5. As noted earlier, in Abazov's opinion, the socialization of Kazakhstani party leaders and, even though limited, work experience of few Kazakh diplomats in the Soviet foreign ministry's central apparatus and missions abroad had ensured a more sustainable formation of foreign policy practices. See Abazov, "Practice of Foreign Policymaking," 39. Gleason also notes this: "These leaders [Central Asian presidents] relied for advice and assistance upon high officials whose careers had been built on the Soviet ladder of advancement. These individuals likewise relied upon Soviet-era line-level officials and middle managers to manage the affairs of the bureaucracies." See Gleason, "Foreign Policy and Domestic Reform," 16.

these overwhelmingly powerful neighbours prompted the republic's leadership to develop strong existential sentiments that were consequently reflected in policy planning.

As a policy response to these new developments president Nazarbayev and his associates soon elaborated a peculiar foreign policy behavioural model believed to be an effective strategy to defend national interests at the time. This model was subsequently labelled a *multivector foreign policy* and became a motto in the republic's course of foreign affairs. In practice, however, the underlying principle of multivectorism was the strategy of balancing between great powers and not an omnidirectional orientation of the country, as it is often described or implied. As Starr observes:

Linking these three pillars (Russia, China, and USA) is the concept of *balance*, the achievement of which at any point in time is the main tactical challenge....It is a strategy and not simply a fog of high-flow rhetoric. It provides clear goals and first principles for action, yet allows of diverse tactical solutions.³⁸⁵

This principle of balancing (but not multivectorism) was indeed explicitly manifest in policy papers and strategic concepts contemporaneous to the initial period of Kazakhstan's independence.

The ability of different governmental institutions to produce prudent and consolidated foreign affairs strategy may come as a surprise given the under-institutionalization and ambiguity of policymaking in the beginning of the 1990s. At this stage, the roles of policymaking actors were diffused and their functions often overlapped. Despite these challenging operational circumstances Almaty policymakers were able to collectively contribute to Nazarbayev's efforts to chart the pragmatic external affairs course, while retaining unanimity in their worldviews and policy orientations.

Foreign policy establishments, however, did not demonstrate this consentience when the hierarchy of policymaking organizations was concerned. In 1993, the MFA and the ID AP engaged in a bitter turf war between each other that only the president could put to an end. Nazarbayev's interference in the bureaucratic confrontation between the foreign ministry and the

³⁸⁵ Starr, "Kazakhstan's Security Strategy," 14. Emphasis in original.

subdivision of his administration was not surprising, considering the escalation of tensions between these institutions and the president's special fondness for international politics.

According to Nazarbayev's vision, the foreign ministry eventually had become the principal policymaking body. As was demonstrated in instances of presidential diplomacy towards China and Russia, it was the foreign ministry that provided main policy input, whereas the International Department coordinated the exchange of information and carried out other technical functions. The foreign ministry's records of diplomatic negotiations with Beijing and Moscow reveal in detail the ministry's contribution, as well as tell about Nazarbayev's personal involvement in foreign affairs, and, in general, expose many aspects of the presidential advisory team operational and policy planning.

This chapter will first explore the deployment of the concept of multivectorism in the official discourse and alternative definitions of the republic's foreign affairs. Then the chapter will review strategic dilemmas and goals Almaty's policymakers were confronted with as they deliberated on the republic's future in the international arena. Policy papers examined later in the chapter verify the argument that there was a deliberate and intricate strategy of balancing between great powers. This is followed by an investigation of the Kazakhstani inter-institutional politics in their conflicting facet, as the correspondence between the MFA, ID AP, and the president suggests. The last empirical section reconstructs Nazarbayev's politics in the Chinese and Russian directions in order to illustrate the president's personal contribution and depict a full cycle of foreign policymaking, from the development of a strategy to its implementation. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the general trends in the evolution of Kazakhstani foreign policymaking at the initial stage of the republic's existence.

Euphemistic foreign policy concept

There has been much written in Kazakhstani and Western literature about a multivector foreign policy that Kazakhstan has been following for the past two decades.³⁸⁶ From a conventional point of view multivectorism indicates a *tous azimuth*, non-ideological course towards all possible external actors. Stated differently, “this concept should be understood as the renunciation of an unequivocal and exclusive orientation toward any external force – a great power, a political bloc, a civilization, or any other regional association.”³⁸⁷ Such a definition appears more comprehensible if contrasted against other alternative foreign strategies. For example, juxtaposed to a policy of a state that follows a single-handed foreign orientation toward one particular international partner or block, at the expense of relations with others (e.g. a Cold War “satellite state”); or, on the other polarity, a state that deliberately chooses an isolationist policy, encapsulating itself from external influences (North Korea being an extreme example). The term itself was derived from the official foreign policy rhetoric of the president and other high-ranking authorities in the 1990s.³⁸⁸ In Nazarbayev’s words, multivectorism is a “development of friendly and predictable relations with all states, which play significant [roles] in global affairs and present a practical interest to the nation.”³⁸⁹

Even though the definition of multivectorism is conventionally applied to the broad spectrum of Kazakhstan’s external activities and chronologically covers the entire period of the republic’s foreign affairs since the inception of independence, the expression itself did not appear as early. The term “multivector foreign policy” was first introduced into the official discourse by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1995. In that year, the ministry published a

³⁸⁶ As was discussed in chapter II.

³⁸⁷ Murat Laumulin, *The Geopolitics of XXI Century in Central Asia* (Almaty: KISI, 2007), 213.

³⁸⁸ For the discussion of the conception of multivectorism within the context of official policy rhetoric see Laumulin, “Triumf,” and Murat Laumulin, “Mnogovektornost’ kak Ona Est’,” *Kontinent* 3, no. 115 (2004): 20-23; Nikolai Kuz’mín, “V Ekspornom Iсполnenii,” *Expert Kazakhstan* 47 (December 2008), <http://expertonline.kz/a4607/>; and Abdunabi Sattorzoda, “Nekotirie teoreticheskie aspekty mnogovektornosti vo vnesheinei politike gosudarstv Tsentral’noi Azii,” *Vremya Vostoka* (June 2009), <http://www.easttime.ru/reganalitic/1/206.html>.

³⁸⁹ President Nazarbayev’s speech at the Collegium of the MFA, 2000. Cited in Marat Shaikhutdinov, “Prezident Nazarbayev i formirovanie vneshnepoliticheskoi strategii Respubliki Kazakhstan,” *Institute of World Economics and Politics* (July 2008), http://iwep.kz/stariysite/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1456&Itemid=44.

brochure containing the collection of speeches and articles presented at the Council on the Foreign Policy of Kazakhstan in Almaty on 15 February 1995. This Council was the first large meeting of policymakers from different state institutions devoted to the discussion of the progress of the Kazakhstani diplomacy and to the planning of a future foreign policy strategy. In the preface to this brochure, prepared by the ministerial editorial board headed by a newly appointed minister Tokaev, the nation's external strategy was characterized in the following way: "Due to the peculiarities of its geographic location, Kazakhstan adheres to the principles of *multivectorism*, realizing a course of development of balanced relations with both European and Asian nations."³⁹⁰ This was one of the earliest documents where Kazakhstani officials conveyed the notion of multivectorism. The term was not featured in the preceding documentation, both internal and public.³⁹¹

Interestingly enough, the president in his speech at this milestone policy meeting did not advert to the term, limiting the description of the foreign policy as "balanced and multilateral."³⁹² Only a year later, in the 1996 annual address, Nazarbayev called for the foreign policy "to have a multivector character; not to dogmatically close on just a few priorities; and be flexible, prudent, and balanced."³⁹³ The notion of multivectorism has thereafter sporadically emerged and disappeared from the official discourse. A few examples will suffice here. In the 1997 strategic document, *Kazakhstan 2030*, the term multivectorism was not used to define a foreign policy posture. Nazarbayev deployed the metaphor of the "Snow Leopard" who is peaceful but will never give away what belongs to him.³⁹⁴ Neither it is likely that this idiom was

³⁹⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, *Vneshniaia Politika Kazakhstana. Sbornik Statei* (Almaty-Moskva: MID RK, 1995), 3. Emphasis added.

³⁹¹ The year 1995 as the approximate chronological period of introduction of the term multivectorism was confirmed by Murat Laumulin, interview with the author, 20 June 2013, Almaty.

³⁹² Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Vneshniaia Politika*, 9.

³⁹³ "The Annual Address to the People of Kazakhstan, 7 October 1996," Nursultan Nazarbayev, *Nursultan Nazarbayev's personal website*, accessed 10 August 2013, http://personal.akorda.kz/upload/hronika/hronika_swf/1996-1997/index.html.

³⁹⁴ The text of the strategy reads: "It will never be the first to attack anyone, ever prone to avoiding direct clashes. However, any time when his freedom, habitation or descendants come to be threatened, the animal would defend them with all its might." See "The Annual Address to the People of Kazakhstan, 16 October 1997," Nursultan Nazarbayev, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, accessed 12 August 2012, http://mfa.gov.kz/en/#!/information_about_kazakhstan/kazakhstan-2030/.

introduced to the first Foreign Policy Concept (*Kontseptsiia Vneshnei Politiki*), enacted in 1995, where it was substituted by the notion of *balanced relations*.³⁹⁵ Still, Tokaev used the idea of multivectorism extensively in his works that were first published just a few years after the adoption of the Foreign Policy Concept and in which he explains the principles of the republic's external strategy.³⁹⁶ Tokaev describes the notion of multivectorism as the one that "presupposes increased attention of establishment and development of friendly and mutually advantageous relations with influential nations of Asia and Europe."³⁹⁷ This principle of openness to any part of the world is strikingly similar to another foreign policy concept attributed to the Kazakhstani diplomacy of the 1990s – the *Eurasian Bridge* philosophy.

The first direct reference to the republic's role as a strategic transcontinental link was made in the earliest programmatic document of Kazakhstan, "*A Strategy of the Establishment and Development of Kazakhstan as a Sovereign State on 16 May 1992*": "Today Kazakhstan can play a strategically important role of the communication link between Europe, post-Soviet Asia, rapidly progressing Asia-Pacific, and South of Asia."³⁹⁸ Passolt argues that this strategy was dually directed inside and outside the republic because of the need to appease the large Russian population while advertising the country's openness to the nations on the both sides of the Eurasian continent.³⁹⁹ This strategic Eurasian Bridge rhetoric has further evolved into the Eurasianism doctrine of integration of the post-Soviet space, first stipulated by Nazarbayev in Moscow in 1994.⁴⁰⁰ The latter doctrine of Eurasianism, however, was quite different from the original Eurasian Bridge concept. Laumulin defines the Eurasian Bridge policy: "in the early 1990s, the government projected the concept of the Eurasian Bridge, showing that Kazakhstan

³⁹⁵ This argument is based on the analysis of the texts of draft policy papers, which possibly were subsequently included in the content of the Concept. For the draft policy papers see "Main directions of the foreign policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan (analysis and assessment)," *MFA*, 1994-1995. APRK f. 175NL, op. 1, d. 156.

³⁹⁶ Tokaev, *Pod Stigom*; and *Vneshniaia Politika*.

³⁹⁷ Kassym-Zhomart Tokaev, *Ocherki Diplomata. Pod Stigom Nezavisimosti* (Almaty: Zhibek Zholy, 2007b), 14.

³⁹⁸ Nursultan Nazarbayev, "A Strategy for the Establishment and Development of Kazakhstan as a Sovereign State," *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, 16 May 1992.

³⁹⁹ Passolt, "Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy," 102-105.

⁴⁰⁰ For the text of the president's public lecture in the Moscow State University on 29 March 1994, where Nazarbayev outlined basic ideas of the Eurasian Union see G. Nurymbetova and R. Kudaibergenov, *Vneshnepoliticheskie Initsiativy Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan N.A.Nazarbaeva* (Almaty: Kazak Entsiklopediiasy, 2010), 46-52.

belongs both to Europe and Asia with respect to geography, culture, history, and civilization.”⁴⁰¹

This more constructivist interpretation is different from the economic integrationist appeals made by Nazarbayev in 1994.⁴⁰² While it is hard to judge why the connotation of the Eurasian Bridge concept underwent such evolution in the president’s rhetoric, an assumption can be made that Nazarbayev felt a discursive appeal of this concept and for him it appeared as a more versatile notion, applicable to a wide range of continental affairs.

Laumulin argues that the Eurasian Bridge concept preceded the multivector policy:

“Later on, in the late 1990s, the concept [of the Eurasian Bridge] transformed into the so-called principle of multivector diplomacy.”⁴⁰³ Similarly, in Gleason’s interpretation, the initial concept of “Eurasian-ness” – “the idea of the close linkages among the peoples of the Central Eurasian landmass” has evolved into the concept of multivector policy that was aimed at “maintaining a balanced distance from Russia, remaining neither too close nor too distant.”⁴⁰⁴ In this vein, the Eurasian Bridge concept may be considered as the transitional formulation of the omnidirectional foreign policy of Kazakhstan. As Laumulin comments, “the president’s constant statements that Kazakhstan lays in the heart of Asia and serves as the way that links Europe and Asia could be interpreted as the attempt to conceptually formulate the international status of the republic.”⁴⁰⁵ Overall, the delineation between the Eurasian bridging strategy and multivectorism is convoluted. Consider Tokaev’s words at the ministerial Collegium on February 1994: “The peculiarity of the geopolitical position of Kazakhstan that serves as a natural linking role between East and West, Asia and Europe, presupposes an increased flexibility, special sensitivity, and an adequate reaction towards events in the external domain.”⁴⁰⁶ This Eurasian link notion, much like multivectorism later on, was likely to be an umbrella concept covering the entire spectrum of broadly oriented geographical and functional aspects of Almaty’s external

⁴⁰¹ Laumulin, *Geopolitics of XXI century*, 242.

⁴⁰² See Cummings, “Eurasian bridge,” for an analysis of Eurasianism as an external and internal policy instrument.

⁴⁰³ Laumulin, *Geopolitics of XXI century*, 242.

⁴⁰⁴ Gleason, “Russia and Central Asia’s Multivector Foreign Policies,” 251.

⁴⁰⁵ Laumulin, *Kazakhstan v Sovremennikh*, 140.

⁴⁰⁶ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 824, l. 28.

affairs. Nazarbayev, in one of his earliest foreign policy statements, even before the independence, stipulated this openness: “Geographic positioning and social potential of the republic facilitate Kazakhstan’s orientation towards both Asia-Pacific and Euro-Atlantic regions.”⁴⁰⁷ After all, this rather vague foreign policy provision can be equally attributed to the Eurasian Bridge principle or, as Passolt and Gleason do, to multivectorism.⁴⁰⁸

However it is the principle of multivectorism, and not the Eurasian Bridge doctrine, that is considered by Kazakhstani experts and policymakers alike to be fundamental to the republic’s foreign policy. For example, Ermukhamed Ertysbaev notes that this policy has become “the conscious doctrine of Kazakhstan in the sphere of international affairs.”⁴⁰⁹ Meanwhile, the ubiquity of the notion of multivectorism in the academic literature on one hand and its irregular utilization and substitution by other terms in the official discourse on the other, confounds the understanding of the phenomenon. From the operationalization point of view, what is the multivector policy? Is it a strategic doctrine followed by the republic’s leadership, is it a delineating definition of the specific foreign strategy the country follows, or is it an academic notion, occasionally borrowed by officials to be included to their public statements? Finding an answer to these questions seems to be precursory to the assessment of the foreign policy behaviour of Kazakhstan.

Laumulin argues that in reality the concept of multivectorism was basically a euphemism for the actual policy of balancing between great powers.⁴¹⁰ As Laumulin noted elsewhere:

⁴⁰⁷ “The Inaugural Address to the Supreme Soviet, 10 December 1991,” Nursultan Nazarbayev, *Nursultan Nazarbayev’s personal website*, accessed 29 July 2013, http://personal.akorda.kz/upload/hronika/hronika_swf/1990-1991/index.html.

⁴⁰⁸ Passolt, “Kazakhstan’s Foreign Policy,” 112; Gleason, “Russia and Central Asia’s Multivector Foreign Policies,” 251.

⁴⁰⁹ Ertysbaev, *Kazakhstan i Nazarbaev: Logika Peremen* (Astana: Elorda, 2001), 509.

⁴¹⁰ Laumulin, “Mnogovektornost’,” 20.

Across the literature on the topic written in Russian the term *balansirovanie* implies not a state’s strategy to seek defensive collations externally, or to build up military power internally, as prescribed by the neorealist theorizing, but rather a strategy for ensuring a balance in foreign relations with different external entities. Compare the understanding of Kazakhstan’s balancing with Schweller’s neorealist definition: “Balancing means the creation or aggregation of military power through internal mobilization or the forging of alliances to prevent or deter the territorial occupation or political and military domination of the state by a foreign power or coalition.” See Schweller, “Unanswered Threats,” 166.

However paradoxically, during the first half of that decade the declared multi-vector foreign policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan did not appear in reality. It was more dualistic, a policy of balance between Russia and America, between the West and the CIS.⁴¹¹

Indeed, across the official foreign policy discourse the term “balanced foreign policy” often comes as a substitute to the multivector foreign policy. This may not necessarily come as wordplay, since the two notions bear two slightly different connotations. If the former signifies Almaty’s purposeful play on the overlaps of the great power’s interests, than the latter is a broader and more vague definition. They are, however, not mutually exclusive. Depending on the audience, either of the notions could have been used by Kazakhstani leadership and diplomats. For instance, when speaking with the American or Chinese colleagues, multivectorism comes as a more politically correct definition. On the other hand, the term balancing seems to be a more precise expression to use for a discussion of the long-term foreign policy priorities in the security sphere with fellow diplomats. This parallels Gleason’s argument about the purpose of the “multivectorism” label, which he makes in reference to Central Asian states’ external relations that bypass Moscow:

Russia is too big and too close to ignore, too aggressive to contest. At the same time, Russia is not easy to interact with simply as an equal partner. Central Asian policy officials use the concept of ‘multivector foreign policy’ to *explain and justify* their diplomatic and security relationships with other countries within the Central Asian region and with other countries outside the region and with international organizations.⁴¹²

Moreover, often both definitions are pooled together. For example, in a 2004 interview Tokaev plainly used both terms: “Balanced, multivector foreign policy – it is not a whim, but an objective necessity. Our historic mission, if you want. In other words, Kazakhstan can not, [and] does not have a right to conduct a different policy.”⁴¹³ In Ertysbaev’s interpretation, multivectorism and balancing serve as the two foundations of Kazakhstan’s foreign policy and safeguards of national interests.⁴¹⁴ It seems that for the Kazakhstani leadership the terms became interchangeable at some point in the mid-1990s.

⁴¹¹ Laumulin, *Geopolitics of XXI century*, 214.

⁴¹² Gleason, “Russia and Central Asia’s Multivector Foreign Policies,” 244. Emphasis added.

⁴¹³ Kassym-Zhomart Tokaev, quoted in Laumulin, “Mnogovektornost’,” 16.

⁴¹⁴ Ertysbaev, *Kazakhstan i Nazarbaev*, 509.

This finding is the key to understanding what Almaty politicians and diplomats meant when they enunciated the multivector foreign policy idiom. For the president and his key advisers, both notions of a balanced policy and multivectorism (and, earlier, the Eurasian Bridge) stand for the same strategic foreign policy principle of prevention a single *pro-state X* orientation and capitalization of the intersecting interests of great powers – namely Russia, China, and the USA. Such an understanding casts the republic’s foreign policy in a different light. The multivector policy, therefore, comes as an official title for a purposeful, intricate strategy that has guided Almaty’s foreign policy decisions. Marat Shaikhutdinov acknowledges that the “multivectorism is not only a mean and method of survival, but also of the strengthening of the geopolitical and international subjectivity in the face of more powerful states.”⁴¹⁵ It might not necessarily have been labelled multivector policy all the time, but the principle of balancing between great powers, embedded in multivectorism, has been maintained in Kazakhstan’s outlook. Meanwhile, as will be shown below, this balancing strategy was believed to be the optimal response to the systemic constraints as they were seen from the vantage point of Almaty’s policymakers.

External challenges of independence

Nazarbayev’s close associate, Makhmud Kasymbekov, quotes president’s retrospective vision of the situation of Kazakhstan at the eve of independence:

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union many rapacious looks were turned on Kazakh lands. I shall not give their names or colours: nation’s historians know them well.⁴¹⁶

This perception of strategic vulnerability and the need for alertness is illustrative of the sentiments that dominated foreign policy discourse in the initial period of independence and which eventually predetermined a preference for the strategic balancing behaviour model. For example, one internal policy paper prepared in 1992 states that the first strategic goal of

⁴¹⁵ Shaikhutdinov, *Geopolitika, Globalistika i Teoriia Natsional’noi Bezopasnosti*, 268.

⁴¹⁶ Kasymbekov, *Perviy. Ocherki o Prezidente Respubliki Kazakhstan* (Astana: Foliant, 2011), 158.

Kazakhstan's foreign policy is to safeguard state sovereignty and territorial integrity of the republic.⁴¹⁷ Tokaev openly writes in a similar perceptual paradigm:

After the collapse of the Soviet Union Kazakhstan faced a difficult dilemma: which foreign policy it needs to pursue in order to better *protect* its interests? This task was complicated by the peculiar geopolitical location of the young state and uneasy demographics inherited from the times of the colonial past.⁴¹⁸

Also note that here Tokaev is implying a need to *safeguard* the national interests, rather than seeking ways to *realize* them.

Indeed, there was much to be concerned about at this dramatic period at the inception of independence. To name a few: a long, unprotected and disputed border with China; a large Slavic population who were not readily self-identifying themselves as citizens of the newly independent republic; and a neo-imperialist revival in Russia.⁴¹⁹ Laumulin portrays the dramatic nature of the situation in December 1991:

To say that Kazakhstan after the fall of the Soviet Union found itself in a complicated situation is to tell almost nothing. The situation was extremely complicated. Traps and dilemmas were set by Kazakhstan's geography and geopolitics, demographics and history, economy and politics.⁴²⁰

Furthermore, in reference to a possible direct military threat, one internal policy document stipulates that Kazakhstan's military potential neither represents a threat to neighbouring states nor does it have sufficient resources for independent defence capabilities in the existing geopolitical environment.⁴²¹ Moreover, in the first of the nation's programmatic documents Nazarbayev publicly acknowledged the existence of perceived potential military threats: 1) aspiration of certain nations or coalitions to dominate on the global or regional level and attempts to resolute disputes through military means; 2) presence of powerful armed forces

⁴¹⁷ "Foreign Policy and National Security Concept of the Republic of Kazakhstan," *CSS*, first half of 1992. APRK f. 166N, op. 1, d. 13, l. 7.

⁴¹⁸ Kassym-Zhomart Tokaev, *Ocherki Diplomata. Preodolenie* (Almaty: Zhibek Zholy, 2007a), 131. Emphasis added.

⁴¹⁹ The 1993 political report of Kazakhstani embassy in Russia reads: "It is necessary to note that there are powerful political forces in Russia which aim to complicate relations between two nations and cause interethnic tensions in Kazakhstan. This is especially notable in the electoral period. In particular, there were attempts on part of these forces to resuscitate territorial issue and to acuminiate the question of Russian population." APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2156, l. 31. For more on these concerns see Abazov, "Practice of Foreign Policymaking"; Laumulin, *Kazakhstan v Sovremennikh*; Olcott, *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled promise*; Starr, "Kazakhstan's Security Strategy"; and Gleason, "Russia and Central Asia's Multivector Foreign Policies."

⁴²⁰ Laumulin, *Tsentral'naia Aziia. Vol.3*, 251.

⁴²¹ "Main directions of the foreign policy." APRK f. 175NL, op. 1, d. 156, l. 8.

groupings in certain states or coalitions, and the continued presence of their basing systems including territories near Kazakhstan's borders; 3) internal political instability and armed interstate conflicts; 4) build-up of military potential by certain states.⁴²² These enormous challenges led Nazarbayev and his group of security and foreign policy advisers to be preoccupied with the concern that outside actors may threaten the statehood of the newly born nation. This belief predetermined the inclination of the Kazakhstani leadership towards the survivalist logic in handling the republic's foreign relations.

This defensive rationale and the compelling drive for political and security resilience dictated the logic of foreign policy of the time, as attitudes of Nazarbayev's advisory team defined the republic's foreign policy goals and orientations. Such a *weltanschauung* of the Kazakhstani leadership's narrowed the republic's foreign strategic policy outlook to only a few nations (or vectors) that were seen as likely sources of threat. These were the two adjoined states, which happened to be nuclear powers with great military and population resources – Russia and China. Naturally, the Kazakhstani policymakers regarded relations with Moscow and Beijing as being of primary importance. At the same time, another important player – the USA was also crucial to account for in the balancing game. As Shirin Akiner explains the balancing dynamics, Almaty, through maintenance of relations with these three great powers, ensured “that potential predatory advances from any one of them will be blocked by the others. This in turn safeguards Kazakhstan's territorial integrity, as well as its political and economic independence.”⁴²³ Nevertheless, notwithstanding the importance of the USA in the securitization of the republic's sovereignty, the American direction of Kazakhstan's foreign relations was less influenced by the perception of threat. In a larger part due to the fact that during the initial period of bilateral relations, the diplomatic agenda of Almaty and Washington was imbued by issues of nuclear disarmament.⁴²⁴ Therefore, the initial strategic outlook was explicitly bi-vector in nature.

⁴²² Nazarbayev, “Strategy.”

⁴²³ Akiner, “Evolution of Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy: 1991-2011,” *Journal of Turkish Weekly*, 6 (February 2013), <http://www.turkishweekly.net/article/406/evolution-of-kazakhstan-39-s-foreign-policy-1991-2011.html>.

⁴²⁴ Kazakhstan's nuclear politics are discussed in Chapter V, below.

Nazarbayev had to define a strategy to manoeuvre between “the immeasurably more powerful neighbours of Russia and China.”⁴²⁵ On practical terms, the president needed to adopt a policy that would preserve the de facto borders of the ex-Kazakh SSR and make sure that the republic was secured against possible hostile actions by its neighbours.⁴²⁶ As a result of this situational context, all principal foreign policy actions, initiatives, and moves were dictated by this survivalist rationale.

Planning the defensive balancing

Naturally, this defensive strategic outlook at some point had to be translated into the content of strategic policy documents that would guide Almaty’s external affairs, particularly in relations to Moscow and Beijing. Paradoxically, the first official Foreign Policy Concept (*Kontsepsiia Vneshnei Politiki*) was adopted only in 1995. A foreign policy concept is the usual form that strategic documents on external relations take on the post-Soviet territory and diplomats and politicians use them as official guidelines and reference frameworks. For example, such concepts were officially endorsed in Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Russia.⁴²⁷ The Russian document presents “a systemic description of basic principles, priorities, goals and objectives of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation.”⁴²⁸ In Kazakhstan, foreign policy concepts are a state secret and therefore no official definition can be obtained. In general, in Kazakhstani legal terms, a concept is the generic form of the official document used in strategic planning, which “reflects general vision of the development of a particular sphere, justification of the change of the respective

⁴²⁵ Dannreuther, *Creating New States*, 73.

⁴²⁶ In Nazarbayev’s words: “However independent a state is, until the nation’s border is regulated, and until your integrity and indivisibility is recognized by all neighbours, there is no much use of this independence. ... The state is blood, flesh, cradle and tombs of fathers. The border is a ‘body’ of statehood. Until the border problem is solved, the problem of stability can not be solved” (Cited in Kasymbekov, *Perviy*, 159-160). This reflection is quite representative of the sentiments of the republic’s elite at the time.

⁴²⁷ See, respectively, “Kontsepsiia Vneshnei Politiki Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic*, accessed 8 April 2012, http://www.mfa.kg/acts/koncepciya-vneshnei-politiki-kr_ru.html; “Kontsepsiia Vneshnei Politiki Respubliki Moldova (Proekt),” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova*, accessed 8 April 2012, <http://www.iisr.ru/kvprm.html>; “Kontsepsiia Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, accessed 8 April 2012, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/6D84DDEDEDBF7DA644257B160051BF7E;

⁴²⁸ “Kontsepsiia Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, accessed 8 April 2012 http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/6D84DDEDEDBF7DA644257B160051BF7E;

state policy, proposals and solutions of the problematic issues of this sphere.”⁴²⁹ Each foreign policy concept is reviewed and approved by the Security Council. Nikolai Kuz'min observes that Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy Concept is “a view of the world, of the international system, of problems we are facing and the ways to solve them,” and adds that the content of a foreign policy concept was not hidden from the public as some of its provisions would be included in the president's annual address.⁴³⁰ Nazarbayev, speaking before the foreign ministry's Collegium in November 2008, described the future content of a new Foreign Policy Concept in the following way: “The document should contain an advanced analysis of the contemporary situation in the world, clearly define positions of the nation on the most important international issues, and Kazakhstan's foreign policy interests and role in global and regional affairs.”⁴³¹

On the other hand, considering the intensity of diplomatic activity since independence in December 1991, the question arises about the guidelines and principles that steered the republic's foreign policy before the first Concept was enacted in 1995. Three years, especially during such a decisive period, is a rather long deadline. There existed, however, several transitional documents that were used as foreign and security policy guidelines by the MFA and the president. Some of them took the form of public programmatic documents, some were the policy papers addressed to Nazarbayev and some were the internal foreign ministry's drafts and work plans.

The first public document that had discussed, among other issues, the immediate and long-term foreign policy goals of the republic was “*A Strategy for the Establishment and Development of Kazakhstan as a Sovereign State*” proclaimed in May 1992 (the May 1992 Strategy).⁴³² At the same time, this Strategy was a generic programmatic developmental document, akin to the “Kazakhstan 2030” strategy adopted in 1997 and was not a specific policy

⁴²⁹ “Sistema Gosudarstvennogo Planirovaniia v Respublike Kazakhstan,” *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda (Arkhiv)*, accessed 9 April 2012, <http://mail.kazpravda.kz/c/1245710960>.

⁴³⁰ Kuzmin, “V Ekspornom Ispolnenii.”

⁴³¹ “Official website of the Administration of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan,” http://www.akorda.kz/ru/page/page_nursultan-nazarbaev-kazakstan-respublikasy-syrtky-ister-ministriginin-keneitilg_1348723221

⁴³² Nazarbayev, “Strategy.”

document focused entirely on foreign affairs.⁴³³ Tokaev writes that the first draft of the foreign policy concept (that is of a doctrinal document that specifically outlines a foreign policy strategy) was prepared by the foreign ministry in March 1992, while the Apparatus of the President and the Centre for Strategic Studies were preparing their own versions.⁴³⁴ The MFA had been also developing annual work plans, which also served as policy guides for the upcoming year. In total, eight policy documents were prepared during the studied period:

Table 1.1: Official public and internal foreign policy planning documents (and drafts), produced between 1992 and 1995⁴³⁵

| | Date | Document type | Title | Developer and author(s) |
|---|----------------------------------|---|---|---|
| 1 | April 1992 | Policy paper | Main provisions of the Foreign Policy Concept | MFA. Suleymenov, Tokaev |
| 2 | May 1992 | Strategic plan | Strategy of the Establishment and Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan as an Independent State | AP. Nazarbayev, Zhukeyev |
| 3 | first half of 1992 | Policy paper | Foreign Policy and National Security Concept | CSS. Kasenov, Abuseitov, Laumulin |
| 4 | February 1993 | Policy paper | On foreign policy priorities in 1993 | MFA. Suleymenov, Tokaev |
| 5 | April 1993 | Internal ministerial document | MFA annual report and work plan | MFA |
| 6 | April 1993 | Policy paper | On foreign policy of Kazakhstan (analysis, prospects) | ID AP. Kasymov, Akhmetov. |
| 7 | February 1994 | Internal ministerial document | MFA annual report and work plan | MFA |
| 8 | summer 1994 – first half of 1995 | Strategic doctrine and preceding drafts thereof | Foreign Policy Concept of the Republic of Kazakhstan | MFA, AP. Nazarbayev, Zhukeyev, Suleymenov, Tokaev, Isinaliev, Sarybai, Kasymov. |

⁴³³ Former Vice-president Yerik Asanbayev tells in the interview that the May 1992 Strategy was a three-year strategic plan and that it was the first programmatic plan in line of strategic plans of national development adopted in the first decade after independence. See Karlygash Ezhonova, *Svideteli* (Almaty: East Point, 2001), 217.

⁴³⁴ Tokaev, *Ocherki. Preodolenie*, 145. It is likely that Tokaev refers to the MFA document submitted to the president in April 1992. See “Main provisions of Foreign Policy Concept of the Republic of Kazakhstan.” *MFA*. 9 April 1992. APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 21, ll. 147-156.

⁴³⁵ See, respectively, APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 21, ll. 147-156; Nazarbayev, “Strategy”; APRK f. 166N, op. 1, d. 13; APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2155, ll.1-12; APRK, f. 75N, op. 1, d. 2; APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2155, ll. 13-29. APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 345; APRK f. 175NL, op. 1, d. 156.

