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## The Afghanistan Conflict As a Power Resource for Central Asia?

Analyses of the significance of the conflict in Afghanistan for Central Asia regularly contain two contradictory theses: On the one hand, the conflict is presented as a security problem for Central Asia. On the other hand, it can also be concluded that the Central Asian states profit from their neighbour's chaos, with the instability of Afghanistan acting as a key source of legitimacy and power for their own regimes, and strengthening their position vis-à-vis the major powers.

Turning to the first thesis: Several attempts have been made to provide it with an empirical underpinning, although these analyses have come to differing conclusions. A number of authors have argued that the situation is best seen in terms of an "internal security dilemma". In contrast to classical theories of security, this views the main danger for weakly institutionalized regimes such as those of Central Asia as lying not abroad, but in the domestic sphere. Consequently, those countries' threat perceptions foreground not attacks from foreign powers but coup and revolution. It is argued that even the return of the Taliban need not imply that Central Asia will be attacked, as their ideological and practical focus is entirely on Afghanistan. If violence does continue in Afghanistan, or even escalates, there is a danger of regional contagion, yet this risk is reduced by the existence of relatively effective security apparatuses in Central Asia. Nonetheless, other authors – as well as the Central Asian regimes – stress that the conflict in Afghanistan represents a real risk to Central Asia. This is partly based on history: During the 1990s, the presidents of the Central Asian countries were extremely concerned at the advances made by the Taliban and actively intervened in the conflict by supporting warlords in northern Afghanistan who were fighting the Taliban. Furthermore, the return of the Taliban or an increase in fighting in northern Afghanistan could trigger a refugee problem or lead to the spillover of violent Islamism into Central Asia, leading to regional destabilization.

While both these positions ultimately have their merits, no theory-guided exploration of the second "benefit thesis" has yet been undertaken. This contribution seeks to examine the extent to which the conflict in Afghanistan is a "power resource" for the states of Central Asia vis-à-vis the major powers, the international community, and the Western hegemonic order. This question is based on the assumption that while small states depend on co-operation with major powers, they also always try to actively shape these relationships and strive to maintain as much room for manoeuvre as possible. Whether they can avoid becoming completely dependent on a single power depends on both internal and external factors. This contribution

argues that the Afghanistan war that started in 2001, and the international attention paid to Afghanistan and adjacent regions have been crucial factors for the Central Asian states' ability to shape their relationships with major powers. If international attention to Afghanistan declines, this will have an impact on patterns of co-operation with external powers in the region and will also affect domestic politics.

### *Extraversion and Power Resources*

To what extent can a situation such as the conflict in Afghanistan be considered as a "power resource"? In International Relations, small and weak states are generally examined as objects for the policies of regional or international major powers rather than being considered as independent actors. From this perspective, small states are not much more than auxiliaries in the fulfilment of great power strategies. However, this point of view overlooks the fact that small and weak states also possess a certain room for manoeuvre that allows them to shape their relations with the major powers in their own interests. The Africa expert Jean-François Bayart contrasted the "yoke paradigm" with the concept of extraversion. The "yoke paradigm" stands for the dominant assumption in International Relations that small and weak states find themselves permanently "under the yoke of external actors".<sup>1</sup> While the concept of extraversion takes due account of small states' dependency on their external environments, it also draws attention to the proactive strategies they can use to manage this dependency and inequality. It focuses on the ability of weak states to deal with the kinds of problems typical for post-colonial and post-Soviet states, "to engage the international arena, lower international pressures, secure the survival of their regime, and weaken their domestic opponents".<sup>2</sup>

There are various techniques of extraversion; two are particularly relevant to this study. The first is "patron alliance manipulation", in which small states play major powers off against each other. Now that Russia has lost its hegemonic position in Central Asia, one can speak of a multipolar order in the region. The states of Central Asia have profited from this multipolarization, as they are now able to choose who to co-operate with in certain areas. The second technique is that of influencing the image that the international community has of a state ("production of frames and representations"). While all states try to create positive images for the international audience, for small and authoritarian states this is an especially difficult task. First, their political structures and practices often do not comply with the norms and ideas of the

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1 Jean-François Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*, 2nd edition, Cambridge 2009, p. 5.

