Integrating Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy Making: The Role of Legitimacy in the Process of Autocratic Regime Consolidation

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Abstract

Turkmenistan remains the least studied country of the former Soviet Union despite its highly strategic - and often volatile - Afghan and Iranian borders. Its obscurity is even more remarkable considering both its vast hydrocarbon reserves - thought to be the world's fourth largest - and promising transit potential. This thesis claims that Turkmenistan's regime transition in February 2007 is a strong case-study for understanding the role "legitimacy" plays in the process of regime consolidation. The research explores the evolution of Berdimuhamedow's administration as a multi-level process, with carefully calibrated domestic reforms providing a vital source of domestic and international legitimacy. The primary vehicles for achieving these aims were the "Doctrine of Positive Neutrality," and the "Great Renaissance" which act as vague rhetorical vessels for the advancement of state propaganda. The focus of the study is thus symbolic, rather than performative legitimacy. The study's core arguments are (1) that the international spread of liberal democratic values creates opportunities for autocratic regimes to display low-cost legitimating commitments to these norms; and (2) that regimes unconstrained by domestic opposition are prone to a more extreme decoupling of rhetorical commitments from implementation. The claims put forward in this paper counteract the traditional democratization thesis by contending that in Central Asia, autocratic regimes borrow the form – but not the substance – of liberal democratic states, granting them substantial durability. The study provides extensive qualitative analysis of Turkmen propaganda and official policy statements to provide supporting evidence for these claims.

Key Words: Legitimacy; Neutrality; Consolidation; Regime transition; Political reform; Democratization; Turkmenistan; Central Asia; Nation-building.

Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BSSR	Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic
CAC	Central Asia-Centre
CAT	Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment
CCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women
CERD	Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
CESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
CIO	Chairman in Office
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CPT	Communist Party of Turkmenistan
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSCE	Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe
DPT	Democratic Party of Turkmenistan
EAPC	Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council
EU	European Union
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPA	Inter-Parliamentary Assembly
KNS/MNS	Committee/Ministry of National Security
MID	Ministry of International Affairs
NAM	Needs Assessment Mission
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PRC	People's Republic of China
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
TAP	Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan Pipeline
TAPI	Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Pipeline
TCGP	Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline
TSSR	Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic
UN	United Nations
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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Contents

(0) Introduction

Legitimization and Foreign Policy Making in the Berdimuhamedow era

Until his death in December 2006, Turkmenistan was under the monolithic, totalitarian rule of Saparmurat Nyyazow. The regime systematically obliterated political opposition, silenced dissent, and established an alarmingly effective police state. These policies came with international repercussions, with the regime swiftly denounced as "the most repressive in Central Asia and one of the most authoritarian in the world" (Anceschi, L; 2008: p124). Although his regime relied on the full force of the state, Nyyazow also crafted a symbolic landscape in which foreign policy acted a crucial mechanism of both domestic and international legitimization (Anceschi, L; 2008: p49).

The Doctrine of Positive Neutrality became the centerpiece of Turkmen foreign policymaking, and regime survival acted as its core determinant (Anceschi, L; 2008: p2). Foreign policy thus became domestically oriented, acting as a crucial keystone within Nyyazow's nation-building paradigm (Anceschi, L; 2008: p49). Indeed, although foreign policy operates within a political environment external to the state; it also has to deal with an environment that is internal to it.

In some case studies, particularly autocratic states, foreign policy tends becomes a hostage to domestic considerations. This interplay between the exogenous and endogenous dimensions of statecraft varies from state to state, and indeed, from era to era within the same state. This study then, occupies itself with the regime transition which occurred in February 2007 when Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow became President of Turkmenistan.

As a second-tier successor regime, the subject of legitimacy can be expected to be more difficult for leaders such as Berdimuhamedow since they lack the symbolic value of being "father of the nation." Nevertheless, the stability of Berdimuhamedow's succession suggests that authoritarian

structures are more resilient to internal pressures than regional scholars suspect. This durability can be explained, on the one hand, by the repression and coercive power that Berdimuhamedow wields, and on the other, by the degree of legitimacy his regime has managed to attain.

This case study seeks to shed light on the methodology autocrats utilize to construct a "legitimating framework" that justifies their regime. This thesis uses a symbolic approach toward the concept of legitimacy, arguing that leaders solicit consent by convincing the public of its inevitability. Leaders achieve this persuasion through use of vast nation-building projects in which they project themselves onto a country's past and future. In addition, as Schatz (2006) notes, we may also include the notion that there are international grounds for legitimacy (Schatz, E; 2006: p3). Indeed, Anceschi extensively explored Positive Neutrality's symbolic power in the Nyyazow era as a core component of that regime's rapid consolidation (Anceschi, L; 2008: p49).