As seen in Table 1.1, quite a few high-ranking authorities representing different state institutions were involved in the elaboration of policy papers. These public and internal policy documents reflected policymakers' views on the state of international affairs and the foreign policy guidelines and principles. One of the members of the working group on the final draft of the Foreign Policy Concept, Kairat Sarybai, recalls the fundamental questions the developers were posing for themselves in summer 1994: "Who are we and where are we?"⁴³⁶ Tokaev's address to the Collegium in February 1994, the time at which a newly independent Kazakhstan was finalizing its foreign policy course, is very illustrative of how key decision-makers interpreted the world around them, what strategic dilemmas they were facing, and what were the perceived tactics and strategies to ensure nation's survival and development:

Like never before we need a deep analysis of the state of international affairs on the regional and global levels, a precise calculation of tactical aims and strategic interests of Kazakhstan within its external context. It is important to correctly weigh Kazakhstan's potential with its international actions, to know how to critically approach foreign policy priorities, to practice skills of political manoeuvring without forsaking (and constantly keeping in mind) fundamental aspirations of the Kazakhstani people – preservation and strengthening of the independence of our state.⁴³⁷

Along the formative period, the principal objective for Nazarbayev's advisory team was to find an optimal mode of interaction with the external world, while dealing with the totality of political and security challenges emanating from the outside. Certainly, economic objectives, like the need to attract foreign investments, develop transit routes, or seek assistance to create a market economy were integral parts of the general foreign policy outlook, but the importance of political and security issues was overwhelming. Starr highlights the importance of the security factor for Kazakhstan: "It is no accident...that President Nazarbayev...identified 'the security of the nation and the preservation of its state' as a *precondition* for advances in these other areas [economy and politics]."⁴³⁸ In some ways confirming Starr's presumption are Tokaev's recollections that the basic provisions for the Foreign Policy Concept were based on the May

⁴³⁶ Erlan Idrissov, *Prioritety kazakhstanskoi diplomatii na rubezhe vekov* (Moscow: Russkiy Raritet, 2000), 212.

⁴³⁷ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 824, l. 20.

⁴³⁸ Starr, "Kazakhstan's Security Strategy," 12. Emphasis in original. Starr further adds that relatively high level of external and internal security enjoyed by Kazakhstan in the later times, "have led several otherwise competent observers simply to ignore security when they assess the state of Kazakhstan's development." Olcott's *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise* is provided as an example; for Starr, these scholars "confuse effect with cause." Ibid, 12, n.1.

1992 Strategy and the priority was given to issues of national security.⁴³⁹ References to this May 1992 Strategy also appear in the 1993 policy paper “On foreign policy priorities in 1993”; in the 1993 MFA’s annual plan; and in the 1993 ID AP document.⁴⁴⁰ The frequent reference to the May 1992 Strategy demonstrates that different institutions at different time points were using the uniform formulation of what the national interest and strategic challenges were. The key strategic imperatives of the May 1992 Strategy pertaining to foreign policy and national security were:

The consideration for the geopolitical self-determination. Maintenance of multilateral and multivariate military-political balances in order to ensure security and sovereignty of Kazakhstan.

The peculiarity of Kazakhstan’s geopolitical position and ethno-demographic composition, level of economic development and military development, make dominant not the military, but political instruments based on, primarily, own resources and reasonable, balanced diplomacy in order to ensure the security [of the state].

In construction of national security we proceed from our geostrategic positioning on the juncture of two powers – Russia and China.⁴⁴¹

Considering the importance Almaty had been paying to the issues of territorial integrity and sovereignty of the newly born state, it is not accidental that the principal attention was expectedly rendered to relations with Russia and China, which became the two priority vectors for the Foreign Policy Concept developers. Starr credits Tokaev with the development of this bi-directional balancing strategy:

Tokaev proposed that Kazakhstan seek two roughly equal partnerships and to manage the relationship between them [Russia and China] in such a way as to affirm its own sovereignty and independence...to balance them in way that are mutually beneficial, that minimize or curtail the worst tendencies of each partner, and that in the end strengthen the sovereignty and independence of Kazakhstan itself. ...All this requires delicacy and art.⁴⁴²

As demonstrated below, members of Nazarbayev’s advisory team had been determined to find a way to utilize the interplay of rivalry dynamics between great powers in order to maximize the republic’s national interests. All in all, these two themes – a defensive paradigm and a balancing strategy vis-à-vis great powers are explicitly reflected in the content of the reviewed

⁴³⁹ Tokaev, *Ocherki. Preodolenie*, 144-145.

⁴⁴⁰ See, respectively, APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2155, ll. 1-12; APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 345, ll.54-55; APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2155, ll. 13-29.

⁴⁴¹ Nazarbayev, “Strategy.”

⁴⁴² Starr, “Kazakhstan’s Security Strategy,” 14.

documents that were written in the settings of strategic uncertainty. As it was said during one of the earliest internal discussions of conceptual approaches to Kazakhstan's foreign policy:

Likely we should not fool ourselves and let priorities to set the main directions for work. History shows, that states that are positioned at the juncture of the continents need to show resourcefulness (*izvorotlivost'*); with a view to create an absolutely secure conditions for our state. There is a danger that these priorities will call for them. Kazakhstan can only be independent if we keep our eyes on adjacent states and blocks.⁴⁴³

Certainly, the perception of threat from Russia and China was grounded on specific political and security factors emanating from the proximity to these great powers. Reviewed documents reflect a number of specific concerns Almaty policymakers shared among themselves in this, at times perilous, external environment. Perhaps the most complicated and cautious was the discovery of China as a great neighbour. At the outset of bilateral relations, Kazakhstan's leadership was under the influence of preconceptions, part of which originated from the Kazakh historical memory and part from the uneasy history of a regional neighbourhood during the Soviet Union.

From the preceding historical period, Kazakhstan and China inherited number of complex problems, greatest of which was the border dispute.⁴⁴⁴ Another problematic matter was China's nuclear arsenal and continuing tests on the Lobnor polygon, located in Xinjiang region, close to the Kazakhstani border. However the biggest strategic dilemma Almaty had in relation to China, described in one document as a "nascent superpower," were the possible hegemonic aspirations Beijing might have entertained.⁴⁴⁵ One internal discussion portrays an alarming picture of Beijing's politics in relation to Kazakhstan:

China, judging from its ambitions and potential, is seriously aiming to obtain a leading position in the world already by the beginning of the next century. PRC's aim in Kazakhstan is quite clear – to press out Russia's and Turkey's influence, to counter the USA, to expand a zone of political, ideological, and, if possible, a physical presence in the republic.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴³ APRK f. 75N, op.1, d. 345, l. 6.

⁴⁴⁴ For the history of Kazakhstan's border negotiations with China, Russia, and Central Asian regional nations see Kassym-Zhomart Tokaev, et al., *Pravda o Gosudarstvennoi Granitse Respubliki Kazakhstan* (Almaty: Zhibek Zholy, 2007).

⁴⁴⁵ China is defined as a superpower in the draft policy paper "Main directions of the foreign policy." APRK f. 175NL, op. 1, d. 156, l. 21.

⁴⁴⁶ "Minutes of the Collegium, February 8, 1994." APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 824, l. 22.

Again, within this context the problem of unregulated borders and disputed territories was certainly a number one agenda topic. Ertysbaev puts himself in the president's shoes:

Suppose we would leave it as it is. This problem would surface again. Who can assume what would the situation look like then? How China will act if the problem will re-emerge? Who can foresee their territorial claims then? Who would rule this great empire and what policy would these rulers pursue? It is all unknown.⁴⁴⁷

The principal importance of regulation of the Sino-Kazakh border dispute is a recurring theme in the reviewed documents. A less openly discussed security issue was the illegal immigration of the Chinese to Kazakhstan. The usual practice of the time for the Chinese citizens was to come to Kazakhstan with a group of tourists and stay illegally.⁴⁴⁸ Head of the International Department of the President's Apparatus Gani Kasymov wrote in the policy document prepared for the president: "We need to immediately work on this problem using all legal means in order to prevent a creation of a Chinese 'fifth column' in Kazakhstan and appearance of a 'Chinese factor' in internal politics of our republic in the future."⁴⁴⁹ A large Kazakh population living in Xinjiang region further complicated the ethnic component in bilateral relations. The president's adviser observes: "It is well known the Beijing was conducting an assimilation policy towards Turk minorities, including Kazakhs, which was aimed at eliminating their cultural identity and assimilating them with Han population."⁴⁵⁰

The ethnic factor loomed much more in relations with the other great power – the Russian Federation. As one draft document explains, the nexus between demography and foreign policy in the following way:

The interethnic accord gains a critical importance due to the multiethnic composition [of the nation], peculiarities of the territorial and sectoral distribution of significantly large enclaves of non-indigenous population. This problem has an explicit external aspect, neutralization of which [the aspect] will be one of the main directions of the republic's foreign policy. Dynamics of ethnic and cultural issues...may complicate the background of the Kazakhstani diplomacy in the Russian and Chinese directions.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁷ Ertysbaev, *Kazakhstan i Nazarbaev*, 483.

⁴⁴⁸ As it was reported at the foreign ministry's Collegium, in August 1992 from the group of 113 Chinese tourists only 12 have returned. "Minutes of the Collegium, 19 February 1993." APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 345, l. 6.

⁴⁴⁹ "On Kazakhstan's foreign policy (analysis, prospects)." ID AP. 6 April 1993. APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2155, l. 28.

⁴⁵⁰ Ertysbaev, *Kazakhstan i Nazarbaev*, 484.

⁴⁵¹ "Main directions of the foreign policy." APRK f. 175NL, op. 1, d. 156, l. 14.

In general, such features as the distinctiveness of the ethnic composition of the republic, frequently pronounced in the public discourse, was often an epithet to indicate the fact that a new Kazakhstani nation was comprised of a 40% Slavic population. The largest portion of the Slavic population resided in Northern Kazakhstan, which far-right Russian politicians like Vladimir Zhirinovskiy had claimed to be part of Russia. The related problem of Cossacks was another point of Almaty's discontent. Against this background, Russia's pressure for a double-citizenship of the Kazakhstani residents of Slavic descent had certainly caused even more anxiety. For these reasons, the republic's leadership was constantly monitoring the internal political situation in Russia: "We need to clearly set orienting points. This is unarguably Russia – everything that is related to the influence of internal processes in Russia over Kazakhstan. This requires a special approach to Russia."⁴⁵² The fear of the risk of falling into the zone of influence of China, which Almaty policymakers constantly thought of, was not less prominent in their deliberations about Russian politics. In November 1994, at the ministerial Collegium Tokaev said: "Efforts of our state on the international arena will be aimed against possible attempts of the neo-imperial tendencies in Russia's foreign policy to politically press Kazakhstan on the issues of citizenship and situation of the population of the Russian origin."⁴⁵³

The Kazakhstani leadership planned to deal with problematic issues in bilateral relations with Beijing and Moscow in a complex, systemic way. In other words, Almaty's policymakers attempted to construct a holistic picture of interrelated security challenges caused by the republic's vulnerable external and internal state of affairs. An example of such a complex vision of foreign policy challenges is found in the protocol of the MFA Collegium that took place in February 1994:

[Kazakhstan] needs to neutralize any preconditions to the development of a such situation that could lead to aggravation of our relations with neighbouring states on the basis of territorial or economic reclamations, sentiments of particular ethnic groups among a population, existence of defence structures on our territory, or increase of internal instability in bordering nations.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵² "Minutes of the Collegium, 19 February 1993." APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 345, l. 4.

⁴⁵³ "Minutes of the Collegium, 19 November 1994." APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 826, l. 11.

⁴⁵⁴ "Minutes of the Collegium, 8 February 1994." APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 824, l. 8.

At the same time, this approach naturally implied avoiding a uni-vector foreign orientation. Characteristically, at the same venue in February 1994, diplomats were warned that “it would be politically short-sighted to fetish the Russian direction of Kazakhstan’s foreign policy.”⁴⁵⁵

Kazakhstan’s policy response to the security dilemmas posed by relations with Russia and China was the development of the balancing model of foreign policy. Excerpts from the reviewed policy documents reveal that often the contraposition of great powers’ interests was the main instrument sought to level out the strategic vulnerability of Kazakhstan:

The Russian military might is reckoned by Beijing which is why the Russian vector in the Kazakhstani security policy remains prioritized in the nearest and future perspective.⁴⁵⁶

The Chinese factor bears a long-term importance in relations of Kazakhstan with key foreign partners, particularly in containment Beijing’s regional hegemonism. We need to fully utilize an overlap of interests of the USA, Russia, Japan, and other Asia-Pacific nations in that matter.⁴⁵⁷

Practicing flexibility and ability for a political manoeuvring we need to undertake actions to neutralize China’s aspirations to expand and strengthen its own sphere of influence in Kazakhstan through supplanting of potential rivals like Russia, USA, Turkey and others. To this end we need to fully exploit congruence of our interests on one hand and geopolitical plans of corresponding powers on the other.⁴⁵⁸

Kazakhstan, like other CIS states was proclaimed to be a zone of strategic interests of Russia....Taking into account the fact that there is a certain space for a political manoeuvring it is possible to presume that negative repercussions of cooling of Kazakhstani-Russian relations can be neutralized. The situation will not be as fatal if we could deploy other possibilities, namely: the potential of relations with the USA and other Western nations.⁴⁵⁹

There is an occurrence of certain disagreements between Russia, USA, and China in reference to Kazakhstan. Under these conditions it is important to maintain a balance of interests in our relations with great powers and to achieve an equal partnership with them, while skilfully and flexibly use the contradictions among them to our own advantage.⁴⁶⁰

What can be additionally demonstrated from these very characteristic passages is that Almaty decision-makers did not employ the Eurasian Bridge or multivectorism rhetoric in their internal discussions. Certainly, the multidirectional undertone is present, but it mainly relates to strategies towards the three great powers. Even though that the above excerpts are derived from the content of the documents prepared by the foreign ministry, the content of policy papers

⁴⁵⁵ “Minutes of the Collegium, 8 February 1994.” APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 824, l. 20.

⁴⁵⁶ “Main directions of the foreign policy.” APRK f. 175NL, op. 1, d. 156, l. 21.

⁴⁵⁷ “Main directions of the foreign policy.” APRK f. 175NL, op. 1, d. 156, l. 79.

⁴⁵⁸ “Minutes of the Collegium, 4 November 1994.” APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 826, l. 15.

⁴⁵⁹ “Minutes of the Collegium, 8 February 1994.” APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 824, ll. 20-21.

⁴⁶⁰ “Main directions of the foreign policy.” APRK f. 175NL, op. 1, d. 156, l. 17.

sourced from other policymaking institutions briefly introduced above, suggests that in general, the actual policy planning discourse was very “technical” in a sense of its practicality and rationality. Policymakers in their documents clearly enunciated the republic’s goals and spelled out the means of realization of the strategy of balancing.

In developing the republic’s foreign policy strategy political leadership was motivated primarily by the desire to minimize possible harm to the republic’s statehood that seemed very likely because of the unfavourable internal and external circumstances in 1992-1994. Reviewed documents clearly indicate that the republic’s leadership was carefully triangulating the great powers’ political and security dynamics. Almaty opted for a behavioural model of playing on great powers’ conflicting interests. These strategic imperatives laid the foundation of the balancing foreign policy doctrine that was essentially an amalgam of a foresight, pragmatism, and rationale as much as of hesitancy, and apprehensions of those involved in foreign policymaking.⁴⁶¹

Institutionalization of the foreign policymaking apparatus

As Almaty decision-makers were approaching closer to a finalized vision of the conception of the republic’s foreign strategy, another, if not equally important, foreign policy development had been progressing. Throughout 1993 a turf war was unfolding in the corridors of Almaty’s policymaking establishments. Organizational theory describes turf wars as situations in which bureaucratic organizations engage in power competition among each other to improve their relative influence vis-à-vis each other. Accordingly, an organization is found to “jealously guard and seek to increase its turf and strength, as well as to preserve undiluted what it feels to be its ‘essence’ or ‘mission’.”⁴⁶² This competition for power does not come as a surprise, considering

⁴⁶¹ The balancing strategy has subsequently continued to manifest in a multilateral format with the active engagement of Kazakhstan not only in the CST arrangements, originated in 1992 but also in the NATO PfP from 1995, and the Shanghai Five-SCO, from 1996.

⁴⁶² Valerie M. Hudson, “Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1, no. 1 (2005): 8.

that the institutionalization of the republic's foreign policymaking apparatus was at the embryonic phase.

Given the complexity and scale of the international issues, Nazarbayev had to establish a foreign policymaking machinery from the earliest stage of Kazakhstan's independence.

Nazarbayev recalled that in 1992 there was some sense of euphoria about international prospects – many people around him and in the general public believed that it was enough just to proclaim the independence and the whole world would open its doors for the republic.⁴⁶³ In reality it was neither simple nor easy to find a fairway in the world undergoing major geopolitical changes. The president understood that the nation needed its own foreign policy quickly, before the national interests could be undermined by real or potential threats. Nazarbayev expediently started to form a policymaking apparatus that would assist him in handling the upcoming challenges with his own person in the centre of the scheme. Ertysbaev explains why the decision-making scheme was configured this way:

The concentration of foreign policy authority in the hands of the president becomes understandable if we look at the end of 1991-beginning of 1992...in the shortest time [Nazarbayev] not only had to assert himself as a head of the newly independent state and occupy a place in the international community, but also to deal with the burden of colossal problems inherited from the Soviet Union....Strategic, tactical, and even instantaneous tasks had to be solved promptly, that is why the president's prerogative in the foreign policy was predetermined.⁴⁶⁴

The three main institutions below the president in which the foreign policy was conceived, conceptualized, initiated, and implemented were: the Apparatus of the President with the International Department in charge of handling foreign affairs; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and the Centre for Strategic Studies. The Apparatus, later transformed to the Administration of the President was the penultimate bureaucratic structure before the president. The Head of the Apparatus, Nurtai Abykaev in many instances served as a gatekeeper to president Nazarbayev. State Counsellor Tolegen Zhukekeyev's role in planning and realizing external affairs of the republic was quite influential up until 1994 when he was appointed to the position of the Security Council Secretary for a few months to be later appointed a vice-premier

⁴⁶³ Nazarbayev, *Na poroge*. 2nd. ed., 191.

⁴⁶⁴ Ertysbaev, *Kazakhstan i Nazarbaev*, 463-464.

for social affairs. Reflecting on his ambitions during this period, one expert writes that Zhukeyev wanted to become “Kazakhstan’s foreign policy guru” and one interviewee described him as an eminence grey of foreign politics.⁴⁶⁵ For example, Zhukeyev was the person who signed the 1992 Lisbon Protocol on accession to the NPT treaty on behalf of the republic. While Counsellor Zhukeyev was officially affiliated with the President’s Apparatus, the Apparatus had its own foreign policy detachment, the International Department (*Mezhdunarodnyi Otdel*), which role in foreign policy, according to Kasenov, was more organizational than analytical.⁴⁶⁶ In the foreign ministry, the central policymaking body was the Collegium. This consultative body (*soveshatel’nyi organ*) was in fact the most important inter-departmental unit where strategic foreign policy issues were elaborated and discussed. This authoritative unit, headed by the Minister and run by 16 other leading diplomats had the power to review the central apparatus’s and embassies’ work; to control the execution of the president’s decisions; to approve or disapprove diplomatic personnel appointments; to hear the top management of the Ministry’s and ambassador’s reports.⁴⁶⁷ The foreign minister was able to bypass the International Department to communicate its policy advice directly to the president.⁴⁶⁸ The CSS was involved in “preparing, drafting, and evaluating the most important documents, programs, and moves in the areas of foreign policy and national security.”⁴⁶⁹ The Centre’s head, Kasenov, at least at the earliest stage, also enjoyed occasional access to the president bypassing the President’s Apparatus and submitted analysis and advice directly.⁴⁷⁰

Recollections during the interviews with former foreign minister Tuleitai Suleymenov and the head of the president’s chancellery Makhmud Kasymbekov about Nazarbayev’s preferences for group decision-making and inter-agency policymaking coordination and cooperation suggest

⁴⁶⁵ Daniyar Ashimbayev, “Kazakhstanskaia Diplomatia: Kadry,” *Kontinent*. 3, no. 115 (2004), 18; high-ranking governmental official, name withheld by request, interview with the author, October 25, 2011, Astana.

⁴⁶⁶ Kasenov, “Institutions and Conduct,” 267.

⁴⁶⁷ Kurmanguzhin, *45 let*, 216-217.

⁴⁶⁸ Tuleitai Suleymenov, former foreign minister of Kazakhstan, interview with the author, Astana, 7 December 2011. Salim Kurmanguzhin, former deputy foreign minister of Kazakhstan, interview with the author, Almaty, 10 February 2012.

⁴⁶⁹ Kasenov, “Institutions and Conduct,” 269.

⁴⁷⁰ Former official at the Administration of the President of Kazakhstan, name withheld by request, 30 November 2011, Astana.

that the model in the beginning of 1990s was essentially *a mix of formality and collegiality* (to adapt the memories of the diplomats to scholarly terms).⁴⁷¹ In instances of strategic foreign matters, the president preferred to be informed and personally involved in the policymaking process at any point of time. He could either convene ad hoc groups comprised of representative of different institutions to discuss available policy options, or, equally possible, he could communicate with his advisers or high-ranking experts individually, either by inviting them or even by telephone.⁴⁷² Unsolicited policy advice could reach the president either through formal lines of communication whereas a memorandum is written, for example, by the head of one of the president's apparatus departments and then passed other through the head of the apparatus. Alternatively, the analytical memorandum could be handed in to the president personally, depending on the political authority of the correspondent. A memorandum was usually a conceptual material prepared collectively at one of the institutions that outlined a foreign policy problem or a foreign policy initiative to the president and contained a policy recommendation. The president is known to either write an instruction, in case he wanted this memorandum to progress into an actual foreign policy act, or to initial the document, signalling that the he had read it, but did not feel that the advice was worth further realization.⁴⁷³ The lines of inter-institutional communication were blurred and the decisional hierarchy below the president was not yet formalized. Overall, until at least 1995, Kasenov's assertion about an irregular and non-systematic character of foreign policy decision-making in Kazakhstan appear to be relevant.⁴⁷⁴ It is possible to presume that such an ambiguous situation where different institutions were supposed to produce alternative strategies on the same issue and inconsistent group decision-making norms were not only the consequences of the early developmental drawbacks aggravated by lack of finances and staff. It could be in fact that this was Nazarbayev's deliberate intention as it encouraged a more productive internal policy discussion.

⁴⁷¹ Kasymbekov, the Head of the Chancellery of the President, interview with the author, Astana, 24 November 2011. Suleymenov, *interview*.

⁴⁷² Kurmanguzhin, *interview*.

⁴⁷³ Kasymbekov, *interview*.

⁴⁷⁴ Kasenov, "Institutions and Conduct," 267.

It is in this oblique policymaking environment that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs endured a profound bureaucratic attack from the head of the International Department of the president's apparatus Gani Kasymov. Kasymov was a career Soviet diplomat educated in Moscow, reaching the peak of his Soviet career in the position of the General Secretary of the Kazakh SSR foreign ministry. In 1990 he was appointed, first, a foreign policy adviser to the president and later he became a head of the International Department in the president's apparatus. Although Kasenov scales down the Department's role to handling routine organizational functions, nonetheless it appears to be an important institution in the policymaking hierarchy.⁴⁷⁵ Its political weight stemmed from two factors. First, all formally prepared policy papers from the foreign ministry addressed to president pro forma had to be either funnelled through or approved by the Department. Second, the head of the department, Kasymov, occasionally had direct access to president's "ears and eyes," either during the foreign trips, where he would normally accompany the president, or during day-to-day work at his apparatus that was located in the same governmental building on the Republic's Square where the president worked.

In 1993 Kasymov writes several letters addressed to Nazarbayev, in which he criticizes operational, functional, and organizational aspects of the MFA's work. The thrust of his criticism was related to the state of affairs in the republic's foreign policymaking. In two memoranda Kasymov points out to the president the existing problems of the republic's foreign policy mechanism at large.⁴⁷⁶ Kasymov expresses concern that the further development of the Kazakhstani diplomacy could be stalled due to the problems of policy elaboration and implementation. Kasymov highlights three basic areas of nation's foreign policymaking that in his opinion are either missing or deficient: the absence of a foreign policy concept; an

⁴⁷⁵ Kasenov, "Institutions and Conduct," 267.

⁴⁷⁶ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2661, ll. 1-6; f. APRK 5N, op. 1, d. 2157, ll. 5-7.

ineffectiveness of policy decision-making and implementation mechanism; and a shortage of trained diplomatic personnel.⁴⁷⁷

The fact that there was no officially adopted foreign policy concept at the time gave Kasymov the reason to argue that the Kazakhstani diplomacy was “impulsive and lacked focus.”⁴⁷⁸ To develop such a conceptual document he proposed to task the president’s apparatus, the foreign ministry, the Centre for Strategic Studies, and other think tanks to elaborate several alternative versions of an external strategy. These projects would be then discussed at the Security Council and the synthesized document would then need to be endorsed in the parliament. The second problem raised by Kasymov is related to the way a foreign policy decision was initiated, formulated, and implemented. In the letter he draws a picture of a fractured decision-making mechanism, plagued by the irregular work of the Security Council, the weak central apparatus of the foreign ministry, the ineffective embassies, and the lack of control from the republic’s leadership and the parliament.⁴⁷⁹ To improve the inter-institutional coordination, Kasymov proposes a novel scheme of the strategic decision-making: “Embassy-MFA-President’s Apparatus-(Security Council)-MFA-Embassy.”⁴⁸⁰ According to the proposed coordination sequence, initially the information and analysis is gathered and produced “in the field,” i.e. diplomatic missions abroad, and sent to the central apparatus of the foreign ministry, then the ministry aggregates the information and sends the synthesized analytical memorandum to the International Department of the President’s Apparatus, the Department decides whether to pass the information on to the president, then, if the president receives it and thinks that a certain

⁴⁷⁷ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2661, ll. 1-6.

These points were recognized by the MFA itself to a certain degree. Former first deputy Minister Salim Kurmanguzhin writes that the necessity for a separate foreign policy analysis department within the ministry was acknowledged, but such unit was not created due to the “shortage of professional diplomats and absence of researchers.” See Kurmanguzhin, *45 let*, 216.

Kasymov had also produced a separate analytical memorandum placing heavy criticism of the CICA initiative calling it “an unsuccessful attempt” and using the point to exemplify the ministry’s drawbacks. However, because the CICA initiative is a separate case in the republic’s diplomatic history and due to its complex and controversial nature, this element of Kasymov’s criticism is beyond the scope of the present research. For the complete text of the memorandum see APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 233, ll. 37-45.

⁴⁷⁸ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2661, ll. 2-3.

⁴⁷⁹ There were three meetings of the Security Council in 1993; none of them was devoted to foreign policy issues. See APRK, f.5N, op. 1. for year 1993.

⁴⁸⁰ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2661, l. 3.

policy act has to be taken then he informs the International Department which tasks the ministry and the ministry tasks its overseas missions. The Security Council stands between the ID and the president in cases where security and defence matters are concerned. This scheme presumes the President's Apparatus and the Security Council to be positioned at the pinnacle of the decisional process. The third problem, the low human resources potential, can be at least partially solved, Kasymov writes, through cooperation with Russian think tanks and universities. This problem, according to Kasymov, is exacerbated by questionable appointment and promotion practices of diplomats in the foreign ministry, which bypass the KNB and the President's Apparatus consent.⁴⁸¹

In another letter Kasymov elaborates on the perceived shortcomings of the existing mechanism of foreign policymaking.⁴⁸² In particular, Kasymov was not happy with the fact that the foreign ministry occasionally had a direct access to the president. He straightforwardly argues that this bypassing of his department indicates that the ministry wants to exclude the International Department from foreign policymaking and become the only foreign policy executive body. Kasymov doubts the ministry's ability to carry out the policymaking and implementation on its own. He writes that policy papers prepared by the MFA reveal the ministry's superficial attitude to international issues; an absence of a clearly oriented concept; and certain "passiveness and shiftlessness" – these factors combined supposedly decreased "the efficiency of the Kazakhstani diplomacy."⁴⁸³

On these grounds Kasymov proposed to establish a set of rules for the endorsement of the policy documents addressed to the president and drafts of the international agreements to be signed by the president.⁴⁸⁴ The political documents would be primarily prepared in the MFA and then compulsorily endorsed by the ID before they reach the president. The MFA and the Ministry of Defence would jointly prepare the military-political and national security documents.

⁴⁸¹ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2661, l. 1.

⁴⁸² APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2157, ll. 11-12.

⁴⁸³ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2157, l. 11.

⁴⁸⁴ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2157, ll. 5-7, APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2157, ll. 11-12.

Then the Defence and Political Analysis departments of the President's Apparatus would endorse them and the International Department would prepare a written assessment of these documents as an attachment.

Recalling the events inflicted by this bureaucratic attack, Tokaev writes: "The understanding of the importance of the MFA did not come instantly. There were attempts to degrade its role, to make diplomats carry out 'servant' functions in protocol and document elaboration spheres."⁴⁸⁵ In response to Kasymov's criticism, the ministry prepared a large letter addressed to the president.⁴⁸⁶ Reflecting on Kasymov's invective on the lack of the conceptual foundation for republic's foreign affairs, the ministry writes that there actually was a conceptual foreign policy paper – the May 1992 Strategy, basing on which the foreign apparatus had been setting its strategic goals.⁴⁸⁷ The authors of the letter expectedly disagree with Kasymov's proposed scheme of foreign policymaking mechanism "Embassy-MFA-AP-MFA-Embassy," introduction of which would make the ministry "a subsidiary division of the ID AP." As a counter-measure, the authors of the letter make a proposition for the ID AP operational functions to be downgraded and limited to the presidential protocol services. The underlining point is made: "The MFA needs a goodwill advice, but not ambitious claims to curate the foreign ministry. Our principal position is that there is a need for close coordination of work in order to effectively realize the president's foreign policy provisions."⁴⁸⁸

It is thus understandable why several years later Tokaev wrote in his memoirs that the foreign ministry was "decisively and consistently defending the position that the president has an exclusive right to determine the strategic directions of the foreign affairs of the nation and to take cardinal decisions."⁴⁸⁹ In the diplomats' view, in a highly centralized foreign policymaking environment with the president at its pinnacle, the foreign ministry would be the primary

⁴⁸⁵ Kassym-Zhomart Tokaev, *Ocherki Diplomata. Pod Stigom Nezavisimosti* (Almaty: Zhibek Zholy, 2007b), 15.

⁴⁸⁶ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2157, ll. 26-31.

⁴⁸⁷ The ministry explicitly states that the letters it is writing in response was prepared by the Head of the ID AP, and not the ID AP. In the concluding part of the ministry's letter authors write that they wanted to avoid engagement into a dispute with the "officials who surround you." APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2157, ll. 26-31.

⁴⁸⁸ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2157, ll. 26-31.

⁴⁸⁹ Tokaev, *Ocherki. Pod Stigom Nezavisimosti*. 15.

organization to provide the president with advice and expertise. Whereas the foreign ministry advocated “a need for a unified team that would formulate and implement Kazakhstan’s foreign policy course,” the ministry saw itself as a leader for this team.⁴⁹⁰

Nazarbayev watched closely the evolution of the turf war between the two alternative centres for foreign policy planning and making. He eventually decided to extend his authoritative help to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which he saw as the next policymaking echelon after himself. Nazarbayev explicitly stated his position to all personalities involved, defending the MFA and telling Kasymov to “desist from chicanery over the MFA (*prekratite sutiagu vorkug MIDa*).”⁴⁹¹ It remains unclear why Nazarbayev had favoured the ministry instead of the International Department. One possible explanation may be that the ministry possessed more human resources since the majority of the Soviet-trained diplomats, intelligence officers, and foreign policy experts were actually working in the foreign ministry’s apparatus. In March 1992 Suleymenov wrote to Nazarbayev with his view on diplomatic personnel recruitment: “In our opinion, the executive diplomatic corps has to be formed with the [ex] cadre of the [ex-Soviet] MFA, KGB, MVES, as well as with diplomats currently working in the Russian structures, since this category has already developed certain diplomatic work skills.”⁴⁹² Another possibility is that in such highly personalized policymaking process the minister was simply a more politically powerful person than the head of the International Department. Either way, in the conclusive report to the Head of the President’s Apparatus Abykaev, Kasymov uses less belligerent tone and

⁴⁹⁰ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2157, l. 31.

⁴⁹¹ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2157, l. 26.

Full text of the instruction:

“To: Abykaev N.A. (President’s Chief of Staff)

Zhukeyev T.T. (State Counsellor on foreign and security policy)

Kasymov G.E. (Head of the International Department of the president’s apparatus)

1. Desist from chicanery over the MFA (*prekratite sutiagu vorkug MIDa*).

2. If you have justified reservations, elaborate them and we will discuss with you at the MFA Collegium.

To: Suleymenov T.S. (Foreign minister)

Do not be offended, but draw conclusions, not everything is so wonderful in your work.”

