EURASIATIQUE

TRANSFORMATION

Volume XIII

Eurasiatique XIII Editorial Board

It is my absolute privilege to introduce this year's edition of *Eurasiatique*, the graduate student journal of the University of Toronto's Centre for European and Eurasian Studies. At this time of immense upheaval, the papers of this journal provide a timely and insightful contribution to the multifaceted idea of transformation – the theme of this year's journal.

We are witnessing nothing short of a fundamental, generational reorientation of the international order. Previously established foreign policy are being upended, with political leaders and scholars alike struggling to account for where the pieces of this new geopolitical jigsaw will land. Populist forces, isolationism, autarky, and political instability are threatening decades-old certainties and bringing to the fore questions about the health of democracies. Conflicts and regime changes are reshaping geopolitical orientations across Europe and Eurasia, threatening hitherto deep-rooted partnerships. The extent to which individual and group identities, international alliances, and domestic politics are being transformed merits greater scholarly attention – are the geopolitical disruptions of the 21st century any different from those of the past? And if so, how?

Eurasiatique XIII explores transformation across the European and Eurasian space, the driving forces behind these changes, and their consequences. One only needs observe the drastic resurgence of personality politics and propagandistic rhetoric to recognize rapidly shifting dynamics. Countries are moving away from traditional partners, balancing the influences of greater powers through interregional ties. Popular discontent is being exploited, vivifying the ties between internal instability and geopolitical reshuffling. The interrelated nature of identity, politics, and geopolitical groupings necessitate a deeper understanding of how and why transformation is sweeping through societies across the region, making our analysis of these phenomena evermore imperative to reflect contemporary challenges.

The brazen, undeniable nature of Russia's revisionist, imperial nature, manifest in its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, has had far reaching consequences beyond the battlefield. In Central Asia, this undisguised aggression has forced reckoning with Russian and Soviet imperial legacies. Emma Larson explores the evolving nature of identity in Kazakhstan and recent efforts to distance itself from Moscow without entirely rupturing ties, emphasizing the country's indigenous language and culture. Will Hicks, in turn, examines the role of Islam in shaping national identity formation and political legitimacy in Uzbekistan, emphasizing the rupture from alleged communist atheism to leveraging religion whilst mitigating domestic radicalization. This theme is further built upon by Rohina Kabir who takes a broad view of Uzbekistan's strategic hedging in the context of Afghanistan under the Taliban threatening water supplies through its construction of the Qush Tepa Canal. With a potentially destabilizing neighbour to the south, itself courting relations with Russia and China, Uzbekistan is facing a multitude of geopolitical and ideological challenges it seeks to contend with.

It is not just neighbours reimagining their relationships with Russia; within Russia itself, there has been a wholescale transformation of the way the country's history is being utilized, written about, and remembered. David Chobotov looks at the shifting dynamics in memory politics and their impact on narratives around the invasion of Ukraine.

Reimaging history is neither unique to Russia, nor is it a new phenomenon. The way societies tackle their national histories is subject to constant revisions. Santiago Dominguez takes this analytical lens to reexamine Spain's perceived 'golden age', underscoring how this period of imperial expansion and increasing elite wealth obfuscates the devasting economic reality for the

rest of society. Joseph Beaudry shifts the focus eastward to the Balkans, analyzing the transformation of Albanian foreign policy under Enver Hoxha, notably the country's positioning during the Sino-Soviet split and the enduring implications of this geopolitical positioning.

This volume further contributed to the current debate over extent to which the present moment is one characterized uniquely by upheaval, or indeed whether it represents a reassertion of previously existing national patterns. Matthew Chasmar tackles France's global standing, notably through an intricate assessment of the country's nuclear policy, its eschewing of U.S. interdependence, and potential responses to contemporary challenges. Fionnuala Braun takes up the idea of Gallic distinctiveness in a Western context in her reimagining of homosexual liberation in France and the movement's evolution in response to domestic and international challenges.

Amidst a whirlwind of developments, it falls upon the next generation of scholars to rise to the the existential challenges facing Europe and Eurasia. My hope is that, through both interpretations rooted in historical analysis and critical evaluations of present dynamics, the writers in this year's journal have been able to contextualize these issues and offer insights into ways to recognize and address them.

Finally, I would like to extend my deepest appreciations to the Editorial Board for their unwavering work, commitment, and dedication this year. They have done an outstanding job in their own right, and proven to be a vital source of support and inspiration. Just as this issue has sought to build on the powerful work of past editions, I am sure that next year's team will continue this 13-year legacy.

Tom Law
Editor-in-Chief

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Transforming Discourses of Kazakhness and State Identity in President Tokayev's New Kazakhstan

Emma Larson is a second-year master's student at Columbia University's Harriman Institute of Russian, Eurasian, and East European Studies. There, she focuses on the gender, social, and political history of Central Asia. Emma's current research interests revolve around the role that gender played in state- and nation-building in early Soviet Kazakhstan as well as how pre-Soviet gender politics in Central Asia's nomadic communities can complicate narratives surrounding the region's contemporary "re-traditionalization" and "re-Islamization." She looks forward to beginning a PhD in history this fall.

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Abstract: This article considers the extent to which official discourses of "Kazakhness" have changed in Kazakhstan's official state identity since Nursultan Nazarbayev stepped down from the presidency in 2019. According to Marlene Laruelle, the Nazarbayev regime propagated a hybrid state identity that balanced understandings of Kazakhstan being "Kazakh" (a political entity for ethnically Kazakh people), Kazakhstani (a multiethnic nation at the crossroads of the Eurasian continent), and transnational (an outward-looking state interested in integrating into an increasingly globalized world). However, recent years have seen an intensification of popular discourses concerned with rooting Kazakhstan's state identity more soundly into a singularly ethnonational paradigm that emphasizes the ethnically Kazakh underpinnings of the state.

The article uses three case studies (language politics, historical memory, and the state's relationship to Islam) to consider the extent to which President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's post-Nazarbayev government has answered popular calls to increase the weight and importance given to ethnic Kazakhness in official discourses of Kazakhstan's state identity. Each case study includes an exploration of relevant Nazarbayev-era policies and rhetoric before delving into the changes—or lack thereof—made by the Tokayev regime. The article finds that overall Tokayev has continued many of the same approaches adopted by Nazarbayev, despite slight changes towards ethnicization vis-à-vis language politics and historical memory, and away from ethnicization regarding the state's relationship to Islam. The article's sources include speeches given by Nazarbayev and Tokayev; governmental policies presented by the two presidents; monuments, memorials, and buildings constructed under each president; recent census data from Kazakhstan; and secondary-source articles that illustrate popular discourse surrounding notions of Kazakhness in Kazakhstan's state identity.

Keywords: Kazakhstan, national identity, language politics, historical memory, Islamization

Introduction:

On March 16, 2022, just months after the "Bloody January" events during which the Kazakhstani state violently repressed hundreds of anti-regime protestors who had mobilized in cities across the country, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev delivered his annual State of the Nation address to the people of Kazakhstan. On the one hand, Tokayev paid credence to the significant achievements that Kazakhstan has made in its thirty years of independence from the Soviet Union and thanked his presidential predecessor Nursultan Nazarbayev for all that he had done to set the country on a positive post-independence path. On the other, he spoke directly to the way that the Bloody January protests "shook society" and demonstrated "the lasting value of independence and how important peace, stability, and harmony are." Tokayev called for "unity," stressing that only by coming together can the state move towards a new political order

that Tokayev, in a symbolic break with the past, dubbed "the New Kazakhstan."[1]

The emphasis on unity in this State of the Nation speech—and in many other speeches given by Tokayev in recent years—is significant for it raises the question: unity around what? And for whom? Though Kazakhstan may be becoming more demographically unified, with census data from 2021 showing that ethnic Kazakhs make up 70.4 percent of the country's population compared to 63.1 percent in 2009 and just 39.7 percent in 1991, there is yet no consensus as to the norms, values, and identifiers that signify what this increased "Kazakhness" means for the country's state identity.[2] As Marlene Laruelle explained in "The Three Discursive Paradigms of State Identity in Kazakhstan," ethnic Kazakhness is only one aspect of the narrative that Kazakhstan's post-Soviet governments have disseminated as they balance ethnic and civic attributes of nationhood.[3] Yet, recent events, including former president Nursultan Nazarbayev's 2019 resignation, the aforementioned 2022 Bloody January demonstrations, and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, have spurred an intensification of popular discourse concerned with rooting Kazakhstan's state identity more soundly in an ethnonational paradigm that emphasizes the ethnic Kazakh underpinnings of the state and uses decolonial frameworks to reimagine state identity.[4]

To discern what the Tokayev regime means by its increasing references to Kazakhstan's "unity" in light of these demographic and social changes, this article considers the extent to which official discourses of Kazakhstan's state identity have changed since Nursultan Nazarbayev stepped down from the presidency in 2019. Using language politics, historical memory, and the state's relationship towards Islam as three case studies, it compares the policies and rhetoric employed by both of independent Kazakhstan's presidents to uncover the current state's understanding of the identity that underlies Tokayev's "New Kazakhstan." It argues that although the Tokayev regime has made small shifts to emphasize ethnic Kazakhness in official discourses of state identity, especially regarding the Latinization of the Kazakh alphabet and reevaluations of Kazakhstan's Soviet history, continuity with the previous regime and an emphasis on the non-ethnic underpinnings of the state remain the dominant forces driving the state identity of the Tokayev administration.

Language Politics

The rhetoric and policies surrounding language politics in Kazakhstan are particularly good means to track if and how the Tokayev regime's state identity for Kazakhstan has diverged from that of its predecessor. As Michael Billig argued in *Banal Nationalism*, "language plays a vital role in the operation of ideology and in the framing of ideological consciousness" on both an individual and communal level.[5] The official languages spoken in a state, especially a multiethnic and multilingual one, can thus be a "prime determinant of nationalist identity" due to the fact that "those speaking the same language are liable to claim a sense of national bond."[6]

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[1] "State-of-the-Nation Address by President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev," *Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, https://www.akorda.kz/en/state-of-the-nation-address-by-president-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-kassym-jomart-tokayev-17293

[2] "Zhalyktyn Ulttyk kuramy," *Kyskasha korytyndylar Kratke itogi* (Kazakhstan Respyblikasy Strategiailyk zhosparlau zhane reformalar agenttigi Ulttyk statistika biurocy, 2021), 11; Bhavna Dave, *Minorities and Participation in Public Life: Kazakhstan* (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2004).

[3] Laruelle, "The Three Discursive Paradigms of State Identity in Kazakhstan."

[4] Mihra Rittmann, "The Kazakhstan elections and the transition that wasn't," *Human Rights Watch*, June 5, 2019, https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/06/05/kazakhstan-elections-and-transition-wasnt; Diana T. Kudaibergenova and Marlene Laruelle, "Making Sense of the January 2022 Protests in Kazakhstan: Failing Legitimacy, Culture of Protests, and Elite Readjustments," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 38, no. 6 (2022), 441-459; Talgat Aralkhan, "The War in Ukraine Is Changing Kazakhstani Identity," *Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung*, October 8, 2023, https://www.rosalux.de/en/news/id/50365

[5] Michael Billig, "Nations and Language," from *Banal Nationalism* (SAGE Publications, 2010), 4.

[6] Billig, "Nations and Language," 12.

Nazarbayev Era

Engaging with the potential for nationalist mobilization inherent to language use, political leaders in Kazakhstan have made changes to the country's linguistic landscape in an attempt to construct a state identity that includes aspects of ethnic Kazakhness. These efforts began even before Kazakhstan gained independence when, in 1989, the Kazakh Communist Party passed a resolution declaring Kazakh the state language of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. After breaking from the Soviet Union in 1991, the Nazarbayev regime continued to use language to build a state identity that included attributes of ethnic Kazakhness by instituting policies that aimed to both increase the status of the Kazakh language and motivate more Kazakhstani citizens to become fluent in the constitutional language of the state. These policies, which included making Kazakh fluency a requirement for entering the civil service, legally increasing the proportion of public media broadcasted in Kazakh, and instituting Kazakh as an obligatory subject in all primary and secondary schools, have undoubtedly caused a rise in the number of Kazakhstani citizens fluent in Kazakh.[7] Indeed, recent census data suggests that the number of Kazakh speakers in Kazakhstan has doubled since 1989, with 80.1 percent of Kazakhstan's population claiming fluency in 2021.[8] In as early as 2000, President Nazarbayev celebrated the increasing role that Kazakh played in the country's language landscape by calling Kazakhstan a "Turkophone" country and deeming the language problem in Kazakhstan to be "resolved."[9]

Many Kazakhs, however, would vehemently disagree with Nazarbayev's bold claim that language politics are no longer relevant in Kazakhstan, for in an attempt to avoid alienating the significant population of ethnic Russians living in the country, the Nazarbayev regime never failed to emphasize equality, multilingualism, and balance in both its policy and rhetoric regarding language use in Kazakhstan. Though efforts were made to increase the status and use of the Kazakh language, language politics writ large were understood by Nazarbayev's government as a means to manifest civic attributes of state identity rather than ethnic Kazakh ones.[10] Accordingly, Russian remains legally enshrined in Kazakhstan's constitution as holding equal linguistic status in the state's public and administrative affairs.[11] It has furthermore been rhetorically legitimized as Kazakhstan's language of interethnic communication, both in speeches delivered by Nazarbayev throughout his tenure as president and through policy efforts such as the 2012 "Trinity of Languages" project, which expressly demarcates Kazakh as the state language, Russian as the language of interethnic communication, and English as the language of the global economy.[12] As current events such as Nazarbayev's 2019 resignation, the 2022 Bloody January demonstrations in Kazakhstan, and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 spur calls for an official state identity that more clearly relies upon an ethnonational paradigm of Kazakhness, many Kazakhs are beginning to view official legitimations of the Russian language in Kazakhstan as unacceptable and see the abandonment of Russian in favour of Kazakh as a means to unite the country around an ethnic Kazakh state identity that rejects the linguistic Russification of the past.[13]

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[7] Laruelle, "The Three Discursive Paradigms of State Identity in Kazakhstan," 6.

[8] William Fierman, "Language and Identity in Kazakhstan," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 31, no. 2 (1998), 171–186; "Ana tili," *Kyskasha korytyndylar Kratke itogi* (Kazakhstan Respyblikasy Strategiailyk zhosparlau zhane reformalar agenttigi Ulttyk statistika biurocy, 2021), 23.

[9] Bhavna Dave, *Kazakhstan: Ethnicity, Language, and Power* (Routledge, 2007).

[10] Diana Kudaibergenova, "The Archaeology of Nationalizing Regimes in the Post-Soviet Space: Narratives, Elites, and Minorities," *Problems of Post-Communism* 64, no. 6 (2017): 350.

[11] Ainur Kulzhanova, "Language Policy of Kazakhstan: An Analysis," (MA Thesis, Central European University, 2012), 10.

[12] "Address by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev to the People of Kazakhstan, January 27, 2012," *Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, https://www.akorda.kz/en/addresses/addresses_of_president/address-by-the-president-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-nursultan-nazarbayev-to-the-people-of-kazakhstan-27-01-2012_1341926486; Zhazira Bekzhanova and Tsediso Michael Makoelle, "Latinization of the Kazakh Alphabet: Implications for Education, Inclusion, and Social Cohesion in Kazakhstan," *SAGE Open* (2022): 1.

[13] Aralkhan, "The War in Ukraine Is Changing Kazakhstani Identity." For more on how Russia's full-scale invasion in Ukraine is changing public opinion on Russia in Kazakhstan, see Central Asia

Tokayev Era

Despite demands to reject the use of Russian in Kazakhstan, the Tokayev regime has not made any significant changes to the state's approach to language use in Kazakhstan, maintaining continuity with the prior regime's aim to, as Tokayev said in 2023, "implement a balanced language policy" that "creates favorable conditions for representatives of various ethnic groups to use their mother tongues."[14] This balance is seen in the varying nature of the policies regarding language use in Kazakhstan that Tokayev has passed since entering office. For example, although a December 2021 amendment to the Law on Visual Information decreed that Russian translations no longer need to be provided in product advertising, Tokayev in October 2023 established an organization under the auspices of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) that aims to promote the development of Russian in all CIS countries.[15] The most symbolic manifestation of the Tokayev government's balanced approach to language policy in Kazakhstan is a new law that would increase the legally mandated share of Kazakh-language media in television and radio programs from 50 to 70 percent that has remained stalled in parliament since being introduced by lawmakers in October 2023.[16]

Given that official policies regarding language use in Kazakhstan have remained balanced, the Tokayev regime has used rhetorical shifts to signal an increased privileging of the Kazakh language and the ethnic Kazakh state identity associated with its use. For example, Tokayev has distanced himself from Nazarbayev's practice of labeling Russian the language of interethnic communication and instead chooses to highlight the potential that Kazakh has to become the default language used between different ethnic groups. "I believe that the role of the Kazakh language as a state language will grow and the time will come when it becomes the language of interethnic communication," Tokayev claimed in his first State of the Nation Address in 2019.[17] Tokayev also tends to favor speaking and writing in Kazakh while propagating his own political messaging, marking a shift towards a Kazakh-only norm.[18] Instituting this change domestically in speeches, Tokayev has also highlighted his preference for the Kazakh language abroad: at a routine meeting with Russian leader Vladimir Putin in November 2023, Tokayev chose to use Kazakh instead of the customary Russian to deliver his opening remarks, signifying a desire to associate the Kazakh language with an official identity for Kazakhstan on an international stage.[19]

Though these rhetorical moves suggest Tokayev's interest in using language politics in Kazakhstan to highlight the ethnic Kazakh underpinnings of the state, he has never strayed from his firm belief that, as he said in an October 2022 speech, "it is unacceptable to use the Kazakh language for political games" and that "a balanced language policy is the only way we can achieve our goals."[20] The continuous attending to the need to find balance in language

Barometer's "Central Asia Barometer Survey Wave 12," https://ca-barometer.org/en/cab-database
[14] "Vystuplenie Glavy gocudarstva Kasym-Zhomarta Tokaeva na vtorom zacedanii Natsionalnogo kuraltaia 'Adileti Qazaqstan – Adal azamat'," *Ofistialnyi sait Prezidenta Respubliki Kazaqstan*, June 17, 2023, https://www.akorda.kz/ru/vystuplenie-glavy-gosudarstva-kasym-zhomarta-tokaeva-na-vtorom-zasedanii-nacionalnogo-kurultayaadiletti-kazakstan-adal-azamat-175233
[15] "Tokaev odobril proekt dogovora o mezhdunarodnoi organizatsii po russkomu iazyku," *RadioAzattyk*, October 18, 2023, https://rus.azattyq.org/a/32642612.html
[16] Agence France-Presse in Astana, "Kazakhstan drafts media law to increase use of Kazakh language over Russian," *The Guardian*, October 6, 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/06/kazakhstan-drafts-media-law-to-increase-use-of-kazakh-language-over-russian
[17] "President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's State of the Nation Address, September 2, 2019," *Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, https://www.akorda.kz/en/addresses/addressesofpresident/president-of-kazakhstan-kassym-jomart-tokayevs-state-of-the-nation-address-september-2-2019
[18] Bekzhanova and Makoelle, "Latinization of the Kazakh Alphabet," 9.
[19] Justin Burke, "Kazakh president uses language to deliver a surprising message to Russia," *EurasiaNet*, November 10, 2023, https://eurasianet.org/kazakh-president-uses-language-to-deliver-a-surprising-message-to-russia
[20] "Kazakhstan to pursue balanced language policy - president Tokayev," *Interfax*, October 19, 2022, https://interfax.com/newsroom/top-stories/84038/

politics and the explicit aim to keep Kazakh outside of "political games" makes clear that Tokayev, like his predecessor, is wary of using language to institute a state identity that emphasizes ethnic Kazakhness and prefers to see language as means to push forward civic ideals in which the languages of all ethnic groups are recognized and supported by the state.

The Tokayev regime has, however, been slightly more forward in implementing a state identity for Kazakhstan that highlights ethnic Kazakh demands in its policies and rhetoric surrounding the Kazakh language's written script. Historically an oral language, Kazakh was written in Arabic and Latin until 1940, when the Cyrillic alphabet was introduced as part of the Soviet Union's shift towards Russification.[21] Soviet leaders considered the use of the Cyrillic script for Kazakh to be a way to help Kazakhs learn Russian, a critical aspect of Soviet colonial incursions, and create symbolic coherence amongst the ethnically and linguistically diverse populations living throughout the Union Republics.[22] In the post-Soviet space, many Kazakhs have begun to view replacing the Cyrillic script with a Latin one as a tangible means to not only shift away from Soviet-era policies, but also move towards an official state identity for Kazakhstan that highlights ethnic Kazakhs' Turkic heritage over their Russified past by bringing the country's language in line with the script used by most the Turkophone world.[23]

Concrete moves to Latinize Kazakh first began under former president Nazarbayev, with a 2017 decree that provided an official version of a Latin alphabet for Kazakh and called for the transition to the new script to be completed by 2025.[24] However, rather than emphasizing Latinization as a break with the Soviet past and a means to highlight Turkic attributes within Kazakhstan state's identity, Nazarbayev described a Latin script for Kazakh as a modernizing force that would integrate the country into the world economy. "For the sake of our children we must make this decision [to Latinize Kazakh]," he said in 2012, "[as it will] encourage the modernization of the Kazakh language."[25] Furthermore, Nazarbayev's discussions of Kazakh's Latinization maintained the importance that Russian and its alphabet should continue to play in Kazakhstan, as he insisted that the country should "treat the Russian language and Cyrillic as carefully as the Kazakh language [for] it is known that mastering Russian is a historical advantage for our nation."[26]

Since coming to power, the Tokayev regime has made a series of changes to the policies and rhetoric surrounding Nazarbayev's Latinization plans that illustrate how a Latin alphabet for Kazakh can be used to increase attributes of Kazakhness in official discourses of Kazakhstan's state identity. For example, in 2021, Tokayev formally rejected the alphabet instituted by Nazarbayev's 2017 policy and presented a new version of a Latinized script for Kazakh.[27] Critically, this new script brings Kazakh in line with the Common Turkic Alphabet used by other Turkophone countries, suggesting that the Tokayev government is engaging with the potential for Latinization to signal a broader rapprochement with the rest of the Turkic world.[28] Tokayev has further distanced himself from Nazarbayev's Latinization by rhetorically

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[21] Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations* (New York University Press, 2005), 76.

[22] Bekzhanova and Makoelle, "Latinization of the Kazakh Alphabet," 2; Andrew Warner, "Alpha. Bravo. Cyrillic.," *JSTOR DAILY*, December 7, 2022.

[23] Henry Spencer, "Reading between the Lines: The Latinization of Kazakh," *The Cambridge Language Collective*, https://www.thecambridgelanguagecollective.com/politics-and-society/qjfcs8r9pdd9yklf7kh5h03pr9dz8a; Aralkhan, "The War in Ukraine Is Changing Kazakhstani Identity."

[24] "O perevode alfavita kazakhskovo iazyka s kirillitsy na latinskuiu grafiku," *Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, October 16, 2017, https://www.akorda.kz/ru/legal_acts/decrees/o-perevode-alfavita-kazahskogo-yazyka-s-kirillicy-na-latinskuyu-grafiku

[25] Bekzhanova and Makoelle, ""Latinization of the Kazakh Alphabet," 7.

[26] Bekzhanova and Makoelle, ""Latinization of the Kazakh Alphabet," 7.

[27] Assel Satubaldina, "Kazakhstan Presents New Latin Alphabet, Plans Gradual Transition Through 2031," *The Astana Times,* February 1, 2021, https://astanatimes.com/2021/02/kazakhstan-presents-new-latin-alphabet-plans-gradual-transition-through-2031/

[28] Spencer, "Reading between the Lines: The Latinization of Kazakh."

emphasizing how Latinization will preserve Kazakhstan's cultural past.[29] Tokayev's new connection between the Latinization of the Kazakh alphabet and the preservation of Kazakh heritage may be a response to the fact that Latinization in general in Kazakhstan is becoming more ethnically oriented among a population aiming to push forward a state identity towards attributes of ethnic Kazakhness.[30]

Another change that Tokayev has made to Nazarbayev's Latinization has been to push back the end date for the full transition to a Latin alphabet to 2031, saying in a speech in 2023 that the Nazarbayev regime "made many serious mistakes trying to solve [the problem of Latinization] as quickly as possible."[31] On the one hand, slowing down the transition to a Latin script may hint at hesitancy on the part of the Tokayev regime to follow through with a Latinization that is increasingly perceived as emphasizing ethnic Kazakh demands. However, that this Latinization is now being done with the intent to preserve Kazakh culture and highlight Kazakhstan's connection to the Turkophone world does demonstrate that the Tokayev government understands and is utilizing the potential of Latinization to move the country away from its Russified past and towards an ethnically Kazakh paradigm of state identity.

Still, the contradictory nature of his policies and rhetoric makes it difficult to determine whether Tokayev has used language politics in Kazakhstan to move the state's identity either towards or away from ethnic Kazakhness. Like Nazarbayev before him, Tokayev and his government continue to be aware of the potential that language has for nationalist mobilization yet remain hesitant to threaten the existing balance between civic and ethnic markers of state identity found in Kazakhstan's current approach to language politics. While answering public calls to rhetorically legitimize the Kazakh language on both the domestic and international stage, Tokayev continues to maintain, as he said in 2021, that "the widespread use of the Kazakh language does not mean any restriction on the use of other languages, especially Russian."[32]

Historical Memory

Language politics seems to be a means through which Tokayev has aimed to balance ethnic and civic attributes of nationhood in official discourses of Kazakhstan's state identity. In other areas, however, he has been even bolder in rewriting state-sanctioned narratives of Kazakhstan's identity to highlight the ethnically Kazakh underpinnings of the state. One of the most pertinent examples is the Tokayev government's use of historical memory. As Jack Eller explains in *From Culture to Ethnicity in Conflict*, a sense of shared history is a critical part of the group identity shared by members of a given nation, suggesting that the norms and constraints placed on historical memory can directly influence the kind of nation that states claim to represent.[33] Fully aware of the important role that historical memory plays in nation-building, the Nazarbayev regime, in the ideological vacuum left behind by the absence of Soviet ideology, went to great lengths to craft a history for Kazakhstan that legitimized the country's independence by pushing forward an inclusive state identity that recognized the right of all ethnic groups in Kazakhstan to find a place in the state's shared past.

Nazarbayev Era
As a result, the history employed by Nazarbayev in the construction of this historical

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[29] "Tokaev predlozhil ne speshit' s perekhodom s kirillitsy na latinistu," *Kommersant'*, February 17, 2022,
https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5218961

[30] Bekzhanova and Makoelle, "Latinization of the Kazakh Alphabet," 1.

[31] "Tokaev o perezhode kazakhskogo alfavita na latinistu: My dopystili mnogo grubyzh oshibok," *Tengri News*, April 12, 2023, https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/tokaev-perehode-kazahskogo-alfavita-latinitsu-dopustili-496250/

[32] "Polnyi tekct stat'i K. Tokaeva 'Nezavisimost' prevyshe vsevo'," *24kz*, January 6, 2021, 24.https://kazpravda.kz/n/polnyy-tekst-stati-tokaeva-nezavisimost-prevyshe-vsego/

[33] Jack David Eller, *From Culture to Ethnicity: An Anthropological Perspective on International Ethnic Conflict* (University of Michigan Press, 1999), 19.

memory was an overwhelmingly ancient one that stayed away from the potential that more recent political history has to sow divisions between different ethnic groups living in Kazakhstan. For example, in his 2018 essay "Seven Facets of the Great Steppe," Nazarbayev harkened back to the Scythian Empire that existed across the Eurasian steppe from the seventh to third centuries BCE to assert a primordial connection between contemporary Kazakhstan and the great and powerful nomadic societies that once occupied the country's territory.[34] Another example of how the Nazarbayev regime used distant history in its construction of Kazakhstan's historical memory is a speech from 2015 meant to honor the 550th anniversary of the founding of the Kazakh Khanate.[35] In the speech, Nazarbayev claims that "the spirits of our brave ancestors, who left a vast homeland to their descendants, have since [1465] inspired a major patriotic revival among our people…and filled their hearts with a sense of pride for their national history."[36]

Comfortable speaking to Kazakhstan's ancient past, Nazarbayev tread much more carefully in discussions surrounding the country's more recent Soviet history. He specifically aimed to not frame Soviet power as an ethnically Russian colonizing force that oppressed an ethnically Kazakh nation in a way that would suggest the right of ethnic Kazakhs to claim primacy within the state identity of a now independent Kazakhstan. The Nazarbayev regime thus instituted what the political scientist James Richter has called a strategy of "abnegation" and largely ignored the repressive elements of the Soviet regime.[37] When discussing the Soviet past, Nazarbayev instead chose to highlight how the multiethnic makeup of Kazakhstan, which he described as "a way of life, a moral imperative, an invaluable wealth, and an asset of our state," resulted from Soviet policies.[38] In moments where repressive aspects of Kazakhstan's Soviet history were brought into official state discourse, such as in the 1997 decree to make May 31 a Day of Remembrance for Victims of Repression or the 2017 unveiling of a monument to the victims of Soviet-era famines, the Nazarbayev regime made efforts to emphasize how the Soviet Union's policies affected all Kazakhstani citizens equally and were never meant to intentionally harm a specifically Kazakh ethnic group.[39]

Tokayev Era

Rejecting Nazarbayev's abnegation of the crimes of the Soviet past, bottom-up efforts to re-remember the parts of Soviet history that the previous regime deemed unsuitable for official discourse have increased dramatically in recent years.[40] This aim is directly connected to broader desires to reshape Kazakhstan's state identity in ways that recognize the harm that ethnic Kazakhs suffered at the hands of the Soviet Union and highlight the ethnically Kazakh nation's capacity to survive.[41] Tokayev, driven by a belief that "each nation must write its own

[34] Nursultan Nazarbayev, "Seven Facets of the Great Steppe," *Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, November 21, 2018, https://www.akorda.kz/en/events/akorda_news/press_conferences/article-of-the-president-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-nursultan-nazarbayev-seven-facets-of-the-great-steppe
[35] G.M. Yemelianova, "Islam, national identity and politics in contemporary Kazakhstan," *Asian Ethnicity* 15, no. 3 (2014): 287.
[36] Galiaskar Seitzhan, "Let Our Ancestors Inspire Us, Nazarbayev Says on 550th Anniversary of Kazakh Khanate," *The Astana Times*, September 14, 2015, https://astanatimes.com/2015/09/let-our-ancestors-inspire-us-nazarbayev-says-on-550th-anniversary-of-kazakh-khanate/
[37] James Richter, "Famine, Memory, and Politics in the Post-Soviet Space: Contrasting Echoes of Collectivization in Ukraine and Kazakhstan," *Nationalities Papers* 48, no. 3 (2022): 483.
[38] Assel Satubaldina, "Kazakhstan's Diversity is Its Greatest Strength, Says Kazakhstan's First President Nursultan Nazarbayev," *The Astana Times*, April 29, 2021, https://astanatimes.com/2021/04/kazakhstans-diversity-is-its-greatest-strength-says-kazakhstans-first-president-nursultan-nazarbayev/
[39] Richter, "Famine, Memory, and Politics in the Post-Soviet Space," 484; RFE/RL's Kazakh Service, "Kazakhstan Unveils Monument to Victims of Soviet-Era Famine," *RFE/RL*, May 31, 2017, https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-unveils-monument-victims-soviet-era-famine/28520523.html
[40] Kamila Smagulova, "Decolonial Debates on Identity Within Kazakh Postcolonial Reality," *[Dis]Solutions: Decolonial Encounters* (Goethe-Institut, 2023), 5.
[41] Aralkhan, "The War in Ukraine Is Changing Kazakhstani Identity."

history without succumbing to the influence of alien ideology," has made concrete steps towards reconsidering Kazakhstan's Soviet past in ways that answer calls for the construction of a new historical memory for Kazakhstan.[42] Indeed, he has lamented that Nazarbayev made "balanced decisions" when considering Kazakhstan's history and says that it is time for a "history written from the perspective of national interests [that will] contribute to the awakening of national self-awareness."[43]

The best example of the Tokayev regime's use of Soviet history to increase attributes of ethnic Kazakhness within Kazakhstan's state identity is the 2020 formation of the State Commission for the Full Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repressions. In a clear move away from Nazarbayev's glossing over of the traumas of the Soviet past, the commission consists of eleven working groups tasked with reevaluating Soviet archives, declassifying previously unavailable documents, and rehabilitating various Kazakh figures repressed, deported, or executed by Soviet forces.[44] As of December 2023, the commission had rehabilitated 311,000 victims and declassified 2.6 million archival records.[45]

Tokayev's use of history to highlight Kazakhness in official discourses of Kazakhstan's state identity is also seen in specific rhetorical moments in which Tokayev speaks about historical events through the lens of Kazakh consciousness. One relevant example is how Tokayev has incorporated the history of the early twentieth-century independence movement Alash Orda into reflections of what he calls the "consolidation of our statehood."[46] Aiming to disband Russian colonial forces and institute an autonomous Kazakh government, Alash Orda perpetuated a Kazakh state identity rooted in an ethnonational paradigm that expressly rejected both Russian political power and the Russification inherent to the Russian Empire's and Soviet Union's imperial projects.[47] Tokayev has labeled the leaders of Alash Orda "outstanding people" who "worked hard to promote the idea of independence," lauding the expressly anti-colonial historical figures and pushing forward a state identity for Kazakhstan that finds legitimacy in the ethnically Kazakh underpinnings of the state.[48]

Another historical event that Tokayev has instituted as part of a more ethnically Kazakh state identity is the Jeltoqsan protest of 1986, during which hundreds of Kazakh students were violently repressed by Soviet forces after demonstrating against Moscow's decision to replace the Kazakh Republic's Communist Party leader with an ethnic Russian.[49] Asking his government to "appreciate and popularize the courage and feat of Jeltoqsan's heroes in every possible way," Tokayev has endorsed an understanding of Kazakhstan's Soviet history that celebrates the Jeltoqsan protesters' efforts to fight for ethnic Kazakh sovereignty within the identity of the state.[50]

Despite making changes to his treatment of Kazakhstan's Soviet history that emphasize the primacy of ethnic Kazakhness within the country's state identity, Tokayev also maintains continuity with how the Nazarbayev regime related to the Soviet past in certain critical ways. For example, Tokayev remains deeply concerned with the need to depoliticize history and view tumultuous historical events with thoughtful consideration. In a speech

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[42] "Polnyi tekct stat'i K. Tokaeva 'Nezavisimost' prevyshe vsevo'," *24kz*.

