Global Positioning Semantics: President Karimov’s Evolving Definitions of the Uzbek Nation’s Rightful Place in the World 1991-2011

Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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2011
Abstract

“Global Positioning Semantics” is a political communication strategy by which a leader attempts to make his or her personal imagined world map, a person’s understanding of his or her own country’s relationship to the rest of the world, that of the entire nation. By analyzing the President of Uzbekistan’s speeches and interviews spanning the twenty years after the fall of the USSR, I traced Karimov’s description of the future Uzbek nation and other global actors—the USSR, Russia, the United States, Europe, China, Belligerent Islam, Iran, Turkey, Central Asia, and Afghanistan. In this project, in-depth qualitative analysis of the President’s statements is accompanied by charts of the specific values—both traditional and modern—that Karimov assigned to the future Uzbek nation but repeatedly changed those that he attached to the other global actors as the utility of association with the actors became more or less advantageous. Like the north and south poles, Karimov’s vision of the world was suspended between the negatively-charged symbolism of the Uzbek nation’s Soviet past and the positively-charged ideal of the nation’s glorious future. Countries and non-state actors that the President positioned near the negatively-charged pole are the recipients of the negative symbols associated with that pole. Actors that he situated near the positively-charged pole, Karimov described as already possessing some of the qualities of the future great Uzbek nation. The close relationship between the countries described with these complementary traits and the
Republic of Uzbekistan allegorically advances the nation toward the realization of their destiny. I posit that by ascribing the characteristics of the Uzbek nation to other state and non-state actors, Islam Karimov indicated to the Uzbek people alongside which powers he believed the nation rightfully belonged as they established their post-Soviet national identity.
Dedication

For Mom.
I promise
never to torture you
with Lawrence Welk tapes.
Vita

June 2005..........................South Whidbey High School

2009.................................B.A. Political Science, Washington State University

2009 to present.....................M.A. Slavic and East European Studies, The Ohio State University

Field of Study

Major Field: Slavic and East European Studies
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I would like to state firmly one truth: we will continue to pursue an independent policy which meets our national interests without being dependent on anybody or dancing to the tune of various political games.—President Islam Karimov, 2003

**Introduction: The Imagined World Map**

Two years after assuming leadership of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), the state which had elevated him to this high position crumbled and Islam Abduganievich Karimov became the first president of the independent Republic of Uzbekistan. Two decades later, Islam Karimov is still the country’s first president. Karimov, since the outset of independence, has spoken prolifically of his desire to “reclaim” Uzbekistan’s rightful position in the world by forging it as a modern country rooted in its centuries-old traditions. These twin goals are an important component of Karimov’s nation-building efforts. Along with state-sponsored spectacles, textbooks, construction of statues, and preservation of national monuments, President Karimov transmitted the national message to Uzbekistan’s population through speeches and interviews broadcast on Uzbek television and radio stations and published in Uzbek newspapers.

By analyzing the President’s speeches and press conferences spanning the twenty years since the fall of the Soviet Union, I traced Karimov’s description of the future Uzbek nation over time and discovered that he remained consistent in the values and descriptions that he attributed to it. Yet, at the same time, his descriptions of other countries and non-state actors changed. I posit that by attributing the characteristics of the
future great Uzbek nation to other global actors, Karimov indicated alongside which powers he believed the nation rightfully belongs. Through the use of comparisons, Karimov maintained the content of the Uzbek national identity across time, while simultaneously altering the orientation of the deserved position of the Uzbek people.

I use the terms “the imagined world map” and “symbolic geography” to describe a person’s understanding of his or her own country’s relationship to the rest of the world. Regardless of physical geography in the real world, on the imagined world map, countries that are viewed as sharing a variety of characteristics or values are positioned near each other, while those which have few or no attributes in common are seen as distant. For twenty years, Islam Karimov consistently and exclusively applied values and characteristics to the USSR that are the opposite of those which he attributes to the Uzbek nation. Thus I contend that, like the north and south poles, Karimov’s vision of the world is suspended between the negatively-charged symbolism of the Uzbek nation’s Soviet past and the positively-charged symbolism of the nation’s glorious future. As the utility of association with certain global actors become more or less advantageous in his nation-building project, Karimov positioned these actors toward one of these two poles. Countries and non-state actors that the President positioned near the negatively-charged pole are the recipients of the negative symbols associated with that pole. Actors that he situated near the positively-charged pole, Karimov described as already possessing some of the qualities of the future great Uzbek nation. The close relationship between these countries and the Republic of Uzbekistan symbolically advances the nation toward the realization of their destiny.
The imagined world map for Islam Karimov is not simply a personal psychological conception of the world. He utilized the imagined world map as a political communication strategy with which to convince Uzbekistan’s population of his narrative of the Uzbek nation’s rightful place in the world. Thus, the President hoped to make his personal imagined world map, the imagined world map of the entire Uzbek nation. Karimov’s management of his portrayal of the imagined world map in his public statements was also part of his strategy to cope with a universal leadership problem, the need to appear steadfast and yet maintain the flexibility to adapt to changing conditions. The imagined world map as a communication strategy is “Global Positioning Semantics.”

The figures in the following sections visually demonstrate Karimov’s modifications of his imagined world map. The Russian Federation rose from primarily negative associations in the early and mid-1990s to increasing laudations of their democratic nature and military and technological advancement after 2000. Russia’s positive standing on Karimov’s imagined world map solidified in the new millennium with the ascension of Vladimir Putin. The United States and Europe were the recipients of almost exclusively positive associations through 2003 followed by primarily negative associations from 2004 until 2009. In 2009, Karimov resurrected the West as a positive entity but did not grant the West its previous position on the imagined world map. Through the present day, the West’s description remains one-dimensional. Although positive, it does not contain a variety of characteristics. Additionally, Karimov infrequently attributed any measured values to the People’s Republic of China until 2003, when his references to China became more varied, although exclusively positive.
Meanwhile, Karimov excluded from the imagined world map Iran and Turkey, two states which share a historical connection with the Uzbek nation. At the same time, Karimov divided the descriptors that he applies to Afghanistan and the other Central Asian states\(^1\) between those with positive connotations and those with negative, an indication of their shared history with the Uzbek people and the president’s bleak assessment of their progress in modernizing their societies. These rises, falls, and absences indicate President Karimov’s changing message to the Uzbek people of their nation’s rightful global position.

\(^1\)“Central Asia” as it is used in this paper includes the former Soviet republics of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. Other definitions of Central Asia are expanded to include Iran and Afghanistan, or alternatively, to exclude Kazakhstan, whose government and population frequently seek to exclude themselves from the Central Asian grouping.
The Road Goes Ever On and On: A Brief Account of a Long History

The interplay of civilizations dominated Central Asia’s history from the beginning. Persians, Turks, Mongols, Arabs, and Russians each left their mark on the region and its peoples. Beginning around the year 2000 BCE, Indo-Iranian peoples populated the Central Asian lands. The first Persian Empire expanded into the region beginning in the mid-6th Century BCE, introducing the Zoroastrian religion. However, a series of Greco-Persian conflicts, instigated by Alexander the Great, prevented the Persian cultural traditions from taking root immediately. From the 3rd to the 7th Century CE, another Persian Empire, the Sasanians, arose. The Sasanians successfully popularized the Zoroastrian religion, some aspects of which are apparent in Central Asia to this day, including the widely-celebrated holiday Navruz, marking the vernal equinox.

Arabs armies first introduced the Islamic religion to Central Asia in the 8th Century CE. The local population benefited from converting to Islam as it spared them from taxation, although it did not lead to equality with their Arab conquerors. The Arabs themselves did not settle in the region permanently, but their faith profoundly impacted the local culture. Over the next two centuries, with the rise of the Abbasid dynasty, Islam became a universal religion and conversion rates increased, replacing Buddhism as the
dominant religion. In the 9th Century CE, Central Asia produced its first Islamic rulers, the Samanids, an Iranian dynasty that cultivated Persian as the literary language for Islam in Iran and Central Asia. This paved the way for Central Asia to become an important center for Islamic societies in the 10th Century CE.

Although taking place gradually over the course of several hundred years, the Turkicization of the region was greatly spurred on by the Mongol conquests of the 13th Century CE, led by Genghis Khan. Among the tribes of Mongols and Turks which settled in Central Asia was the Barlas tribe. Hailing from Mongolia, this tribe had evolved to encompass both Turkic and Muslim cultures. From the Barlas arose a man named Timur, who became the hero of the modern Uzbek nation. Timur, known in Western literature as Tamerlane, established an empire with its capital in Samarkand, a city in present-day Uzbekistan, which extended over much of today’s Central Asia and parts of Iran. Timur was known for his ruthlessness in conquest, but his successors became great patrons of art, science, and religion. The Timurid dynasty was unseated by another set of Turkic nomads, the Uzbeks, with whom Soviet ethnographers and historians later designated as the heirs of Timur.

Russian colonial expansion into the southern territories in the 18th and 19th Centuries CE was motivated by the practical imperialist goals—acquisition of lands and markets. For the most part, the Russians did not interfere in the cultural practices of the people. Russian colonizers established Tashkent as the capital of Turkestan, the Russian Empire’s name for the entire Central Asian territory. In 1917, the Bolshevik Revolution toppled the Tsar. The Bolsheviks encountered a degree of resistance in Central Asia by
the Basmachi fighters. The Basmachis struggled for several years but eventually succumbed to the Bolsheviks.²

In 1922, the Soviet Union was established. Unlike the Russian Empire, the Soviets’ purpose in Central Asia was ideologically motivated. They intended to spread the Communist Revolution. Their incursion into the region, therefore, impacted on local culture and societal structures more significantly than their tsarist predecessors.

Uzbekistan was first created as a political entity by the Soviet government during the 1924 “national delimitation” that divided Central Asia into ethnically based administrative units. Soviet anthropologists, linguists, and historians subsequently defined the region’s ethnic groups, their histories, and their languages to match the imposed borders. The names of the ethnic groups—Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Tajik, and Turkmen—already existed but did not account for the complex identities of the region. These labels did not have the political meaning that the Soviet policymakers ascribed to them. The Soviets intentionally drew boundaries that left minority ethnicities in each republic and divided the region’s resources, making each republic dependent upon membership in the Union.² In drawing the region’s borders, Soviet cartographers favored Uzbekistan by bestowing upon it a great number of important cities, historical sites, and natural resources. During the seven decades of Soviet rule, these ethnic identities and the borders which contained them solidified, producing the current geopolitical situation in Central Asia.

The Soviets constructed schools, hospitals, roads, and railways. They developed the region’s infrastructure and education, a part of the Soviet legacy that locals benefit

² Karimov’s government redesignated the basmachis as national heroes.
from to this day. In comparison to their neighbors in Afghanistan, the populations of the Central Asian republics enjoy much higher literacy rates, over 98% in each of the post-Soviet republics, 99.3% in Uzbekistan, compared to just 28.1% in Afghanistan.iii However, Soviet rule also had its price. Collectivization destroyed local traditions of nomadism. Thousands of Central Asians were incarcerated or killed during the Stalin purges. The Iron Curtain which divided Eastern Europe from the West, also veiled the Muslims of Central Asia from the intellectual movements and events of the 20th Century that shaped the sociopolitical identities of the Middle East. Under the atheist government, Islam was driven out of the public realm, mosques were destroyed, and transmission of Islamic knowledge rested on untrained individuals.3 And most critically for the present day, the cotton monoculture resulted in the salinization of large swatches of previously fertile soil and the draining of the Aral Sea.

The leadership of Yuri Andropov, who served as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1982 to 1984, created tensions between Moscow and the Central Asian SSRs, especially Uzbekistan. Andropov singled out Uzbek authorities as an example of the corruption that he believed contributed to the Brezhnev era economic stagnation. Hundreds of top Uzbek officials were charged with embezzlement and the falsification of cotton harvest records, including posthumously Sharaf Rashidov, the first secretary of the Communist Party in Uzbekistan from 1959 to

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1983, who died shortly before charges were brought against him. The “Cotton Scandal,” as it was known, left Central Asians feeling singled out.

The Gorbachev Era (1985-1991) went nowhere in healing these wounds. In November 1986 in Tashkent, Mikhail Gorbachev gave a fiery anti-Islamic speech that Central Asians perceived as discriminatory because the General Secretary did not attack Christianity with the same vehemence. Gorbachev’s reform programs, known as glasnost (openness) and perestroika (reconstruction), attempted to reinvigorate the Soviet Union. Instead, the reforms resulted in the weakening of the central authority. The rise of nationalism throughout the Union in the late 20th Century did not leave the Central Asia SSRs untouched. In 1989 and 1990, a series of interethnic riots in Central Asia left hundreds of Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, and Turks dead. In spite of growing discontent, on March 17, 1991, Uzbekistan voted to approve a referendum on the preservation of the Soviet Union.

In mid-August 1991, a coup attempt by Communist Party members opposed to Gorbachev’s reforms failed in Moscow. Although Islam Karimov reportedly supported, he recognized the inevitable disintegration of the Union and on August 31, 1991 declared Uzbekistan’s independence. With the dissolution of the USSR, the independent Republic of Uzbekistan emerged as the most populous of the Central Asian states, possessing the largest of the region’s militaries and carrying the historical precedent, established by both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, of acting as the region’s

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4 Karimov’s has since resurrected Rashidov as a national hero, who resisted the Soviet authority in service of the Uzbek people.
5 Uzbekistan celebrates Independence Day (Mustaqillik kuni) on September 1st.
hub. The borders and ethnicities created by the Soviet authorities remained, unquestioned by the local populations.

Islam Abduganievich Karimov was born on January 30, 1938 in Samarkand in the Uzbek SSR, located near the Uzbek-Tajik border. According to Uzbekistan’s government website, the President is Uzbek by nationality.\textsuperscript{iv} In reality, he is at least partially Tajik, a fact that he acknowledged publicly at least once in 1998 when promoting Uzbekistan as a leading contributor of foreign aid to then-civil war-embroiled Tajikistan.\textsuperscript{v} Karimov completed degrees in engineering and economics at the Central Asian Polytechnic and the Tashkent Institute of National Economy. As a young adult, Islam Karimov joined the Communist Party and worked in the Uzbek SSR office of Gosplan, the State Planning Agency, for seventeen years beginning in 1966.

The Communist Party Central Committee elected Karimov First Secretary of Uzbekistan in June 1989 on the heels of the “Cotton Scandal.” In fact, the scandal may have facilitated Karimov’s rise to power as the rapid changes in personnel as leaders were implicated by the central government in Moscow permitted him to ascend quickly through the ranks.\textsuperscript{vi} As First Secretary, Karimov supported distancing Tashkent from Moscow and pursued a number of nationalist issues, including lifting restrictions on the religion of Islam. He remained in the position of First Secretary until the collapse of the Soviet Union two years later.

As the leader of a newly independent state, Karimov further co-opted the nationalist stance of his political rivals, the Erk and Birlik parties. On this platform, he was elected president of the independent Republic of Uzbekistan in December 1991.
Through a referendum to extend his term in office and two more elections of suspect fairness, Karimov overstayed the number of consecutive presidential terms allowed by the Republic of Uzbekistan’s constitution.\textsuperscript{6}

The office of president is the most powerful in the Republic of Uzbekistan. The president initiates and approves legislation, appoints and dismisses top national and regional leaders, and establishes general government policy. The Oliy Majlis, the Uzbek parliament, acted as a rubber stamp for President Karimov these past twenty years. Disagreements may occur behind the scenes, but the parliament and the President have consistently presented a united front in public.\textsuperscript{vii} Further establishing a government dominated by a single point of view, political parties in Uzbekistan must be approved by the government in order to compete in elections.

Under President Karimov’s leadership, Uzbekistan has been a regular violator of human rights. In 2010 alone, at least 200 people were arrested or convicted on charges based on articles 159 (“attempt to overthrow the constitutional order”) and 244 (“membership in an illegal religious or extremist organization”) of the Uzbek Criminal Code, according to Human Rights Watch. Although the exact number is unknown, Uzbekistan’s prisons are estimated to house thousands of political prisoners. Torture is a routine practice in Uzbekistan’s criminal justice system, including beatings, rape, sexual humiliation, and asphyxiation. Freedom of expression is also greatly repressed as independent journalists are subject to harassment.\textsuperscript{viii} In May 2005, the Uzbek government

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\textsuperscript{6} Uzbekistan’s constitution only allows for two consecutive presidential terms of office. Karimov is now in his third. However, his transgression did not encounter any resistance. Ironically, Karimov continues to give an annual public address on Constitution Day (Konstitutsiya kuni), December 8\textsuperscript{th}, praising the document for its significance to the independent republic.
committed one of the most egregious violations of human rights when government forces opened fire on protestors in the city of Andijon, killing as many as 750 civilians. In March of this year, Human Rights Watch announced that the Uzbek government canceled its office registration, essentially forcing the organization to terminate operations in Uzbekistan and further decreasing the international community’s ability to monitor the Uzbek state’s treatment of its citizens.

The events of September 11, 2001 propelled Uzbekistan and the rest of the Central Asian states into the forefront of American foreign policy as the region became the staging area for U.S. operations in Afghanistan. However, Uzbekistan and Central Asia’s importance extends beyond the war in Afghanistan. These countries sit at the crossroads of three critical regions—the Middle East, Russia, and China—each possessing a historical and cultural connection the Central Asian states. As a blend of these three cultures, Central Asia truly constitutes a unique region.