2 Cédric Jourde, The International Relations of Small Neauthoritarian States: Islamism, Warlordism, and the Framing of Stability, in: *International Studies Quarterly* 2/2007, pp. 481-503, here: p. 484.

Western hegemonic order; moreover, they are often stigmatized by the external actors. Second, while strong states have the capacity to underpin their framing with credible actions, small states face problems in delivering “narrative material” to support their representations. Yet, whether an authoritarian country is perceived as stable, unstable, democratic, or despotic is not merely down to chance or “reality”, but can potentially be influenced: “The ruling elites in these regimes frame their domestic and foreign policies in ways that can resonate with hegemonic international discourses, seeking either to obtain more support or lower democratization pressure or both”.<sup>3</sup> Shifts in international discourses, which are mostly shaped by the Western hegemonic order, also have an impact on small and non-Western states, providing them with a resource to frame their own claims.

The possibility of carrying out both patron alliance manipulation and frame production depends on external factors, which we can consider as power resources for small states. The technique of patron alliance manipulation only functions when several major powers pursue interests in the region and rely on co-operation with local states. Changes in the regional order, such as civil wars, affect these configurations of interests and thus also influence the opportunities for local states to undertake extraversion. For its part, framing requires discursive “material” that can be used for the construction of frames and representations. The meanings that they communicate are usually not entirely false, but rather represent a one-sided and exaggerated view of the facts. For instance, the danger of terrorism in a country may be real, while the characterization of the entire political opposition as terrorists is unlikely to be. A civil war in a neighbouring country is particularly useful as discursive material for a regime that wishes to present itself as stable. This can also be considered as a power resource that regimes can use to pursue their interests.

In the remainder of this paper, I shall undertake an empirical examination of the role played by the war in Afghanistan in the extraversion strategies of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In examining patron alliance manipulation, I will mostly refer to secondary literature. At the forefront of my considerations will be the question of the extent to which the conflict in Afghanistan has increased opportunities for extraversion. In terms of the second strategy, the production of frames and representations, I will examine the role played by the Afghanistan conflict in frame production.

### *Domestic and Foreign Policy Context*

The domestic and foreign policy contexts in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan display both similarities and differences. On gaining independence from the So-

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3 Ibid., p. 482.

viet Union in 1991, the new states faced the same problems as had post-colonial states. They had no experience in foreign affairs, which had been the preserve of Moscow, and had to learn how to formulate and implement their own foreign policy: “Their relations with the rest of the world were dominated not so much by what they wanted, but by what the rest of the world desired to do with Central Asia”.<sup>4</sup> In the civil war against the “United Tajik Opposition”, the government of Tajikistan relied on support from the military forces of Russia and Uzbekistan.<sup>5</sup> Uzbekistan’s policy towards Afghanistan was also deeply influenced by Russia during the 1990s. But the 1990s were also marked by the start of collaboration with the West, which also had domestic consequences at first: The ideological vacuum that came with the collapse of communism was compensated for by integration into the Western-dominated global community and orientation towards the prevailing models of democracy and capitalist free market economics. Ultimately, however, these models did not take root. Instead, the self-designation of both states as democratic republics stands in stark contrast to the very high degree to which political and economic power are concentrated in the hands of the political elite.<sup>6</sup>

The key differences relate to emancipation from external influences and financial autonomy. While Uzbekistan looked mostly to Russia for security-policy leadership at first, it was quick to adopt an economic policy that differed sharply from International Monetary Fund (IMF) policies.<sup>7</sup> This relatively high degree of ideological independence was facilitated by the country’s wealth of resources. By contrast, Tajikistan remains more dependent on money from abroad. Despite their differences, both countries remain small and weak states in the international system and rely on co-operation with major powers.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia was unable to retain its position as an imperial power. The consequence for Central Asia was the emergence of a multipolar order.<sup>8</sup> However, this did not see the revival of the “Great Game”, in which several major powers compete to establish themselves as a hegemonic power; the interests of Russia, China, the USA, and the EU are too varied for that. Furthermore, although the region plays a cer-

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4 Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia. Islam or Nationalism?* Karachi 1995, p. 209.