[43] "Polnyi tekct stat'i K. Tokaeva 'Nezavisimost' prevyshe vsevo'."

[44] "O Gosudarstvennoi komissii po polnoi reabilitastii zhertv politicheskizh repressii," Informastionno-pravovaya *Sistema hormativnykh pravovykh aktov Respubliki Kazakhstan*, November 24, 2020, https://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/U2000000456

[45] "Gosudarstvennaia komissiia po polnoi reabilitastii zhertv politicheskizh repressii zavepshila svoiu rabotu," Ofistial'nyi *sait Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan*, https://www.akorda.kz/ru/gosudarstvennaya-komissiya-po-polnoy-reabilitacii-zhertv-politicheskih-repressiy-zavershila-svoyu-rabotu-2611356

[46] "Polnyi tekct stat'i K. Tokaeva 'Nezavisimost' prevyshe vsevo'."

[47] Gulnar Kendirbai, "Challenging Colonial Power: Kazakh Cadres and Native Strategies," *Inner Asia* 10, no. 1 (2008), 65-85.

[48] "Polnyi tekct stat'i K. Tokaeva 'Nezavisimost' prevyshe vsevo'."

[49] Joanna Lillis, "Kazakhstan: A Look Back at the Zheltoksan Protest a Quarter-Century Ago," *EurasiaNet*, December 16, 2011, https://eurasianet.org/kazakhstan-a-look-back-at-the-zheltoksan-protest-a-quarter-century-ago

[50] "Polnyi tekct stat'i K. Tokaeva 'Nezavisimost' prevyshe vsevo'."

celebrating thirty years of Kazakhstan's independence, Tokayev said that "history should be studied by historians, not politicians" and warned against the divisions that occur when history is accompanied by "loud slogans and populism."[51] Tokayev's desire to keep his treatment of the past unpolitical is seen in his continuation of the Nazarbayev norm to refuse to highlight how ethnic Kazakhs may have been specifically targeted by the Soviet Union's most destructive policies. Tokayev has not, for example, labeled the Kazakh famine of 1930 to 1933 a genocide, even though 1.3 of the 1.5 million people it killed were ethnic Kazakhs.[52]

The State's Relationship to Islam

Despite aiming to do so without inciting divisions among the ethnically diverse population that makes up Kazakhstan, the Tokayev regime has clearly made new and conscious efforts to reconsider the country's Soviet history in a way that emphasizes ethnic Kazakhness in official discourses of state identity. The same cannot be said for the regime's relationship to the grassroots Islamic movements that have become an increasingly popular means through which Kazakhs are connecting to a pre-Soviet religious identity rooted in ethnic Kazakhness. Repressed by the Soviet government for most of the twentieth century, Islam in Kazakhstan has witnessed a large resurgence in popularity since the country gained independence in 1991. The number of mosques in the country has risen from 59 in 1989 to 2,693 in 2022, and census data from 2021 shows that 69.3 percent of Kazakhstani citizens identify as Muslim compared to just 47 percent in 1993.[53]

Nazarbayev Era

Part of this increase in religiosity may be attributed to Nazarbayev-era efforts to use Kazakhstan's Islamic heritage as part of the creation and consolidation of a state identity for Kazakhstan in the years immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Though Kazakhs' nomadic lifestyle meant that the Islam they practiced was uniquely blended with elements of pre-Islamic rituals, Islam has been part of Kazakh cultural life since the seventh century.[54] When the Soviet Union collapsed, nation-builders in Kazakhstan understood Kazakhs' Islamic heritage as a means through which to both legitimize the existence of their independent country and reject secular, Soviet-era frameworks of Kazakhstan's state identity.[55] Taking advantage of religion's nation-building potential, the Nazarbayev government embraced both the Kazakh Sufi and Hanafi school of Sunni Islam, adopting Islamic symbols in state monuments and architecture, endorsing an independent Kazakh muftiate, joining the Organization of Islamic Conference (which brands itself as the collective voice of the Muslim world), and accepting financial and educational resources from other Muslim countries like Turkey, Egypt, and Kuwait to open religious institutions and send Kazakhs on the hajj pilgrimage.[56]

Despite attempts to incorporate Islam into official discourses of Kazakhstan's state identity, the threat of Islamic extremism loomed large and the Nazarbayev regime remained

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[51] "Polnyi tekct stat'i K. Tokaeva 'Nezavisimost' prevyshe vsevo'."
[52] Richter, "Famine, Memory, and Politics in the Post-Soviet Space," 476.
[53] A. Mustafayeva, "Islamskoe Vozrozhdenie V Kazahstane V 90-e Gody XX Veka," *Vestnik KazNU*, 2013; Aibarshyn Akhmetkali, "Evolution of Islam in Kazakhstan: How Modern Kazakh Muslims Balance Their Religious Identity, the Soviet Legacy and National Traditions," *The Astana Times*, August 15, 2022, https://astanatimes.com/2022/08/evolution-of-islam-in-kazakhstan-how-modern-kazakh-muslims-balance-their-religious-identity-the-soviet-legacy-and-national-traditions/; "Dini senimi boiynsha zhalik," *Kyskasha korytyndylar Kratke itogi* (Kazakhstan Respyblikasy Strategiailyk zhosparlau zhane reformalar agenttigi Ulttyk statistika biurocy, 2021), 35; "Kazakhstan: People," *The 1993 CIA World Factbook* (The Project Gutenberg eBook, 2021).
[54] Yemelianova, "Islam, national identity and politics in contemporary Kazakhstan," 287.
[55] Bilal Ahmad Malik, "Islam and Nationalist Mobilization in Kazakhstan: Post-Soviet Cultural (Re)framing and Identity (Re)making," *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* 11, no. 2 (2023), 383-426.
[56] Yemelianova, "Islam, national identity and politics in contemporary Kazakhstan," 286, 292-293.

wary of directly conflating Islam, and by association Kazakhness, with the state.[57] As a result, Nazarbayev consistently stressed the role of religious values in general as a source of a unified state identity for Kazakhstan, and made statements and instituted policies that presented the country as a symbol of multireligious and multiethnic harmony rather than an expressly Muslim and Kazakh state.[58] In a speech from 2006, for example, Nazarbayev praised Kazakhstan's "consistent policy of ensuring tolerance [and] interreligious and interethnic unity for representatives of all groups who live in our country and make up the people of Kazakhstan" and celebrated how the country is able to "respect and nurture the best traditions of Islam and of other world and traditional religions while building a modern secular state."[59]

The clearest example of Nazarbayev's desire to push forward an official identity for Kazakhstan that emphasized multireligious and multiethnic attributes over Islamic and Kazakh ones is the creation of the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. Held for the first time in 2003 and every three years thereafter in the aptly named Palace of Peace and Accord in Kazakhstan's capital city, the Congress brings together representatives from seventeen of the world's major religions to "search for common human landmarks in world and traditional forms of religion" and "achieve mutual respect and tolerance between religions, confessions, nations, and ethnic groups."[60] In a speech he delivered after being elected chairman of the Congress, Nazarbayev spoke to the unique and aspirational role that Kazakhstan could play in the pursuit of these goals due to the "unity of the people of our country, within which representatives of over one hundred and twenty nationalities and more than forty religious confessions live and work in peace and harmony."[61]

Tokayev Era

Despite the government's efforts to craft an official state identity for Kazakhstan that paints the country as a haven for multi-religious harmony, calls to shift towards an ethnically Kazakh state identity are finding salience in Islamization, signifying an increasingly widespread connection between a religious Islamic identity and an ethnic Kazakh one.[62] Indeed, public opinion polls show that the vast majority of ethnic Kazakhs in Kazakhstan identify as Muslim, and an increasing number explicitly want religion to play a larger role in the country's political life, with public opinion surveys showing some Kazakhs going as far as to claim that it is "very important" for their government to adopt policies in line with Islamic Shari'a law.[63]

Though the connection between an Islamic and Kazakh identity demonstrates the increased potential for Islam to be part of official state identity discourses that highlight ethnic Kazakhness, the Tokayev regime has maintained Nazarbayev's attempts to depoliticize Islam and continues to understand the harmony of Kazakhstan's diverse population as being one of the most—if not the singular most—important aspects of the state's identity. Tokayev's speech opening the 2022 Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, for example, explained that the success of a future Kazakhstan "largely depends on the solidarity of our multiethnic and multiconfessional nation and the peace and harmony in our land."[64] Even

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[57] Adilet Beisenov, "State-Mandated Muslimness in Kazakhstan," *Central Asia Program at George Washington University*, June 30, 2023, https://centralasiaprogram.org/state-mandated-muslimness-kazakhstan/.

[58] Laruelle, "The Three Discursive Paradigms of State Identity in Kazakhstan," 5.

[59] "Address of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, to the People of Kazakhstan, March 1, 2006," *Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, https://www.akorda.kz/en/addresses/addresses_of_president/address-of-the-president-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-nursultan-nazarbayev-to-the-people-of-kazakhstan-march-1-2006

[60] "About the Congress," *Congress*, https://religions-congress.org/en/page/o-sezde

[61] "N. Nazarbayev's Speech After Being Elected Chairman of the Congress," *Congress*, https://religions-congress.org/en/news/vystupleniya-I/25

[62] Dina Sharipova, "Perceptions of National Identity in Kazakhstan: Pride, Language, and Religion," *The Muslim World* 110 (2020), 89-106.

[63] Azamat Junisbai, Barbara Junisbai, and Baurzhan Zhussupov, "Two Countries, Five Years: Islam in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan through the Lens of Public Opinion Surveys," *Central Asian Affairs* 4 (2017): 1, 10.

[64] "President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's speech at the opening ceremony of the VII Congress of the

instances of Tokayev's symbolic support for Islam, such as his widely covered pilgrimage to Mecca and public celebrations of the fast-breaking Ramadan meal, keep actual discussions of the Islamic faith far from considerations of Kazakhstan's identity as a state, as the government continues to use religion as a means through which to institute an ethnically diverse and multi-religious state identity rather than an exclusively Kazakh and Islamic one.[65]

In the past two years, Tokayev seems to be taking an even harder line against attempts to associate Islam with Kazakhstan's state identity. For example, in October 2023, the government announced a ban on hijabs in schools, explicitly stating the need for Kazakhstan to remain a secular state.[66] Tokayev's moves away from an Islamic state identity for Kazakhstan are also seen in his response to the 2022 Bloody January protests. Blaming the violence on Islamic "radicals," "bandits," and "terrorists," even though the demonstrations involved no signs of radical Islam, Tokayev explicitly associated Islam with the division of national unity and delegitimized the role that Islam has to play in a state identity rooted in harmonious diversity.[67] "It is our duty to bring to justice all the bandits and terrorists involved in these bloody crimes," Tokayev said in an address after the protests took place, and to "never again allow the peace and tranquility in our country to be disrupted."[68] By construing Islamic actors as outside forces working to divide and disarray the unanimity of an otherwise peaceful state, Tokayev is distancing Islam from Kazakhstan's state identity and disregarding the potential for Islam to be a part of the state's official identity discourses.

In addition to symbolizing how the Tokayev regime maintains continuity with the Nazarbayev era by remaining hesitant to emphasize Islam in official discourses of Kazakhstan's state identity, the government's response to the Bloody January protests more broadly serves as an apt representation of how Tokayev has continued with much of the political rhetoric and policy instituted by his predecessor. For example, Tokayev's decision to call in troops from the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) during the protests has widely been regarded as a sign of just how dependent Kazakhstan remains on its neighbour to the north, a relationship that Nazarbayev went to great lengths to foster.[69] Additionally, much of the impetus behind the January protests stemmed from Tokayev's failure to institute political reforms to limit the corruption that had become so synonymous with the regime constructed by the Nazarbayev government. Indeed, when the protests broke out, Nazarbayev both remained the unelected chair of Kazakhstan's National Security Council and was enjoying—alongside many of his closest family members—lifetime immunity from prosecution.[70]

Bloody January, however, forced Tokayev to reconsider his affinities with the Nazarbayev system and demonstrated the need for a reevaluation of many aspects of Kazakhstan's political life.[71] Indeed, it is clear that the protests and their aftermath have uncovered a huge number of public calls for official discourses of state identity in Kazakhstan to begin to emphasize the ethnic Kazakh underpinnings of the state and leave behind the non-ethnic attributes that have thus far defined the country's conception of itself.

Leaders of World and Traditional Religions," *Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, https://www.akorda.kz/en/president-kassym-jomart-tokayevs-speech-at-the-opening-ceremony-of-the-vii-congress-of-the-leaders-of-world-and-traditional-religions-1481411

[65] Akhmetkali, "Evolution of Islam in Kazakhstan."

[66] Anatolij Weisskopf, "Kazakhstan announces ban on hijabs in schools," *DW*, October 22, 2023, https://www.dw.com/en/kazakhstan-announces-ban-on-hijabs-in-schools/a-67175196

[67] Kudaibergenova and Laruelle, "Making Sense of the January 2022 Protests in Kazakhstan," 452.

[68] "State-of-the-Nation Address by President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev."

[69] Kudaibergenova and Laruelle, "Making Sense of the January 2022 Protests in Kazakhstan," 454.

[70] Leonie Brassat and Florian Kriener, "Quashing Protests Abroad: The CSTO's Intervention in Kazakhstan," *Journal on the Use of Force and International Law* 10, no. 2 (2023): 275; RFE/RL's Kazakh Service, "Kazakhstan's Constitutional Court Nixes Law On First President-Leader Of Nation," *RFE/RL*, January 11, 2023, www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-nazarbaev-law-annulled/32218636.html.

[71] Kudaibergenova and Laruelle, "Making Sense of the January 2022 Protests in Kazakhstan."

Conclusion

Tokayev remains wary of taking up these calls too quickly. Though his government has shifted towards an ethnicization of Kazakhstan's state identity regarding the Latinization of the Kazakh script and a reevaluation of historical memory, it has moved further away potentially ethnicizing state discourse on Islam in wake of Kazakhs' increasing religiosity. The varied nature of Tokayev's approach to Kazakhstan's state identity signals a quiet continuation of the Nazarbayev-era proclivity for balance. Like Nazarbayev, Tokayev has addressed, to an extent, some of his population's most ardent demands for ethnicization while abstaining from a complete rejection of civic markers of state identity. Indeed, the Latinization of the Kazakh script and honest conversations about Soviet crimes against Kazakh citizens are the two areas in which bottom-up discussions of Kazakhstan's state identity have gained the most salience in recent years, and it is noteworthy that it is in these realms that Tokayev has made moves towards ethnicization, as rhetorical and cursory as these capitulations may be. By contrast, the potential for ethnicization in the state's relationship to Islam continues to be an avenue that Tokayev's regime is hesitant to actualize, likely due to security risks connected to the rising threat of Islamic extremism throughout Central Asia.[72]

It is interesting to consider the possibility that the balanced nature of the Tokayev regime's approach to Kazakhstan's state identity may be predicated on security interests, especially when considering the precarious position that Kazakhstan occupies as a neighbour to an ever-more aggressive and expansionary Russia. To be sure, Tokayev is likely aware that an extreme shift towards Kazakhness in his country's state identity would be perceived as a slight by both the ethnic Russians living in Kazakhstan and the Russian state writ large. He has thus chosen to stick to the status quo rather than risk burning bridges with one of his most powerful economic and political partners. To be sure, ties between Russia and Kazakhstan have only strengthened in recent years, with energy dependence between the countries rising, 2022 and 2023 showing record levels of economic cooperation, and Tokayev taking pages from Putin's authoritarian playbook by imposing new rules on unauthorized assembly and running practically unopposed in a snap presidential election in November 2022.[73]

Unwilling to threaten his relationship with Russia, Tokayev has made relatively few substantial changes to the way that ethnic Kazakhness fits into official discourses of Kazakhstan's state identity in both his rhetoric and policies regarding language politics, historical memory, and the state's relationship to Islam. Though there have been small shifts to move official state discourses of Kazakhstan away from the Russification of the country's past and towards an ethnically Kazakh future, especially regarding the Latinization of the Kazakh alphabet and reevaluations of Kazakhstan's Soviet history, cautious continuity is the name of the game in Tokayev's "New Kazakhstan." Only time will tell how long such a delicately balanced stasis is likely to hold.

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[72] For more on the rising threat of Islamic extremism in Central Asia and the responses of various Central Asian countries, see Bruce Pannier, "Countering a 'Great Jihad' in Central Asia," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, November 19, 2024; Alison Milofsky and Barmak Pazhwak, "Amid Central Asia's Struggle with Extremism, Uzbekistan Promotes Pluralism," *United States Institute of Peace*, July 30, 2024; and Noah Tucker and Edward Lemon, "A 'Hotbed' or a Slow, Painful Burn? Explaining Central Asia's Role in Global Terrorism," *Combating Terrorist Center Sentinel* 17, no. 7 (2024).

[73] Kate Mallinson, "Russia's influence in Kazakhstan is increasing despite the war in Ukraine," *Chatham House*, February 29, 2024, https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/02/russias-influence-kazakhstan-increasing-despite-war-ukraine

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Exploiting the Sacred: The Political Instrumentalization of "Secular" Islam in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan

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Abstract: This article investigates the seemingly paradoxical relationship between religion and state in Uzbekistan. While repression of religious freedoms has existed in the state since its independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union, it has simultaneously endorsed Islam; former president Islam Karimov repeatedly celebrated Islam and its importance to Uzbek national identity and culture. I argue that the Uzbek political elites have exploited the "idea" of Islam for its nation and identity-building purposes, while also depoliticising it to prevent Islamic political movements from threatening government regimes. Applying the "religious resurgence" theory from political scientist Jonathan Fox, this paper portrays Uzbekistan as a battleground between secular and religious dynamics, with political actors attempting to secularise the very idea of religion. Importantly, the paper concludes by suggesting that the government's current assertive approach to secularism will not last. Prolonged repression of Islam and its subsequent subordination to the private sphere may lay the foundation for political instability in the future.

Introduction

The authoritarian state of Uzbekistan, the most populous in Central Asia , is often considered the religious and cultural hub of the region.[1]Approximately 87-88% of the Uzbek population are Muslim, predominantly, with strong levels of piety and devotion.[2] Despite this, the country's constitution contends that there must remain a clear separation between religion and state. Article 31 of the constitution provides the grounds to practice any or no religion, while Article 61 restricts the state from interfering in religious organizations.[3] Uzbekistan's firm attitude towards secularism has culminated in intense religious repression, seen by the shutdown of non-sanctioned mosques and the imprisonment or death of individuals due to their religious beliefs.[4]

Almost paradoxically, however, the state has heavily endorsed Islam as a key tenet of

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[1] Andrea Schmitz, *Religious Policy in Uzbekistan: Between Liberalisation, State Ideology and Islamisation* (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik German Institute for International and Security Affairs, 2023), 5; D. N. Bakhodirovna, "The Influence of 'Halal Tourism Standards' in Religious Tourism Development in Uzbekistan," Journal of New Century Innovations 28, no. 1 (2023): 136.

[2] U.S. Embassy in Uzbekistan, *2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Uzbekistan*, https://uz.usembassy.gov/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom-uzbekistan/; Mohammed Al-Momani and Khaled Aladwan, "Religiosity and Democratization: Toward Finding a Causal Linkage in Muslim Countries," The Arab Journal for Arts 17, no. 1 (2020): 345–366.

[3] Schmitz, *Religious Policy in Uzbekistan*, 5.

[4] Edward W. Walker, "Islam, Islamism and Political Order in Central Asia," *Journal of International Affairs* 56, no. 2 (2003): 39.

Uzbek identity since its inception in the early 1990s following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Indeed, former president Islam Karimov often spoke about the importance of religion and Uzbekistan's historical connection to Islam, notably stating that "human beings need spirituality like they need to breathe air and drink water."[5] This positions Uzbekistan as a unique case in the study of religion-state dynamics, as it has consistently endorsed and engaged with Islam yet does not hesitate to carry out brutal government-sanctioned acts of religious discrimination.

Accordingly, this paper argues that political elites have a vested interest in controlling the narrative of Islam in Uzbekistan; they instrumentalise apolitical elements of Islamic identity to legitimize their secular and highly authoritarian regime. This creates a facade of religious acceptance despite the state's intensely secular and repressive policies. This paper will first present a historical background to provide crucial historical context to its analysis, highlighting the transformation from Soviet-era policies to the contemporary policies of the state. It will then introduce scholar Jonathan Fox's interpretation of religious resurgence theory as its theoretical framework, before presenting an investigation into the functional use of Islam in Uzbekistan.[6]

Historical Review of Islam in Uzbekistan

Islam began to spread throughout Central Asia during an Arab invasion in the 7th century and became securely established in the region's major urban centers by around 850 AD.[7] In fact, religious and state authority in the region were traditionally intertwined, and were "merely different facets of a unified system of belief, epistemology and practice."[8] Much of this political-legal polity was undone by Soviet policies beginning in the 1920s. Given the unwavering Soviet posture on secularism, mosques were closed and Sharia courts were abolished across Central Asia.[9] Most importantly, however, numerous major religious schools were shut down, ensuring that "the great majority of the population no longer had the possibility of gaining any sort of formal knowledge of Islam."[10]

Uzbekistan gained independence directly following the Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991, and its autocratic president Islam Karimov quickly realized that the state had to build a national identity from the top down to separate itself from its Soviet past. Soon after, the country began the sweeping process of "de-sovietization," a nation-building project that sought to institutionalize "new national symbols… national heroes and national holidays" and enact a new constitution in 1992.[11] Indeed, Karimov aimed to construct national pride from scratch, heavily leaning into promoting "a sense of responsibility to the motherland."[12] Key to his nation-building endeavors was the apparent "revitalization" of Islam in Uzbek life; he began to promote the importance of Uzbek "spirituality" and oversaw the construction of over 4000 new mosques in the country between 1989 and 1993.[13]

Yet, while this apparent religious and cultural revival may have suggested a different posture towards religious freedom than the Soviet Union's, Karimov remained steadfast in his goal to subdue Islamic political movements by force. The crux of this tension came in 1998 with the formation of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), a terrorist organization with

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[5] Charles Kurzman, "Uzbekistan: The Invention of Nationalism in an Invented Nation," *Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East* 8, no. 15 (1999): 88.

[6] Jonathan Fox, "Is It Really God's Century? An Evaluation of Religious Support and Discrimination from 1990 to 2008," Politics and Religion 7, no. 1 (2014): 4–27.

[7] Shirin Akiner, "Islam, the State and Ethnicity in Central Asia in Historical Perspective," *Religion, State and Society 24*, no. 2–3 (1996): 93.

[8] Akiner, "The State and Ethnicity," 96.

[9] Akiner, "The State and Ethnicity," 114.

[10] Akiner, "The State and Ethnicity," 114.

[11] Mehran Kamrava, "Nation-Building in Central Asia: Institutions, Politics, and Culture," *The Muslim World* 110, no. 1 (2020): 10.

[12] Kamrava, "Nation-Building," 12.

[13] Akiner, "Islam, the State and Ethnicity," 118.

a mandate to establish an Islamic caliphate in the country.[14] After the IMU began armed incursions into Uzbek territory, Karimov showed no hesitation to ban Islamic organizations and issue thousands arrests and beatings, only increasing the number of IMU sympathizers.[15] Following Karimov's death in 2016, incumbent president Shavkat Mirziyoyev has since maintained the country's inclination towards secular authoritarianism. In fact, "repression remains the means of choice [for the regime] should Islamic milieus seriously challenge the secular state."[16] Today, Uzbekistan is considered one of the most unfree states in the world according to Freedom House, with a score of just 12/100.[17]

Examining the Literature and Deriving a Theoretical Foundation

The literature on the relationship between religion and state often compares religious and secular institutions to indicators such as globalisation, modernisation, and human development, as seen by secularisation theory or the notion of ontological security.[18] There is, for the most part, less of an emphasis in this theory-based literature on how colonial (and in this case Soviet) legacies can affect religion-state dynamics, specifically if a state gains independence from a larger country. Therefore, such existing theories in religion-state discourse are less suitable for analysing Uzbekistan.

For example, religious markets theory contends that religions can be viewed as firms competing within a state's marketplace, with religious consumers "weighing costs and benefits and seeking the highest return on their spiritual investment."[19] Intense state restrictions against religious freedoms indicate a closed market and therefore less religious participation, while the opposite can be said for limited state interference. While potentially practical in Western contexts, the Uzbek case challenges this conception of religion. Its highly secular system of governance would suggest a closed market with little religious participation, a pattern seen across the former Soviet republics of Central Asia. In reality however, both participation and religiosity remain high due to Islam's cultural significance in the country. As identified by Al-Momani and Aladwan, 73% of the Uzbek population define religion as being either "rather" or "very" important in life, with 62.3% also reporting that God plays a "very important" role in life.[20]

Ultimately, this paper's analysis of Uzbekistan derives much of its theoretical basis from the perspective of religious resurgence theory. Notably explored by Jonathan Fox, the theory contends that, on average, support and influence of religions worldwide is gradually increasing, rather than decreasing as earlier theories suggest.[21] The implications of Fox's analysis of religious resurgence are twofold. It first demonstrates that religious support rises with religious discrimination in a country, suggesting that increasing repression can lead to resurgent religious movements. It also indicates that "every country is essentially a battleground between the supporters of secular and religious ideologies."[22] In Uzbekistan, this manifests itself in the state's protracted battle against fundamentalist movements as well as its constant struggle to maintain power through both force and ideology. This framework therefore provides an insightful framework for the paper's analysis.

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[14] Walker, "Islam, Islamism and Political Order," 37.

[15] Walker, "Islam, Islamism, and Political Order," 36.

[16] Schmitz, *Religious Policy in Uzbekistan*, 1.

[17] Freedom House, "Countries and Territories," https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores?sort=desc&order=Total+Score+and+Status.

[18] Klodiana Dhima and Matt Golder, "Secularization Theory and Religion," *Politics and Religion* 14, no. 1 (2021): 37–53; Catarina Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security," Political Psychology 25, no. 5 (2004): 741–765.

[19] Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Religious Markets and the Economics of Religion," *Social Compass* 39, no. 1 (1992): 123.

[20] Al-Momani and Aladwan, "Religiosity and Democratization", 12–13.

[21] Fox, "Is It Really God's Century?" 4–27.

[22] Fox, "Is it Really God's Century?," 22.

Uzbek Nation-Building and the Establishment of a "Secular" Islam

The notion of maintaining political legitimacy "implies a reciprocal relationship between power holders and their claims to authority in relation to subjects."[23] Given the overwhelming proportion of pious Muslims in Uzbekistan, the promotion of Islam by the regime should, in theory, institutionalize a culture of reciprocity between the state and the public. Furthermore, the lack of hierarchy or universal leadership within Islam suggests that it is easily "manipulable," allowing political stakeholders to use their authority to represent Muslims and their faith.[24]

Accordingly, Islam has been one of the most crucial facets of constructed some semblance of identity and nationalism in post-Soviet Uzbekistan, fostering legitimacy for the authoritarian regime. Looking to rally the public around a common ideology after the state's independence, the incumbent regime turned to symbols, ideas, and norms of Uzbekistan's pre-Soviet past. In doing so, President Karimov "saw Islam as a potent force for nation-building, [and] a culturally salient source of identity that could be easily tapped."[25] As such, architecture, artifacts, and reflections of Uzbekistan's Islamic heritage have been "of paramount importance" in maintaining state legitimacy over the last few decades.[26] Karimov's glossy rhetoric of religion's importance suggested a strong inclination to cater to the Muslim-majority population; he often reiterated that humanity is in a "constant, sometimes painful and arduous, search of a spiritual source."[27] Of course, this narrative has continued to this day. Founded in 2017, the Centre of Islamic Civilisation in the state capital of Tashkent exemplifies the performative role of Islam within the country's politics. It presents Uzbekistan "as a historical nucleus of Islamic culture" and illustrates the "contribution [of Uzbek Islam] to the development of human civilisation."[28]

While undoubtedly "conscientious of the importance of Islam in… [fostering] public legitimacy," the political elite have been cautious in meticulously depoliticizing Islam, the political elite have been cautious in meticulously depoliticizing Islam.[29] With the growing fear that the state could "lose control over the religion's political impulses," Karimov and incumbent president Mirziyoyev have manufactured an iteration of Islam that is politically dormant and functions as a secular, or even "irreligious" religion.[30]

With this strategy, the elite found it imperative to "selectively cultivate those aspects of Islam that could be put at the service of state policy," contributing to the narrative of Uzbekistan as a thriving nation-state.[31] For example, Karimov's rhetoric on Islam depicted it as "an archaic museum-piece" which contributed to national identity yet played no role in political culture.[32] He ensured that Islam aided his claim to authority, although in its political form it remained a vestige of the past. Today, the state promotes this "Traditional Uzbek Islam" through the use of monumental buildings, art, pilgrimage tourism, and any other practice deemed not to spur political mobilization.[33] This form of Islam as a marker of cultural heritage has also been crucially distinguished from Wahhabism, which is portrayed by the state as "the Islam of the uneducated."[34]

Ultimately, one notices that this is a reproduction of Fox's observations, whereby the

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[23] Mariya Y. Omelicheva, "Islam and Power Legitimation: Instrumentalisation of Religion in Central Asian States," *Contemporary Politics* 22, no. 2 (2016): 146.
[24] Omelicheva, "Islam and Power Legitimation," 146.
[25] Kamrava, "Nation-Building in Central Asia," 16.
[26] Schmitz, Religious Policy in Uzbekistan, 18.
[27] Kurzman, "Uzbekistan: The Invention of Nationalism," 88.
[28] Schmitz, *Religious Policy in Uzbekistan*, 18–19.
[29] Shahram Akbarzadeh, "The Islamic Dilemma in Uzbekistan," in *Islam and Political Legitimacy*, ed. Shahram Akbarzadeh and Fethi Mansouri (London: Routledge, 2003): 91.
[30] Kamrava, "Nation-Building in Central Asia," 16.
[31] Schmitz, *Religious Policy in Uzbekistan*, 9.
[32] Kurzman, "Uzbekistan: The Invention of Nationalism," 89.
[33] Schmitz, *Religious Policy in Uzbekistan*, 6.
[34] Schmitz, Religious Policy in Uzbekistan, 9.