Uzbekistan, with its central location, large population, energy and mining resources, and relatively large military, sought under President Islam Karimov’s urging to assert itself as the regional leader. As a result, the Republic of Uzbekistan’s policy decisions and those of President Karimov personally have regional implications and extra-regional repercussions. Moreover, Central Asia faces a number of grave societal, political, and ecological dilemmas. Not least of all is the fact that Karimov and several of his Central Asian colleagues are reaching the upper limits of the human lifespan. While they may yet have a decade or two left in the driver’s seat of their respective countries, Central Asia as a whole will soon be facing a generational shift that will likely result in
instability and may lead to violence. If we are to understand, cope with, and assist in this inevitable transition, we must comprehend the nuances of the current context in Central Asia, since the future of the region depends greatly on the impact of its leaders today.
Imagined World Cartography:
Methodology and Its Contribution to the Wider Literature

My method in broaching the topic of President Karimov’s representation of the Uzbek nation and its rightful place in the world is a quantitative approach to qualitative problem. I reduced President Karimov’s descriptions of various state and non-state actors to a set list of qualities, thirty in all (fifteen positive, fifteen negative) and placed these values onto timelines. These timelines, included in the following sections, demonstrate visually alterations in Karimov’s message which previously were transmitted audibly. In order to arrive at this method, I first conducted a significant amount of qualitative research. While reading a large number of President Karimov’s speeches and interviews, I took note of which countries Karimov discussed and how he talked about them. In this way, I arrived at both the list of descriptors and the actors included in this study. The list of countries was also influenced by which states I thought should be important to the President of Uzbekistan, given its geographical location and historical roots. This is how Iran and Turkey came to be included in the study, despite Karimov’s relative silence regarding them.
Neither the list of characteristics nor the list of actors included in this study is comprehensive. Another researcher conducting the same study may choose to explore other values or understand their meaning to Karimov in a slightly different way. Despite these minor variations due to the difficulties in applying a quantitative analysis to a qualitative set of materials, I believe any researcher would find similar trends in Karimov’s description and orientation of the world.

Ultimately, this project is a blend of quantitative and qualitative analysis, using both to uncover the changes across time in President Karimov’s message of the Uzbek nation’s rightful global position. As this is an analysis of his words, I also wanted to allow the President to speak for himself. To that end, I have included a large number of direct quotations. I believe this multifaceted approach is an intriguing, new framework through which to analyze nation-building in Uzbekistan.

In order to represent Karimov’s perspective as purely as possible, I marked a descriptor on each country’s timeline only when Karimov’s intention was blatant. This reduced the impact of inexact translations and my own biases. The following figure shows the language used by the President himself which precluded a mark. I have arranged these descriptors into fifteen positive and fifteen negative categories, the names of which often match Karimov’s own language exactly:

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7 I, in fact, also marked for Japan, South Korea, India, and Pakistan. In the end, I chose not to incorporate them in the in-depth study due to time limitations. Other potential additions to this list of actors include international organizations, such as the United Nations, NATO, and the SCO.
### Historical Roots

- Historical heritage
- Traditional culture
- Ancestors
- Amir Timur
- Alisher Navoiy
- Mystical connection of Uzbek people to the land of Uzbekistan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foreign Roots</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on its origin outside Uzbekistan</td>
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<td>Great power chauvinist</td>
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<th>Spiritual</th>
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<th>Lack of Spirituality</th>
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<td>Lack of spirituality</td>
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<tr>
<th>Moral</th>
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<tr>
<td>Moral</td>
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<td>Individual moral values—merciful, generous</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Immoral</th>
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<td>Immoral</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evil</td>
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<tr>
<td>Criminal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Violation of specific moral values</td>
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<th>Educated/Intellectual</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educated</td>
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<tr>
<td>High quality educational institutions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Historical intellectualism</td>
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<table>
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<td>Uneducated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poorly educated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low quality educational institutions</td>
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<td>Lack of historical intellectualism</td>
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<tr>
<th>Modern</th>
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<tr>
<td>Modern</td>
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<td>Modernization of society</td>
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<th>Backwards</th>
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<tr>
<td>Backwards</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medieval</td>
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<tr>
<td>Obsolete</td>
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</table>

### Table 1: Descriptors

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8 Alisher Navoiy was a fourteenth-century Turkic-language writer, who like Timur has been recognized by Uzbekistan’s state as a national hero.

9 Spirituality and morality are very closely linked according to Karimov’s implied definitions of the two characteristics. However, they are two separate qualities. According to Karimov’s representation, morality stems from spirituality, which is a somewhat mystical characteristic that prompts people to act morally. Karimov’s understanding of spirituality is discussed in greater detail in the section False Coordinates: The West.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Secular</th>
<th>Secular Respect for all religious beliefs</th>
<th>Nonsecular</th>
<th>Attack on secularism Caliphate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td><strong>Totalitarian/Undemocratic</strong></td>
<td>Totalitarian Undemocratic Violation of democratic norms Oppressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market Economy</td>
<td>Market Economy</td>
<td><strong>Controlled Economy</strong></td>
<td>Controlled economy Command economy Centralized economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosperous</td>
<td>Prosperous Wealthy High standards of living</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Low or falling standards of living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intellectually Independent</strong></td>
<td>Independence of thought Free of dogmas</td>
<td><strong>Dogmatic</strong></td>
<td>Dogmatic Mentality of dependence Accusations of brainwashing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Militarily Advanced</td>
<td>Strong military High-quality military equipment or training</td>
<td><strong>Militarily Weak</strong></td>
<td>Low quality of military equipment or training Military losses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technologically Advanced</td>
<td>Possession of advanced technology High quality technological equipment</td>
<td><strong>Technologically Undeveloped</strong></td>
<td>Lack of technology Poor-quality technological equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stable</td>
<td>Peace Calmness Stable economy</td>
<td>Unstable</td>
<td>War Conflict Unstable economy Crisis</td>
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Table 1: Descriptors Continued
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Dependence of action</th>
<th>Lack of foreign influence</th>
<th>Own path</th>
<th>Own policy</th>
<th>Dependent</th>
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<td>Internationally</td>
<td>Internationally</td>
<td>Prestigious</td>
<td>Internationally</td>
<td>Inconsequential</td>
<td>Powerless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prestigious</td>
<td>prestigious</td>
<td>Great power</td>
<td>The best or one of the best in the world in a particular category</td>
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<td>Table 1: Descriptors Continued</td>
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</table>

I restricted my sampling of Karimov’s speeches and interviews to those which were broadcast on Uzbek television or radio or published by Uzbek newspapers, so as to ensure that Uzbeks were the intended recipient of Karimov’s message. The majority of my sources were acquired from BBC Monitoring archives and are translations directly from Uzbek television or radio transcripts. Other materials were drawn from UzReport.com, which derives the majority of the articles used here from the “Jahon” Information Agency. “Jahon,” meaning “world” in Uzbek, is under the auspices of Uzbekistan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Although its name and inclusion in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicate the news agency’s global mission, the speeches which I used from this source were initially delivered internally. Thus, Karimov intended the message contained in these addresses to reach the national audience. Still other speeches were taken directly from the “Jahon” website and from the “Press Service of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan” website.
The number of sources collected for each year varies. Given the growing interest in the region and expanding technological capabilities, permitting the rapid global dissemination of information, the quantity of sources available from the 2000s dwarfs that which is available from the 1990s. To supplement the limited number of sources from the first decade, I also analyzed a number of Karimov’s propagandist publications, purported to be compilations of his speeches. The number of books, speeches, and interviews are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Interviews/Speeches</th>
<th>Books</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Interviews/Speeches</th>
<th>Books</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (6 chapters)</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (11 chapters)</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 (19 chapters)</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1 (19 chapters)</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>4 (55 chapters)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Sources

This collection of sources, while wide, is not complete. Not all news broadcasts were processed or processed fully. The exclusion of some sources may have swayed the
data to a degree. But since the sources include topics ranging from domestic to international issues and were not selected for this specific purpose, they essentially constitute a random sampling. Moreover, as a result of the varied number of sources for each year, increases and decreases in the volume of references for each characteristic is not a reliable indicator of Karimov’s intentions, although neither is it insignificant. Instead, the existence of notable trends in the positive or negative representation of individual actors constitutes the primary point of analysis in this project.

For each source, I marked instances in which Karimov applies the following descriptors to the Uzbek nation or another entity—historical roots, spiritual, moral, modern, secular, democratic, market economy, prosperous, educated, intellectually independent, militarily advanced, technologically advanced, stable, independent, and internationally prestigious. I also took note of the times that the President described these entities in the opposite manner—foreign roots, disconnection from land, lack of spirituality, immoral, backwards, nonsecular, undemocratic, totalitarian/undemocratic, controlled economy, poor, uneducated, dogmatic, militarily weak, technologically undeveloped, unstable, dependent, and internationally inconsequential. Furthermore, I marked the times when he directly likened these entities to the Soviet Union and Belligerent Islam, due to Karimov’s repeated use of these analogies. Each measured characteristic was recorded only once per speech or interview in order to prevent the data from being skewed as I made judgment calls about what constituted a separate thought and what was a continuation of an earlier idea. It is not uncommon for Karimov to refer to a global actor without attributing to it any of the measured characteristics. In these
instances, the actor does not appear on the provided timelines or on Karimov’s imagined world map, which represents his understanding of the similarities and differences between his own nation and other groups.

Karimov’s books necessitated a different analytic strategy because of their length in comparison to his speeches and interviews. In my opinion, the implications of a descriptor being invoked repeatedly in a five-page speech are significantly different than the same descriptor appearing an equal number of times in a two-hundred page book. I determined that it was a fair representation of Karimov’s intention to mark each factor once per chapter, based on the conclusion that a break in chapters interrupts the flow of an idea, suggesting that its appearance in the subsequent chapter constitutes a new thought. Due to the discrepancy in method, when I placed Karimov’s invocation of descriptors on a timeline, I distinguished the type of source by the shade of the mark. Longer publications appear in lighter shades, while his speeches and interviews are marked in darker shades. When multiple countries were included in the same timeline, each was assigned a different color.

A number of scholars have studied Karimov’s cultivation of the Uzbek nation, examining the same endeavor from a variety of angles. Laura Adams in her book *The Spectacular State: Culture and National Identity in Uzbekistan* looks specifically at the state’s use of spectacle in promoting the Uzbek national identity. She draws her conclusions from her personal observations of these spectacles and from interviews she

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10 The Uzbek nation, according to Karimov, is composed of all ethnic Uzbeks living within Uzbekistan’s borders. He acknowledges more than one hundred other ethnicities residing in Uzbekistan as citizens and encourages them to feel a vested interest in the state, but excludes them from the Uzbek nation-building project as it is set forth in his speeches. Ethnic Uzbeks living outside Uzbekistan are likewise excluded from the nation-building venture, but are referred to by Karimov as the brothers of the Uzbek nation.
conducted with the performers and directors who participate in these demonstrations. Adams finds that the current state reappropriated the Soviet methods of monopolizing ideology and popular ideas about culture. Rather than military parades, Uzbekistan’s cultural and political elites utilize Olympics-style spectacle to demonstrate the national message.

Along with Laura Adams, Beatrice Manz, Andrew March, Roger Kangas, and Olivier Roy have examined the President of Uzbekistan’s leadership and engagement in nation-building. Manz focuses on the state’s use of the Turco-Mongolian conqueror Amir Timur as a national hero. She asserts that Timur serves as an inspirational figure in lieu of the Uzbek nation’s non-existent revolutionary heroes. March modifies Manz’s argument by contending that historiography in Uzbekistan, including the glorification of Timur, is less for the benefit of the Uzbek nation and the cultivation of national pride than to support Karimov’s “Ideology of National Independence.” This national ideology, March claims, is a key means of legitimizing Uzbekistan’s government. Kangas, on the other hand, offers a comprehensive accounting of presidential power in Uzbekistan and the way in which it was wielded by Karimov in the first decade of independence. Kangas describes Uzbekistan’s system of government, finding that its institutions are weak, and questions the sustainability of Karimov’s method of leadership. Roger Kangas’s prediction that Islam Karimov has “a good ten to twenty years as president” left in him has so far been proven true. However, Kangas points out the irony that President Karimov faces a similar dilemma to that of the national hero he tirelessly promoted. Like Amir Timur, Karimov routinely and intentionally undercut competitors, leaving no
obvious candidate to replace him when he is no longer able to govern.\textsuperscript{xiv} Finally, Olivier Roy traces the development of the Central Asian nations from their creation by Soviet authorities through the independent era, arguing that the local elites reappropriated the Soviet colonial administrative structures, resulting in the long-term success of the invented nationalities. Roy states that the real legacy of the Soviet Union in Central Asian politics was not its ideology but Sovietism as a technique of power.\textsuperscript{ xv} The common thread among each of these authors’ works is that in different ways, each focuses on Karimov and his administration’s use and manipulation of history in support of the nation-building endeavor.\textsuperscript{11}

My work in this project compliments the existing literature because I examine Karimov’s representation of the Uzbek nation’s history as one component of perhaps his greater message of the future towards which the nation is progressing under his guidance. My work also contributes to the discussion of Uzbekistan’s nation-building efforts because I analyze the President’s rhetoric over time, instead of as treating his national ideology as a unitary block impervious to change. My methodology, which forced me to take note of the subtleties of Karimov’s message, revealed a number of alterations in Karimov’s depiction of the world at large. While appearing consistent overall in the direction in which he is guiding the Uzbek nation, President Karimov alters several times alongside which other countries the future great Uzbek nation will be located. This discovery opens up the discussion of nation-building in Uzbekistan to other possible modifications made in the state’s message in the past twenty years.

\textsuperscript{11} Each of these authors’ works will be discussed in greater detail as they relate to my own argument.
Like Adams, I approach the topic of nation-building in Uzbekistan by working with a fixed set of materials, Karimov’s own words. The limitation of sources precludes a comprehensive analysis of the undertaking, but it does permit the exploration of the nuances of one particular component of the venture. Far more so than other means of dispersing the national message, Karimov himself controls the content of his verbal statements. Although his speeches are frequently written by his staff, to the extent that the words emanate from his own mouth, the images contained in them have received Karimov’s direct approval. Meanwhile, his spontaneous speech, while likely indirectly influenced by his advisors, is clear indications of his own perspective and intentions. Karimov is not the sole decision-maker in determining the method or message of nation-building in Uzbekistan. He is, however, the single most important individual. As an authoritarian leader, Karimov sets the tone, which is subsequently interpreted by all other producers of national ideology.

12 These materials were originally presented in either Uzbek or Russian. However, I read them in English translation. This admittedly allows for the possibility of a party, other than Karimov, to intentionally or unintentionally alter the message, but even in the event of a few inaccurate translations, the overall trend would not be affected due to the large pool of sources. While aware of the potential impact on the data of these limitations, I am of the opinion that they neither undermine the integrity of the research nor devalue its conclusions.
The Receding Horizon Line: The Future Great Uzbek Nation

In 1991, the people of the independent Republic of Uzbekistan were faced with the question, “Who are we if we are no longer Soviets? And where does our nation belong in the world if not as part of one of the world’s leading powers?” For the past twenty years, their president answered these questions consistently. Islam Karimov asserted innumerably that the Uzbek nation is the descendent of an ancient civilization that is currently in the process of embracing modernity and attaining a respected place in the world. Karimov’s statements to this effect are essentially interchangeable, varying only in the exact construction of the sentences. The precise words he chooses have remained constant and are contained in the following quotation:

*Today, when the international community acknowledges our successes and sustainable results on the way of building the democratic state, civil society, modern system of economy, securing a worthy niche in the world, naturally the following question emerges: on what these achievements are based? The reason for this lays, above all, in the rich history, cultural and spiritual heritage of our people, deep intellectual potential and roots, as well as the ability of our nation to secure great accomplishments on the way of achieving the set high goals.*—Karimov, 2009

The characteristics listed in this quotation, with the addition of a few others, are those which Karimov attributed to the future great Uzbek nation\(^\text{13}\) throughout the independent era—historical roots, spiritual, moral, educated, modern, secular, democratic, market economy, prosperous, intellectually independent, militarily advanced, technologically

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\(^{13}\)This is a manipulation of one of the Uzbek state’s slogans “O’zbek Halqini Buyuk Kelajagi,” meaning “The Uzbek nation’s great future.”
Figure 1: The Future Great Uzbek Nation
advanced, stable, independent, and internationally prestigious. The descriptors Karimov chose to invoke do not vary, nor is there a significant variation in which characteristics he emphasized. While the volume of references for each attribute is not important, the sudden appearance or disappearance of a descriptor would be noteworthy. Yet, all of the positive characteristics are invoked regularly across time. This consistency is an indication that the President’s description of the content of the national identity is stable, justifying to an extent the wide-spread academic treatment of Karimov’s project as one unwavering object.

Although Karimov’s description of the Uzbek nation is steady, there is one outlying mark on this figure which requires further explanation. In 1993, Karimov described Uzbekistan’s ideal economy as controlled. This he did in the following context:

*The modern socially-oriented market is a market controlled by the state. The differences in its manifestations relate only to differing degrees of state control versus competition.*—Karimov, 1993

President Karimov continued on to claim that this proposed model “differs radically from directive planning and is mostly of an instructive and guiding nature.” The President concluded this statement by specifying that the socially-oriented market has nothing “genetically” in common with the Soviet command economy. This discrepancy illustrates that the coding of Karimov’s speeches is an imperfect science. While the

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14 This is true with the possible exception of militarily advanced, which does not appear as a descriptor of the Uzbek nation until 1998, after the appearance of Belligerent Islam on the imagined world map. Perhaps Karimov began to feel the need for military protection with the growing threat of Islamist movements, especially those he saw emanating from Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Kyrgyzstan. This supposition of a belated addition to the description of the Uzbek nation cannot be confirmed, however, due to the low number of resources dating from the 1990s.

15 Laura Adams’ book *The Spectacular State: Culture and National Identity in Uzbekistan* is the one other scholarly work about nation-building in post-Soviet Uzbekistan I read that directly acknowledges modifications over time in the national message.
timelines in this study do reveal overall trends in the reorganization of his imagined world map, they do not fully capture Karimov’s intentions without the accompaniment of in-depth analysis.