5 Cf. Lena Jonson, *Tajikistan in the New Central Asia. Geopolitics, Great Power Rivalry and Radical Islam*, London 2006, pp. 3-4.

6 Cf. Alisher Ilkhamov, Neopatrimonialism, patronage and factionalism in post-Soviet Uzbekistan, in: Daniel Bach/Mamoudou Gazibo (eds), *Neopatrimonialism in Africa and Beyond*, Abingdon 2012, pp. 186-196.

7 Cf. Herman W. Hoen/Farukh Irnazarov, Market reform and institutional change in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan: paradoxes and prospects, in: Joachim Ahrens/Herman W. Hoen (eds), *Institutional Reform in Central Asia. Politico-Economic Challenges*, London 2012, pp. 3-18.

8 On Multipolarity, cf. Detlef Nolte, How to Compare Regional Powers: Analytical Concepts and Research Topics, in: *Review of International Studies*, 4/2010, pp. 881-901.

tain role in the geopolitical thinking of the major powers, it is also “no one’s top priority”.<sup>9</sup>

In the West, Central Asia is perceived as an unstable region. The instability is linked, above all, to three factors: weak statehood, authoritarianism, and the nearness to Afghanistan. The Western framing of Central Asia as an unstable region was recently made particularly clear in a report by the International Crisis Group, which urgently warned of the danger of state failure and state collapse.<sup>10</sup> Although the problems indicated in this report are real, it can be criticized for making a causal link between them and phenomena such as state failure and state collapse that is based on questionable assumptions about the stability and instability of authoritarian regimes.<sup>11</sup>

The pressure to democratize brought to bear by Western actors rests on the assumption, among others, that stability can only be achieved in liberal democracies. Democratization is thus seen as a means of tackling the causes of instability. The pressure to democratize is exerted by means of various instruments, including election observation, judicial and administrative reforms, and civil society projects. Generally speaking, Western democratization pressure is far from consistent but is rather contradictory and highly selective.<sup>12</sup> In the case of Uzbekistan, sanctions also play a role. Key actors here include the EU, the OSCE, and, in terms of bilateral relations, states such as the USA. From the perspective of the authoritarian regimes, a particular danger is presented by “colour revolutions”, which appear to them as informal instruments for regime change and “democracy promotion” by Western actors.<sup>13</sup>

However, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have so far resisted this pressure to democratize. In terms of the sociology of rulership, liberal democracy and the logic of neopatrimonial rule are mutually exclusive. While liberal democracy is accompanied by the vertical and horizontal distribution of power resources, the logic of neopatrimonial rule requires a significant monopolization of power.

In resisting the pressure to democratize, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have not only made use of the extraversion strategies examined below. Their cooperation with other authoritarian states in the region in bodies such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty

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9 Uwe Halbach, Zentralasien als Bühne Internationaler Politik [Central Asia as a Scene of International Politics], in: *Religion und Gesellschaft* 10/2012, pp. 14-16, here: p. 14.

10 Cf. International Crisis Group, *Central Asia: Decay and Decline*, Asia Report No. 201, 3 February 2011, at: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/central-asia/201-central-asia-decay-and-decline.aspx>.

11 Cf. John Heathershaw/Nick Megoran, Contesting danger: a new agenda for policy and scholarship on Central Asia, in: *International Affairs* 3/2011, pp. 589-612, here: p. 590-604.

12 Cf. Steven Levitsky/Lucan A. Way: International Linkage and Democratization, in: *Journal of Democracy* 3/2005, pp. 20-34, here: p. 22.

13 Cf. Roy Allison, Virtual regionalism, regional structures and regime security in Central Asia, in: *Central Asian Survey* 2/2008, pp. 185-202, here: p. 186.