"forces of secularism prefer that religion be relegated to the private sphere."[35] The political elite in Uzbekistan have attempted to resist the Islamization of society while exploiting Islam's identity-building qualities, reinforcing their dominant position of secular power in the process. Of course, the state "possesses growing scope to define what religion should and should not do," consolidating a monopoly over the Islamic narrative in the country.[36]

The Secular State: Balancing Religious Endorsement with Persecution

Fearful of Islamic movements that may threaten the secular government's authority, the Uzbek political elite has actively undertaken coercive responses to any disobedience of this alternative form of Islam. Throughout Uzbek history, any increase in radicalization has been equally met with rising instances of persecution by the government. Even as of 2023, the Uzbek government still prosecutes Muslims based on arbitrary and ambiguous accusations, and "imposes undue restrictions on peaceful religious communities and people."[37] The construction of an "authentic" versus "extremist" binary gives the regime a justification to discriminate against religious groups whose practices do not fit within this secular narrative, regardless of whether they share moderate or more radical values. Additionally, the pretext of alleviating this constructed sense of danger allows the secular government to "associate all political opposition with increasing Islamic radicalization," thereby eliminating any political activity deemed threatening enough to challenge their power.[38]

However, the secular regime's consistent battle against the Islamisation of Uzbekistan has appeared to also have led to an increase of religious mobilisation, sometimes manifesting in fundamentalist forms. In fact, the persecution of religious activists has, ironically, contributed greatly to the proliferation of fundamentalism and alternative religious dogmas.[39] Such discrimination was likely one of the primary precursors to the emergence of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which in turn allegedly produced splinter groups.[40] Accordingly, these dynamics have created a "profound division on the concept and practice of political legitimacy" in the country.[41]

This connection between religious discrimination and religious support certainly aligns with Fox's understanding of religious resurgence. Within Uzbekistan, one could feasibly apply the theory that "religion and secularism are inevitably political competitors."[42] More importantly, however, is the indication that persecution and repression demonstrated by the secular regime can be met by defiance from religious forces. Repression, in this case, initiates and magnifies the threat of religious insurgents that the state so desperately seeks to destroy, laying the foundations for the secular state's gradual erosion of authority. This is directly associated with Fox's observation that religious discrimination and support increase simultaneously. It is this state-backed "secular" model of Islam that pushes against religious forces in a protracted struggle for authority and legitimacy in the post-Soviet era.

Conclusion

The instrumentalization of Islam in Uzbekistan is a phenomenon whereby elites balance endorsing a depoliticized Islam for its nation-building and regime-legitimising qualities with preventing *Islamicized* political movements from threatening regime security. In an effort to build public rapport, the state has highlighted Islam's importance to Uzbek culture, yet

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[35] Fox, "Is It Really God's Century?" 22.
[36] Schmitz, Religious Policy in Uzbekistan, 21.
[37] Human Rights Watch, "Uzbekistan: Backsliding on Religious Freedom Promises," June 7, 2023, https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/24/uzbekistan-backsliding-religious-freedom-promises.
[38] Omelicheva, "Islam and Power Legitimation," 156.
[39] Schmitz, *Religious Policy in Uzbekistan*, 10.
[40] Schmitz, Religious Policy in Uzbekistan, 10.
[41] Akbarzadeh, "The Islamic Dilemma in Uzbekistan," 99.
[42] Fox, "Is It Really God's Century?" 22.

ensured that it should be viewed only through a "secular" lens to mitigate its political potential. Individuals or communities deemed to reject this constructed narrative of Islam are met with persecution by the state, which, by proxy, can result in the emergence of Islamist movements and even radicalised armed groups.

Considering the future of Uzbekistan's relationship between religion and state, sacrifices may have to be made by the secular government in order to maintain power and legitimacy. Ultimately, attaining a monopoly over the Islamic narrative and persecuting dissidents may be effective in the short-term, but may eventually provide the foundation for a proliferation of religious forces which will have the potential to seriously challenge the secular state.

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Uzbekistan's Strategic Hedging: Navigating the Geopolitical Costs of Afghanistan's Qush Tepa Canal

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Abstract: The collapse of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in August 2021 presented Uzbekistan with a complex strategic dilemma to how to engage with the Taliban-led government while addressing its implications for regional stability and development. This paper explores Uzbekistan's approach to Afghanistan's unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral initiatives which brings major powers into the region. It examines how Uzbekistan is navigating these dynamics by fostering economic interdependence within the region, now including Afghanistan in its strategies. Historically, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan excluded Afghanistan from its treaties, particularly those related to water resources. In hindsight, this decision to exclude Afghanistan, an upstream country, was not strategically advantageous. However, Uzbekistan is reevaluating Afghanistan's role in the region, viewing it as both a challenge and an opportunity. This study focuses on three critical issues shaping Uzbekistan's engagement with Afghanistan: 1) Uzbekistan's domestic issues, 2) regional cooperation, and 3) international cooperation. This is particularly significant in an era of weaponized interdependence, where states use interconnected relationships to balance between competing powers. Uzbekistan along with other Central Asian countries have found common ground to ensure no big power has leverage on their countries and to do this they've engaged in economic interdependence. By adopting an economic interdependence approach to promote sustainable peace in the region, this paper examines Uzbekistan's role in stabilizing Central Asia and strategizing for economic growth in the region.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, water management, Russia, China, Amu Darya, Qush Tepa

Introduction

Qush Tepa Canal is a canal being built in northern Afghanistan, an upstream country, to divert water from the Amu Darya, a transboundary river. The Amu Darya, one of Central Asia's longest rivers, spans 1,578 miles (2,540 km), if traced from its primary source, the Panj River in the Pamirs, Tajikistan.[1] It acts as the border between Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Afghanistan and Tajikistan are the upstream countries. As a result of water flowing downstream to Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the canal would significantly reduce the flow to the downstream countries that need water for existential

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[1] Ibraimov B, Ali F (2023) May 18 A lot of work for diplomats as Taliban build Qosh Tepa Canal. The Third Pole. https://www.thethirdpole.net/en/regional-cooperation/a-lot-of-work-for-diplomats-as-taliban-build-qosh-tepa-canal/

purposes.[2] Due to Turkmenistan's isolationist foreign policy, the onus has fallen onto Uzbekistan, after ending a period of isolationism following the change of presidency in 2016, to negotiate not only for itself but on behalf of Central Asia. This research examines how Uzbekistan is working at the national, regional, and global level to mitigate the effects of the Qush Tepa Canal.

The history of the Qush Tepa Canal project is complex. It was initiated in the 1970s under Afghanistan's President Mohammed Daoud Khan but was halted following the Soviet Union's invasion.[3] Water treaties regarding the Amu Darya were established between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan, dating back to 1946. However, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, new agreements were established by the newly independent states. In the early years of independence, the management of the Amu Darya, among other issues like border demarcation, became a source of tension between Central Asian nations.[4] This led to these countries, upstream and downstream, collaborating on treaties for water management – with the exception of Afghanistan. Despite being one of the upstream contributors, providing 30 percent of the water to the Amu Darya, Afghanistan was not included in any of the new agreements.[5]

Both in 1970s and now, under the Taliban, the motivation behind building the canal remains to irrigate an estimated 550,000 hectares (equivalent to more than 2,100 square miles) of desert land.[6] This development could effectively increase Afghanistan's arable area by a third, potentially enabling the nation to achieve self-sufficiency in food production for the first time since the 1980s, according to Afghan authorities and analysts.[7] From a humanitarian perspective, the construction of the Qush Tepa Canal can serve to alleviate conditions in the northern provinces of Afghanistan, addressing food shortages and severe drought. Taliban officials claim they do not intend to utilize an amount that would threaten water security for others, instead stating that they will only take what is necessary to improve livelihoods in Afghanistan.[8]

However, for Uzbekistan, this canal will exacerbate its own water scarcity, representing an economic and existential crisis for both itself and Uzbekistan.[9] Uzbekistan is the world's leading cotton producer, and is a major contributor to Uzbekistan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – any threat to this industry would have devastating ramifications for the entire country.

In response to Afghanistan's establishment of the Qush Tepa Canal, Uzbekistan has been playing a key role in bridging a polarized world to establish sustainable peace in the region. This is strategically framed to tame the region into regional economic interdependence while Uzbekistan hedges its political stance between major global powers. To map the paper's structure, I will begin with the historical context of the Uzbekistan and Afghanistan relationship to provide a viewpoint of Afghanistan's estrangement from the region despite shared borders, resources, and geographic strategic allocation, enabling deeper understanding of Uzbekistan's foreign policy framework. I will then discuss Uzbekistan's international cooperation and engagement to foster regional economic interdependence, including its strategic hedging that

[2] Yaazdani, Z. (2023, October 14). Work on Second Phase of Qosh Tepa Canal Starts. TOLOnews. Retrieved October 28, 2023, from https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-185493

[3] Rahman, H. (2023, September 16). *Uzbek President Concerned by Construction of Qush Tepa Canal*. TOLOnews. Retrieved October 28, 2023, from https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-185120

[4] Sullivan, Charles J. "Battle at the Border: An Analysis of the 2021 Kyrgyzstan- Tajikistan Conflict," Asian Affairs 52(3), 2021, 529-535; McGlinchey, Eric. "The April 2021 Kyrgyz-Tajik Border Dispute: Historical and Causal Context," Asian Affairs 52(3), 2021, 529-535.

[5] Sullivan, Charles J. "Battle at the Border: An Analysis of the 2021 Kyrgyzstan- Tajikistan Conflict,"

[6] Ibraimov B, Ali F (2023) May 18 A lot of work for diplomats as Taliban build Qosh Tepa Canal. The Third Pole. https://www.thethirdpole.net/en/regional-cooperation/a-lot-of-work-for-diplomats-as-taliban-build-qosh-tepa-canal/

[7] Ibraimov B, Ali F (2023) May 18 A lot of work for diplomats as Taliban build Qosh Tepa Canal.

[8] Pannier, B. (2023, October 17). *Central Asia in Focus: Taliban Mark Milestone in Controversial Canal Project*. RFE/RL. Retrieved October 28, 2023, from https://pressroom.rferl.org/a/32641655.html

[9] Rouge, C., Tilmant, A., Zaitchik, B. F., Dezfuli, A., & Salman, M. (2018). Identifying key water resource vulnerabilities in data-scarce transboundary river basins. Water Resources Research, 54(8), 5264–5281. https://doi.org/10.1029/2017WR021489

ensures leverage for its national interests and avoids power asymmetries, especially for the context of Qush Tepa Canal. I will finally analyze the interplay of major power rivalries in the region through sanctions, tariffs, and the involvement of China, Russia, and the West, which are competing to establish a sphere of influence.

Uzbekistan's Domestic Issues

Historical Context of Uzbekistan – Afghanistan Relationship

During the Soviet-Afghan War, many Soviet soldiers deployed by the Soviet Union were Turkic, originating from mostly what are now independent Central Asian Republics (CARs), including Uzbekistan.[10] The Turkic Uzbeks soldiers shared cultural, linguistic, and religious ties with the Uzbek population in northern Afghanistan. This bridged the people and brought a sense of familiarity. In 1979, the Soviet Union installed its own regime in Afghanistan, known as the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA), similarly to the one the U.S. installed between 2001-2021, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.[11] In both eras, the governments were backed by foreign influence, the Soviet era was supported by the Soviet Union, predominantly by Moscow, while in 2001, the country was backed by NATO, primarily by Washington. Many Uzbeks fought under the Soviet flag against the Mujahideen, a western backed militant group.[12] However, the Soviet-backed government faced resistance from western-backed proxies engaged in a national, religious, and ideological battle against Soviet influence.

By the late 1990s, the Mujahedeen, once supported by the West, had transitioned into power brokers in Afghanistan's government after establishment of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Many of these figures were well known in the region. For example, Atta Mohammad Noor, a former Mujahideen commander, later became the governor of Balkh, a province bordering Uzbekistan.[13] Similar to the Tajik experience following independence, post-civil war governance in Afghanistan saw former warlords integrated into political leadership, with the memory of their roles as warlords erased.[14] In Afghanistan, the integration of the Mujahedeen in certain places of power proceeded smoothly, however, at a regional level, it strained relations with Uzbekistan. These tensions stemmed from lingering memories of the war and betrayal – betrayal because the Northern Alliance, provinces located in the North of Afghanistan, had consisted of large number of Mujahideen fighting the Soviets. The Northern Alliance fighters were predominantly of Turkic origin with similar culture and language, fighting a Soviet army that was also predominantly Turkic. This fostered a sense of betrayal following the Afghan-Soviet war.

From the Uzbek perspective, the Mujahedeen and the Taliban shared similar motives, with little distinction between them—both were considered terrorist entities. Both groups aimed to expel foreign influence and resist the spread of liberal values supported by external powers. Their tactics included attacks on civilians, destruction of homes, and widespread violence. In the case of the latter, the Soviet-backed Afghan government also engaged in oppressive measures including disappearances.

Following the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, Uzbekistan emerged as an independent

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[10] Zhou, J. (2012). The Muslim battalions: Soviet Central Asians in the Soviet-Afghan war. The Journal of Slavic Military Studies, 25(3), 302-328. https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2012.705567
[11] Brown, J. (2013). Oil fueled? The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Post-Soviet Affairs, 29(1), 56-94. https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586x.2013.778543
[12] Felbab-Brown, V. (2024, March 28). *Recognition and the Taliban*. Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/recognition-and-the-taliban-2/
[13] Mukhopadhyay, D. (2014). Atta MohammadNoor, the Son of Balkh. In *Warlords, Strongman Governors, and the State in Afghanistan* (pp. 76–165). chapter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[14] O'Brien, M. L. (2021). The legacy of conflict: reconstruction and migration in the aftermath of civil war in Tajikistan. International Migration Review, 56(1), 237-269. https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183211025492; Driscoll, Jesse, "Consolidating a weak state after civil war: a Tajik fable, in Heathershaw and Schatz, eds., Paradox of Power: The Logics of State Weakness in Eurasia (2016), pp. 25-43.

state. During this period of uncertainty, the Uzbek government adopted an authoritarian approach to maintain stability and limit external influences, aiming to avoid Afghanistan's fate. Uzbekistan became part of the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS), a European Union (EU) program established in 1991- 2006 to provide technical and financial assistance to post-Soviet states, members include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Mongolia, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.[15] Since inception, there had been only a handful of projects that have been considered successful but received a lot of criticism due to weak implementation and a lack of oversight.[16]

After September 11, 2001, Uzbekistan felt sympathetic to U.S. efforts in Afghanistan, even allowing the establishment of an American airbase.[17] As Uzbekistan grappled with terrorism, Russia faced its own internal troubles in Chechnya, while U.S. intelligence sharing had the potential to improve resistance against global terrorism. However, due to U.S. interference in Uzbekistan's internal affairs, the Uzbek government later demanded that American forces be withdrawn from Uzbekistan in 2005.[18]

Since then, much has changed. With Afghanistan falling under Western powers' sphere of influence, Uzbekistan aligned itself more closely with Russia. This alignment grew as the Russia's power increased in the region through economic re-stabilization, including the sale of gas, and increasing economic cooperation with the European Union (EU).[19] For example, the Partnership for Modernization (PfM), launched in June 2010, aimed to promote Russia's economic modernization and technological development while strengthening the EU-Russia cooperation framework.[20] The PfM was suspended following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014.[21] This severed the EU's relationship with the region as well by reducing EU technical assistance through Russia-led projects, pushing them toward Chinese or Russian alternatives.[22]

After the Taliban takeover in August 2021, often referred to as 'Taliban 2.0,' – with the first Taliban (1996–2001), referred to 'Taliban 1.0' – there was reluctance by the international community to engage with the new government. The situation only changed when major global powers such as China and Russia green-signaled (with caution) engagement with the Taliban. These powers had their own national interests that dragged their sphere of influence along with them. China sees Afghanistan as a strategic geographic location for its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Russia needs China for its war in Ukraine.[23] Russia alone did not have the capability to wage a war against Ukraine and its allies, therefore needing China

[15] CORDIS, cordis. europa. eu. (1995, June 21). *What is Tacis?*. What is TACIS? https://cordis.europa.eu/article/id/4390-what-is-tacis

[16] *OSCE*. The European Commission's Tacis Programme 1991 – 2006. (n.d.). https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/1/34459.pdf; Cronin, D. (2014, April 12). *Tacis programme hurt EU's reputation, says watchdog*. POLITICO. https://www.politico.eu/article/tacis-programme-hurt-eus-reputation-says-watchdog/

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[22] Laruelle , M. (2008, April). *Russia's Central Asia Policy and the role of Russian nationalism*. Central Asia - Caucasus Institute Silk Road Program. https://www.silkroadstudies.org/publications/silkroad-papers-and-monographs/item/13137-russias-central-asia-policy-and-the-role-of-russian-nationalism.html

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and its partners to back them militarily. China, also facing economic pressures from the West, view its indirect contribution to the conflict and weakening of Western economies as beneficial, as it would make them dependent on China once again. This China-Russia Condominium has set others to forge their own path for their national interest by taming Afghanistan under the Taliban, creating regional economic interdependence. In return, the Taliban would receive the semblance of a recognition that they yearn from the international community, without legitimately being recognized. States avoid recognizing them to avoid compromising their stance in the international community. Against this backdrop, Uzbekistan is carefully navigating its relationships with major powers in the region, such as Russia and China, to cautiously engage with this window of opportunity, which is shaping both regional and international power structures.

Shifts in Domestic Relations

Three major events reshaped Uzbekistan's foreign policy since its independence. The first major shift occurred in 2014 with NATO's formal conclusion of combat operations in Afghanistan.[24] While this marked a partial withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces, Afghanistan remained a focal point of great power rivalry. Adversarial powers, such as Russia and China, used this transition to expand their influence in the region. However, the continued presence of U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan kept the country at the center of geopolitical contention.[25]

The second major shift came with the death of long-time Uzbek leader Islam Karimov in 2016 and the rise of Shavkat Mirziyoyev. Under Karimov's nearly three-decade rule, Uzbekistan followed an isolationist policy, avoiding deep regional and global engagement.[26] However, Mirziyoyev's leadership pushed for a political and economic openness, fundamentally changing Uzbekistan's foreign policy framework.[27] One example of this transformation was the liberalization of Uzbek academia. Before 2017, for example, political science courses and literature were heavily restricted, reflecting the regime's control over ideological discourse. However, following Mirziyoyev's reforms, universities began offering political science programs, albeit within certain controlled limits.[28]

The third major shift was Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine's invasion in 2014, which significantly altered the geopolitical dynamics of the post-Soviet space.[29] By 2017, Uzbekistan's decision to pursue a more open diplomatic strategy was shaped by the understanding that the backing of a big power in the region was necessary, especially amidst evolving regional geopolitics. The country carefully navigated between Russian influence and opportunities to engage politically and economically on a global scale.

Reasons for Uzbekistan's Diplomatic Engagement with the Taliban

Security concerns also play a significant role in shaping Uzbekistan's approach toward the creation of the Qush Tepa Canal. Although Uzbekistan has other levers to utilize, such as cutting off Afghanistan's electricity supply, doing so would create a hostile environment between the two countries, potentially leading to conflict—a scenario Uzbekistan aims to avoid for three key reasons. First, the Taliban are a proscribed terrorist organization, linked with Al-Qaeda. The Taliban's military capability could cause significant damage to Uzbekistan. Uzbek air defense capabilities are not sufficient to stop the guerrilla tactics that the Taliban resort to during combat. The Taliban's years of combat experience puts them at a significant advantage

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[24] Shifrinson, J. R. I. (2016). Deal or No Deal? The End of the Cold War and the U.S. Offer to Limit NATO Expansion. *International Security*, *40*(4), 7–44. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43828313

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[26] Dadabaev, T. (2018). Uzbekistan as Central Asian game changer? Uzbekistan's foreign policy construction in the post-Karimov Era. *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*, *4*(2), 162–175. https://doi.org/10.1177/2057891118775289

[27] Terzyan, A. (2020). What has changed in Uzbekistan? explaining post-Karimov state-building. https://doi.org/10.47669/psprp-6-2020

[28] Terzyan, A. (2020). What has changed in Uzbekistan?

[29] Terzyan, A. (2020). What has changed in Uzbekistan?

compared to Uzbekistan's inexperienced soldiers. Uzbekistan's military heavily relies on Russia as its primary arms supplier and security partner, however, now that Russia is preoccupied with its own war in Ukraine, additional support is difficult to come by.[30] Therefore, any rise of hostility between the Taliban and Uzbekistan will force Uzbekistan to deal with hostilities alone, which is unlikely to result positive outcomes. This is particularly so given Uzbekistan's increasing Islamization and the subsequent rise in sympathy for the Taliban's ideology among Uzbeks.

These domestic religious dynamics represent another angle of security concerns shaping Uzbekistan's approach. In recent years, Uzbekistan has witnessed a revival of Islamic sentiment, partly fueled by investments from Arab states seeking to restore its historical status as a center of Islamic learning and culture.[31] This resurgence has led to growing pockets of domestic sympathy for the Taliban. In 2021, large crowds in Registan, Samarkand, gathered to celebrate the Taliban's victory, viewing it as a symbolic expulsion of foreign forces from Afghanistan. This support shows the delicate balance Uzbekistan must strike between ensuring national security and managing the rising influence of external religious ideologies. Ignoring these sentiments or taking an aggressive stance against the Taliban could risk alienating portions of its own population and triggering domestic unrest.

Lastly, in addition to prioritizing economic security and embarking on the Qush Tepa Canal project, the Taliban reclaimed Payghambar Island (Prophet's Island), a disputed territory along the Uzbek-Afghan border.[32] Shortly after, Uzbeks recaptured the island, though security concerns remained. This is especially pressing given Uzbekistan's pursuit of membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO), being one of the only CARs without membership, to facilitate deeper integration into global markets for long-term economic growth.[33] However, ongoing territorial disputes jeopardize its accession to the WTO.

For decades, Uzbekistan operated under a largely state-controlled economic model, limiting its engagement with the global economy. However, as global trade dynamics evolved, the country recognized the necessity to diversify its economic base. Sectors like cotton production and natural resource extraction, once pillars of the Uzbek economy, have become less sustainable due to growing water scarcity further exacerbated by projects like Qush Tepa Canal. Therefore, it is in Uzbekistan's interest to invest in a cordial relationship and mitigate any conflict with Afghanistan by promoting a deep regional economic interdependence. Engaging with the Taliban in mutually beneficial projects would not only occupy their focus but also outweigh the cost of taking on projects that would be detrimental to the region or its neighboring country.

Uzbekistan's Strategic Adaptation and Forward Strategy

Since the creation of the Qush Tepa Canal, Uzbekistan has been compelled to rethink its economic trajectory, particularly in response to the growing challenges of water scarcity. While the canal offers Afghanistan a vital agricultural resource, it has simultaneously intensified Uzbekistan's concerns over water management in a region already burdened by the environmental fallout of Soviet-era policies. To mitigate the anticipated decline in agricultural GDP, Uzbekistan has accelerated its shift toward fintech and technology-driven industries, reducing its reliance on water-intensive sectors. This transition is crucial as the Amu Darya

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[30] Varol Sevim, T., & Rozanov, A. (2014). Ups and downs in foreign policy of Uzbekistan towards security approach of Russia*. *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, *17*(3), 18–33. https://doi.org/10.5782/2223-2621.2014.17.3.18

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River and the Aral Sea continue to diminish due to decades of mismanagement.[34] Beginning in the 1960s, Soviet irrigation projects diverted vital water sources for large-scale agricultural production, leading to severe environmental degradation.[35]

In addition to economic diversification, Uzbekistan is also responding to rapid population growth, which places further strain on national infrastructure and resources. The government has prioritized human capital development by expanding access to education and postgraduate studies, equipping the younger generation with skills tailored for a modern, technology-based economy.[36] This strategic investment ensures that Uzbekistan remains competitive in the region while reducing dependence on agriculture and other resource-intensive industries. By fostering an educated workforce, the country is positioning itself as an emerging hub for innovation and economic modernization.[37]

A key development in this strategy was the establishment of a trade house in Mazar-i-Sharif in 2025, spanning 220 square meters.[38] This initiative has provided Uzbek entrepreneurs with a platform to introduce their products to the Afghan market, foster business partnerships, and expand trade opportunities. As a result, trade turnover between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan surged from $46.3 million in January 2024 to $153.7 million in January 2025.[39] This growing economic interdependence is not merely a means of boosting trade—it serves as a strategic tool to stabilize relations with Afghanistan and discourage territorial disputes. By deepening economic ties, Uzbekistan seeks to foster regional stability, ensuring that economic cooperation takes precedence over conflict.

Security Cooperation and Intelligence Sharing

Security remains a cornerstone of Uzbekistan's engagement with the Taliban, as regional stability hinges on managing shared threats from extremist groups. Additionally, intelligence-sharing agreements with the Taliban have emerged as a crucial tool for counterterrorism efforts, particularly concerning the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).[40] Previously aligned with the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the IMU has since become an adversary to the Taliban. By aligning security interests, Uzbekistan seeks to neutralize threats posed by extremist groups while reinforcing diplomatic engagement as a means of ensuring stability.[41]

Beyond security cooperation, Uzbekistan has also taken proactive measures to address critical domestic challenges, particularly the issue of water scarcity. Recognizing the severity of the crisis, the government has launched public awareness campaigns urging citizens to conserve water and adopt sustainable practices. Additionally, Uzbekistan has explored technological innovations and regional partnerships to enhance water efficiency and secure alternative resources. This multifaceted approach reflects Uzbekistan's broader strategy: balancing economic diversification, regional security, and sustainable resource management to safeguard

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[34] Wang, M., Chen, X., Cao, L., Kurban, A., Shi, H., Wu, N., … & Maeyer, P. D. (2023). Correlation analysis between the Aral sea shrinkage and the Amu Darya river. Journal of Arid Land, 15(7), 757-778. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40333-023-0062-z

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[41] Ionova, E. (2021). Central Asian countries in the context of the Afghan crisis. Russia and New States of Eurasia, (3), 78-92. https://doi.org/10.20542/2073-4786-2021-3-78-92

its long-term stability and prosperity. While the risks of engaging with the Taliban persist, Uzbekistan's calculated strategy balances immediate security needs with long-term geopolitical positioning.

Regional Cooperation

Uzbekistan's internal stability is closely tied to regional stability, with one of the most pressing challenges being the oversight of the Taliban's ambitions projects like the Qush Tepa Canal. If the Taliban are part of regional cooperation such as the water agreement as well as trade agreements, this would be a calculated move that will lead to prosperity in the region. This would only be possible if the region was backed by a major power in the region, like China. This approach could appeal to the Taliban's long-standing desire for international recognition. In return, if they adhere to global standards, the recognition could unlock economic opportunities not only for Afghanistan, where 20 million people are at risk of famine, but also for the entire Central Asian region.[42]

Beyond water governance, regional economic interdependence has long served as a geopolitical stabilizer, with successful models seen in the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Middle East is now also engaging in regional economic interdependence as a way of securitization.[43]

ASEAN was founded in 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore, partly as a response to the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. During this period, many ASEAN nations relied on the U.S. for security and economic support. The Vietnam War (1955–1975) reinforced this alignment, as the U.S. fought communist forces in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. However, following the U.S. defeat in Vietnam, communist victories in Mainland Southeast Asia (1975), and a gradual U.S. military withdrawal, ASEAN leaders recognized the need to diversify their international partnerships. The U.S. closed its military bases in the Philippines (1991–1992), further reducing its regional presence. At the same time, China transformed from a perceived threat to a regional partner**.** By the 1990s and 2000s, China emerged as ASEAN's top trading partner**,** surpassing the U.S. and Japan. The signing of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) in 2010 further strengthened economic relations.

China's strategy of deepening economic and diplomatic ties with ASEAN parallels its current approach to Central Asia**.** Just as China shifted from being a perceived ideological and security threat in Southeast Asia to becoming a key economic partner, it is now pursuing a similar path in Central Asia by positioning itself as a regional leader and alternative to Russian influence**.**

Security cooperation also plays a critical role. In Southeast Asia, China aligned with ASEAN to counter Vietnam's regional dominance in the 1980s. In Central Asia, China is similarly expanding its security engagement, particularly through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), through which it collaborates with regional governments on counterterrorism, border security, and military exercises. This is especially relevant as Russia's

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[42] *Immediate funding needed to avoid new ration cuts for millions in Afghanistan: World Food Programme*. UN World Food Programme. (n.d.). https://www.wfp.org/news/immediate-funding-needed-avoid-new-ration-cuts-millions-

[43] *Economic Integration, trade and connectivity*. International Partnerships. (n.d.). https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/sustainable-growth-and-jobs/economic-integration-trade-and-connectivity_en; Hong, L., Maizland, L., Galina, C., Albert, E., & Fong, C. (2025, January 15). *What is ASEAN?*. Council on Foreign Relations. https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-asean; Rouis, M., & Tabor, S. R. (2013). *Regional Economic Integration in the Middle East and North Africa : Beyond trade reform*. Open Knowledge Repository. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/a763a4ec-f08d-5686-a0a7-22992cfa2188; Haghirian, M. (2022, December 28). *Regional Economic Integration comes into focus at second Baghdad Conference*. Bourse & Bazaar Foundation. https://www.bourseandbazaar.org/articles/2022/12/23/regional-economic-integration-comes-into-focus-at-second-baghdad-conference

influence in Central Asia wanes due to its focus on the war in Ukraine, allowing China to take on a greater leadership role.

Moreover, China's soft power and diplomatic engagement in both regions follow a similar trajectory. In ASEAN, China shifted from ideological confrontation to economic cooperation, gradually gaining trust. In Central Asia, China is presenting itself as a reliable partner, emphasizing mutual economic growth and regional stability rather than military dominance. This has allowed China to compete with Russia's traditional role in the region while avoiding direct confrontation. Extending this strategy to Central Asia, particularly by integrating Afghanistan, could help mitigate instability and promote cooperation. Economic integration not only balances regional power dynamics but also discourages zero-sum approaches to resource control.

Many Uzbeks initially feared that increasing Chinese investment could lead to economic dependence, political leverage, and potential challenges to Uzbekistan's sovereignty.[44] However, these concerns have gradually diminished as China's investments have expanded beyond Uzbekistan, focusing on regional trade routes and infrastructure development.[45] Through the BRI, China is positioning itself as a regional economic driver rather than solely concentrating on Uzbekistan.