This thesis argues that although Berdimuhamedow's policies are more sophisticated, they nevertheless display continuity with the Nyyazow era. Crucially, Turkmenistan's foreign policy remains domestically oriented, creating an illusion of political reform conducive to enhanced engagement with democratic external actors (Peyrous, S; 2012: p108). The regime uses these relationships as a display of performative legitimacy, projecting statements into the domestic media to convince the population of the leadership's diplomatic achievements.

This thesis argues that these trends can be applied to other case studies. The main arguments are as follows: (1) the spread of liberal democratic values on the world stage has created extensive opportunities for low-cost legitimating commitments to liberal norms; and (2) that regimes unconstrained by domestic opposition are prone to a more extreme decoupling of rhetorical commitments from implementation.

Berdimuhamedow has utilized two core concepts to demonstrate his rhetorical commitments to international norms. The first is a continuation of the Nyyazow era's Doctrine of Positive

Neutrality, which was unanimously endorsed by the UN on December 12, 1995. Speaking at the 65th session of the UN General Assembly in 2010, Berdimuhamedow outlined the policy as follows:

"For us neutrality is not just a legal status. It is an active position, a full-scale involvement in the international process through peacemaking and assisting in working out effective models of economic cooperation. This also includes provision of a political platform for solving problems, both within the region and beyond, for the purpose of consolidating peace, security, and creating favorable conditions for sustainable development and progress. This is the main purpose and content of our steps and initiatives on the world stage" (65th Session of the UN General Assembly; 2010).

The vague formulation of Positive Neutrality is intentional, granting nation-builders the capacity to manipulate its content to align it more closely with the regime's changing commitments between February 2007 and April 2016. The second concept - the Great Renaissance – is similarly vague, and acts as a mechanism through which the new regime presents itself as embodying democratic reformism. According to official rhetoric:

"The Great Renaissance policies are spectacular, all-embracing reforms initiated by our highly valued President of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow […] emphasizing progressive thinking, professionalism, and an innovative approach to everything touching on the interests of the people […] *The President of Turkmenistan is leading the way to a cardinal transformation, receiving the warm support of his citizens and positive feedback from all over the world"* (Neytralnyi Turkmenistan; May 23, 2008)

Mild domestic reforms initiated under the new incumbent, and the subsequent opening up to diplomatic engagement between Turkmenistan and western actors suggests a crucial nexus between domestic politics and foreign policymaking. To reframe our understanding of autocratic

regime consolidation, this thesis analyses the interconnection between the international and domestic spheres, as well as the manner in which the regime projected both spheres internally and externally throughout its consolidation. Berdimuhamedow himself made this nexus clear during a 2010 speech at the UN:

"The foreign policy of any state is inseparable from its domestic policy. By proclaiming and implementing the principles of peace, harmony, tolerance and humanism in society, the Turkmen state projects these concepts in its relationships with the external world. In this sense, the neutrality of Turkmenistan is based on the firm moral framework of the state." (Internet Gazeta Turkmenistan.ru; 14 December 2010)

In Turkmenistan then, the regime has a complex understanding of the interconnection of the domestic and international spheres in terms of normative projection. Following this line of enquiry, the paper seeks to answer the following questions:

- Why do autocratic regimes extensively utilize democratic rhetoric despite failing to internalize its normative values?
- What is the concept "legitimacy" and what role does it play within centralized autocratic states?
- What strategies do authoritarian regimes pursue in order to legitimize themselves?
- Does Legitimization perform a strategic role in reintegrating autocratic regimes within the international community?
- Is legitimacy a purely domestic concept? International? Or both?

(0.1) Research Focus

The transition from Nyyazow's autocratic isolationism to the new, more open, yet equally repressive regime of Berdimuhamedow is an important example of the interconnection between foreign and domestic politics. Indeed, Turkmenistan is a rich case-study for scholars of regime consolidation. Not only did Turkmenistan experience the most heavily centralized regime to emerge from the wreckage of the Soviet Union; but, following Nyyazow's death in 2006, defied the expectations of regional observers by making a stable transition to a new autocratic order under Berdimuhamedow.