Organization (CSTO) also represents a form of “protective integration” against this pressure and the resulting internal and external threats.<sup>14</sup>

### *Patron Alliance Manipulation*

#### *Uzbekistan*

The Afghanistan conflict greatly increased Uzbekistan’s opportunities for patron alliance manipulation. In the 1990s, the country’s close integration with Russia was considered a barrier to sovereignty and the consolidation of domestic power. Consequently, reducing these interdependencies with the former imperial power became a key priority. As this was largely successful, Uzbekistan was quite willing to accept the USA as a new partner. As early as late September 2001, Uzbekistan granted the USA the right to establish an airbase. However, Luca Anceschi argues that this did not reflect a common interest in long-term co-operation. Although the USA claimed it was following a “qualitatively new, long-term strategy”, Uzbekistan’s goals were focused on the short-term priorities of power politics.<sup>15</sup> Co-operation with the USA allowed Uzbekistan to achieve three goals: first, to increase its distance from Russia; second, to receive military and financial assistance from the USA, which was used to suppress the religious opposition. Finally this also had the effect of increasing the legitimacy of the Karimov regime.<sup>16</sup>

Co-operation with the USA was helpful in the short term, but later came to be seen as a problem: While the USA did provide assistance, it still followed its strategy of democracy promotion (and pressure) in the post-Soviet space, also placing pressure on Uzbekistan to undertake liberal reforms. In 2005, Uzbekistan brutally put down a popular uprising in Andijan and afterwards resisted US calls for an international investigation,<sup>17</sup> accepting that this would lead to the end of US co-operation.

The Uzbek government compensated for the loss of the US as a partner by turning once again to Russia. While the US airbase was closed in 2005, by November of the same year, Uzbekistan and Russia had signed the Treaty on Allied Relations,<sup>18</sup> which was interpreted as a “‘defensive’ measure taken by Uzbekistan amidst growing pressure from the West”.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, the

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14 Cf. Roy Allison, cited above (Note 13).

15 Cf. Luca Anceschi, Integrating domestic politics and foreign policy making: the cases of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In: *Central Asia Survey* 2/2010, pp. 143-158, here: p. 150.

16 Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

17 Cf. Anna Kreikemeyer, Instability in the Ferghana Valley: International Reactions, in: Andrea Berg/Anna Kreikemeyer (eds), *Realities of Transformation*, Baden-Baden 2006, pp. 227-246, here: p. 232-234.

18 The text of the treaty is available (in Russian) at: [http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/spd\\_md.nsf/0/72EF98B3AEF0CDC9C3257DB90047370E](http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/spd_md.nsf/0/72EF98B3AEF0CDC9C3257DB90047370E).

19 Cf. Farkhod Tolipov, The Strategic Dilemma of Central Asia, in: *Russia in Global Affairs* 4/2006, at: [http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/n\\_7344](http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_7344).

role of the CSTO was enhanced, and Uzbekistan rejoined in 2006. As well as common security interests, such as combating terrorism and the illegal drug trade, the CSTO also serves to promote the “protective integration” of the authoritarian states against the pressure to democratize emanating from the West.<sup>20</sup> The turn to Russia, however, did not mean a complete break with the West. Germany has continued to use the “strategic airbase” that it has operated since 2002.

The 2005 foreign-policy realignment was, however, not Uzbekistan’s last. In 2012, a less profound but nonetheless visible turn from “East” to “West” took place. Although the bilateral Treaty of 2005 remained in place, Uzbekistan left the Russian-dominated CSTO once again. There are many possible explanations for this step. Uzbekistan’s membership of the CSTO reduced its capacity to perform patron alliance manipulation, and leaving increased it. Relations with the USA are currently seen as solid once again. At least at the symbolic level, the opening of a NATO liaison office in Tashkent showed a continued interest in maintaining relations with Western states.