Water Management Agreements

Uzbekistan understands the importance of engagement with Afghanistan. Central Asian nations have changed their approach and are now including Afghanistan in regional discussions, a shift from past exclusions of Afghanistan such as from the 1992 Almaty Agreement.[46] This marked a significant milestone in the post-Soviet era, establishing a new framework for water allocation among the Central Asian republics following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This agreement was designed to address the complex and often contentious issue of water distribution in a region heavily reliant on shared transboundary water resources, particularly the Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers. However, its exclusion of Afghanistan, one of the key upstream countries that plays a pivotal role in the region's hydrological system. By omitting Afghanistan, the agreement failed to account for the country's potential impact on water availability downstream, creating a gap in the framework that has since contributed to ongoing tensions and challenges in regional water management. This exclusion has become increasingly significant as Afghanistan's development projects, such as the Qush Tepa Canal, have the potential to alter water flows, further complicating the already fragile balance of water-sharing arrangements in Central Asia. Following the Taliban's launch of the Qush Tepa Canal project, Afghanistan has been consistently being incorporated into regional water talks, a significant step in cooperative water management to include the upstream countries.[47]

Strategic Economic Projects Strengthening Regional Ties

So far, there have been four pathways created to regional prosperity, all of which require Afghanistan's cooperative involvement, transforming regional connectivity and economic opportunities. The first is the Trans-Afghan Railway, a major ongoing project connecting Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan.[48] This railway aims to establish a direct link from Uzbekistan through Afghanistan to Pakistan, providing Central Asian countries access to the Indian Ocean via Pakistani ports such as Karachi, Gwadar, and Qasim. With an estimated cost of $4.95 to $7 billion, the project is expected to be completed by 2027 and fully

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[44] *Soft Power or land grab? Chinese investment raises alarm in Uzbekistan*. Kun.uz. (2025, March 7). https://kun.uz/en/news/2025/03/07/soft-power-or-land-grab-chinese-investment-raises-alarm-in-uzbekistan

[45] *South Caucasus and Central Asia Belt and Road Initiative – Uzbekistan Country Case Study*. World Bank. (2020, June). https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/7b901f03-d114-54de-a13b-6012a28f7934/content

[46] *By-law of the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia*. FAO. (1992, December 5). https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC215835/

[47] *By-law of the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia*. FAO.

[48] Malikzada, N., Omeri, A., Amiri, K., & Kian, E. (2025, February 5). *Uzbekistan announces Trans-Afghan railway construction to begin in 2025*. Afghanistan International. https://www.afintl.com/en/202502057551

operational by 2030.[49] The key partners of this project include Russia, Kazakhstan, and Qatar.[50] The railway is set to offer Central Asia an alternative route that bypasses Russia, reducing transportation costs by up to 40% and slashing travel time between Uzbekistan and Pakistan from 35 days to just 3-5 days. This transformative project not only enhances trade efficiency but also provides Uzbekistan with a significant opportunity to diversify its economy, reducing its reliance on agriculture. This Trans-Afghan Railway is mutually beneficial to all the parties involved. On October 19, 2024, Uzbekistan's transport minister announced that an agreement had been reached, and construction began in early 2025. This development marks a critical step in Uzbekistan's broader strategy to integrate into global trade networks and strengthen its economic resilience.

Second, the China and Afghanistan launched a direct freight train in early 2025 as part of the BRI.[51] The Nantong-Hairatan railway line connects Jiangsu Province in eastern China to the dry port of Hairatan near the Uzbek-Afghan border, with goods taking approximately 20 days to reach their destination. The first shipment included 50 containers of commercial goods, marking a significant step in strengthening regional trade ties. This initiative complements the Trans-Afghan Railway by providing an additional route for goods to flow between Central Asia, South Asia, and beyond, further solidifying Afghanistan's role as a key transit hub in the region.[52] Intertwining Afghanistan into this economic collaboration is carefully engineered by China, one of Uzbekistan's biggest investors, followed by Russia. Engaging Afghanistan means economic stability in the country, the region, and greater influence for China.

Third, the multimodal transport corridor is being developed to improve trade efficiency across South and Central Asia.[53] This corridor aims to connect the two regions through a network of rail, road, and sea routes, with a focus on increasing trade and transit through Afghanistan. Proposed routes begin in Uzbekistan, run through Afghanistan, and extend to Pakistan, with shipments ultimately reaching the port of Jebel Ali in the United Arab Emirates. The estimated delivery time for this route is 20-25 days, and the preliminary cost of the project is $5 billion.[54] With a transit potential of up to 20 million tons of cargo, this corridor will link Europe, Russia, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, India, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia, demonstrating that cooperation with Afghanistan opens new opportunities not only for Uzbekistan but for the entire region. By integrating multiple modes of transportation, this corridor addresses logistical challenges and enhances the efficiency of cross-border trade, stepping forward towards regional economic integration.

Fourth, the regional cooperation extends beyond economic efforts to support Afghanistan's smooth transition toward stability in the region. For example, Azerbaijan, a Turkic country and former Soviet republic, has taken significant steps to engage with the Taliban. Azerbaijan's engagement demonstrates the effort to stabilize Afghanistan and integrate it into international frameworks. In November 2024, Azerbaijan invited Taliban representatives to attend the COP29 Climate Change Conference, marking the first time the Taliban participated in a major United Nations event since regaining power.[55] This invitation allowed Afghan officials to observe global discussions on climate change and engage in potential

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[49] Malikzada, N., Omeri, A., Amiri, K., & Kian, E., *Uzbekistan announces Trans-Afghan railway construction to begin in 2025*.

[50] There is a trade-off for these countries to take part. These countries contribute to Russia's war effort and in return, incentives for these countries to have shorten shipment delivery times. As long as they remain on board, Russia is bound to accept these conditions.

[51] Azadi. (2024, November 24). *Freight train arrives in Afghanistan from China as Beijing looks to increase ties*. RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty. https://www.rferl.org/a/china-afghanistan-freigh-train-link-taliban/33214113.html

[52] Azadi. (2024, November 24). *Freight train arrives in Afghanistan from China as Beijing looks to increase ties*.

[53] Bowes, J., & Javaid, F. (2024, November 30). *The trans-afghan multimodal transport corridor: Will it achieve regional connectivity?*. South Asian Voices. https://southasianvoices.org/ec-m-co-n-trans-afghan-corridor-11-30-2024/

[54] Bowes, J., & Javaid, F. *The trans-afghan multimodal transport corridor*

[55] Asia, T. of C. (2024, August 2). *Is Afghanistan ready for dialogue with Central Asia on water issues?*. The Times Of Central Asia. https://timesca.com/is-afghanistan-ready-for-dialogue-with-central-asia-on-water-issues/

bilateral meetings, signaling a cautious yet strategic approach to diplomatic normalization. Azerbaijan's role in this process shows the importance of regional actors in helping the process of fostering dialogue and cooperation of the region with the Taliban, particularly as Central Asia seeks to balance security concerns with economic and environmental priorities.[56] By leveraging economic cooperation and diplomatic engagement, Central Asia can ensure large-scale infrastructure projects like the Qush Tepa Canal serve as instruments of progress rather than sources of conflict. Furthermore, Azerbaijan has provided governance training to Taliban officials.[57] This initiative aims to strengthen Afghanistan's administrative capacity while creating a more stable governing structure that could, in turn, contribute to regional security. This collaborative approach to regional partnerships promotes sustainable development across Central Asia and beyond.

These developments enhance regional connectivity in driving economic growth and stability. The Trans-Afghan Railway, the Nantong-Hairatan freight line, and the multimodal transport corridor collectively represent a transformative shift in how Central and South Asia engage with each other and the wider world. By reducing dependency on traditional routes and fostering new partnerships, these projects not only boost trade but also promote political and economic stability in a region historically marked by fragmentation. For Uzbekistan, these initiatives are a strategic move to position itself as a central player in regional trade networks, while for Afghanistan, they offer a pathway to economic recovery and integration, a path that Taliban believe to mean to lead to official recognition.

International Cooperation

Competing Spheres of Influence

The intersection of influence between rival global powers often creates challenges, creating complexities that hinder national or even regional growth. This dynamic is evident in the case of Ukraine that finds itself in the midst of rivaling Russian and Western spheres of influence, where geopolitical tensions rise due to the clash of these competing powers. Uzbekistan navigating to avoid being overpowered by big powers has both the Russia-China condominium and Western influence present in the country, albeit to varying degrees.[58] While the West's influence is much weaker, its presence still marks a form of deterrence and remains relevant for Uzbekistan's investments and global expansion.

China's expanding influence over infrastructure and trade projects is reshaping regional dynamics, and Russia is relied upon for security and political stabilization. Setting these influences in different spheres ensures their influence does not clash with one another, avoiding Ukraine's fate. Instead, Uzbekistan aligns external forces to create mutually beneficial economic and geopolitical advantages in the region.

Uzbekistan is strategically engaging the West's regional involvement as it is actively diversifying its partnerships to avoid overreliance on any single power. A key example is Canada's recent talks to open an embassy in Uzbekistan, signaling deeper diplomatic engagement. Moreover, Uzbekistan is strengthening its relationship with the European Union, as demonstrated by the EU-Central Asia Summit in Samarkand on April 3–4, 2025. This summit opened discussions on trade, security, and sustainable development, positioning Uzbekistan as a bridge between Central Asia and Europe.[59] By balancing engagement with regional powers like China and Russia while simultaneously expanding Western partnerships, Uzbekistan is safeguarding its interests, establishing a more resilient foreign policy. This

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[56] Bowes, J., & Javaid, F. (2024, November 30). *The trans-afghan multimodal transport corridor*

[57] Muxtar-Agbabali, F. (2024, August 16). *Azerbaijan's strategic expansion in Afghanistan - a calculated gamble amid uncertainty?* Azerbaijan's strategic expansion in Afghanistan - A calculated gamble amid uncertainty? https://caliber.az/en/post/azerbaijan-s-strategic-expansion-in-afghanistan

[58] Yar, A., Khan, R. A., & Javed, N. (2023). Afghanistan's geopolitical and geo-economic significance in regional connectivity and development. *Journal of Political and Legal Sovereignty*, 1(2), 86. https://doi.org/10.38142/jpls.v1i2.86

[59] European External Action Service. (2025, February 13). *First EU-Central Asia summit to take place on 3-4 April 2025*. European Union. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/uzbekistan/first-eu-central-asia-summit-take-place-3-4-april-2025_en

approach not only mitigates dependency risks but also unlocks new economic opportunities, reinforcing the country's role in regional stability. As Uzbekistan navigates these geopolitical tensions, it aims to maintain strategic autonomy that is essential for its long-term success on the global stage.

China and Russia Condominium

The Taliban's regaining power in Afghanistan in 2021 marked a major shift in the region's geopolitical landscape, allowing Russia and China to assert greater influence in the post-U.S. withdrawal era. Both nations have leveraged economic, military, and diplomatic tools to secure their strategic interests, often at the expense of Western influence. Russia has taken a pragmatic approach to the Taliban's rule, engaging in military exercises along Afghanistan's borders with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to counter terrorist threats.[60] Additionally, Russia has deepened economic ties with the Taliban, securing agreements for the supply of oil, gas, and wheat while negotiating a transit deal for liquefied natural gas (LNG) under the "Kazan Format."[61]

China, similarly, has engaged with the Taliban to advance its economic and strategic interests, particularly regarding Afghanistan's vast mineral resources. By integrating Afghanistan into its BRI, China has strengthened economic ties with Afghanistan. The Taliban's 25-year oil extraction deal with China's Xinjiang Central Asia Petroleum and Gas Company (CAPEIC) in 2023 indicates Beijing's willingness to invest in Afghanistan despite the inherent risks.[62] However, due to the Russia and China condominium, China and Russia are able to pull these deals and are not as afraid of Islamic extremism spreading into the Xinjiang region.[63] Russia and China's growing economic and military engagement reflects their efforts to consolidate control, while at the same time limiting the influence of Western nations. [64]

In the context of the Qush Tepa Canal project, this geopolitical maneuvering has significant implications for smaller states in their sphere of influence. The canal is a major Taliban-led initiative aimed at diverting water from the Amu Darya River. Russia and China's growing influence in Afghanistan could play a decisive role in shaping the future of the canal. On one hand, their economic and strategic investments in Afghanistan can provide the Taliban with the resources and legitimacy needed to complete the project, potentially exacerbating water scarcity issues downstream and increasing the regional tensions. On the other hand, Russia and China's vested interests in maintaining stability in Central Asia could lead them to mediate between Afghanistan and its neighbours, ensuring the canal's construction does not escalate into conflict. Currently, it seems to be the latter, as the Qush Tepa Canal project's completion date appears to be delayed year by year, suggesting that China and Uzbekistan may have reached an agreement with the Taliban regarding new trade routes. This delay could indicate a strategic compromise aimed at balancing regional water-sharing concerns while advancing economic interests.

Moreover, the Russia-China condominium's ability to engage with the Taliban without facing constraints from Western states positions them as key players in determining the canal's trajectory. Their involvement could either facilitate a cooperative framework for water-sharing or further complicate the situation by prioritizing their own strategic and economic interests over regional stability. Ultimately, the creation of the Qush Tepa Canal underscores the broader struggle for influence in Central Asia, with Russia and China's actions likely to shape not only the project's outcome but also the region's geopolitical and environmental future.

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[60] Imranullah, A. and Hakimuddin, M. (2024). Strategic interests and geopolitical considerations: assessing the importance of afghanistan for the us post-withdrawal. J. Arts Humanit. Soc. Sci., 1(2), 1-9. https://doi.org/10.69739/jahss.v1i2.18

[61] Imranullah, A. and Hakimuddin, M. (2024). Strategic interests and geopolitical considerations

[62] Imranullah, A. and Hakimuddin, M. (2024). Strategic interests and geopolitical considerations: assessing the importance of afghanistan for the us post-withdrawal. J. Arts Humanit. Soc. Sci., 1(2), 1-9. https://doi.org/10.69739/jahss.v1i2.18

[63] Imranullah, A. and Hakimuddin, M. (2024). Strategic interests and geopolitical considerations

[64] Yar, F. G. M., Zahid, S., & Miakhil, J. M. (2024). Afghanistan's Geopolitical and Geo-Economic Significance in Regional Connectivity and Development. Journal of Political and Legal Sovereignty, 1(3), 78-86. https://doi.org/10.38142/jpls.v1i3.86

The Role of Regional Powers in Shaping Afghanistan's Future

The involvement of Russia and China in Afghanistan indicate the broader trend of regional powers exerting influence in the absence of Western leadership. Both countries have used economic and military tools to stabilize the region while advancing their own interests. For instance, Russia's military exercises and energy agreements with the Taliban demonstrate its commitment to maintaining a security buffer in Central Asia and securing new trade routes.

Moreover, when it comes to countries engaging with the Taliban, the region is no longer intimidated by the international community's pressure to avoid engagement with the group, despite its well-documented human rights abuses and designation as a terrorist organization. The first ministry that was taken down after Taliban took over in August 2021 was the Ministry of Women Affairs.[65] According to the Human Rights Watch, Afghanistan is facing the world's most severe women's rights crisis as it ranked last on the Women, Peace and Security Index. Afghan women and international officials labeling it "gender apartheid." This level of systemic oppression has not been seen since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 75 years ago, with the only comparable period being the Taliban's previous rule from 1996 to 2001.[66]

Especially since the U.S. is largely responsible for the Taliban's rise to power through the Doha Deal, Uzbekistan has adopted a foreign policy approach that echoes China's principle of non-interference in the internal matters of other countries.[67] This strategy reflects an effort on Uzbekistan's end to avoid external entanglement in domestic affairs. By aligning itself with this principle, Uzbekistan aims to maintain stable diplomatic relations, foster regional cooperation, and avoid the pitfalls of geopolitical rivalries that often arise from external meddling. This approach not only strengthens Uzbekistan's position as a neutral and pragmatic actor but also aligns with its broader goals of ensuring regional stability and economic development. In doing so, Uzbekistan demonstrates a commitment to respecting sovereignty while pursuing its own strategic interests in a complex and interconnected geopolitical landscape.

Sanctions

The impact of Western sanctions on Russia has had profound and often counterintuitive effects on Central Asia and the Caucasus. While one of the primary goals of these sanctions was to restrict trade with Russia, the region has experienced a significant trade boom with Moscow since 2022. This surge has been largely driven by the rerouting of European exports, which declined in direct shipments to Russia but increased dramatically through Central Asia and the Caucasus. According to a June 2024 Oxford Economics report, exports to Russia rose by 5% in Georgia, 30% in Kazakhstan, and an astonishing 193% in Armenia. This growth was fueled by a marked increase in imports from the European Union across the region.[68] Research from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development highlights that goods subject to Western export controls—imposed as part of sanctions against the Kremlin—have formed a disproportionate share of this rerouted trade. Notably, reports of white goods, such as washing machines and refrigerators, being shipped through the region so Russia could extract dual-use components made international headlines. [69]

Central Asia's role in softening the blow of Western sanctions extends beyond trade. The region has become a critical hub for Russians seeking access to goods and financial

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[65] Three Years Since the Taliban Takeover. (2024, August). https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/resolve-of-afghan-women-in-the-face-of-erasure-three-years-since-the-taliban-takeover-en.pdf

[66] Barr, H. (2024, February 7). *The Taliban and the Global Backlash against Women's Rights*. Human Rights Watch. https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/02/06/taliban-and-global-backlash-against-womens-rights

[67] *How the doha deal led to the collapse of Afghanistan; insider's perspective*. How the Doha Deal Led to the Collapse of Afghanistan; Insider's Perspective | The Munk School. (2022, November 25). https://munkschool.utoronto.ca/event/doha-deal-how-us-abandoned-afghanistan

[68] Hess, M. (2024, December). *The impact of Russia sanctions on Central Asia*. Foreign Policy Research Institute. https://www.fpri.org/article/2024/12/the-impact-of-russia-sanctions-on-central-asia

[69] Hess, M. *The impact of Russia sanctions on Central Asia*.

services no longer readily available at home. [70] Uzbekistan has also contributed to Russia's war efforts, with Uzbek producers supplying cotton pulp to Russian gunpowder factories, which manufacture ammunition and artillery rounds for Russian troops in Ukraine. Between January and August 2023 alone, Russia imported cotton pulp worth $7.2 million, 87% of which came from Uzbekistan.[71] The region's complicity in helping Russia evade sanctions and sustain its war effort has drawn criticism from the international community. As the West grapples with the effectiveness of its sanctions regime, the role of Central Asia in this complex web of trade, finance, and geopolitics will continue to be a tension.

Conclusion

After the Soviet Union fell apart in 1991, Uzbekistan stepped into a new era of independence, beginning to craft its own national identity. One of the most powerful symbols of this newfound independence was the adoption of a new flag, featuring three bold stripes of blue, white, and green, separated by thin red lines. Each colour on the flag holds a special meaning that reflects Uzbekistan's values and history. The blue stripe represents water, essential for life and historically the nation's lifeblood, especially in a region where water is scarce and precious. The white stripe symbolizes peace and stability, ideals that Uzbekistan has strived to maintain in a historically turbulent region. The green stripe stands for nature and prosperity, indicating the country's agricultural heritage and its hopes for a prosperous future. Finally, the thin red lines remind of the sacrifices and struggles endured to achieve independence and protect their nation.

However, today, the construction of the Qush Tepa Canal in neighbouring Afghanistan poses a significant threat to these very foundations that Uzbekistan's flag represents. The canal, which aims to divert water from the Amu Darya River, could drastically reduce the water flow into Uzbekistan, challenging the country's control over its most vital resource. Water scarcity could undermine Uzbekistan's agricultural sector, which is crucial for its economy, and disrupt the livelihoods of millions of people who depend on it. This, in turn, could threaten the nation's economic stability, symbolized by the green stripe on the flag. Moreover, the potential for conflict over water resources could destabilize the region, jeopardizing the peace and stability that the white stripe stands for. In this way, the Qush Tepa Canal not only threatens Uzbekistan's water security but also risks eroding the very principles and values that the nation's flag proudly embodies.

Uzbekistan has so far managed to navigate the complex regional dynamics by establishing economic interdependence, a strategy that has proven effective in maintaining stability and promoting cooperation. By prioritizing regional trade, infrastructure projects, and resource-sharing agreements, Uzbekistan has created a framework that encourages mutual dependence and reduces the chances of conflict. This approach has been particularly significant in dealing with Afghanistan, where the Taliban's return to power in 2021 has introduced new challenges.

While the countries investing in the region, including Uzbekistan, have not officially recognized the Taliban government, they share common values and interests that often distance them from Western approaches. These nations prioritize pragmatic engagement over ideological alignment, focusing on economic and security benefits rather than political conditions. This pragmatic stance is heavily influenced by China's foreign policy, which emphasizes respect for the sovereignty of recipient countries and a strict policy of non-interference in internal affairs. By adopting this approach, regional players have been able to maintain relationships with the Taliban without imposing political demands or addressing contentious issues such as human rights violations.

However, this strategy has its drawbacks. The emphasis on non-interference has led to the sidelining of critical issues, such as the Taliban's severe restrictions on women's rights and

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[70] Moscow Times Reporter. (2024, September 16). *Should the West sanction Russia's neighbors in Central Asia?* The Moscow Times. https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/09/16/should-the-west-sanction-russias-neighbors-in-central-asia-a86310/pdf

[71] The Moscow Times. (2024, January 15). Uzbekistan's cotton pulp exports fuel Russian ammunition production. The Moscow Times.

their erasure from public spaces in Afghanistan. These concerns have been largely ignored or "swept under the rug" by regional actors in favor of maintaining economic and political stability. While this approach has allowed Uzbekistan and its neighbors to avoid direct confrontation with the Taliban, it raises ethical questions about the long-term consequences of prioritizing economic interests over human rights and social justice. Uzbekistan's strategy of regional economic interconnectedness has provided short-term stability and fostered cooperation, but it also shows the delicate balance between pragmatism and principle in a region where geopolitical and humanitarian concerns often collide.

Through military cooperation, economic agreements, and strategic engagements, regional powers like Russia and China have exerted significant influence over Afghanistan, shaping its post-conflict trajectory in ways that align with their own interests. While their approaches differ as Russia focusing on security and counterterrorism, and China prioritizing economic investments and infrastructure projects, both nations share a common goal of stabilizing the region to safeguard their strategic and economic interests.

However, for Uzbekistan, the presence of Western powers in the region is seen as a crucial counterbalance. Uzbekistan is acutely aware of its history, particularly the decades of Soviet dominance, and is determined to avoid a repeat of being overshadowed by a single overpowering force. By maintaining a balance of power among Russia, China, and the West, Uzbekistan aims to ensure that no single actor dominates the region, thereby preserving its own sovereignty and strategic autonomy. This balancing act is not just about politics, it is also about securing economic opportunities while addressing security concerns, particularly in relation to Afghanistan.

Uzbekistan's ability to navigate this complex geopolitical landscape will play a pivotal role in shaping not only Afghanistan's development (and vice versa) but also the broader dynamics of Central and South Asia. By establishing regional economic interconnectedness and engaging with multiple global powers, Uzbekistan seeks to create a stable environment that benefits all parties involved. At the same time, it must carefully manage the competing interests of major powers to prevent conflicts that could destabilize the region.

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How World War II Memory Politics are Shaping the Russo-Ukrainian War

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Abstract: Memory of World War II has played and continues to play an important role in how Russia and Ukraine shape their national identities. In Ukraine's efforts to distance itself from Russia's sphere of influence, Russia has increasingly contextualized its conflict with Ukraine through a historical lens, with a particular focus on WWII. This essay sets out to examine the role of differing WWII memory politics in shaping ongoing conflict between the two countries. It explores (a) the evolution and divergence of WWII memory in Russia and Ukraine; (b) the instrumentalization of historical memory by political leadership; and (c) the role of competing narratives in fueling ongoing war. By applying Margaret Somers' and Gloria Gibson's definition of narratives – as relational to other narratives, as causally emploted, selectively appropriated, and temporal – this essay demonstrates that the divergent memories of WWII are not just reflections of past events but are active instruments shaping the present conflict. This essay argues that Russia's invocation of the "Great Patriotic War" operates as a performative tool to galvanize domestic support, to delegitimize Ukrainian sovereignty, and to frame its military actions as an extension of the Soviet Union's struggle against fascism. This narrative underscores themes of Soviet-era heroism, unity, and victory, which contrast sharply with Ukraine's interpretation of WWII. Since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and especially following the full-scale invasion in 2022, Ukraine has increasingly emphasized its historical resistance to external domination, framing its independence movement within a broader historical context. This divergence reveals an acute ideological incompatibility: While Russia uses WWII memory to assert dominance and continuity, Ukraine leverages it to construct a distinct national identity aligned with Western democratic values.

Keywords: World War II, Russo-Ukraine War, Memory Politics, Narratives, Identity

Introduction

The memory of World War II plays an important role in Russian and Ukrainian national identity formation. Since Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, it has increasingly framed its conflict with Ukraine through a historical lens, invoking WWII references to justify its aggression. This trend subsided following the annexation, but then intensified with the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022; "Nazi Ukraine,"[1] a "Russian territory" under the dictatorship of President Vladimir Zelensky, a drug-addicted dictator,[2] are statements commonplace in both

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[1] EUvsDisinfo. "FLASHBACK – Putin Starting the War: What He Said and What It Really Means," (2025). https://euvsdisinfo.eu/flashback-putin-starting-the-war-what-he-said-and-what-it-really-means/
[2] EUvsDisinfo. "Why is the Kremlin so Hung up on Smearing Zelenskyy?" (2025). https://euvsdisinfo.eu/why-is-the-kremlin-so-hung-up-on-smearing-zelenskyy/

Russian media and political rhetoric. While such claims are invariably false, they allow
President Vladimir Putin to frame the war as a continuation of Russia's struggle against
Nazism, to rally domestic support for military action, and to position himself as the dutiful
saviour to the Ukrainian people's purported fascist oppressors.[3] Meanwhile, Ukraine has
actively reassessed its historical narrative of WWII since 2014, seeking to distance itself from
Russian interpretations. While Russia's historical positive narrative of WWII stresses Russo-
Ukrainian unity, Ukraine's perspective on WWII reflects a growing focus on its historical
struggle for independence.

In this essay, I pose the question: How have differing WWII memory politics in
Ukraine and Russia informed the ongoing conflict? To answer this question, I draw on
historians Paul D'Anieri, Marc Edele, Jade McGlynn, Maria Popova, Oxana Shevel, Andrew
Wilson, and Elizabeth Wood, to explore (a) the evolution and divergence of WWII memory in
Russia and Ukraine, (b) the instrumentalization of historical memory by political leadership,
and (c) the role of competing narratives in fueling the Russo-Ukraine war. By employing
Margaret Somers and Gloria Gibson's definition of 'narratives' in my analysis of these three
themes, I marshal the argument that (1) Russia's invocation of the "Great Patriotic War"
(GPW) serves as a tool for mobilising public support for its so-called "special military
operation," showcasing a unique manipulation of performative collective memory; (2) that
Russia's remembrance of WWII seeks to delegitimize Ukrainian sovereignty; and (3) that
Ukraine's interpretation of WWII seeks to affirm the historical roots of its independence
movement.

Somers' and Gibson's Definition of Narratives

Before diving into this discussion, it is important to establish an operational definition
of "narratives." In this essay, I will be drawing on Somers and Gibson's argument that
'narratives' are constructed and driven by four key components: (1) relationality of parts, (2)
causal emplotment, (3) selective appropriation, and (4) temporality.[4] This definition emphasizes
how narratives are relational, meaning they derive meaning from their connections to other
narratives, making the definition particularly relevant when analyzing the intertwined historical
accounts of WWII. Causal emplotment highlights how events are organized into coherent
stories, which is critical for understanding how both Ukraine and Russia frame WWII to serve
their respective political agendas. Selective appropriation underscores the deliberate inclusion
or exclusion of events, shedding light on how historical memory is manipulated to reinforce
nationalism or delegitimize opponents. Finally, the emphasis on temporality recognizes the
dynamic nature of narratives over time, enabling this essay to trace how interpretations of
WWII have evolved in Russia and Ukraine. Together, these features provide a robust analytic
lens for unpacking how the two countries' contested historical narratives of WWII contribute to
the ongoing conflict.

The Evolution of WWII Memory in Russia and Ukraine Before 2014

To understand how WWII memory politics have shaped the ongoing Russo-Ukraine
conflict, it is essential to examine the evolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics'
(USSR) WWII narrative, and the subsequent divergence in memory between Russia and
Ukraine that followed Soviet disintegration. According to Edele, the narrative under Stalin's
leadership went as follows: The united Soviet people defeated Hitler and his army of fascist
invaders who posed an existential threat to the Soviet Union and its people.[5] Stalin's messaging

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depicted the USSR as both victim and victor; it was attacked by Europe's most brutal dictator, it was threatened with genocidal policies, and under Stalin's leadership, it played a catalytic role as a liberator in the anti-Nazi coalition.[6] General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev denounced his predecessor as a dictator, deeming his "cult of personality" inconsistent with communist and Party ideology.[7, 8] The Soviet narrative of WWII shifted to emphasize the Communist Party's leadership in the war, portraying Soviet success despite, rather than because of Stalin. New emphasis was placed on cultivating the "Great Patriotic War of the Soviet People" narrative.[9] Under Leonid Brezhnev, however, Stalin was rehabilitated as a competent leader and manager of the war effort.[10] Finally, under Mikhail Gorbachev came *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*; the breakdown of the Soviet Union went hand in hand with a breakdown of its history.[11] Stalin's invasion of Poland in 1939, in which he exercised his ostensible "rights" under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, was brought under public scrutiny for the first time, as was the "start" to the GPW in 1941 – both were remembered as a catastrophe rather than moments of glory.[12] For the first time, public debates emerged on wartime repression, executions, blocking detachments, and penal battalions.[13] Public discourse also explored anti-Bolshevik sentiments, the controversial conduct of Soviet troops, the mass surrenders, and the initial positive reception of Nazi troops in certain Soviet territories.

Despite Ukraine's independence and the emergence of new Russian perspectives on WWII in the wake of *Perestroika*, the Kremlin remained committed to the narrative of Russo-Ukrainian "Slavic Unity."[14] In the volatile early post-Soviet landscape, Russia sought to maintain influence over Ukraine by shaping its relationship with Kyiv in ways that aligned with its broader vision for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and its own leadership within it. Considering itself the rightful successor to the USSR, the Kremlin thought itself the rightful leader of the CIS – the big "older brother."[15] At a minimum, Russia had envisioned the CIS to facilitate integrated structures within CIS states, including Ukraine; at a maximum, it viewed the CIS as the foundation to a new union in which it would assume a leading role.[16] As such, maintaining pressure on Kyiv was central to Moscow's strategy of repressing Ukraine's independence at this critical stage of post-Soviet identity formation. Russia aimed to:

> keep the Ukrainian problem within a definite framework, not allow it to get out of control, and maintain the basic elements of cooperation and friendly relations between the two peoples through a combination of policies of reconciliation, pressure, and wide-ranging use of international instruments, waiting until Kyiv outgrows its most acute period of striving for self-assertiveness.[17]

This strategy continued the Soviet tradition of maintaining Ukraine under Russia's control; it also set out to ensure that Ukraine would maintain a similar outlook on history to

II," *History and Memory* 29, no. 2 (2017): 98, https://doi.org/10.2979/histmemo.29.2.05.

[6] Edele, "Russia's History Wars," 96.

[7] Edele, "Russia's History Wars," 98.

[8] "Khrushchev's Secret Speech, 'On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences', Delivered at the Twentieth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union," *Wilson Center Digital Archive*, Feb 18, 2025, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/khrushchevs-secret-speech-cult-personality-and-its-consequences-delivered-twentieth-party.

[9] Edele, "Russia's History Wars," 98.

[10] Edele, "Russia's History Wars," 98.

[11] Edele, "Russia's History Wars," 98.

[12] Edele, "Russia's History Wars," 98.

[13] Edele, "Russia's History Wars," 98.