⁴⁹² APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 20, l. 116.

Many highly positioned members of the Kazakh SSR Communist Party and Soviet diplomats joined the ranks of the independent foreign ministry, including the minister and all his deputies. For the detailed analysis of Kazakhstani diplomatic personnel dynamics see Ashimbayev, “Kazakhstanskaia Diplomatiia,” 17-19.

tries to justify the critique of the ministry's work by saying that his department felt obliged to take part in the work on elaboration of the foreign policy concept:

The Department continues to believe that the work on the development of our strategy has to be carried out permanently, since it is not a congeal substance. Moreover, the situation demands not only a fast comprehension, but also an elaboration of adequate preventive measures to confront future challenges. To calculate and forecast changes in the multidimensional life and find a place in it while securitizing the state, is a duty and obligation of all concerned specialists.⁴⁹³

The way the bureaucratic confrontation ensued and ended had direct and far-reaching implications for the nature of foreign policy decision-making structure and process. In the aftermath the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had legitimized its privileged position in the policymaking structure. Tokaev reflects on the outcome of the conflict:

Such a support from the president has undoubtedly increased the MFA's authority among governmental institutions. Moreover, and this is more important, the ministry's capacity was reinforced. Diplomats had understood that they are entrusted with big political issues.⁴⁹⁴

The president's support warranted the foreign ministry's principal position in the Almaty policymaking hierarchy. Any subsequent attempts to redistribute the balance of authority were highly unlikely without the president's sanction. Thus, the foreign ministry became a prime policymaking institution with an exceptional level of authority in matters of external affairs and with the principal role of communicating aggregated policy advice to the president.

This chronicle of bureaucratic conflict between the foreign ministry and the International Department (or more precisely, the latter's head Kasymov), reveals several important features of the nature of Almaty's foreign policymaking. The most striking finding is the absence of any policy debate on strategic foreign policy issues. Kasymov had never questioned the foundational principles of Kazakhstani foreign policy. The general strategy of balancing between great powers or the main foreign policy orientations and priorities had not become the subjects of Kasymov's criticism.

It may also be possible that the president and his key policy advisers viewed the international environment through one perceptual lens. In either case, this episode demonstrates

⁴⁹³ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2157, ll. 32-36.

⁴⁹⁴ Tokaev, *Ocherki. Pod Stigom Nezavisimosti*, 15.

that the bureaucratic “pulling and hauling” did not concern strategic matters, and that the turf war had developed in its limited form, where the two institutions fought not for their contradictory policy positions, but for mere political authority. Nazarbayev recognized that such solidarity on the fundamental strategy of the republic was a crucial element for a successful diplomacy with Kazakhstan’s great neighbours. As discussed below, the president relied on many of his advisers in charting a course of engagement with Beijing and Moscow. As far as the document records show, there were no internal debates on how to handle controversial questions on the bilateral agenda with either neighbour.

Nazarbayev’s personal diplomacy and diplomatic manoeuvring

Eastern approaches

Discovering China as a great Eastern neighbour was a particularly complicated and cautious process. During the earliest period of contacts in 1990s, Kazakhstan leadership was under the influence of preconceptions that originated from Kazakh historical memory and a Sino-Soviet confrontation of the Union’s past.

The contemporary history of Almaty’s affairs with Beijing started in July 1991 when Nazarbayev visited China for the first time in the capacity of the president of the Kazakh SSR. At this point in time Nazarbayev, a leader of Kazakhstan, although already a sovereign, but not yet an independent state, had already envisioned border problems with China. The border issue was issue number one on Nazarbayev’s agenda during this July visit. He told Jiang Zemin:

We want to establish a new type of relations between our nations. First of all this relates to the border situation. We have common border along several thousand kilometres, and here it is important that old disagreements are being resolved, because setting of a good neighbourhood relations corresponds to the interests of peoples of our nations.⁴⁹⁵

Nazarbayev did not limit his actions to diplomatic talks with China’s Chairman. He wanted to make sure that he would be personally involved in the resolution process of the Sino-Soviet border issue. Upon his return to the Union, in the report to Gorbachev about the results of

⁴⁹⁵ APRK f. 7, op. 1, d. 602, l. 30.

his trip, Nazarbayev added by hand the following line: “The participation of the republic in the decision process over the problems of the Eastern part of Sino-Soviet border which relate to Kazakhstan would be desirable.”⁴⁹⁶ This evidently indicates how considerate and pro-active Nazarbayev was about the republic’s territorial integrity at the outset of Sino-Kazakhstani affairs.

In any case, the Sino-Soviet talks on border problems terminated with the fall of the Soviet Union, leaving Nazarbayev to seek ways to solve it without Moscow’s backing.⁴⁹⁷ The border problem was not the only issue causing serious concerns in Almaty. Other controversies, even though less strategic, but not less acute, were the large Kazakh Diaspora in Xinjiang, the continuation of Lobnor nuclear tests in the immediate proximity of Kazakhstan, and the trans-border rivers problem. The presence of these issues on the Kazakh-China agenda ensured that Nazarbayev continued to pay principal importance to building friendly and working relations with Beijing.

With these paramount questions in mind, president Nazarbayev foresaw his state visit in October 1993 to Beijing as a milestone in the history of Kazakhstani-Chinese relations.⁴⁹⁸ The visit was of vital importance for Kazakhstan since the negotiations agenda was supposed to cover the main issues and problems in the bilateral relations. This became particularly acute after Chinese prime-minister Li Peng aborted his visit to Almaty in April 1993.⁴⁹⁹ In anticipation of Nazarbayev’s visit, both sides agreed to produce a joint “Declaration on the Principles of Peaceful Relations” that the two presidents were to sign in Beijing. Kazakhstan leadership

⁴⁹⁶ APRK f. 7, op. 1, d. 602, l. 41; APRK f. 7, op. 1, d. 398, l. 53.

⁴⁹⁷ There was the initial agreement in place to coordinate border negotiations between Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan through the “Joint Delegation of the Governments” (see Tokaev, et al., *Pravda o Gosudarstvennoi Granitse*, 12). However this agreement was later breached by Moscow, according to a former diplomat, name and place withheld by request, interview with the author, 10 September 2012.

⁴⁹⁸ Shirin Akiner argues that Nazarbayev’s meetings with his counterparts were far from being just ceremonial because every visit brought to life essential political and economic agreements that put the relations between states in motion: “Thus, in a very real sense they served as an engine for pushing forward the country’s foreign policy objectives. This pattern of personal contacts was maintained in the ensuing years, though the program of visits became more selective and was often linked to specific projects.” See Akiner, “Evolution,” 4.

⁴⁹⁹ Discussion points, prepared by the foreign ministry to the president to have with him at the then aborted talks with Li Peng in April 1993 were almost identical to the points, included in president’s portfolio before his talks with Jiang Zemin in October 1993. APRK f.75N, op. 1, d. 234, ll. 5-57.

considered this Declaration to be the principal document that would set the course of future relations with China.

Much of the decision-making concerning Kazakhstan's policy towards its Eastern neighbour occurred during the preparations for the president's visit to Beijing in October and for the discussion of the text of the joint declaration with the Chinese counterparts.⁵⁰⁰ The importance of the upcoming visit for Nazarbayev was reflected in the level of personalities he tasked with the preparatory groundwork. Tokaev, deputy minister and a professional sinologist was appointed as a chief negotiator. Naturally, Tokaev mobilized both the central apparatus of the foreign ministry and Kazakhstani embassy in Beijing, headed by the former Speaker of the Supreme Soviet Murat Auezov. Tokaev came to China beforehand, leading an "advance group" of experts and diplomats to finalize the details of the visit. He worked in close cooperation with Counsellor Zhukeyev who was involved in agenda setting from the side of the Apparatus of the President and cabled his instructions from Almaty.⁵⁰¹

One internal analytical memorandum written in preparation of the visit provides an insightful view of Kazakhstani leadership's perceptions on issues with China.⁵⁰² The addressee of this document highlighted several sections and wrote marginal notes.⁵⁰³ These notes emphasise the issues on the Kazakhstan-China agenda deemed most important for Almaty policymakers and reflect their attitude towards these issues. The following are the highlighted

⁵⁰⁰ As early as in August Kazakhstan's ambassador to China Murat Auezov sent Tokaev a letter about the draft text of the joint declaration requesting the ministry's orders on his consequent actions. He highlighted the importance of the Taiwan issue, stating that the article on Taiwan bears a "principal meaning" for Beijing. Also, Auezov considered the draft not to reflect a "dynamism and constructiveness" of the CICA initiative and proposed to include this definition of the initiative to the text of the declaration. Another important message Auezov sent was about the congruence procedure for the text of the declaration with Chinese diplomats. The ambassador told Tokaev: "The Chinese side is ready to instantly consider Kazakhstan's proposals and reservations and update the draft accordingly." The fact that the Chinese side had, at least to a certain extent, listened to Kazakhstan's proposition is an important point reflecting the interactive nature of the Kazakhstan-Chinese relations. APRK 75N, op. 1, d. 467, ll. 1-3.

⁵⁰¹ President's instruction on one of the letters reads: "Zhukeyev T.T. – responsible for the whole ideology of the visit from our side." APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 233, l. 3.

⁵⁰² APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 467, ll. 5-7.

⁵⁰³ It is impossible to verify the addressee; however this person was certainly occupying a high level policymaking position judging from the quality of the printer used to produce the document and location of the document in the archival fond. Tokaev and Zhukeyev are the most likely candidatures.

excerpts; corresponding marginal notes are given in italics; the underlined passages are reproduced as in the original:

During the discussion of international problems, the Chinese can raise an issue of the East-West relations and Kazakhstan's position in this system. A more precise position of the PRC toward Kazakhstan's CICA initiative can be formulated. *The position [to be included] to the themes to discuss with the Chairman of the PRC.*

The problem of nuclear tests on the Lobnor polygon. The Chinese think that the anti-Chinese sentiments in Kazakhstan relating to nuclear arms tests are encouraged by the Kazakhstani leadership and Nazarbayev personally. Inside the Chinese Foreign ministry there is an opinion that Kazakhstani leader does this in order to gain diplomatic bargaining leverage in negotiations in Beijing through developing a so-called 'guilt complex' for the damage incurred by Kazakhstan from tests in Xinjiang. *We need to energetically [the end is unintelligible, but most likely the meaning is "rebut"]*.

Diplomatic circles in China consider incomplete legal arrangement of border and presence of disputed sectors to be another problem important for the prospects of Kazakhstan-China relations. Therefore, it is likely that Beijing will express readiness in expediting final congruence of disputed border sectors. *Taking into account other memoranda, we need to press [the Chinese side]*.

The Chinese will touch upon the issue of the activities of anti-Han Uighur organizations allegedly present on Kazakhstan's territory.

Representatives of the indigenous population of Xinjiang and some foreign diplomats express opinions that the president's visit after an aborted visit of the Premier of the State Council of China Li Peng, and given the fact that almost all first ranking Kazakhstani leaders had visited China already, can create an impression of a certain weakness and acceptance of Almaty of its secondary status vis-à-vis its 'Great Neighbour.' *We need to eradicate this position by our actions.*

A number of observations can be made here. Generally it is possible to talk about the careful planning that Nazarbayev undertook in order to convince the Chinese to find a mutually acceptable solution to the most pressing issues, particularly the border delimitation. For this task both the MFA and AP were mobilized. For Almaty's leadership, the primary goal of Kazakhstan's foreign policy in a Chinese direction was to get an official recognition from Beijing and, through that recognition, assurances about inviolability of borders, territorial integrity, and guarantees of political sovereignty.⁵⁰⁴ Achieving these ends was certainly an interactive exercise, where president Nazarbayev accomplished a personal diplomatic tour de force at the meetings with Chairman Zemin.⁵⁰⁵ Overall, Nazarbayev acted as an equal and his

⁵⁰⁴ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 467, ll. 17-20.

⁵⁰⁵ The President was able to practice his diplomatic skills with Zemin since the Chairman spoke Russian fluently and they could talk *tête-à-tête* without interpreters.

Kasymbekov, showing Nazarbayev's diplomatic skills, refers to president's personal recollections about private talks with Chairman Zemin about disputed sectors on the border. "Aksakal [a Kazakh traditional form of addressing a highly respected senior. Literal translation – white beard.] Jiang Zemin told me: 'Look, I advice you: while we are

visit in October 1993 yielded concrete political results.⁵⁰⁶ The aggregated policy advice reflected in the internal exchange of letters, memoranda, instructions between Kazakhstani embassy in Beijing, central ministry's apparatus, International Department, and State Counsellor Zhukeyev, in one form or another, reached the president who attended to most of the points raised at the preparatory stage and utilized them in negotiations with his Chinese counterpart.

Northern vector

Relations with the former Union “big brother” – the Russian Federation – were considered by Almaty as the number one priority throughout the 1990s. As it was shown above, a number of ethnic, territorial and political factors caused a great deal of concern and development of the perception of threat emanating from the North. Already in March 1992, Nazarbayev tasked the MFA to prepare a foundational treaty with Russia and instructed the president's apparatus to supervise the work on it.⁵⁰⁷ The “Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance,” signed in Moscow in May 1992, laid the basis of the Kazakhstani-Russian relations in the new status of independent states and not Soviet republics. It was considered by Almaty as the principal document ensuring that both Nazarbayev and Boris Yeltsin had reached an understanding on a number of major points on the bilateral agenda.

The treaty covered the majority of the crucial political and security issues, and was referred to in one internal letter as the document that “defined the principles and main directions of cooperation.”⁵⁰⁸ Among others, the most essential provisions read:

The High Contracting Parties build their relations as friendly nations, consequently guided by principles of mutual respect of the state sovereignty and territorial integrity, peaceful resolution of disputes and non- use of force or the threat of use of force, including economic and other forms of pressure, equal rights and freedoms, fulfilment of obligations in a good faith, and other commonly accepted rules of the international law.

friends, sort out the border issue, clear the situation and make a final decision’.” Nazarbayev's reply to this was: “Mister Chairman, you are a large country and we are a small one. I propose – let the 53% of disputed territories be ours, and 47% - yours.” See Kasymbekov, *Perviy*, 170-171.

⁵⁰⁶ The MFA report on the results of Nazarbayev's visit sums up main results of negotiations by stating:

“Considering geopolitical position of our nation, the joint declaration's importance in terms of provision of long term security interests of Kazakhstan can not be overestimated.” APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 467, ll. 9-11.

⁵⁰⁷ Tokaev, *Ocherki. Pod Stigom Nezavisimosti*, 147.

⁵⁰⁸ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 22-26.

In case of the act of aggression against any of the Parties or both, Parties will provide each other the necessary assistance, including the military one.

The High Contracting Parties recognize and respect the territorial integrity and inviolability of the existing borders of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Parties will forbid and suppress, in accordance with their legislature, the establishment and activities on their territories of the organizations and groups, as well as activities of individuals, directed against independence, territorial integrity of both states, or directed on aggravation of interethnic relations.⁵⁰⁹

Overall, given the overwhelming relative power capabilities of Russia, the document gives the impression that Kazakhstan was more interested in signing the treaty than its counterpart. After all, Russia's territorial integrity was unlikely to be challenged by Kazakhstan, neither could Russia's military forces significantly benefit from the Kazakhstani arms support in case of an external aggression. In the period following the signing of the treaty, Almaty was also able to reach a compromise with Moscow on additional bilateral issues such as the agreement not to set a maritime border in the Caspian Sea and demilitarization along the Chinese border.⁵¹⁰

However, there remained a number of other problematic questions that Kazakhstan highlighted in its communication with Moscow. In 1992-1994 the status of the Baikonur military-space complex, dual citizenship and the Cossack political mobilization had concerned Almaty policymakers most. These points of discontent were correspondingly reflected in documents developed at the time in the republic's policymaking establishments and in the agendas of bilateral talks between Kazakhstani and Russian politicians and diplomats.

Up until 1994, Almaty policymakers experienced hardships in repelling the Russian pressure to make more concessions on the Baikonur complex and to extend a double-citizenship to willing ethnic Slavs living in the republic. One internal document exposes the intensity of the Almaty-Moscow debate:

In practice it [the Russian assertiveness] leads to rough and aggressive position of the Russians on Baikonur, strategic forces, and on dual citizenship. Prospects of a compromise that would consider Kazakhstani positions are unlikely, and, if we speak realistically, overall impossible.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁹ For the full text of the treaty see "O ratifikatsii Dogovora o Druzhe, Sotrudnichestve i Vzaimnoi Pomoshi mezhdou Respublikoi Kazakhstan and Rossiiskoi Federatsiei," *Adilet legal database*, accessed 21 June 2012, <http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/B920005500>.

⁵¹⁰ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 22-26.

⁵¹¹ "Minutes of the Collegium, 8 February 1994." APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 824, l. 20.

Throughout the mid-1990s Russia had been persistently bringing up these issues in negotiations with Kazakhstan. For instance, when in April 1993 the Russian ambassador Boris Krasnikov had an appointment with Nazarbayev, he raised the following issues: the status of the Russian language; the possibility of double-citizenship; and allegedly increasing emigration of the Russian population from the republic.⁵¹² At this meeting Nazarbayev explained to the Russian envoy the official Kazakhstani position, stating that all citizens regardless of ethnicity had equal rights; the Russian language remained a means of inter-ethnic communication; that Cossacks are not recognized as a ethnic group and that their paramilitary organizations would not be tolerated; and that dual citizenship is not possible.⁵¹³

The problem of Cossacks was perhaps the most uncomfortable to discuss at this April meeting because just a month before president Yeltsin signed the famous “Decree on the State Support of Cossacks,” which Kazakhstani Cossacks, similarly to their counterparts elsewhere, considered a direct signal and encouragement from Moscow to continue their political mobilization in the territory of Kazakhstan.⁵¹⁴ To add to Almaty’s nervousness with the neo-imperialist tendencies in the higher echelons of the Russian political establishment, there was now a rise of pro-Moscow organizations inside the republic. Cossacks started to form organizations with ranks, uniforms and other paraphernalia common to paramilitary organizations. Their activities in the Central and Northern regions of Kazakhstan, where there native Kazakh population was disproportionately low in comparison to significantly larger Slavic, was particularly alarming.

In summer 1993, Russia wanted to stage high-level negotiations headed by vice-premier Sergei Shakhrai from the Russian side to discuss with Kazakhstan the issue of Cossacks in the

⁵¹² APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2164, l. 83.

⁵¹³ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2164, l. 83.

⁵¹⁴ One of the provisions of the decree directly tasked the Russian foreign ministry to regulate relations with other CIS countries concerning Cossacks residing on their territories. For the full text of the decree see “Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii o reformirovanii voennykh struktur, pogranychkh i Vnutrennikh voisk na territorii Severo-Kavkazskogo regiona Rossiiskoi Federatsii i gosudarstvennoi podderzhke kazachestva,” *Official site of the President of Russia*, accessed 24 May 2012, <http://graph.document.kremlin.ru/page.aspx?1177598>.

republic and, quite possibly, try to convince Almaty to extend additional privileges to them. Yeltsin sent Nazarbayev a telegram with the request to consider such possibility.⁵¹⁵ For Nazarbayev it clearly was not a welcoming development so he sought diplomatic and legal advice from the MFA, KNB, and the Prosecutor General's apparatus on the available alternatives to reject the request while abiding the norms of the diplomatic etiquette. In the collective letter signed by heads of these organizations the president was advised to refrain from hosting a Russian delegation since:

Such a discussion would establish an unneeded precedent and would mark a withdrawal from our previous positions that state that there is no such problem in Kazakhstan as the problems of Cossacks. The visit and negotiations could be considered as the de facto recognition by Kazakhstan of the existence of such problem in Russian-Kazakhstani relations. Moreover it could instigate an unneeded frenzy among Russian-speaking population and have negative impact on internal political situation in the republic. It would also give a reason for some national-patriotic forces to accuse the nation's leadership in inability to counter the Russian interference in internal affairs of Kazakhstan, which could cause damage to the credibility of the leadership and the prestige of the nation in the eyes of world's public opinion.⁵¹⁶

Nazarbayev agreed to this collective advice and endorsed the official message of the Kazakhstani MFA to the Russian MFA in which Almaty boldly made it clear that it does not want to engage in discussions on the issue of Cossacks:

In the opinion of the MFA the problem of Cossacks does not exist in Kazakhstani-Russian relations. Cossacks are not recognized as an ethnicity in Kazakhstan. Creation of any paramilitary formations is forbidden by the country's law. Persons who have proclaimed themselves Cossacks, like any other citizens of Kazakhstan, have equal rights regardless of race, ethnicity etc. At the moment, the MFA does not see a necessity in holding bilateral talks on the interstate level on the situation with Cossacks.⁵¹⁷

A hard-line stance on the problem of the Cossacks demonstrated by Kazakhstan exemplified both the sensitivity and resilience of Nazarbayev's policymaking team towards issues of sovereignty and interethnic relations. It is highly possible that Nazarbayev had also discussed this issue with Yeltsin personally, behind closed doors. In any case, the eventual Russian MFA's response revealed acquiescence with Nazarbayev's demands to leave the Cossack issue out of the political agenda, both domestically and internationally: "The Russian Federation MFA is honoured to inform that it shares the concern related to the activities of some

⁵¹⁵ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 298, ll. 169-170.

⁵¹⁶ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 298, ll. 169-170.

⁵¹⁷ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 298, ll. 167-168.

Cossack diasporas that constitute infringement of Kazakhstan's legal framework."⁵¹⁸ The talks with vice-premier Shakhrai did not take place. The assertive behaviour of the Kazakhstani leadership in this case made it possible for the Cossacks' problem to never been raised between both countries thenceforth.

The history of negotiations with Russia in the initial period of independence enhanced the confidence of Almaty policymakers in their diplomatic abilities. Certainly, there were unsettled disagreements left on the bilateral agenda. For example, although the text of the "Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance" did contain the point on the use of the Baikonur complex, it specified that the matter would have to be solved through separate agreements. Nevertheless, the overall tendency was positive for Almaty. The fact that Kazakhstan was able to secure a principal agreement with Russia on the most pressing matters concerning the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security guarantees was certainly an encouraging sign for Almaty policymakers. Moreover, Russia's agreement not to support the Cossacks could also be considered as another indication for Kazakhstan that it is achievable to follow the chartered course and defend national interests even in negotiations with great powers. It is possible to assume that not only the self-confidence of diplomats grew, but also their belief in Nazarbayev's international authority as well as in Russia's goodwill on strategic issues.

Conclusion

Rosenau, discussing the construction of a national interest, writes about the inherent ambiguity of the concept:

What is best for a nation in foreign affairs is never self-evident. More important, it is not even potentially knowable as a singular objective truth. Men are bound to differ on what constitute the most appropriate goals for a nation. For, to repeat, goals and interests are value-laden. They involve subjective preferences, and thus the accumulation of national interests into a single complex of values is bound to be as variable as the number of observers who use different value frameworks.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁸ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 298, ll. 171.

⁵¹⁹ James N. Rosenau, *The Study of World Politics. Vol. 1* (London: Routledge, 2006), 249.

In the case of Kazakhstan, the national interest was defined by the leadership in a precise form – to preserve borders of the former Kazakh SSR and to maintain political sovereignty. This vision had set the parameters for the republic’s foreign policy. The acknowledgement of the criticality of the republic’s play on great powers’ interests for the statehood’s survival does not necessarily mean that policymakers in Almaty were acting out of an inferiority complex. More likely, they can be credited for the careful and pragmatic calculations of Kazakhstan’s relative capabilities.

The fact that there were no substantial disagreements among Almaty leadership on either strategic foreign policy orientation or courses of actions strengthens the assumption about the centralization of policymaking in Nazarbayev’s hands. The policymakers might have disagreed on certain operational matters of foreign conduct, but their visions had to correspond with the president’s opinion. The turf war that unfolded during this challenging period proved to be a “infantile disorder” indicative of the formative phase of policymaking apparatus development without the implication of serious repercussions to the republic’s strategic outlook. Through this bureaucratic confrontation the Kazakhstani policymaking apparatus was moulded to accommodate the foreign ministry as its pillar with other institutions retaining their involvement in the foreign decision-making process. Eventually, these different actors with varying degrees of political authority and closeness to the president had concurred in identification of security threats posed by the international environment and opted for the general strategy of balancing.

This policymaking model proved its effectiveness in assisting Nazarbayev’s diplomatic endeavours both with China, which eventually ended with the peaceful and just resolution of a century-old dispute, and with Russia, which ensured Moscow’s guarantees regarding territorial integrity and military protection without having to make manifest concessions in regard to the republic’s sovereignty. In general, Nazarbayev’s personal involvement and policy advice from his associates from the various institutions were critical in the development of the Kazakhstani foreign strategy. Through difficult and complex process of policy planning and coordination, the MFA, the CSS, the ID AP and Counsellor Zhukeyev profoundly contributed to the way

Nazarbayev's had come to envision the republic's international future. Recalling these achievements, Nazarbayev said: "In such an uneasy situation, when the nation's destiny was on the scales of history, we were prudent and self-restrained. We unfolded substantial negotiations with all near and distant neighbours and started to affirm territorial integrity and strengthen nation's borders."⁵²⁰

The principle of balancing between interests of foreign actors also manifested in the resolution of the nuclear dilemma that Nazarbayev and his key advisers faced in 1991-1992. The issue of the inherited Soviet nuclear arsenal had immediately turned into a significant problem for Nazarbayev, as the Western nations, led in their effort by the USA, subjected the Kazakhstani president to intense diplomatic pressure both publicly and behind closed doors in order to force him to relinquish nuclear weapons on terms dictated by the West. The salience and urgency of the matter ensured that Almaty policymakers treated it separately from any other international issue. The next chapter follows this episode and expounds the presidential decision-making behind the development of Almaty's nuclear strategy.

⁵²⁰ Nazarbayev's speech at the Third Kazakh Kurultai, 2005. Cited in Kasymbekov, *Perviy*, 158.

Chapter V: Nuclear decision-making

The first impression that one gets of a ruler and of his brains is from seeing the men that he has about him. When they are competent and faithful one can always consider him wise, as he has been able to recognize their ability and keep them faithful. But when they are the reverse, one can always form an unfavourable opinion of him, because the first mistake that he makes is in making this choice.
Niccollo Machiavelli, *The Prince*.

A nuclear dilemma had been the principal foreign policy problem for Nazarbayev and his advisers. The immediate salience of the factor of nuclear weapons deployed on Kazakhstani territory has not thus far been surpassed in the republic's foreign policy history. This issue was unique in several aspects. The first, and foremost, reason for this was the fact that the nuclear factor directly related to the national security and sovereignty of the newly emerged state. Second, the nuclear theme dominated the initial relations of Kazakhstan vis-à-vis two major powers of the time – Russia and the USA. Third, the nuclear issue chronologically and circumstantially coincided with the formative period of Kazakhstani foreign policy decision-making tradition.

Between the period from 16 December 1991, when Kazakhstan gained its independence, and 23 May 1992, when the Lisbon Protocol to the START I (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) was signed, Almaty deliberately pursued an ambivalent nuclear strategy neither confirming nor renouncing its nuclear status.⁵²¹ Only on May 23, 1992 did Kazakhstan finally give up its nuclear ambitions and agree to become non-nuclear weapon state.⁵²² This day marked the end of one of the most complicated rounds of foreign policymaking involving the highest-ranking authorities of the republic.

The existing scholarship on the case of Kazakhstan's denuclearization unanimously argues that political and security developments in the international environment were the key

⁵²¹ A bilateral "Treaty on the Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms" signed by the USA and the USSR on 31 July 1991.

⁵²² On other countries' denuclearization processes, see, for example, William J. Long, and Suzette R. Grillot, "Ideas, Beliefs, and Nuclear Policies: The Cases of South Africa and Ukraine," *The Nonproliferation Review* 7, no. 1 (2000): 24-40.

factors leading to the Kazakhstani leadership's final decision to renounce its nuclear status.⁵²³ Nazarbayev's memoirs and public statements support this argumentation.⁵²⁴ The political and security considerations also come into play when researchers correlate an overall ambivalence of the republic's nuclear strategy with Nazarbayev's desire to gain a maximum out of the nuclear cards he held.

In an attempt to transcend limitations imposed by these systemic international factors, Kazakhstan's leadership elaborated and pursued a sophisticated strategy that balanced between an immediate relinquishment of weapons and an entrance to the nuclear club. Evidently, Nazarbayev was the key actor in the development and realization of this foreign policy scenario. At the same time, the president received information, advice, and analysis that assisted him both in identification of international constraints and in planning and implementing his nuclear game. Nevertheless, the existing literature only implicitly suggests that Nazarbayev relied on his advisory group in developing his nuclear agenda. Hitherto, a nuclear decision-making process under way in Almaty was described rather abstractly, averting its detailed exposition.

Since Kazakhstan's denuclearization was certainly not a single man's endeavour, the input of the president's advisers has to be credited. To a certain degree, the views and opinions of those around Nazarbayev steered the nuclear strategy pursued by Almaty during the six-month period under consideration. Knowing the roles and policy positions of key decision makers would enhance the understanding of Kazakhstan's nuclear behaviour. Archival materials reviewed in this chapter shed some additional light on how the presidential advisory group was involved in charting Nazarbayev's nuclear strategy.

⁵²³ Laumulin, *Kazakhstan v Sovremennikh*, 143-160; William C. Potter, *The Politics of Nuclear Renunciation: The Cases of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine* (Washington, DC: Henry L. Stimson Center, 1995), 16-19, 35-42; and Mitchell Reiss, *Bridled Ambition: Why Countries Constrain their Nuclear Capabilities* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1995), 138-182.

⁵²⁴ Nazarbayev, *Na poroge*. 2nd. ed., 61-73; *Epitsentr Mira*. 2nd. ed. (Almaty: Atamura, 2003b), 27-38; and Nursultan Nazarbayev and Peter Conradi, *Nursultan Nazarbayev: My Life, My times and the Future...* (Northampton: Pilkington Press, 1998), 139-50. President Nazarbayev, quoted in Don Oberdorfer, "Kazakhstan agrees to give up the A-Arms; START treaty roadblock is cleared," *Washington Post*, 20 May 1992. The statement by President Nazarbayev to the Supreme Soviet Hearings, Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Kazakhstan, *The Evening Session of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Kazakhstan, May 26, 1992. Minutes* (Almaty: The Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 1992).

Issue overview

Deliberately ambivalent nuclear policy

The emergence of Kazakhstan on the world political map on 16 December 1991 was a direct result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In turn, the collapse of the nuclear state created “a paradoxical situation where in the place of one nuclear superpower, there had emerged at least four.”⁵²⁵ Kazakhstan was among these four nuclear powers, now host to the world’s fourth largest nuclear arsenal.⁵²⁶ Immediately after independence, this invoked noticeable domestic and international developments pro et contra the nuclear Kazakhstan.

The republic’s leadership faced a major foreign policy issue that concerned some of the most fundamental aspects of Kazakhstan’s existence and future development. From December 1991 to May 1992, for the first six months of the existence of the republic in a nuclear capacity, the Kazakhstani leadership’s position on the renunciation of its nuclear status and relinquishment of nuclear weapons constantly oscillated between renouncement and retainment.⁵²⁷ Such behaviour was induced by a specific strategy that included elements of: an intentional ambiguity in Almaty’s nuclear stance; frequent introduction of new issues to the denuclearization agenda; and a simultaneous political and security diplomatic manoeuvring vis-à-vis Russia and the USA.

The ambivalence of the Kazakhstani nuclear stance manifested itself from the start. One of the earliest statements by Nazarbayev on the nuclear issue was made at a meeting with the US Secretary of State James A. Baker on 17 December 1991, where Nazarbayev told the State Secretary: “As long as Russia has nuclear weapons, Kazakhstan will too.”⁵²⁸ This statement was soon reiterated in the first official letter to Bush, in which Nazarbayev informed his American

⁵²⁵ Omurserik Kasenov, Dastan Eleukenov, and Murat Laumulin, *Kazakhstan and the Non-Proliferation Treaty* (Almaty: Institute for Strategic Studies, 1994), 4.

⁵²⁶ “Contribution to International Security,” *Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in USA*, accessed 10 March 2011, <http://www.kazakhembus.com/page/contribution-to-international-security>.

⁵²⁷ Laumulin, *Kazakhstan v Sovremennikh*, 143-144; also Reiss, *Bridled Ambition*, 138-141.