In summary, it can be said that Uzbekistan has been extremely skilful in making use of the opportunities offered by the multipolarization of the regional power structure since 1991. The regime pursued its short-term interests by making sudden shifts of international allegiance. Above all, however, this room to manoeuvre was made possible by the war in Afghanistan. Operation Enduring Freedom and the subsequent ISAF mission raised US interest in the region by an extraordinary degree, while also leading to a situation in which the USA was dependent on co-operation with the Central Asian states. It was this that really created the rivalry between the USA and Russia, which, following its provisional withdrawal from Central Asia, wanted to reattach the region. Uzbekistan’s 2005 change of course also took place against the background of Afghanistan-related ongoing US interest in the region: This allowed Uzbekistan to distance itself from the US without running the danger of becoming a client of Russia. By making this policy shift, Uzbekistan was able to sidestep Western pressure for democratization, simultaneously enabling a return to intensified co-operation within the scope of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) at a later date, but without the pressure for democratization.

### *Tajikistan*

Tajikistan’s abilities to engage in patron alliance manipulation are more limited than those of Uzbekistan as a result of its greater dependence on Russia. Moreover, the country’s dependence on remittances from migrant workers in Russia is an overwhelming power resource for Russia and weakens Tajikistan’s room for manoeuvre. Nonetheless, the Afghanistan conflict had a

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20 Allison, cited above (Note 13), pp. 188-189.

significant impact on Tajikistan's opportunities to undertake extraversion: First, it has enabled Tajikistan to expand its co-operation with other actors besides Russia. Second, Tajikistan has played the Afghanistan card to generate substantial material support, which has mostly been used to further the genuine interests of the state or of actors within the state.

The key determinants of Tajikistan's foreign policy were its economic weakness and the civil war in the 1990s. Both had the consequence of ensuring that the survival of the regime was strongly dependent on external actors. Tajikistan's top foreign policy priority was therefore necessarily to secure support from external actors in the areas of security policy and the economy.<sup>21</sup> In the 1990s, for historical reasons, that meant above all Russia: "If any country in Central Asia was considered Russia's backyard, it was Tajikistan."<sup>22</sup> As a result of the civil war, Russian troops were stationed in Tajikistan under a CIS mandate. They were responsible for securing the country's borders until 2005, but ultimately also acted to protect the regime. The war in Afghanistan suddenly thrust Tajikistan into the field of vision of other major powers. The government attempted to grasp this opportunity by offering the USA the chance to establish a military base in the country, which Washington declined. There was thus no turn away from Russia. Nonetheless, Tajikistan used the presence of the USA in the region to negotiate with Russia over the modalities for the continued presence of the Russian base in Tajikistan. To create pressure here, the government used the tactic of delaying the conclusion of negotiations with Russia on the grounds that it was looking into the possibility of pursuing enhanced security co-operation with the USA.<sup>23</sup> The result was a far better deal for Tajikistan for the lease of the base to Russia. Yet it also meant that Tajikistan will remain closely bound to Russia for the foreseeable future. On 1 October 2013, Tajikistan extended the agreement that allows Russia to maintain a base in Tajikistan until 2042.<sup>24</sup> The OSCE also continues to play a key role in the country, particularly in the improvement of border security.

The regime was successful in generating support for combating drug trafficking and extremism. Both phenomena, which are closely connected with Afghanistan, create real problems for the security of the regime. There is also a constant fear that co-operation between extremists in Afghanistan and actors within Tajikistan could increase.<sup>25</sup> However, Tajikistan has also been able to make optimal use of these threats to generate large volumes of inter-

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21 Cf. Jonson, cited above (Note 5), p. 3.

22 Ibid., p. 4.

23 Cf. Zafar Abdullayev, Tajikistan, Russia Probe Military Partnership, *EurasiaNet*, 3 March 2004, at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/print/57704>.

24 Cf. Ratification of Russian military base deal provides Tajikistan with important security guarantees, in: *Jane's Intelligence Weekly*, 1 October 2013.