This thesis explores the regime's post-2006 transition by drawing attention to the interplay between Turkmenistan's domestic and external environs, both of which were used to legitimize the new administration. A crucial mechanism in this regard was the continuation of Positive Neutrality, a policy that became operational on 12 December 1995, when the General Assembly of the United Nations approved an ad hoc resolution [A/50/80(A)] endorsing Turkmenistan's intention to acquire a neutral status. This policy, and its strong emphasis on the importance of the UN Charter on Human Rights, is a crucial avenue through which both regimes have attained external legitimacy. In addition, the new concept of the Great Renaissance is an example of the ways in which autocratic regimes construct a sense of political reform through which to legitimize themselves within the eyes of the international community and the domestic population.

The process of legitimization does not operate in a vacuum; its analysis must be placed within the context of the Turkmen regime's wider priorities and domestic evolution. In other words, Berdimuhamedow's consolidation occurred on multiple-levels, with foreign and domestic policy deliberately calibrated to entrench the regime's power vertical. This calibration occurred through the strategic use of Positive Neutrality and the Great Renaissance, which were used to legitimize the new leadership.

In line with the growing scholarship on autocratic consolidation, this paper argues that (1) a democratically oriented symbolic landscape; (2) legitimizing external partnerships; and (3) faux-elections were the primary strategies and aims of the regime's foreign and domestic policy-making. The research's three empirical chapters will thus explore each of these themes in great detail. The key question then, is how do autocratic regimes legitimize their rule in the absence of popular mandates?

(0.2) Methodology

Researching an autocratic state's foreign and domestic policy is a methodologically challenging task because of the secretive nature of policy documents. This is particularly true concerning Turkmenistan, one of the most secretive and closed-off countries in the world. Conducting politically sensitive field-work is virtually impossible and researchers are often forced to rely on potentially unreliable interviews with dissidents-in-exile.

Archival research is thus the primary source of data collection for this thesis. Since official policy is the object of this study, the arguments presented are predominantly based on statements issued by the government in Aşgabat. These include official documents from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as press coverage by state-controlled news outlets. These include the Russian-language daily newspaper, *Neytralnyi Turkmenistan* (Neutral Turkmenistan), and the government website, *Zolotoy Vek* (Golden Century). More specifically, this research qualitatively examines selected pieces from the 40, 368 individual news articles issued by the Turkmen State News Agency outlets between 21 December 2006 and 30 April 2016 - the transition period in question - as well as key foreign and domestic policy statements from the Nyyazow era wherever necessary.

The primary methodological tool of the paper is thus discourse analysis. This methodology attempts to understand the meanings embedded in texts as well as the broader discursive environment in which language constructs both meaning and relations of power (Gill, R; 2000:

p188). In analyzing the political culture of Turkmenistan, it is crucial to pay particular attention to what Gill describes as "the organization and functions of discourse" (Gill, R; 2000: p188). Indeed, the main claim in this paper is that democratic rhetoric is designed to play a legitimizing role, thus consolidating the power of Berdimuhamedow's autocratic regime over society.

The analysis of this large collection of news stories and other forms of official state media is accompanied by an additional examination of information from other third-party independent media sources. An important reason for this is that important data is only partially accessible and reliable in Turkmenistan. GDP, poverty line, inflation, unemployment, and other quantitative metrics are often grossly exaggerated by the government, requiring careful analysis of data and crosschecking of sources. Therefore, the author has relied on human rights reports, economic indexes, and economic assessments performed by credible agencies such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the US State Department, and the United Nations. A two month internship was also undertaken by the author in *RFE/RL's* Prague headquarters between May 1 and July 5 2015. The internship provided access to the organization's vast archives of Turkmen reports, providing an invaluable source of data.

The author remains aware of the dangers of using secondary sources. All political groups and agencies that report on Turkmenistan have their own misconceptions, perspectives, and even outright biases. Verifying such information, particularly with no access to the country, is one of the key methodological challengers for researchers focusing on Turkmenistan. Nevertheless, all of the materials consulted have been cross-referenced against additional sources in order to construct a more detailed examination of political developments.

The paper's core arguments are as follows: (1) the spread of liberal democratic values on the world stage has created extensive opportunities for low-cost legitimating commitments to liberal norms; and (2) that regimes unconstrained by domestic opposition are prone to a more extreme decoupling of rhetorical commitments from implementation.