[14] Roman Solchanyk, *Ukraine and Russia: The Post-Soviet Transition* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 130.

[15] Maria Popova, and Oxana Shevel, *Russia and Ukraine: Entangled Histories, Diverging States* (Cambridge; Polity Press, 2024), 32.

[16] Popova and Shevel, *Russia and Ukraine*, 67.

[17] Solchanyk, *Ukraine and Russia*, 12.

Russia, which was key for Russia to uphold its shared identity narrative. Astrid Erll points out that a "central function of remembering the past within the framework of collective memory is identity formation."[18, 19] As such, retaining a shared memory with Ukraine in the Soviet transition was integral for Russia to preserve the identity paradigm of "Slavic Unity."

Ukrainian memory of WWII mirrored, in many respects, that of Russia's during the Soviet period and up until Crimea's annexation. Ukrainians celebrated Victory Day (on May 9), the Soviet holiday established under Brezhnev, and the Soviet-era framing of WWII as the "Great Patriotic War" – emphasizing the Soviet Union's role as the primary victor over Nazi Germany, the collective sacrifices of its people, and the glorification of the Red Army — was also prevalent.[20] Like in Russia, however, the aftermath of *Perestroika* came with a similar effort to incorporate a more nuanced view of WWII into the Ukrainian national narrative. This included recognising the experiences of diverse groups, such as victims of Soviet and Nazi atrocities, and revisiting the roles of nationalist groups and fighters.[21] In this remembrance, key differences in memory came to the fore. Many Ukrainians were painfully aware of the darker aspects of Soviet inter-war, wartime, and post-war policies, and for some, particularly in western Ukraine, this memory was still fresh.[22] Many remembered the Red Army not as liberators but as occupiers and had hoped Hitler would recognize Ukraine as an independent state. For this reason, the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) occupy a central, albeit contentious, place in Ukrainian WWII memory.

The war was devastating for Ukraine, as Nazi Germany's Operation Barbarossa turned Ukraine into a major battleground. While some initially viewed the German invasion as liberation from Soviet oppression,[23] Nazi brutality quickly shattered those hopes. Nazi Lebensraum policies led to mass exploitation and atrocities, best exemplified by the Babyn Yar massacre near Kyiv. The OUN, led by figures like Stepan Bandera, initially collaborated with Nazi Germany, seeing it as a potential ally against Soviet control.[24] However, when it became clear that Germany had no interest in supporting Ukrainian independence, the OUN and UPA turned against both Nazi and Soviet forces, waging a guerrilla war on multiple fronts.[25] Despite the violence these groups perpetrated in support of Nazi objectives, these groups came to symbolize the resistance and the enduring struggle for national sovereignty. Stepan Bandera, for instance, became regarded as a hero, rather than a terrorist. This reinterpretation took on legal and symbolic significance during Viktor Yushchenko's presidency (2005–2010), as he sought to officially recognize these groups as fighters for Ukrainian independence. However, this framing only became widely accepted after the Euromaidan revolution. By contrast, Russia continued to portray Bandera and the OUN-UPA as Nazi collaborators. These differences in memory were a stark departure from Russia's preferred readings of WWII history. Saying that this made Russia broadly upset would be an understatement, as this departure from shared memory directly impacted the Russo-Ukrainian "Slavic Unity" paradigm the Russian state had been trying to cultivate since *Perestroika*.

How Russian and Ukrainian Memory of WWII Changed

The Russian annexation of Crimea marked a decisive shift in how Russia and Ukraine remembered WWII, turning their once-shared narrative into a battleground for competing historical interpretations. In the leadup to this escalatory challenge to Ukrainian sovereignty, Ukrainians took to the streets of Kyiv to protest then President Yanukovych's decision to *not* sign a political association and free trade agreement with the European Union (EU) in favor of

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[18] Jade McGlynn, "Historical Framing of the Ukraine Crisis through the Great Patriotic War: Performativity, Cultural Consciousness and Shared Remembering," *Memory Studies* 13, no. 6 (2020): 1060, https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698018800740.

[19] Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 170.

[20] Popova and Shevel, *Russia and Ukraine: Entangled Histories, Diverging States,* 87.

[21] Popova and Shevel, *Russia and Ukraine: Entangled Histories, Diverging States,* 31.

[22] Popova and Shevel, *Russia and Ukraine: Entangled Histories, Diverging States,* 91-94.

[23] Popova and Shevel, *Russia and Ukraine: Entangled Histories, Diverging States,* 95.

[24] Edele, "Russia's History Wars," 91.

[25] Edele, "Russia's History Wars," 92.

closer alignment with Russia. What became known as Euromaidan, or Ukraine's "Revolution of Dignity," was not representative of the entirety of the Ukrainian people's sentiment towards Russia,[26] yet it made Putin realize that Ukraine was slipping from Russia's sphere of influence. It is important to note here that Russia never got over the "divorce syndrome" of Ukraine's independence following Soviet disintegration; unlike other former soviet states, Russia viewed Ukraine's separation as a tragedy.[27] The CIS, which was seen as the only way to "block and prevent the complete severance from Russia and Ukraine,"[28] had failed, as had Russia's efforts to cultivate "Slavic Unity" through shared memory – a failure made especially clear by the Revolution of Dignity, which underscored Ukraine's rejection of Russian influence. Putin's administration faced a choice: Either accept the conclusions of Euromaidan and learn to live with a truly independent Ukraine state, with the sovereign right to its own policies corresponding to its own interests; or accept Ukraine's bid for independence as a historical misunderstanding or temporary accident, that the only way to bring Kyiv back into Moscow's sphere of influence was by pursuing forceful measures.[29] Putin opted for the latter, responding to the Euromaidan demonstrations and the administration change that followed with the annexation of Crimea.

Putin coupled the annexation with a carefully crafted, multi-layered public relations campaign. D'Anieri notes that this campaign unfolded through four interconnected steps.[30] First, a disinformation campaign aimed to deny the involvement of Russian forces in Crimea and eastern Ukraine.[31] Though Russia's responsibility was painfully obvious to Ukraine and the international community alike, disinformation tactics obscured Russia's role in the conflict. Russia claimed no initial responsibility over the '*zelyonye chelovechki*' (or 'little green men') in unmarked uniforms. Second, a campaign to delegitimize the post-Maidan government in Kyiv by exaggerating the influence of 'fascists' in Ukraine's new administration.[32] This tied Ukraine's contemporary politics to WWII, framing the conflict, for the first time, as a continuation of the Soviet struggle against Nazism. The invocation of WWII served Putin in many ways beyond justifying military action. This laid a foundation to the third step in his information campaign, which he amplified through state-controlled media: An effort to push a nationalist narrative portraying Crimea and Eastern Ukraine as historically and rightfully Russian.[33] This was (naturally) followed by accusations of "Western hypocrisy" to deflect criticism and rationalize breaches of international law. For example, a specific comparison was drawn between the annexation of Crimea to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) support for Kosovo's independence.[34] This four-pronged information campaign presented internal enemies, the Ukraine nationalists as Nazi collaborators, and external enemies, NATO, the United States, and the EU as shadowy forces that endorsed Ukraine's fascist movement.

As discussed in part three of this essay, strong feelings towards WWII existed in Russia long before Putin weaponized them to justify "military intervention" in Ukraine. Victory Day continues to enjoy widespread popularity in Russia, and grassroots initiatives to commemorate the war continue to emerge organically "from below" before eventually receiving state support.[35] In many ways, Putin's invocation of WWII leverages pre-existing sentiments rather than constructs them. However, it is important to note that Putin's passing of the 2014 *Law Against Rehabilitation of Nazism*, or *Federal Law no. 128-FZ: On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation*[36] marks a decisive shift in how the

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[26] Popova and Shevel, *Russia and Ukraine,* 143.

[27] Solchanyk, *Ukraine and Russia*, 13

[28] Solchanyk, *Ukraine and Russia*, 13.

[29] Solchanyk, *Ukraine and Russia: The Post-Soviet Transition*, 12.

[30] Paul J. D'Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilized Divorce to Uncivil War*, 2nd ed.(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108657044, 235.

[31] D'Anieri, *Divorce to War*, 235.

[32] D'Anieri, *Divorce to War*, 235.

[33] D'Anieri, *Divorce to War*, 235.

[34] D'Anieri, *Divorce to War*, 236.

[35] Edele, "Russia's History Wars," 107.

[36] Government of Russia, *Federal Law No. 128-FZ of 5 May 2014 - On Changes to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation*. No. 128-FZ, Moscow: Government of Russia, 2014. https://melaproject.org/sites/default/files/2019-07/Federal%20Law%20No.%20128-

country views its history,[37] criminalizing dissenting views on the Soviet past and shielding the
state's portrayal of Ukraine as Nazi from public scrutiny. To those unfamiliar with Ukraine's
historic struggle for independence, the signing of this memory law, much like the annexation of
Crimea, appears to be an ad hoc response of a government increasingly feeling threatened by
both internal and external enemies. The law shows, however, that history has become a key
ideological battleground in Putin's "preventive counterrevolution."[38] While critical historians
within Russia have long advocated for a nuanced and self-critical historical consciousness to
foster democratization,[39] the memory law leaves Putin unchallenged in his capacity to
champion a triumphalist and monolithic narrative of WWII, one that reinforces his conception
of "sovereign democracy" as the unofficial state ideology.

Putin's invocation of WWII, and his method of invocation, in the Russo-Ukraine
conflict serves multiple functions. Chief among them is the use of a "victory over Nazism"
sentiment as a tool to rally domestic support for military action. Jade McGlynn rightly points
out that Russian state media's use of historical framing significantly decreased following
Crimea's annexation, but that the decrease was accompanied by a heightened focus on victory
and cultural consciousness facilitated through Victory Day celebrations.[40] This effectively
functioned as a "happy ending" to the annexation, conveying a sense of achievement and
highlighting Putin's obsession with pushing a "Russian victory" narrative. Andrew Wilson
neatly describes the phenomenon as '*pobedobesie'*, or 'victory madness'.[41] The narrative of
victory achieved through the suffering of the Soviet people was a cornerstone of Soviet
leadership that Putin has since revived. Victory is the Soviet "eternal narrative",[42] if you will,
because like the Soviet Union, Russia has constructed eternal enemies. Russian historians and
political figures like Vladimir Medinsky helped in retooling the Soviet narrative of Nazism: the
Nazis tried to destroy the Soviet Union; therefore, Nazism was everything anti-Soviet, and now
it is everything anti-Russian.[43] This effectively puts Ukraine at the centre of the "anti-Russia"
project.[44] Russian anthropologist Serguei Oushakine importantly describes this portrayal of
Russian wartime suffering as "a performative rather than a descriptive device," functioning as
"a tool with which to stir the memory of our feelings."[45] This rhetorical strategy not only
reinforces collective identity but also underscores the continuity between Soviet and modern
Russian uses of historical memory to legitimize state power. This ethos has become central to
Russia's portrayal of itself as a besieged yet righteous power, further bolstering Putin's image
as a strong paternal leader reminiscent of Stalin.[46] The narrative also appeals to Soviet
nostalgia, a potent force in Russian society. The Levada Center published a poll in 2020
suggesting that up to 75% of Russians view the Soviet Union as the pinnacle of their country's
history.[47] Of course, it is not clear how this figure was arrived at, but projecting this sentiment
allows Putin to portray his regime as a continuation of Soviet-era strength, stability, and

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FZ%20of%205%20May%202014%20-
%20On%20Changes%20to%20Certain%20Legislative%20Acts%20of%20the%20Russian%20Federat
ion%20.pdf.

[37] Edele, "Russia's History Wars," 108.

[38] Edele, "Russia's History Wars," 93.

[39] Edele, "Russia's History Wars," 109.

[40] McGlynn, "Historical Framing," 1062.

[41] Andrew Wilson, *Political Technology: The Globalisation of Political Manipulation* (Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 2023), 92.

[42] Wilson, *Political Technology*, 92.

[43] Wilson, *Political Technology*, 92.

[44] Wilson, *Political Technology*, 92.

[45] Oushakine, Serguei Alex. *The Patriotism of Despair: Nation, War, and Loss in Russia*. 1st ed.
Cornell University Press, 2009. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt7z6nz. 6.

[46] Wood, Elizabeth. "Performing Memory: Vladimir Putin and the Celebration of WWII in Russia,"*The
Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 38, no. 2 (2011): 172-200. https://doi.org/10.1163/187633211X591175.
XX.

[47] Andrei Nikerichev, "75% of Russians Say Soviet Era Was 'Greatest Time' in Country's History –
Poll," The Moscow Times, Sanoma News, March 24, 2020,
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/03/24/75-of-russians-say-soviet-era-was-greatest-time-in-
countrys-history-poll-a69735.

'victory'.

How differing WWII Memory has Contributed to the Ongoing Conflict

   Somers and Gibson's definition of narratives – as relational to other narratives, as causally emploted, selectively appropriated, and temporal – helps answer the central question this essay poses, namely: *How have differing WWII memory politics in Ukraine and Russia contributed to ongoing conflict?* The relational and causal components of Somers and Gibson's definition of narratives highlight how meanings of historical events emerge through interconnections. Russian historical memory since 2014 has been grounded in its portrayal of the Great Patriotic War, clashing with Ukrainian narratives emphasising national resistance and independence. Moscow's official stance frames WWII as a unifying struggle that legitimized Soviet authority over its territories, including Ukraine. Conversely, Ukraine contests this by presenting narratives of the OUN and the UPA as part of a broader anti-Soviet resistance. Meanwhile, Russian political rhetoric and media persist in portraying these groups as Nazi collaborators. In response to such narratives and to further distance Ukraine from Soviet legacies, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy introduced legislation in May 2023, replacing the Soviet-style Victory Day celebrations with May 8 as the Day of Remembrance and Victory over Nazism.[48] This move aligned Ukraine's historical memory with European practices and reclaimed WWII as a cornerstone of Ukraine's national story, rather than a fragment of a shared Soviet legacy. At the same time, Ukraine's official stance on the OUN-UPA, and its commemoration of WWII directly fuels Russia's propaganda narrative that frames Ukraine as a failed state ruled by 'fascists'. The relational nature of these narratives underscores their mutual exclusivity: Russian glorification of Soviet heroism inherently denies Ukrainian claims of independence efforts during this era. This antagonistic dynamic reveals how these narratives are both causal and relational, and how they serve as tools for shaping historical and political identity.

   Selective appropriation involves the deliberate inclusion or omission of historical events to construct favorable narratives, a strategy evident in both Russia and Ukraine's WWII histories. Vladimir Putin's historical positivism emphasizes Soviet heroism and "Slavic Unity" while reframing inconvenient truths, such as the Soviet-Nazi pact or wartime repression. This approach reinforces Russian nationalism and delegitimizes dissenting views while casting Ukraine's independence efforts as treachery. Conversely, Ukraine selectively elevates the roles of the OUN, UPA, and Stepan Bandera, celebrating their fight for independence while downplaying their collaboration with Nazi forces and associated atrocities. For Ukraine, this selective lens is not a historical revision but a response to Russia's monopolization of WWII memory. Emphasising nationalist resistance serves as a counter-narrative that legitimizes its sovereignty and aligns its identity with Western democratic values, despite the controversies surrounding these historical groups and figures.

   Temporality captures how narratives shift over time, revealing the evolving interpretations of WWII in Russia and Ukraine since 2014. For Putin, the annexation of Crimea and the raging war in Eastern Ukraine marked a return to Soviet-style diplomacy, accompanied by a reframing of WWII as a moral justification for contemporary Russian policies. Putin's rhetoric increasingly equates Russia's actions with the Soviet Union's fight against fascism, portraying Ukraine and its Western allies as existential threats. In Ukraine, the Euromaidan revolution catalyzed a re-evaluation of its historical memory, with an emphasis on independence struggles rather than Soviet victimhood. This shift aligned Ukraine's narrative with its aspirations for integration into the European Union and NATO states while challenging Russia's hegemonic account of WWII. This reorientation not only reinforced national unity in the face of Russian aggression but also signaled a deeper ideological break with Moscow, further solidifying Ukraine's pivot toward the West. In response, Russia intensified its own revisionist history, weaponizing WWII memory to justify its actions and delegitimize Ukraine's sovereignty, a strategy that underscores its broader geopolitical ambitions to maintain influence over the post-Soviet space.

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[48] Nicolas Camut, "Zelensky Moves to Change Ukraine's WWII Victory Day in Jab at Russia," Politico Europe, Axel Springer SE, May 8 2023, https://www.politico.eu/article/volodymyr-zelenskyy-change-ukraines-victory-day-wwii-russia/.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine cannot be fully understood without examining the evolution and politicization of WWII memory. Russia's narrative of the GPW functions as a performative tool to rally domestic support, to delegitimize Ukraine's sovereignty, and to frame its military actions as a continuation of the Soviet struggle against fascism. By contrast, Ukraine's interpretation of WWII emphasizes its long-standing resistance to external domination, situating its independence movement within a broader historical context.

By applying Somers and Gibson's framing of narratives, this paper demonstrated that the divergent memories of WWII are not just reflections of past events but are active instruments shaping the present conflict. The selective appropriation of history underscores the incompatibility of the two nations' narratives: while Russia clings to Soviet-era heroism, unity, and "victory," Ukraine seeks to forge a distinct identity aligned with Western democratic values. Temporality reveals that these narratives have evolved dynamically, reflecting and reinforcing the respective political and cultural priorities of each state. Ultimately, the interplay between these competing memories has not only exacerbated tensions but also entrenched ideological divides, making WWII memory politics a central battleground in the struggle over Ukrainian sovereignty and identity.

The role of WWII memory in shaping Russian and Ukrainian national identities, particularly in the context of Russia's struggle to define a collective identity beyond the state, presents avenues for future research. In Putin's Russia, WWII serves as a primary marker of Russianness, filling the ideological void left by the Soviet collapse and reinforcing a historical continuity that ties national pride to state-led narratives. Even among critics of the regime, alternative forms of identity remain constrained by the overwhelming presence of state-controlled historical discourse. In contrast, Ukraine's collective memory is more decentralized, with WWII functioning as one component of a broader national narrative. However, tensions remain regarding the nationalist interpretations of WWII, which do not always align with the European values that Ukraine aspires to embrace. Additionally, future research should further interrogate the concept of "politics of memory" itself – does it always require state intervention, or can non-state actors meaningfully shape historical narratives? While Ukraine's Institute of National Remembrance plays a role in decommunization policies, its influence on historical scholarship and education is limited compared to the centralized control exercised by the Russian government. Examining the institutional mechanisms behind memory politics in both countries could provide deeper insights into how history is mobilized to serve contemporary political agendas.

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Spanish Early Modern Poverty and Debt: How Conservative Feudal Policies and Mismanaged Finances Impoverished Early Modern Spain

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Abstract: Spain's so-called 'Golden Age,' spanning from 1500s-1700s is commonly misappropriated as a period of wealth and affluence. However, wealth extracted from the Americas—particularly silver—failed to enrich the Spanish nation as commonly believed, largely due to the Spanish government's inability to reinvest vast silver profits into productive industries. The influx of American silver and the economic disparity within Spanish society also highlights significant economic mismanagement, societal inequality, and an outdated feudal framework that hindered Spain's growth. Through an analysis of Spain's economic policies, it becomes evident that small elite aristocracies reaped the benefits of wealth from both silver and wool exports, while most peasants and labourers remained impoverished. Furthermore, Spain's participation in costly wars, such as the Thirty Years' War, further strained its finances, and depopulated the Peninsula, leading to repeated bankruptcies and a lack of fiscal control. This essay contends that Spain's medieval feudal system, perpetuated by the legacy of the Reconquista, created an economically repressive and socially stratified society, which exacerbated poverty despite vast colonial wealth. Spain's economic difficulties during its 'Golden Age' were not the result of inevitable decline, but rather the outcome of a failure to adapt to emerging economic structures and global markets, ultimately leaving much of the population impoverished and the nation.

Keywords: Mercantile-Economics, Spain, Colonialism, Conservatism, Poverty

Introduction

Historian Henry Kamen cynically claimed that "seldom [have historians] been more in accord than over the decline of Spain," suggesting that there is a rare consensus that Spain reached some great point from which to decline.[1] Spanish history is often viewed as though Spain experienced a 'golden age' during the early modern period (1500s – 1700s), wherein gold and silver from the Americas funded a global mercantile empire. However, Kamen reveals that Spain's great rise was fraught with impoverishment and limited economic growth. In reality, Spain was devastated by the violent era of the *Reconquista* (translates to the 'reconquest'), ruled by a form of medieval feudalism, and was in a poor position to transition into the emerging capitalist market. Even in its 'golden age,' poverty and emptiness were frequent throughout Spain, to the point that contemporary travellers and writers noted the desolation.

Historian John Lynch, echoes Kamen quoting Francesco Guicciardini, an envoy of Florence to Ferdinand of Aragon in the spring of 1512 who called Spain an "utter deserted country, where there is not a lodging to be found nor a tree to be seen, only vast stretches of

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[1] Henry Kamen, "The Decline of Spain: A Historical Myth?", *Past and Present* 81, no. 1 (1978): 24, https://www.jstor.org/stable/650362.

rosemary and heather, for this arid land." Lynch asserted that "much of Spain was, indeed, deserted and if its land was ill-cultivated it was partly because it was under-populated" noting also that "it was no coincident that Don Quixote and Sancho travelled most of the time in solitude along deserted routes."[2]

How did Spanish society tolerate so much poverty in the early modern period, given the wealth of colonies? One answer appears from how Spain entered the early modern period with powerful conservative institutions which perpetuated oppressive social and political structures. This answer suggests that Spanish society entered the early modern period retrogressively compared to other societies in Europe. Analyzing how the Spanish medieval framework repressed Spanish peasants, and how its mismanagement and over-exportation of American silver and Spanish wool served to impoverish Spanish society, provides an economic explanation for poverty in the Spanish Empire amidst their 'golden age.'

Historical Background

The medieval period of early modern Spain began when Umayyad Muslims invaded the Iberian Peninsula in 711 CE. This invasion marked the beginning of a territorial conflict between Muslims and Christians, ending in 1492 with the Spanish *Reconquista* of the peninsula. The experience of 800 years of religious war and discrimination shaped Spanish attitudes of the early modern period (1500s-1800s).[3] Daniel Peralías Oto and Diego Romero-Ávila have studied this period to understand the effects of the *Reconquista* on Spain's history to the present day. Oto and Ávila argue that the *Reconquista* happened quickly once the Christians had the upper hand over the Muslims. The speed by which the *Reconquista* occurred led to "imperfect colonization," or a disproportionate and racially discriminatory expansion of the area creating an "inegalitarian society with negative consequences for long-term economic development."[4] The rapid rate of the *Reconquista* contributed to the cost of human capital in the region; it continued to plague Spain into the early modern period. In 1609, 120,000 *Moriscos* (Muslims in Spain) were expelled from Valencia alone. These expulsions were frequent in the early modern era, as well as in the *Reconquista*.[5] Violence and expulsions through a proto-colonial structure had long-term economic effects on the region because of the displacement of populations, loss of manpower, and the formation of an "inegalitarian society.

Structure of Spanish Society

Spanish society entered the early modern period with an antiquated social framework. In the thirteenth-century, the Kingdoms of Aragon and Castile were governed by a repressive feudal system that originated in the late Middle Ages called the *seigneurial*.[6] This system was

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[2] John Lynch, *Spain under the Habsburgs Volume I: Empire and Absolutism 1516-1598* (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 101. Lynch cites a migration of population from the north to the south may have been an important factor in this poverty as Jews and *Moriscos* were forcefully emigrated and created a vacuum, as well as the migration to America. See also Henry Kamen, "The Decline of Spain: A Historical Myth?", 29, who cites James Lockhart and Enrique Otte, two sixteenth-century Spaniards who left Spain saying, "that wretched country, because it is only for people who have a lot of money… that poverty and need which people suffer in Spain." Kamen also cited Francesco Guicciardini who said that "poverty is great here, and I believe it is due not so much to the quality of the country as to the nature of the Spaniards."

[3] Daniel Peralías Oto, and Diego Romero-Ávila, "The Economic Consequences of the Spanish Reconquest: The Long-Term Effects of Medieval Conquest and Colonization," *Journal of Economic Growth* 21, no. 4 (December 2016): 410, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10887-016-9132-9.

[4] Oto, and Ávila, "The Economic Consequences of the Spanish Reconquest," 410.

[5] Oto, and Ávila, "The Economic Consequences of the Spanish Reconquest," 411.

[6] Paul H. Freedman, *The Origins of Peasant Servitude in Medieval Catalonia* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 211-212.

akin to ancient slavery, from which lords exploited serfs living on their land to produce a profit.[7] Spain did not deconstruct this feudal framework in the early modern era, creating social and economic complications.[8] The reliance of peasants and serfs on local authorities for aid and support led to the decentralization of Spanish society in the late fourteenth-century.[9]

Despite the Spanish Monarchy's attempts to unify the realm, Spain remained decentralized throughout the early modern period. In 1476, "Spain destroyed feudal castles, declared private wars illegal, and [displaced] frontier governors."[10] In 1581, Spain attempted to abolish *confraternal* hospitals in major cities to form a centralized general hospital,[11] and in 1532 the crown abolished *encomiendas* and the use of "Indian slavery" in America to promote self-sufficient colonies.[12] However, these efforts did little to quell the powerful aristocracy and mitigate the capacity of regional groups in enforcing their authority in local communities. For instance, *confraternities* re-emerged in 1592 because the Cortes of Madrid determined that "the reduction of hospitals had not been useful and asked that consolidated hospitals be returned to their previous state."[13]

Centralized hospitals could not afford to treat the influx of patients amidst several deadly epidemics, exposing a weakness in the Spanish state. Likewise, settlers in the colonies continued to aspire to live a life "free of menial work" and continued to find other methods to outsource labour, such as African slavery, defeating the crown's attempts to entice Spanish settlers to farm.[14] While the extent to which Spain was successful in centralising their state is difficult to assert, this evidence suggests that, unlike other contemporary nations, Spain struggled to transition into a modern nation-state. Meanwhile, Spain's decentralized structure was exploited for profit by a small, powerful elite group at the detriment of the common people.

The *Mestas*, a tiny but powerful elite group, benefited tremendously from Spain's decentralization in the sixteenth-century. The *Mestas* controlled a sheep monopoly, which was Spain's primary export before silver,[15] and despite making up only 2-3% of the Spanish

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[7] Freedman, *The Origins of Peasant Servitude in Medieval Catalonia*, 6. Paul Freedman uses a definition of a *seigneurial* system from French historian, Marc Bloch, which is "a system of lordship by which nobles exercised formally public powers of a military, political and fiscal nature… comprised substantially more than a collection of legal customs. It was an organization of productive activity." Freedman also writes that "lords profited from the end of ancient slavery by maintaining a regime of economic exploitation and of semi-liberty."

[8] Daniel Nemser, "Introduction: Iberian Empire and the History of Capitalism," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 19, no. 2 (2019): 2, https://doi.org/10.1353/jem.2019.0017. Nemser is careful to mention that there is a misinforming myth from the period known as "Black Legends" which were stories perpetuated by the British and the French that characterized the Spanish as "superstitious, backward, greedy, and cruel" to affirm their superiority. Nonetheless, Nemser is arguing that Latin America was more capitalistic than historians assume, he does not argue that Spain entered into a capitalistic structure, rather that Spain was able to integrate its feudal structure within the newly formed capitalist structure of the north-western European states.

[9] Mar Grau-Satorras, Iago Otero, Erik Gómez-Baggethun, and Victoria Reyes-García, "Prudent Peasantries: Multilevel Adaptation to Drought in Early Modern Spain (1600-1715)," *Environment and History* 27, no. 1 (February 1, 2021): 15, 24, https://doi.org/10.3197/096734019x15463432086964.

[10] Lynch, *Spain Under the Habsburgs Volume I*, 5.

[11] Maureen M Flynn, "Charitable Ritual in Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 16, no. 3 (1985): 345, https://doi.org/10.2307/2540221.

[12] Edward Cavanagh, and Lorenzo Veracini, ed., "Settler Colonialism in New Spain and the Early Mexican Republic," In *The Routledge Handbook of the History of Settler Colonialism*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 110.

[13] Flynn, "Charitable Ritual in Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain," 347.

[14] Cavanagh, and Veracini, ed., "Settler Colonialism in New Spain and the Early Mexican Republic," 110.

[15] Jaime Vicens Vives, "The Economies of Catalonia and Castile," In *Spain in the Fifteenth Century 1369-1516: Essays and Extracts by Historians of Spain*, by Roger Highfield, 31–56, (New

population, they controlled 97% of the land (see Figure 1).[16] With this tremendous wealth, the *Mestas* could choose whether to pay taxes and would receive benefits if they did.[17] Spanish policies provided protections and benefits to this group, such as the Land Lease Law of 1501, which prevented pasturage from being converted to tillage to protect the sheep routes. This policy contributed to the increasing cost of living as peasants could not grow sufficient food crops, resulting in shortages and a reliance on grain imports.[18] While inflation increased the cost of living throughout the sixteenth-century, wages did not rise until 1580 further impoverishing the population.[19]

Figure 1. Migratory sheep routes and some Mesta land ownership in sixteenth-century Spain, Found in Jaime Vicens Vives, "The Economies of Catalonia and Castile," In Spain in the Fifteenth Century: Essays and Extracts by Historians of Spain, 39.

Despite making up 95 percent of the population, tenant-farming peasants remained exceptionally poor, and buying power was reduced dramatically with the introduction of imported silver and gold. Half of Spain's national income went to the clergy, who at most numbered 100,000.[20] By 1530, the vast quantity of silver imports had rippling effects on the economy (see Figure 2).[21] Between 1501 and 1550, prices for goods doubled, and doubled again between 1551 and 1600.[22] Increasing prices of goods harmed Spanish manufacturing, which failed to compete with the market as other nations produced goods at lower prices.[23]

York: Harper & Row, 1972): 43. See also Andrea Finkelstein, *The Grammar of Profit: The Price Revolution in Intellectual Context*, (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 25-27.

[16] Finkelstein, *The Grammar of Profit,* 27.

[17] Vives, "The Economies of Catalonia and Castile," 39-40. See also, David Hacket Fischer, *The Great Wave: Price Revolutions and the Rhythm of History,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 23.

[18] Finkelstein, *The Grammar of Profit,* 26.

[19] Finkelstein, *The Grammar of Profit,* 33.

[20] Finkelstein, *The Grammar of Profit,* 188.

[21] Lynch, *Spain Under the Habsburgs Volume I,* 121

[22] Finkelstein, *The Grammar of Profit,* 33.

[23] Lynch, *Spain Under the Habsburgs Volume I,* 107.

Furthermore, agriculture prices rose faster than non-agriculture prices, creating starvation-like scenarios for many Spaniards. Yet, these conditions hardly affected the smaller demographic of wealthy landowners because they used their lands to profit from inflation by producing wool and cattle or increasing tenant rent.[24] This security inequality was coupled with questionable economic decisions made by the Spanish government to agitate poverty further.

GOLD AND SILVER

Period	Silver percentage by weight	Gold percentage by weight	Period	Silver percentage by weight	Gold percentage by weight
1521–1530	2.949	97.051	1591–1600	99.287	.713
1531–1540	89.602	10.398	1601–1610	99.466	.534
1541–1550	87.677	12.323	1611–1620	99.598	.402
1551–1560	87.672	12.328	1621–1630	99.819	.181
1561–1570	98.803	1.197	1631–1640	99.911	.089
1571–1580	99.164	.836	1641–1650	99.848	.152
1581–1590	99.428	.572	1651–1660	99.890	.110

Figure 2 Gold and silver imports in early modern Spain. Found in, Earl J. Hamilton, "Imports of American Gold and Silver Into Spain, 1503-1660," The Quarterly Journal of Economics 43, no. 3 (May 1929): 468.