25 Cf. Jafar Usmanov, The effects on Tajikistan of security developments in Afghanistan since 2001, in: Netherlands Helsinki Committee (ed.), *Security and Human Rights 2/2013*, pp. 149-158, here: p. 155.



national support.<sup>26</sup> In terms of combating the trade in drugs, Tajikistan knew how to make use of third-party funds to shore up its own security apparatus in ways that did not necessarily target the illegal trade in drugs.<sup>27</sup> Overall, the regime has been successful in outsourcing subsidiary aspects of security to external actors, allowing it to focus on the primary issues.<sup>28</sup>

### *Frame Production and Practices*

#### *Uzbekistan*

The Karimov regime has used the conflict in Afghanistan in various ways to frame itself in a positive light not just with regard to the global community but also towards its own population. This process should be seen as a component of efforts to produce legitimacy for the regime – both domestically and abroad – and thereby consolidate its hold on power.

Some authors state that Uzbekistan's foreign policy is framed in highly idealized terms, and that no proof is ever provided of the successes claimed.<sup>29</sup> However, this phenomenon must be explained with the structural problem Uzbekistan shares with many other small and authoritarian states: the relative lack of discursive material for the production of positive frames in the field of foreign policy. Taking this into account, the conflict in Afghanistan provided the regime with valuable narrative material for the production of positive frames and representations.

To better understand the context, I will first of all focus on the production of frames for domestic consumption. The rhetorical use made of the instability in Afghanistan is revealed in the following example, an extract from a speech by Karimov, which he held on 9 May 2014, the Day of Memory and Reverence, a national holiday to commemorate the end of the Second World War:

We wish for peace and stability in the neighboring Afghanistan. Uzbekistan advances its cooperation with that country on a bilateral basis.

I deem it necessary here to put it one again [...] that our people need peace and tranquility. Our nation that has experienced much throughout its history, understands pretty well that only in a country that enjoys peace and harmony, benevolence and mutual respect, can pros-

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26 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 155-158.

27 Cf. Filippo De Danieli, Counter-narcotics policies in Tajikistan and their impact on state building, in: *Central Asia Survey* 1/2011, pp. 129-145.

28 Cf. Anna Matveeva, Tajikistan: Evolution of the Security Sector and the War on Terror, in: Anja H. Ebnöther/Ernst M. Felberbauer/Martin Malek (eds), *Facing the Terrorist Challenge: Central Asia's Role in Regional and International Co-operation*, Vienna 2005, pp. 133-155.

29 Cf. Anceschi, cited above (Note 15), pp. 147-148.

perity be achieved, can an affluent and happy life be built, can the kindest and noblest ends and aspirations be furthered.<sup>30</sup>

Karimov starts with an implicit reminder of the instability in Afghanistan. This serves as a contrast to highlight Uzbekistan's own stability, which he links to the welfare of the Uzbek people. Without stating it explicitly, the speech contains an appeal to the population to accept the given situation in Uzbekistan against the background of the Afghan chaos to ensure "peace and harmony".

However, Afghanistan does not only provide a narrative for the production of legitimizing frames domestically. This practice is far more evident at the international level.

In the second half of the 2000s, the Afghanistan conflict provided material for the construction of representations of Uzbekistan on the international stage (UN General Assembly and NATO meetings). While issues related to Afghanistan already played a role in official speeches in the 1990s, the change of international discourse enabled Uzbekistan to make itself heard by the international community. Every one of the ten speeches considered in this context, whether made by Karimov himself, the Uzbek foreign minister, or by other members of the cabinet, mentions the instability in Afghanistan and the associated dangers for neighbouring countries and international security. The dangers named include the spread of war in the region, drug trafficking, and extremism. The descriptions of these dangers are then linked to positively slanted representations of Uzbekistan. As in the domestic sphere, Afghanistan's instability is contrasted with Uzbekistan's stability with particular frequency, thus showcasing the latter.

- In a speech to the UN General Assembly in 2011, the deputy prime minister of Uzbekistan laid out Uzbekistan's economic successes of the last 20 years in detail, noting among other things the high rate of growth and the political stability of the "Uzbek model of democratization". This was immediately followed by four paragraphs describing the instability in Afghanistan and the necessity of resolving the conflict: "And [...] the situation remains [...] tense despite all measures now being taken by the international community."<sup>31</sup>
- President Karimov dedicated the first part of his speech at the UN General Assembly to the Afghanistan conflict and proposals for its settlement. At the end of his speech, he referred to the success of the Uzbek model, measured according to the Human Development Index (HDI):

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30 Uzbekistan National News Agency, *Building on Peace and Cohesion in the National Advancement and Prosperity*, 9 May 2014, at: <http://www.uza.uz/en/society/building-on-peace-and-cohesion-in-the-national-advancement-and-prosperity-10.05.2014-4091>.