The characteristics Karimov put forth to describe the ideal Uzbek nation, or rather the destination towards which the nation is progressing under his guidance,\textsuperscript{16} can be further delineated into two categories—the traditional and the modern:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Modern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Historical Roots</td>
<td>Secular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral</td>
<td>Market Economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educated</td>
<td>Prosperous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Prestigious\textsuperscript{17}</td>
<td>Educated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intellectually Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Militarily Advanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technologically Advanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internationally Prestigious</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Traditional/Modern Qualities

The Uzbek nation’s traditional qualities, according to Karimov’s narrative, were inherited from its ancestors and lay dormant during decades of Soviet oppression. The modern qualities are those which Karimov claimed to be personally introducing to the nation. The President asserted that these modern attributes are compatible with traditional Uzbek values and that the combination will result in the Uzbek nation’s resurgence onto the

\textsuperscript{16} All other actors in this paper are marked for Karimov’s description of them as they exist today.
\textsuperscript{17} Educated and International Prestige fall in both the traditional and modern categories because Karimov references both the achievements of centuries-old Uzbek intellectuals, as well as the importance of the development through high-quality education of globally-competitive scientists and other professionals. The achievements of these past intellectuals are often appropriated by Karimov for their global significance.
world stage, the culmination of the work of every regional intellectual, at least those acknowledged by the state, for several hundred years:

*Today we are glad that the dreams of our great ancestors are coming true, our grandfathers’ and fathers’ dreams about peace and calmness on our land, about well-being and prosperity, about rich harvest, about happiness and luck of peasants who go to fields with clean thoughts.*—Karimov, 2006

In his article “The use and abuse of history: ‘national ideology’ as transcendental object in Islam Karimov’s ‘ideology of national independence’,” Andrew March comments that the president of Uzbekistan organized the entire history of the Uzbek nation, the one inherited from Soviet ethnographers and historians, into a single coherent storyline, as illustrated in the above quotation. The President’s characterization of history pits the Uzbek people against an eternal evil force which seeks to destroy Uzbek independence. March points out that this interpretation of Uzbek history claims a number of disparate groups have worked seamlessly toward a single goal of national independence. Among these discordant groups are Soviet dissidents (Basmachis) and Soviet leaders (Rashidov), Jadidist modernizers and medieval theocrats.

According to Islam Karimov’s formula, the achievement of the great Uzbek nation is predicated on its recognition by important global actors. He frequently repeated throughout the independent era the theme of Uzbekistan’s international significance, whether due to its critical natural resources, intellectual contributions, or elite boxing

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18 The Jadids (Jadid means “new” in Arabic) advocated for the cultural and social renewal of the Russian Empire’s Muslim population in the early 20th century. Jadidist educational reforms focused on developing functional literacy amongst the populations of Turkestan and Tatarstan, rather than continuing the practice of rote memorization of the Quran.
school.\(^{19}\) (See Figure 1) Karimov’s need to be recognized on the world stage as an important actor may stem directly from an insecurity caused by the fall of the Soviet state and the loss of prestige experienced as a fragment of a former superpower. Through repetition of the Uzbeks’ once and future greatness, Karimov sought to reassure his country’s population that their global significance was not dependent upon the defunct Soviet Union; if they follow his path, the Uzbek nation can be great once more.

This desire for international acknowledgement and accolade significantly affected the President’s manipulations of the imagined world map in two ways: (1) He emphasized the respect and similarities that exist between the “great powers”\(^{20}\) and Uzbekistan as a means of transferring their prestige onto his own country; (2) Countries’ imagined locations were at least partially dependent on the current state of their real-world relations with Uzbekistan. When a country was viewed as disrespecting Uzbekistan’s sovereignty or treating the Uzbek nation as a “younger brother,”\(^{21}\) Karimov repositioned it near the negatively-charged pole on the imagined world map by either directly associating it with negative characteristics or by comparing it to either the Soviet Union or Belligerent Islam, which are situated firmly at the negatively-charged pole.\(^{22}\)

\(^{19}\) In a press interview shortly after the 2004 Summer Olympics held in Sydney, Australia, Karimov boasted about Uzbekistan’s “famous” boxing school. He declared that the five medals won by Uzbek athletes at the Sydney Olympics “represent a bold step forward.” Nevertheless, he insisted that “if there had been any justice in the sports world, the awards gained by the Uzbek nation, by our Uzbek lads, would have been far more.” (Islam Karimov, “‘Evil forces brainwashing our children’—Uzbek president,” Uzbek Radio first program, BBC Monitoring Central Asia, (Tashkent, August 31, 2004).)

\(^{20}\) Great powers is a term frequently used by Karimov to refer to the permanent members of the UN Security Council, as well as Germany and Japan.

\(^{21}\) Karimov frequently uses the imagery of younger and older brothers to describe the mentality of what he calls “great power chauvinists,” usually referring to Europe, the United States, or Russia.

\(^{22}\) This will be discussed at greater length later.
One of the Uzbeks’ claims to greatness, according to their current leader, is their ancestor, the 14th Century conqueror, Amir Timur. In her article “Tamerlane’s Career and Its Uses,” Beatrice Manz contrasts Timur as a historical figure with the way Karimov and his administration use him as a symbol for the Uzbek nation. Historically, Timur was a Muslim and ethnically Mongol. He spoke both Turkic and Persian, and ruled over a territory spanning Central Asia and Iran. As such, Timur may be legitimately claimed by a number of modern-day nationalities, but Karimov claimed him exclusively on behalf of the Uzbeks. This assertion continues the narrative constructed by the Soviets during their delineation of the Central Asian nations in the 1920s. The Soviet narrative conflated the Uzbek nomads, who displaced the Timurid Dynasty, with the Timurids themselves. The cultural achievements of Timur’s dynasty were more widely recognizable than those of the nomadic Uzbeks, fulfilling a key aspect of the Soviets’ predetermined national formula. The Uzbek people’s connection to Timur contributes to the post-Soviet nation-building effort in Uzbekistan by securing for the nation an internationally recognized place in world history. Manz’s interpretation of Amir Timur’s utility in Uzbekistan’s current nation-building venture is supported by my findings. As is apparent in Figure 1, Karimov frequently described the future Uzbek nation of carrying great weight in the international arena. Specifically, Manz contends that Timur’s position as the father of the Uzbek nation helps today’s Uzbekistan reclaim some of the international prestige it lost with the collapse of the Soviet superpower. As evidence of this, she cites a

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24 Timur’s court hosted emissaries from throughout Europe. His life was immortalized by English playwright Christopher Marlowe’s 16th century play entitled Tamburlaine the Great.
statue of Amir Timur that replaced a bust of Karl Marx in the central square of Tashkent as evidence that Timur has superseded Marx as a key international figure for the Uzbek people.\textsuperscript{xxii} Timur’s creation of a centralized government, his patronage of scholarly and artistic works, and his stance as an internationally recognized figure all legitimate the place of his heirs, Karimov’s Uzbek nation, amongst the world’s most powerful states.\textsuperscript{xxiii}

In contrast to Beatrice Manz, Andrew March contends that Karimov and his state’s idolization of Amir Timur is only partially for the purpose of developing a national pride and promoting a national history that extends beyond a long period of colonization. The cult of Timur, which March refers to using Timur’s Europeanized name “the cult of Tamerlane,” served as a cult of personality by proxy. By establishing a single thread reaching back through Uzbek history and dividing the world into good and evil, Karimov represented his battles in the 20\textsuperscript{th} and 21\textsuperscript{st} Centuries as essentially the same as those fought by Amir Timur in the 14\textsuperscript{th} Century.\textsuperscript{xxiv}

March’s argument is likewise supported by my findings, which reveals Karimov’s juxtaposition of the character of Uzbek nation to that of the Soviet Union and Belligerent Islam. (See Figures 1, 2, and 3) President Karimov presented these two actors as the latest manifestations of the Uzbek people’s enemy. Moreover, Karimov enumerated a number of the values that define the Uzbek nation as eternal and inherited from their ancestors, including Amir Timur. These are the traditional Uzbek qualities—spiritual, moral, educated, and internationally significant. (See Table 4.1) This national ideology is, at least in part, motivated by self interest. The President’s personal power is enhanced if Uzbekistan’s population accepts his national ideology under the auspices of following the
path of their great ancestor Amir Timur, because in the present day, Karimov is the principle authority determining what is spiritual and moral.

Symbolic geography is just one of Karimov’s communication strategies demonstrated in his public addresses. Another is revealed by contrasting the President’s speeches with his interviews. In his prepared speeches and propagandist publications, Karimov rarely employed the pronoun I, opting instead for the more inclusive we. Yet, when he spoke spontaneously in a press conference or interview, Karimov often used the pronoun I. This distinction clearly demonstrates the intentionality of the use of we in prepared speaking engagements. I contend that Karimov used the plural pronoun in order to privilege his own version of the truth without making everyday citizens feel excluded. Through these speeches and publications, he delivered a monologue, but by using the pronoun we, he invoked more voices than just his own. Thus, opposition to the norms and values he advanced as characteristic of the Uzbek nation may be portrayed as an attack on not just Karimov the individual, nor even the government of Uzbekistan, but on the entire Uzbek nation, reaching back through the ages to Amir Timur. Opposing voices are automatically outliers and inherently illegitimate.

Laura Adams makes a similar argument with regards to the Uzbek state’s use of spectacle as a tool in the nation-building project. She contends that all spectacles, including the cultural presentations put on by Uzbekistan’s government, enable elites to close opportunities for input from below, while not causing the masses to lose their sense of participation. This is the modus operandi of Karimov’s state, the cultivation of a false sense of participation. In other words, through his publicly broadcast speeches and
interviews, Karimov has acted as the driver and the GPS system of the Uzbek nation. By using the pronoun *we*, he indicated that the annoying voice emanating from the box on the dashboard is that of the entire Uzbek nation, informed by coordinates received from above, either God or a satellite. And yet the voice of the Uzbek nation telling the state to turn left or right, East or West, sounds suspiciously like that of Karimov himself.

The future great Uzbek nation is the destination towards which Islam Karimov continually professed to be guiding the Uzbek people since the outset of the independent era. This destination’s coordinates are represented on the imagined world map by the list of traditional and modern qualities that Karimov asserted are characteristic of the ideal Uzbek nation. Throughout the past two decades, Karimov repeatedly announced progress towards this goal but cautioned that its achievement will be a long and steady process. Intermixed with proclamations of progress, the President decried setbacks to the nation’s forward advancement. Karimov blamed the persistence of the “Soviet mentality of dependence” and groups falling into the category of Belligerent Islam, discussed in later sections, for obstructing the nation’s path. Thus, the future great Uzbek nation, is like the horizon line, constantly receding into the distance. No matter how far the Uzbek people have come, they always have further left to go, justifying Karimov’s continued reign.
The 70-Year Roadblock: The USSR

Between 1991 and 2011, President Islam Karimov invariably criticized the USSR. Comparison of the timelines for the Uzbek nation and the Soviet Union (Figures 1 and 2) reveals the degree to which Karimov’s descriptions of these two entities for the entirety of the independent era are in direct contrast to each other, a circumstance which surely did not come about unintentionally. The term totalitarian is Karimov’s most frequently employed descriptor of the defunct-Soviet Union. From the point of view of the international community, this may be a hypocritical accusation, given the abundance of human rights violations committed by Uzbekistan’s government, but for Karimov, totalitarian and the word democratic, an oft repeated goal of the Uzbek state, are purely symbolic and posed in opposition to each other. Likewise, Karimov juxtaposed Uzbekistan’s pursuance of privatization and a market economy with the Soviet command economy and stressed the resurgence of the Uzbek nation’s spiritual and moral richness, despite the corrupting influence of Soviet atheism and immorality. He treated the Soviet Union as a roadblock in the progression of the great Uzbek nation’s historical path.

25 Uzbekistan has forged the superficial trappings of democracy—political parties and elections, but this “democracy” is dominated by Karimov. Uzbekistan’s political parties were created in response to the demands of the president and his administration. The state controls the media, and elections are routinely rigged. In 1991, Karimov’s lone opponent, Mohammed Solih, fled the country. In 2000, Karimov won with 91 percent of the vote. His opponent in this election, Abdulhafiz Jalolov was a political ally who had been recruited to give the appearance of democracy. Jalolov admitted that he had also voted for Karimov. (Lewis, 13-14)
Figure 2: The USSR

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According to the President’s narrative, the Soviet Union stood in the nation’s way for seven decades and now that the obstruction has been removed, it was his duty to guide the Uzbek people forward. Because Karimov depicted the Uzbek nation’s destination of national greatness as the precise opposite of the Soviet past, it may be surmised that these historical points represent the positively and negatively-charged poles of his imagined world map.

Similar to this metaphor of the Soviet Union and the Uzbek nation constituting opposite geographic poles, Andrew March asserts that Karimov’s national ideology is predicated on a historical dichotomy of forces which possess positive ideas of progress and those with anti-humanist ideas of gain-seeking and reaction. This creates essentially a timeless battle of good versus evil, in which Karimov believed himself to be the latest incarnation of the strong leader for the inherently good and progressive Uzbek nation, while the USSR was a temporary manifestation of the reactionary forces. According to this logic, the Uzbek people have once again outlasted the evil force, although they must still live with the after-effects of the battle.

Reinforcing March’s assertion, Figure 2 clearly illustrates the President’s negative characterization of the USSR. Karimov categorically ignored the positive aspects of life in the Soviet Union, with the exception of a single admission in 1993 of the benefits of the Soviet educational policies. Even in that instance, Karimov quickly dismissed the Soviet-inspired academic advancements as insignificant compared to the enormous suffering that was caused by the totalitarian state imposed from abroad. Nevertheless, careful examination of Figure 2 reveals that Karimov made no attempt to convince the
Uzbek people of things that would require blatant falsification—that the Soviets were uneducated or internationally inconsequential. Perhaps the President believed that by repeating a negative portrayal of the USSR while ignoring its redeeming attributes, the people would accept Karimov’s narrative and cease unfavorable comparisons of the present-day quality of life in Uzbekistan with that of life under Soviet leadership.

Furthermore, this figure only accounts for explicit descriptions of the USSR. There are a number of oblique criticisms of the Soviet Union that are also consistent across time, although they do not appear on the Soviet timeline. The most important and oft repeated amongst these implied criticisms is the Soviet Union’s lack of spirituality. Karimov consistently emphasized the need to reclaim the spirituality of the Uzbek nation, implying that it was lost as a result of the Soviet experience:

*From the first days of our independence a major task, at state policy level, has been to revive the invaluable spiritual and cultural legacy that has been molded by our ancestors over many centuries. We regard the revival of spiritual values, the return to the spiritual sources of the nation, to its roots, as a natural process in the growth of national self-awareness.*—Karimov, 1998

In this quotation, just one example of many, Karimov underscored the need for *revival* of the Uzbek nation’s spiritual values, implying the need for a spiritual renaissance after the Dark Ages of Soviet oppression.

Karimov may have intended the contrasting descriptions of the Soviet and independent eras to create the impression of a break in the history of Uzbekistan at the moment of Soviet collapse, even as many of the structures and practices inherited from the USSR continue unaltered. This strategy, in combination with his self-claimed role as the caretaker of the Uzbek nation, also downplays Karimov’s own past imbedded in
the Communist Party. It furthermore disguises the strange national history of the current Uzbek people, having been formed as an entity and granted independence at the behest of the Moscow-dominated Soviet Union, rather than as the result of popular mobilization. Olivier Roy in his book *The New Central Asia: Geopolitics and the Birth of Nations* suggests that the cultivation of a nationalist legitimacy which does not break too sharply with the Soviet period is intentional in order to preserve the memories of the people and guarantee the continuation of the identities forged by the Soviets in the 1920s. I agree with this assessment, and yet the nationalist message in many ways necessitates the demonization of the USSR so as to justify the change of political systems and their post-Soviet hardships.

The combination of both breaking with and preserving the Soviet past is exemplified in the case of the Day of Memory and Honor (Xotira va Qadirlash kuni). This holiday remains intrinsically Soviet because it commemorates the Uzbek veterans of the Soviet military who fought in World War II against Nazi Germany and those who supported the war effort from the home front. It was celebrated throughout the Soviet Union as Victory Day (Den’ Pobedy) and continues to be celebrated under that name in a number of other post-Soviet republics, including the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Belarus.

For the past twenty years, President Karimov delivered a speech without fail on the renamed Day of Memory and Honor. Although the holiday’s honorees both fought in the Soviet military and took in refugees from throughout the Union, in his annual May 9th addresses, Karimov rarely mentioned the USSR itself. He instead routinely described the
war as if it were exclusively between the Uzbeks and the Nazis. On the rare occasion when he referred to the Soviet Union in these speeches, the President unquestionably rejected the notion that the Soviet Union as a political entity had a hand in the victory:

...our ancestors died for their parents, children, love, peace and future of their motherland, not for the sake of occupying a certain hill, hoisting a red flag there or for Stalin, who caused a lot of suffering to our people.—Karimov, 2010

In this excerpt from President Karimov’s 2010 Day of Memory and Honor, both poles of his imagined world map are represented. The President describes the Uzbeks of the 1930s and 1940s as having fought for the same causes which today’s Uzbeks support in their struggle to construct and stabilize the independent Republic of Uzbekistan. According to Karimov, Uzbeks in all eras sacrifice themselves out of love for their families and their homeland, for the pursuit of peace and for the benefit of future generations. He frequently contrasted these worthy reasons to endure suffering with those which were undeserving of spilled Uzbek blood—gaining territory for the Soviet Union and honoring Stalin. The very change in the name of the holiday from Victory Day to Day of Memory and Honor, whether or not it was at the personal behest of the President, indicates a desire at the state-level of a desire to distance the independent Republic of Uzbekistan from its Soviet predecessors.