In order to explore this crucial decoupling of rhetoric from operationalization, the thesis splits the analysis into two interrelated components: (1) the declaratory content of Positive Neutrality and the Great Renaissance, which are contained within official documents and foreign policy statements issued between 21 December 2006 and April 2016; and (2) policy implementation since 21 December 2006.

The thematic division between rhetoric and implementation is the primary methodological tool through which the author seeks to develop the central hypothesis of calibrated decoupling of rhetoric and implementation as a strategy of cost-free regime legitimization. The data is thus organized accordingly:

1. Qualitative analysis of declaratory statements. This will identify the Turkmen regime's understanding of democratization and human rights.
2. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of operational foreign policy. This process will shed light on the private (undeclared) objectives pursued by the regime.
3. Application of comparative analysis to assess the degree of convergence between declaratory and operational foreign and domestic policy.

Utilizing this approach to data analysis will highlight the severe inconsistencies between rhetoric and implementation that have plagued Berdimuhamedow's policymaking process. Furthermore, by revealing an extreme level of de-coupling, the thesis will gain insight into the undeclared objective of Berdimuhamedow's policies: regime consolidation. The final aim then, is to assess the extent to which domestic and external emphasis on human rights have contributed toward consolidating the new regime.

(0.3) Thesis Structure

The methodological subdivision of Turkmen policy-making into two facets (declaratory and operational) is mirrored in the structure of the paper. Part 1 critically assesses the rhetorical and ideological shifts within Berdimuhamedow's regime. This section seeks to understand Turkmenistan's primary foreign policy concept: the Doctrine of Positive Neutrality; and its domestic concept: the Great Renaissance. These rhetorical tools form the core of Berdimuhamedow's legitimizing strategy. The second part of the paper examines in depth how the declaratory elements of both doctrines were translated into operational policy. The core aim of the paper then, is to understand the dynamics which shaped the severe disconnect between policy rhetoric and implementation: namely, the imperatives of regime consolidation.

The analysis of Turkmenistan's international concept: Positive Neutrality, is conducted in the literature review. This chapter explores the Turkmen regime's understanding of neutrality and compares it with the perspectives of long-established European neutrals such as Sweden. This chapter is designed both to analyze Turkmenistan's primary foreign-policy concept, whilst critically engaging with theoretical literature that addresses the question of domestic influences on foreign policy-making. The first section explores the nature of neutrality as a concept, whilst the second section addresses its primary rhetorical component: the promotion of human rights. This second section explores the interconnection between human rights and legitimization; a nexus that's critical for the arguments presented in this thesis. The chapter finishes by exploring literature on democratization and regime consolidation, seeking to understand what role human rights commitments play in these political projects.

The second chapter – the theoretical framework – describes in detail the nature of Turkmen authoritarianism in the Berdimuhamedow era. This chapter explores the notion of democracy and human rights norms as a strategy of authoritarian consolidation. Since the endogenous and exogenous dimensions of Turkmen politics are so closely interconnected, it is argued that

understanding the structure of Berdimuhamedow's domestic regime is integral to understanding the main determinants of Turkmenistan's rhetorical commitments to liberalization.

The third chapter integrates these themes and applies critical analysis to Berdimuhamedow's second concept – the Great Renaissance. The chapter also pays attention to the domestic relevance of both Positive Neutrality and the Great Renaissance, which have been used to legitimize the new regime in the eyes of Turkmenistan's citizens, as well as create a new nation-building paradigm to supplant Nyyazow's "Golden Age" concept. The chapter thus carefully explores the interconnection between domestic politics and foreign policy-making, asking a key question: Is the declaratory content of Positive Neutrality and the Great Renaissance aimed at a domestic or an international audience, or both?

The operational stage of Turkmen policy is dealt with in part 2 of the paper. The first chapter in this section deals with the most significant domestic reform of the Great Renaissance – the use of multi-candidate elections and the creation of new political parties. The investigation departs from declaratory content and instead places the spotlight on implementation. By contrasting this latter stage with the declaratory content previously outlined it is possible to trace the objectives pursued by the regime.

Chapter 4 delves into the introduction of multi-candidate elections in Turkmenistan, as well as the creation of two new political parties under the auspices of the regime. The chapter examines the processes through which the regime manipulated these developments as a strategy through which to consolidate the new regime domestically, as well as create a false sense of reform that could be used as political leverage on the international stage. Electoral politics, however superficial, are thus an important component of the regime's legitimization strategy.