⁵²⁸ President Nazarbayev, cited by the US Secretary of State, James A. Baker, as reported by the ABC News Channel, *World News Tonight with Peter Jennings*, 17 December 1991.

counterpart “Kazakhstan will join the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as a nuclear weapon state.”⁵²⁹

Intriguingly, according to Mitchell Reiss, as early as December 1991 Nazarbayev allegedly twice pledged in private talks with American officials to join the NPT as a non-nuclear state, thus renouncing Kazakhstani claims on the nuclear weapons deployed on its territory.⁵³⁰ In public statements made during the following months, however, Nazarbayev withdrew his non-nuclear commitment and confirmed the nuclear status of the republic.⁵³¹ Reiss writes that Nazarbayev was “deliberately more ambiguous on the nuclear issue in public than he was in private with the Americans.”⁵³² To give another illustration, consider the impressions of the two Western foreign ministers who discussed the issue with Nazarbayev in January and February 1992. For the French minister Roland Dumas, Nazarbayev “virtually behaved like the leader of a nuclear power.”⁵³³ The British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd told reporters after meeting with Nazarbayev: “I am clear that President Nazarbayev has no ambitions for Kazakhstan to be a nuclear power but he is very conscious of the cost and time taken to dismantle and transfer the nuclear weapons.”⁵³⁴ This seemed to be a specific diplomatic tactic employed by Nazarbayev to keep the nuclear issue oblique for the moment.

In general, Nazarbayev is believed to be a skilled diplomat. Reiss makes an inquisitive inference about Nazarbayev’s ability to manipulate a situation in negotiations. Explaining the episode of Nazarbayev’s stopover in Moscow on 17 May 1992, en route to Washington, to discuss with Yeltsin his upcoming negotiations with the Americans, Reiss presumes:

From his press statement after this meeting, it was clear that Nazarbayev had fooled Yeltsin into allowing Almaty to keep half of its SS-18s beyond the seven-year START

⁵²⁹ “Nazarbayev-Bush letter, 7 January 1992.” APRK, f. 5N, op. 1, d. 289, l.2.

⁵³⁰ Reiss, *Bridled Ambition*, 141.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*

⁵³² *Ibid.*

⁵³³ Dumas cited in Mikhail Shchipanov, “Easier to Deal With Bush,” *Kuranty*, 8 February 1992. Also, consider the following excerpt from the Nazarbayev-Dumas dialogue: Dumas: “Will you have more [nuclear] tests?” Nazarbayev: “No, I put a ban on them. ... **For now.**” (Emphasis added). “Minutes of the talks between President Nazarbayev and French state minister – Minister of Foreign Affairs Roland Dumas in Almaty, 25 January 1992.” APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 218, l. 13.

⁵³⁴ Steve Doughty, “West Must Pay Us to Destroy Our Nuclear Weapons,” *Daily Mail*, 20 January 1992.

framework...Nazarbayev's cleverness alerted Washington to the possibility that he might attempt a similar ploy in Lisbon.⁵³⁵

While keeping a vague stance on the fate of the nuclear weapons deployed on the republic's territory, Nazarbayev was a keen supporter of another nuclear alternative – to preserve the unified control over nuclear weapons and to establish a joint strategic forces command in cooperation with Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine. At the CIS inaugural summit in Almaty on 21 December 1991, the agreement on “Joint Measures on Nuclear Arms” was signed, and “The Agreement on Strategic Forces,” signed at the Minsk Summit on 30 December 1991, reiterated the four nation's intention to keep the joint command over nuclear weapons. These acts allowed Nazarbayev to reach two objectives: to remain within a single strategic space with Russia, thus deterring possible military threats from outside the CIS territory, and to obtain additional international legitimacy over the nuclear weapons deployed on the republic's territory. One of the main provisions of these agreements was setting a veto system for nuclear launches. In theory, the launch of nuclear missiles would have to be authorized by all four presidents who were interconnected by a special communication line. In reality, the functions of command and control over Soviet nuclear missiles were never handed over by the first and the last Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev to anyone except Russia's president Yeltsin.⁵³⁶

As Kazakhstan continued to defend its right for a nuclear status, it presented a new argumentation of its claim. Based on the provisions of the NPT, according to which any state that produced and tested nuclear weapons prior to January 1967 was considered a nuclear weapon state, Almaty justified its claim for a nuclear state status to Washington: “if circumstances made the independent republic to become a nuclear state, then it [the republic] should be accepted as such, in accordance with the international definitions.”⁵³⁷ In a twist to this argumentation, Kazakhstan also proposed the introduction of a new classification of a nuclear

⁵³⁵ Reiss, *Bridled Ambition*, 146.

⁵³⁶ On 25 December 1991 Gorbachev resigned and passed nuclear launch codes to the president of Russia Boris Yeltsin.

For the illustration of Nazarbayev's belief in the unfeasibility of the veto system see “Minutes of the talks between Nazarbayev and Dumas, 25 January 1992.” APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 218, ll. 1-19.

⁵³⁷ “Nazarbayev-Bush letter, 7 April 1992.” APRK, f. 5N, op. 1, d. 1361, l. 27.

state, whereby, since the republic was nuclear at the time, but intended to denuclearize in the future, it should be considered as *a temporary nuclear state*.⁵³⁸ These two policy positions are explicated in the Kazakhstani foreign ministry's policy paper submitted to the president in April 1992:

Kazakhstan cannot be called a non-nuclear state because it would contradict the objective reality. Nuclear weapons were deployed on the republic's territory long before 1 January 1967. Thus, in accordance with the Treaty [NPT], Kazakhstan, as one of the successors to the USSR, should be categorized as a state-possessor of nuclear weapons. At the same time, the ultimate goal of Kazakhstan is to become a territory free from nuclear weapons, that is a 'nuclear free' zone....The logic itself dictates the following conclusion: Kazakhstan possesses nuclear weapons temporarily. But as of now it possesses them in reality. Therefore Kazakhstan is in its right to have a status of a state-possessor of nuclear weapons. This position would allow Kazakhstan to fully secure its interests as a sovereign state, an independent subject of international law. Besides, the republic in the foreseeable future would be able to keep powerful leverages over global processes, alongside leading powers.⁵³⁹

On another occasion, showing some flexibility, Nazarbayev linked the prospects of Kazakhstan's nuclear renouncement to geostrategic security concerns and global nuclear disarmament: "We have a perception of a threat from the USA, China, Russia, among others; if they [dismantle] their strategic weapons, we will follow suit."⁵⁴⁰ The nuclear claim was articulated up until early May 1992, when during the visit of Japanese foreign minister Michio Watanabe the president clearly restated the point that Kazakhstan was a nuclear state.⁵⁴¹ Nonetheless, a few weeks later, on 19 May 1992, Nazarbayev officially proclaimed Almaty's intention to accede to the START treaty and to join the NPT treaty.⁵⁴²

⁵³⁸ President Nazarbayev: "I sent a letter to President Bush in which I informed him of our desire to become a non-nuclear state. However, pending the destruction of the nuclear warheads, I asked him to temporarily view Kazakhstan as a nuclear state," as reported in the *Official Kremlin International News Broadcast*, 28 April 1992. It is unknown, though, whether the president meant the 7 April 1992 letter, as in the letter itself there are no passages containing the term a "temporary nuclear state." APRK, f. 5N, op. 1, d. 1361, ll. 25-28.

⁵³⁹ "Main provisions of the Foreign Policy Concept." APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 21, ll. 154-155. Underlined passages in original.

⁵⁴⁰ "Nazarbayev Seeks 'Parity' in Atom Cuts: When Others Disarm, So Will Kazakhstan," *Washington Post*, 23 February 1992.

⁵⁴¹ On 1 May 1992, in the interview to the Japanese TV channel, Nazarbayev stated that "Kazakhstan will retain its nuclear weapons for at least 15 years," quoted by *NHK TV*, aired 1 May 1992, transcript, as reported in *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 4 May 1992. On 2 May 1992, during talks with Watanabe in Almaty, Nazarbayev told the Japanese diplomat that the republic "had no alternative but to keep nuclear weapons unless Russia, US and China will guarantee the security of Kazakhstan," quoted in "Kazakh Leader Shows Understanding of Territorial Dispute," *Japan Economic Newswire*, 2 May 1992.

⁵⁴² "Joint declaration between the United States and Kazakhstan by President Bush and Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev, 19 May 1992." The US State Department, *Dispatch*, vol. 3, no. 21, 25 May 1992.

Four days later, on 23 May 1992, Kazakhstan State Counsellor Zhukeyev signed the Lisbon Protocol to the START I treaty proclaiming that Kazakhstan would join the NPT as non-nuclear weapon state and would accede to the START I treaty as a signatory state.

The shift in Kazakhstan's position was determined by several factors. The key security factors were: the conclusion of the Collective Security Treaty (CST) in Tashkent on 15 May 1992; the statement of the Chinese Foreign Ministry assuring Kazakhstan that Beijing had no territorial claims; the message from US Secretary of State Baker to Nazarbayev reaffirming the US security commitment to non-nuclear states if they were threatened with nuclear power; and the intention to sign the bilateral "Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance" between Kazakhstan and Russia.⁵⁴³ According to Nazarbayev, an equally important factor for Almaty's nuclear policy shift was the change of the US position whereby Washington finally agreed to recognize Kazakhstan as an independent party to the START treaty. This was reflected in Nazarbayev-Bush letter written on the eve of Nazarbayev's visit to Washington, in which the Kazakhstani president's explains the change in Kazakhstan's position:

The signing of the CST led to the qualitatively new situation in the national security sphere of Kazakhstan. Furthermore, considering the fact that the USA agreed with our request to consider Kazakhstan as a Party to the START and that in the future Kazakhstan will participate in the START process as an independent and full-fledged partner, and also considering the US assurances about holding its obligations for taking immediate assistance measures in case Kazakhstan becomes the object of aggression or threat....Kazakhstan accedes to the NPT as a non-nuclear state.⁵⁴⁴

These security and political points circumscribed the contours of nuclear deliberations as they touched upon underlying issues that informed how decision-makers in Almaty perceived a nuclear dilemma and correspondingly adapted their nuclear position and strategy.

Nuclear geopolitics

For the Kazakhstani leadership the nuclear dilemma was essentially a security dilemma. In this context, the nuclear arsenal was viewed both as a deterrence mechanism against a possible threat

⁵⁴³ Omurserik Kasenov, and Kairat Abuseitov, *The Future of Nuclear Weapons in the Kazakh Republic's National Security* (McLean, Virginia: Potomac Foundation, 1993), 6.

The bilateral treaty with Russia was signed on 25 May 1992.

⁵⁴⁴ "Nazarbayev-Bush letter, 16 May 1992." APRK f. 5, op. 1, d. 289, l. 49.

and as a bargaining tool to receive security guarantees in exchange for the arsenal's relinquishment. At the same time, one of the general concerns of the time was the actual utility of the nuclear weapons for the nation's security needs, as it was noted by Kasenov and Abuseitov, "[were] the nuclear arsenals really able to provide the needed guarantee of security for the Republic of Kazakhstan in the essentially new type of international situation?"⁵⁴⁵

For many in Almaty at this time a probability of a direct military threat from China and Russia was realistic. One internal analytical document written for Kazakhstan's leadership stated:

Kazakhstan, elaborating its national security concept, has to come from its geostrategic location 'at the junction' of two powers, RFSR and PRC, each of these two could possibly make territorial claims in the future and each of these two posses powerful military potential, including nuclear weapons.⁵⁴⁶

In view of the alleged Chinese territorial claims and the likelihood of a far-right neo-imperialist rise in Russia, nuclear weapons were considered as an effective deterrent instrument.

In one interview for the American press, Nazarbayev said to reporters:

I must tell you that our neighbour China has nuclear weapons, our neighbour Russia has nuclear weapons....Some Russian politicians have territorial claims to Kazakhstan. There are Chinese textbooks that claim that parts of Siberia and Kazakhstan belong to China. Under these conditions how do you expect Kazakhstan to react?⁵⁴⁷

The geostrategic location of Kazakhstan in the Central Asian region was another point of concern. Laumulin notes that the disappearance of the Soviet strategic arsenal from its territory left the young republic "practically defenceless in the face of impetuous developments in Central Asia."⁵⁴⁸ Many security threats and challenges have escalated in the region including political destabilization, economic collapse, border disputes, separatist movements, ethnic and religious conflicts.⁵⁴⁹ The geographical proximity of Kazakhstan to the Middle East, with several nuclear

⁵⁴⁵ Kasenov and Abuseitov, *The Future of Nuclear Weapons in the Kazakh Republic's National Security*, 6.

⁵⁴⁶ "Foreign Policy and National Security Concept." APRK f. 166N, op. 1, d. 13, l. 5.

⁵⁴⁷ "Kazakhstan President Seeks Security Guarantees in Exchange for Disarmament," *Agence France Presse*, 6 May 1992.

⁵⁴⁸ Laumulin, *Kazakhstan v Sovremennikh*, 148.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

“threshold states” – Pakistan, India, Iraq, and Iran – added further stress to the strategic security outlook.⁵⁵⁰

These specific security concerns were regularly reiterated in Nazarbayev’s public statements and diplomatic cables. The demand for security guarantees from major world powers was an inalienable element for any talks on Kazakhstan’s denuclearization. In another example, in the April 1992 interview with Russian journalists Nazarbayev told them: “Kazakhstan will show flexibility if the USA guarantees the inviolability of its territorial integrity, ensures that the republic does not come under nuclear attack from either the USA or Russia, or China.”⁵⁵¹ The letter from Nazarbayev to Bush written the same month reads:

It is an invariant goal of Kazakhstan to become a nuclear-free state. If this process could possibly become unilateral then we will need relevant guarantees from the USA, Russia, China, and Great Britain. I base my judgment on the assumption that the Republic of Kazakhstan could rely on international guarantees to ensure its national security.⁵⁵²

The nuclear issue thus appeared to be an existential one for Kazakhstan’s leadership. Kazakhstan had no choice but to realistically weigh up the real value of the nuclear weapons factor for ensuring its military security. The internal policy memorandum written to Vice-President Yerik Asanbayev reads: “Apparently, the main goal of the Kazakhstani diplomacy should be the utilization, for the provision of the republic’s security, of the fact that nuclear weapons are deployed on its territory.”⁵⁵³

For Kazakhstan’s leadership, Russia and the USA were the principal security guarantors. At the same time, they were also perceived as potential sources of strategic threat. This point, interconnected with the American and Russian natural interest in the fate of the republic’s nuclear weapons, predisposed the Kazakhstani nuclear policy dynamics to be informed by interactions with the USA and Russia.

⁵⁵⁰ Potter, *Politics of Nuclear Renunciation*, 36.

⁵⁵¹ *Official Kremlin International News Broadcast*, 28 April 1992.

⁵⁵² “Nazarbayev-Bush letter, 7 April 1992.” APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d.1361, l. 26.

⁵⁵³ “Nuclear Policy of Kazakhstan,” *State Defence Committee, MFA, and CSS*. APRK, f. 75N, op. 1, d. 21, l. 187.

Trilateral nuclear diplomacy

The interrelatedness of Kazakhstan's security concerns and outside powers' interests made the nuclear dilemma substantially multilateral, whereby Almaty had to consider its policies towards each participating country within a broader political and security context. To illustrate this point, consider the following presumption put forward by Potter: while the Russian nuclear umbrella could assure deterrence from China, nuclear deterrence from Russia could be seen in a form of the "independent nuclear weapons program"; the latter action would certainly alienate Moscow – the option Almaty could not afford.⁵⁵⁴ Furthermore, the retaining of nuclear arsenals would increase chances of Western isolation of Kazakhstan, thus making it more susceptible to Russian or Chinese pressures.⁵⁵⁵ The need to calculate the repercussions of Kazakhstan's dealings vis-à-vis each nation and each security issue had certainly complicated the solution of the nuclear dilemma for the Kazakhstani leadership.

As Almaty was probing the realization of its own nuclear strategy, both Moscow and Washington were extensively practicing public and behind-the-scenes politics of pressure to convince Almaty's decision makers to renounce nuclear weapons. Putting himself in the place of policymakers in Almaty, Potter assumes: "Given the country's geostrategic location, it is natural that Kazakhstan's leadership was most attentive to its nuclear-armed neighbours. Any nuclear weapons ambitions it may have entertained, however, were also constrained by anticipation of the West's response."⁵⁵⁶

Indeed, Almaty well realized the inevitability of a negative reaction from Russia and the USA to any Kazakhstani step off the denuclearization path. For Russia it was important to remain the sole nuclear state for several reasons, including its claim for the Soviet seat at the Permanent Security Council, matters of international prestige, and geopolitical factors affecting its complicated relations with another newly emerged nuclear state, Ukraine. Russia had a direct leverage on Kazakhstan's nuclear stance since Moscow was in fact the only power to exercise

⁵⁵⁴ Potter, *Politics of Nuclear Renunciation*, 37-38.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

command and control over the strategic forces deployed on the territory of four post-Soviet states. Russia's importance for Kazakhstan's strategic security had been reflected in many policy papers of the time, for example, in one of the earlier papers on the republic's foreign policy concept, the relations with the Russian Federation were described as being of a "vital importance."⁵⁵⁷ Almaty certainly had to carefully consider Moscow's opinion. Illustrative of this trend was a stopover of Nazarbayev in Moscow en route to Washington. During this stopover, Nazarbayev discussed with his Russian colleague Kazakhstan's nuclear position and wanted to hear Yeltsin's judgment of Almaty's tactics on the upcoming talks with the Americans.⁵⁵⁸ Moscow's major leverage came from the fact that Russia's president was actually the only head of state in full control of the Soviet strategic forces. The Kazakhstani leadership clearly realized the formal character of the "launch veto" arrangements provided by agreements signed at Almaty and Minsk summits. On 25 December 1991, the same day Gorbachev passed nuclear codes to Yeltsin, the latter issued a decree on the "Improvement of the Steadfastness of the Combat Control of the CIS Unified Armed Forces' Strategic Nuclear Forces in Emergency Situation" which allowed Russia's president to use the nuclear forces deployed on the territory of the four republics without other presidents' prior consent.⁵⁵⁹ This decree undermined the principles of the Almaty and Minsk accords.

Nazarbayev shared the distress over the impracticality of unified nuclear control and the probability of the unilateral use of nuclear weapons by Russia even with Western diplomats. On 25 January 1992 French Foreign Minister Dumas had a meeting with president Nazarbayev. Following are the excerpts from the minutes of this meeting, which in detail reveal Nazarbayev's attitude to the question of the unified control of the strategic nuclear arsenal.

General Chesnot (member of the French delegation): Please pardon me, but I will ask you a military question. You said that for 10 more years you will have in your possession the nuclear strategic weapon....How do you think you can make a decision to use this weapon? Do you

⁵⁵⁷ "Main provisions of the Foreign Policy Concept." APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 21, l. 151. Numerous references underlying Russia's importance for Kazakhstan are found in the policy documents reviewed in Chapter IV.

⁵⁵⁸ Nazarbayev and Conradi, *Nursultan Nazarbayev*, 148. As discussed earlier, Reiss, *Bridled ambition*, 146, presents a different interpretation of this conversation.

⁵⁵⁹ Nazarbayev, *Epitsentr Mira*. 2nd. ed., 98.

want to have an independent launch button or do you agree that this button will be held by Russia's president?

Nazarbayev: We have signed the agreement in that respect. The launch button is with the Commander-in-Chief of the CIS Unified Forces, with the Head of the General Staff [of the CIS Unified Forces], and with the President of Russia....The decision about a possible use is made by four heads of states that possess nuclear weapons. This is because the one who has the nuclear weapons has to consider that he can be retaliated.

Dumas: Yes, the retaliation.

Nazarbayev: This is why I am not indifferent; this is why we have a special instantaneous connection line to make a decision.

General Chesnot: Do you possess any other physical material device, apart from the telephone communication, to prevent the decision of the president of Russia, with which, possibly, you would not agree?

Nazarbayev: I like this question! Today nobody, neither Kravchuk, nor Shushkevich, nor me can block it [the decision of the president of Russia on the use of nuclear weapons]....After we have signed the agreement that a decision to use of the nuclear weapon can only be made in concurrence with all of us, Yeltsin issues the decree [the 25 December 1991 Decree] by which, in case of the shortage of time, Yeltsin, the Commander-in-Chief, and the Head of the General Staff can make this decision. What does he [Yeltsin] mean by shortage of time? The decision can be made in different mood. I wrote him that this decree breaches our agreements....I wrote him a letter that this is no good.⁵⁶⁰

As one Kazakhstani expert suggested, this 25 December 1991 Yeltsin decree had eventually become the decisive factor in Nazarbayev giving up whatever nuclear ambitions he might have entertained to date.⁵⁶¹

The USA, another principal partner in Almaty's nuclear diplomacy, had a genuine interest in the relinquishment of all Soviet nuclear arsenals to Russia so they would have to deal with nuclear disarmament matters with one party rather than with all four. In fact, the nuclear factor was a key reason for the USA (among other Western countries) to be interested in Kazakhstan. The president's press-secretary Seitkazy Matayev explicitly articulated this point in spring 1992: "If we didn't have nuclear weapons, they would never have bothered," said the press-secretary, commenting on recent visits by US State Secretary Baker, British foreign secretary Hurd and French foreign minister Dumas, "a state with nuclear bombs has a decisive role in world affairs...Nuclear weapons are our trump card."⁵⁶² This interest, however, reflected not only the significance of Almaty's politics for the USA, but also for the reciprocal implications whereby Kazakhstan was subjected to intense American pressure.

⁵⁶⁰ "Minutes of the talks between Nazarbayev and Dumas." APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 218, ll.1-19.

⁵⁶¹ Foreign policy expert, name and place withheld by request, interview with the author, 20 February 2012.

⁵⁶² Matayev quoted in Andrew Higgins, "Deadly Secrets for Sale," *Independent*, 19 April 1992.

Consider this section of the “Nuclear and Security Issues Agenda” attached to a letter sent by Bush to Nazarbayev on 28 December 1991.⁵⁶³ A fairly bold style of language used in the Agenda discursively suggests an element of power politics from the USA from the earliest phase:

As a matter of high priority, Russia should confirm specifically that it considers itself bound to fulfil all the obligations of the former Soviet Union under the NPT. All other Republics should promptly become parties to the NPT as non-nuclear weapon states and take all steps necessary to fulfil their obligations under the Treaty.⁵⁶⁴

Using similar stylistics, Secretary Baker wrote Nazarbayev about his meeting with the Russian foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev: “On the question of START ratification, I reiterated our view that ratification process in the US required a single partner and that that partner should be the Russian Federation.”⁵⁶⁵

The USA also utilized the NATO authority to exert pressure on the Kazakhstani leadership. In April 1992 the US chargé d'affaires in Almaty William Courtney conveyed the “NATO statement on NPT Accession” to minister Suleymenov. The part of the text addressed to Nazarbayev read:

Neither the mere physical presence of nuclear weapons in these states [Belarus, Kazakhstan, Ukraine], nor the locus of past Soviet testing activities constitutes grounds for regarding these states as nuclear weapon states under the treaty [NPT]....Allies fully expect that Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan will accede to the NPT not as non-nuclear weapon states....This will facilitate their further integration into the international community and will promote the security interests of all concerned states.⁵⁶⁶

The annual review of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reflects the scale of political pressure used by Washington to compel Almaty to give up its nuclear ambitions:

The character of Kazakhstani-American relations was mainly defined by the presence of strategic offensive arms on the territory of Kazakhstan and Washington’s interest in the adoption of the status of a nuclear-free state by Kazakhstan. The MFA’s efforts were aimed at finding an active variant of the solution of this problem, while asserting Kazakhstan’s right as an independent sovereign state. After long, sometimes exhausting negotiations we were able to persuade Russia and USA to convert the START treaty to a multilateral format. Our statement on the intention to relinquish strategic weapons in accordance with the START treaty timetable and join the NPT has eliminated the elements of American power politics (*politika silovogo davleniia*) that manifested themselves prior to signing the Lisbon Protocol on May 23, 1992.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶³ “Bush-Nazarbayev letter, 28 December 1991.” APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 20, ll. 267-279.

⁵⁶⁴ “Bush-Nazarbayev letter, 28 December 1991.” APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 20, l. 278.

⁵⁶⁵ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 20, l. 43.

⁵⁶⁶ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 21, l. 44.

⁵⁶⁷ “MFA annual report, 12 April 1993.” APRK, f. 75N, op. 1, d. 2, l. 4.

Such pressure also took form of mass-media reports and intelligence “leaks” on alleged sales of Kazakhstan nuclear components to the Middle East states that were sounded in January 1992. Several European and American information agencies reported that Tehran could have purchased nuclear technologies and weapons from Almaty.⁵⁶⁸ Almaty policymakers had correctly recognized the motivation behind these “leaks.” Illustrative of this understanding of the situation is the letter from the plenipotentiary mission of Kazakhstan in Moscow.⁵⁶⁹ On 10 January 1992 the mission’s head, Kanat Saudabayev informed Nazarbayev about the visit by Counsellor R. Clark from the US Embassy in Moscow. Counsellor Clark expressed the US State Department’s concern about the “unconfirmed information” that Kazakhstan could export nuclear components to Iran. In the letter Saudabayev indicates the “political forces, not interested in development of full-fledged Kazakhstani-American relations” as sources of such false accusations.⁵⁷⁰ Saudabayev was worried about the possible negative American reaction in case Washington receives additional falsified information about nuclear export. He warns Nazarbayev: “the American side is throwing a ‘trial balloon’ on a very serious issue...Kazakhstan will find itself in a vulnerable position in regard to possible charges of breaching its international obligations.”⁵⁷¹ Laumulin assumes that these allegations about covert arm deals with Iran were initiated in order to test the readiness of Kazakhstan to follow the international agreements and, at the same time, to gauge the strength of the Islamic sentiments in the republic and the proclivity of the Kazakhstani leadership to cooperate with Islamic fundamentalist regimes.⁵⁷² When Nazarbayev discussed this issue in his meeting with French foreign minister Dumas, the president told the European diplomat:

Concerning insinuations about our relations with Arab nations, including Iran and others, I responsibly state that this is not less than a provocation. We yet do not have any, neither

⁵⁶⁸ See, for example, “Washington uneasy over possible sale of Soviet weapons technology to Iran,” *Agence France Presse*, 8 January 1992; “Soviet A-Bombs ‘Sold to Iran’,” *Daily Mail*, 24 January 1992; John Laffin, “Iran and a nuclear ‘gift of the gods’,” *Daily Mail*, 25 January 1992; “Iran bought nuclear weapons,” *Toronto Star*, 24 January 1992.

⁵⁶⁹ “The letter from the Plenipotentiary mission of Kazakhstan in Moscow to president Nazarbayev, 10 January 1992.” APRK f.75N, op. 1, d. 20, ll. 227-228.

⁵⁷⁰ APRK f.75N, op. 1, d. 20, l. 228.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷² Laumulin, *Kazakhstan v Sovremennikh*, 145.

political nor economic relations with Iran or Pakistan, or with other Arabic nations. They can occur, but they can only concern our mutually beneficial economic relations. Kazakhs treat Islamic fundamentalism the same way French do.⁵⁷³

Eventually, Kazakhstan's foreign ministry had to officially deny allegations of selling nuclear weapons and its components, stating that they were "aimed at damaging Kazakhstan's international prestige on the eve of it joining the UN."⁵⁷⁴

However, not only "stick," but also "carrot" politics were used in the American and Russian attempts to influence Kazakhstan's decision. The Americans promised large-scale economic and technical assistance to Kazakhstan. The fact that the Lisbon Protocol was signed at the international aid conference devoted to assisting post-Soviet nations in transition is illustrative of the point. Counsellor Zhukeyev would later recall: "Kazakhstan received its own Marshall Plan in exchange for nuclear renouncement."⁵⁷⁵ Potter, with reference to the US ambassador, sums up the incentives and disincentives presented to the Kazakhstani leadership by the USA:

Lengthy discussions between senior US and Kazakhstani officials...especially in the period prior to May 1992, had the effect of highlighting to Kazakhstan the security liabilities of retaining nuclear weapons and the strategic, as well as economic, benefit that would accrue from their removal.⁵⁷⁶

Motivation from the Russian side would primarily come from the politico-military domain. Nazarbayev had solid reasons to expect Russia to guarantee the republic's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as to extend a nuclear protection. One of the main goals of the Almaty CIS summit in December 1991 was to recognize Russia as the legal successor to the USSR, including its membership in the nuclear club, thereby legitimizing its claim for a

⁵⁷³ APRK f.5, op. 1, d. 218, l.8.

⁵⁷⁴ *Izvestiia*, 29 January 1992.

Interestingly, in November 2012 Kassym-Zhomart Tokaev, who was the deputy foreign minister in 1992, revealed that in 1992 the Libyan president Muammar Gaddafi sent a confidential personal letter to Nazarbayev offering him a multibillion contribution in exchange for the retainment of the nuclear arsenal and creation of the first "Muslim nuclear bomb." See "Qadhafi Said Offered Kazakh President to Preserve Nuclear Weapon," *BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit*, 29 November 2012.

⁵⁷⁵ "Pora perestat' toptat' sia u dverei vlasti," Tolegen Zhukeyev, interview transcript, 24 October 2008, *Spik.Kz*, accessed 12 February 2010, <http://www.spik.kz/?lan=ru&id=104&pub=1152>.

⁵⁷⁶ Potter, *Politics of Nuclear Renunciation*, 39. Nazarbayev later recalled that in Washington the American side made an attempt to pressure him and linked the possibility of signing the package of bilateral agreements on economic cooperation and aid to the signing of the proposed agreements on nuclear weapons. The president did not submit to the pressure and expressed his readiness to leave the US without any agreements reached. The US only then proposed producing a letter about the security guarantees extended to Kazakhstan. Nazarbayev, *Na Poroge*. 2nd. ed., 65-66.

permanent seat at the UN Security Council. At the Almaty summit CIS presidents agreed to support Russia in taking over the USSR seat in the Security Council.⁵⁷⁷ In turn, Russia was expected to serve as a security guarantor for Kazakhstan, Belarus and Ukraine. Eventually Russia did become the primary security guarantor for Kazakhstan after the nuclear renouncement. The republic remained in the common strategic military space and thus under the Russian nuclear umbrella. These political-military arrangements were legalized first in Tashkent, where the Collective Security Treaty was signed on 15 May 1992, and then in Moscow, where the bilateral “Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance” between Kazakhstan and Russia was signed on 25 May 1992.

The Russian and American factors were the most significant external factors for the republic’s nuclear strategy. The politics of Moscow and Washington delineated a corridor within which Almaty could manoeuvre. Nazarbayev’s nuclear game had to constantly take into account considerations of the outside partners. Each action or change in position from Russia or the USA automatically entailed a policy response from Kazakhstan. Therefore, Almaty’s nuclear politics appears to be a highly interactive endeavour.

Nuclear deliberations

Issue novelty

When the nuclear dilemma surfaced, neither Nazarbayev nor his policy advisers had at their hands a finalized comprehensive and coordinated policy position. This situation occurred because of the infancy of Kazakhstan foreign policy per se and because of the novelty of the issue for Nazarbayev himself. Chronologically, the founding period of Kazakhstan’s foreign policy coincided with the nuclear period of the republic’s history. The absence of any prior experience of independent foreign policy planning and implementation at the early stage of

⁵⁷⁷ See “The Decision of the Heads of States of the CIS,” *CIS Secretariat*, accessed 11 January 2013, <http://cis.minsk.by/reestr/ru/index.html#reestr/view/text?doc=5>. Russia took over the Soviet seat on 24 December 1991.

independence was the general setting in which the nuclear debate unfolded.⁵⁷⁸ As described in detail in the previous chapter, both the foreign ministry and other institutions, involved in foreign policymaking were at their nascent formation stages. Standard operating and policy planning procedures were only beginning to emerge to deal with routine and non-routine policy issues. Although virtually every foreign policy issue had to be dealt with from scratch, the nuclear question naturally required serious expertise and attention.

Although some basic information about the nuclear infrastructure was known in Almaty prior to independence, Nazarbayev admits that only in December 1991 he found out detailed information about nuclear weapons deployed on Kazakhstan territory.⁵⁷⁹ In one letter to Bush Nazarbayev confidently tells his American colleague:

To be frank, due to understandable reasons, previously [before the independence] main information about the presence, qualitative composition, and potential power capacity of this type of weapons [nuclear missiles] was not available for Kazakhstan. Naturally, some time was needed for me personally to comprehend the situation.⁵⁸⁰

Potter draws a more sceptical picture of Nazarbayev's comprehension of nuclear matters at the initial period. The author quotes an anonymous Kazakh official who, serving as the presidential adviser at the CIS summit in Almaty on 21 December 1991, was asked by Nazarbayev: "What should we do with the nuclear weapons?"; in a reply to this question the adviser suggested to "not be in a hurry."⁵⁸¹ Potter uses this evidence to illustrate his point about Kazakhstan's leadership initial inexperience in foreign matters.⁵⁸²

⁵⁷⁸ All interviewed individuals who worked in the foreign ministry in the beginning of the 1990s highlight this point as a particular feature of the initial period of independence.

⁵⁷⁹ Jonathan Aitken, *Nazarbayev and the Making of Kazakhstan* (London: Continuum, 2009), 137.

Before the proclamation of independence, on 29 August 1991 Nazarbayev closed the Semipalatinsk testing polygon – an action that certainly required some basic understanding of a nuclear problem.

⁵⁸⁰ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 1361, l. 25.

⁵⁸¹ Potter, *Politics of Nuclear Renunciation*, 16.