There are a number of possible reasons Karimov did not attempt to abolish this intrinsically Soviet holiday, even though he rejected many other symbols of association

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26 In later part of the independent era, Karimov has begun to acknowledge the sacrifice of other former Soviet nationalities—the Georgians, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and the other Central Asian nationalities. Yet Karimov remains resolute in his disparagement of the Union that brought them together in a single cause.

with the Soviet Union. For the people who lived and fought during World War II, it is important that their sacrifice be recognized. While today their numbers are dwindling in Uzbekistan\(^{28}\) as they are everywhere in the world, at the dawn of the independent era twenty years ago, they were much more numerous. Any attempt to expunge from Uzbek history all remembrance of World War II may have met with unnecessary resistance at a time when the future of Uzbekistan and that of Karimov as its leader was uncertain. Additionally, the Uzbek role in defeating the Nazis is a source of pride that can be expropriated in support of the nation-building project. At a moment in history when they were already being forced to reconsider their identity, President Karimov did not pressure the Uzbeks to relinquish all aspects of their identity, in this case as the victors over fascism.

Laura Adams, who examines the use of spectacle in Uzbekistan’s cultivation of the national identity, notes that the Soviet form of celebrating Victory Day, a nationally-televised cultural display, has become the norm in the independent republic, sans the quintessential military parade. Complimenting my own argument, Adams comments that the switch in style of celebration carries the benefit of distancing the current era from association with the Soviet past represented by the military parades.\(^{xxxii}\) Adams also notes that Karimov signed a decree in the first years after independence which determined that holidays in Uzbekistan would be celebrated with theatrical spectacles, although she is somewhat skeptical about the influence that the President’s personal preference had in making this decision.\(^{xxxiii}\)

\(^{28}\) Only 4.7% of Uzbekistan’s population, or 1,312,529 people, are over the age of 65 according to the World Factbook maintained by the CIA.
I cannot speak to Karimov’s role in electing cultural spectacles over military parades as the preferred form of national celebration, nor awareness of the symbolic effect of the change in distancing the independent republic from the USSR. However, I can say with complete certainty that he would be pleased with this outcome. A break with the Soviet past by whatever means was an apparent goal of Karimov. This is evident in the stark contrast of his description of the USSR compared to that of the future great Uzbek nation. (See Figures 1 and 2)

While insisting that the independent Republic of Uzbekistan is fundamentally different than the USSR and expunging its memory from the positive moments of 20th century history, Karimov encouraged the perception that one negative aspect of the Soviet legacy still lingers amongst the Uzbek people. This is the Soviet “mentality of dependence,” which he repeatedly asserted is detrimental to the Uzbek nation’s progress toward true democracy and the development of a market economy. The President utilized the supposed persistence of the Soviet mentality as a scapegoat to excuse the slow advancement of political and economic development in the Republic of Uzbekistan since 1991. The “mentality of dependence” appears to be Karimov’s term for the popular nostalgia for the Soviet era, when everyone received a guaranteed salary and access to education and healthcare was widespread. Karimov denied the legitimacy of this nostalgia amongst the Uzbek people because such a longing undermines his narrative of the Soviet Union as the antithesis of the Uzbek nation. The Uzbek nation’s destination is located at the opposite pole on the imagined world map from the Soviet state and all it represents. In order to someday arrive at their destination, Karimov declared, this final
piece of the Soviet roadblock, the mentality of dependence, must be removed from the path of the Uzbek nation.
Recalculating…Recalculating…: The Russian Federation

For the majority of the 1990s, it appears that the president of the newly independent Republic of Uzbekistan kept the Russian Federation at a distance from the Uzbek nation on the imagined world map by alternately disparaging and ignoring the world’s largest country. During this period, Karimov attributed to Russia primarily negative descriptors—unstable, poor, undemocratic, uneducated, foreign roots. Karimov also directly likened the Russian Federation to the Soviet Union a number of times during this period, a clear indication of his assessment of the Uzbek nation’s relationship to their former comrades. (See Figures 2 and 3) The Russian Federation was doubly cursed in Karimov’s mind, given its historical association with the USSR and the similarly despised Russian Empire. Due to its historical distance, the Russian Empire did not have as great an impact on Karimov’s conceptions of the world as its successors. However, several times the Uzbek president referred to the Russian Empire as an example of great power chauvinism.

During the period 1998-2002, Karimov decreased the number of negative qualities that he assigned to the Uzbek nation’s former “big brother.” Instead, President Karimov emphasized the qualities of modernity which Russia possesses—democratic, market economy, prosperous militarily advanced, technologically advanced, independent, and internationally prestigious. On occasion, Karimov even admired Russia’s historical roots and centuries-old traditions. This is significant because traditional, as well as
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modern qualities are key aspects of Karimov’s description of the future great Uzbek nation. Therefore, in order to be located alongside the rightful position of the Uzbek nation, a country must possess both traditional and modern qualities. Thus by describing Russia as possessing both types of characters, Karimov rearranged imagined world map to position the Russian Federation alongside the destination toward which he was guiding the Uzbek nation, but he did so with a degree of wariness:

*It seemed at first that after the demise of the party of the imperial power, chauvinism would be a thing of the past [in Russia]. But events have proved otherwise.* ...Frank disappointment can be traced in the words and actions of certain politicians and experts at the growing understanding that Moscow and Russia are not the former Soviet Union. This causes irritation and a kind of painful reaction to the fact that in the former Soviet Republics their national-state interests are not only clearly expressed, but that a quite independent policy is being conducted to implement these goals.— Karimov, 1998

In this quotation, Karimov accused Russia of holding onto the Soviet past. Several times Karimov employed this strategy of comparing actors to the USSR as a means of dissociating them from the Uzbek people. By setting up a simple analogy, the negative connotations imbued in the Soviet symbol were transferred to the country or entity to which it is linked. At these times, Karimov may not have explicitly altered the descriptions of these actors. (See Figure 3) For instance, a country or region previously described as democratic is not redefined as totalitarian. However, their status in Karimov’s worldview become clear. The transference of the negative qualities of the Soviet Union was accompanied by a decrease in the number of positive descriptions and frequently, an increase in the number of negative ones. By association, Russia was the recipient of the negative imagery consistently applied by Karimov to the USSR.
Additionally, throughout the 1990s, Karimov criticized the Russian Federation, along with many former Soviet states, for prioritizing political transformation over economic reform. According to his assessment, this was a continuation of the Soviet practice in which political ideology dominated the economic sphere. In comparison to this “shock therapy,” President Karimov regarded his own policy for the gradual implementation of a market economy as pragmatic. Thus, by underscoring the politically-dominated economic model, Karimov oriented the Russian Federation toward the negatively-charged pole.

Karimov’s positive assessment of the Russian Federation solidified in the early 2000s, concurrent with Vladimir Putin’s ascension to the presidency. Putin’s presence at the helm of the Russian state seems to have accelerated this change. Under Putin’s leadership, Russia stabilized politically and economically. With the metamorphosis of their circumstances Russia recaptured a number of the qualities which Karimov valued highly—stability, economic development, a degree of prosperity, and technological development. At the same time, Putin reached out to the Central Asian countries as one aspect of his foreign policy. Putin’s personal efforts and his internal success changed the utility of the Uzbek nation’s association with the Russian Federation in Karimov’s assessment. As a result, Karimov rewrote history so as to deemphasize the detachment of Uzbekistan from Russia in the early post-Soviet period:

I would like to note that Russia has always been a priority partner for us. Since the first days of our independence, we have always regarded Russia as an equal and at the same time, a powerful partner. Please note the “equal” and “powerful”. In general, we cannot

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29 The emphasis here should be put on the word gradual. Karimov endlessly criticizes the shock therapy undergone by the economies of other former-Soviet states. He frequently repeats the proverb: “Never destroy the old house until the new one is built.”
often combine those two words, since a powerful neighbour or partner sometimes wants to emphasize the “powerful” rather than the “equal.”—Karimov, 2000

When compared to the first quotation in this section, this statement illustrates a distinct difference in Russia’s position near the negatively-charged pole to a more positive position. Uzbekistan’s equal association with a powerful actor such as the Russian Federation garnered prestige for the Uzbek state and indicated a global acknowledgment of their own growing power. This positive relationship symbolically advanced the Uzbek nation along the imagined world map toward their future.

Nevertheless, the second half of this quotation indicates the hesitancy with which Karimov approached the new relationship. This hesitancy is also illustrated in Figure 3, where for four years, spanning from 1998 through 2001, Karimov divided his description of the Russian Federation between positive and negative attributes. Independence of action is one of the most dearly-held values in his description of the Uzbek nation. Since the days of the Russian Empire beginning in the 18th Century, their northern neighbors have dominated Central Asia. Although Russia’s power waned temporarily in the 1990s, the Russian state to this day possesses significant potential to interfere in Uzbekistan’s affairs and interrupt its international policy intentions, due to Russia’s size, geographical proximity, supply of critical natural resources, military prowess, and growing economic strength.

This theme of cooperation with and distrust of Russia endured in Karimov’s statements for the remaining eleven years examined in this project. However, from 2003 onward, President Karimov clearly repositioned the Russian state away from the negative pole on Karimov’s imagined world map. When Karimov again linked Russia to the
Soviet Union, he explicitly differentiated between Putin’s state and the individuals who longed for the Soviet past and the domination of the former-Soviet space:

*Struggle is under way in Russia between democratic forces and those which want to restore the former Soviet Union.*—Karimov, 2001

As previously stated, President Karimov’s definition of democracy was unrelated to the competition of ideas and fair voting practices. Instead, Karimov regarded democracy as the opposite of Soviet totalitarianism and all movements which he described as extremist—communism, nationalism, Islamism, etc. Therefore by describing Russia as *democratic* and ceasing all comparisons of Russia to the Soviet Union, Karimov subtly signaled to the Uzbek people that present-day Russia, having relinquished its chauvinist aspirations, had altered its own course to become an apt partner for Uzbekistan and that the future Uzbek nation will occupy a position alongside Russia on the imagined world map.

Although this shift in Karimov’s perception of Russia occurred first, it was reinforced by the fact that in 2004, Uzbekistan’s relations with the West began to sour as the United States and Europe sought to impose their own standards of human rights and democracy on the Uzbek state. Meanwhile, Russia’s consideration of international human rights and democratic standards coincided with Karimov’s to a much greater extent.

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30 I do not wish to imply that the *West* is a real, definable, or cohesive entity. However, Karimov frequently refers to the United States and a number of western European countries as the *West*. Having lived in the Soviet Union for more than fifty years of his life, it is little wonder that this Cold War construct continues to pervade his understanding of the world’s political geography. It is interesting to note that Karimov refers to African and Latin American states extremely infrequently. Their physical location, which is remote from Uzbekistan, and their lack of economic, political, and military prestige are all possible reasons for this omission. Their exclusion may also be further evidence of Karimov’s persisting Cold War mentality, in which Africa and Latin American constitute the Third World and the turf on which the First and Second World powers compete for influence. Karimov instead focuses his attention on the primary Cold War powers—the United States, Europe, China, and the states of the former Soviet Union.
degree. Essentially, Russian officials did not comment on the status of human rights and democracy in Uzbekistan, which satisfied Karimov. In essence, Karimov wanted to be left alone to control his own space.

Attendant to the improvement in their relations, Karimov’s presentation of Russia to the Uzbek nation changed:

*There is not a country in the world which is as rich as Russia, if we take into account its underground and other resources, the people’s culture, history and other potential, it is very difficult to find such a country in the world.—Karimov, 2004*

Here Karimov appealed to Russia’s rich culture and history, signaling their similarity to the Uzbek nation and presenting them as a natural ally. Through association with Russia in the traditional realm, Uzbekistan also symbolically acquired Russia’s modern “riches”—military advancement and economic prosperity.

It hardly seemed possible in the early days after the collapse of the Soviet Union for the Russian Federation to overcome its association with USSR and the similarly despised Russian Empire. In their respective eras, both the Soviet Union and Tsarist Russia hijacked the course of the Uzbek people, according to Islam Karimov’s portrayal of history. As their current leader, he claimed that it was his responsibility to ensure that a similar usurpation does not happen again.

However improbable, the Russian Federation did rise to hold a positive position on Karimov’s imagined world map, mostly due to the efforts of Vladimir Putin. This reconfiguration of the imagined world map did not occur overnight. For a period of three to four years, Karimov took advantage of his role as the Uzbek nation’s GPS to carefully

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31 This translation is imprecise. However, I believe this refers to resources that are buried as opposed to politically underground.
recalculate the nation’s rightful place in the world, eventually favoring the Russian Federation.
**False Coordinates: The West**

Although Karimov recognized the United States of America and Europe\(^{32}\) as two separate entities, I have chosen to discuss both in a single section because their fates on his imagined world map are greatly intertwined. This is evident in the similarity of their changing description across time—exclusively positive characteristics through 2003, followed by a mixture of both positive and negative attributes until 2009. In 2009, Karimov stopped describing the Western states negatively. However, the positive characteristics, which President Karimov assigned to the West in this late period, were limited to the single attribute *internationally prestigious*. (See Figures 4 and 5)

With the evaporation of the Soviet Union, the people of Uzbekistan were in the midst of an identity crisis. Seemingly overnight, they were transformed from citizens of one of the world’s foremost powers, self-assured in their own political and economic supremacy, into members of a state uncertain of its economic viability and comparatively devoid of global political significance. The Soviet Union’s Cold War opponents remained, the bearers of aid and possessors of the qualities that the Uzbek nation hoped to regain. In this way, the West came to symbolize on Karimov’s imagined world map

\(^{32}\) *Europe* was the most difficult actor among those included in this project to code as it does not comprise an easily definable entity. Karimov clearly does not regard Russia as a European power, although the most politically powerful region of the Russian Federation is located on the European continent. His perception of other former Soviet states located in Europe is less clear, especially Ukraine and the Baltic states. Nevertheless, it is evident that Karimov considers France, Great Britain, and Germany to be the core European states in accordance with the Cold War division of the world. For this reason, the *Europe* timeline is a conglomeration of Karimov’s references to France, Great Britain, Germany, and Europe as a singular unit. Each is marked in a different color, allowing the reader to interpret each individually.
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Figure 5: The United States of America
prosperity, prestige, and modernity. From the collapse of the Soviet Union until 2004, Uzbekistan’s rightful position in the world, Karimov claimed, was alongside the Western nation-states. Karimov presented the U.S. and European interest in Uzbekistan as if it proved the nation’s international significance. He intimated that Western corporations were working with Uzbek firms to upgrade the technological base of the country and that American and European military aid would result in a strong military force capable of defending the republic’s borders.

Even in the simplest of ways, the “greatness” of the great Western powers was transferred to the Uzbek nation. In an interview conducted on the return trip from the celebration of the 50th anniversary of NATO in 1999, Karimov stressed that he and then-U.S. President Bill Clinton sat next to each other at the reception. This happenstance, President Karimov suggested, was indicative of the United States and Uzbekistan’s close and mutually advantageous relationship and was likely envied by many countries.xxxix The seating arrangements at the NATO celebration were a physical representation of Uzbekistan’s rightful place in the world, which, for the years 1991 through 2003, Karimov presumed was alongside the Western powers.

While indicating that their relationship was a natural fit and mutually beneficial, President Karimov did not claim that Uzbekistan was equal to the United States, nor to the West as a whole, in a number of respects, notably in measures of prosperity, technological development, and military prowess. Instead, Western levels of achievement in these areas represented the goal of the Uzbek nation. Karimov frequently stated this explicitly:
... this is not a matter of equality but of partnership, I would say. The point is to be partners with the USA and to organize cooperation and mutually advantageous relations and through this to maintain contacts with America, whose strength is beyond doubt today, and which is, one may say, the foremost in all respects, be it economic potential, the living standard of its population, the riches it has accumulated, the level of prosperity of its people, the development of life in general, military potential and high-technological developments, its aircraft and spaceships (sic)... From this point of view, to cooperate with that country, to be partners and to lean on its strength, potential and opportunities is a big achievement for such a state as Uzbekistan. Therefore it is not a matter of equality but of strengthening cooperation and on the basis of that cooperation to achieve the goals set before our state, people, our public and society.—Karimov, 1999

In this quotation, Karimov admitted the inequality of Uzbekistan’s relationship with the United States. Partnership with the NATO military alliance, even if not as a full member, Karimov indicated, advanced Uzbekistan toward the nation-state goal of possessing a strong, modernly-equipped military force capable of securing the state’s borders. This cooperation with the United States, along with the occurrence of their leader literally rubbing elbows with the American president, raised the Uzbek nation’s global prestige and hastened them towards the day when they will occupy their rightful position in the world.

The characteristics listed in the above quotation highlight the aspects of the United States, and to a similar degree, of Europe, which Karimov frequently admired until the mid-2000s. Through direct comparison with the United States or Europe, President Karimov projected these qualities onto Uzbekistan’s own present or future situation.

Also, note that all of the characteristics listed in the above quotation are contained in the modern aspect of the Uzbek nation’s future, indicated in Table 4.1. Absent from the list are references to tradition or a historical past. While Karimov mentioned the long
history of Europe from time to time, primarily in reference to the Silk Road, he never explicitly admired their long cultural history as he does China’s, Afghanistan’s, and the other Central Asian states’, along with other countries’ not included in this study. (See Figures 6, 10 and 11) Traditional qualities were weighted equally with the modern qualities in the President’s description of the Uzbek nation. Because traditional ones were largely excluded from his description of the Western powers, Karimov may subconsciously have been aware that the Uzbek nation did not have much in common with the European states, even as he claimed their rightful place amongst them.

By this token, alignment with the United States on the imagined world map was even more disingenuous as the U.S. does not have a long history to acknowledge. Lacking these roots, the United States could not hope to share a cultural understanding, nor to possess a similar spirituality, which Karimov claimed is inherited from one’s ancestors; spirituality is a resource to be tapped into, rather than created. Because of their physical distance, Karimov possibly felt that the Western states threatened his independent regime less in those first thirteen years than global powers in closer proximity to Uzbekistan. Nevertheless, the association between the West and the future Uzbek nation always presented an uncomfortable alignment.