Chapter 5 examines the foreign policy objectives pursued by the regime, namely, Berdimuhamedow's strategy to expand Turkmenistan's relations with Western democratic actors. The international perception of the regime's human rights record emerges as an important barometer for assessing the degree of support and/or dissent that surrounds Berdimuhamedow and his associates. The chapter contends that rather than unleashing genuine reform, the regime has coopted the norms of liberal democracy via its two main concepts as a mechanism through which to gain favorable standing in the West, and thus increase its sense of legitimacy in the domestic sphere.

The conclusion thus argues that Berdimuhamedow has successfully utilized (1) a democratically oriented symbolic landscape; (2) legitimizing external partnerships; and (3) faux-elections in order to construct a legitimizing framework. The regime's extreme model of authoritarianism meant that these avenues became cost-free legitimization strategies capable of stabilizing the new leadership.

Part 1

Understanding the Rhetorical Dimension of Berdimuhamedow's Autocratic Regime

Literature Review

Establishing a Conceptual Framework for Turkmenistan's Foreign Policy-Making

"Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented." – Elie Wiesel

Academic literature on Turkmenistan is scarce, restricted to just a few international scholars (Sabol, S. 1995, 2003, 2010; Denison, M. 2009; Anceschi, L. 2009, 2010, 2010; Sir, J. 2009; Horak, S. 2015, 2014, 2011, 2009; Peyrous, S. 2012), and Turkmenistani dissidents in exile (Kadyrov, S. 2003; Demidov, S. 2001). The purpose of this literature survey is to explore conceptual literature on neutrality, human rights norms, legitimization, and regime consolidation; elements of primary importance within Turkmenistan's policy paradigm.

In its narrowest form, neutrality is a legal concept with strict policy prescriptions laid out in the Hague Convention of 1907. Its key features are: (1) inviolability of borders, (2) disengagement from wars, and (3) the banning of military transit across national territory. Under this lens, neutrality is a dichotomous concept. Turkmenistan fails to meet the strict legal standard. Firstly, the country's borders are under threat, with regional actors publicly doubting the state's capacity to counter the Islamist threat on its Afghan border (RFE/RL; 23 October, 2015). Furthermore, limited transit capacity has been tolerated by Aşgabat's elites. For more than six years the U.S. made payments ($820 million in 2012 alone) to Turkmenistan in order to use its airspace (Cooley, A; 2012: p72). Numerous reports suggest the flights weren't strictly humanitarian (Eurasianet; August 1, 2010).

Clearly, a dichotomous view of neutrality does not necessarily converge with a state's operationalization of the concept (Ojanen et al.; 2000: p10-12). Other scholars have noted that the

ways in which laws are implemented, internalized, and made meaningful must be understood (Cover, R; 1983: p4-5; Karsh, E; 1988b: p60). Variation in the behavior of neutral states suggests that the concept holds a broader meaning.

A large number of scholars place neutrality within "small state" theory (Duval, R & Thompson, W; 1980: p520; Harbert, J, R; 1976: pp109-127). The major consensus within this subfield is that small states are more vulnerable than superpowers (Ahnlid, A; 1992: pp241-76; Baker Fox, A; 1959; Barston, R, P; 1973; Hey, J, A, K; 2003; Paterson, W, E. 1969). However, many have noted that the emphasis on vulnerability is a result of the realist hegemony in IR scholarship up until the late 1970s (Krasner, S; 1981; Plischke, E; 1977). Under a realist framework, small-states are merely "price-takers" whose policy choices are determined by the structural balance between superpowers (lingebritsen et al., 2006; Waltz, K; 1979). Neutrality is thus one of two possible choices for small states; the other is to join a military alliance (Ogley, R; 1970: p14; Schweller, R, L; 1994).

From the late 1980s onward, political economy became popular, assessing the role of small-states in the global economy (see Ahnlid, A; 1992; Katzenstein, P, J; 1985; Moses, J, W; 2000). In addition, focus shifted to the role of small states in international organizations such as the EU (Gstohl, S; 2002; Kurzer, P; 2001; Luif, P; 1995; Miles, L; 2002). In tandem with this research agenda emerged constructivism. This school of thought emphasized "soft security" and the importance of neutrality's domestic context (Kite, C; 2006; Miles, L; 1995, 2000, 2002, 2006; Mouritzen, H & Olesen, M, R; 2010; Phinnemore, D; 2000). Other studies within this field highlight importance of identity-driven sources of neutrality (Agius, C; 2006; Malmborg, A, M; 2001). Indeed, Turkmenistan's elites have also attempted to locate an ideational source to legitimize Positive Neutrality, arguing that it is a "purely Turkmen" concept. Nyyazow often stated that the principle of neutrality "meets the historical reality [of the country]" (Nyyazow, S; 1996: p80), whilst the former Turkmen Foreign Minister, Shikhmuradov argued that neutrality was rooted in the country's landscape since "survival in desert areas, where each drop of water is equal to a golden grain, would be impossible without a solid family model and peace between neighboring peoples" (Shikhmuradov, B; 1992: p2).