Economic Policies amid War and Desolation

The Spanish Cortes enacted problematic legislation to combat the growing inflation in Spain, which led to tremendous debt and an unstable surplus. For instance, by 23 April 1552, the Cortes was importing cloth at the same value as the wool Spain was exporting, so on 25 May 1552, the Cortes prohibited goods made from wool, silk, and leather to anywhere but the colonies. However, the Cortes later admitted that this caused an economic depression and unemployment and returned to exporting these commodities in 1555.[25] Spain had little room to expand its market in the early modern period. Since Spain had priced itself out of the manufacturing market, it became a primary resource exporter. While wool and silver were quite profitable, Spain poorly administered the trade of these resources and did not reinvest the immense profit from the silver mines into the Spanish economy, which contributed to inflation.[26]

Eventually, Spain became too dependent on foreign markets. It was unable to develop a closed market in which it sold manufactured goods to its colonies in exchange for American resources as it became reliant on buying these goods from other countries.[27] Spain became a repository for silver that other nations used to produce wealth and prosperity. Often, great sums of wealth arrived in underdeveloped metropolises like Sevilla, although they were ill-equipped to make up the balance of trade and became dependent on the colonial market.[28] Furthermore,

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[24] Lynch, *Spain Under the Habsburgs Volume I,* 104.

[25] Lynch, *Spain Under the Habsburgs Volume I,* 120.

[26] Earl J Hamilton, "Imports of American Gold and Silver into Spain, 1503-1660," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 43, no. 3 (May 1929): 472, https://doi.org/10.2307/1885920. Hamilton suggests that imports of gold and silver created the "illusion of prosperity" while being terribly mismanaged by the crown.

[27] Kamen, "The Decline of Spain: A Historical Myth?", 42.

[28] Kamen, "The Decline of Spain: A Historical Myth?", 42. See also Stanley J Stein, and Barbara H. Stein, *Silver, Trade, and War: Spain and America in the Making of Early Modern Europe*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 42. Stein comments that silver became seen as a harvest-able crop, like wool.

Spain produced wool, sold it to the lowlands, and bought back Flemish textiles at a loss.[29] However, Spain's problems went beyond poor market conditions; the transportation of silver proved costly, and the decision to direct much of the silver toward war proved to be a serious pitfall.

Despite treasures from the colonies lining the Spanish coffers, Spain declared bankruptcy and defaulted on its debt payments in 1557, 1575, and 1596.[30] For Spain to transport vast amounts of silver safely across the Atlantic, it needed to construct costly ships to ward off pirates and privateers. Thus, the Spanish government mortgaged an annual treasure fleet at ruinous interest rates while waiting for silver to arrive from the colonies. By 1534, a significant part of Spanish revenue was spent paying off the out-of-control interest on public debt.[31] The Spanish treasury was further agitated by Spanish participation in the Thirty Years' War of the early seventeenth-century.[32] Given that Spain declared bankruptcy just prior to the conflicts' outbreak, fighting a costly war proved detrimental to its financial stability, indicated by the reduction of Spanish imports of silver from previous years into the seventeenth-century (see Figure 3).[33]
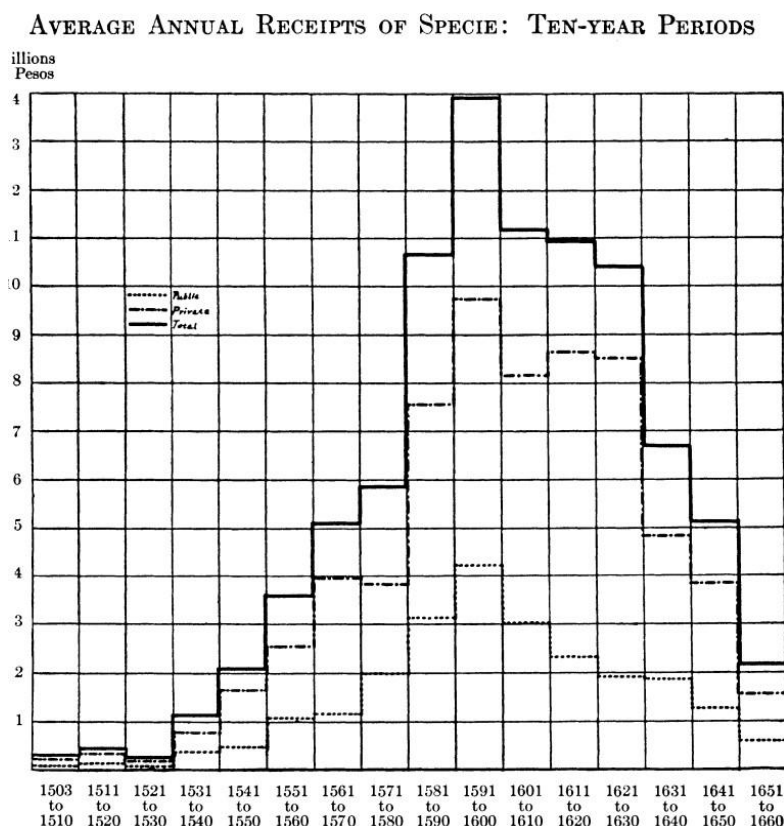

Figure 3 Receipts of silver coins in Spain. The image is slightly cut off, the top left says "millions," and the top unit is 14. Found in, Earl J. Hamilton, "Imports of American Gold and Silver Into Spain, 1503-1660," The Quarterly Journal of Economics 43, no. 3 (May 1929): 465.

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[29] Stanley J Stein, and Barbara H. Stein, *Silver, Trade, and War: Spain and America in the Making of Early Modern Europe*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 42.

[30] Finkelstein, *The Grammar of Profit,* 27.

[31] David Hackett Fischer, *The Great Wave: Price Revolutions and the Rhythm of History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 23.

[32] Stein, and Stein, *Silver, Trade, and War: Spain and America in the Making of Early Modern Europe*, , 41.

[33] Earl J. Hamilton, "Imports of American Gold and Silver Into Spain, 1503-1660," 465.

Impacts on the Quality of Life

Participation in the Thirty Years' War was costly for Spain, mainly due to the loss of manpower and the vast spending of silver. Between 1649 and 1654, the war cost Spain 66,865,000 ducats, or nearly 26 million kilograms of silver.[34] The war was so costly that in July 1621, months following the inauguration of King Phillip IV, the Spanish council of finance had to inform the king that he was beginning his rule with an "empty treasury."[35] Furthermore, Spain also lost a lot of manpower, as many Spaniards found "an early death" in Flanders, and emigration to the colonies continued.[36]

Spanish population growth trailed behind other European powers in the early modern era, which may be correlated with the economic, social, and political conditions. Alexander V Avakov compiled data from civilization over a period of 1,000 years, and his analysis reveals notable trends in Spanish population growth. In the sixteenth-century, Spain had a population of 6,800,000 inhabitants,[37] while in the seventeenth-century, Spain's population only rose to 8,770,000 inhabitants.[38] Comparing this to Britain, which had a population of 3,681,000 in the 1500s[39] to 7,997,000 in the 1700s.[40] Spain added 1,970,000 people to their population between 1500 and 1700, while Britain added 4,316,000 in the same period.[41] This data reveals how war, inflation, and social inequality affected population growth, suggesting that the quality of life in Spain in the early modern period was lower than in surrounding nations.

As the data, alongside the political and economic context, reveals, the quality of life for Spanish commoners in the early modern period was poor, and colonization to the Americas intensified the severity of Spanish poverty. Emigrants could not afford to live in "that wretched country because it is only for people who have a lot of money."[42] Money was a big determiner of one's social status; Spain had no legally defined third estate but simply a mass of six million people defined by their exclusion from the aristocracy. Thus, if any peasant were to accumulate a large sum of money, they would be able to, in theory, live nobly in Spain.[43] However, John Lynch is cynical about that possibility saying:

> "the vast majority of Spaniards, peasants in the fields, labourers in the towns, had no hope of advancement, only the fear that they might fall even lower, into that underworld of Spanish

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[34] Kamen, "The Decline of Spain: A Historical Myth?", 30. Earl J. Hamilton, notes in "Monetary Inflation in Castile, 1598-1660," 196, that the ducat was a unit of account representing 375 maravedis. François R. Velde and Warren E. Weber, noted in "Fiat Money in 17th Century Castile," 1, that 34 maravedis represented 35.24 grams of silver. Therefore, accounting for the value of a ducat, the war would have cost 25,074,000,000 maravedis.

[35] John Lynch, *Spain under the Habsburgs Volume II Spain and America 1598-1700*, (Oxford: B. Blackwell), 196, 90-91.

[36] Kamen, "The Decline of Spain: A Historical Myth?", 30.

[37] Alexander V Avakov, *Two Thousand Years of Economic Statistics: World Population, GDP and PPP*, (New York: Algora Publishing, 2010), 19.

[38] Avakov, *Two Thousand Years of Economic Statistics,* 37.

[39] Avakov, *Two Thousand Years of Economic Statistics,* 19.

[40] Avakov, *Two Thousand Years of Economic Statistics,* 37.

[41] Avakov, *Two Thousand Years of Economic Statistics,* 37. Avakov created a measure for population growth between periods, the higher the number represents a higher rate of population growth. Avakov determined that Spain had a measure of 0.06 population growth between 1600 and 1700 (Avakov, 126), while Britain had a significantly higher 0.33 population growth during this period (Avakov, 132a). Spain trailed behind most powerful European regions such as Belgium: 0.22 (Avakov, 39), France: 0.15 (Avakov, 124), and Russia: 0.29 (Avakov, 132a). A notable standout from these numbers is Germany, who experienced a marginal population decline (Avakov, 128), likely due in part to the Thirty Years' War which devastated the land. Population trends reveal that Spain was struggling to keep up with the population trends of other European countries throughout the early modern period.

[42] Kamen, "The Decline of Spain: A Historical Myth?", 29. Kamen is quoting Francesco Guicciardini from 1512.

[43] Lynch, *Spain Under the Habsburgs Volume II*, 148.

society populated by vagabonds, beggars, and bandits, the victims of widespread unemployment.[44]

Lynch illustrates the insecurity that Spaniards had to live with because of the changing economic climate of the colonial market. The cost of living had increased exponentially due to runaway inflation, and wages did not increase until the 1580s.[45] Contemporary Spaniards, such as Martin de Azpilcueta in 1556, noticed the changes and observed how a flood of silver created undesirable market conditions.[46] The lower classes knew that their work was degrading within Spanish society, in the absence of a middle class they only had the aristocracy to compare themselves to.[47] Peasants were significantly burdened by regressive tax policies which took away any profit that they might have otherwise acquired, leading to a mass exodus of what few middle-class families existed in cities, causing greater growing unemployment, and forcing many to join a religious order or the military.[48]

In the absence of a middle class, Spanish society was polarized between a ruling, minuscule upper-class and a mass of subservient lower-class peasants; the introduction of American silver in the Spanish economy widened this divide.[49] Furthermore, discriminatory expulsions of minority groups such as Jews and Moors also contributed to the disconnect.[50] The lack of a middle-class trapped the lower classes to work in the destitute fields because cities had little prospect.[51] Spaniards had few opportunities and were under unequal pressure to support the Spanish crown. Meanwhile, as the lower classes were buckling under the weight of economic forces, the aristocracy enjoyed many benefits. For example, social classes, such as the *Hidalgos*, avoided paying certain taxes.[52] Thus, during Spain's 'golden age' in the early modern period, the country's inegalitarian society was fraught with debt, poverty, starvation, and dwindling population growth.

Conclusion

The view that Spain entered a 'golden age' in the early modern period ignores the varying degrees of poverty that prevailed in Iberia. Following the *Reconquista*, Spanish society was organized in a deeply feudal structure, and the deaths and expulsions of peoples left the peninsula barren. Despite copious amounts of silver flooding the vaults of the Spanish palace, much of that money was poorly managed and failed to create a meaningful profit for Spain. The colonies were a double-edged sword, bringing Spain unimaginable wealth while trapping it in debt, inflation, and reliance on the manufacturing of other nations. Few Spaniards benefited from the influx of American silver; those who did were rich aristocrats who used their lands to produce wealth amidst uncontrolled inflation. However, the reality was starkly grim for the vast majority of Spaniards. With the disappearance of the middle class, large masses of the lower-class were forced to retreat into the countryside to work for the aristocracy, reinforcing feudal social structures.

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[44] Lynch, *Spain Under the Habsburgs Volume II,* 152.

[45] Finkelstein, *The Grammar of Profit,* 33.

[46] Fischer, *The Great Wave: Price Revolutions and the Rhythm of History,* 23l. The full quote is "in Spain, in times when money was scarcer, saleable goods and labor were given for very much less than after the discovery of the Indies, which flooded the country with gold and silver."

[47] Lynch, *Spain Under the Habsburgs Volume I,* 108.

[48] Lynch, *Spain Under the Habsburg Volume Is,* 108. On page 15, Lynch expands on how anti-Jewish policy hurt the middle class in Spain. Jewish people made up a vital part of the community, holding key positions as financiers, artisans, and officials, Jews brought capital into the country. However, in 1492, Spain decided to expel an estimated 150,000 Jews, leaving a huge gap in the middle class of Spain.

[49] Finkelstein, *The Grammar of Profit,* 33.

[50] Lynch, *Spain Under the Habsburgs Volume I,* 15.

[51] Lynch, *Spain Under the Habsburgs Volume I,* 108.

[52] Fischer, *The Great Wave: Price Revolutions and the Rhythm of History,* 23.

Spanish society was heavily inegalitarian during the early modern period. John Lynch was precise in saying that "the Spanish peasants were hopeless victims of the *seigneurial*society, rigid in its structure and undeviating in its ideals."[53] Thus, Spain's entrance into the early modern period was retroactive and disorganized; the great wealth of American silver was poorly managed and Spanish society was trapped under archaic feudal structures. Despite Spain's vast empire and its great influx of wealth, its economic, political, and social structure prevented it from adopting an early modern capitalist system. The Spanish Empire did not so much experience a 'decline' as it instead struggled to maintain and administer a tremendous wealth of valuable primary resources. Spain's economic turmoil provides an insight into how the Spanish economy regressively settled into the modern period and exhibits how conservative *Reconquista* era social policies rooted themselves and negatively impacted the framework of early modern Spanish society.

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[53] Lynch, *Spain Under the Habsburgs Volume II,* 153.

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Between Ideology and Survival: Albanian Foreign Policy under Hoxha

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Abstract: Albania's Cold War foreign policy under Enver Hoxha offers a unique case study of a small nation navigating the bipolar global order. Unlike many states that aligned with superpowers based primarily on pragmatic considerations, such as economic and military aid, Albania's foreign policy decisions were driven by a complex interplay of ideological rigidity and survival. This paper examines Albania's shifting alliances—first with the Soviet Union, then with China, and finally, its retreat into isolation—to explore the motivations and consequences of these decisions. Initially, Albania aligned with the Soviet Union to counter Yugoslav influence and secure economic support. However, Hoxha's staunch Stalinism led to a break with Moscow following Nikita Khrushchev's de-Stalinization policies. This ideological divergence prompted Hoxha to seek partnership with Maoist China, resulting in a brief but transformative relationship. When China adopted a more pragmatic international stance, Albania rejected this shift, ultimately choosing autarky over compromise. The paper argues that while Hoxha's ideological inflexibility often undermined Albania's economic stability, it was central to his strategy for maintaining national independence and regime security. This ideological consistency also earned Albania symbolic significance on the global stage, influencing factions within the broader communist movement. This analysis challenges traditional realist interpretations of Cold War alliances by emphasizing the role of ideology in shaping Albania's foreign policy trajectory. By contextualizing Albania's unique position in the Cold War, the paper underscores the complex interplay between ideology, geopolitics, and survival in small-state diplomacy.

Keywords: Albania, Cold War, Communism, Alliances, Isolationism

Introduction

One of the most notable aspects of the Cold War was its bipolarity. For a variety of reasons — some ideological and some pragmatic — countries sought alliances with the United States or the Soviet Union. While some countries were given more support than others based on their perceived level of strategic value, the main benefit to the recipient country was usually economic and military aid, while donor countries looked to expand their spheres of influence and sway local policy decisions.[1] Barring drastic political changes, countries would often remain in these alliances for the long term. Albania, a small Balkan nation led by ardent communist Enver Hoxha, took a different approach to Cold War foreign policy. Hoxha was always looking for ways to keep Albania independent, a difficult feat for a country that was surrounded by powerful neighbours like Greece and Italy. He sought alliances as a way of deterring invasion, although aid was an important consideration as well. However, ideology was always Hoxha's primary consideration, and it led him to make several abrupt policy changes over the course of his time in power.[2] His falling out with the Soviet Union over Nikita Khruschev's rejection of Stalin's legacy led to an alliance with the People's Republic of China (PRC), followed by isolation and Albania's turn to autarky.[3] This paper seeks to explain the reasoning behind a foreign policy that seems illogical and disjointed in hindsight. It will also argue that this strategy was mainly pursued to ensure the survival of Albania as an independent

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[1] Engerman, 'Development Politics and the Cold War'.

[2] Artisien, 'Albania in the Post-Hoxha Era'.

[3] Szalontai, 'Weathering the Storm, Toppled by the Storm'.

state under Hoxha's Stalinist system. Albania's unique foreign policy gave it an outsize influence on global politics and made it one of the Cold War's most interesting case studies.

Historical Context

Albania's foreign policy decisions under Hoxha cannot be understood in isolation from its history. In 1912, the Balkan Wars brought hundreds of years of Ottoman rule to an end, leaving a power vacuum that was taken advantage of during the First World War.[4] Different parts of this small country were occupied by neighbours Austria-Hungary, Greece, and Italy, and its civilians suffered greatly at the hands of the occupiers. Many starved to death, while others were massacred by the invading armies.[5] At the conclusion of the war, a government led by a tribal chief named Ahmed Zogu managed to drive the remaining Italian troops from Albania. This victory provided him with great political legitimacy, and he spent the following years consolidating his power. In January 1925, a democratically-elected constituent assembly, which had recently written the country's new constitution, elected Zogu president. On November 27, 1926, Zogu signed the Tirana Pact with Italy, bringing additional aid and greatly increasing Italian influence in Albania. In 1928, with Italian support, Ahmed Zogu proclaimed himself King Zog I. For 11 years, Zog ruled with absolute power in a period marked by relative stability. He faced little internal opposition and held nearly absolute power.[6] All the while, Albanian independence continued to erode in Italy's favour. Zog was reliant on Italian money for his vast modernization projects, and the new Italian government became increasingly impatient with his resistance to Italian domination. By 1939, Italy's fascist Prime Minister Benito Mussolini had different plans for Albania, and the decision was made to invade. On 7 April 1939, tens of thousands of Italian troops entered Albania with aerial and naval support. Greatly outnumbered and subverted by their Italian trainers, the 8,000 strong Albanian army put up little resistance. Despite their disorganization, the Italian invaders quickly took over the entirety of the country. King Zog was promptly deposed and forced to flee to Greece on 12 April.[7]

Italy would control Albania through a puppet government until 1943. Mussolini planned on colonizing Albania with ethnic Italian settlers, but the locals were treated relatively well, and Albanians were not considered to be racially inferior. They also attempted to gain legitimacy by supporting Albanian irredentist claims on Kosovo, which increased their support among some segments of the population. The occupation brought some economic opportunity as well. The Italians began large infrastructure projects using local labour, helping to reduce the high rate of unemployment that had existed prior to the invasion. However, Italy had no real interest in developing the Albanian economy in the long-term, preferring to focus on military infrastructure and other vanity projects that brought little benefit to the local population.[8] Over time the administration became progressively more ineffective, and resistance from disparate monarchist, nationalist, and communist groups grew. Eventually, armed partisans began attacks on Italian targets, including an assassination attempt on King Victor Emmanuel III during an official visit in May 1941. With British support, the partisans became increasingly powerful. By the summer of 1942, Italian forces had lost control of the countryside, and a year later the occupation was in disarray. By this point the communists had grown in influence, benefitting greatly from Yugoslav assistance. They controlled several parts of the country and continued attacking increasingly uneasy Italian troops.

At the same time, Enver Hoxha, Albania's future leader, was slowly making his way up the communist ranks. While many people involved in the early days of the Communist Party

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[4] Fischer and Schmitt, 'Arnavutluk to Albania: The Triumph of Albanianism, 1912–1924'.

[5] Kryeziu, 'Albanians in Confrontation with the Challenges of World War I'.

[6] Fischer, 'Interwar Albania'.

[7] Tase, 'Italy and Albania'. Tase, Peter. 'Italy and Albania: The Political and Economic Alliance and the Italian Invasion of 1939'. *Academicus International Scientific Journal* III, no. 06 (2012): 62–70.

[8] Fischer, 'Italian Policy in Albania, 1894-1943'.

of Albania suggest that Hoxha was on the periphery of the movement, he had good relationships with many of the party's most important figures. His limited involvement meant that he had not been involved in opportunistic infighting like other, more prominent party members. He used this to his advantage and was a devoted Party member, although he was relatively little-known and was not seen as a likely leadership candidate. While the Albanian resistance did weaken Italy's grip on the country, losses elsewhere were the greatest factor that forced Italy's withdrawal. The invasion of Sicily by the Allied powers in July 1943 led to Italy's surrender in September, leading Germany to occupy Albania in Italy's place. Germany's occupation was more successful than Italy's in many respects, in part because they chose to occupy only strategically important areas, like ports, rather than attempting to control the whole country. They also managed to get some influential Albanians, like former prime minister Mehdi Frashëri, involved in their puppet government. Nonetheless, mistakes were made as well. By paying little attention to the countryside and its poorer residents, the Germans allowed the partisans to grow in strength. This was compounded by Italy's defeat, which made resupply from the British more straightforward. While the German collaborationist government enjoyed a relatively high level of legitimacy, it could not secure adequate resources for the Albanian population. By April 1944, much of Albania was suffering from a lack of food, shelter, and medical care. Germany's defeats elsewhere were making the occupation untenable, and in October-November 1944, the capital Tirana fell to Hoxha's communist partisans.[9]

Albania and the Soviet Union

The beginning of Hoxha's rule centred around rebuilding Albania along communist lines. The destruction of many of the country's traditional ruling structures during the occupation made his task easier. In addition, his most significant domestic enemies, the anti-communist Balli Kombëtar (BK), had lost credibility. Many BK members had collaborated with the German occupation, making the group as a whole deeply unpopular.[10] Despite favourable political conditions, the economy remained an issue, and Hoxha had to turn to his ally Yugoslavia for help. In 1941, Josip Tito's Yugoslavia had helped form the Communist Party of Albania. The Communist Party of Yugoslavia sent two delegates, Miladin Popović and Dušan Mugoša, to help unite Albania's various communist factions. These factions were often based on regional affiliations, and personal differences had prevented the party from uniting. Yugoslavia knew that a united communist movement in Albania would make the group a stronger fighting force, and Hoxha became leader precisely because he was an outsider that was not affiliated with a specific faction.[11] While Hoxha was grateful for the role the Yugoslavs played in his rise to power, tensions rose between the two countries following the end of the Second World War.[12] This was partly due to disagreements over the status of Kosovo, which was part of Yugoslavia but seen by Hoxha and many other ethnic Albanians as an integral part of their historic lands.[13] As the years passed, Tito's plans for Albania began to change. He fell out of favour with Stalin, widening the rift between Yugoslavia and the USSR and presenting Hoxha with a new opportunity.[14] When Tito proposed that Albania join Yugoslavia, Hoxha turned to the Soviets, who quickly provided massive loans and technical assistance.[15] Until Stalin's death in March 1953, the Soviet Union was Albania's main benefactor. The relationship was mutually beneficial. The Soviets gained influence in the Balkans to combat Yugoslavia's growing influence, while the Albanians received badly needed economic aid.[16] Most importantly for Hoxha, the Soviets guaranteed the survival of his regime and his country's independence. Under Soviet protection, Hoxha was able to pursue his Stalinist

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[9] Fischer and Schmitt, 'The Second World War and the Establishment of the Communist Regime'.
[10] Fischer and Schmitt.
[11] Fevziu and Elsie, 'The Founding of the Communist Party'.
[12] Marku, 'Shifting Alliances'.
[13] Vukadinovic, 'The Shift in Yugoslav-Albanian Relations'.
[14] Perović, 'The Tito-Stalin Split'.
[15] Vucinich, 'The Albanian-Soviet Rift'.
[16] Marku, 'Shifting Alliances'.

domestic policies without fear of Yugoslav intervention.

Unfortunately for Hoxha, Stalin's death was the beginning of a new era for the Soviet Union. Hoxha was very fond of Stalin on a personal level, and the two met many times despite Stalin's lack of interest in Albania.[17]Aside from their friendship, Hoxha admired Stalin's ideology as well, and he looked to model Albania after the USSR. When Khruschev's de-Stalinization policies led to the Soviets removing Stalinist leaders in Bulgaria and Hungary, Hoxha was determined to avoid the same fate[18]. He managed to do so by ruthlessly eliminating those who seemed to oppose his leadership. Purges had long been a tool for Hoxha, but the risk of Soviet infiltration created a new threat.[19] There was also concern that a rapprochement between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia could threaten Albanian independence.[20] Despite all of this, the status-quo alliance between Albania and the USSR held until 1960. That year, Hoxha's second foreign policy about-face took place: he denounced the Soviets, fed up with what he saw as meddling in Albanian affairs, especially regarding Khrushchev's insistence on the importance of agriculture in contrast to Hoxha's focus on heavy industries. One year later, the Soviets promptly cancelled their economic agreements with Albania and cut off diplomatic relations.[21] In turn, Hoxha's army seized the joint Albanian-Soviet submarine base at Vlorë, along with several Soviet submarines.[22]

Albania and China

Following Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech', in which the new Soviet leader made a break with the cult of personality under Stalin, Hoxha began to accuse Khrushchev of revisionism, and perceived supporters of the new Soviet line in Albania were removed from their positions or eliminated.[23] Hoxha needed to find a new benefactor, and once again he was able to take advantage of a feud between the Soviet Union and another communist country. The Sino-Soviet split had recently taken place, and China seemed the perfect candidate to fill the void left by the USSR because both had reason to be angry with the Soviets due to a shared, strong, anti-revisionist Marxist-Leninist ideology.[24] China benefited from the relationship as well, as they finally found a European partner that would increase their legitimacy in the fight for leadership of the communist world. Albania provided support to China in international fora and fought to transfer China's United Nations membership, which had previously been held by the Republic of China government exiled in Taiwan, to the PRC.[25] While China was not willing to provide as much economic assistance as the Soviet Union, massive amounts of aid arrived in Albania over the course of the partnership. This included loans, cash donations, and the construction of metallurgic and power plants, among other things.[26] With China's support, Albania was able to mitigate the negative economic and diplomatic effects of the Soviet departure. Crucially for Enver Hoxha, China also guaranteed Albania's continuing independence by deterring potential enemies from intervening. By this time, Hoxha feared a Soviet invasion more than annexation by Yugoslavia. The USSR was not willing to attack a Chinese ally to topple an unfriendly country, nor was Yugoslavia to retake claimed territory.

The partnership remained strong for some time, but leadership changes in China in the mid 1970s marked the beginning of the end of the Sino-Albanian friendship.[27] Hoxha derided Deng Xiaoping's new Three World Theory, which Deng had presented to the United Nations General Assembly in April 1974. Hoxha called the idea revisionist and claimed that it

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[17] Fevziu and Elsie, 'Stalin and the Soviets', 2016.
[18] Riches and Palmowski, 'Chervenkov, Vulko'; , '10. The Collapse of the Rákosi Cult'.
[19] Kaloçi, 'Black List of Enver Hoxha'.
[20] Fevziu and Elsie, 'Stalin and the Soviets', 2016.
[21] Pilaca and Nako, 'Splitting Apart'.
[22] Fischer and Schmitt, 'Albania's Stalinist Dictatorship, 1944–1989'.
[23] Marku, 'Communist Relations in Crisis'.
[24] Kreka and Bezeraj, 'From Communist Allies to Pragmatics Partners'.
[25] Musabelliu, 'China-Albania Ties Going Strong at 75'.
[26] Marku, 'China and Albania'.
[27] Boriçi, 'The Decline of the Albanian–Chinese Relations 1971-1978'.

contradicted Leninist theory.[28] The Three World Theory divided the world into three parts.[29]

The First World consisted of the United States and the USSR, and the Second World was made up of their developed allies. And, most importantly, the Third World, which comprised developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. According to the theory, China was part of the Third World, creating a wedge between itself and Albania. After Hoxha's denunciation of the theory, China's economic aid began to wane.[30] In 1975, two-thirds of Albanian imports came from China, and it was the destination for one-fifth of Albanian exports. Consequently, investment growth dropped as well, falling by 0.8% per year between 1980 and 1985. Over time, Albania's gross domestic product (GDP) was greatly affected as well. Annual GDP growth averaged 5% in the 1970s and had declined to about 1% by the 1980s.[31]

With that, Albania's descent into isolation began. It became the only European country which refused to sign the Helsinki Accords in 1975,[32] and the Albanian deputy prime minister Adil Çarçani told China of his country's intention to "rely only on our own forces."[33] Boriçi's article suggests that Mao Zedong's death in 1976 played a part in the falling out as well, in addition to the rapprochement between the U.S. and the PRC. The divorce came to a conclusion on July 7, 1978 with a note from the Chinese announcing the halt of all forms of assistance to Albania. Once again, Hoxha's ideological inflexibility ended an alliance that his country relied upon — which had originally emerged from a political split between two communist countries that Hoxha was able to take full advantage of. China would prove to be the last foreign ally of communist Albania, and the alliance had a profound impact on the country.[34]. The partnership was also very important in Chinese history, having marked the beginning of its attempts to project power around the world and assume leadership of the socialist world.

Albania After Hoxha

Until the fall of communism in 1991, Albania was one of the world's most isolated nations. With the withdrawal of Chinese support, the Albanian economy suffered greatly. According to a 1992 paper published by the International Monetary Fund, large construction projects were cancelled, and the agricultural and heavy industrial sectors were particularly affected. The paper also suggests that the loss of access to Chinese farming equipment slowed the pace of mechanization, leading to a decline in Albanian crop production relative to other Eastern European nations. Analysis in the paper notes that Albanian industrial output declined as well, as heavy industry was especially reliant on Chinese technical assistance.[35] On top of these economic issues, Enver Hoxha's health began to fail. He became increasingly paranoid, and purges against his opponents continued even as he suffered from serious heart problems.[36] When Hoxha died at the age of 76 on April 11, 1985, the country was plunged into several days of mourning. Many Albanians had the only leader they ever knew—one who kept their country independent despite constant attempts to subjugate it. His death began a period of uncertainty. Although Hoxha had named his successor, former Deputy Prime Minister Adil Çarçani, nobody knew how he would lead the country. Çarçani's governance style was less oppressive, and the country began the slow process of liberalization.[37] Albania's first democratic elections took place on March 15, 1991, and Albania began to emerge from its isolation.[38] The economy was liberalized, and the new government began to forge relationships with Western countries, most

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[28] Hoxha, 'The Theory and Practice of the Revolution'.
[29] Yee, 'The Three World Theory and Post-Mao China's Global Strategy'.
[30] Boriçi, 'The Decline of the Albanian–Chinese Relations 1971-1978'.
[31] Johnston et al., 'Albania'.
[32] Warrick, 'Albania Promises to Honor Helsinki Accords - UPI Archives'.
[33] Boriçi, 'The Decline of the Albanian–Chinese Relations 1971-1978'.
[34] Evans, 'Cold War Bedfellows'.
[35] Johnston et al., 'Albania'.
[36] Abrahams, '1. Hoxha's Heart'.
[37] Partos, 'Obituary'.
[38] Abrahams, '2. Fences Fall'.

significantly the United States.[39]

Analysis

These three major periods of Albanian foreign policy — Soviet, Chinese, and isolationist — were all driven by some combination of ideology and a strong desire for survival. Hoxha looked for allies amid his country's difficult geopolitical circumstances. He had originally sided with the Soviet Union to avoid annexation by Yugoslavia. Ideological considerations were at play as well, and the alliance with the Soviet Union came to an end as a result of de-Stalinization. While Yugoslavia was no longer interested in annexing Albania, Hoxha was not aware of this. Hoxha may have been clouded by his rivalry with Tito and Yugoslavia, but there is little doubt that Albania's split with the Soviet Union was driven primarily by the latter's denunciation of Stalin and his legacy, as well as fears that Hoxha would be removed from power for his refusal to play along.