Also excluded from this list was any mention of democratic values. Long before 2004 and the obvious cooling of Uzbekistan’s relations with the U.S. and Europe, President Karimov denied the viability of European and American models of democracy in his own country. Karimov insisted that the particularities of the Uzbek nation’s
traditions, history, and values make Western democratic systems impracticable in the Uzbek context:

_We will move in the way the whole world is moving. We want to live like Europe does, like all democratic countries do...But your model of democracy, your values are not good for us. They are not good for us because we live (sic) in Uzbekistan, a country where 85% of people are Muslims. Our religion is Islam, our values are different from what we call western values._—Karimov, 2006

This quotation is one example of Karimov’s oft repeated claim that because Uzbekistan’s population is dominated by Muslims, their nation’s mentality was not compatible with Western conceptions of democracy. The form of democracy which Karimov claimed to be developing in Uzbekistan will be specific to their Islamic character. This is yet another indication that an alignment between the West and the Uzbek nation on the imagined world map was a case of false coordinates. Karimov set his sights on the wrong destination for the Uzbek nation, beside the Western states. When it became evident that the West not only held fundamentally different core values and traditions than the Uzbek nation but was also determined to interfere in Uzbekistan’s internal policy, Karimov recalculated alongside which global powers the future great Uzbek nation would be positioned. However, because he maintained that a variety of legitimate forms of democracy exist, one of which is specific to the Uzbek nation, when Uzbekistan’s rightful place in the world shifted away from the West, _democratic_ did not cease to be an essential aspect of the future Uzbek nation. (See Figure 1)

Immediately following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, Islam Karimov voiced his support for the American government and its decision to invade Afghanistan. President Karimov reorganized this as an opportunity to be rid of
a source of instability that had long plagued his country. Afghanistan’s tumult under the 
Taliban provided the training ground for Islamic extremists, who from time to time 
launched attacks within Uzbekistan’s borders. The U.S. presence in the region also 
resulted in a dramatic increase in American monetary aid to Uzbekistan, which reinforced 
Karimov’s support for the war. Moreover, American’s courting of Uzbekistan to gain 
access to Uzbek military bases combined with the opposition that that relationship drew 
from the Russian Federation enhanced the Uzbek nation’s global prestige. Karimov 
demonstrated Uzbekistan’s independent policy by allowing American forces to use 
Uzbek territory as a transit point despite Russia’s protests and at the same time 
boast that the world’s most powerful state needed his country’s help.

The war in Afghanistan furthermore provided the opportunity for Islam Karimov 
to adopt a tone of superiority toward the powerful European states. In 2002, Karimov 
chastised Europe for its inaction in fighting international terrorism. Karimov attributed 
European negligence to a lack of spirituality brought about by self-indulgent 
materialism. By contrast, this accusation highlighted Uzbekistan’s own spirituality.

Defining Karimov’s understanding of “spirituality” is a difficult undertaking. 
Karimov frequently used the words “spirituality” and “spiritual” without expounding 
upon their meaning, and yet spirituality clearly was a critical component of the character 
of the future Uzbek nation. (See Figure 1) Therefore, I patched together three quotations 
from three different years, hoping to shed some light on the President’s concept of 
spirituality. These three quotations represent just about the only times in this vast
collection of documents that Karimov discussed the meaning of spirituality. It seems that Karimov’s definition of spirituality embodied a sense of social responsibility:

_Spirituality appears when man feels himself to be an integral part of the nation and devotes his life and work to his people._—Karimov, 1992^{xliii}

President Karimov declared that it was the government’s duty in cultivating spirituality to:

...educate people who are free and perfectly developed and who know their rights, who rely on their own power and possibilities, who independently approach the events taking place around them, at the same time who see their private interests in harmony with the interests of the country and the people.—Karimov, 1999^{xliv}

Thus, spirituality connected the individual to the nation and the state. If one is “spiritual,” their interests are intertwined with the nation’s. However, Karimov also elaborated that:

...the government’s culture and its level of spirituality becomes known through its treatment of the handicapped.—Karimov, 2000^{xlv}

Therefore, through spirituality the people are not only responsible to the state but the state is charged with the protection and care of its people. Spirituality, according to Karimov, referred to a practicable code of ethics and is regarded as the antonym for self-interest.^{xlvi} Therefore on an international level, Europe’s apathy towards the Afghan conflict prior to 2001 and what the President viewed as their insufficient participation in the War in Afghanistan after the September 11^{th} terrorist attacks constituted a violation of spiritual responsibility. In 2002 and 2003, Karimov offered similar arguments for Europe’s general opposition to the Iraq War, which he initially supported. Despite his continued disagreement with the European states, in this set of materials, President Karimov never again directly accused Europe of a lack of spirituality.
Karimov’s opinion of U.S. and European involvement in the Afghan and Iraq wars reversed just two years later as Uzbekistan’s relationships with these two entities became strained. In July 2004, then-Secretary of State Colin Powell told the U.S. Congress that he could no longer certify that Uzbekistan was achieving “substantial and continuing” progress on human rights, as congressional legislation demanded. As a result, $18 million in U.S. assistance to Uzbekistan was cut. The Department of Defense undermined this gesture by announcing $25 million in aid to the Uzbek government shortly thereafter, but the increase in defense dollars was not sufficient to cause Karimov to forget the diplomatic pressure from the State Department.

One year later, the Andijon tragedy occurred, resulting in even more pressure from the West regarding Uzbekistan’s human rights record. Specifically, European and, with some hesitancy, American officials demanded that Uzbekistan’s president allow an international investigation into the events. These demands clearly violated the “independent path” of the Uzbek nation, which was to be guided exclusively by President Karimov. The Western countries undermined what may have been the key to their attractiveness as a point of association with the Uzbek nation on the imagined world map, their inability to interfere with Karimov’s independent policies. In what appears to be a pattern of linking events in order to inflate the drama and significance of his argument, in 2005, Karimov equated the U.S. and European actions in Iraq and Afghanistan with their demands for an international investigation into the Andijon incident. He claimed that each of these was an example of great power chauvinism.\textsuperscript{xlvii}
From 2005 until 2009, Karimov adjusted the coordinates on his imagined world map and shifted the United States and Europe toward the negatively-charged pole:

*Be aware that if some people [from the West] want to defeat us, they will change our way of thinking and our outlook, and they will demand we forget our history completely. Most importantly, they will insult and restrict our ancient traditions, will demand that we deviate from our traditions. And they will gradually prepare [our] children for this if we fail to notice this.*—Karimov, 2006xl\textsuperscript{viii}

In fact, during this period extending from 2004 until 2009, Karimov equated the West directly with the USSR:

*Dogmatism, no matter in what form it shows itself; be it religious dogmatism or communist dogmatism, they ignore everything, act against their own principles, and carry out their activities proceeding from a Bolshevik principle which says “You are either with us or against us.” We are confident that it is impossible to export democracy and different models of open societies. It is also impossible to import or push through a universal project of state construction.*—Karimov, 2005xl\textsuperscript{xli}

In the above quotation, through the use of comparison President Karimov transferred to American and European democratic and human rights standards the negative attributes which he previously established as characteristic of the Soviets, namely dogmatism and foreign origination. With this, Karimov sent a clear message that the Uzbek nation’s future is as detached from the Western countries as it is from its own Soviet past.

In late 2005, when relations between Uzbekistan and the United States were most strained, Karimov elicited a unique criticism of the U.S., accusing it of violating its own democratic principles:

*I think it is short-sightedness for a country which views itself as the most powerful country to say that its own model of democracy is applicable everywhere and recommend it to all, and use great forces behind this. Think for yourselves dear friends, exporting democracy and introducing it forcibly from abroad is in itself against the nature of the concept of democracy.*—Karimov, 2005\textsuperscript{1}
This quotation is interesting not only for the accusation of undemocratic behavior, but also for the way in which President Karimov reduced the United States’ status as the most powerful country in the world to merely be its own perception of itself. Just six years earlier, as we have seen, Karimov himself called the United States “the foremost in all respects.”

As previously stated, Karimov employed democracy as a means of symbolically differentiating the Uzbek present and future from the Soviet past. Throughout this historical period and until the present day, democracy in Uzbekistan was dominated by the “majority,” and through the wielding of power, Karimov always represented the majority. Theoretically, opposition groups were allowed to voice dissenting opinions, but unsurprisingly, in a country frequently cited for human rights violations against dissenter, a viable opposition has yet to arise. Karimov’s government accused groups, both internal movement and international organizations, which endeavored to voice alternative opinions of using democracy as a screen behind which to advocate extremist policies.

As the animosity between Uzbekistan and the West died down in the late 2000s, President Karimov distinctly rearranged the imagined world map once again, this time so that the Western states veered to a new location at a distance from the negatively-charged pole. Karimov’s negative descriptions of Western countries ceased, but they did not reclaim their former position at the positively-charged pole, nor as the rightful neighbors of the future Uzbek nation when the Uzbeks finally obtain their deserved position on the world stage. Karimov’s attributions of characteristics, positive or negative, to the
European states stopped altogether. The President mentioned various European countries and the European Union in his speeches and interviews since 2009, but he did not attribute to them any shared qualities with the future great Uzbek nation. Meanwhile, the United States retained a presence on Karimov’s imagined world map. While it was positioned toward the positively-charged pole, the U.S. remained at a distance from the deserved position of the Uzbek nation. Since 2009, President Karimov only described the United States as being internationally prestigious.
The Reappearance of the Silk Road: The People’s Republic of China

Until 2004, President Karimov referred to the People’s Republic of China in the Uzbek press almost exclusively as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, a body which the President regarded as the height of prestige. Even as China gradually increased its interactions with Uzbekistan through Shanghai Cooperation Organization and trade agreements regarding energy resources, Karimov did not frequently address publicly the Sino-Uzbek relationship. When their borders with China first opened in the 1990s, the Central Asians had little knowledge of the neighboring power beyond the post-1960 Sino-Soviet split, which posed the People’s Republic of China as the primary Cold War opponent of Soviet Asia. After independence, Uzbeks genuinely feared the potential for Chinese domination replacing that of the Soviet authorities. This fear may have motivated Karimov to exclude China from the imagined world map, thereby invalidating the Chinese way as a legitimate path for the Uzbek nation.

Beginning in 2004 and lasting through the present day, Karimov has acknowledged ties between Uzbekistan and China, admiring China in particular for achieving a high level of technological advancement. In 2005, China supported the Uzbek government’s role in the Andijon incident. Just weeks after the crisis, Karimov flew to Beijing to meet personally with China’s President Hu Jintao. At this time, the People’s Republic of China appeared for the first time as a real presence on President Karimov’s imagined world map. Karimov emphasized their ancient history. Based upon
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the previously-established respect for antiquity, Karimov’s acknowledgement of China’s ancient roots served as an indication of China’s greatness and their similarity to the Uzbek nation. In his speeches, the President also admired a number of China’s modern characteristics—their high levels of education, prosperity, and technological advancement. (See Figure 6) China, for Karimov, epitomized a real world example that a nation can be both traditional and modern. This suggests the possibility that Uzbekistan can also build on their historical roots to military, economic, and technological prowess.

China’s appearance on Karimov’s imagined world map may have been the result not only of cooling Uzbek relations with the West but also of China’s own increasing global prestige as it weathered the global financial crisis with more grace than the Western countries. Karimov blamed the United States for causing the global economic downturn. Conversely, the President compared the Uzbek response to the crisis to the Chinese response:

*The essence of creating a stable state, economic system is in preventing periodical crises from affecting the foundations and the essence of the system that we are building. Why am I comparing the Chinese and Uzbek models? Because they are similar in many ways.—Karimov, 2009*

When the 2008 economic crisis struck, Karimov had already shifted the rightful place of the Uzbek nation to be adjacent to the People’s Republic of China. The changing real world conditions, with China’s rise as an economic powerhouse coinciding with the West’s economic stumble, certainly enhanced the desirability of an eastward orientation as opposed to a westward one.

At the Sharq Taronalari Music Festival held in Samarkand in August of 2009, Karimov proclaimed in his opening address:
I believe that each and everyone present at this square will agree with me if I say that this city, which reflects the immortal spirit of the East, its ancient and every young look, takes pride of unique architectural monuments as well as the hospitable and kind people living here, who for over the span of many centuries embodied the most noble qualities and characteristics, language and nature of various nations and ethnicities, shall turn into an integral and splendid part of this festival and give it a new freshness, charm and fascination.—Karimov, 2009

In this address, Karimov repeatedly employed the terms *East, Eastern, and Oriental* to describe the Uzbek nation. Although he had previously referred to the Uzbek nation on occasion as an Eastern civilization, in this instance, Karimov simultaneously drew the audience’s attention to the city’s combined character, embodying the traditional and the modern, or as he says in the above quotation, “its ancient and ever young look.” As China rose toward the positively-charged pole on his imagined world map, it seems that the combination of the traditional and the modern became qualities that were intrinsically “Eastern” to Karimov’s reckoning. Through the present day, Karimov fully abandoned his assertion that the Uzbek nation belongs alongside of the Western powers, selecting instead a position beside the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation.

Some political analysts early in this new decade claimed that Uzbekistan appears to be reacquiring a westward orientation, abandoning the eastward outlook it embraced when U.S./Europe-Uzbekistan relations cooled in the mid-2000s. The timelines in this project reveal a different story. (See Figures 4, 5, and 6) Karimov’s association of the Uzbek nation with the People’s Republic of China began before Uzbekistan’s relations with the West became strained. This strong association also continued after U.S.-Uzbek relations rekindled. Moreover, in the post-reconciliation era to date, Karimov only

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33 Karimov also frequently described Uzbekistan as a bridge between the East and West. The number of times the President invoked the bridge motif seems to have decreased in the late 2000s.
attributed the positive characteristic of *internationally prestigious* to the United States, while China maintained a variety of descriptors. In the last three years, President Karimov clearly relocated the U.S. and Europe away from the negatively-charged pole on the imagined world map. However, Karimov no longer aligned the Uzbek nation with the American and European powers. In order to be considered a natural neighbor for the Uzbek nation when they attain their rightful place in the world, a country must share not just one positive attribute, but a wide array of them, preferably encompassing both traditional and modern qualities. That being said, the West was always a strange bedfellow for Karimov’s conception of the Uzbek nation because he never attributed any traditional characteristics to the United States and few to the European countries. This theory and its accompanying timelines indicate that while relations with the West thawed, even warmed, Karimov continued to guide the Uzbek nation eastward.

The Silk Road, the route along which goods were traded between the East and West for centuries, brought great wealth to the Central Asian region and facilitated the exchange of ideas, technologies, and cultures. This historical figure is an apt metaphor for what Karimov hoped to gain from Uzbekistan’s real world relations with the People’s Republic of China as well as its relationship with China on the imagined world map—China’s level of technological development and prosperity.
Hit the Road, Jack: Belligerent Islam

Despite the government’s claims of religious freedom, religious practice in Uzbekistan is regulated and monitored by the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan (MBU). Organizations and individuals operating outside the MBU regulations were subjected to slander, arrests, and torture by the state. President Karimov used a variety of labels to refer to these independent Muslims, most common amongst his lexicon are Wahhabism, Islamic extremism, and Islamic fundamentalism. In this project, however, I have opted to use his less commonly invoked term “Belligerent Islam.” This was a conscious decision on my part in an attempt to avoid unintentionally perpetuating the weighty connotations attached to the alternative terms. Having read this mass of sources, I feel that in the context of Uzbekistan, there is an inherent violence in the term Wahhabism. Karimov seemed to have used this term more often when he wanted to emphasize the unmitigated evil of the people to whom he applied the label, but he not always treated Islamic fundamentalists in this manner. From time to time, the President indicated a certain degree of sympathy for the Uzbek members of these movements, who he suggested have had their young

### Figure 7: Belligerent Islam

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minds polluted by foreign aggressors. Karimov even on occasion expressed a desire and ability to forgive these people if they will reenter the fold of his accounting of Uzbek national morals. As with the term Wahhabism in the Uzbek context, I feel that “Islamic extremism” and “Islamic fundamentalism” are weighty terms in the American, post-9/11 context. In order to avoid perpetuating stereotypes both of Muslims and of Karimov’s treatment of them, I have elected to the more neutral of Karimov’s terms—Belligerent Islam—to represent the gamut of movements that he characterized as negative and non-native forms of the Islamic religion.

Situated alongside the USSR at the negatively-charged pole on the imagined world map during the years 1998 through 2006, Karimov’s description of Belligerent Islam ran counter to both the traditional and the modern aspects of his version of the Uzbek nation. (See Figures 1 and 7) In his mind, the various Islamist movements included in the category of Belligerent Islam were absolutely incompatible with Uzbek society. It appears that Karimov did not begin to present the conflict with the varying interpretations of the Islamic religion as the battleground on which Uzbekistan’s future would be decided until the mid-1990s. With the passage of time, Karimov may have determined that a negative “other” more contemporary than the USSR was essential to contrast with the Uzbek nation’s positive values. Presently, the median age in Uzbekistan is 25.7 years, which means that more than half the population has little or no memory of Soviet era. The new generation’s formative years, beginning around the age seventeen and lasting throughout young adulthood, transpired in the post-Soviet atmosphere.

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35 The term “Islamist” specifically refers to a political form of Islamic fundamentalism. In contrast, “Islamic” is simply the adjectival form of “Islam.”
These young adults are likely to evaluate the current situation not in comparison to the historic experience but in terms of whether or not it satisfies their needs and desires. Having not personally suffered the so-called Soviet oppression, the younger generation may not accept the Soviet past as a legitimate scapegoat for the present inequities. Awareness of the generational shift may have motivated Karimov to emphasize the adversary that was present during the formative years of the new generation. Belligerent Islam had reared its head in Tajikistan’s Civil War lasting from 1992 to 1997 and in the continuous violence in Afghanistan.