31 *Address by H.E. Mr. Elyor Ganiev, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan at the 66th Session of the UN General Assembly*, New York, 26 September 2011.

“Our own model of democratization of the country, transition to socially oriented free market economy [...] has served as a foundation for these achievements”.<sup>32</sup>

At least until the Andijan events, the regime was able to credibly underpin the narrative of the stable state on a practical level by means of its persecution of so-called “religious extremism”. This included genuine terrorist groups, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which has meant that Uzbekistan has been able to rely on the support of the USA. This domestic “struggle against terrorism” has repeatedly been used to combat every form of domestic opposition. Although, after Andijan, the suppression of internal extremism could no longer be used to portray Uzbekistan as a haven of stability, other practices have taken its place, such as the granting of Germany the right to establish a “strategic airbase”.

However, the war in Afghanistan also provided an opportunity for Uzbekistan to present itself as a “real player” in efforts to bring peace to the country and as a partner for co-operation with the West. The majority of official speeches considered here contain analyses of the situation in Afghanistan as well as proposals for how to deal with it in the future. Besides appealing for a non-military settlement, Karimov and his deputies have regularly stressed one particular model, the “six-plus-three initiative”, as an expansion of the “Six plus Two group on Afghanistan”. Conceptually, this draws on the informally convening latter group, which consisted of Afghanistan’s neighbours, together with the USA and Russia, and dealt with the situation there until 2001. Precisely because the proposed model has not yet been implemented, it offers Uzbekistan an opportunity to present itself as a proactive member of the international community, capable of proposing its own solutions to the conflict in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan has also stressed its willingness for co-operation in this context: Only three and a half years after Andijan, at the NATO/EAPC summit in Bucharest, Karimov underscored Uzbekistan’s willingness to co-operate with the West.<sup>33</sup> Uzbekistan has also attempted to present itself as an agent of peace by supporting the reconstruction of Afghanistan: “Today Uzbekistan renders a comprehensive assistance to the recovery of peaceful life in Afghanistan. This particular assistance, which has already been rendered to the neighboring country, includes construction of bridges and motorways, the strategically important railroad line Khairaton-Mazari-Shareef [...] as well as uninterrupted supply of Kabul with electricity

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32 Press Service of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, *President’s Speech at UN Session on Millennium Development Goals*, 20 September 2010, at: <http://www.press-service.uz/en/news/1146>.

33 Cf. *Address by President of the Republic of Uzbekistan H.E. Mr. Islam Karimov at the NATO/EAPC Summit (Bucharest, April 3, 2008)*, 4 April 2008, at: <http://www.un.int/wcm/content/site/uzbekistan/cache/offonce/pid/8471.jsessionid=D4DB156AEDC8095277FF427EE4A2D61>.

power.”<sup>34</sup> Uzbekistan has been involved in the building of eleven bridges as well as the railway line mentioned here.<sup>35</sup> Uzbekistan particularly values these opportunities that enable it to present itself as a peacemaker and agent for stability, as its foreign policy practices with regard to its four Central Asian neighbours provide little material for the generation of positive images.