With all of this in mind, I would argue that ideology was the primary factor in Hoxha's foreign policy decision making. International relations frameworks like realism discount ideology as a real consideration, and in most circumstances, this argument is sound. Realism stipulates that foreign policy decisions are made primarily for reasons of survival, with other factors playing a limited role. Ideology is often used as a justification for ties between states, but survival is the underlying reason in many of these cases. On the whole, Hoxha took foreign policy decisions that were meant to keep Albania independent, thus helping to keep his regime in power. However, he also made decisions that harmed his country's economy. In his first split, he rejected continued cooperation with the Soviets on ideological grounds. This resulted in Albania losing out on huge aid packages, mainly in the form of loans and technology sharing. While he was able to form a new partnership with China, it provided fewer material benefits to Albania, especially in its initial stages. When he chose to end the partnership with China, he once again cut ties with a patron on ideological grounds. The loss of Chinese support was even more detrimental, and its immediate consequences were a serious setback to the Albanian economy. Especially in this last case, Hoxha made a decision based on ideology that had direct consequences for his regime. While he knew that he could stamp out a rebellion, he also knew that his ideological inflexibility would create more risks for the regime. Interestingly, this "purity" gained him many admirers in the West, especially among Maoists, who were disillusioned with both the USSR's de-Stalinization and China's new Three Worlds Theory.[40] To them, Hoxha was the only true anti-revisionist, a communist leader who refused to deviate from the original tenets of Marxism-Leninism. In fact, some of the parties influenced by Hoxha's ideological mode of governance still exist today.[41] With these reasons in mind, the realist rejection of ideology as a factor in foreign policy cannot be applied to Albania's case. Ideology was the main driver in Albania's Cold War foreign policy decision making.

Conclusion

Despite the hardships Albania faced during Hoxha's time in power, the country has successfully transitioned to democracy. There have been some serious hurdles along the way — most notably the civil unrest of 1997, which was brought about by the collapse of massive pyramid schemes designed to take advantage of the newly-capitalist country's lack of financial literacy.[42] But there is little doubt that Albanians today enjoy a far higher standard of living than they did during the Cold War, even as the imprint of Hoxha's rule remains.[43]

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[39] Abrahams, '9. The Fall'.
[40] Smith, 'Enver Hoxha Was Ruler For 40 Years in Albania'.
[41] 'ICMLPO'.
[42] Lane, 'Albania, March 1997'.
[43] Abrahams, 'Epilogue'.

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Considering France's Approach to Arms Control since the Cold War: Nonproliferation, Test Bans, and Disarmament

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Abstract: Since acquiring nuclear weapons in 1960, France has viewed its nuclear deterrent as the ultimate safeguard of its vital interests. Given this doctrine, France has traditionally been skeptical of international initiatives in the areas of nuclear arms control and disarmament, which seek to control or roll back the nuclear age. Prominent examples of this skepticism include France's initial opposition to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and Partial Test Ban Treaty, two prominent nuclear arms control agreements. The end of the Cold War posed an existential crisis for France's nuclear arsenal. Overall, French nuclear doctrine and policy emerged from this crisis with few changes. However, during this time the French approach to arms control and disarmament shifted rapidly. Notably, France ratified the Non-Proliferation Treaty, became a champion of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and unilaterally reduced the size of its nuclear force.

However, France has exhibited continued reticence towards initiatives pursuing further nuclear disarmament, such as the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. This demonstrates the ongoing paramountcy of defence-related concerns in France's approach to nuclear arms control and disarmament efforts. Indeed, current events — notably the retrenchment of arms control, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and U.S. equivocation on NATO, seem to suggest that France's openness to disarmament is unlikely to continue, as the nuclear arsenal becomes more important to protecting France's vital interests.

Keywords: France, nuclear weapons, disarmament, arms control, nonproliferation

Introduction

Just four months later, Russian forces exploited ongoing tensions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia as a flimsy justification to occupy a fifth of Georgia's internationally recognized territory. NATO's On February 13, 1960, France conducted its first successful nuclear test, with the *Gerboise Bleue* test at Reggane in Algeria.[1] For the past 74 years, France has expanded and maintained the *Force de Frappe* — its nuclear deterrent — which it continues to regard as

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[1] "France Joins the Club." Accessed March 31, 2024. https://www.atomicarchive.com/history/cold-war/page-11.html.

vital to its security and national interest more broadly.[2] The nuclear age since *Gerboise Bleue* has also been characterized by the development of international efforts to control the use, development, and spread of nuclear weapons. This is the realm of international arms control and disarmament. Arms control aims to control nuclear weapons by constraining state actions in the nuclear realm. Disarmament aims to roll back the nuclear age altogether, by reducing or ultimately abolishing nuclear stockpiles.[3]

Given traditional French skepticism to arms control and disarmament, I will explore the extent to which France's approach to nuclear arms control has changed since the end of the Cold War. I will argue that since the Cold War, France has become far more open to arms control and disarmament, while still regarding the *Force de Frappe* as the ultimate safeguard of its vital interests.

To ground this argument, I will explore how France's position in the nuclear arms control areas of nonproliferation and test bans, as well as in nuclear disarmament, have changed since the end of the Cold War. Changes in these areas have arisen less due to a sympathy for the ideals of these efforts, but rather due to changing strategic, technical, and economic factors that have allowed France to participate in arms control and disarmament initiatives without sacrificing the credibility of its deterrent. I will then discuss the implications that this holds for the French approach to arms control and disarmament considering current trends, namely the retrenchment of global arms control, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the Trump Administration's policies towards European security.

A Brief Summary of French Nuclear Doctrine and Policy

Before discussing France's approach to nuclear arms control and disarmament, it is important to first understand how France approaches the *Force de Frappe,* and what that means to French policy and politics. France acquired nuclear weapons at a turbulent time in that nation's history. In 1958, facing the stresses of a bloody war of decolonization in Algeria, France's Fourth Republic collapsed, and the Fifth Republic took its place. Charles De Gaulle — the first President of the Fifth Republic and the architect of its constitution — was determined to remake France in accordance with his own vision for the country.[4] Though De Gaulle had not made the original decision to develop a French deterrent, he pursued this effort with enthusiasm.

International relations scholar Philip H. Gordon proposes 6 possible justifications for France's acquisition of nuclear weapons: status, influence, independence, national security, technological gains, and strong domestic leadership.[5] As the political scientist Corentin Brustlein writes, many of these motivations — namely status, influence, independence, and security — remain salient to this day.[6] Indeed, the continued salience of these motivations is crucial to understanding the evolution of France's approach to arms control and disarmament.

The development of the nuclear bomb brought genuine security benefits for France. During the Second World War, France was militarily defeated and occupied for over four years. France likewise faced invasions in the First World War and the Franco-Prussian War. These events loomed large in the minds of French policymakers. A nuclear deterrent served to ensure that similar invasions would never happen again, being "a way of turning national soil into

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[2] The official designation for the Force de Frappe is *force nucléaire stratégique.*

[3] Freedman, Lawrence. 'Nuclear Disarmament: From a Popular Movement to an Elite Project, and Back Again?' in George Perkovich & James M. Acton (eds), *Abolishing Nuclear Weapons: A Debate.* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009), 143.

[4] Emmanuel Destenay, "Debate: Why France Needs the Fifth Republic," The Conversation, September 24, 2023, http://theconversation.com/debate-why-france-needs-the-fifth-republic-212636.

[5] Gordon, Philip H., 'Charles De Gaulle and the Nuclear Revolution', in John Gaddis, and others (eds), *Cold War Statesmen Confront the Bomb: Nuclear Diplomacy Since 1945.* (Oxford, 1999; online edn, Oxford Academic, 16 Nov. 2004), 229. [Gordon]

[6] Brustlein, Corentin. 'France: The evolution of a nuclear exception,' in Harsh V. Pant, and others (eds), *Handbook of Nuclear Proliferation.* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 117. [Brustlein]

sanctuary."[7]

A national deterrent also ensured that the security benefits of the bomb were not dependent on allies — crucial to De Gaulle's vision of an influential and independent French foreign policy. To French leaders, the Dunkirk evacuation in 1940, defeat of French forces at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, and the Suez Crisis of 1956 all stood for the same lesson: France's allies could not be relied upon. De Gaulle particularly believed that no nation could depend on allies to defend it against nuclear threats, rendering American security commitments to Western Europe unreliable.[8] As De Gaulle himself wrote, "A great state which does not possess [nuclear weapons] [. . .] does not command its own destiny."[9]

Finally, much has been written about France's desire for nuclear weapons as a status symbol. As Gordon has outlined, "[France] had known war (and frustration) for nearly two decades, and it had left a sour taste in their mouths." France's occupation during the Second World War, along with its defeats in Indochina, Suez, and Algeria, led to a growing sentiment that France was no longer a great power.[10] France wished to regain this status, and saw entry into the nuclear club as a way to do so.[11] With nuclear weapons, France would once again be one of "*les Grands*."[12]

In accordance with its motivations for nuclear status, France has developed a "strictly defensive" doctrine in which the *Force de Frappe* will only be used if French "vital interests" are threatened.[13] These interests are left deliberately vague, but are thought to encompass at least the national territory plus its vicinity.[14] In accordance with its defensive posture, France has adopted a *tous azimuts* perspective — the *Force de Frappe* is not directed against a particular adversary but is intended to deter threats to vital interests emanating from any state.[15] This doctrine relies on the idea of "deterrence of the strong by the weak" (*dissuasion du faible au fort*), leveraging what General Pierre-Marie Gallois called the "equalizing power of the atom" (*pouvoir égalisateur de l'atome*).[16] Due to the incredibly destructive nature of nuclear and thermonuclear weapons, France can threaten a potential adversary with unbearable costs (a nuclear strike inflicting casualties approximately equivalent to the French population), with only a relatively small nuclear arsenal. The technical credibility of this "equalizing power" crystallized in the mid-to-late 1970s, when France developed a second-strike capability based around thermonuclear bombs and ballistic missile submarines.[17]

The importance of the *Force de Frappe* in France's defence and foreign policy is institutionally entrenched by two unique facets of the French political system. The first is what has been termed the "nuclear monarchy."[18] Only the President of France has the authority to use nuclear weapons — an authority neatly described by President François Mitterrand in 1983 when he declared, "*la dissuasion, c'est moi*."[19] Nuclear decision-making is strongly centralized in the Presidency, and has become even more centralised since 1958. Here, it is executed by two institutions vital to France's nuclear policy: the president's private military staff, and the Defence Council.[20] The political scientist Bruno Tetrais estimates that only approximately 20

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[7] Brustlein,117.

[8] Brustlein, 117.

[9] Gordon, 231.

[10] Gordon, 233.

[11] Brustlein,118.

[12] Gordon, 229.

[13] Kristensen, Hans M., Korda, Matt & Johns, Eliana. "French nuclear weapons, 2023." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 79, no. 4, 272. https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2023.2223088. [Kristensen]

[14] Brustlein,119.

[15] Brustlein, 121.

[16] Brustlein, 118-119.

[17] Brustlein, 119.

[18] Tetrais, Bruno. "The Last to Disarm?" *The Nonproliferation Review* 14, no. 2 (2007): 257. doi:10.1080/10736700701379344. [Tetrais]

[19] Center for Strategic & International Studies, *U.S.-European Nonproliferation Perspectives: A Transatlantic Conversation*. Washington, April 2009. https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/wps/csis/0016759/f_0016759_14462.pdf, 6. [CSIS]

[20] Tetrais, 257.

people oversee French nuclear policy, with even the Defence Minister and Ministry of Defence having only a minimal role in nuclear affairs.[21] As intended by De Gaulle, Parliament has only limited capacity to challenge defense policy, and nuclear policy especially.[22]

The second is what is referred to as the "French nuclear exception" — enduring political and public support for the *Force de Frappe*.[23] No major French political party or politician opposes the *Force de Frappe*, and there has never been a significant anti-nuclear movement in France.[24] Tetrais describes this exception as having truly crystallised in 1981, when President Mitterrand — a socialist and staunch critic of De Gaulle's policies — nevertheless maintained De Gaulle's centralised approach to nuclear decision-making during his Presidency.[25]

When the Cold War ended, the French deterrent experienced an existential crisis — what General Lucien Poirier called a "crisis of its foundations" (*crise de fondements*).[26] Despite the nominally *tous azimuts* nature of France's nuclear policy, France had adopted a deterrent posture influenced by the Cold War, seeing its nuclear weapons as part of NATO's deterrent against the Warsaw Pact. Indeed, this status was confirmed by that alliance in the 1974 Ottawa Declaration. Thus, the disappearance of the Soviet Union — formerly France's main adversary — raised the spectre of the *Force de Frappe*'s irrelevance.[27]

Nonetheless, the French deterrent has persisted, with only minor changes. As per Tetrais, the *Force de Frappe* remains a sort of life insurance for France, regardless of the state of the international system. Keeping the deterrent ensures France would be prepared should a new major threat to Europe emerge anywhere in the world. It further prevents any regional power from blackmailing France with the threat of weapons of mass destruction. These rationales inform the preservation and ongoing modernization of France's nuclear arsenal.[28] Today, the idea of the *Force de Frappe* as the ultimate safeguard of France's vital interests remains paramount. France currently has an arsenal of approximately 290 warheads,[29] deployable by land- and sea- based aircraft, or by submarine-launched ballistic missiles.[30] Under the current Presidency of Emmanuel Macron, France has taken steps to modernize its deterrent, pursuing next-generation aircraft, ships, submarines, missiles, and warheads.[31] France's approach to nuclear weapons has changed since the Cold War. This is evident from the transformation in France's approach to arms control and disarmament, as will be explored further throughout this paper.

Nonproliferation: The NPT and Beyond

The first domain of arms control where an evolution in France's approach is seen is the area of nuclear nonproliferation, especially regarding the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Since 1991, the French position on nonproliferation has changed dramatically, with France becoming a strong supporter of nonproliferation efforts.[32]

In the early days of French nuclear thought, nonproliferation had yet to emerge as an established norm. Some architects of the French deterrent, like General Gallois, saw no harm in nuclear proliferation, believing it could promote stability in the international system — with France itself being a prime example of this effect.[33] France did not initially take a strong stance

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[21] Tetrais, 258.
[22] Tetrais, 259.
[23] CSIS, 11.
[24] Tetrais, 261.
[25] Tetrais, 260.
[26] Brustlein, 120.
[27] Brustlein, 120.
[28] Tetrais, 252.
[29] Kristensen, 272.
[30] Kristensen, 273.
[31] Kristensen, 274-277.
[32] Brustlein, 124.
[33] Brustlein, 124.

against proliferation, seeking to promote its nuclear industry abroad. For example, during the 1970s France undertook nuclear cooperation with Iran and Iraq.[34] Accordingly, France resisted international pressure towards nonproliferation, including the NPT, which seeks to limit the spread of nuclear weapons. Under this agreement, non-nuclear states pledge not to acquire nuclear weapons, while nuclear-weapon states pledge to pursue nuclear disarmament. As it had developed nuclear weapons before 1 January 1967, France is considered a nuclear-weapon state under the NPT.[35] However, France refused to participate in the agreement, arguing that the NPT only assisted superpower interests and restricted the global competitiveness of the French nuclear industry.

This is not to say that France was a rogue actor in the nuclear nonproliferation regime throughout the Cold War. In 1968, France declared that it would abide by the principles of the NPT, though it continued to refuse to join the agreement. Further, in 1970 France expanded its export controls on nuclear technologies.[36]

However, a significant change in France's approach to nonproliferation did not take place until 3 June 1991, when President Mitterrand presented an arms control and disarmament plan to the United Nations. This framework included an announcement that France would accede to the NPT. France joined the treaty the following year.[37] Soon afterwards, at the 1995 NPT Review Conference, France supported the indefinite extension of the NPT.[38] Political scientists Florent Pouponneau and Frédéric Mérand regard this shift as one in which France, previously resistant to the constraints of nonproliferation, came to view it as a benefit to their national interest.[39] This emerges in large part from concern about the risks that nuclear proliferation posed to French security, in particular the possible danger of new nuclear actors.

Revelations about the advanced state of Iraq's nuclear program following the 1991 Gulf War shocked French policymakers, especially as Iraq had been an NPT signatory. The dissolution of the USSR, meanwhile, raised questions about the security of that country's vast nuclear arsenal. French leaders were further concerned by other potential new members of the nuclear club, such as North Korea, Iran, and Pakistan.[40]

Beyond its heightened commitment to the NPT, France has also expanded its participation in non-NPT nonproliferation efforts. Even during the Cold War, France opposed the proliferation of weapons or technologies that could undermine the credibility of the French deterrent. For example, France has traditionally protested the development of missile defence technologies, in part because the development of effective missile defences by the USSR would have undermined the credibility of the *Force de Frappe*. For this reason, France strongly supported the ABM Treaty and was critical of the United States' (U.S.) Strategic Defense Initiative, fearing it would spark an arms race in missile defence.[41]

After the Cold War, France has become involved in opposing regional proliferation. One way in which it has done so is in participating in international agreements to create regional Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zones (NFWZs) in different areas of the Earth. France has

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[34] Pouponneau, Florent, and Frédéric Mérand. "Diplomatic Practices, Domestic Fields, and the International System: Explaining France's Shift on Nuclear Nonproliferation." *International Studies Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (2017): 2. [Pouponneau & Mérand].

[35] "NPT," *The Nuclear Threat Initiative* (blog), accessed March 31, 2024, https://www.nti.org/education-center/treaties-and-regimes/treaty-on-the-non-proliferation-of-nuclear-weapons/.

[36] Brustlein, 122.

[37] "Désarmement nucléaire." Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Étrangères. Accessed 31 March 2024. https://www.francetnp.gouv.fr/the-npt?lang=fr. [Désarmement nucléaire]

[38] Rauf, Tariq & Johnson, Rebecca, "After the NPT's Indefinite Extension: The Future of the Global Nonproliferation Regime," *The Nonproliferation Review* 3, no. 1 (December 1995): 3, https://doi.org/10.1080/10736709508436604.

[39] Pouponneau & Mérand, 11.

[40] Brustlein, 122

[41] Kolodziej, Edward A., 'British-French Nuclearization and European Denuclearization: Implications for U.S. Policy.' In Philippe G. Le Prestre, and others (eds), *French Security Policy in a Disarming World: Domestic Challenges and International Constraints*. (Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner, 1989), 117.

signed and ratified the Tlateoco Treaty, signed the Ratotonga and Pelindaba Treaties, and has engaged in negotiations regarding the Bangkok Treaty.[42] These treaties create NFWZs in Latin America, the South Pacific, Africa, and Southeast Asia, respectively.[43]

France has been especially active in efforts to restrain the development of Iran's nuclear programme. France has come to regard the possibility of Iran developing nuclear weapons as one of the greatest threats to the nuclear nonproliferation regime.[44] Indeed, at certain points in time France has taken a tougher stance towards Iran's nuclear program than has the U.S.,[45] especially following the 2002 closure of the Natanz uranium enrichment facility. France was active in EU+3 negotiations seeking Iranian cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency, and backed all UN Security Council resolutions imposing sanctions on Iran for its nuclear ambitions.[46] More recently, France participated in negotiations leading to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the multilateral agreement aiming to restrain Iran's nuclear program, and was party to the finalized agreement.[47]

In short, France's approach to nuclear nonproliferation evolved significantly after the Cold War, and represents just one of several areas in which the French position has shifted to greater openness towards international agreements. Yet it is vital to note that concerns about preserving the effectiveness of the *Force de Frappe* still played a vital role in changing the French position towards nonproliferation.

Test Bans: From PTBT to CTBT

A second domain of arms control where France's position changed at the end of the Cold War is its approach to nuclear test bans. As with nonproliferation, France initially resisted international attempts to restrict its nuclear testing efforts. However, this traditional reticence shifted after the Cold War, with the 1990s once again being a seminal time for France's approach to this area. Indeed, France has emerged as a strong supporter of the international test ban regime — a far cry from its previous position.

Nuclear testing, by its very nature, is immensely environmentally destructive. For example, France's own nuclear tests in the Sahara Desert have left environmental damage which persists to this day.[48] Thus, limiting nuclear tests emerged as one of the first priorities of the international arms control regime. The Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) entered into force in 1963. This Treaty bans nuclear tests in the atmosphere, outer space, under water, or in any other location where radioactive fallout would affect the territory of another state.[49] Though the PTBT was signed and ratified by numerous states, France refused to participate in this agreement.[50]

During this time, France continued its programme of nuclear testing. A total of 17 tests (including *Gerboise Bleue*) were performed in Algeria between February 1960 and February

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[42] CSIS, 10

[43] "Overview of Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones," United Nations Platform for Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones, accessed March 31, 2024, https://www.un.org/nwfz/content/overview-nuclear-weapon-free-zones.

[44] Brustlein, 124.

[45] Pouponneau & Mérand, 2.

[46] Brustlein, 124

[47] "What Is the Iran Nuclear Deal?" Council on Foreign Relations, accessed April 1, 2024, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-iran-nuclear-deal#chapter-title-0-2. [Council on Foreign Relations].

[48] Lamine Chikhi, "French Nuclear Tests in Algeria Leave Toxic Legacy," *Reuters*, March 4, 2010, https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSJOE6230HA/.

[49] "Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT)," *The Nuclear Threat Initiative* (blog), accessed March 31, 2024, https://www.nti.org/education-center/treaties-and-regimes/treaty-banning-nuclear-test-atmosphere-outer-space-and-under-water-partial-test-ban-treaty-ptbt/.

[50] "Treaty banning nuclear weapon tests in the atmosphere, in outer space and under water," United Nations Treaty Collection, accessed March 31, 2024, https://treaties.un.org/pages/showDetails.aspx?objid=08000002801313d9.

1966. Of these, 4 were atmospheric tests.[51] Following 1966, testing moved to the Mururoa and Fangataufa Atolls, both part of the overseas territory of French Polynesia, as by this time Algeria had gained independence.[52] France would go on to perform 193 nuclear tests in the South Pacific between September 1966 and January 1996. This would include 46 atmospheric tests between the two atolls.[53] France's last atmospheric nuclear test took place in 1974 — over a decade after the PTBT entered into force.[54]

Despite this position, France later emerged as a significant supporter of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). This treaty bans all nuclear testing, and establishes an international monitoring system to ensure compliance.[55] During negotiations for the CTBT in 1996, France became the first of the NPT nuclear powers to support the "zero option" for the CTBT, taking the position that the treaty should prohibit all nuclear tests, regardless of yield.[56] In 1998, France — along with the UK — became one of the first nuclear-weapon states to ratify the CTBT.[57]

However, even during this time, preserving the effectiveness of the *Force de Frappe* came first. In 1992, France had unilaterally declared a moratorium on nuclear testing. In 1995, President Jacques Chirac lifted this moratorium, announcing plans for six underground nuclear tests in the South Pacific.[58] These tests were conducted over the fall and winter of 1995-1996.[59] The testing program was met with widespread condemnation. In a rare departure from the "nuclear exception," the decision to resume testing was unpopular within France itself.[60] The international reaction was similarly condemnatory, with Pacific states in proximity to the testing sites being among the most strident critics of this decision.[61] In particular, conducting new tests was seen by many as a violation of the nuclear powers' promise to show restraint in their testing programs before the entry into force of the CTBT.[62]

However, from the French perspective, support for the CTBT and the new testing were inextricably linked. In 1992, France had begun a nuclear simulation program to meet the need previously served by real-world nuclear testing. However, French scientists wanted more data on the real-world behaviour of thermonuclear weapons, to be confident in their simulations. It was for this reason that the new tests were conducted.[63] Following the conclusion of these tests, France has continued to maintain its strong support for the international test ban regime. France subsequently permanently dismantled its nuclear testing and fissile material production sites,

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[51] Norris, Robert S. "French and Chinese Nuclear Weapon Testing," *Security Dialogue* 27, no. 1 (1996): 40, https://web.archive.org/web/20130124025211/http://docs.nrdc.org/nuclear/files/nuc_01009601a_006.pdf [Norris]
[52] Norris, 41.
[53] Norris, 40.
[54] Jon Henley, "France Has Underestimated Impact of Nuclear Tests in French Polynesia, Research Finds," *The Guardian*, March 9, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/09/france-has-underestimated-impact-of-nuclear-tests-in-french-polynesia-research-finds.
[55] "Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)," *The Nuclear Threat Initiative* (blog), accessed March 31, 2024, https://www.nti.org/education-center/treaties-and-regimes/comprehensive-nuclear-test-ban-treaty-ctbt/.
[56] Tetrais, 254
[57] Brustlein, 122.
[58] Brustlein.
[59] CSIS, 9
[60] MacKay, Don. "Nuclear Testing: New Zealand and France in the International Court of Justice," *Fordham International Law Journal* 19, no. 5 (1995), 1857. https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1483&context=ilj. [MacKay]
[61] Tony Wright, Matthew Gledhill, Andrew McCathie and Andrew Byrne, "From the Archives 1995: Outrage at French Nuke Testing," The Sydney Morning Herald, September 5, 2019, https://www.smh.com.au/world/oceania/from-the-archives-1995-world-outrage-as-french-prepare-for-bomb-no-2-20190830-p52mi9.html.
[62] MacKay, 1857.
[63] Brustlein, 122.

eliminating its ability to conduct future nuclear tests or produce bombs for those tests.[64] Today, France would be unable to conduct a nuclear test without support from its allies.[65]

France has also continued to advocate for the CTBT, which has not yet entered into force. Though the treaty has 187 signatories and 178 ratifications, it still requires the ratifications of 8 key nuclear states, including the U.S.[66] France has remained a strong supporter of the CTBT, and has continually called on the remaining holdouts to ratify the treaty. France has similarly advocated for all states taking the steps it made in terms of dismantling test sites and fissile material production facilities.[67] This represents the continued maintenance of a position far more supportive of nuclear test bans than during the Cold War, once again demonstrating a significant change in the French approach to arms control.

Nuclear Disarmament: Still Putting Vital Interests First

A third domain where the French position has evolved since the Cold War is nuclear disarmament. However, since the end of the Cold War, France has not embraced disarmament to the same extent as nonproliferation or test bans, given its skepticism that a nuclear free world would further French security interests.

France never amassed a vast nuclear stockpile on the scale of the superpowers. However, the size of the French arsenal did increase over time, reaching its peak at 540 warheads in 1991-1992.[68] Following the Cold War, in a departure from previous actions, France took numerous steps towards unilateral nuclear disarmament. Between 1990 and 2008, France reduced its nuclear arsenal by almost 50%, to less than 300 warheads. This was accompanied by cuts to France's nuclear delivery methods. France opted not to replace 30 Mirage IV-P medium-range bombers and reduced its number of ballistic missile submarines from six to four. It further eliminated all its land-based missiles at the Plateau d'Albion,[69] going so far as to dismantle the launch facilities permanently.[70] As previously mentioned, France also dismantled its fissile material production sites and nuclear testing facilities.[71]

Despite these steps towards disarmament, France has continued to resist attempts to reduce nuclear stockpiles further or abolish nuclear weapons entirely. In April 2009, then-President of the U.S. Barack Obama gave a speech in Prague, endorsing "global zero" — the pursuit of nuclear disarmament, with abolition as an overt goal — as a tenet of American foreign policy.[72] Disarmament has been promoted by other Western nuclear powers, notably the United Kingdom.[73] France, however, has been critical of nuclear abolition.

Clarity on the French position can be gleaned from France's approach to disarmament in the NPT context. Article VI of that treaty pledges all nuclear states to pursue disarmament. The article reads, "[e]ach of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and

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[64] Tetrais, 254

[65] Tetrais, 265.

[66] "Nuclear Testing and Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) Timeline," Arms Control Association, accessed 31 March 2024, https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/NuclearTestingTimeline#:~:text=In%20July%201993%2C%20President%20Bill,and%20impede%20nuclear%20arms%20competition.

[67] CSIS, 15.

[68] Kristensen, 272.

[69] CSIS, 9.

[70] Brustlein, 122.

[71] CSIS, 13.

[72] Makoto Takahashi, "Obama's Nobel-Winning Vision of 'World without Nuclear Weapons' Is Still Distant," The Conversation, October 27, 2016, http://theconversation.com/obamas-nobel-winning-vision-of-world-without-nuclear-weapons-is-still-distant-67566.

[73] "Political Perceptions of Nuclear Disarmament in the United Kingdom and France: A Comparative Analysis," *The Nuclear Threat Initiative* (blog), November 30, 2009, https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/disarmament-uk-france/.

effective international control."[74]

Since acceding to the NPT in 1992,[75] France has participated in NPT Review Conferences that have taken place in 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, and 2015.[76] At these conferences, France has advanced an interpretation of Article VI which emphasises the nature of "general and complete disarmament." Indeed, France consistently argues that nuclear disarmament only makes sense in the context of steps towards disarmament by both nuclear and non-nuclear states. France further argues that its support for biological, chemical, and conventional disarmament is evidence of its commitment to Article VI.[77]

This interpretation stems from the nature of French nuclear policy, which sees the *Force de Frappe* protecting France's vital interests from any threat — not just nuclear ones. As such the abolition of nuclear weapons in a world that is heavily conventionally armed is seen as diminishing France's ability to defend itself. In addition, France sees itself as already being a good actor in the global nuclear sphere, especially after its unilateral disarmament actions during the 1990s. For this reason, France is reluctant to make further reductions to its nuclear capabilities without concessions from those states with far larger arsenals and far more aggressive nuclear postures than France itself takes.[78] Consistent with France's focus on "general and complete disarmament," France has endorsed initiatives that do not implicate a reduction in nuclear warheads. Since 1997, France has supported the proposed Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT), advocating for negotiations on the treaty in the Conference on Disarmament.[79] The FMCT would prohibit the production of fissile material.[80] As France has already unilaterally given up the capacity to produce fissile material, the FMCT would not require any changes to French nuclear practice.[81] France has also called for limits on nuclear delivery systems, proposed negotiations to ban short- and medium-range surface-to-surface missiles and called for all states to implement the Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation.[82] France has also been a supporter of chemical and biological disarmament.[83] For example, the country acceded to the Biological Weapons Convention in 1984 and ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention.[84]

Yet France remains unconvinced that a world without nuclear weapons is one in which France is safer. In January 2021, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) entered into force. The goal of this treaty is nuclear abolition, and accordingly contains a number of provisions to prohibit nuclear weapons entirely.[85] France (along with all other nuclear states) has refused to sign the TPNW, arguing that this treaty is "unsuited to the international security context, which is marked by renewed threats of the use of force, Russian

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[74] "Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons," opened for signature July 1, 1968, Treaty Series: Treaties and International Agreements Registered of Filed and Recorded with the Secretariat of the United Nations 729, no. 10485 (1974): 172, https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20729/v729.pdf.

[75] .Désarmement nucléaire.

[76] "NPT Review Conferences and Preparatory Committees," United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, accessed March 31, 2024, https://disarmament.unoda.org/wmd/nuclear/npt-review-conferences/.

[77] Tetrais, 254.

[78] Brustlein, 124.