Without a greater number of sources from the 1990s, it is impossible to substantiate the delayed appearance of Belligerent Islam on Karimov’s imagined world map. Even with a larger pool of sources, it would only be possible to prove or disprove this phenomenon, not the motivations behind the adjustment of narrative. However, it is clear that Karimov was not oblivious to the change in demographics. In the address he delivered on the Republic of Uzbekistan’s 17th Independence Day, celebrating the collapse of the Soviet Union, Karimov stated explicitly:

*It is known that in the East...the age of 17 years old is considered to be the time and symbol of adulthood.*36 Our children who were born in the first year of independence are now entering this beautiful period of life. At the moment, the number of such young men and women in our country makes up six hundred seventy three thousand people.— Karimov, 2008

Like the Soviet Union, Belligerent Islam occupied a firm position at the negatively-charged pole of Karimov’s imagined world map, although his descriptions of these two entities were not identical. He regarded both as being foreign, immoral, and

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36 It is a pure stroke of chance that Karimov’s understanding of the age of adulthood matches exactly the age that renowned political scientist Sigmund Neumann states is when children start questioning the world around them and thus have their conceptions of the world shaped by current events.
dogmatic. However, Karimov’s criticism of the USSR tended to focus on its totalitarian nature and controlled economy, whereas his condemnation of Belligerent Islam, in addition to the above listed factors, was due primarily to the proposed implementation of the caliphate political system, which he derided as both backwards and nonsecular:

...how can we go back to the Middle Ages—thousands of years back? How can we give up television at all? How can we give up the means of communication now? When the world is building its future on IT and when the world is changing, how can we give all that up and live in a caliphate system of that century in Uzbekistan or other Muslim countries?—Karimov, 2004

Despite their differences in description, President Karimov drew parallels between the Soviet Union and Belligerent Islam in order to amplify the threat of Islamic movements, as well as to highlight their unnatural presence in Uzbekistan given their foreign origins:

The unavoidable losses caused by reforms during the transition period, the objective processes of differentiation within the population and natural distinctions of ownership level have forced part of the population to take the attitude of a Soviet-like mentality in calling for a return to utopia and illusory equality, and to the pseudo-struggle against luxury and excessiveness—a return in essence to the equally-leveled standards that make people flat and society uncolored—instead of applying and developing their own skills and knowledge in order to improve their well-being. In these circumstances ideas such as Wahhabism become deceptively attractive.—Karimov, 1998

This quotation is interesting because President Karimov blamed the Soviet mentality of dependence for inciting Wahhabism. It hardly seems logical that the mentality of an atheist state would provide fertile ground for religious fundamentalism, and yet Islam Karimov made the two fit together. In accordance with Andrew March’s analysis of the Uzbek national ideology, concluding that history is the tool of ideology, Karimov linked these two disparate challenges to each other. President Karimov treated each of the challenges to Uzbek nationalism throughout history as if it were a single
battle between good and evil. As such, the national ideology of the inherently good Uzbek people, Karimov believed, would ward off a slew of unwelcome –isms—Islamism, Liberalism, and Pan-Turkism—and will replace one final –ism—Marxism-Leninism.

Yet, even as he derided Belligerent Islam, Karimov did not shirk the Uzbeks’ Muslim identity. President Karimov took the presidential oath with one hand on the Quran and the other on the constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Karimov was also the first Central Asian leader to perform the hajj to Mecca after the Soviet collapse. His nation’s Islamic faith connects them to their history, the foundation on which Karimov claimed the future great Uzbek nation is being built. President Karimov particularly stressed the region’s significance in the development of the Islamic religion centuries ago. Their ancestors’ contributions to Islam served as a source of pride and global prestige.

Perhaps Karimov’s frequent admiration of the greatness of the Islamic religion and its importance to the Uzbek nation was intended in part to counteract his demonization of Wahhabis, Islamic extremists, etc. (See Figure 7) There is no doubt in my mind that Karimov truly regarded Islam as an undeniable part of Uzbek history and culture, but perhaps he intended the frequency and tone of his laudations of Islam to preempt accusations that he was anti-Muslim. Karimov may have also intended for this purpose his repetition of the secular nature of the Uzbek state. (See Figure 1) This strategy would echo that of President Karimov’s consistent disparagement of the Soviet

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37 The hajj, one of the pillars of Islam, is the pilgrimage to Mecca that is required once in the life of every able-bodied Muslim who can afford the trip.
Union, ignoring all of its redeeming qualities as an attempt to modify the nation’s collective memory.

The President’s frequent use of the term “Wahhabism” during the period 1998 through 2006 acted as a cue to the Uzbek population of the incompatible nature of these movements with the values inherent in the Uzbek identity.\textsuperscript{38} Wahhabism is the dominant form of Islam practiced in Saudi Arabia. Muslims who adhere to the belief system, known as Wahhabis, recognize the Quran and the Hadith as the only authoritative Islamic texts. Wahhabis consider religious practice that does not strictly coincide with these writings to be heretical. In Saudi Arabia, the Wahhabis destroyed many monuments and tombs, claiming these sites were used for idol worship. Such idolatry, in their view, is a direct challenge to the indivisibility of God, the core tenet of Islam. In contrast, Central Asian Muslims incorporate many historically non-Islamic traditions in their religious practice, including visiting to the tombs of local Muslim saints.\textsuperscript{39}

When Karimov used the term “Wahhabism,” he was not specifying Saudi Arabia’s sect of Islam, although Wahhabism’s origins outside Central Asia enhanced its utility as a symbol. Karimov used Wahhabism as a catch-all phrase, combining various movements with sometimes vastly different goals and strategies to appear as one

\textsuperscript{38} Throughout the USSR, the term \textit{Wahhabism} was used much as today’s American politicians and media members use \textit{Islamic fundamentalism}. According to Alexander Knysh, the vagueness of these terms “enables it to explain a great number of seemingly unrelated events world-wide in terms that are easily understood (or misunderstood) by the average consumer of such discourses.” (Alexander Knysh, “A Clear and Present Danger: “Wahhabism” as a Rhetorical Foil,” \textit{Die Welt des Islams} 44, no.1 (2004):24-25, http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=b9f7d927-616a-403e-828a-cfee52603838%40sessionmgr11&vid=2&hid=17 (accessed March 6, 2011)) Amongst the leaders of former Soviet states, Karimov is not unique in continuing to use the term Wahhabism in this manner in the post-Soviet era. The Russian government, for example, frequently refers to Chechen and Daghestani separatists as \textit{Wahhabis}.

\textsuperscript{39} Islam does not have a hierarchy of saints in the manner of the Roman Catholic Church. Instead, Muslim “saints” are simply Muslims who are widely recognized as holy. Visits to the tombs and shrines of “saints” are an established expression of piety in Uzbekistan and a common Sufi practice.
The threat posed by these movements was thus amplified, justifying more stringent action by Uzbekistan’s government.

From 1998 to 2006, Karimov frequently labeled any citizen of Uzbekistan who displayed opposition to his regime and its policies as a victim of foreign Islamist influence, such as Wahhabism, whether or not they were in fact connected to an Islamist organization:

*Millions and even billions are being spent bringing Wahhabis into Uzbekistan, along with not only their movement but also their ideology. They want to outstrip our religious leaders. That is why I say outloud: People, leaders of religious establishments! Why are you not fighting against the Wahhabi movement? The state should certainly wage a fight against them. But do you have an ideology or an idea against their false and evil features? No, you don’t. People’s minds must be taken care of, cleared and armed with ideology.—Karimov, 2000*

Ironically, President Karimov considered ideology to be one of the damning features of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, throughout the independent era, Karimov proposed to fill the ideological gap left by communism with a national ideology. Because the President’s proposed national ideology predates Belligerent Islam’s appearance on his imagined world map, (see Figure 7) we may conclude that Karimov’s desire to cultivate a nationality was not a reaction to the threat of Islamist groups, although he used the ideology to combat Islamists’ influence amongst the Uzbek population as much as to eradicate the Soviet mentality of dependence. The President claimed that this national ideology was fundamentally different than either the communist or religious ideologies

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40 Karimov especially emphasized the prioritization of the economy over politics, meaning de-ideologization and marketization of the economy will take precedence over political reform in the state agenda. Karimov frequently repeated this point throughout the 1990s and to decreasing degrees in the 2000s. In reality, the structure of Uzbekistan’s economy underwent few changes since the Soviet era and even experienced an increase in state-controls since the outset of independence. (Neil J. Melvin, *Uzbekistan: Transition to Authoritarianism on the Silk Road* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000), 85.)
due to its emphasis on both spirituality and morality.\textsuperscript{lxv} By Karimov’s reckoning, the Communist Party was intrinsically linked with the communist ideology, both being formed by directive from above, and thus it prevented democratic competition. In contrast, Karimov’s party, the Liberal Democratic Party, was portrayed as a popular movement. This claim is reinforced by his use of the pronoun we, emphasizing his role as the authentic voice of the entire nation. He contended that the party’s well-defined national ideology would bring about free thought to combat the dogmatism of both communist and Islamist ideology and that it would encourage political parties to improve their work. In this way, democratic competition would ensue.\textsuperscript{lxvi}

President Karimov was particularly unsettled by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), a militant jihadist organization that seeks the overthrow of Karimov’s government and its replacement with an Islamic state, because its very name challenges his idea that Belligerent Islam is unnatural to the Uzbek people. Several times in the period 1998–2006, the President challenged the name of the IMU, insisting that along with Uzbeks a variety of Central Asian and extra-regional ethnicities were included in the IMU’s ranks.\textsuperscript{lxvii}

It is called the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. But we know very well that its members were representatives of all ethnic groups and not only in Central Asia. There were also die-hard militants from Pakistan, Afghanistan and countries far from Central Asia.¶...Some of our neighboring countries—and I will not name them—are gloating at the name “Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.” In particular Kyrgyz politicians very much like to note that the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which is located in the north of Afghanistan, poses a threat to the territory of Kyrgyzstan.—Karimov, 2003\textsuperscript{lxviii}

In 2004, a coordinated bombing struck both the American and Israeli embassies located in Tashkent. The IMU claimed responsibility, but Karimov adamantly argued that these
attacks were committed by Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (HTI), a transnational organization founded in 1953 which today maintains offices in Western Europe. The HTI denied responsibility. As a result of their ideology which precludes violence as a tactic for the achievement of their goal, the majority of the HTI’s confirmed activities in Uzbekistan have been limited to the distribution of propagandist leaflets.\textsuperscript{lxix} Nevertheless, Karimov dismissed the HTI’s claim of innocence. The President continued to insist that the HTI must have perpetrated the attacks because violence is inherent in their cause to implement a caliphate in Central Asia.\textsuperscript{41} In my estimation, Karimov clung to this line of rhetoric because the HTI, with its foreign roots and offices, did not pose the same threat to his conception of the Uzbek national identity as did the IMU, whose local origin is indicated in its very name.

Although it is not uncommon for Karimov to talk about an actor without attributing to it any of the values measured in this project, since 2006, President Karimov simply stopped mentioning Belligerent Islam in any manner. Up until the present day, the President continued to discuss international terrorism and only occasionally religious extremism as sources of destabilization, but mostly when referring to China’s three evils—international terrorism, extremism and separatism.\textsuperscript{lxx} This modification of the President’s narrative surprised me. After reading thousands of pages of President Karimov’s speeches and interviews, I did not see this change of course coming, nor looking back, can I pinpoint the moment the change occurred. Although I do not have access to every utterance Karimov made during this four and a half year period, the years

\textsuperscript{41} The IMU is included on the list of Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations compiled by the U.S. Department of State. However, the HTI is not. In fact, the HTI operates legally in Europe, maintaining their headquarters in London.
2007-2011 are represented by 122 documents, 122 opportunities for Karimov to mention Belligerent Islam. Included in these were a number of obvious openings for Karimov to blame Wahhabis and Islamist extremists for inciting unrest—explanations of the 2005 Andijon events, 2010 Osh riots, and 2011 uprisings in the Middle East. Therefore, I am fairly confident that Belligerent Islam has indeed disappeared from Karimov’s imagined world map. This change in Karimov’s rhetoric supports Andrew March’s assertion that Islamophobia is not Karimov’s primary justification for authoritarianism. Rather, the Uzbek President’s constant call for stability and welfare for the people provides a more permanent defense for his non-democratic rule.\textsuperscript{lxxi} As is evident in Figure 7, Karimov erased Belligerent Islam from his imagined world map. Meanwhile, he described the future Uzbek nation up until the present day as both stable and prosperous. (See Figure 1)

In May 2005, one year after the embassy bombings in Tashkent, civilians filled the streets in the city of Andijon in the Fergana Valley,\textsuperscript{43} following a civilian-led raid on the local prison to free twenty-three popular businessmen. The government had accused these men of membership in an Islamist organization of suspect existence, Akromiya.\textsuperscript{44} Fueled in part by their belief that Karimov would be receptive to their complaints of economic hardship and oppression by local officials, the crowd swelled. Instead of an audience with the president, the people were met with gunfire from government forces. When the day was done, an estimated 750 civilians were dead.\textsuperscript{lxxii}

\textsuperscript{42} Islam Karimov would not describe his hold on Uzbekistan’s leadership as non-democratic. Instead, the President would more likely argue that he is democratically elected and that the Republic of Uzbekistan under his careful guidance is gradually developing a more perfect democracy.

\textsuperscript{43} Soviet planners divided the Fergana Valley between three republics—today’s Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

The demonstrators in Andijon, with their alleged extremist Islamist affiliations, were accused by Karimov of trying to eliminate the key components of Uzbek nationhood by damaging their international prestige and causing the Uzbek people to be dependent. With their purported attempt to regress the Uzbek nation from its future greatness, the Andijon demonstrators, as representatives of the broader phenomenon of Belligerent Islam, were located at the negatively-charged pole on Karimov’s imagined world map.

Beginning in 2007, Karimov’s narrative of the events in Andijon changed drastically, placing primary responsibility for the bloodshed on local officials and ceasing all verbal indication that an Islamist group instigated the uprising. In January of this year, Karimov told the media:

*After some time has elapsed, I would like to talk about participants in the Andijon events…All of them are Uzbek people. Therefore, no matter who and how [they] participated in these events, I personally think…that of course a senior official sure had responsibility before these people in any case…We did not pay attention to them in a timely manner. To avoid the outbreak of such events, above all, everywhere we should live with the concerns of people and humans.*—Karimov, 2011

Given that Karimov had previously accused Islamic extremists of inciting the violence in Andijon, emphasizing the foreign origins of their ideas to the territory of Uzbekistan, it was significant that in this quotation Karimov stated unequivocally that the participants in Andijon were exclusively Uzbek. Moreover, President Karimov shifted the blame for the

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tragedy onto the state and their lack of engagement with the people. This is a huge leap from his initial rejection all accountability on behalf of the government.

The 2010 riots in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, which led to thousands of ethnic Uzbeks crossing the nearby border into Uzbekistan in search of safe haven from the interethnic conflict, would have also seemed like an obvious opportunity for Uzbekistan’s president to verbally attack Islamist groups, especially after he stated that the Andijon incident was an attempt by Islamic extremists to recreate Kyrgyzstan’s Tulip Revolution in Uzbekistan. If the riots had taken place prior to 2007, Karimov may well have characterized these events differently. In actuality, the President blamed neither Kyrgyz nor ethnic Uzbeks, placing responsibility instead on an unnamed third party:

*Why did this event happen? The main issue allegedly was a clash between ethnic Uzbek and Kyrgyz people. I am absolutely against any statement about any kind of confrontation or bloodshed between the two peoples. Why? [Because] that was an organized action...We know those forces who are interested in this. It was not the Kyrgyz people who caused this disaster. It was not ethnic Uzbek people living there [in Kyrgyzstan] either.—Karimov 2010*

Karimov’s stated concern regarding the Osh riots was that it was an attempt to draw Uzbekistan into a conflict with Kyrgyzstan. He took pride in the fact that the alleged attempt failed. With Karimov’s explanation of the motivation behind the Osh riots, it is surprising that he did not accuse a Wahhabist group of instigating the violence. Belligerent Islam in this instance could have served not only as a scapegoat but as a common enemy for the Uzbek and Kyrgyz authorities.

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46 Osh is located in Kyrgyzstan’s slice of the Fergana Valley, which it shares with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. During the Soviet era, these borders were meaningless and locals crossed between republics freely. It was only with independence that these republics adopted the trappings of statehood—passports, visas, and barbed wire fences.

47 I make the distinction here between Uzbeks and ethnic Uzbeks. As I state on page 2, ethnic Uzbeks who are not citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan are not included in Karimov’s conception of the Uzbek nation.
A third opportunity for Karimov to disparage Islamist extremists presented itself in the ongoing “Arab Spring” as it is known, the domino-like set of pro-democracy revolutions in the Middle East. News of these events was greatly suppressed inside Uzbekistan according to Agence France Press. The coverage of the Arab revolts permitted inside Uzbekistan by the government ran in state newspapers under headlines such as “In Jordan, Radical Islamists Coming to Power” and “Cairo: Brutal Control Over Radicals.” It appears that the narrative of Belligerent Islam is alive and well in Uzbekistan, but that it no longer stems from Islam Karimov. In an implied reference to the Arab uprisings, Karimov said:

...we are of course watching what is happening in the world. If I am asked about the reason behind the fact that the situation in our country is totally different, I will say that a country will be peaceful if its people are content with their lives. It is never possible to stir up a nation that is content with its life...People are watching everything in daily life—which leaders are performing well or not so well and how, how people live this country, and what is their goal, whether or not is trying to improve people’s situation.— Karimov, 2011

Perhaps the Belligerent Islam narrative, which Karimov encouraged from 1998 through 2006, gained a life of its own. By excluding Belligerent Islam in his explanation of these events, President Karimov has not encouraged its perpetuation, but neither has he openly disputed it. The narrative may be perpetuated by other sources in the government and the media because it is a storyline that is known to be safe, not warranting government retribution. Without incentive to stop, the media will likely continue to recycle this message.