⁵⁸² While making a chronologically correct observation that Kazakhstan's leadership had only recently started to engage in foreign policy and thus had a "very limited experience in international affairs," Potter overlooks the fact that even prior to independence the president had at least some preliminary information about the nuclear subject. The anonymous witness's account cited by Potter does not correlate with the confident style Nazarbayev held during his talks with James Baker just 5 days before. Had Nazarbayev been a complete novice in nuclear problem it would be unlikely that his discussions on nuclear issues with Baker were held *tête-à-tête*, if held at all. The cited dialogue between Nazarbayev and his adviser was most likely framed more generally and aimed at motivating his advisers to produce more policy options than the Kazakh leader had to the date.

Therefore, it is natural that Nazarbayev initially had no set nuclear position.⁵⁸³ To develop one there was a need, to one degree or another, for the policy advice and expertise of advisers he had around him. While the circle of experienced diplomats, foreign policy experts, and nuclear specialists in the republic was limited, the president mobilized every professional to deal with this issue.

Alternative nuclear discourses

During this six-month period, from December 1991 till May 1992, Nazarbayev was continuously receiving different, often contradictory policy recommendations that ranged from dovish proposals of unilateral and unconditional nuclear disarmament to hawkish calls to run an independent nuclear weapons programme. Nazarbayev recalls: “We had no choice but to embark on the difficult path of measuring conclusions and counterarguments, doubts and fears, in a grand debate as we deliberated whether or not Kazakhstan would become a nuclear power.”⁵⁸⁴

Nuclear proponents argued that nuclear weapons would effectively allow Kazakhstan to increase its own political status as a full-fledged member of the nuclear club and to deter possible security threats from China, Russia and the Middle East. To overcome technical and financial difficulties in managing the entire nuclear arsenals, a proposition was made to keep the small number of strategic nuclear missiles in order to maintain a so-called “defensive sufficiency” whereby not the quantity but the mere presence of nuclear weapons would count.⁵⁸⁵

Representatives of another pole in a nuclear debate, nuclear pacifists, who urged for an unconditional denuclearization, mainly represented ecological movements and based their clause on the catastrophic effects of Semipalatinsk nuclear test range closed in August 1991 by the president’s decree. Apparently, such unilateral unconditional renouncement did not seem to

⁵⁸³ Potter, *Politics of Nuclear Renunciation*, 16.

⁵⁸⁴ Nazarbayev as quoted in Aitken, *Nazarbayev and the Making of Kazakhstan*, 138.

⁵⁸⁵ For the explications of the points, see the interview with Burkytbai Aiaganov, *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 26 February 1992.

guarantee any security or economic gains in return. The main argumentation base was constructed from the environmental and civilizational elements.

The circle of critics of nuclear retention included a mid-level official in the president's apparatus and a former foreign minister of the Kazakh SSR Isinaliev.⁵⁸⁶ Nevertheless, neither "hawks" nor "doves" were represented at the highest foreign policymaking echelons. It made the former less susceptible to the extreme political pressure from Washington and Moscow Nazarbayev was subject to. Correspondingly, the latter could not fully perceive prospects of appropriate political, security, and economic compensation for nuclear weapons. Furthermore, both wings did not have sufficient technical information about the state of affairs with the stationed nuclear weapons. It is unlikely that the nuclear pacifists and nuclear protagonists knew that the full control over strategic arms remained in Moscow's hands and that a safe deconstruction of silo-launched nuclear missiles required enormous technical and financial resources that Almaty did not have.⁵⁸⁷

Meanwhile, Nazarbayev's political post clearly gave him a better opportunity to perceive all elements of the puzzle since he was a person in the centre of a nuclear debate. At some early stage in this period, Nazarbayev discarded both ultra-dovish and ultra-hawking opinions and in this grand debate chose a "steady course between capitulation and confrontation."⁵⁸⁸ According to Nazarbayev's own recollections and Tokaev's memoirs, the president affirmatively adhered to the non-nuclear option but deliberately protracted the finalization of a nuclear question in order to gain maximum political, security, and economic compensation.⁵⁸⁹ Hence, out of the three major nuclear outlooks prevailing at the time: 1) position of "hawks" in favour of keeping an entire nuclear arsenal to serve as a deterrent and as a political leverage; 2) position of

⁵⁸⁶ Burkytbai Aiaganov headed the Public Opinion Research and Sociological Forecasting Sector of the Apparatus of the President.

One newspaper article criticizing nuclear agreements reached by Nazarbayev in Washington in May 1992 was written by a former minister of foreign affairs Isinaliev and sent to *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, but it remained unpublished. See Isinaliev, "Net Garantii Bezopasnosti," 21 May 1992. APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 1381, ll. 18-23.

⁵⁸⁷ For Nazarbayev's view on a nuclear debate in Kazakhstani society, see Nazarbayev, *Epitsentr Mira*. 2nd. ed., 27-38.

⁵⁸⁸ Reiss, *Bridled ambition*, 143.

⁵⁸⁹ Nazarbayev and Conradi, *Nursultan Nazarbayev*; Nazarbayev, *Na poroge*; *Epitsentr Mira*; Tokaev, *Pod Stigom*.

“bargainers” who argued for retaining nuclear arms until they can be exchanged for security guarantees; and, 3) position of “doves” who wanted immediate and total denuclearization, Nazarbayev vowed for the second one – the “bargainers’ line.”⁵⁹⁰

But Nazarbayev was certainly not alone in charting the nuclear course. Almaty’s nuclear strategy was an amalgam of the president’s own contemplation and policy recommendations he received from his key advisers. Once the “bargainers’ line” became the official course of action, Nazarbayev’s foreign policy team began to elaborate a blueprint of Almaty’s nuclear strategy. This middle path between retention and renouncement is where foreign policymaking manifested itself.⁵⁹¹ Nazarbayev set the general preferences – to eventually become a nuclear-free state but to protract nuclear renouncement for as long as it was necessary to gain political and economic dividends. His advisory group generated a number of alternative nuclear positions in line with the president’s general strategy.

Obscure foreign policymaking

Just as the Kazakhstani nuclear strategy seemed ambiguous for Russian and American diplomats, a nuclear decision-making process in Almaty continues to seem obscure to researchers. The existing literature on Kazakhstan’s denuclearization contains limited information on the principal details of the foreign policymaking process and structure in the studied period. A usual practice in both primary and secondary sources is to abstract foreign policymaking, either by centring the focus of attention on the president’s role, or by anthropomorphizing and substituting decision-making personalities with such constructs as “Kazakhstan,” “the Republic,” “Almaty” etc. Therefore, many questions are left unanswered. Who were the president’s key advisers on nuclear politics? Was there an established ad hoc group to deal with this issue? What were the policy positions of the foreign minister? How was policy advice communicated to the president?

⁵⁹⁰ Aitken, *Nazarbayev and the Making of Kazakhstan*, 137-138.

⁵⁹¹ Reiss, *Bridled Ambition*, 142.

These and other queries, principal for a foreign policy decision-making analysis, have not been hitherto explicated.

Narratives of Kazakhstan's denuclearization mostly revolve around Nazarbayev, and he is often identified in them as the sole decision-making actor. The president's biographers depict foreign policymaking through the prism of Nazarbayev's vision and action. Ertysbaev:

“Nazarbayev could not miss a chance to take advantage of the situation when Kazakhstan, even if for a short time, became a nuclear state. He determinedly decided to expand issues of nuclear security and convert them to the dimension of security guarantees for Kazakhstan.”⁵⁹²

Kasymbekov: “Nevertheless, President of Kazakhstan Nazarbayev chose a path that even his former opponents today agree to have been the most rational.”⁵⁹³ Aitken: “So Nazarbayev had to restrain his instincts to indulge in the gesture politics of an immediate renunciation of nuclear weapons after becoming president. Instead, he embarked on a delicate diplomatic minuet with the world's major nuclear powers, designed to extract maximum advantage for Kazakhstan.”⁵⁹⁴

As Reiss flatteringly summarizes:

But he [Nazarbayev] adroitly negotiated the pace, terms, and price of their [nuclear weapons] return to extract maximum advantage. He was able to parlay a weak hand – a poor economy, fewer nuclear weapons than in Ukraine, borders with two nuclear-armed states, enormous human suffering and environmental harm from past nuclear tests, and suspicion over ties to other Moslem states – into a winning hand, gaining kudos for his statesmanship and international status for his country.⁵⁹⁵

Nazarbayev's own autobiography and memoirs expectedly focus on the president's deliberations and involvement in the denuclearization process, very loosely hinting at the advisory group around him.⁵⁹⁶ Similar difficulties in obtaining detailed information were encountered at the interviews with former and active government officials. During the interviews, Nazarbayev's character featured prominently, reflecting his active role in nuclear

⁵⁹² Ertysbaev, *Kazakhstan i Nazarbayev*, 469.

⁵⁹³ Kasymbekov, *Institut Prezidentsva*, 220.

⁵⁹⁴ Aitken, *Nazarbayev and the Making of Kazakhstan*, 129.

⁵⁹⁵ Reiss, *Bridled Ambition*, 150.

⁵⁹⁶ Only in one instance does Nazarbayev directly credit the presence of the adviser, who was the Russian general from the strategic forces branch providing expert advice to the president at the negotiation rounds in Washington. Nazarbayev recalls: “All the time the Russian officer was sitting next to me, giving me advice and correcting any mistakes which I made.” Nazarbayev and Conradi, *Nursultan Nazarbayev*, 148.

policymaking. His custom to consult with his associates was also confirmed by senior foreign ministry and the president's office officials.⁵⁹⁷ At the same time, names or ranks of these advisers were not disclosed. Nevertheless, the president's practice to discuss nuclear issues both formally and informally suggests that there was an established circle of his advisers who assisted him in elaborating Kazakhstan's nuclear strategy.

Intentionally or not, the Kazakhstani decision makers directly involved in nuclear deliberations tend not to be specific in their accounts either. In his memoirs, Nazarbayev himself often uses the pronouns "we," "us" etc. to describe his foreign policymaking circle. Illustrative of this tendency, Nazarbayev describes nuclear negotiations with Baker in his autobiography in the following manner:

However, I insisted that it would be wrong to see this as an attempt by us to stake a claim to the nuclear weapons on our territory. We were realists; we knew how expensive it would be to maintain these weapons...Nevertheless, we were not prepared simply to renounce these weapons without getting something in return – in particular, security guarantees.⁵⁹⁸

In Nazarbayev's memoirs, even the name and rank of the official who signed the Lisbon Protocol on behalf of Kazakhstan was withheld. This person, State Counsellor Zhukeyev, was depicted as "a representative of Kazakhstan."⁵⁹⁹

Tokaev, who was in the office of the deputy foreign minister from March 1992 onwards and personally participated in the elaboration of the nuclear strategy, is also unspecific in his recollections. Tokaev abstracts the decision-making in Almaty either by anthropomorphizing the republic or signifying the president's role. Describing the complexity of the nuclear dilemma, Tokaev recollects: "Kazakhstan faced an uneasy task of grasping the specifics of global nuclear politics, to determine positions on different issues of nuclear disarmament. President Nazarbayev charted a denuclearization course."⁶⁰⁰

Reiss, having interviewed many people who were involved in nuclear decision-making both in Almaty and Washington, made the following observation:

⁵⁹⁷ Kasymbekov, *interview*; Kurmanguzhin, *interview*, 10 February 2012, Suleymenov, *interview*.

⁵⁹⁸ Nazarbayev and Conradi, *Nursultan Nazarbayev*, 146.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 149.

⁶⁰⁰ Tokaev, *Pod Stigom*, 696.

What may not have been known to US officials at this time [December 1991-May 1992] was the nature of a behind-the-scenes nuclear debate then under way in Almaty. Government officials and military officers argued over the perceived political advantages and disadvantages that nuclear weapons conferred....Although only the contours of this debate are known, it had clearly influenced Kazakhstan's nuclear stance at the two December 1991 summits and afterward.⁶⁰¹

Potter is more straightforward in describing the essence of the nuclear decision-making. The author also bases his findings on the interviews he conducted with Kazakhstani and US officials. Potter argues that nuclear decision-making was contracted at the highest level with only two persons in charge of making decisions: "Although the ministers of foreign affairs and defence were involved formally in the formulation of nuclear policy, in fact all key internal and international nuclear deliberations appear to have involved only President Nazarbayev and State Counsellor Zhukeyev."⁶⁰²

If the president's role in denuclearization is illustrated rather sufficiently, the existence of some sort of decision-making structure is only implicitly suggested. The opaqueness of non-Nazarbayev foreign policymaking has been a common problem for researchers of that period. The lack of primary information impeded scholars from making a detailed description of the personalities and organizations involved in the nuclear deliberations. While the presence of some sort of advisory group is presumed, the literature does not trace or describe any nuclear decision making not involving the president. And although it is possible to generally follow Nazarbayev's line of thought, it is hard to portray the organizational and institutional settings in which the president was making his choices, because of the "obliviousness" of the main protagonists of the nuclear episode. As a result, the picture of a nuclear decision-making is blurred.

The ad hoc decision-making group

The archival documents reviewed in this section shed additional light on the events and policy debates arising around the nuclear dilemma. Due to technical reasons and matters of confidentiality noted in Chapter I, it is not possible to obtain access to a comprehensive set of

⁶⁰¹ Reiss, *Bridled Ambitions*, 142.

⁶⁰² Potter, *Politics of Nuclear Renunciation*, 41.

documents relating to the nuclear policy development. The reviewed set of archival documents includes letters, analytical memoranda, drafts of public statements and addresses, and policy papers produced in the Apparatus of the President and the Foreign Ministry in the period from December 1991 to May 1992. The majority of these documents reflect an uneasy diplomatic game around the two distinct nuclear issues that featured prominently in Almaty's general strategy of protracted denuclearization. The first, and the principal one, was Kazakhstan's nuclear status per se. The USA and Russia insisted that Kazakhstan should proclaim itself non-nuclear weapon state and join the NPT under this category. Almaty attempted to avoid a renouncement of its nuclear status, first by referring to the original NPT provisions on the categorization of nuclear states, and later by introducing a new, "temporarily nuclear weapon state" classification. The second policy position concerned Almaty's desire to become a full-fledged member of the START treaty, thus transforming it from the bilateral to multilateral format. Here as well, the American and Russian leadership had a divergent opinion as both states wanted to keep the START treaty bilateral. In this case, Almaty took a firm stand and skilfully steered a negotiation process.

To proceed with the review and analysis of the content of these letters it is essential to consider the particular class of documents called the *Rezolutsiia* (instruction). *Rezolutsiia* is the written reaction of the addressee to a document he receives, in most cases it is formulated as a direct instruction. It usually contains formal commands and guidelines for the immediate subordinate of the addressee in a document or an issue concerned. The first set of documents under review contains appended instructions from high-ranking decision makers, including Nazarbayev himself, that relate to the nuclear issue. These written messages reflect not only an addressee's reaction to a letter, but also reveal important details about the composition and dynamics of the decision-making circle. They show the hierarchy of officials, levels of their responsibility, scope of their work, chains of command, and lines of communications. Not only do the instructions reveal some important information about the president's preferences for the

dynamics of his advisory group, they are also helpful for planning out a general structure of nuclear decision making.

The main document type under review is the *Pismo* (Letter). The internal exchange of letters between the president and the foreign ministry was one form of nuclear decision-making. The reviewed letters follow the internal discussion of the membership status in the START treaty. Nazarbayev named the US agreement to consider Kazakhstan (along with Belarus and Ukraine) as a full-fledged party to the START I treaty as one of the main reasons for the shift in the republic's position and Almaty's final decision to renounce a nuclear status. The coordination of negotiations on the START treaty membership status was one of the primary tasks of the foreign ministry. This issue was the subject of extensive negotiations with the USA and Russia on the level of the respective foreign ministers. The main points of these negotiations are reflected in the documents considered below. The analysis of the set of documents in the START treaty portrays an interactive picture of discussions between the president and the foreign ministry's staff.

Instructions on the nuclear policy development

The reviewed instructions were appended to the documents relating to nuclear decision-making.

Instruction 1.1

Foreign minister Suleymenov forwarded Nazarbayev the letter by US State Secretary Baker with the cover letter addressed to the Head of the President's Apparatus Abykaev. This letter was considered by Nazarbayev, who instructed Counsellor Zhukeyev to prepare a reply.

[Handwritten]

To: Comrade Zhukeyev T.T.

In coordination with the MFA prepare a reply. Simultaneously ... [unintelligible] an opportunity to explain our position on the further reductions of the strategic arms. (We can communicate in the form acceptable to the USA, because Kazakhstan adheres to democratic, civilized principles).

N. Nazarbayev, 28 March 1992⁶⁰³

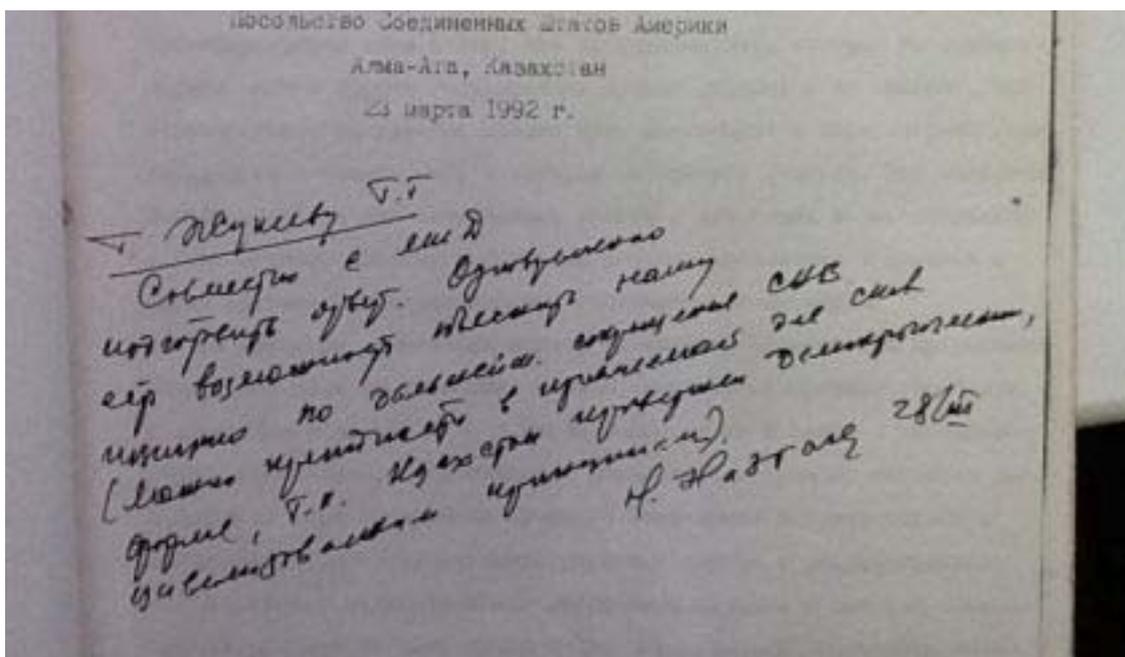


Image 1.1 Nazarbayev’s instruction to Zhukeyev, 28 March 1992.
(photograph by the author with the permission from the APRK)

Instruction 1.2

In turn, Zhukeyev ordered the foreign minister to prepare a reply on behalf of the president.

The State Counsellor of the Republic of Kazakhstan

*To: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan
Comrade Suleymenov T.S.*

Instruction:

Please, urgently prepare a reply. Please, endorse a prepared draft with me.

T. Zhukeyev, 30 March 1992

In turn, minister Suleymenov tasked deputy minister Tokaev with this order.

[Handwritten]

To: Comrade Tokaev K.K.

*Instruction: For the execution.*⁶⁰⁴

⁶⁰³ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 20, l. 39.

⁶⁰⁴ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 20, l. 36.



Image 1.2: Zhukeyev’s instruction to Suleymenov, 30 March 1992.
 (photograph by the author with the permission of the APRK)

Instruction 2.1

Minister Suleymenov sent the president a letter regarding the presidential campaign in the USA (4 April 1992) as part of preparatory work for the president’s visit to the USA in May 1992.⁶⁰⁵

Nazarbayev read the letter and sent it to Abykaev. In the instruction, Nazarbayev charged Abykaev with the task of assembling the advisory group that would assist the president before and during his trip:

[Handwritten]

To: Abykaev N.A.

Instruction:

1. *There is a need to set up a group to elaborate the overall ideology of the visit to USA. Submit for approval.*
2. *Possibly, as a supplement, prepare one political document for signing.*

⁶⁰⁵ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 1343, ll. 64-67.

N. Nazarbayev, 14 April 1992⁶⁰⁶

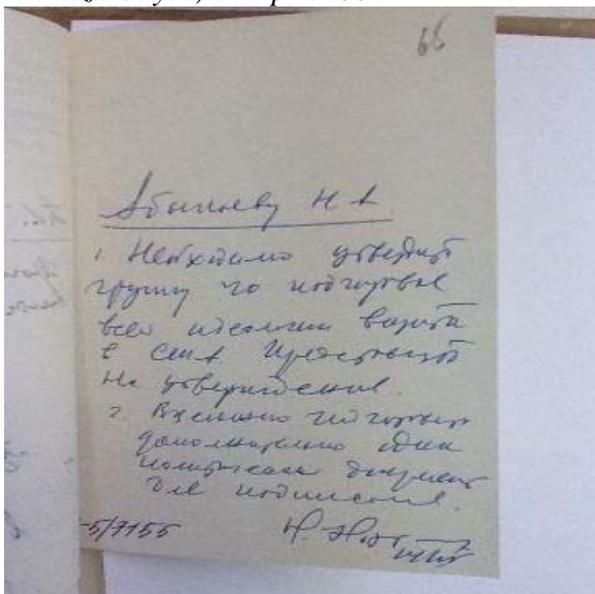


Image 1.3: Nazarbayev's instruction to Abykaev, 14 April 1992.
(photograph by the author with the permission of the APRK)

Instruction 2.2

Abykaev in turn ordered the head of the International Department in the Apparatus of the President Kasymov, to suggest suitable candidates to be included in this group.

The Head of the Apparatus of the President and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan

To: Comrade Kasymov G.E.

Instruction:

Please, urgently submit your proposal.

N. Abykaev, 15 April 1992⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰⁶ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 1343, l. 65.

⁶⁰⁷ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 1343, l. 64.

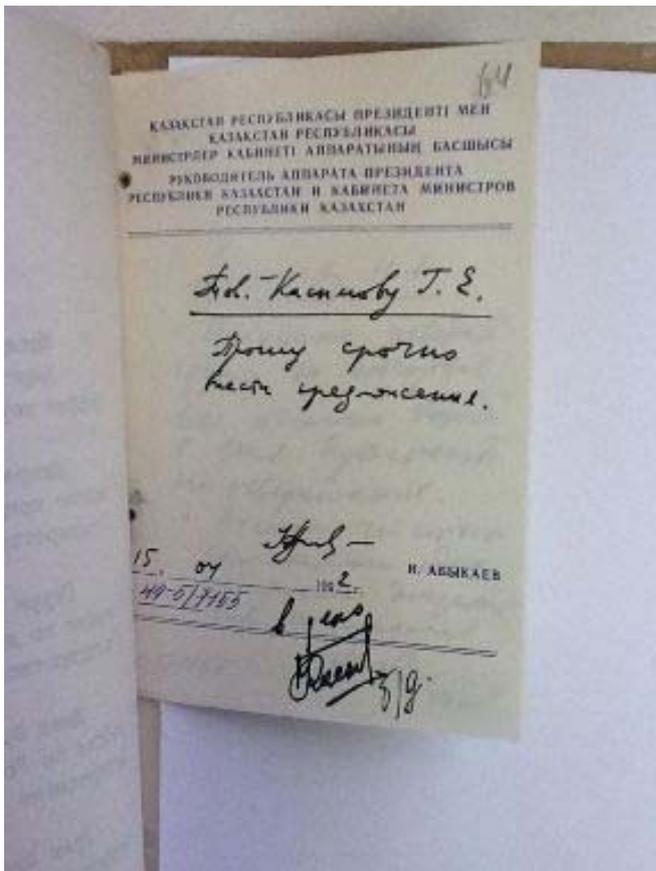


Image 1.4: Abykaev’s instruction to Kasymov, 15 April 1992.
(photograph by the author with the permission of the APRK)

Instruction 3.1

Nazarbayev forwarded the draft of the “Protocol on ratification and implementation of the START” proposed by the Americans to minister Suleymenov and ordered him to develop Kazakhstan’s position on the issue.

The President of the Republic of Kazakhstan

To: Comrade Suleymenov T.S.

Instruction:

Please define our position/draft in regard to the document sent from USA.

Time for execution: 3 days.

N. Nazarbayev, 20 April 1992

Minister Suleymenov tasked deputy minister Tokaev and the head of the International Law Directorate Askar Shakirov to execute the president’s order.

[Handwritten]

To: Comrades Tokaev K.K.

Shakirov A.O.

Instruction: For the execution.

T. Suleymenov, April 1992⁶⁰⁸



Image 1.5: Nazarbayev’s instruction to Suleymenov, 20 April 1992.
(photo by the author with the permission of the APRK)

Instruction 4.1

Minister Suleymenov sent a letter, addressed to the president, presenting the ministry’s view on the “Position of Kazakhstan on joining the NPT.” Nazarbayev read this letter and forwarded it to Zhukeyev who in turn returned the copy to the MFA in order to execute the president’s task.

To: Zhukeyev T.T.

Instruction:

We need to find (work out) a unified approach to this problem.

Prepare jointly with the MFA.

⁶⁰⁸ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 21, l. 50.

N. Nazarbayev, 6 April 1992

When the copy was returned from Zhukeyev, minister Suleymenov tasked his deputy Tokaev, who eventually wrote on the instruction:

Kazakhstan's approach to the NPT issue was reflected in President Nursultan Nazarbayev's letters to G. Bush and J. Baker.

*K. Tokaev, 1 May 1992.*⁶⁰⁹

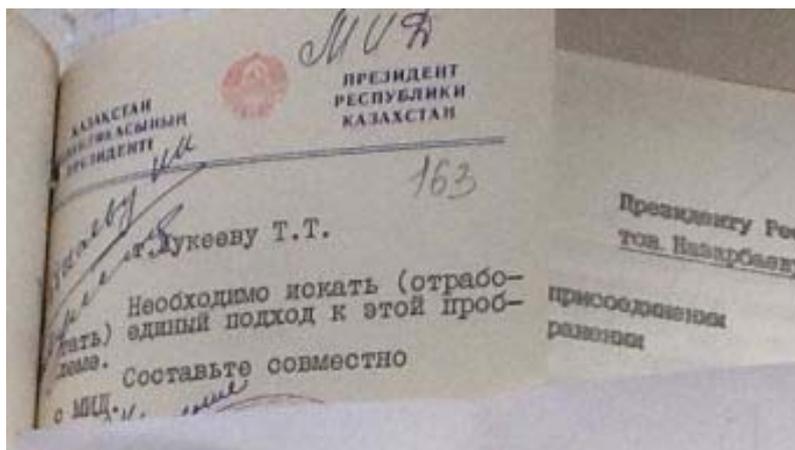


Image 1.6 Nazarbayev's instruction to Zhukeyev, 6 April 1992.
(photo by the author with permission of the APRK)

Inferences from instructions

A number of inferences about the structure and nature of nuclear decision-making can be drawn from the reviewed instructions. The documents confirm the other sources' argument that Nazarbayev performed as the ultimate foreign policymaking actor. Nazarbayev was deeply involved in nuclear decision-making in several ways. First, the president appears as the final bureaucratic level to which the policy advisory group reported. The handwritten instructions show that Nazarbayev immersed himself in nuclear policy elaboration and implementation, and continually kept track of the issue. The instructions also indicate that the president personally coordinated the work of his advisers.

The work of key members of the nuclear policy group is reflected in the instructions. Among them are State Counsellor Zhukeyev, foreign minister Suleymenov, and deputy foreign

⁶⁰⁹ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d 21, l. 163.

minister Tokaev. The documents show that Zhukeyev was working on a nuclear issue in close coordination with the MFA. The importance of developing a “unified approach” is stressed by the president, suggesting that Nazarbayev favoured policy coordination and cooperation among his advisers.

Despite the fact that in the Instruction 1.2 the State Counsellor is in a position to task the foreign ministry, Instruction 1.1 demonstrates that communication between Nazarbayev and the foreign ministry at some points would bypass the State Counsellor. Instruction 2.1 clearly indicates that there was a group of experts involved in the preparation of all aspects of the upcoming trip to the USA, allowing the presumption that some mid-level officials and experts were involved in developing the nuclear strategy. Instruction 4.1 suggests that Nazarbayev evidently relied on the MFA’s advice and expertise on the nuclear problem. Again, this instruction clearly reveals that the foreign ministry was directly involved in a nuclear debate alongside the State Counsellor.

Letters on the START membership

The following section depicts the internal documents exchange that ensued as the issue of Kazakhstan’s participation in the START treaty evolved into what eventually became the Lisbon Protocol to the START treaty.

Letter 1, Suleymenov to Nazarbayev, 30 March 1992.

In the 30 March letter to Nazarbayev, Suleymenov informs him about an urgent cable from Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev regarding the START treaty implementation and ratification and writes his own vision in respect to the Russian letter.⁶¹⁰ The statuses, roles, and obligations

⁶¹⁰ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 21, ll. 232-236. In the referred cable, the Russian foreign minister urges his Kazakhstani counterpart to try to find an agreement acceptable for all four nuclear countries at a proposed four-lateral meeting offered to be organized and hosted by the Russian side on 1-2 April 1992 in Moscow. Suleymenov informs Nazarbayev that following this message he consulted with his Belarusian and Ukrainian colleagues who assured him that they would hold on to their previous positions expressed in Kiev 10 days before (which most likely was contrary to the Russian position). APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 21, l. 234.

of the four post-Soviet nuclear states in the START treaty were outlined in the two proposed documents elaborated by Russia: 1) the “Agreement on implementation principles and procedures of the START treaty”; and 2) the “Protocol on the mechanism of implementation of the START treaty.” The leaders of the four nuclear states could not previously concur on these two documents during the Kiev summit on 20 March 1992.

According to the Suleymenov’s follow up on the cable, the main disagreement of Almaty (and, possibly, of Kiev and Minsk) with Russia in the START treaty concerned two points: the ratification procedures, and the status of Russia in the agreement. With ratification procedures, the Russian side insisted that since the START treaty was bilateral (signed on 31 July 1991 by the USSR and the USA), then Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Belarus, having ratified the treaty in their parliaments, would submit relevant approval documents to the government of Russia. Therefore, Suleymenov concludes, the Russian Federation would be in the capacity of a party to the agreement. In respect of the status of Russia in the proposed agreement, Moscow wanted to include in the agreement a provision by which the Russian Federation would be defined as the “sole nuclear state” (*edinstvennoe iadernoe gosudarstvo*). Suleymenov reports that the USA “is affirmatively against the conversion of the START treaty from a bilateral to a multilateral one,” while not being against the exclusion of the provision that would consider the Russian Federation as the “sole nuclear state.”⁶¹¹

According to the letter, at that moment Kazakhstan’s admission to the START treaty as an independent party seemed unfeasible for Almaty. So Suleymenov proposes to Nazarbayev the following policy option: to accredit the Russian Federation to act as the party to the agreement and to appoint Russia to represent and ensure the interests of other member states (Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Belarus). The copies of the ratification instruments would then be submitted directly to the USA. Suleymenov justifies this alternative as the one that would “fully assert the interests of Kazakhstan as a sovereign state, independent subject of international law.” The

⁶¹¹ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 21, l. 235.

important result of this action, according to the letter, would be a denial (in agreement with the USA) of Russia's claim to be the "sole nuclear state," which was the "principal moment" for Almaty. Another, and "probably the most important" end, would be the creation of "favourable conditions in Kazakhstan-US bilateral relations" on the eve of Nazarbayev's visit to Washington.⁶¹²

Letter 2, Suleymenov to Nazarbayev, 13 April 1992.

As negotiations with the Americans and Russians ensued, Suleymenov wrote an update on Kazakhstan's position on the START treaty.⁶¹³ Suleymenov reminds Nazarbayev that according to the agreement drafted earlier by Russia, the three republics – Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Ukraine – would have to submit their ratification instruments to the government of Russia. Moscow would then be expected to undertake the obligations to represent the other three nuclear states in dealings with the USA. The foreign minister explains that this provision would make Russia the only party to the agreement. However, the US position had changed, Suleymenov writes, and at that point the USA agreed to the direct exchange of ratification instruments with Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Ukraine. The recognition of Russia as the "sole nuclear" state remained to be supported by both the Russian and American sides. Noting this, Suleymenov argues that such recognition would mean that Kazakhstan could only be non-nuclear weapon state.

Considering the previous letter, where Suleymenov proposed to submit ratification instruments to Russia and to allow it to represent Kazakhstan's interests, the foreign ministry position has clearly changed:

For Kazakhstan such approach by US and Russia is unacceptable, because it contradicts our position regarding the status of our Republic as one of the former USSR's successors in relation to nuclear weapons. In principle the proposed variant of the START treaty ratification procedures does not suit us because Kazakhstan, as one of the USSR's successor states cannot delegate Russia the right to act as a Party to the Agreement.⁶¹⁴

⁶¹² APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 21, l. 236.