A final element that continually arises together with the reference to instability in Afghanistan is the call for sovereignty to be respected. Rejecting interference in the internal affairs of small authoritarian states is more effective when such claims do not stand alone but are combined with positive images of the state or reminders of relevant contributions for the international community. In his speech at the 2008 NATO/EAPC summit, Karimov initially offered his co-operation within the scope of the NDN; he also immediately rejected interference in Uzbekistan’s domestic affairs: “At the same time, the sovereign interests on maintaining the security and legislation of our country must be observed.”<sup>36</sup> While NDN is not connected with questions of sovereignty, it is a reminder of an important “good” Uzbekistan has to offer the ISAF troops. Thus, it is also a reminder of the power resources that Uzbekistan owns vis-à-vis ISAF. At the UN General Assembly in 2006, i.e. immediately after the Andijan events, respect for sovereignty was even given pride of place, with the Uzbek foreign minister calling for reform of the United Nations to guarantee “sovereign equality and non-interference into internal affairs”.<sup>37</sup> Yet this speech only indirectly mentions the instability in Afghanistan and omits Uzbekistan’s potential contribution to stabilization. In his 2012 speech, the foreign minister emphasized the issue of Afghanistan and Uzbekistan’s contribution to stabilization, later rejecting interference in Central Asian affairs by external powers.<sup>38</sup>

### *Tajikistan*

Afghanistan’s instability also plays a role in the production of frames in Tajikistan. At the international level, it is however clear, that Afghanistan is only one of many narratives.

Speeches by representatives of Tajikistan at the UN General Assembly are dominated, both qualitatively and quantitatively, by Central Asia’s water problem – though here too there are many links to Afghanistan. For instance, Tajikistan is planning to build a new dam, primarily for the generation of

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34 Abdulaziz Kamilov, *Address at the General Assembly of the United Nations*, 28 September 2012, New York, at: <http://www.uzdaily.com/articles-id-20305.htm>.

35 Cf. Nargis Kassenova, *Relations between Afghanistan and Central Asian States after 2014. Incentives, Constraints and Prospects*, Stockholm 2014, p. 8.

36 Karimov, cited above (Note 33).

37 *Statement by H.E. Mr. Vladimir Norov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan at the General Debates of the 61st Session of the United Nations General Assembly*, New York, 25 September 2006, available at: <http://www.un.org/webcast/ga/61/pdfs/uzbekistan-e.pdf>.

38 Cf. Kamilov, cited above (Note 34).

hydro-electricity, to be exported to Afghanistan. The Tajik government is also keen to use the water issue to present itself as a proactive actor with an interest in regional stability, including the stability of Afghanistan.

Nonetheless, no direct link is made here between the instability in Afghanistan, on the one hand, and Tajikistan's own stability – and the associated insistence on non-interference by the West – on the other. One reason for this may be Tajikistan's relatively greater dependence on Western partners such as the OSCE. This might lead to a situation in which it is harder for Tajik politicians to speak out against international interference and democratization pressure on the international stage.

However, Tajikistan has used the problems associated with Afghanistan to explicitly call for international assistance, as shown in this extract from an interview with President Emomali Rahmon, carried on the television station euronews: “The big problem is drug smuggling. The authorities in charge both in the Republic of Tajikistan and in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan are cooperating to fight this both at the borders and inside Afghanistan, but we need help from the international community.”<sup>39</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The Afghanistan conflict, the international attention, and the interests of Western powers in Central Asia after 2001 have improved both regimes' options for patron alliance manipulation and the production of positive representations. Thanks to its own position of strength, Uzbekistan, in particular, has been able to profit greatly from this. Yet Tajikistan has also been able to turn its weakness and dependencies to its advantage. The regimes in both countries have successfully made use of these two techniques to consolidate their positions and resist the pressure to democratize. To that extent, the Afghanistan conflict can be considered to be a power resource for the regimes.

It is then natural to ask how much changes in the situation in Afghanistan could affect the regimes' extraversion strategies, and hence possibly their stability. While it is unlikely that peace will come to Afghanistan, the possibility of feudalization is higher, with weak central authorities coming to share power with local “feudal rulers”. A declining interest in the region on the part of the major powers as a consequence of such a “precarious” type of stabilization would also have an effect on the opportunities for extraversion in Central Asia, particularly if the interest of the USA were to decline and international attention to focus on other conflicts.

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39 *President Emomali Rahmon: There is no short-cut to democracy, Euronews Interview with Emomali Rakhmon, 30 March 2012, at: <http://www.euronews.com/2012/03/30/president-emomali-rahmon-there-is-no-short-cut-to-democracy>.*