This change in Karimov’s narrative seems to have passed unnoticed both inside Uzbekistan and in the greater world. This fact is unsurprising because although the
change was abrupt, it was subtle. Karimov chose to re-characterize the events of the past and simply leave Belligerent Islam out of his explanations of current events. There was not one moment when the President made a grand gesture to signal the change. The exclusion of Belligerent Islam only caught my notice after the accumulation of five years of the President’s silence on the topic. This case demonstrates the value of my methodology. Because the marking of individual descriptors forced me to focus on precisely which values Karimov ascribed to a subject at each moment in time, I was prevented from falling prey to my own assumptions. The method saved me from unintentionally perpetuating the narrative of Belligerent Islam after 2006 and crediting it to President Karimov.

I can only speculate at the reasons why Karimov may have eliminated Belligerent Islam from his imagined world map. Given the timing of the disappearance, a year after government forces opened fire on civilians in Andijon, it seems to me that the two events are connected. Perhaps there was a greater degree of internal resistance to his explanation of the massacre than he anticipated. Perhaps in 2006, Karimov began to feel in real terms the international condemnation. Or perhaps, his use of Wahhabism after September 11, 2001 was primarily aimed at an American audience, who stopped listening in 2005, when they could no longer ignore Uzbekistan’s human rights abuses under the guise of fighting international terrorism. All of these theories assume that Karimov felt he had overplayed his hand with the Andijon event. It is possible that the shift in narrative had nothing to do with Andijon. Whatever the reason for the change, it demands further exploration.
The Road Not Taken: The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Turkey

In the early days following the collapse of the Soviet Union, then-U.S. Secretary of State James Baker urged the Muslim states of the former USSR to follow in the footsteps of secular Turkey and not those of extremist Iran. At first glance, these two countries logically represented models for the post-Soviet Muslim republics to adopt. Along with their populations’ shared religion, both the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Turkey are historically and linguistically connected with Central Asia. The Uzbek language, along with the Kyrgyz, Turkmen, and Kazakh languages are all Turkic-based, while Tajik is a modern variety of Persian.

Iran and Turkey’s timelines (See Figures 8 and 9) are notable for their lack of marks. These figures reveal that despite external hopes and fears to the contrary, alignment with either country was never Islam Karimov’s intention. This is primarily because Karimov has never wavered from his assertion that the Uzbek nation’s path will be independent of external influence. Since 1991, the Uzbek president has insisted his country’s course will be specific to the nature of the Uzbek people. Therefore, according to President Karimov, it is impossible to simply adopt practices from anywhere beyond Uzbekistan’s borders.

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President Karimov does mention Turkey and Iran slightly more often than the sparse marks that appear on their timelines. (See Figures 8 and 9) In these additional comments, Karimov does not attribute any of the measured values to these countries. Regardless, the President mentions Iran and Turkey, especially Iran, surprisingly infrequently given their proximity and regional significance.
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Furthermore, Secretary Baker’s comment failed to capture the divergences between Central Asians and the other Muslim-majority countries that had come about as a result of the Soviet Iron Curtain. For the majority of the 20th century, Central Asian Muslims were separated from the intellectual currents and transformative events that shaped Islamic thought during that period. As such, the Central Asian societies emerged after the fall of the Soviet Union with different ideas about political Islam and without strongly-felt reactions to the Palestinian issue. Given this understanding of Uzbekistan’s cultural development, the absence of Iran and Turkey on Karimov’s imagined world map may represent not only a conscientious choice to limit ideological competition but a nuanced understanding of his country’s peculiarities as a result of the Soviet experience.

The main link that President Karimov acknowledged between Central Asia and all Middle Eastern states, including Iran and Turkey, is their common Islamic faith. The extended history of Islam in the region also caused Karimov to emphasize the historical roots of the countries of the Middle East:

*There are great opportunities in Uzbekistan, since the most valuable manuscripts of the eastern world are being kept in Uzbekistan. These opportunities should be brought to the entire Muslim world...*--Karimov, 2004

Karimov made this statement as he was departing for a two-day visit to Kuwait to sign a variety of agreements. That same day Karimov insisted that this visit did not indicate that the Republic of Uzbekistan was aligning itself with the Middle East:

*Our visit to the Arab country Kuwait is pursuing specific goals. But I would not describe it as a increasing interest by Uzbekistan in the countries of the Middle East...*--Karimov, 2004
From time to time, Karimov used their shared faith to connect Uzbekistan to the greater Islamic World. However, he always maintained the uniqueness of Islam in Uzbekistan and the greater Central Asian region, a version of the religion which he considered moderate in comparison to the forms of Islam practiced in the Middle East. Although he never said so aloud, Karimov likely associated the Islamic Republic with political Islam for obvious reasons. Besides the fact that Iran’s government is dominated by the ayatollahs, Iranians are predominantly Shiite Muslims, while Uzbeks are Sunnis. These two branches of Islam split in the 7th Century CE in a dispute over who should succeed the Prophet Muhammad as the Muslims’ primary leader. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Iran sent emissaries to the Central Asian states, mostly to Tajikistan, whose population speaks a dialect of Farsi. One aspect of the mission of these envoys was to provide religious training. Needless to say, Karimov diametrically opposed what he viewed as a violation of the nation’s independence, and though there was little effort on the part of Iran to extend their outreach to the Republic of Uzbekistan, neither did Karimov invite it.

While not crediting Iran with many positive characteristics, Karimov attempted to avoid intentionally antagonizing Iran. Having received an exponential increase in military aid from the United States in 2002 in exchange for access to airfields which supported American operations in Afghanistan, Karimov unequivocally voiced his support for the U.S.-led wars in both Afghanistan and Iraq. He adopted then-U.S. President Bush and his administration’s rhetoric:

49 “Ayatollah” is an honorific title for an Iranian Shiite religious leader.
You know that another country, North Korea, has now got nuclear weapons and is threatening some countries. If tomorrow Saddam Husayn gets hold of weapons of mass destruction, who will then stand up to him? The policy of everyone now is: “Don’t rattle my cage and I won’t rattle yours.” This is the policy of rich Europe.—Karimov, 2003

Iran, the third member of President Bush’s “Axis of Evil,” was noticeably absent from this quotation as it is from most of Karimov verbiage. Karimov adopted George Bush’s rhetoric in a prudent foreign policy move, but he adapted it to his domestic policy concerns, first and foremost, preserving Uzbekistan’s independence. Because of the lack of descriptors, positive or negative, that President Karimov applied to Iran, I postulate that he decided to leave Iran off of the imagined world map intentionally, signaling that the Uzbek nation belongs neither alongside Iran nor at as great a distance as possible.

One possible explanation for this omission is that Karimov was cognizant of the fact that Uzbekistan has economic ties with Iran that he did not wish to jeopardize. Additionally, Karimov was likely wary of Iran’s growing military power and sees no reason to strain relations with a country that may soon be a nuclear power. At the same time, Karimov did not wish to encourage his people to consider Iran’s roadmap for Islamic statehood a legitimate path.

President Bush’s argument poached by Islam Karimov in the above quotation also matched the Uzbek President’s established pattern of communication. In the twenty years from 1991 through 2011, Karimov frequently connected events in order to very efficiently transmit his meaning. Therefore, it was natural for Karimov to appropriate President Bush’s line of reasoning that connecting North Korea’s capabilities to Iraq’s potential, while ignoring the multitude of dissimilarities.
Compared to Iran, Turkey shares more cultural and historical ties to the Uzbek people and as a result had a slightly greater presence on Karimov’s imagined world map. Both Turkey and Uzbekistan’s populations are primarily Hanafi Sunni, although the form and practice of religion in Uzbekistan was greatly affected by the Soviet experience. Turkey also enjoyed the benefit of its reputation of secularism, making its identity more similar to the proposed identity of the future Uzbek nation than that of religion-dominated Iran. Turkey’s positive relations with the West may have also boosted it in Karimov’s esteem during the 1990s when his view of the Uzbek nation’s proper place in the world was next to the Western nations. At the same time, the Western inclination would have worked against a symbolic association with Iran, considering the tensions that exist between the Iranian state and the West.

In spite of these reasons for Karimov to set the course of the Uzbek nation along the same path as the Republic of Turkey, it has not factored significantly onto his imagined world map. Throughout this twenty year period, President Karimov infrequently assigned descriptors of any kind to Turkey. (See Figure 9) This is an indication that very shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union, Karimov anticipated Turkey’s potential to emerge as the regional leader, a position, which he wished to claim for his own country. As such, Karimov rejected notions of Pan-Turkism, noting that the Uzbek people are culturally, not politically connected to their Turkic heritage:

*Although being historically and linguistically a part of the family of Turkic nations, our people have resolutely rejected the promises of pan-Turkism, along with the chauvinistic idea of a ‘Great Turan’. For us Turan is a symbol of the cultural, but not the super-

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50 I will provide more detail on this in the following section, *Fellow Travelers: Central Asia.*

51 Turan is the Turkic people’s legendary place of origin, consisting of the Altai Mountains and the Gobi Desert. Turanism is the glorification of the Turkish ethnicity.
This quotation is interesting for the way Karimov used the Uzbek people’s Persian heritage in order to combat the influences of Pan-Turkism. The Uzbeks’ Persian roots connect them not only to the Tajik people but also to modern-day Iranians. However, it is significant that Karimov here only explicitly referred to the Uzbeks’ connection to the Tajiks via their shared heritage. In these twenty years, President Karimov never formulated a historical connection between Uzbekistan and Iran. This is evidenced by the utter lack of traditional qualities—historical roots, spiritual, moral, educated—that appear on the Iranian timeline. (See Figure 8) I believe the quotation exemplifies an intentional strategy on Karimov’s part to bind together the entirety of Central Asian, including Tajikistan, while denying the legitimacy of Turkey and Iran’s ties to the region.

Any minute motivation for Karimov to align the Uzbek nation with Turkey diminished over the past two decades as secularists in Turkey have gradually been forced to share power with Islamist political parties. This change in Turkey’s internal politics prompted Karimov to withdraw Uzbek students from Turkey’s universities in August 1997. He cited concern that these students would be exposed to Islamist ideas.

Islam Karimov claimed to have chosen the road less traveled, Uzbekistan’s independent path. By excluding both countries from the imagined world map, Karimov clearly signaled that Uzbekistan will not follow the paths laid by either Iran or Turkey. The President established for himself alone the right to set Uzbekistan’s course. This, however, begs the question, why if the West also offered an alternative roadmap did
Karimov choose to position it at the negatively-charged pole of the imagined world map while he elected to simply leave Iran and Turkey off the map?

The difference between the two is that the West actively endeavored to change the course of the Uzbek nation by complaining of human rights violations, calling for more democratic practices, and demanding an international investigation into the Andijon tragedy. On the other hand, President Karimov recognized the potential for influence stemming from Iran and Turkey. Karimov elected to leave these two states off the world map perhaps as a way of preempting their influence without antagonizing two close neighbors and important trade partners. Likewise, Russia, via the Soviet Union, and Belligerent Islam did actively challenge the Uzbek nation’s path, while for the first twelve years of independence, Karimov saw in the People’s Republic of China the potential for encroachment. As a result the Russian Federation until 2000 and Belligerent Islam from 1998 until 2006 were firmly located at the negatively charged pole of the imagined world map, while China was largely excluded from the map until 2004. Following this pattern, it is apparent that Karimov’s motivations for the positioning of countries on the imagined world map were consistent but their actual placement was determined by context.
Fellow Travelers: Central Asia

Central Asia represents an exception on Karimov’s imagined world map. President Karimov evaluated most global actors as either positive or negative. Only at moments of transition, in the cases of the Russian Federation, Europe, and the United States, did Karimov attribute both positive and negative characteristics to these countries in rapid succession. (See Figures 3, 4, and 5) In contrast, Karimov’s description of the other Central Asian states—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan—as well as of the region as a whole have been consistently divided between positive and negative descriptors. In general, President Karimov attributed to the Central Asian countries a number of traditional qualities—historical roots, spiritual, educated, and internationally prestigious. At the same time, he criticized their progress in the cultivation of the markers of modern statehood. Karimov accused the Central Asian states collectively of being dependent, unstable, technologically undeveloped, poor, undemocratic, backwards, and possessing a controlled economy. (See Figure 10)

It is no secret that Karimov pursued leadership of the Central Asian region on behalf of Uzbekistan. He believed this status was deserved due to its central location, large population, energy self-sufficiency, status as the second largest cotton producer in
Figure 10: Central Asia

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the world, along with what Karimov evaluates to be greater success in the independent era:

...over 50,000,000 people are living in Central Asia and 25,000,000 of them are living in Uzbekistan, not to mention other aspects of the potential which Uzbekistan possesses—in view of this, everybody should understand...that these issues can be solved successfully only with the participation of the state which occupies a central place in Central Asia.— Karimov, 2000

Through his public utterances, both formal and informal, Uzbekistan’s president sought to undercut potential competitors for this position by treating his relationship to the entire region much in the same way that he treated his relationship to the Uzbek nation. He did not use the pronoun we in reference to Central Asia as explicitly as he did with the Uzbek nation, although he has done so on occasion. However, he frequently elucidated the position and needs of Central Asia as a solitary entity, leaving no room for interpretation by another state’s leader.

To justify his claim of regional leadership, Karimov emphasized the shared history and tradition of the Central Asian people, reinforcing their natural cohesiveness:

...Uzbek and Tajiks, the two nations have lived together for many centuries. They have always been together even in the most difficult times, in misfortunes. They have drank water from the same spring and ate bread and salt from the same soil...[O]n what basis the Tajiks could be distinguished from the Uzbeks[?] Can one distinguish them on the basis of their appearance or inner lives, mentality?—Karimov, 2000

Yet, while he consistently reinforced a shared heritage among the Central Asian nations, Karimov posited that the Uzbeks have long been the most advanced of the Central Asian nations. An essential part of Karimov’s historical accounting of the Uzbek nation characterized Amir Timur as the nation’s founding father. In terms of the Uzbek nation’s

52 The Uzbek SSR was assigned a leading role in the region by the Soviet leadership, who intentionally constructed economic and infrastructure systems that straddled the border between the Uzbek republic and the other Central Asian SSRs.
relationship to the rest of the Central Asian people, Beatrice Manz addresses Timur’s role and that of his culturally-astute descendents\(^3\) in allowing the Uzbeks to challenge the Tajiks in their historical significance. The Tajik people lay claim to the Persian heritage of the Central Asian region and along with it, the Persians’ numerous writers and cultural icons.\(^4\) Moreover, Manz acknowledges Timur’s importance in a country that touts its long suffering under the Russian and Soviet empires and yet is utterly devoid of revolutionary heroes responsible for overthrowing either of these “oppressors.”\(^{xcii}\) The Republic of Uzbekistan did not win its independence. Rather, it had independence thrust upon it by a sudden and unexpected change of circumstances. This historical development is a challenge to Karimov’s narrative of the Soviet Union as purely negative, which he accommodated much in the same way that he dealt with the benefits of the Soviet lifestyle—by simply ignoring the inconvenient truth.

While emphasizing the traditions and history common amongst the Central Asian nations, President Karimov did not attribute many modern qualities, listed in Table 4.1, to the other Central Asian states. These are the qualities that through his reforms, Karimov has claimed to be introducing to the Uzbek nation. He never asserted that the nation has fully achieved this destiny, only that the Uzbek people have progressed further along the path of modernization of society and the state than the other Central Asian nations:

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\(^3\) A number of Timur’s descendents were cultural icons, among them, Timur’s grandson Ulugh Beg, who was a gifted mathematician and astronomer and who contributed to the star tables that were used for centuries in the Middle East and Europe. Furthermore, Timur’s successors were cultural and artistic patrons.

\(^4\) As noted in the previous section, *The Road Not Taken: the Islamic Republic of Iran and Republic of Turkey*, the Persian and Turkic heritages of the region are greatly intertwined in actual fact. The imposition of state borders and the cultivation of matching modern nations has resulted in the rhetorical disentanglement of the two narratives.
We have been doing this [restructuring the economy] for a longer time than Kyrgyzstan. Therefore obviously you [Kyrgyzstan] are better and more firmly involved with the International Monetary Fund. The International Monetary Fund is the daddy who controls you in every way...We in Uzbekistan have chosen a somewhat different model. And we are not as dependent on international institutions as the economy of Kyrgyzstan is....—Karimov, 1998

With the claimed head start on its Central Asian fellow travelers along the post-Soviet road, due to its pragmatic leadership which avoided many of the potential potholes of the road of transition, Karimov declared that Uzbekistan will help introduce these hallmarks of modernity to the entire region. Karimov presumed that:

Possessing such a legacy [both Turkic and Persian heritages], together with the combination of high educational standards, urbanization and industrialization, and a traditional way of living, Uzbekistan has the potential to become the initiator of the cultural integration of the Central Asian states.—Karimov, 1998

While on the one hand desiring to secure Uzbekistan’s position as the Central Asian hegemon, Karimov has also been wary of regional integration by means of a Central Asian Union because sources of instability elsewhere in the region have the potential to threaten the nation’s well-being:

We live in one region. We have no reason to be happy that prices have increased around us, but they are low in our country. Unfortunately, no matter how much you try to close the border, it is open. Speaking frankly, our own smart people are never tired of smuggling these [food] products abroad and selling at higher prices. I would like, above all, to order border guards, customs officers and policemen to critically assess their work, and prevent these kinds of cases. Because, if we do not pay attention to this, prices in our country will be as high as theirs [in neighbouring countries] tomorrow...May nobody be offended, neighbourliness is one thing, but, as president, I am responsible for our people’s interest.—Karimov, 2008

Here Karimov clearly stated that the Republic of Uzbekistan’s primary concern is for its own people. Uzbekistan would help its neighbors but not to the detriment of its own citizens.
In opposing regional integration, Karimov was likely not only concerned about the well-being and stability of the country but also for his own grip on power. Integration would allow other states access to Uzbekistan, a circumstance to which Karimov has been fastidiously and emphatically opposed. As we have seen, Karimov repeatedly rearranged the imagined world map due to real or feared threats of violation of his control over his state by foreign powers, whether state or non-state in nature. The President of Uzbekistan has been as unwilling to accept criticism from Kazakhstan as advice from America.