⁶¹³ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 21, 163-169.

⁶¹⁴ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 21, ll. 167-168. Underlined passages in original.

Suleymenov writes that the republic is ready to submit ratification instruments to the USA and considers it to be a “significant concession” on the part of Kazakhstan as far as the ratification procedures are concerned. The foreign minister notes that this concession “has to be mutual” and in exchange it would be desirable for the US and Russia to “show some understanding on our position regarding the [nuclear] status of Kazakhstan.”⁶¹⁵

Letter 3, Suleymenov to Nazarbayev, 25 April 1992.

On 16 April 1992, Washington proposed its own version of the document that would guide the four post-Soviet states’ actions towards the START treaty.⁶¹⁶ It now took the form of the “Protocol ratification and implementation of the START treaty.” The question of the nuclear or non-nuclear status of Kazakhstan (along with Belarus and Ukraine) was put in a different context. Instead of recognizing the Russian Federation as the “sole nuclear” state, the USA introduced provisions concerning the NPT treaty and the obligations of Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Ukraine to join the treaty as non-nuclear weapon states.

Suleymenov sends Nazarbayev an analysis of the American variant of the proposed Protocol on the ratification and implementation of the START treaty. Firstly, Suleymenov highlights important changes in the American position towards recognition of Kazakhstan’s political status in the START treaty. He summarizes the main points: 1) the American party agreed for the START treaty to be ratified, not endorsed by Kazakhstan’s Supreme Soviet; 2) the right of Kazakhstan to carry equal responsibilities with other signatory states is asserted; 3) the American party has changed its position in recognition of the treaty parties and now recognizes all four nuclear states as equal signatory parties; 4) Kazakhstan will exchange ratification instruments with the USA on its own.⁶¹⁷

In the meantime, Suleymenov points at the points of disagreement with the USA. He expresses concern about the provision of Article 5 of the Protocol, according to which it would

⁶¹⁵ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 21, l. 168. Underlined word in original.

⁶¹⁶ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 21, ll. 49-57.

⁶¹⁷ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 21, l. 55.

become possible for Russia to station its strategic offensive weapons on the territories of Kazakhstan, Belarus and Ukraine “for the shortest possible time.”⁶¹⁸ On this issue, Suleymenov argues that the presence of one state’s nuclear weapons on the territory of another state will incur negative reaction from the population, particularly if the latter state is aiming to become nuclear-free.

Another point of disagreement is the demand by Washington for Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Ukraine to join the NPT as non-nuclear weapon state. Suleymenov writes: “Both USA and Russia argue that if these three countries join the NPT as nuclear states then the size of the ‘nuclear club’ will increase from five members to eight, which can serve as a serious undermining factor for international security.”⁶¹⁹ Suleymenov comments that this stipulation is the main point of discord between Kazakhstan and the USA.

Letter 4, Nazarbayev to Baker, April 29 1992.

The main arguments from Suleymenov’s letter were reflected in the Nazarbayev-Baker letter that continues a discussion of the proposed “Protocol on the Ratification and Implementation of the START Treaty” to be signed by the four post-Soviet nuclear states.⁶²⁰ Nazarbayev writes to Baker that Article 5 of the Protocol, which allows Russian strategic forces to be deployed in Kazakhstan, “requires certain adjustment.”⁶²¹ Justifying this point, Nazarbayev uses Suleymenov’s argument about the negative reaction of the local population of a sovereign state to the presence of nuclear weapons belonging to some other state deployed on the territory of a former state outlined in the 25 April 1992 letter.

To avoid commitment to non-nuclear status, Nazarbayev proposes producing a separate ratification and implementation protocol related to the NPT realization and excluding Article 6 of the Protocol, which refers to the NPT and binds Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Ukraine to join the

⁶¹⁸ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 21, l. 53.

⁶¹⁹ Here Suleymenov quotes Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev’s statement on the same subject made on 11 April 1992. APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 21, l. 56.

⁶²⁰ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 289, ll. 42-44.

⁶²¹ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 289, l. 43.

NPT as non-nuclear weapon states and within a defined timetable.⁶²² Nazarbayev links the need to exclude reference to the NPT, and, consequently, to non-nuclear status of Kazakhstan, with the probability of a successful ratification in the Supreme Soviet:

I want to sincerely and very confidentially inform you that the possibility of such an unfavourable for us turn of events, embedded in the Article 6 text, cannot be entirely excluded. There is a probability that provision of a specific timetable for Kazakhstan to join the NPT as non-nuclear weapon state can be used by particular forces in the parliament to delay ratification of the START treaty.⁶²³

It is noticeable that Nazarbayev avoids precise formulations of Kazakhstan's nuclear status. In the concluding section he writes to Baker:

I would like to underline that Kazakhstan, striving to become a non-nuclear state, adheres firmly to the continuation of the global disarmament process under strict and effective international control. In this process the Republic intends to be actively involved as an equal partner. Kazakhstan fully supports the NPT and is ready to accede to it.⁶²⁴

Here, Nazarbayev is evidently not telling Baker unequivocally whether Kazakhstan wants to enter the NPT as nuclear or non-nuclear weapon state.

Reflection on the Lisbon Protocol

The text of the "Protocol to the Treaty between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms" (the Lisbon Protocol) is very similar to the text of the document proposed by Baker in April. It is important to highlight that the three issues discussed between Nazarbayev and Suleymenov in the above letter exchange are reflected in the Protocol. First, in accordance with Article 5 of the protocol, Kazakhstan (together with Belarus and Ukraine) would join the NPT treaty as non-nuclear weapon state in the "shortest possible time." Second, in accordance with Article 6, Kazakhstan (together with Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine) would exchange their ratification instruments with the US. Third, the provision of a temporary storage of Russian nuclear weapons on the territories of the three republics is omitted from the protocol.

⁶²² Exact dates were not specified in the draft Protocol. There was a blank space left instead in Article 6. APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 289, l. 44.

⁶²³ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 289, l. 44.

⁶²⁴ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 289, l. 44.

Inferences from letters

The review of the letters exchanged between the president and the foreign minister reveals additional nuances about the Kazakhstani nuclear decision-making. It clearly indicates that on at least several occasions the Foreign Ministry had provided the president with policy advice and analysis. It also shows that Kazakhstan's leadership attempted, although unsuccessfully, to delink the issue of START treaty membership from the issue of nuclear status in the NPT. On the other hand, as reflected in the letters, Kazakhstan firmly backed its position that the republic (along with Belarus and Ukraine) should become a full party to the START treaty even though this step, much to the displeasure of Russia and the USA, transformed the START treaty from a bilateral to a multilateral treaty. The discussion, reflected in Letter 3 from Suleymenov to Nazarbayev and in the following Letter 4 from Nazarbayev to Baker on the proposed provision that would allow Russian strategic weapons to be temporarily stationed on Kazakhstan territory, shows that the Foreign Ministry provided the president with direct policy advice. In this case, the Foreign Ministry developed a justification for the undesirability of such a provision and the president approved it so it was reproduced in his letter to the US state secretary.

Nuclear policymaking circle

The principal finding can be made that there was an ad hoc foreign policymaking group tasked with elaborating the nuclear strategy and providing policy advice to the president. The archival documents confirm that the presidential foreign policy advisory team played a significant role in developing key components of Almaty's nuclear strategy. It assisted Nazarbayev in identifying, interpreting, and evaluating systemic factors; it developed substitutive courses of action for the president to follow; it provided Nazarbayev with the argumentation of Almaty's position on different nuclear issues of the denuclearization period.

Key foreign policy advisers held the highest-ranking positions; they were all government officials either from the Apparatus of the President, like State Counsellor Zhukeyev, or from the

foreign ministry, like minister Suleymenov or deputy minister Tokaev. A number of mid-level diplomats were also drafted into the nuclear decision-making. The available archival documents show that at least one more governmental institution played a noticeable role in nuclear deliberations – the Centre for Strategic Studies under the President, headed by Kasenov.

State Counsellor Zhukeyev was one of the three state counsellors and was in charge of foreign and security policy. In one interview Zhukeyev recollected:

I was in charge of nuclear issues, a foreign policy, and a national security. ...There are documents that one day will be retrieved from archives. There are internal memos, scenarios, which I wrote in regard to how we should have acted. From my point of view, there was not a single chance for Kazakhstan to retain nuclear weapons.⁶²⁵

The head of the Apparatus of the President Abykaev was not directly involved in foreign policymaking; however he was a “gatekeeper” through whom many of the policy papers related to the nuclear question were submitted to Nazarbayev.

Foreign minister Suleymenov was another of the president’s advisers on foreign policy. As a head of the foreign ministry he signed cover letters to many analytical memoranda and drafts of the president’s letters. However, the authorship of these documents was often collegial. An active contributor to the development of nuclear position was the head of the International Security and Arms Controls Directorate Bolat Nurgaliev.⁶²⁶ The head of the International Law Directorate Askar Shakirov was also involved in nuclear discussions. Their immediate supervisor was the deputy minister Tokaev.

The CSS’s role in nuclear decision-making is directly reported in its work statement for the year 1992: “[The CSS] prepared and submitted analytical memos on nuclear policy as part of the preparation process for the president’s visit to USA.”⁶²⁷ Apart from the Centre’s head, Kasenov, two senior CSS experts were involved in articulating nuclear policy – Kairat Abuseitov, the Chief of Foreign Policy and National Security Program, and Murat Laumulin, a Senior Research Fellow.

⁶²⁵ “Pora perestat’ toptat’sia u dverei vlasti,” Tolegen Zhukeyev, interview transcript, 24 October 2008, *Spik.Kz*, accessed 12 February 2010, <http://www.spik.kz/?lan=ru&id=104&pub=1152>.

⁶²⁶ Interviews with Nurgaliev are referenced in Reiss, *Bridled Ambition*.

⁶²⁷ APRK 166N, op. 1, d. 9, l. 2.

Conclusion

The geostrategic concerns, political and security incentives and disincentives from the Americans and Russians, and a need for sustainable economic and technical assistance in development, led Nazarbayev to a decision not to go nuclear. This was by no means an easy decision, which the president made at times of strategic uncertainty of the republic's future and divided domestic opinion. However, Nazarbayev recognized that the resolution of the nuclear dilemma, while dichotomous in its essence, provided for a range of alternative courses of action not necessarily leading to an immediate renouncement of Kazakhstan's nuclear status and relinquishment of strategic arms. Once Nazarbayev decided to step off the nuclear path, he mobilized his advisers and tasked them to develop an evasive nuclear policy that would protract the inevitable relinquishment of nuclear weapons and renouncement of nuclear status as long as it was needed to secure political, security, and economic gains from the Americans and Russians. The ambivalent multi-element nuclear strategy intentionally pursued by Nazarbayev was in fact a product of group decision-making by the president's advisory team.

As a result of prolonged and complicated nuclear deliberations, the president and his advisers acquired exceptional diplomatic and decisional experience. The nuclear dilemma was a starting point for Nazarbayev's ability to form and manage the foreign policymaking structure and process. As Aitken comments: "How Nazarbayev handled the choreography of his nuclear negotiations is a story that reveals much about him as both a man and a statesman."⁶²⁸ Correspondingly, the Kazakhstani foreign policymaking tradition was profoundly influenced by the formal and informal schemes and procedures intuitively developed during the nuclear episode.

While the geopolitical triangulation exercise and the resolution of the nuclear dilemma were mainly imposed on Almaty and were perceived by policymakers as constraining situations, the

⁶²⁸ Aitken, *Nazarbayev and the Making of Kazakhstan*, 129.

Nagorno-Karabakh peace initiative started as the opportunity offered by the international system to increase the republic's clout. This facilitating environment, however, did not last for long and Almaty's tolerance for pressure imposed by foreign actors was tested again, when its peace effort terminated and almost turned into a foreign policy fiasco, largely due to the hostility of the CSCE Minsk Group. The following chapter follows this largely forgotten episode.

Chapter VI: The Nagorno-Karabakh Peace Initiative

Our experience of the first half of the nineties fully complies with the old saying that there are years that accommodate decades of a usual history.
Nursultan Nazarbayev, *Na Poroge XXI Veka*.

This case discovers a little known chapter in the diplomatic history of Kazakhstan.⁶²⁹ In 1991-1992 Almaty was one of the most notable contributors to the international conflict resolution process in Nagorno-Karabakh. This episode stands out of the line of foreign policies pursued by Kazakhstan in the beginning of 1990s. At a glance, there were no apparent reasons why Nazarbayev decided to devote his time and efforts to assist the two Transcaucasian nations in finding ways to end the bloody conflict at a time when Kazakhstan itself was facing colossal international challenges. For Almaty, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was a remote one both in terms of security and politics. On the contrary, there were many other foreign policy issues that Almaty had to solve in 1992 and which were of much higher importance, ranging from the nuclear question to the delimitation of the section of the former Sino-Soviet border. Neither did Kazakhstan have reasons to project its interests in the Caucasus. The salience of the issue was relatively low given the foreign policy agenda in 1992. Nevertheless, Almaty embarked on this diplomatic journey and was able to achieve considerable success in bringing the Armenian and Azerbaijani sides closer to peace.

The detailed examination of the Nagorno-Karabakh peace initiative decision-making exposes a complex combination of humanitarian and political motives informing Almaty's foreign policymaking process. The initiation of Kazakhstan's peace mission brought political dividends not only to Nazarbayev, but also to his close associates who proposed the idea to the president. At the same time, the president was not only interested in gaining international clout for himself and for the republic, but also had sincere personal inspiration to stop the bloodshed he witnessed during his tour to the region in autumn 1991.

⁶²⁹ Suffice to say that no scholarly publications on Almaty's peace initiative have been published in Kazakhstan.

The case is also interesting due to the changing dynamics of Almaty's peace initiative. What started as a purely non-reactive foreign policy under permissive conditions of the international context had later become highly adaptable and conforming to the growing contextual pressures. The case illustrates Kazakhstan as a state sensitive to its international environment. Throughout the course of its peace mission, Almaty's foreign policy had closely reflected the policies of the two largest bidders in the mediation process – the Minsk Group and Russia. The republic's policymakers proved to be vulnerable to the exclusive attitude of international mediators and as a result did not advance their unilateral mediation process further. Eventually, disappointment with modest results in the field, lack of international support, and dissatisfaction with the overall peace process progress naturally led to the gradual withdrawal of Kazakhstan from the Nagorno-Karabakh problem.

Historical background

During the last years of the Soviet Union's existence the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was considered to be one of the largest and bloodiest inter-ethnic conflicts fought on the Soviet territory with approximately 20,000 casualties and one and a half million refugees.⁶³⁰ After the fall of the Union the Nagorno-Karabakh issue transformed from an internal conflict between Soviet administrative units to a full-scale inter-state war between now independent Armenia and Azerbaijan. There was a "gradual spread of isolated hotspots to a real war. Interests of Russia, Georgia, Turkey, and Iran were directly concerned."⁶³¹ At the same time, a chaotic withdrawal of the Soviet Army and MVD Interior Forces both saturated the region with uncontrolled arms and created a power vacuum that would otherwise be able to constrain military actions by the combating sides. Amidst the growing intensification of combat actions, Armenia and Azerbaijan

⁶³⁰ Svante E. Cornell, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict. Report no. 46," *Department of East European Studies, Uppsala University* (1999), http://edoc.bibliothek.uni-halle.de/servlets/MCRFileNodeServlet/HALCoRe_derivate_00003079/Nagorno-Karabakh%20Conflict.pdf;jsessionid=A91D405C2A6F357ECA72B2E68ACB55B6.

⁶³¹ Vladimir Kazimirov, "Karabakh: Kak Eto Bylo," *Mezhdunarodnaia Zhizn* 5 (1996), 42.

proclaimed their independence in 1991 and by the beginning of 1992 became members of the UN, CSCE, and CIS.⁶³² The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict thus became international.

Following these developments, in the late 1991- mid 1992 period there has emerged an international mediation process. Thomas De Waal, the author of one of the most comprehensive studies of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, describes the variety of peace initiatives of the period: “In 1991–1992, a galaxy of negotiators offered to mediate. There was the joint mission by presidents Yeltsin and Nazarbayev; a trip by the former US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance on behalf of the United Nations secretary general; the short-lived mediation by Iran.”⁶³³ These were both multilateral efforts under the aegis of international organizations and unilateral initiatives started by few concerned nations. The largest missions were formed by the CSCE in the format of the so-called Minsk Group, and by Russia, that established its mission in April-May 1992. Iran and Kazakhstan had also tried to help to solve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In May 1992 Iran’s initiative to settle the peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan was aborted by the seizure of Azerbaijani controlled strategic town of Shusha by Karabakh Armenians who did not participate in the Tehran meeting. Later, Kazakhstan was able to bring together foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan in Almaty in late August 1992 and persuade them to sign a ceasefire agreement. This ceasefire, however, did not last long and Kazakhstan’s effort, received optimistically at the start, ended in vain as well.

1992 is considered to be the initial phase of international mediation.⁶³⁴ The first noticeable international moves came from the CSCE in February 1992 when it commissioned the “Interim Report of the Rapporteur Mission on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh,” and from the CIS at the Kiev summit on March 1992 when the decision was made to send the CIS

⁶³² Armenia and Azerbaijan became members of the CSCE on 30 January 1992. See “Second Meeting of the Council in Prague, (January 1992),” in *The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe: Analysis and Basic Documents, 1972-1993*, ed. Arie Bloed (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993), 106-107.

⁶³³ De Waal, *Black garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 228.

⁶³⁴ See *Ibid.*, also, John J. Maresca, “Lost Opportunities in Negotiating the Conflict over Nagorno Karabakh,” *International Negotiation* 1, no. 3 (1996): 471-499.

peacekeeping force to the conflict zone.⁶³⁵ The failure of the ceasefire agreement at the CSCE Stockholm meeting on December 1992 marked the end of the first stage of international mediation. This period yielded very modest results both due to internal dynamics, whereby both Armenia and Azerbaijan were overconfident in their military superiority and were not convinced in the necessity of negotiations; and, externally, due to the lack of professionalism of the Minks Group.⁶³⁶

Minsk Group

The CSCE Minsk Group, the largest international mediation mission on Nagorno-Karabakh conflict at the time, was a consultative and coordination body created de facto in June 1992 to assist international negotiators to deal with the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. Since the UN preferred the CSCE to work on the Nagorno-Karabakh problem, the Group was the most authoritative international body commissioned to deal with the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. As such, it mostly represented the ideas and views on how to solve the conflict elaborated in the USA and Western European foreign policy establishments.⁶³⁷ Initially, this special body was created as a result of the decision made in March 1992 at the Helsinki summit to convene a high-level conference on Nagorno-Karabakh with the participation of Armenia and Azerbaijan as soon as possible. The conference, envisioned as “an on-going forum for negotiations towards a peaceful settlement of the crisis on the basis of the principles, commitments and provisions of the CSCE,” was planned to be convened on 21 June 1992 and to be hosted in the informal capital of the CIS, Minsk (hence the name of the body). An important nuance was introduced – the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh republic’s leadership was also invited to the conference in the status of “elected and other representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh,” and this became the main obstacle for

⁶³⁵ “Interim Report of the Rapporteur Mission on the Situation in Nagorno-Karabakh (February 1992),” in Bloed, ed., *Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe*, 1191-1208; “Agreement on the Groups of military observers and the Collective peacekeeping forces in the CIS,” *CIS Secretariat*, accessed 11 January 2013, <http://cis.minsk.by/reestr/ru/index.html#reestr/view/text?doc=62>.

⁶³⁶ Maresca, “Lost Opportunities,” 478-483.

⁶³⁷ Vladimir Kazimirov, *Mir Karabakhu: Posrednichestvo Rossii v Uregulirovanii Nagorno-Karabakhskogo Konflikta* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 2009), 35-41.

Azerbaijan's participation in Minsk, so Baku declined the invitation.⁶³⁸ After this refusal, the USA and Russia proposed to set up a preparatory meeting to ensure the Minsk conference takes place eventually. All sides welcomed this idea. The first preparatory meeting was held on 1 June 1992 in Rome because the chairman of the future Minsk Conference was the Italian diplomat Mario Raffaelli. Original members of the Minsk Group included: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Czechoslovakia (later replaced by Finland), Germany, Italy, Russia, Sweden, Turkey, and USA.⁶³⁹ Since the Minsk conference still has not been convened, the Minsk Group exists to this date and "spearheads the OSCE's efforts to find a political solution to the conflict in and around Nagorno-Karabakh involving Armenia and Azerbaijan" and is headed by co-chairing troika – France, Russia and USA.⁶⁴⁰ Kazakhstan's leadership was determined to join the Group, but, as revealed below, the institution did not welcome it.

Russian mediation mission

Despite the activities of the CSCE, in 1992 Russia was considered to be the primary negotiator for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: "The Russians had many advantages in Armenia and Azerbaijan. In 1992, the Caucasus and Russia were still part of the same economic space; everyone spoke Russian; even the old official telephone lines still went directly through to Moscow."⁶⁴¹ The Russian MFA set up its own mediation mission on Nagorno-Karabakh on 5 May 1992. The mission's task was to organize "the systemic work of the Russia's MFA in the interests of the peace regulation in Karabakh"; it was established as an organ of unilateral mediation; however it was additionally tasked with dealing with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict within the framework of the CSCE.⁶⁴² Experienced career diplomat, Vladimir Kazimirov was appointed as the head of the mission. Russia's mission intensified its efforts starting from autumn

⁶³⁸ Suren Zolian, "SBSE v Karabakhskom konflikte (1992)," in Nagornyi Karabakh: Problema i Konflikt, (Erevan: Lingva, 2001), under "Nachalo Minskogo protsesssa," <http://armenianhouse.org/zolyan/nf-ru/karabakh/6.html>.

⁶³⁹ "Helsinki Additional Meeting of the CSCE Council (March 1992)," in Bloed, ed., *Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe*, 841-844.

⁶⁴⁰ "Minsk Group," *OSCE Minsk Group Official Website*, accessed 12 April 2012, <http://www.osce.org/mg>.

⁶⁴¹ De Waal, *Black Garden*, 231.

⁶⁴² Kazimirov, *Mir Karabakhu*, 28, 32.

1992 against the backdrop of the growing disappointment with the Minsk Group's progress. The Russian mission promoted itself as favouring multilateral efforts and actively backing mediation efforts within the CIS and CSCE formats.⁶⁴³ This impression was shared elsewhere – at the earlier stage of the conflict internationalization, the Armenian president Levon Ter-Petrosyan assessed Moscow's role in the following way:

Whereas now Russia tries to delegate part of the responsibility to international organizations. I think that we should applaud Russia's efforts in this respect. It is to a large extent thanks to Russia that we were able to draw the attention of the international community to the Karabakh problem. In other words, Russia did not refuse to participate in solving the Karabakh problem, but it did refuse to do it alone.⁶⁴⁴

At the same time, Russia was advancing its own vision on how to end the conflict. The principle difference in the Russian approach at the initial stage of the conflict was the recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh as the third party to the conflict, in addition to Armenia and Azerbaijan.⁶⁴⁵

CIS mediation

The CIS was another large international organization committed to resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. After the founding summit of the CIS in Almaty in December 1991, the organization began to seek ways to solve a conflict among its members.⁶⁴⁶ As earlier as 30 December 1991 heads of the CIS states called for Armenia and Azerbaijan to continue negotiations.⁶⁴⁷ On 20 March 1992 at the Kiev summit the heads of states agreed on the proposal by Yeltsin and Nazarbayev to send a group of CIS observers and CIS collective peacekeeping forces to the Nagorno-Karabakh region should Armenia and Azerbaijan request the CIS to do so, and signed the CIS agreement on military observers and collective peacekeeping forces.⁶⁴⁸ At the summit the CIS leadership also decided to keep the UN, CSCE and other international

⁶⁴³ Ibid, 28-35.

⁶⁴⁴ *Official Kremlin International News Broadcast*, 8 April 1992.

⁶⁴⁵ Kazimirov, *Mir Karabakhu*, 33.

⁶⁴⁶ Azerbaijan ratified the CIS founding "Almaty Declaration" of December 1991 only in September 1993, but participated in all preceding CIS summits.

⁶⁴⁷ Kazimirov, *Mir Karabakhu*, 400.

⁶⁴⁸ "Agreement on the Groups of military observers and the Collective peacekeeping forces in the CIS," *CIS Secretariat*, accessed 11 January 2013, <http://cis.minsk.by/reestr/ru/index.html#reestr/view/text?doc=62>. Azerbaijan's delegation signed the agreement with the reservation that it will become enforced only after parliament ratification, which never happened.

organizations informed and cooperate with them. Nazarbayev frequently made references to the CIS in relation to the conflict, likely caused by his desire to use the Commonwealth's platform to back Almaty's efforts. At the same time, the CIS efforts had become integrated in Russia's mediation attempts and they are often considered as the joint mediation process.⁶⁴⁹

Kazakhstani peace initiative

President of the Kazakh SSR as a peacemaker

The Nagorno-Karabakh peace initiative was one of the very few of diplomatic affairs that Kazakhstan had started before its independence was proclaimed in December 1991 and, with a short break, pursued by the republic in its new sovereign status. The origins of the Kazakhstani mediation initiative can be traced back to the last months of the existence of the Soviet state. On 17 August 1991 Yeltsin (the President of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) visited Nazarbayev (the President of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic) in Almaty to discuss the immediate future of the USSR and the text of the new treaty of the Union of Sovereign States. It was yet another venue for the presidents to share their concerns about the outgrowth of inter-ethnic conflicts that plagued many Soviet regions – e.g. the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, clashes in Osh and Ingushetia, and, of course, the Armenian-Azerbaijani confrontation in Karabakh. Not only did these conflicts jeopardize the fate of the proposed new treaty of the Union, but they had also called in question the stability of the ethnic situation in Kazakhstan and Russia. While in Kazakhstan the Slavic population outnumbered Kazakhs in the entire northern part of the republic, in Russia there was a problem of ethno-nationalistic secession movements like the one in Tatarstan. Both Nazarbayev and Yeltsin had reasons to be concerned about the spill over effect of the inter-ethnic clashes that could endanger the stability of their republics.

These concerns were reflected in the topics and texts of the joint statements the presidents made at the conclusion of their August meeting. These statements were made in the form of a

⁶⁴⁹ See Kazimirov, *Mir Karabakhu*, 239-254.

petition to the Union's president Mikhail Gorbachev. In one petition Nazarbayev and Yeltsin told Gorbachev that they view the territorial integrity of the Kazakh republic and the Russian Federative as the principal warrant to prevent the "catastrophic disintegration of the Union and its member-states."⁶⁵⁰ In another statement the two presidents requested Gorbachev to intensify measures to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Nazarbayev and Yeltsin blamed central authorities (i.e. Moscow) in the absence of cohesive policy, which had led, in their view, to notable political mistakes and loss of chances to deescalate the conflict, and proposed their services as mediators to Gorbachev and to the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan.⁶⁵¹ It is during that meeting that Nazarbayev and Yeltsin had finalized their decision to get involved in the conflict resolution in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Eventually, their proposal to visit the troubled region in September and host negotiations was accepted both by Gorbachev and local leaders.

Although the mediation initiative was formed as a joint mission, each president made his own preparations. Nazarbayev relied on his staff in Almaty as well as in Moscow, where the plenipotentiary representation of the republic served as a liaison office with both the Union and the Russian Federation's authorities. As part of the preparation of Nazarbayev's visit to Armenia and Azerbaijan, the plenipotentiary envoy to the Union Saudabayev wrote a memorandum to the Kazakh president where he suggested that the recognition of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region could complicate the upcoming negotiations; he also advised to prepare, jointly with Yeltsin, an address to the conflicting sides to establish a moratorium on combat activities for the period of their visit; meet with Yeltsin on neutral territory to elaborate a coordinated programme of mediation (Mineralnie Vody was suggested and Zheleznovodsk was later chosen as the venue); and to arrive at the Nagorno-Karabakh capital Stepanakert simultaneously with Yeltsin.⁶⁵² The official delegation of the Kazakh SSR headed by Nazarbayev to Zheleznovodsk included Zhukeyev, who was then the Deputy Chairman of the

⁶⁵⁰ APRK f. 7, op. 1, d. 399, l. 17.

⁶⁵¹ APRK f. 7, op. 1, d. 399, ll.10-11.

⁶⁵² APRK f. 7, op. 1, d. 399, ll.74-75.

State Council, several staff members of the president's apparatus and the Supreme Soviet deputies. Aboard the president's plane en route to the region, Nazarbayev told journalists: "We need to approach both sides as atheists. Only in this case our approach, neutral in its form, would not exclude the possibility of solving this problem in its essence. I think it is too early to count on some global success. We have a more feasible task – to seat leaders of both republics on one table."⁶⁵³ With him Nazarbayev had a draft of the speech on the Nagorno-Karabakh problem that reflected the main points of the joint appeal to Gorbachev, particularly in regard to the immediate cease-fire and a form of the governance of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region, which was prepared to him by his staff members.⁶⁵⁴

In four days between 20 and 23 September 1991 the two presidents travelled to Baku, Gyanja, Stepanakert, and Yerevan. They were able to convince leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Nagorno-Karabakh to meet on 23 September 1991 in the southern Russia's town of Zheleznovodsk where they had eventually signed the Zheleznovodsk Communiqué.⁶⁵⁵ The meeting was the first attempt to resolve the conflict and a departing point for the consequent international mediation efforts to facilitate the negotiation process between the fighting sides. At the conclusion of the visit Nazarbayev got a sense of the complexity of the problem and developed a personal interest in helping the peoples of Armenia and Azerbaijan. In an interview to the official Soviet newspaper *Izvestiia* Nazarbayev told reporters: "It would be naive to expect any expedient results from this visit. The reconciliation process is complex and long, and we have to realize this fact. [I am] a middleman, a man who stands in the middle, assisting conflicting sides to meet and produce an agreement."⁶⁵⁶

Upon the return to Almaty after brokering the Zheleznovodsk agreement the president officially formed a group of observers to be dispatched to Nagorno-Karabakh. On 8 October 1991 Nazarbayev signed the executive order "On the formation of temporary working group of

⁶⁵³ APRK f. 7, op. 1, d. 399, l. 91.

⁶⁵⁴ See APRK f. 7, op. 1, d. 399, ll. 105-112.

⁶⁵⁵ For the text of the "Joint Communiqué on the Results of the Mediating Mission of the Presidents B. Yeltsin and N. Nazarbayev," 23 September 1991, see Kazimirov, *Mir Karabakhu*, 334-335.

⁶⁵⁶ *Izvestiia*, 23 September 1991.

observers from the Kazakh SSR on the regulation of the conflict in NKAO in accordance with the ‘Joint Communiqué on the Results of the Mediating Mission of the Presidents of the RSFSR and the Kazakh SSR’ dated 23 September 1991.”⁶⁵⁷

The Zheleznovodsk agreements, however, could not stop the fighting. In November 1991 the helicopter carrying observers from Kazakhstan and Russia accompanied by military and political authorities of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region of the Azerbaijani SSR was shot down, killing, among others, the deputy minister of the interior of the Kazakh SSR Sailal Serikov. This effectively put an end to any hopes arising from the Zheleznovodsk Communiqué and the Kazakh SSR’s involvement in the matter. Soon the Soviet Union fell, the fighting intensified, and Nazarbayev’s attention was brought to the pressing international issues of a much larger scale.

Republic of Kazakhstan’s peace initiative

Despite the fundamental internal and external political changes resulting from the independence, the Nagorno-Karabakh problem was still a matter of personal concern for Nazarbayev and he would soon return his attention to this issue. His first post-Zheleznovodsk public statement on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue was the signal to the CIS and broader international community that Nazarbayev had renewed his interest in the problem. In the aftermath of tragic events in Khojaly, on 4 March 1992 the president delivered a special TV statement devoted to the Nagorno-Karabakh problem.⁶⁵⁸ This speech is important in terms of understanding the Kazakhstan’s leadership earlier vision of the problem and the foreseen role the republic would play in solving it. The statement clearly showed Nazarbayev’s position in relation to the conflict and disseminated his ideas about involvement of the CIS in settling the conflict. In his speech Nazarbayev reminded the audience about his role in the 1991 attempt to bring the sides to peace.

⁶⁵⁷ “Three months before the Independence or the Chronicles of the Activities of President Nazarbayev,” *APRK*, accessed September 2012, <http://www.aprk.kz/general/press/2012/313>.

⁶⁵⁸ “Nazarbayev, Nagornyy Karabakh a Threat to the CIS,” *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, March 6, 1992.