[79] CSIS, 10

[80] "FMCT," *The Nuclear Threat Initiative* (blog), accessed March 31, 2024, https://www.nti.org/education-center/treaties-and-regimes/proposed-fissile-material-cut-off-treaty/.

[81] CSIS, 10.

[82] CSIS,14.

[83] CSIS, 16

[84] "Arms Control and Proliferation Profile: France," Arms Control Association, Accessed February 28, 2025, https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/arms-control-and-proliferation-profile-france#:~:text=France%20acceded%20to%20the%20Biological,other%20states%20to%20follow%20suit.

[85] "Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons," United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, accessed March 31, 2024, https://disarmament.unoda.org/wmd/nuclear/tpnw/.

military rearmament, regional tensions and proliferation crises."[86] This once again shows the preponderance of security concerns in France's approach to disarmament — an approach that will not change unless France believes that nuclear abolition will protect its vital interests.

Conclusion and Current Trends

To conclude, since the Cold War, France's approach to nuclear arms control has changed significantly. Where once France was an outlier from the international nonproliferation and test ban agendas, the country has emerged as a strong supporter of efforts in these areas beginning in the 1990s. Yet as shown by France's approach to nuclear disarmament, despite becoming more open to efforts to restrict or roll back nuclear arsenals, France's primary concern remains the defense of its vital interests — a defence for which the *Force de Frappe* is still seen as vital.

This security-first approach to arms control and disarmament suggests that France's post-Cold War shift to greater openness in these areas is unlikely to last, especially in the face of current trends in the international system. The first of these trends is the retrenchment of international arms control efforts in Europe and the Middle East. In 2018, the U.S. withdrew from the JCPOA and re-imposed sanctions on Iran. Despite European efforts to preserve the deal without American participation, efforts to revive the JCPOA have been unsuccessful, and Iran has resumed nuclear activities prohibited under the deal.[87] France has condemned these activities, which heighten the non-proliferation risk posed by the possibility of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons.[88]

In 2019, the U.S. also withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, accusing Russia of violating the agreement. This treaty between the U.S. and Russia banned nuclear-armed, ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges between 500 and 5,500 km. It was the first agreement to eliminate an entire category of weapons from the two countries' nuclear arsenals.[89] Since its invasion of Ukraine, Russia has further curtailed its participation in the international arms control regime, as illustrated by its de-ratification of the CTBT.[90]

The second issue is Russia's ongoing full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which has exacerbated security concerns in Europe. This invasion, which has claimed more lives than any conflict in Europe since the Second World War, has stretched into its third year.[91] Throughout this conflict, Russia has threatened to use nuclear weapons. In May 2024, after President Macron floated the idea of deploying European troops to Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin threatened Western countries with nuclear weapons during his annual national address.[92]

The third trend shaping France's approach to nuclear policy is the shifts in U.S. policy in the second Trump Administration. Since returning to the Presidency in January 2025, Donald

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[86] "Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons," Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Étrangères, accessed 31 March 2024. https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/security-disarmament-and-non-proliferation/disarmament-and-non-proliferation/combating-the-proliferation-of-nuclear-weapons/article/nuclear-non-proliferation-treaty-npt-our-dossier.

[87] Council on Foreign Relations.

[88] "Iran / JCPoA – Joint statement by the spokespeople for the Foreign Ministries of France, Germany and the United Kingdom (15 June 2024)," Ministère de L'Europe et des Affairs Étrangères, accessed March 1, 2025, https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/iran/news/article/iran-jcpoa-joint-statement-by-the-spokespeople-for-the-foreign-ministries-of.

[89] Claire Mills, "Demise of the Intermediate-Rante Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty," *House of Commons Library*, September 17, 2019, https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8634/.

[90] Mathias Hammer, "The Collapse of Global Arms Control," TIME, November 13, 2023, https://time.com/6334258/putin-nuclear-arms-control/.

[91] Steven Pifer, "Russia-Ukraine after three years of large-scale war," *Brookings*, February 19, 2025, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/russia-ukraine-after-three-years-of-large-scale-war/.

[92] Mansur Mirovalev, "After Macron Touted Troops to Ukraine, Putin Warns West of Nuclear War Risk," *Al Jazeera*, March 1, 2024, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/1/how-real-is-putins-threat-to-nuke-the-west.

Trump has clashed with the U.S.' European allies on defence issues, and in his approach to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. President Trump and his officials are pushing NATO members to spend more on defence, calling for the alliance's defence spending target to be increased from two to five percent.[93] The U.S. has also held talks with Russia about ending the invasion without any European participation.[94]

If the U.S.' long-standing commitment to the nuclear defence of Europe is thrown into doubt, the *Force de Frappe* would become more important not only for French security, but to the security of Europe as a whole. As the only nuclear-armed member of the European Union, any initiative for European states to take greater responsibility for their nuclear defence will almost certainly involve France.[95]

In February 2020, President Macron first discussed a "European dimension" to France's vital interests and called for dialogue with France's European allies on the role of France's nuclear arsenal in European collective security.[96] As the threat from Russia grows, and under pressure from the U.S., this idea has taken on greater urgency. On 21 February 2025, the presumptive next Chancellor of Germany, Friedrich Merz, called for greater European nuclear cooperation. Days later, *The Telegraph* reported that France could deploy nuclear-armed aircraft to Germany, as a means of extending its deterrent.[97]

Formally extending a French nuclear security guarantee to the European Union faces no shortage of barriers.[98] Whether the *Force de Frappe* one day becomes the safeguard of Europe's vital interests or not, the effect of these trends will be to place greater emphasis on the role that France's nuclear deterrent plays in that country's security. This is an emphasis that may very well dampen France's participation in arms control and disarmament efforts yet again.

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[93] Laura Kayali, Jacopo Barigazzi, Jack Detsch and Joshua Posaner, "Trump's uphill battle to make NATO allies hit his mega defense spending target," *Politico*, February 13, 2025, https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-nato-allies-defense-spending/.

[94] Olena Goncharova, "EU leaders to discuss special envoy for Ukraine peace talks, Bloomberg reports," *The Kyiv Independent*, February 28, 2025, https://kyivindependent.com/eu-leaders-to-discuss-special-envoy-for-ukraine-peace-talks/.

[95] Laura Kayali, Thorsten Jungholt and Philipp Fritz, "Europe Is Quietly Debating a Nuclear Future Without the US," *Politico*, July 4, 2024, https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2024/07/04/europe-us-nuclear-weapons-00166070/.

[96] Astrid Chevreuil, "France's Nuclear Offer to Europe," CSIS, October 23, 2024, https://www.csis.org/analysis/frances-nuclear-offer-europe.

[97] James Rothwell, James Crisp, Memphis Barker and Colin Freeman, "French nuclear shield could extend across Europe," *The Telegraph*, February 24, 2025, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2025/02/24/france-to-offer-nuclear-shield-for-europe/.

[98] Carine Guerout and Jason Moyer, "France wants to extend its nuclear umbrella to Europe. But is Macron read to trade Paris for Helsinki?" *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, May 10, 2024, https://thebulletin.org/2024/05/france-wants-to-extend-its-nuclear-umbrella-to-europe-but-is-macron-ready-to-trade-paris-for-helsinki/.

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The Final Days of the Homophile Prophet: Arcadie and Homosexual Populism on the Cusp of the Gay Liberation Movement

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Abstract: This paper positions itself at a time of flux during the homosexual liberation movement in France. Operating in a space between a conservative past and a radical future, the homosexual group Arcadie found itself occupying a grey area where members often adhered to both radical and conservative viewpoints on how the homosexual movement ought to move forward. While previous scholarship has argued that Arcadie, which ceased to exist in 1982, was mainly a relic of a sexually conservative past by the 1980s, this piece presents the hypothesis that its dissolution was a deliberate act of a socially and politically aware leader. Furthermore, it postulates that Arcadie's leader, André Baudry, rather than oppressing all expressions of homophile sexuality, created an important place of discovery for many homosexual men who might not have otherwise understood their sexualities. As such, his school of thought served as a framework for those who would eventually go on to found more radical homosexual activism groups in France. The collision of identity, notions of belonging, and a desire to appeal to a popular front are all emblematic of the French body politic during the 1980s. Therefore, Arcadie places itself as a small case study within a broader movement both against and alongside populism and the desires of a modernizing nation.

Keywords: Homophile organization, homosexual liberation, sexual politics, sexual identity, postwar France

Introduction

In May 1982, André Baudry, the combative and mercurial leader of France's homophile organization Arcadie, gave his final interview as the leader of a movement that had spanned over three decades.[1] In it, he expressed his disillusion with the future of his cause. "They make me want to vomit," he said of radical homosexual-rights protests in America. "[T]he homosexual must live in the society that he finds himself in…if he differentiates himself to the point of becoming the laughingstock of the population…this is not a good method."[2] Several days later, Baudry dissolved his organization.[3] After several years of fighting for recognition amongst new, provocative, and politically-centred homosexual movements, Arcadie's moralistic and often conservative viewpoints could no longer compete. The organization itself – despite being extremely politically aware – refused to take on any public political standpoint, adhering to neutrality to reduce polarization. The future of the French homosexual movement had found itself a new home in the development of Comité d'urgence

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[1] Julian Jackson, *Living in Arcadia: Homosexuality, Politics, and Morality in France from the Liberation to AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 233.

[2] André Baudry, "Des homosexuels sous condition," interview by *Gai Pied*, May 1982, LGBTQ History and Culture Since 1940.

[3] Jackson, *Living in Arcadia,* 231 and Christian Colombani, "La fin d'"Arcadie" "Et quant à moi, André Baudry...","" *Le Monde*, July 2, 1982, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1982/07/02/la-fin-d-arcadie-et-quant-a-moi-andre-baudry_3105972_1819218.html.

anti-répression homosexuelle (CUARH), a more radical liberation movement, which fought for political and legal reform by revolutionary means.[4]

CUARH amalgamated many smaller groups into its cause and took on many adherents from Arcadie. Pushed to the sidelines of a field they had once dominated, members of Arcadie watched as CUARH organized a nationwide French march for homosexual legal reform. It drew over 10,000 people, making it the largest homosexual demonstration ever organized in France.[5] To many of the participants in these protests, as well as former Arcadians, it seemed that Arcadie had "missed the boat" – that its failure to side with the more outspoken CUARH had been a critical misjudgment that ultimately led to its dissolution.[6] However, the reality of Arcadie's end was much more complex. Instead of a single misjudgment or failure to act, the organization's demise was predicated on years of slow decline – one not caused by a failure to modernize, but by a recognition that their style of organizing no longer had a place in the movement for homosexual emancipation.

Arcadie's narrative focused on positively presenting the homosexual man in the public eye while simultaneously encouraging homosexuals to consider the possibility of having equal rights. This duality allowed them to occupy a positive place both within homosexual and public discourses. However, as calls for increasingly radical actions mounted, Arcadie's moderate approach, while having laid the grounds for this radicalization, no longer fit the approach of groups campaigning for liberation. Rather than trying to adapt to a change that went against the most fundamental values of their organization, Baudry and his compatriots chose to take a step back, having laid the framework for a homosexual rights campaign that would ultimately fundamentally shift the landscape of human rights politics in France.

Through the use of interviews with and about Baudry, as well as writings by Michel Foucault, this essay seeks to demonstrate the end of Arcadie not as a singular event. Instead, Arcadie's dissolution was the conscious decision of the leader of a populist movement – a leader who recognized that populism had laid the groundwork for radicalism but no longer had a place in the modernizing world of homosexual activism. This essay will expand that narrative by placing the constantly shifting needs of both modernity and progress within the transition of respectable homophile to revolutionary homosexual, and by seeking to explain what part Arcadie might have played in pushing progress forward.

Taking a step back from the micronarrative of one organization, the importance of analyzing Arcadie's final years also takes on a larger issue within the sphere of historical understandings of homosexuality. Historians, such as Vernon A. Rosario and Robert A. Nye in their contributions to the book *Homosexuality in Modern France*, trace a linear history of progress and modernization in homosexual communities.[7] Beginning with seeing homosexuals as pederasts and medical oddities and moving on to Foucault's arguments about state-imposed biopower, these historians see French history of homosexuality through a teleological lens, with antiquated ways of being disappearing without a trace in the face of new forms of activism.[8] In America, many historians have taken a similar approach, writing a linear progress narrative. Henry L. Minton's book *Departing from Deviance: A History of Homosexual Rights and Emancipatory Science in America* crafts an adept interrogation of how opinions on homosexuality were changed in America – and how it went from a pathology to a natural variation of human life.[9] While this book, and others like it, challenge important aspects of the homosexual movement, very few of them interrogate the ebb and flow of progress.[10] None of the sources discussed

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[4] Jackson, *Living in Arcadia,* 231.

[5] Jackson, *Living in Arcadia*, 231.

[6] Jackson, *Living in Arcadia*, 231.

[7] Robert A. Nye, "Michel Foucault's Sexuality and the History of Homosexuality in France," in *Homosexuality in Modern France*, ed. Jeffrey Merrick and Bryant T. Ragan (Oxford University Press, 1996), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195093032.003.0011; and Vernon A. Rosario, "Pointy Penises, Fashion Crimes, and Hysterical Mollies: The Pederasts' Inversions," in *Homosexuality in Modern France*, ed. Jeffrey Merrick and Bryant T. Ragan (Oxford University Press, 1996), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195093032.003.0008.

[8] Nye, "Michel Foucault's Sexuality and the History of Homosexuality in France," 229.

[9] Henry L. Minton, *Departing from Deviance: A History of Homosexual Rights and Emancipatory Science in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

[10] See Eric Cervini, *The Deviant's War: The Homosexual vs. the United States of America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020) and Alison Avery et al., "America's Changing Attitudes toward

above take a deep dive into how progress builds on previous form of action. Rather, they assume that one type of activism emerges from another without acknowledging the trace aspects that link them.

In an anonymously published opinion piece in the homosexual publication *Libération* in 1982, Michel Foucault heralded Arcadie as the first populist homosexual movement in France.[11] He viewed the organization as a politically calculated one that adhered to neutrality in the face of adversity and placed a respectable face on the increasing recognition of homosexuals as French sexual citizens. This type of organizing made Arcadie approachable. They didn't take part in reprehensible or vulgar displays of public affection. In fact, the idealized Arcadian man distanced himself from his sexuality, at least publicly. To Foucault, Arcadie represented a shift in homosexual organizing from the elite political sphere into the popular discourse – essentially, making discourses surrounding homosexuality accessible to anyone in France who wanted to participate in them.[12] Arcadie was much more than a movement concerned with the respectability and social acceptability of the gay man. Rather, it demonstrates that their organizing was foundational to planting ideas of emancipation for all homosexuals, and empowering individuals to take responsibility for their own liberation.

Baudry and Arcadie have long been a neglected aspect of the historiographical landscape of European homophile organizations. Julian Jackson, the author of the one comprehensive overview of the organization, makes note in the beginning of his book *Living in Arcadia* that France's history of "republican universalism" has largely confined French sexual and personal identities to the private sphere.[13] The little work that has been done on Arcadie has largely been the work of American non-historians, or it has been work done to contribute to the larger discourse of the history of sexuality without a focus on the group itself.[14] Furthermore, anti-American sentiment received a new lease on life during the 1980's, and thus American practices of historicizing sex and sexuality were largely ignored by French historians during this period.[15]

While the secondary work on Arcadie is extremely limited, primary sources are extensive. During his life, André Baudry gave many interviews, lectured extensively, and frequently published his thoughts in the pages of *Arcadie: Revue Littéraire et Scientifique*, the club's annual publication.[16] In all of his statements, he made his positions abundantly clear – the homosexual was to be respectable, socialized, and pleasant.[17] His personal behaviours further served to reinforce what he preached to the members of his club. As one Arcadian remembered, "From time to time…André Baudry would cast a gleaming eye over those present and then he went out again satisfied that everyone was dancing respectably."[18] Baudry's constant moralizing was distasteful to some members of Arcadie and simply amusing to others.[19] However, it situated his views with uncompromising clarity – reiterating them countlessly over the course of his life. His testimonies provided a clear view into the sorts of conservative, but emancipatory, rhetoric the average Arcadian might have been exposed to, providing insight into where their own views might have stemmed from. This, in turn, shows the ebb and flow of historical progress and illuminates the role that smaller organizations have had, and may continue to have, in pushing movements forward.

Homosexuality, Civil Unions, and Same-Gender Marriage: 1977-2004," *Social Work* 52, no. 1 (January 2007), https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?p=EAIM&u=usaskmain&id=GALE%7CA161396389&v=2.1&it=r.

[11] Michel Foucault (Didier Eribon pseud.), "Le Départ Du Prophète," *Libération*, July 12, 1982.

[12] Foucault (Didier Eribon pseud.) "Le Départ Du Prophète."

[13] Jackson, *Living in Arcadia*, 4.

[14] See Sylvie Chaperon, "L'histoire Contemporaine Des Sexualités En France," *Vingtième Siècle: Revue d'histoire*, no. 72 (2002), Anne-Claire Rebreyend, "Comment Écrire l'histoire Des Sexualités Au XXe Siècle? Bilan Historiographique Comparé Français/Anglo-Américain," *CLIO: Histoires, Femmes et Sociétés* 22 (2005): 185–209 and Eric Fassin, "The Purloined Gender: American Feminism in a French Mirror," *French Historical Studies* 22 (1999): 113–38.

[15] Jackson, *Living in Arcadia,* 5.

[16] To differentiate between Arcadie as an organization and *Arcadie* as a publication, the publication will be referred to from this point on in italics.

[17] Jackson, *Living in Arcadia,* 160; Christopher Miles, "Arcadie, Ou l'impossible Eden," *La Révue H* no. 2 (1996).

[18] Jackson, *Living in Arcadia,* 153.

[19] Jackson, *Living in Arcadia*, 160.

The Homophile Prophet: Arcadie's Work in Progressing Social and Homosexual Discourses

André Baudry, before all else, was concerned with the public image of his organization. Regardless of what actually occurred at Arcadie's famous dance nights or during various lectures – with topics ranging from the aesthetic superiority of black bodies to sadomasochism – Baudry was constantly vigilant about how Arcadians were presenting themselves to the world around them.[20] He posted notices outside of the Parisian club headquarters on the Rue du Château d'Eau, informing members that they were not to "gather in gangs…[and be] careful about noise, loud conversations."[21] While Arcadie's neighbours likely harboured no delusions about what occurred in the club, it was still of utmost importance that its members comport themselves respectably.[22]

Many of the articles written in *Arcadie* encouraged similar virtues, exhorting dignity, marriage, and faithfulness to one's partner.[23] Any small slip could have been seen as proof of what had already been written about homosexuality – that it was a disease that corrupted young, virile men and turned them to hedonism over procreation.[24] Baudry's non-sexual, respectable homophile man countered that narrative, slowly building the base of the homosexual as a non-threatening presence within everyday life. Furthermore, his high sensitivity to image management was a manifestation of his political consciousness – a theme that continued throughout Arcadie's lifespan and dictated both the inner and outer workings of the organization.

Once one became a member of Arcadie and was safely ensconced within the walls of the Rue du Château d'Eau, behaviour was much less scrutinized. Private lives of Arcadians ranged from the benign to the flamboyant, with some coming to the weekly dance nights dressed in wigs and gowns, while others cruised for sexual partners in the shadows.[25] While none of this behaviour was strictly allowed, neither was it harshly discouraged.[26] Even Baudry's own speeches and monthly letters to the club often extolled the virtues of liberation. He discussed the existence of the powerful enemies of homosexuality and denounced the great injustices forced upon members.[27] Personal testimonies from Arcadians state that they felt empowered by Baudry and ready to "give up everything" to fight for the right to love who they wished.[28] While he did encourage conservatism and modesty, Baudry was also a prophet, the first of his kind for many young homosexuals who had previously believed they were the only ones in the world. His organization, as Foucault stated after its collapse, was truly populist in that it was about the people who were a part of it – empowering them, existing for them, instead of for any elite or institution.[29]

Baudry's own capabilities as an orator, along with providing a safe and welcoming milieu for Arcadians to exist authentically, would have begun to implant the idea that homosexuals were deserving of equal rights under the law. Certainly, after having existed in such a space, no man would have wanted to go back to a hidden life of pretending to be something he was not. Despite holding many conservative views, Baudry found himself in the position to provide an empowering environment – one upon which provided the ideological basis for the liberation movement that followed Arcadie closing its doors.

These two sides of the organization demonstrate the duality that Arcadie navigated daily, which was incredibly valuable in changing homosexual discourse. While operating externally as a group displaying the positive aspects of the community – respectability, dignity, and monogamy – Arcadie was still able to encourage its members to campaign for their rights. By operating simultaneously as a positive force both outside and within homosexual circles, Arcadie was instrumental in establishing a platform upon which homosexuals could campaign for their rights while still gaining allies from outside

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[20] Jackson, *Living in Arcadia*, 154-156.

[21] Jackson, *Living in Arcadia*, 154.

[22] Jackson, *Living in Arcadia*, 154.

[23] Jackson, *Living in Arcadia*, 127-128.

[24] Alessio Ponzio, "'What They Had Between Their Legs Was A Form Of Cash': Homosexuality, Male Prostitution and Intergenerational Sex in 1950s Italy," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 46, no. 1 (Spring 2020).

[25] Jackson, *Living in Arcadia*, 151-157.

[26] Jackson, *Living in Arcadia*, 151.

[27] André Baudry, *En France,* Personal Letter, 1964 and André Baudry, *Cher Ami,* Personal Letter 1962.

[28] Jackson, *Living in Arcadia*, 159-160.

[29] Foucault (Didier Eribon pseud.), "Le Départ Du Prophète."

their community. Without a base of non-homosexual allies and a positive public discourse, it is unlikely that the protests of CUARH would have been as successful. While Baudry presented himself outwardly as conservative and moralistic, the truth of his organization was built upon a much more complex structure of societal acceptability juxtaposed against campaigning for freedom. Certainly, the radical liberation movement was predicated upon decades of diligent work building rapport inside and outside the homosexual community – work completed in large part by Baudry and Arcadie.

The Beginning of the End: CUARH and the Shift to Radical Activism

In July 1982, a full-page article was published in the Parisian homosexual periodical *Gai Pied Hebdo*, entitled "The End of Arcadie?"[30] The article quoted Baudry himself, stating that "unless there is a miracle, on the 30th of June 1982, [Arcadie] will close its doors."[31] To people familiar with the inner machinations of publications like *Arcadie*, *Gai Pied,* and *Libération*, this news came as no surprise. There was a new wave of homosexual activism taking the place of the conservative homophile discourses that had dominated the 1950s-1970s. "Arcadian values" of dignity, monogamy and respectability were being supplanted by newer, more radical discourses – some inspired by the actions of radical homosexual groups in the United States.[32] This radical shift reached new heights of success and recognition with the creation of CUARH in the early 1980s.[33] This organization's mandate was to campaign for the abolition of the most glaring legal discrimination affecting homosexuals.[34] It organized rallies, founded a magazine to lobby for legal reform, and was the catalyst for initiating the largest homosexual demonstration ever to take place in France.[35]

Despite all this, Arcadie refused to join CUARH.[36] Loyal to his policy of political neutrality, Baudry refused to join any sort of lobbying or demonstrations.[37] As such, Arcadie stood aside as CUARH harnessed one of the most successful homosexual activist moments in modern European memory. Fundamental ideological and political differences proved too much for Arcadie and CUARH to reconcile themselves, leading many to accuse Baudry of "missing the boat" of the modernization of homosexual liberation.

The narratives from homosexual publications, however, tell a much more complicated story. Baudry, above all else, was conscious of the public image of his organization. He was hyper-aware of how Arcadians were perceived at all times, and very little escaped his scope when it came to telling the story of his movement. Therefore, by interrogating the interviews Baudry gave to *Gai Pied*, a Parisian homosexual publication, one can begin to understand his motivations for choosing not to join CUARH or not to put his name forth as an organizer for such a successful movement. While *Gai Pied* was outspoken in how Arcadie had outlived its usefulness – stating "we could do more things now…you get the sense that the person who prepared [Arcadie and its texts] was not with the times," – these narratives served not to undermine Arcadie, but rather to set forth the first hints of a shift from populism to radicalism.[38] Baudry, despite being one of the most powerful and respected men in the homosexual community, did nothing to stop these narratives from being circulated. While he did not give his outright approval of them, he certainly did not fight the claims that Arcadie's approach was no longer fit for a modernizing movement. Furthermore, Baudry's own interviews to *Gai Pied* gave the "opinion of Arcadie" – and said in no uncertain terms that Arcadie was not a political organization, and that it condemned issues like a special homosexual vote, which CUARH was campaigning for.[39] In allowing these narratives to circulate, he placed Arcadie in a position to take a back seat to newer organizations

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[30] Y.E., "La Fin d'Arcadie?," *Gai Pied Hebdo*, July 1982, Periodicals from ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, LGBTQ History and Culture Since 1940, Part II.
[31] Y.E., "La Fin d'Arcadie?"
[32] Baudry, "Des homosexuels sous condition."
[33] Jackson, *Living in Arcadia,* 231.
[34] Jackson, *Living in Arcadia*, 231.
[35] Jackson, *Living in Arcadia*, 231.
[36] Jackson, *Living in Arcadia*, 231.
[37] Jackson, *Living in Arcadia*, 231.
[38] Arnal, "Arcadie: L'éternité Moins Le Paragraphe 3," and Jackson, *Living in Arcadia,* 231.
[39] Y.E., "André Baudry et Le Vote Rose," *Gai Pied Hebdo*, March 1981, Periodicals from ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, LGBTQ History and Culture Since 1940, Part II.

that were rallying young people to fight for equal rights. Rather than being a shock decision, his choice to close Arcadie's doors was one he had hinted at for years. Baudry recognized that his and Arcadie's roles in the movement had reached their completion. Having laid the framework for organizations like CUARH, Baudry and Arcadie took a back seat and passed the torch on to more radical movements and facilitated the transition from a political populist discourse to one of legal and political emancipation.

Passing the Torch: From Populist to Revolutionary

The story of Arcadie did not end when it announced the end of its review and club. Baudry and his group had allowed the decline of their review to happen naturally, as they saw it was no longer needed. But the legacy and inspiration of their organization left deep imprints on the years of French homosexual liberation that followed. Michel Foucault, as stated previously, had declared Arcadie to be a "populist movement" – a movement that was not indexed to politics or culture.[40] His writings on André Baudry in the months following the closure of Arcadie make it clear that, to Foucault, the group represented an essential shift in homosexual organizing from the political or classist to a universalist milieu revolving around a "people" instead of a "revolution".[41] Arcadie and Baudry, he claims, were able to do what activists like Magnus Hirschfeld and writers like Stefan George were unsuccessful in doing: humanizing homosexuality.[42] While he acknowledges Arcadie's staunch adherence to apoliticism, to Foucault, this distance had a distinct advantage in that it permitted the group to reach a wider, more diverse audience.[43] Without its basis as a movement rooted in populism, it is unlikely that so many young homosexuals would have found themselves an organization in which they felt comfortable expressing themselves and their views. Foucault acknowledges this openly, valourizing Baudry as the "homophile prophet."[44] Despite Arcadie's successors, such as CUARH and *Gai Pied,* wanting to confirm their origins in revolutionism, it is unlikely they would have experienced such success so early on if it had not been for the groundwork laid down by Baudry and his fellows.

One of Baudry's most enlightening statements about the closure of Arcadie revolves around one of the most pivotal moments in homosexual history: the AIDS crisis. In a 2006 interview with the French gay publication *Triangul'ère*, Baudry expressed his regret that AIDS had not arrived a year earlier – or that Arcadie had not lasted a year longer.[45] He believed it would have given him a reason to continue. Had there been funds, he stated, he likely would have reorganized Arcadie to respond to the crisis.[46] These statements are illuminating as to how Baudry saw – and continued to perceive – Arcadie's purpose. He was clearly strategic with how Arcadie responded to public discourses by keeping an eye on current issues in the homosexual community; this goes without saying. However, his wish to respond to the AIDS crisis shows that he also believed the existence of Arcadie was predicated on Baudry's ability to see its relevance in the political and social landscape of the time. Certainly, the need for a populist homosexual movement increased during the AIDS crisis, with revolutionary organizations leading the charge for liberation, but also alienating many homosexuals and allies who felt that such direct action only caused more polarization in the public discourse.[47] Constrained by financial difficulties, Baudry found himself unable to respond how he might have liked. However, his intentions were clear. Arcadie's existence was very much dependent on the social climate and on whether Baudry believed he could be of use. Therefore, it would be remiss to argue that his original closure of the organization was not enacted strategically, thoughtfully, and with the utmost awareness of the climate

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[40] Foucault (Didier Eribon pseud.), "Le Départ Du Prophète."

[41] Foucault (Didier Eribon pseud.), "Le Départ Du Prophète."

[42] Foucault (Didier Eribon pseud.), "Le Départ Du Prophète" and Marita Keilson-Lauritz, "Stefan George's Concept of Love and the Gay Emancipation Movement," in *A Companion to the Works of Stefan George*, ed. Jens Rieckmann (Boydell & Brewer, 2005), 207–30, https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/companion-to-the-works-of-stefan-george/stefan-georges-concept-of-love-and-the-gay-emancipation-movement/29D4856372F519DC3AF135809438783E.

[43] Foucault (Didier Eribon pseud.), "Le Départ Du Prophète."

[44] Foucault (Didier Eribon pseud.) "Le Départ Du Prophète."

[45] Jackson, *Living in Arcadia*, 247.

[46] Jackson, *Living in Arcadia*, 247.

[47] Jan Willem Duyvendak, "The Dutch Approach to an Epidemic: Or Why 'Act Up!' Did Not Succeed in the Netherlands," *Acta Politica* 20, no. 2 (1995): 189–214.

of homosexual activism at the time.

Conclusion: The Importance of Challenging Dominant Narratives and Linear History

Historians like Julian Jackson, through works like *Living in Arcadia*, have brought our attention to the importance of individual homophile groups and leaders like Arcadie and André Baudry. However, by adhering to the narrative of linear progress and a Darwinian elimination of groups that no longer conformed to the dominant societal narrative, much is left to be interrogated in the history of homosexual activism and rights. The reduction of the end of Arcadie to a simple act of "missing the boat" and failing to adopt revolutionary activism erases the organization's significant importance as France's first populist homophile organization. This paper does not seek to invalidate Jackson's groundbreaking work on Arcadie – rather, it works to complexify the narrative he presents. By painting André Baudry and his organization as strategic historic actors who took ownership of their own relevance, we can begin to complexify the narrative of homosexual history itself. Instead of representing Arcadie as a group that simply failed to step up in the face of modernization, the sources interrogated here show how Baudry was a modern actor – one who laid the basis for the radical emancipation that came in the 1980s. Furthermore, we can begin to see Baudry as the leader of a populist movement that was incredibly aware of public discourse. Rather than simply allowing his organization to be swallowed by the larger, commercial homosexual groups of the 1980s, Baudry strategically stepped back from the public discourse, knowing he had achieved what he wanted – the humanization and emancipation of the homosexual in the public gaze. He had set the course for a future of discourse, action, and modernization that led not only to the CUARH protests in the 1980s, but by extension also to the populist and political French emancipation movement that is still fighting for homosexual rights to this day.

In the final chapter of *Living in Arcadia*, Jackson makes the argument that we are "all Arcadian now."[48] This statement carries the weight of more than an organization that fell to a modernizing form of activism. Rather, it shows Arcadie's true power as a rallying force. Whether or not we recognize it, Arcadie's influence has had a lasting ripple effect on homosexual identity politics in the 21st century. In this sense, we can say that André Baudry's strategic step back from homosexual activism worked exactly as he intended. Modern French homosexual emancipation would not exist without his carefully calculated choice – and in this way, all French homosexual activists carry a small part of the Arcadian doctrine within their own work.

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[48] Jackson, *Living in Arcadia,* 253.

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