Even without the interference of foreign states, the instability which occurred in neighboring states could also potentially challenge the continuation of Karimov’s reign if it were to spill over into Uzbekistan. This fear greatly shaped the President’s understanding of which peoples were included in his concept of the Uzbek nation. Karimov excluded Uzbeks living in states other than Uzbekistan from the national group. He referred instead to these non-citizen ethnic Uzbeks as the nation’s “ethnic brothers.”\(^{xcvi}\) A significant number of these “ethnic brothers,” as many as 2 million, live in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which have repeatedly brought to life the dangers of instability.\(^{55}\) Throughout these states’ conflicts, Karimov never laid claim to their populations of ethnic Uzbeks, even on occasion explicitly rejecting a special interest in the ethnic Uzbeks’ fates.\(^{xcvii}\)

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\(^{55}\) The CIA World Factbook reports 13.8% (taken from a 1999 census) of the Kyrgyz Republic’s estimated 5,587,443 (July 2011 estimate) are ethnically Uzbek. Likewise, according to the CIA World Factbook, 15.3% (taken from the census conducted in 2000) of Tajikistan’s population, estimated to be 7,627,200 (July 2011 estimate) are ethnic Uzbeks. These two figures amount to roughly 1,938,000 of the Uzbek nation’s “ethnic brothers” living in two tumultuous neighboring states.
From 1992 until 1997, Tajikistan was embroiled in a civil war so violent that war-sieged Afghanistan appeared a relative safe haven to nearly half a million Tajiks. The Kyrgyz Republic, on the other hand, twice displayed the potential for revolution. In 2005, President Askar Akayev, who like Karimov retained leadership through the tumult of the collapse of the Soviet Union, was driven out of office and out of the country by popular demonstrations that became known as the Tulip Revolution. This came on the heels of the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia and the 2004-2005 Orange Revolution in Ukraine. Fear of the revolutionary contagion spreading across the border from Kyrgyzstan was palpable, although Karimov categorically denied the possibility:

...I think it is absolutely inappropriate to connect today’s events [Andijon demonstrations] with Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan together. Each country has its own destiny, situation, the mentality of the people and these attempts to name one revolution—pink [Rose], another—orange, third—tulip.—Karimov, 2005

In April 2010, Akayev’s successor Bakiyev was chased out of office by protestors. These events were quickly followed by the June riots in Osh. The combination and quick succession of these events solidified in Karimov’s mind Uzbekistan’s role as a stabilizing force in the region, while still not wishing to become entangled in other states’ problems.
Caution Light: Afghanistan

Afghanistan’s timeline charting its position on Karimov’s imagined world map is distinct from that of Central Asia, but it imitates the same pattern. As with the Central Asian republics, President Karimov’s description of Afghanistan was suspended between its present day upheaval and its historical roots, although he only began acknowledging the long history of Afghanistan’s people in 2009. (See Figure 11) In his speeches and interviews, Karimov regularly listed Afghanistan amongst Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and occasionally Chechnya as sources of potential regional destabilization. Yet, unlike his conceptions of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan along with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, Karimov excluded Afghanistan from his conception of the Central Asian region. According to his perception of the world, Central Asia is defined by their position as a crossroads between the Muslim and Asian worlds and as survivors of the Soviet system. Afghanistan lacks this third bond. Although its people lived under and fought against Soviet occupation from 1979 to 1989, Afghanistan was never a part of the Soviet Union. Thus, Afghan society did not undergo collectivization or face the challenges of preserving its Muslim history while under the control of an atheist state. For this reason,

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56 The inclusion of Chechnya on the list was likely an appeal to Russia for its support in what would become the International War on Terrorism, as the inclusion coincided with the improvement in Uzbek-Russian relations.
57 Once again Karimov uses lists and comparisons to demonstrate his meaning and conflate the threat to the Uzbek nation.
Figure 1: Afghanistan

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in Karimov’s eyes, Afghanistan shares with the Central Asian nations common historical and cultural roots, but they have been separated from each other by the past century of experience.

As with the conflicts in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, Karimov considered Uzbekistan to be at the forefront of finding a solution to the Afghan problem. In the early 2000s, Karimov regularly criticized the U.S. and Europe for their latency in tackling the conflict in Afghanistan, which Karimov had warned throughout the 1990s should be of global concern. Karimov reveled in his role as a whistle-blower and repeatedly released statements that amounted to a politically-polished “I told you so” aimed at the West:

\textit{Albeit late in the day, leading world politicians and state leaders are admitting that Uzbekistan called on the world for vigilance to preserve peace not only for its own people but to save the lives of millions of people throughout the world [from terrorism]. They are all expressing their respect for our decisive policy despite the present complicated situation. The reason for this recognition and proof of it are perhaps provided by the various practical meetings and talks of our country’s leadership and representatives, regardless of whether they were held in Uzbekistan, Europe, Japan, the USA or many other places.}—Karimov, 2001

The President’s warnings, to the world’s great powers accompanied by Uzbekistan’s extended battle against Belligerent Islam, heightened his country’s global prestige. His personal vindication advanced the Uzbek nation toward its great future.

The above quotation stands in stark contrast to Karimov’s accusation of a lack of spirituality amongst the European states as evidenced by their inaction in Afghanistan. Unlike the West, the Uzbek people fulfilled their spiritual obligation to the greater world. Moreover, listed in this quotation were the actors beside which Karimov aligned the Uzbek nation at that moment in history, the period lasting from the fall of the Soviet

\footnote{58 See pages 56-57.}
Union through 2004—Europe and the USA. At that time, it was important to Karimov that Uzbekistan was the recipient of the West’s respect. For President Karimov, it was not enough for Uzbekistan to fight a global threat thanklessly. The value of the fight to the cultivation of the Uzbek national identity was tied to the accolade it garnered from the important players on the world stage. In both ways, the Uzbek nation advanced toward their great future.

From 1991 through the present day, President Islam Karimov called for the stabilization of Afghanistan with international cooperation, although the precise means by which it will be achieved vary depending upon the year. Initially, he fully supported the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Several years into the conflict, Karimov began to emphasize the need for a non-military solution, eventually stating that a military solution for the Afghan problem does not exist. Uzbekistan, as a neighboring country, would benefit directly from the stabilization of Afghanistan, which has served as a training ground for some of the true Islamist groups in Uzbekistan, among them the IMU.

He rightfully claims:

...unless there is peace in Afghanistan, whilst war continues there, whilst Afghanistan remains a centre of international terrorism and spreads this and while it remains a centre for growing drugs, religious extremism and obscurantism, the people in Central Asia can never be confident about their security, peace and prosperity.—Karimov, 2000

Stability, like international prestige, was a key aspect of the President’s depiction of the ideal Uzbek nation. But unlike international prestige, stability is tangible. In fact, all other modern aspects of the Uzbek national identity—secular, democratic, market economy, prosperous, educated, intellectually independent, militarily advanced, technologically

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59 Japan was also included in this list. Although not included in this project, Japan would also be an interesting country to analyze in terms of how it factors on Karimov’s imagined world map.
advanced, independent, and internationally prestigious—either contribute to the acquisition of stability, depend upon the existence of stability, or both.

Uzbekistan and Afghanistan share many cultural, religious, and historical ties. Yet, for all of their similarities, Afghanistan is the antithesis of what Karimov hoped Uzbekistan would become. Afghanistan was lawless and unstable, a country where religious extremists run amok:

*The war which has already been ongoing for 30 years destroyed both economic and social infrastructure, led to impoverishment of population, and this should be admitted, deprives people of any belief to their perspective and nurtures a feeding ground for recruiting the new militants.*—Karimov, 2008

While not appearing on the Afghanistan timeline, this quotation implied a lack of spirituality amongst the Afghan population. Within the Uzbek nation, Karimov claimed it is the lack of spirituality that leaves Uzbek youth susceptible to extremist influence:

*...if someone wants to put obstacles in the way of our independent development, in the way of achieving our goals and building a new society, they will do it by trying to influence our young people’s fledgling spirituality and mind, they will try to brainwash them with ideas that are at odds with the nature and sacred traditions of our people, will try to turn young children into an instrument for achieving their personal gains and vile ends.*—Karimov, 2001

The Afghans, according to Karimov’s assessment strayed from their ancestors values and been poisoned by external ideas.

In this way, Afghanistan, which for three decades has been entangled in conflict, serves as a caution light for the Uzbek nation as it travels along its path toward national greatness. Karimov implied that without his strong and sometimes heavy-handed leadership, the Republic of Uzbekistan may regress into an Afghanistan-like state:
I admit: perhaps in my actions there are signs of authoritarianism. But this I explain as follows: in certain periods of history, especially during the construction of statehood, strong executive power is necessary.—Karimov, 1996

Islam Karimov repeatedly emphasized the threats facing Uzbekistan from all directions, including Afghanistan. Thus, just by keeping these threats at bay, Karimov’s leadership tactics are justified, and if the Uzbek people ever questioned the necessity of the President’s authoritarian actions, he needed only to point to Afghanistan as an example of where the nation could have been without his steadfast guidance.
Conclusions: Global Positioning Semantics

...I think there will be people who will say tomorrow...that Uzbekistan chose to become closer to Russia only because its relations with the USA have cooled off to some extent...

Once, Russia—some newspapers, in particular Izvestiya, wrote that Uzbekistan was drifting towards the USA. I am recalling that it was 10 years ago. At that time I answered this question that there was no such drifting. We are not an iceberg, which drifts in the sea. Uzbekistan is a ship, which has a rudder and sails, and follows a deliberate course, a course which meets only Uzbekistan’s interests.—Karimov, 2004

Many scholars examining the project of nation-building in Uzbekistan, among them Laura Adams, Andrew March, Beatrice Manz, and Rogers Kangas, focus on the manipulation of history. This paper reveals that the Uzbek nation’s future is just as malleable and subject to reinterpretation by President Karimov as is the nation’s past. This methodology exposes both the consistencies and inconsistencies in the President’s understanding of Uzbekistan’s rightful place in the world, according to his changing perceptions of global actors. For two decades, Islam Karimov remained consistent in his description of what the Uzbek nation will become, but he changed beside whom on the imagined world map the Uzbek people will be located when they achieve their deserved position. Yet while the nation’s rightful place has alternated between alignment with the West, Russia, and China, Karimov never wavered in his assertion that Uzbekistan belongs at the apex of the Central Asian region. These rearrangements of the imagined world map constitute the independent path along which Karimov was leading the Republic of Uzbekistan.
The path of the Uzbek nation was indeed independent, as Karimov claimed, in that it has not been guided by a single foreign entity. Rather, Karimov distinctly rearranged the geography of the imagined world map a number of times during the twenty years that have passed since Uzbekistan became independent. Karimov’s symbolic repositioning of countries does appear reactionary, often following real-world changes in relations. However, the geography of the imagined world map is a reflection of the President’s understanding of the Uzbek nation’s relationships with other global actors. Only one factor in determining these relationships was their real-world relations. Positive and negative relations result in positive or negative descriptions respectively, but the precise characteristics included in these descriptions were determined by Karimov’s evolving needs. The West, and specifically the United States, is the most apt example of this. For the first thirteen years after the collapse of the USSR, Karimov described the West as possessing a wide range of positive modern characteristics. This is due to the Western states’ utility in the first decade of independence as a symbol of prosperity, modernity, and prestige, Karimov’s main considerations in determining the rightful place of Uzbekistan in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. When the West fell out grace with Karimov in 2004, he used transference of negative symbolism from the Soviet Union to indicate the Western states’ modified positions on the imagined world map. This strategy allowed for easy redemption when these actors regained favor in 2009. However, in its redemption, the West has not been described in the same way as in the years preceding the diplomatic spat. Karimov has not attributed to Europe any of the
measured attributes, positive or negative, since 2009. Meanwhile, he has described the
United States exclusively and repeatedly as internationally prestigious.

Karimov’s portrayals of some countries may have been reactionary, but the
neglect of some actors on the imagined world map was completely the result of
Karimov’s prerogative. China was relatively invisible until the mid-2000s, and Iran and
Turkey remained invisible throughout the entire independent era, despite being
significant factor in Uzbekistan’s policy considerations. Karimov never aligned the
Uzbek nation with the Middle East and given the recent revolutionary events in the
region, he is unlikely to in the near future, lest he go the way of Hosni Mubarak and Ben
Ali. However, the future is unpredictable. It is possible, although unlikely, that there may
come a day when claiming a rightful place alongside the Middle East is useful to
Karimov. After all, the Russian Federation was able to overcome its association with the
negatively-charged symbol of the Soviet Union in the course of a little more than a
decade.

While the reorganization of the imagined world map hinged on the President’s
prerogative, the Uzbek nation’s path is not truly independent because Karimov always
aligned Uzbekistan with a great power. He did this not solely for the tangible reasons of
economic benefit and security enhancement. Karimov’s formula for Uzbekistan’s future
greatness required that the nation be recognized on the world stage. Uzbekistan garnered
its prestige from its similarity and significance to the world’s great powers, especially the
United States, Europe, Russia, and China. Conversely, each entity affixed to the
negatively-charged pole either temporarily or permanently—the Soviet Union,
Belligerent Islam, Russia, the United States, and Europe—arrived in this position by committing the same cardinal sin. Their values and influence encroached on the space controlled by Karimov. Each of these actors offered to the Uzbek people an alternative roadmap. Karimov spun his verbal resistance to intrusions by powerful actors in order to simultaneously reinforce the impression of the Uzbek nation’s significance on the world stage and advance them toward their future greatness. However, countries which possessed the potential to encroach on the President’s control of the direction of the Uzbek nation but had not yet acted upon it and did not serve the utilitarian purpose of advancing the Uzbek nation toward its future through comparison, Karimov chose to simply leave off of the imagined world map.

Meanwhile, there are a number of countries which were suspended somewhere in-between the negatively and positively-charged poles—the other Central Asian states and Afghanistan. These states were held at bay for fear their own instabilities, in the form of economic conditions or human militancy, might have spilled over the borders into Uzbekistan. Yet, Karimov regarded their historical connection to the Uzbek nation as significant. Therefore, the President did not divorce them from the Uzbek nation despite potential destabilization. Particularly the other post-Soviet Central Asian states played an important role in Karimov’s nation-building plan. By attaining leadership of the entire Central Asian region, Uzbekistan would achieve the desired international prestige, propelling the Uzbek nation into its rightful place in the world.

The use of comparison defines the imagined world map, which represented Karimov’s conceptions of which countries are similar to the Uzbek nation and which
ones share the qualities of the nation’s antithesis, the Soviet Union. The comparisons that appeared on the imagined world map were examples of a broader communication strategy employed by Karimov. He frequently drew parallels between actors or events in order to demonstrate his point, connecting Bolsheviks to Wahhabis, Afghanistan to Chechnya, and Andijon to Iraq.

Is this strategy, by which he likened Uzbekistan’s allies to his own country and attributed values deemed negative to its opponents, unique to Karimov? I do not believe so. World leaders are often faced with conundrum of needing to appear steadfast and resolute while simultaneously maintaining their ability to adapt to changing conditions. Based on informal observations over the course of my lifetime, I conclude that leaders around the world utilize the imagined world map in a similar manner, although they govern countries that differ radically from Uzbekistan in its history, culture, and political traditions. The positive and negative characteristics as well as the actors of comparison would vary according to the individual, but the basic construction of the map, with endless arrangements of the world in between steady positive and negative poles, would be much the same. Nevertheless, the motivations for using the imagined world map as a communication strategy may vary leader to leader. While Karimov’s comparisons of other actors to the Uzbek nation were intended to propel his own people toward their idealized future in one global position or another, American presidents’ comparisons, for example, are likely meant to advance the “other” closer to the American ideal, reinventing these actors as appropriate allies for a principled nation.
In countries with a regular transfer of power, each successive leader enters office with a new method of viewing and interacting with the world. Policy changes are expected with the turnover of administrations. But the leader of Uzbekistan has not changed in more than two decades and yet he re-described the world around him multiple times. The imagined world map as a communication strategy maximizes Karimov’s flexibility in alternating international alliances. By emphasizing the stationary poles, he may indefinitely rearrange the world landscape to accommodate his changing needs, while never allowing his core national message to appear inconsistent.

One may wonder at the long-term utility of this study given that Islam Karimov is 73-years-old and will one day face the ultimate term limit, death. In recent years, Karimov himself has begun to acknowledge his inevitable mortality by working with Oliy Majlis, the Uzbek parliament, to determine an ordered process of succession once he is gone and to limit the powers of whomever may follow in his footsteps. It is my contention, however, that Islam Karimov’s legacy will live on long after the man. In the first twenty years of Uzbekistan’s independence, the Uzbek people learned to understand and define themselves in the new world context. From the very beginning, Islam Karimov has been at the forefront of that effort. We have seen in the case of Belligerent Islam and specifically in the public explanations of the ongoing Arab Spring that Karimov did not have complete control over the narratives propagated by Uzbekistan’s state media. However, this very example demonstrates that the narratives created by Karimov live on after he has ceased to use them. Moreover, in Karimov’s twenty years as head of state, an entire generation of Uzbek citizens has been born and raised into
adulthood, knowing only Karimov as their leader. Whether these young Uzbeks accept his ideas, reject them, reinterpret or rebel against them, Islam Karimov created the context in which Uzbekistan’s youngest generation understands the world.

For twenty years, President Islam Karimov acted as the GPS system for the Uzbek nation, guiding them from their Soviet point of origin to their destination of renewed greatness. Changes in his description of other actors indicate moments in time when Karimov announced to the Uzbek nation that he was recalculating their independent path in order to find the most advantageous route. The independent path has been winding, and yet the description of the Uzbek promised land remained steady. The future great Uzbek nation, encompassing all of the admirable qualities of tradition and modernity, appeared as if a mirage, perpetually just over the horizon.

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