With regard to this Zheleznovodsk mission Nazarbayev made two important points. First, the president publicly accepted the fact that the Zheleznovodsk mission had failed: “The efforts at mediation which Russia and Kazakhstan earlier undertook, the document signed in Zheleznovodsk and the participation of other neighbouring states has not led to the necessary result, and the escalation of military actions is continuing.” Second, the president showed his personal commitment to end the conflict: “When we heard what had happened in the town of Khojaly – earlier we all suffered over what happened in Stepanakert – I was unable to remain unconcerned, because president Yeltsin and I took certain obligations [to facilitate the peace process].” This speech also revealed the fact that Nazarbayev’s personal involvement continued after 1991 as he told the audience that he had initiated telephone conversations both with the leader of Armenia, Ter-Petrosyan, and with the leader of Azerbaijan, Aiaz Mutalibov. At this stage Nazarbayev was clearly in favour of multi-lateral efforts within the CIS framework: “I think that no one should remain unconcerned amongst the inhabitants of all the states which we now call the Commonwealth of Independent States, because this concerns them all, and we should not be unconcerned.” This appeal, however, received moderate reaction from the Armenian and Azerbaijani authorities and neither side took subsequent actions.

Nevertheless, Nazarbayev’s personal interest in the matter did not go unnoticed for his close associates. In June 1992 Nazarbayev received an analytical memorandum (possibly prepared by Zhukeyev) about the Armenia-Azerbaijan relations in the view of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.⁶⁵⁹ Nazarbayev found the information interesting and in turn instructed the author to elaborate Kazakhstan’s own position on this problem “without delay.”⁶⁶⁰ By this time it was clear for Almaty executives that Nazarbayev wanted to renew his involvement in the peace process.

⁶⁵⁹ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 22, ll. 76-80.

⁶⁶⁰ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 22, l. 76.

On 29 June 1992 deputy minister Tokaev prepared a letter addressed to the president informing him about such possibility (which was signed by Suleymenov as the author).⁶⁶¹ Nazarbayev was told that, “according to the received information,” the Western nations would approach Kazakhstan and Russia at the upcoming CSCE summit in Helsinki (9-10 July 1992) with the request to re-start the mediation mission to settle the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Suleymenov suggested Nazarbayev to make a public statement “On the situation around Nagorno-Karabakh” before the CIS summit in Moscow (6 July 1992). In case the president agreed, the foreign ministry would issue its own statement and start a mass-media campaign articulating the president’s concern about the conflict. Suleymenov added that the president’s initiative could be presented to the public as being modelled after the Soviet mission that resulted in the Indian-Pakistani peace talks in Tashkent in 1966. The proposed presidential statement included the following:

Tragic events around Nagorno-Karabakh cause a special soreness in the interethnic Kazakhstan...On behalf of the people of the Republic of Kazakhstan I call presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan to meet at the nearest time on the ‘neutral territory’ and reach an agreement on the immediate stop of the combat actions. I believe that the regulations of the Zheleznovodsk Communiqué of 23 September 1991, still actual and positively appraised by the international community, are a good basis for the dialogue. Almaty is ready to host you.... If you consider the acceptance of the invitation possible, I will endeavour to personally facilitate the successful meeting.⁶⁶²

For some reason Suleymenov decided not to release either of the proposed statements – the handwritten note on the attached draft MFA statement reads: “The decision was made (by comrade Suleymenov T.S.) to temporarily refrain. 27.07.”⁶⁶³ It is possible to presume that Suleymenov had thought that the time had not come to approach the president with this proposal and neither the letter or draft statements were sent to the president.

In the foreign ministry, the moment was considered propitious a few weeks later, in August 1992, when Suleymenov finally approached the president with the idea to initiate unilateral mediation efforts by sending direct messages to Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents

⁶⁶¹ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 22, ll. 12-13.

⁶⁶² APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 22, l. 13.

⁶⁶³ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 22, l. 14.

and inviting them to Almaty.⁶⁶⁴ Simultaneously Nazarbayev was advised to address the UN General Secretary Boutros Boutros-Ghali with the proposal to support the initiative and take part in the Almaty meeting. Suleymenov's message to the president read:

The military standoff around Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan convincingly shows that there is a threat of the loss of control over situation in the Transcaucasian region. Mediation efforts of the international community, CIS member-states, and number of bordering countries brought no feasible results....The MFA, after analyzing the situation, is bringing forward the proposal to send addresses on your behalf to the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The essence of our policy towards the armed conflict between these states will be that Kazakhstan will undertake mediation efforts by inviting presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan to Almaty.⁶⁶⁵

The foreign minister's intuition worked – time was ripe and Nazarbayev welcomed his idea. It is possible that the president was moved by Suleymenov's information about the lack of progress of mediation efforts by Russia and the CSCE. Nazarbayev saw the opportunity to initiate his own mediation mission, as the international peace process, not monopolized by any actor, stalled.⁶⁶⁶ A related point can be made that Nazarbayev felt that, in the absence of other realistic alternatives, his contribution could break a stalemate and bring the conflicting sides closer to a peace agreement. In addition, two high-ranking Kazakhstani diplomats at the time stated in interviews with the author that Nazarbayev decided to assist the conflicting sides in reaching a ceasefire agreement, mainly because of humanitarian considerations and of a desire to gain political prestige for the nation on the international arena.⁶⁶⁷ Speaking about Kazakhstan's motives, both interviewed diplomats highlighted the fact that Kazakhstan "did not have any strategic interests" in the region. Kazakhstan was neither a large power nor inclined to any side's position. The absence of strategic interests of Kazakhstan came in contrast with the Russian position, thus for Armenia and Azerbaijan it was "politically appropriate" to welcome another mediator apart from Russia.

⁶⁶⁴ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 22, ll. 62-63.

⁶⁶⁵ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 22, l. 62.

⁶⁶⁶ On opportunities for peacemaking as a "niche diplomacy" for the small and medium states, which arise from the favourable systemic conditions in the post-cold war international context see Marcus Foster, "Small States in Peacemaking Roles Applying the 'Norwegian Model' of Conflict Resolution in Sudan," *Jackson School Journal of International Studies* 2, no. 1 (2011): 22-32.

⁶⁶⁷ Asan Kozhakov, Personal Representative of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Azerbaijan in September 1992, interview with the author, Almaty, 27 April 2012; Klara Sheryazdanova, the Head of the CIS Department of the MFA in 1992, interview with the author (by telephone), Almaty, 13 November 2012.

It is hard to judge which of these motives played major or minor roles, but Nazarbayev agreed to the MFA's proposal and sent addresses to the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents, inviting them to Almaty to discuss terms of a ceasefire.⁶⁶⁸ The working group was formed in the MFA, headed by deputy minister Tokaev. On 27 August 1992, the Armenian and Azerbaijani representatives arrived in Almaty. Instead of the heads of states, the delegations were led by foreign ministers. Despite this obvious downgrade of the level of the meeting, Nazarbayev had personally met with both ministers behind closed doors to facilitate the talks. The Armenian diplomat quotes Nazarbayev's remark when foreign ministers started to argue about the role the UN should play in the conflict resolution: "Kazakhstan is closer [to Armenia and Azerbaijan] than the UN. I just cannot sleep when I think about all things happening [in the Nagorno-Karabakh region]."⁶⁶⁹ At the end of the day, after lengthy consultations, guests, together with their Kazakhstani colleague Suleymenov, signed the trilateral 'Almaty Memorandum' whereby Armenian and Azerbaijani ministers "confirmed the readiness of their states to suspend military actions in accordance with the appeal of the Minsk Group of September 1, 1992 and undertake practical measures for the realization of its provisions," effectively establishing a ceasefire on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border.⁶⁷⁰ The Almaty meeting was a significant breakthrough in the international mediation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and came as a complete surprise to the international community.⁶⁷¹ For the first time since the unsuccessful Tehran ceasefire agreement of 7 May 1992 both sides met and produced a ceasefire agreement.⁶⁷²

To further institutionalize the role of Kazakhstan in the Nagorno-Karabakh peace initiative Nazarbayev appointed two experienced diplomats to be his personal representatives in the capitals of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The head of the International Department of the

⁶⁶⁸ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 24, ll. 64-65.

⁶⁶⁹ Suren Zolian, "Nagornyi Karabakh posle SSSR (avgust – dekabr' 1991 g.). Zheleznovodskii protsess," in *Nagornyi Karabakh: Problema i Konflikt*, (Erevan: Lingva, 2001), under "Pozitsiia posrednikov," <http://armenianhouse.org/zolyan/nf-ru/karabakh/5.html>.

⁶⁷⁰ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 1310, l. 3.

⁶⁷¹ See Kazimirov, *Mir Karabakhu*, 55-57.

⁶⁷² For the text of the "Joint declaration of the Heads of States in Tehran," signed by the president of Azerbaijan Yakub Mamedov, the president of Armenia Levon Ter-Petrosyan, and the president of Iran Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani on 7 May 1992, see Kazimirov, *Mir Karabakhu*, 337-338.

Apparatus of the President Kasymov and the head of the Cultural Department of the MFA Asan Kozhakov were dispatched to Baku and Yerevan respectively to monitor and coordinate the implementation of the Almaty Memorandum, as well as to liaise Kazakhstani authorities directly with presidents Mutalibov and Ter-Petrosyan. They were provided with offices in the respective presidents' offices with access to the military high-frequency communication line, which they used to send cables to the deputy minister Tokaev.

On 3 September 1992 Armenia and Azerbaijan representatives, together with Nazarbayev's personal envoys, signed the "Idzhevan Protocol", confirming the preliminary implementation of the Almaty Memorandum provisions.⁶⁷³ The main provisions of these documents were that Armenia and Azerbaijan would agree to a ceasefire along the de jure state borders.⁶⁷⁴ The de facto border of the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh republic was out of the provisions of the agreements, but even so, the facts that two sides have finally met and signed the memorandum and protocol were considered as significant steps towards peace reconciliation by the Kazakhstani leadership. The ceasefire agreement was more or less observed to the effect that tensions along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border were reduced in the immediate subsequent period. After the signing of the Idzhevan Protocol Kasymov and Kozhakov returned home to await further developments. Their enthusiasm was soon to diminish, however, as news reports from the field in late September-October showed that the fighting broke out again.

Two weeks after the signing of the Idzhevan Protocol, on 17 September 1992 the Kazakhstani MFA working group met with the Armenian and Azerbaijani diplomats to discuss the possibility of reversing the negative tendencies in the region and of hosting the summit of the three presidents.⁶⁷⁵ The good news for Almaty was that the role of the republic was praised by both Armenia and Azerbaijan representatives, who expressed their willingness to continue a dialogue with each other through Kazakhstan's mediation. For them, Nazarbayev's mission was

⁶⁷³ In the 7 September 1992 letter, Suleymenov informs the president about the work of his personal envoys in Baku and Yerevan. The letter describes moves by both sides in regard to the Protocol's implementation reported back to Almaty by the president's envoys. See APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 1310, ll. 11-13.

⁶⁷⁴ For the text of the Idzhevan Protocol see APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 1310, ll. 61-62.

⁶⁷⁵ See the "Letter from Suleymenov to Nazarbayev, 17 September 1992." APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 22, ll. 103-106.

more effective in comparison to the Minsk Group's one – as an illustration for this point Armenia and Azerbaijan diplomats referred to the failure of the Minsk Group meeting in Rome on 7-10 September 1992. The bad news was that the meeting did not advance Kazakhstan's peace initiative. According to Suleymenov, "the negotiations went hard and tenaciously, with Armenia' and Azerbaijan's representatives constantly arguing, exchanging accusations and reproaches."⁶⁷⁶ This meeting also signalled to Almaty that it might not be able to achieve any further tangible results in brokering the peace agreement. Suleymenov frankly warned the president: "Negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan are gaining a protracted character....There are no visible mutually acceptable conflict resolution options yet."⁶⁷⁷ Suren Zolian, an Armenian diplomat present at the meeting, later recalled that for all participating countries the main agenda of the meeting was not so much to discuss the Almaty peace process but to "find a decent way of putting the matter to rest."⁶⁷⁸

Given these disappointing developments Suleymenov suggested to Nazarbayev to refrain from resending the president's representatives to Baku and Yerevan for some time. However, knowing the symbolic importance of the previously envisioned presidential summit for Nazarbayev's international prestige, Suleymenov at the same time told the president that his ministry would be working to get the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan to come to Almaty to meet with Nazarbayev in a trilateral forum. As Suleymenov reported to the president: "The work on positions' rapprochement will constantly continue at the level of the ministers and deputy ministers....The MFA intends to endure the line of continuing the negotiation process and to steadily work up for the meeting of the heads of states."⁶⁷⁹

As the subsequent events demonstrated, the August foreign ministers' meeting that resulted in signing the Almaty Memorandum and later the Idzhevan Protocol, was the culmination of Kazakhstan's mediation effort and further diplomatic actions gradually declined

⁶⁷⁶ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 22, l. 103.

⁶⁷⁷ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 22, l. 106.

⁶⁷⁸ Zolian, "Nagornyi Karabakh," under "Pozitsiia posrednikov."

⁶⁷⁹ APRK f. 75N, op. 1, d. 22, ll. 105, 106.

thereafter. The three presidents' summit never took place.⁶⁸⁰ Such an unfortunate course of events for Kazakhstan's peace initiative was prompted by the developments in the conflict region, where the fighting continued up the escalation spiral, and by the constraints imposed by the international environment.

Changing international context

Almaty peace process

During the initial period of the "internationalization" of the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process, the international missions were run independently from one another, often overlapping in timing and peace mechanisms proposed: "The result was confusion as the two sides were being encouraged to 'shop around' for whichever mediation effort suited them best."⁶⁸¹ When Kazakhstan launched its own unilateral mediation effort in August 1992 it ran parallel to other initiatives. At the same time, Nazarbayev from the start clearly wanted to gain legitimacy and support of his mediation efforts from the international mediation community. The Minsk Group and Russia were the main protagonists of the conflict resolution process and their attitudes towards Nazarbayev's diplomacy had greatly affected the role Kazakhstan had played in this process.

Although the Almaty peace initiative was unilateral in format, Kazakhstan continuously expressed its desire to conduct the initiative under the auspices of the UN and CSCE. The text of the Alma-Ata Memorandum explicitly signals this intention:

On 27 August 1992 in Almaty the meeting of the delegations headed by the ministers of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan took place. The meeting was initiated by the president of Kazakhstan. Mediation efforts of the Republic of Kazakhstan were undertaken within the context of the CSCE, its Minsk Group, in conformity with the spirit and principles of this organization.⁶⁸²

⁶⁸⁰ The Armenia and Azerbaijan presidents would meet in Kazakhstan to discuss the Nagorno-Karabakh problem only in 2010 at the OSCE Summit hosted by Kazakhstan.

⁶⁸¹ De Waal, *Black Garden*, 228.

⁶⁸² APRK f. 5N. op. 1, d. 1310, l. 3.

In the letter addressed to the Minsk Group chairman Raffaelli, Tokaev informs his colleague about the follow up meeting of the trilateral working group on 17 September. Tokaev, highlighting the importance of the international support, writes to Raffaelli:

As you know, Kazakhstan's mediation efforts are undertaken within the context of peace efforts of the CSCE and its Minsk Group, in accordance with the spirit and principles of this organization. We request you to send your representative to take part in the working group meeting in Almaty.⁶⁸³

In autumn 1992 Kazakhstan wanted to join the Minsk Group with Moscow's assistance requesting the Russian foreign ministry to initiate the motion in the Minsk Group.⁶⁸⁴

Unexpected reaction of the West

Western diplomats on several occasions boldly rejected Nazarbayev's ambitions to integrate Almaty's initiative in the international mediation process and to complement the process with his personal contribution. The UN General-Secretary declined the invitation to join the trilateral talks in Almaty in September. The CSCE leadership, although having noted Kazakhstan's efforts during the Zheleznovodsk process in its February 1992 "Interim Report on Nagorno-Karabakh," nonetheless did not invite Kazakhstan to join the Minsk Group when it was being founded in March 1992.⁶⁸⁵ The CSCE leadership was also against granting a CSCE mandate to observers whom Almaty wanted to send to the region in autumn 1992.⁶⁸⁶

As for the Minsk Group, at the earlier stage the Group neither opposed Nazarbayev's actions nor supported them – the attitude of the Western countries continued to be neutral until Kazakhstan unilaterally brokered a ceasefire agreement at the August trilateral meeting in Almaty. Almaty's advance was greeted with envy by the Minsk Group.⁶⁸⁷ The Group's discontent with Almaty's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh problem resulted in its devotion

⁶⁸³ APRK f. 75N. op. 1. d. 55. l. 15.

⁶⁸⁴ APRK f. 75N. op. 1. d. 22, ll. 103-106.

⁶⁸⁵ See the "Interim Report of the Rapporteur Mission on the Situation in Nagorno-Karabakh (February 1992)," in Bloed, ed., *Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe*, 1191-1208; "Helsinki Additional Meeting of the CSCE Council (March 1992)," in Bloed, ed., *Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe*, 841-844.

⁶⁸⁶ See APRK f. 75N. op. 1. d. 22, ll. 103-106.

⁶⁸⁷ Kazimirov, *Mir Karabakhu*, 56-57.

to exclude Kazakhstan from the international peace process. This intention manifested both in public statements and in behind-the-scenes diplomacy of the Minsk Group leadership.

As it was said, the fundamental change of the Minsk Group's attitude towards Nazarbayev's initiative happened after the Almaty trilateral meeting in August 1992. The signing of the Almaty Memorandum came as a surprise to the Group's Chair Raffaelli.⁶⁸⁸ As the reaction of the Group's diplomats later demonstrated, the surprise was an unpleasant one. Even the moderate achievements reached at the Almaty meeting greatly contrasted with the Minsk Group's lack of progress. As recalled by Kazimirov, the heaviest critique came from the Americans and Italians who were concerned about the Group's prestige and their own personal roles in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution.⁶⁸⁹ The Group's diplomats explicitly showed their frustration about Nazarbayev's unilateral initiative. The Italian delegation expressed concerns about a confusion in the mediation process created by the Almaty peace agreement; and Kazakhstan was blamed by the Minsk Group for putting the entire conflict resolution process at risk and for the erosion of Group's credibility.⁶⁹⁰ Minsk Group representatives even expressed a view that Kazakhstan is not a legitimate mediator.⁶⁹¹ Kazimirov recalls that the US delegate John J. Maresca shared his opinion with the participants of the Rome meeting that only the Minsk Group could reach a peace agreement and that Almaty should either step aside or become an observer in the Group.⁶⁹² However, as Kazimirov recalls the diplomatic communication, when in January 1993 Kazakhstani foreign minister Suleymenov requested to officially send an observer to the Minsk Group meeting, Italy and the USA, without informing other members of the Group, denied the republic's request, "even though Kazakhstan had twice entered the peace

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid, 46, 55.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid, 56-57.

⁶⁹⁰ Paddy Agnew, "Italy: Ceasefire Confusion as Karabakh Talks Restart," *IPS-Inter Press Service*, 8 September 1992; Kazimirov, *Mir Karabakhu*, 57.

⁶⁹¹ Zolian, "Nagornyi Karabakh," under "Pozitsiia posrednikov."

⁶⁹² Kazimirov, *Mir Karabakhu*, 57.

process.”⁶⁹³ This fact, however, did not serve as a predicament for Finland and Switzerland, who were later easily accepted as the full-fledged members of the Minsk Group, Kazimirov adds.⁶⁹⁴

Zolian writes that Russia was not happy either about signing of the Almaty Memorandum, because, for Moscow, Nazarbayev’s success challenged Russia’s leading role in the CIS.⁶⁹⁵ Furthermore, Zolian writes that both Armenia and Azerbaijan authorities were subsequently confronted by the similar negative reaction of the international mediators, which led them to withdraw from the Almaty peace process.⁶⁹⁶ These facts unequivocally demonstrate the Minsk Group’s exclusive attitude towards non-Western international mediation efforts, as well as the Russian suspicion of Nazarbayev’s moves. Such a treatment of Kazakhstan’s initiative becomes more understandable against the general background of the post-Soviet geopolitics.

Russia-West rivalry

The establishment of the Minsk Group, run mostly by the Western diplomats, led the peace process in Nagorno-Karabakh to be interrelated with the larger context of West’s interactions with Russia.⁶⁹⁷ This has certainly complicated the mediation process. Illustrative of this point are the reflections of the US representative Maresca and the Russian chief mediator Kazimirov. Maresca notes that the failure of mediation efforts in 1992-1993 was partly caused by the Russian policy aimed at isolating the issue from international, and mainly Western, participation.⁶⁹⁸ According to the American diplomat, this policy was part of a broader strategy aimed at preserving Moscow’s dominance over the post-Soviet territories: “Russian unwillingness to accept a reasonable compromise based on a significant, but not controlling, role

⁶⁹³ Kazimirov, *Mir Karabakhu*, 61.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁵ Zolian, “Nagornyi Karabakh,” under “Pozitsiia posrednikov.”

This point runs counter to Kazimirov’s assertion that the Almaty meeting was positively assessed by Russia: “Those who thought that stopping the bloodshed was the most important goal could not consider the Alma-Ata Memorandum with envy.” See Kazimirov, *Mir Karabakhu*, 55.

⁶⁹⁶ Zolian, “Nagornyi Karabakh,” under “Pozitsiia posrednikov.”

⁶⁹⁷ De Waal, *Black Garden*, 229.

⁶⁹⁸ Maresca, *Lost Opportunities*, 472.

in an international peacekeeping force, has been particularly striking evidence of neo-imperialist intentions.”⁶⁹⁹ For Maresca, the principal point of non-concurrence in mediation approaches was that Russia wanted to send its own or CIS “separation forces,” which was “directly competing with and undercutting the international proposal for a CSCE force.”⁷⁰⁰ Meanwhile, Kazimirov argues that the involvement of the CSCE in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict “corresponded to the interests of USA and other Western powers.”⁷⁰¹ For the Russians, the first year of the Minsk Group’s work showed that it was not capable to act as mediator – in Kazimirov’s view the achievement of a ceasefire and the end of hostilities, the primary goal of the Russian mediation mission, was a secondary goal for the Minsk Group.

We continued our activities within the Group trying to redirect its course and resist the westerners’ attempts to use its format in their geopolitical interests, mainly to reduce influence of Russia in Transcaucasus. In this situation we had to boost our own [unilateral] mediation attempts, to more actively communicate with the leaders of the conflicting sides on our own.⁷⁰²

While the West could not ignore Russia’s importance and involvement in the matters on the post-Soviet territory, its attitude towards CIS was completely different. CIS’s activities were met with jealousy from the Minsk Group.⁷⁰³ Kazimirov recollects: “Western nations and the CSCE organs, including the Minsk Group have never answered the CIS appeals to cooperate on the Nagorno-Karabakh problem and to support CIS efforts.”⁷⁰⁴ This could have been caused by the Western suspicion towards the structure:

In most of these case studies of peacekeeping and peace enforcement on former Soviet territory Russia has sought to present the operations undertaken as being in some way CIS-led rather than Russian-led. This reflects a belief that the CIS umbrella could offer greater legitimacy, or at least respectability, to these operations and serve to some extent to spread the financial and military burden borne so far principally by Russia.⁷⁰⁵

It is therefore understandable why were Nazarbayerev’s frequent appeals to engage the CIS structures in the peace process not welcomed by the West. For example, when in October 1992

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁰¹ Kazimirov, *Mir Karabakhu*, 35.

⁷⁰² Kazimirov, *Mir Karabakhu*, 72.

⁷⁰³ See Kazimirov, *Mir Karabakhu*, 239-254.

⁷⁰⁴ Kazimirov, *Mir Karabakhu*, 249.

⁷⁰⁵ Roy Allison, *Peacekeeping in the Soviet successor states* (Paris: Institute for Security Studies, Western European Union, 1994), <http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/cp018e.pdf>.

Kazakhstan asked the CSCE to confer its mandate to Kazakhstani observers who planned to be sent by the CIS to the conflict zone, Vienna refused: “The CSCE leadership is expressing doubts about the eligibility of issuing the CSCE mandates for the CIS observers.”⁷⁰⁶

At the same time, while Russia’s own attitude towards other mediators was publicly promoted as open and welcoming, the Kazakhstani foreign office could not fully count on Moscow’s support for its initiative. Officially, the Russian mission adopted a conception of complementary and mutually supported efforts of all interested parties.⁷⁰⁷ Nonetheless, Kazakhstani diplomats did not feel that Moscow was welcoming Nazarbayev’s peace initiative since the Russians rarely coordinated their activities with Almaty, even though promises were made to do so; as a result, Kazakhstani diplomats were instructed by their superiors not to discuss in detail with the Russians the upcoming Almaty meeting.⁷⁰⁸ As Kazimirov recalled his conversation with the Kazakhstani diplomat:

On 25 August [1992] Kazakhstan’s deputy foreign minister Kurmanguzhin in the confidential V-CHe conversation informed me about the initiative of his president and the upcoming meetings of Armenia and Azerbaijan...But he evidently did not want to share with me detailed information and to cooperate closely on that matter.⁷⁰⁹

Zolian’s observation about Moscow’s negative reaction to the signing of the Almaty Memorandum, noted above, suggests that there were grounds for the Kazakhstani hesitation with Moscow.⁷¹⁰

Eventually, Kazakhstan’s independent peace initiative by autumn 1992 began to be perceived as an unwelcome and confusing development that unnecessarily complicated the geopolitical game between the West and Russia around the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Signs of progress demonstrated by Nazarbayev’s unilateral activities only questioned other mediators’ abilities. Hence, the international environment, which seemed so promising and permissive for Nazarbayev in August, had soon become inhospitable for Almaty’s peace endeavour. As a result,

⁷⁰⁶ APRK f. 75N. op. 1. d. 22, ll. 103-106.

⁷⁰⁷ Kazimirov, *Mir Karabakhu*, 55.

⁷⁰⁸ Kazakhstani diplomat, name and place withheld by request, interview with the author, 15 December 2012.

⁷⁰⁹ Kazimirov, *Mir Karabakhu*, 55.

⁷¹⁰ Olivier Roy makes an intriguing argument that Russia was interested in “adding fuel to the fire” in Nagorno-Karabakh since local crises allowed Moscow to maintain its presence in conflict regions through the disposition of military force. See Roy, *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations* (London: Tauris, 2000), 197.

Kazakhstan's actions had progressively received less and less attention and support of other participants in the international mediation process. At some point, a high-ranking authority told Nazarbayev that Kazakhstan "is losing face."⁷¹¹ Achieving no further advances in the implementation of the Almaty Memorandum, Kazakhstan recognized the changing nature of the international context and started to look for alternative variants to remain in the international peace process.

The endgame

At this stage an attractive option of remaining involved in the process on a high international level was to link Almaty's efforts with the Minsk Group activities. Realizing that the Group's Western leadership might not be willing to cooperate with Kazakhstan, Almaty approached Russia with the request to back its intentions. In mid-October, Kazakhstan proposed for Moscow to jointly convene a Minsk Group meeting. Suleymenov explained to Nazarbayev the motive behind this proposal: "This, we think, will provide more legitimacy to Kazakhstan's efforts within the CSCE context. At the Minsk Group meeting there could be considered ... Almaty Memorandum and Idzhevan Protocol as documents, concluded in line with the CSCE actions."⁷¹² Almaty had also asked Moscow, as the member of the Minsk Group, to initiate the procedure of accepting Kazakhstan as the observer to this organization.⁷¹³

It is hard to point to particular reasons why Kazakhstan's ambitions to side with the Minsk Group were not realized, but the facts tell that already by winter 1992 Almaty was left on the roadside of the international resolution process. This situation was fully recognized by Kazakhstani policymakers as the previous enthusiasm quickly faded. In February 1993, at the foreign ministry's collegium, the former president's personal envoy to Armenia Kozhakov sounded a bitter reminder to his colleagues about the past peacemaking ambitions of Kazakhstan:

⁷¹¹ Kazakhstani diplomat, interview with the author, name and place withheld by request, 15 December 2012.

⁷¹² APRK f. 75N. op. 1. d. 22, l. 106.

⁷¹³ APRK f. 75N. op. 1. d. 22, ll. 103-106.

The whole thing died out. We have stopped proposing options for the conflict resolution, did not enter the CSCE Minsk Group. Meanwhile Russia started to work, to fill the occurred gap. In personal contacts with the Armenian diplomats they asked me what is to be done next? Unfortunately, from our side silence was the only reply. It is not understandable why, with what aim the initiative was endeavoured?⁷¹⁴

The minister's reply was: "The mediation initiative is complicated. It is not only about documents. The Nagorno-Karabakh problem is complicated in itself. Yes, it did not work out, but not because of Kazakhstan's fault. The problem's knot is too complex, historically, ethnically."⁷¹⁵ In the 1993 letter criticizing the MFA, former president's personal envoy to Azerbaijan Kasymov referred to the unsuccessful Nagorno-Karabakh initiative: "For example, Kazakhstan, having initiated the Karabakh problem resolution, due to the MFA's passivity did not enter the CSCE Minsk Group and in general became an onlooker of the mediation process."⁷¹⁶

Interestingly, for some reason, in April 1993 Nazarbayev asked Suleymenov whether it would be possible to reinvigorate Kazakhstan's peace initiative. The minister told Nazarbayev that it was possible to renew mediation efforts and suggested several ideas towards this end.⁷¹⁷ Among them Suleymenov proposed Nazarbayev to initiate the summit of the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents on Kazakhstani territory but now with the participation of the Russian delegation. Another suggestion was made to appeal to the conflicting sides to continue negotiations under the aegis of the Minsk Group with the participation of the representative of Kazakhstan. These two points indicate that Almaty had again relied on the same recipes it had last year – to side with the Minsk Group and seek Moscow's support.

Nazarbayev forwarded Suleymenov's proposals to Zhukeyev asking his opinion of the prospects of restarting the peace mission. Zhukeyev prepared an elaborated review in which he took a critical stand to the MFA's ideas and proposed to pull back from the peace initiative delegating future activities to Russia.⁷¹⁸ In particular, he told the president:

⁷¹⁴ APRK f. 75N. op. 1. d. 345, l. 6.

⁷¹⁵ APRK f. 75N. op. 1. d. 345, l. 15.

⁷¹⁶ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2661, l. 3.

⁷¹⁷ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2064, ll. 9-15.

⁷¹⁸ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2064, ll. 25-27.

Perspectives for the regulation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict seem to be distant...In the current situation it would be most rational not to take active steps to renew the Kazakhstani mediation mission; at the same time it is desirable to work on the legitimization of the republic's participation in the international peace process by entering the Minsk Group. Hardly do we need to demonstrate peaceful intentions without having secured solid guarantees of their success and jeopardize the republic's leadership prestige. It is preferable to work within the framework of the CSCE.⁷¹⁹

Zhukeyev advised Nazarbayev to restrict Kazakhstan's participation to a public statement on behalf of the MFA that would be very general in its content. The president agreed with Zhukeyev's opinion and instructed Suleymenov to limit Kazakhstan's involvement to oral propositions on the level of foreign ministries. Hence the story of the first Kazakhstani international peace mission was over.

Conclusion

The episode of Kazakhstan's peace initiative must have raised mixed emotions among Almaty policymakers. On one hand, some success on the ground and corresponding international recognition was achieved by Kazakhstan. This was one of the first instances through which Nazarbayev consolidated his image of the global diplomat. Therefore, the MFA, whose ideas and commitment made a major contribution to the initiative, could accordingly count on president's benevolence. The achievement was especially noticeable since the peace initiative was seen by Kazakhstani diplomats to be a "brave move, considering that we did not have any prior experience in international conflict resolution."⁷²⁰ On the other hand, the mediating mission could be a lesson of disillusionment in the benign nature of the international environment for the republic's policy makers. After all, it is the Minsk Group's direct and indirect pressures on Almaty that had eventually led to the decision to cease its peace initiative.

The reticence of Kazakhstani diplomats in this episode comes in contrast with their assertiveness in the previous two cases. Presumably, the reason why Almaty did not attempt to insist on its involvement in the peace process, either under the auspices of the Minsk Group or

⁷¹⁹ APRK f. 5N, op. 1, d. 2064, ll. 25.

⁷²⁰ Asan Kozhakov, Personal Representative of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan to Azerbaijan in September 1992, interview with the author, Almaty, 24 March 2013.

jointly with Russia, was that the Nagorno-Karabakh issue did not constitute a vital foreign policy problem. The fact that Nazarbayev's contribution was mainly limited to making initial and final decisions on the policy proposals put forward by Suleymenov and Zhukeyev, with the occasional presence at the August trilateral talks in Almaty, reflects the relevantly low level of importance of this issue to the Kazakhstani leadership. This is not to say that the matter was a routine foreign policy act. The peace mission was duly discussed and analyzed at considerably high levels of the foreign policymaking bureaucracy. To recall, the idea to initiate the peace process was the product of the MFA's decision-making and the proposal to terminate the initiative was thoroughly justified by State Counsellor Zhukeyev. Here, Nazarbayev had just endorsed both proposals, without much contribution on generation or coordination of the peace mission. The chief protagonists in this episode were the two authoritative policymaking actors, the MFA and the State Counsellor.

The Nagorno-Karabakh episode is the last of the three empirical inquiries undertaken in this study. Generalizations and conclusions from the gathered evidence will be drawn in the following conclusive chapter that presents key findings of this study and discusses possible future avenues for the research on the phenomenon of Kazakhstani foreign policy.

Conclusion

If an involuntary act is one preformed under compulsion or as a result of ignorance, a voluntary act would seem to be one of which the originating cause lies in the agent himself, who knows the particular circumstances of his actions.
Aristotle, *Ethics*.

This thesis was undertaken with the goal to construct a plausible understanding of the abnormalities in Kazakhstan's external behavioural model in the first half of the 1990s. The principal inquiry that guided the research project was:

What was the role of agency, if any, behind the formation of Kazakhstan's foreign behavioural model?

In particular, the thesis sought to elucidate reasons as to why Kazakhstan did not bandwagon with or balanced against its powerful neighbours; decided to relinquish its nuclear arsenal; and pursued an inconsistent Nagorno-Karabakh peace mission, thereby confounding the deterministic logic of the systemic theories of international relations. The neoclassical realist theoretical framework was selected to assess the validity of the central argument of this thesis that the presidential foreign policymaking element could have played a crucial role in moulding foreign policy strategies realized by Almaty, thus potentially holding important explanatory power at the unit level.

Neoclassical realism integrates international and domestic milieus in one analytical argument by hypothesizing that pressures from the international system are translated into a foreign policy output through some unit-level factors which act as an “imperfect transmission belt.”⁷²¹ Adaptations of the neoclassical realist paradigm find various domestic factors to distort signals from the international environment. This thesis argued that in the case of Kazakhstan, the Almaty's policymaking element could be the unit-level variable that accounted for the peculiarities of the republic's foreign affairs. The focus of the analysis was therefore shifted from the systemic challenges, overwhelming Kazakhstan immediately after independence, to the

⁷²¹ Taliaferro, Lobell, Ripsman, “Introduction,” 4.

examination of decision-making processes and structures in operation during each of the episodes under investigation. Given the prominence of Nazarbayev in post-independence politics of Kazakhstan, the methodology of studies of the presidential group decision-making was employed to draw a portrayal of the republic's policymaking apparatus in a manner that allowed for the integration of this aspect of strategy formation into a comprehensive historical narrative.

Empirical findings presented in the thesis confirm the initial presumption that Nazarbayev's policymaking was an essential link in the causal chain underlying the initial systemic circumstances and an actual policy response, thus supporting the relevance of the application of the neoclassical realist lens to this inquiry. In two cases (Chapters IV, V) Almaty policy makers demonstrated remarkable defiance of the overwhelming political and security pressures. In one case (Chapter VI), the assessed documents showed how Kazakhstan initiated a unilateral peace initiative and eventually reversed its course, having acquiesced to the constraints imposed by the international environment. Both types of policy responses were steered to significant degrees by carefully planned and intended activities on the part of policymakers signalling the presence of agency behind foreign policy. To recall Calder's discussion of properties of reactive external policies, where the "reaction prevails over strategy," in Kazakhstan's case, the opposite claim that the "strategy prevails over reaction" can be supported by this study.

Reconstructing foreign policy decision-making

Primary materials produced by the policymaking apparatus during the evolution of these three episodes supplement each other, and each provide insights of their own, helping to compose a generalized vision of policymaking of the initial post-independence era. Empirical chapters provided an insider's view on how the foreign policy was made in the republic and what rationale was steering policymakers in their activities. Documented evidence of the strategic policy planning undertaken by Nazarbayev and his key advisers, who wanted to devise an adequate

policy which would enable Kazakhstan to avoid the hegemonic pitfalls emanating from the geopolitical pressures of Russia and China (Chapter IV), and to maximize the republic's benefit in the face of the recognized necessity to renounce nuclear status (Chapter V) convincingly demonstrate two characteristics of the policymakers. On the one hand, policymakers were sensitive to the foreign security and sovereignty threats, and on the other, they were committed to defending the national interest of the young republic. Highly skilled diplomacy exercised by Nazarbayev and his leading diplomats in negotiations with Beijing, Moscow, and Washington, reveal the president's profound personal contribution to the outcome of foreign policy manoeuvring. The records of the president's evasive personal nuclear bargaining specifically reinforce the view of Nazarbayev as a visionary statesman motivated by the desire to maximize the interest of the nation.

At first glance, the Nagorno-Karabakh case (Chapter VI) appears to infringe the thesis's argument in favour of elements of agency and defiance of systemic pressures. After all, it was the growing Minsk Group hostility that led to Almaty's disengagement from the peace process, essentially damaging the country's international prestige. In this case, Kazakhstan's actions closely correlated with the dynamics of systemic opportunities and constraints, a finding that should be associated more with the deterministic logic as the underlying cause for this episode's developments. On the other hand it is worth remembering that this issue did not have the nation's security and sovereignty at stake, a fact that could possibly explain Almaty's submissiveness to the external pressure. At the same time, this small-scale episode demonstrated the same high degree of policymakers' sensitivity and adaptability to the international context as in two other cases, albeit with different type of policy response. Moreover, this case in general portrays Kazakhstan not as a vulnerable object of international pressures that is statically waiting for the new challenges to come and then trying to react to them, but as a proactive nation ready to initiate a policy, contribute its limited resources and put its international prestige at risk, thus supporting the argument in favour of agency behind the republic's foreign policy outlook.

In all investigated cases the policy planning involved limited number of actors, all of them belonging to the executive branch and showing high levels of correspondence of their perceptions to Nazarbayev's vision. The chronicles of the limited turf war between the foreign ministry and the International Department of the president's apparatus (Chapter IV), as well as the insignificance of manifestation of the policy debate between "doves," "hawks" and "bargainers" on the issue of nuclear weapons (Chapter V) make it possible to deduct that Kazakhstan's foreign policy outlook was neither affected by the conflicting developments among the highest ranking decision-makers, nor by the attitudes of the general public. Some counterfactual arguments can be made to support this finding. The fact that the International Department's head Kasymov did not question the viability of the foundational principles of the strategic outlook in his bureaucratic charge on the foreign ministry, gives grounds to reason that the turf war neither did, nor, if the tables would have turned in Kasymov's favour, could entail serious foreign policy implications. Similarly, the impact of supporters and critics of the nuclear status on Nazarbayev's decision was equally minimal, causing only minor concerns for policymakers who enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy from the society in their deliberations. Kasenov's observation that the Supreme Soviet ratified the Lisbon Protocol without any preliminary parliamentary discussion only supports the argument on the consensual and exclusive character of decision-making. In other words, a conclusion can be made that neither bureaucratic politics nor necessity in acquiring public support mattered through the course of Kazakhstan's foreign policy.

It appears that from the outset of sovereign policymaking, the consensus had been established on the ends and means of the republic's external strategy among the leadership (not least to the effect of how these ends and means were formulated in policy papers and analytical memorandums). Nazarbayev, his advisers and the diplomatic corps often appeared to have prioritized matters of independence and security, and to have worked towards this goal as one team, not being compromised by manifestations of ideological divisions. From the assessed

material, however, it remains unclear if such uniformity in strategic perceptions was caused by the concentration of the policymaking in the hands of Nazarbayev, who had an exclusive privilege to decide on strategic foreign matters, or by congruence in the views of the president and his key advisers. These two assumptions are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The assessed materials illustrated how policymakers' opinions were communicated, in one form or another, to the president, who then cognitively aggregated them and subsequently informed his subordinates what the finalized policy stance should be.

Here the thesis is not able to give a definitive answer in regard to what exact cognitive and organizational mechanisms were in place when Nazarbayev arrived at specific policy choices. As much as it was a corroborative enterprise, it still was someone's particular contribution of ideas that laid the foundation for a foreign policy act. How much was there an influence of the president at the beginning of the decisional phase is debatable. For example, were the principles of balancing and multivectorism the original ideas authored by deputy minister Tokaev, as Starr contends, or did Tokaev just reflect on the president's worldviews and conceptually formulated them in the form of a strategic concept? The archival documents can only give a tentative conclusion that the advice and information flow was reciprocal – Nazarbayev both confirmed the soundness of his decisions with his team of advisers and benefited from the policy advice received from them. The precise answer to the question, if attainable at all, requires the employment of different sets of methods of investigation that could supplement the information from archival materials and interviews.

Figure 2.1: Balancing strategy elaboration

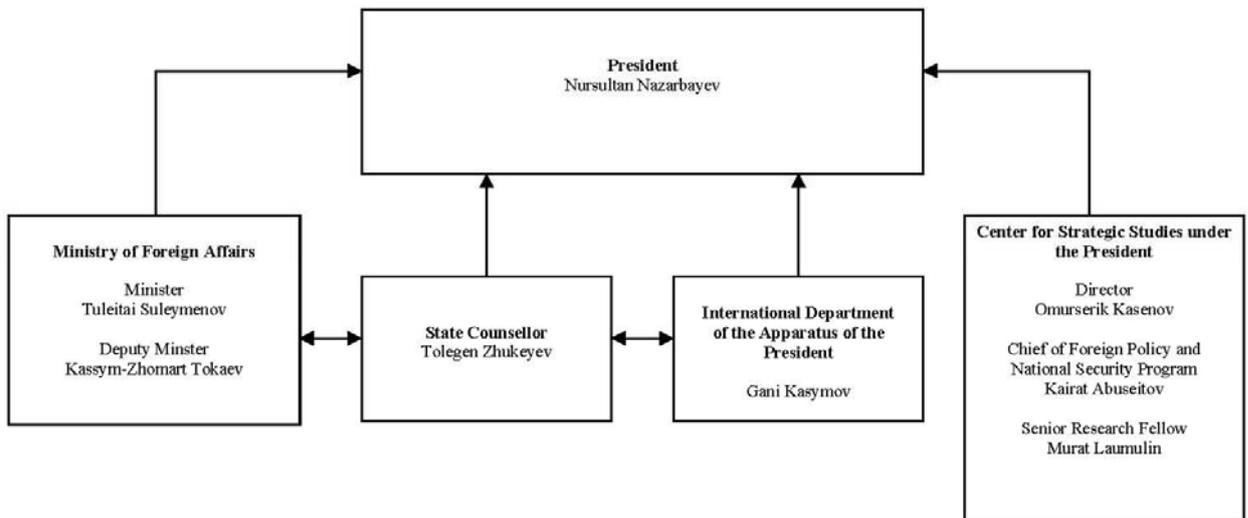


Figure 2.2: Nuclear decision-making

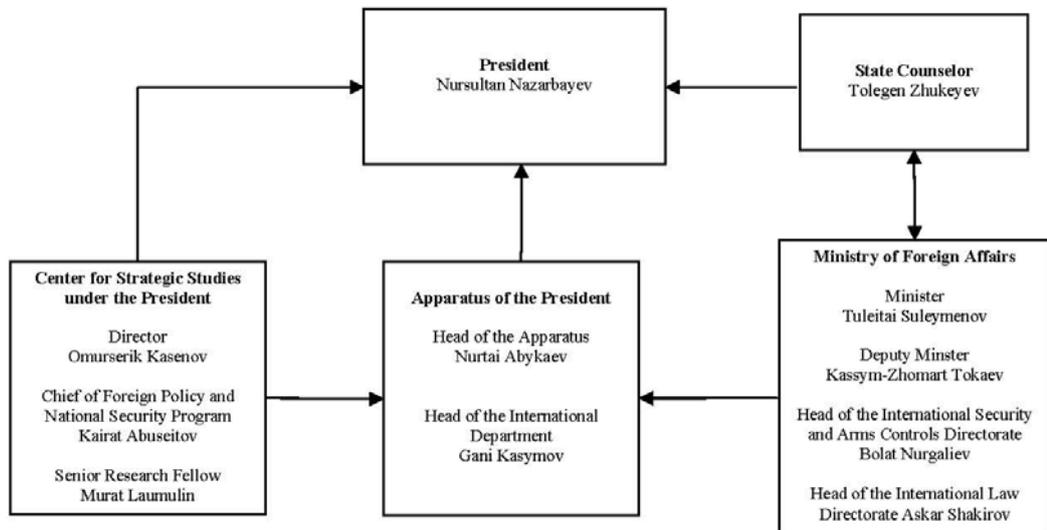
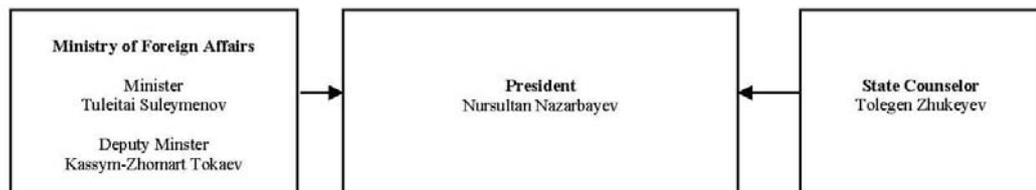


Figure 2.3: Nagorno-Karabakh decision-making



Nazarbayev's advisory group in each of the cases under review demonstrated different prevailing functional patterns of group decision-making models, as conceptualized by Hart et al. The elaboration of the balancing strategy aimed at securing the nation's sovereignty and territorial integrity, when each of Nazarbayev's advisers had developed his own version of the strategy in the forms of policy papers and strategic concepts, was a process closely resembling the "think tank" model. Here, the information was processed and policy solutions generated at the top by several high-ranking authorities, albeit sometimes with the assistance of the cadre of the institutions they headed. At the same, given the salience of the issues the republic's leadership had faced, the "command centre" model that presumes the contraction of the authority at the highest level seems relevant. Only a handful of Nazarbayev's innermost associates was involved in charting the strategic balancing course and coordinated its subsequent realization.

The solution of the nuclear dilemma set forward a somewhat different agenda for Nazarbayev's advisory group. At that point, the tasks for the president's advisors were not limited to the analysis of the information and the provision of the policy advice (i.e. the "think tank" model) and to the elaboration of the nuclear strategy in intensive informal meetings (i.e. the "command centre"). One of the possible roles the advisory group fulfilled in this case was to buttress the president's decision to relinquish the nuclear arsenal and therefore to serve a "sanctuary" role. Nazarbayev had frequently shown his hesitation about disarmament and controversial positions on the republic's nuclear status, both in public and behind closed doors. Certainly, to some degree this evasiveness and dithering could be accounted for by the intentional strategy of protracting the denuclearization, the inevitability of which the president had realised at some stage. At the same time, this could reflect the scale of Nazarbayev's personal contemplations about the fate of the nuclear arsenal and its role in the republic's future. Here, the unanimous support of his eventual position by close associates (who were also well-informed about the amount of international pressure put on the president) could certainly reaffirm Nazarbayev's decision and was likely to be sought by the president.

The functional patterns of the advisory group during the Nagorno-Karabakh peace mission clearly stand out from the other two episodes. Here, the bulk of the decisions were made by the foreign minister Suleymenov and the State Counsellor Zhukeyev. The president's contribution to the process was clearly much less manifest than in the previous two cases. Whereas the "think tank" model here seems appropriate, the lower salience of the issue had correspondingly led to the delegation of the decisional authority to a lower level and therefore the "command centre" role, performed by the advisory group during the elaboration of the balancing strategy and the nuclear episode, was not evident in the Nagorno-Karabakh case. To be sure, this assessment of the advisory group's roles is only preliminary and precise functions of each actor and nuanced details of their interaction with the president remain undisclosed.

Setting the clear conceptual boundaries in regard to Nazarbayev's preferred format of management of his advisory group is equally problematic. The attribution of George's three models of the presidential decision-making – formalistic, collegial, and competitive – to this study produces confusing results, because different decisional dynamics had manifested during the studied period. Across the cases under review, the superiority of the president's view on what was deemed an optimal policy and the centrality of his character in the policymaking apparatus were explicit, suggesting the formalistic nature of the decision-making. At the same time, Almaty policymakers saw the maintenance of the esprit de corps as the principal operational feature of their activities, which suggests some degree of collegiality. To recall, in times when Almaty policymakers were tasked with the charting of the balancing strategy, resolution of the nuclear issue, or initiating a peace agreement in Nagorno-Karabakh, all concerned policymaking actors were viewing the situations through one perceptual lens. The success of Almaty's foreign policy acts was by a substantial degree backed by the commonly shared policymakers' inner confidence and intelligence in ascertaining national interests in talks with their colleagues representing tremendously more powerful international actors. The same combination of self-confidence and competent style of handling foreign relations had also helped in gathering a

breakthrough peace conference in Almaty that brought at one table the fighting Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Moreover, while Nazarbayev had encouraged competitiveness and overlapping responsibilities among different actors by soliciting separate policy advice in a non-regular manner from each policymaking actor – the foreign ministry, the International Department, the CSS, and State Counsellor Zhukeyev – he had fiercely commanded Kasymov to stop intrigues around the foreign ministry thereby signalling his intolerance to any direct inter-institutional confrontation.

Nonetheless, some tentative findings can be made in regard to dominant dynamics of intra-group interactions during the three episodes. Here, again, the group decision-making on two high-salience issues (the balancing strategy and the nuclear dilemma) differed from the low-salience issue (the Nagorno-Karabakh episode). The variable is the level of the president's involvement. In the two former cases, Nazarbayev had actively participated in generating the republic's policies together with his associates, which is a strong collegial characteristic. In the latter case, Nazarbayev delegated the responsibility to produce the Nagorno-Karabakh policies to Suleymenov and Zhukeyev, the policymakers, who at a later phase made two opposing proposals to the president in regard to the republic's further participation in the endeavour. The president's role during this episode was mainly limited to making final decisions on whether to initiate, and, subsequently, continue or seize the peace mission – hence, the formalistic management style appears to be pertinent.

Ambiguities in Kazakhstan's presidential decision-making dynamics and performances are similar to the ones found by Haney in American history, and by Hart et al. in other countries, where characteristics of different models of presidential advisory systems have overlapped. Since the policymaking process was only emerging at the time, the ambiguous manner of the presidential policymaking in Kazakhstan is not a surprising incidence. What can be concluded with a higher degree of confidence is that Nazarbayev was the central policymaking character throughout the studied period. He was being kept informed, consulted and asked for endorsement

in every decisional situation. At the same time, the variety of decision-making models indicates the sophisticated nature of the phenomenon and suggests that Kazakhstan's foreign policy cannot be characterized only in terms of deterministically reactive policy responses, in which case the decision-making could have been less complex and diverse than is observed.

Shifting conceptual paradigm

As it was noted in Chapter II, several observers, such as Dannreuther, Cooley, and Cummings, criticize the deterministic approach to the study of Kazakhstan's foreign affairs where the republic is portrayed as a "simple reactor" to the pressures of the external actors. The empirical evidence assessed in this study demonstrates the correctness of this critique since documents confirm that at least in two cases when the republic's statehood and security was threatened, Almaty had been manoeuvring between international constraints in an attempt to transcend the systemic limitations instead of acquiescing to them. In other words, Kazakhstan in practice had been doing precisely what Cooley called "draw[ing] 'local rules'" and what was so sympathetically accounted for by Starr and Gleason in their depictions of the republic's foreign strategy. Echoing these authors' premises, this thesis exemplifies the validity of the *inside-out* approach to the study of the subject matter, where Almaty's policies are conceptualized not as much as (re)actions in response to systemic forces, but also as actions to defy them and similarly calls for a shift of the epistemological paradigm.

The potency of this approach does not, however, mean that conclusions drawn from other perspectives are irrelevant to the understanding of the phenomenon. After all, it is the conceptual model a researcher applies that determines "what the analyst finds puzzling, how he formulates his question, where he looks for evidence, and what he produces as an answer."⁷²² To be sure, scholars have been able to accurately reconstruct the geopolitical context within which Kazakhstan was situated and to correctly infer the policymakers' perceptions of the strategic

⁷²² Allison, *Essence of decision*, 245

security and independence challenges. For example, the great sense of vulnerability from Russia, hypothesized by Olcott and Cornell to be one of the main drivers of Kazakhstan's foreign policy, has been very closely reflected in the policy documents. At the same time, in some nuances, presented evidence may provide more viable estimations of the leadership's motives and rationale that informed the nation's external outlook than the one found in the literature. As such, Olcott's assumptions about Nazarbayev's willingness to trade sovereignty in exchange for Moscow's support appear to be speculative in the light of the content of the assessed internal policy documents, which revealed the virtually sacred importance of the independence for the republic's leadership and a very cautious approach to Russia in the beginning of 1990s. For the same reasons, Passolt's conjecture about the policy advice contribution from foreign nationals in the sphere of external relations, seems to be an unlikely occurrence in the actual practice of policymaking, and Bukkvoll's argument about Nazarbayev's personal interests overriding the nation's interests seems not to be accurate either.

Throughout the initial post-independence period, Kazakhstan's leadership tended to be explicit and sincere in the motives underlining the nation's strategy. Laumulin's metaphorical portrayal of the strategic dilemmas imposed on Kazakhstan closely corresponds to the actual calculations of the leadership reflected in the foreign policy planning documents. The policymakers' beliefs and ideas regarding international issues that they have publicly raised and articulated, for example the nuclear dilemma or the Chinese border problem, have been almost verbatim iterated in the internal policy documents and substantially reflected in the minutes of the meeting with foreign leaders and diplomats. As far as the strategic issues pertaining to the national interests were concerned, it is unlikely that there was a hidden agenda either internally among the leadership or in negotiations with external actors – policymakers worked on the exact same circle of issues pertaining to the ascertainment of national interests that was known to the public and no secret deals were likely to be brokered during this period. Across cases, patterns of

close correlation between policymakers' articulated beliefs and subsequent foreign policy behaviour were discernible.

By nature of its argument, this thesis seeks to advance the scholarly understanding of Kazakhstan's policymaking. The assessed material allows adding additional empirical information to the accumulated knowledge of this subject. As such, Kasenov's estimates about the insignificance of the International Department and the Supreme Soviet can be supported. In the light of the reviewed documents, the Supreme Soviet's role can be seen as minimal, and the turf war's outcome points to the reasons as to why the International Department subsequently lost its authority. Abazov was able to grasp the underlining collegial atmosphere in which the policymaking was conducted. Indeed, the collective work on strategies formulation was often a prominent format of decision-making. At the same time, the thesis's materials do not support Abazov's argument about the importance of the internal policy debate and a habitual pursuit of consensus. The policymakers have mostly concurred on the foreign policy goals and strategies at the earlier decisional stages, so the nature of their personal interactions is unlikely to have impacted the nation's strategic outlook, at least not by a greater degree than the "external pressures and inputs" recognized by these policymakers.

In general, this thesis demonstrates that an examination of policymaking can complement and support the existing structural and domestic explanations of Almaty's foreign policy behaviour by illuminating Kazakhstani policymakers' rationale to pursue a specific strategy and thereby rendering a better and more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. How the decisions were made tell a great deal about beliefs, thoughts, and calculations of the republic's leadership. Here, the utility of primary sources, particularly the archival documents, as noted by Larson, cannot be overestimated. It is only through the investigation of primary materials that it becomes possible to reveal what exactly guided Nazarbayev and his key advisers in their diplomatic endeavours. In turn, it has been proven by this thesis that their interpretation of the ends and means of the nation's foreign policy greatly impacted Kazakhstan's relations with

external actors – the finding that supplements otherwise mosaic approaches to Kazakhstani politics where usually only one level of variables is included in the analysis.

Appraising neoclassical realism

This thesis was impelled by an a priori assessment that Kazakhstan's foreign policy presents a paradox from the neorealist perspective. The general perception of the environment as hostile, and specific concerns about overwhelming power capabilities of neighbours – motivations generic to systemic realism – have not resulted in the realization of the deterministic assumptions about internal or external balancing behaviours. Even though the survival of the state was blatantly articulated as the main foreign policy goal of the beginning of the 1990s, the Kazakhstani leaders have chosen strategies distinct from systemic realism theorizing. The neoclassical realist school is interested in explaining such empirical puzzles of anomalous foreign policy responses, where international pressures do not lead to the expected responses. The application of the neoclassical realist theoretical framework to the empirical puzzle of Kazakhstan's foreign policy has allowed the construction of a viable understanding of the phenomenon.

One principal theoretical implication can be derived from this research. Despite the fact that the thesis successfully demonstrated how the pressures of the international system were transmitted through the filter of policymakers' perceptions and calculations, thereby following a generic causal sequence conceptualized by Rose, Kazakhstan's case was not an instance of a normatively suboptimal strategy akin to Schweller's understanding of the anomalous policy that eventually results in damaging outcomes for the nation. In particular, Chapter IV depicts Kazakhstan's unwillingness to seek a defensive alliance with other nation(s) against either Russia or China, which would be treated as suboptimal underbalancing from the Schweller's perspective. This reluctance was not caused by leadership's misperceptions about the threatening nature of neighbours or by a failure to adopt prudent protection policies; nor did it eventually

lead to detrimental consequences. On the contrary, Kazakhstan devised an innovative strategy of balancing, allowing minimal geopolitical risks, which nevertheless still goes against the grain of the neorealist theory prescription. Hence, this study shows that a foreign policy does not need to be ineffective to constitute a case for a deviant external behaviour, thereby calling for the possibility of expanding the universe of empirical cases susceptible to a neoclassical realist explanation.

The thesis also confirmed the potency of the integration of the decision-making element to the neoclassical realist agenda, echoing a critique by Tang on the importance of analysis of policymakers' impact on foreign policy output. This research exemplifies the case where domestic processes of policy formulation were neither flawed, nor inhibited by internal political dynamics, or dependent on policymakers' autonomy from other domestic actors. It was the well operating Kazakhstani foreign policymaking machinery that made an instrumental contribution to the country's strategic outlook under pressing international challenges.

This is not to mean that the presidential decision-making component was an isolated endogenic factor affecting Kazakhstan's foreign posture. The systemic pressures, at least to the effect of how they were perceived by Nazarbayev and his key advisers, did exert a profound influence on the resulting policy. The foreign policymaking apparatus was likely to play a direct but secondary role, while the systemic context played an indirect but primary role affecting the profile of Kazakhstan's foreign policy – the causal dynamics consistent with Sterling-Folker's theorizing. After all, the Kazakhstani policies were not irrational in the sense that policymakers have always correlated their strategies with the realities of the international structure, internalized the environmental context, and sought to ascertain the nation's benefit rather than to serve parochial interests of the elites. For example, Nazarbayev was not tempted by secret offers of financial assistance from Libya to retain the nuclear arsenal, opting instead for securing good relations with the West as followed in Chapter V; neither did he consider it possible to trade sovereignty to Russia in exchange for the external legitimization of his regime as revealed in

Chapter IV. This thesis instead demonstrated how systemic forces, pressing for a specific behavioural pattern, were transmitted by the decision-making element in a way that allowed the retaining of a significant degree of agency in the course of state's external strategy.

Opportunities for future research

The foreign policy analysis of Kazakhstan's external behaviour is still in its nascence so there are plenty of research avenues to follow. The thesis assessed the republic's foreign relations only in the part relating to presidential decision-making. This work constructed only one plausible explanation in the foreign policy analysis tradition, leaving many alternative readings out of the research scope due to the author's intention to focus limited timing and resources on the single specific facet of the phenomenon.

Among other possible research projects on foreign policy analysis, three appear to be particularly interesting and potent for the advancement of a more comprehensive understanding of Kazakhstan's foreign policy, both supplementing this research and yielding new alternative explanations of the phenomenon. First, the prominence of Nazarbayev's role in policymaking, as revealed in this work and recognized by observers elsewhere, makes a psychological profiling of his personality to appear as a very promising inquiry. The aggregated volume of primary and secondary materials on the president's actions and verbal record should be sufficient to utilize the assessment at-a-distance methods in order to reconstruct Nazarbayev's personality traits and their impact on foreign policy decisions.

The second research prospect is to conduct a comparative analysis of the Central Asian nations' foreign policies, with the emphasis on the roles played by regional leaders in defining the countries' external outlooks. Whereas the prominence of the region's presidents is likely to constitute the principal similarity pattern, levels of pragmatism and consistency in the region's foreign policies vary. It seems appealing to explore whether these foreign policies are the products of presidents' choices or whether other factors may affect them as well. Here, the

analytical framework of this study may be helpfully applied in order to understand how exactly the Central Asian leaders come to arrive at foreign policy decisions.

The third opportunity is unfolded by this thesis. Since this research has established a temporal reference for future research, it may be possible to follow the same neoclassical realist framework to study subsequent Kazakhstani policies. Here, research questions may be based along the temporal dimension, such that the dynamics of continuity and change in the republic's external behaviour may be examined in reference and juxtaposition to the historical period studied in this work.

The initial post-independence period was an interesting and challenging epoch to the nations in the former Soviet space, which historical developments continue to influence global politics today. Foreign policy behavioural trends, instituted during this extremely complicated formative period, forged the substance of Kazakhstan's strategic outlook for many years to come. With the growing importance of Central Asia on the world political map, the knowledge of the foundations of foreign affairs of regional nations seems to be essential for policymakers and scholars alike. To this end this thesis offered an insightful story of the foreign policy incepted in Almaty on 16 December 1991.

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Appendix I: List of interviews

in chronological order

Diplomats and experts

Laumulin, Murat. Senior research fellow at the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 15 September 2010, Bishkek; 20 June 2013, Almaty.

Kasymbekov, Makhmud. The Head of the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 24 November 2011, Astana.

Suleymenov, Tuleitai. The former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 7 December 2011, Astana.

Kurmanguzhin, Salim. The former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 10 February 2012, Almaty; 2 March 2012, Almaty.

Kozhakov, Asan. Personal representative of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Azerbaijan in September 1992, 27 April 2012, Almaty; 24 March 2013, Almaty.

Sher'iazdanova Klara. The Head of the CIS Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan in 1992, by telephone, 13 November 2012, Almaty.

Satpaev, Dosym. Regional expert, 27 March 2013, Almaty.

Zhumaly, Rasul. Former diplomat at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 28 March 2013, Almaty.

Confidential

High-ranking government official, name withheld by request, 25 October 2011, Astana.

Former official at the Administration of the President of Kazakhstan, name withheld by request, 30 November 2011, Astana.

Former diplomat, name and place withheld by request, 10 September 2012.

Former diplomat, name and place withheld by request, 20 February 2012.

Kazakhstani diplomat, name and place withheld by request, 15 December 2012.

Appendix II: Ethical considerations and UTREC approval

Considering the reservations about the sensitivity of the research topic, some interviewees raised concerns about the possibility of career repercussions for them or political consequences for the country in case the provided information could be attributed to them. These interviewees were willing to participate in the interviews only confidentially. To warrant the confidentiality in instances when it was requested, interviewed individuals are not identified by their names; exact positions held in the past or at the moment of an interview; and, occasionally, by the city of an interview (Almaty or Astana), as the latter information could also facilitate the identification of the position of the individual. Only general information about past or present professional affiliation of the interviewee and the date of the interview is given.

These measures are taken in accordance with the provisions of the University of St. Andrews Teaching and Research Ethics Committee concerning the anonymous collection of data and the maintenance of the confidentiality and trust between the participant(s) and researcher.



20 July 2011

Anuar Ayazbekov
School of International Relations

| | |
|---|---|
| Ethics Reference No: <i>Please quote this ref on all correspondence</i> | IR7769 |
| Project Title: | The 'black box' of Kazakhstan foreign policy: the presidential advisory group and the decision making process |
| Researchers Name(s): | Anuar Ayazbekov |
| Supervisor(s): | Dr S Cummings |

Thank you for submitting your application which was considered at the IR School Ethics Committee meeting on 15 July 2011. The following documents were reviewed:

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| 1. Ethical Application Form | 15.7.2011 |
| 2. Participant Information Sheet | n/a |
| 3. Consent Form | n/a |
| 4. Debriefing Form | n/a |
| 5. External Permissions | n/a |
| 6. Letters to Parents/Children/Headteacher etc... | n/a |
| 7. Questionnaires | n/a |
| 8. Enhanced Disclosure Scotland and Equivalent | n/a |
- (as necessary)

The University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee (UTREC) approves this study from an ethical point of view. Please note that where approval is given by a School Ethics Committee that committee is part of UTREC and is delegated to act for UTREC.

Approval is given for three years. Projects, which have not commenced within two years of original approval, must be re-submitted to your School Ethics Committee.

You must inform your School Ethics Committee when the research has been completed. If you are unable to complete your research within the 3 three year validation period, you will be required to write to your School Ethics Committee and to UTREC (where approval was given by UTREC) to request an extension or you will need to re-apply.

Any serious adverse events or significant change which occurs in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration, must be reported immediately to the School Ethics Committee, and an Ethical Amendment Form submitted where appropriate.

Approval is given on the understanding that the 'Guidelines for Ethical Research Practice' (<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/media/UTRECguidelines%20Feb%2008.pdf>) are adhered to.

Yours sincerely

Dr. J.S. Murer
Convenor of the School Ethics Committee
cc Supervisor

Appendix III: Note on transliteration

This thesis followed the US Library of Congress Romanisation tables for the Russian and Kazakh languages, which was adapted for regular QWERTY keyboard layout. Some conventionally used names for individuals and geographical locations do not conform to the Romanisation tables (e.g. Azerbaijan). In these cases conventional alternatives of spelling in English are used.