To entrench these ideas, the regime went to great lengths to re-construct the ethno-genesis of the Turkmens, linking them to the sedentary Iranian societies of ancient Central Asia (Ancheschi, L; 2009: p56). The reason for this is that the values of "peacefulness, good neighborliness, and diligence" enshrined in neutrality do not match the belligerent history of nomadic Turkmen tribes in the region, and their destructive impact on urbanized cultures (Ancheschi, L; 2009: p56). It is only by artificially attributing sedentary origins to modern Turkmenistan that the elite has been able to force links between current foreign policy and the "historical specificity" of the country (Ancheschi, L; 2009: p56). Neutrality's origins thus lie with the regime, not historical experience.

Beyond cultural identity, other authors analyzed policy internalization and the ways in which historical experience became embedded in normative practice. For example, states can be either *de jure* or *de facto* neutral. De facto neutrality is a status that is self-declared, such as Sweden's; whilst de jure is externally conditioned by international law, such as Turkmenistan's. The final scenario is neutralization, whereby one state imposes neutrality on another. Finland is an example of the latter, having been coerced into neutrality via the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (TFCMA) with the USSR (Hakovirta, H; 1988: pp29-30). In other words, the manner by which a norm emerged has internal repercussions that often override the super-structural considerations of realist scholars (Checkel, J, T; 1998; Finnemore, M; 2003; Katzenstein, P, J; 1996).

In this sense, a norm is a policy guide that enables and constrains foreign policy (Sandholtz, W; 2008: p102). To be considered as guiding behavior and policy over time, norms need to be re-affirmed through corresponding practices (Hakovirta, H; 1988: p14; Kratochwil, F, V; 1989: p61; Pouliot, V; 2010). Turkmenistan's elites have consistently highlighted the de jure nature of the country's neutrality in official propaganda, arguing that the regime is a vital ally of the UN. Indeed, many have noted that "the recalling of the neutrality story has become greater in the telling with each passing UN meeting," culminating in a claim on the Turkmen government's website that the UN had actively sought to form a diplomatic partnership with Nyyazow (Bohr, A; 2016: p73). In fact, between 1992 and 1995, the Turkmen leadership embarked on a highly active and complex campaign to secure its status and convince the UN to codify it (Ancheschi, L; 2009: p23). As this

thesis will argue extensively, Turkmenistan's elites have shown high levels of inconsistency in their policy implementation, demonstrating a low degree of norm internalization.

Other scholarship addresses the importance of the narrative turn in international relations. For example, during the Cold War, neutrals were framed by realists as small, isolationist, and weak. Other scholars however, have noted the ways in which neutral states limited conflict by creating "zones of peace" that allowed belligerents to negotiate with one another (Binter, J; 1985: pp390-396). In addition, neutrals helped construct a new, "moral" approach to international relations (Binter, J; 1985: pp390-396). For example, Sweden's neutrality acted as a platform through which to export its core domestic values. Sweden encouraged development assistance, disarmament, mediation, peace-keeping, and criticized the superpowers for their immoral approach to world politics (Morth, U & Sundelius, B; 1995).

Regime discourse in Turkmenistan frequently refers to the "third millennium," arguing that it bears no resemblance to any era before it. The primary distinction was that this new system was regulated by a "law of peace" (Anceschi, L; 2009: p27). This narrative benefits Turkmen ideologues, who position Turkmenistan as a guardian of the new order, replacing a "culture of war" with a "culture of peace" (Anceschi, L; 2009: p27). Additionally, elites deliberately included the adjective "positive" in their formulation, signaling their rejection of realist narratives of isolationism around the concept of neutrality (Anceschi, L; 2009: p28).

Equally important, in the resolution, *Foreign Policy Concept of Turkmenistan as a Neutral State*, approved by the Khalk Maslakhaty (People's Council) on 27 December 1995, the core objectives of the doctrine were outlined as follows:

- The consolidation of Turkmenistan's sovereignty;
- The creation of a stable external environment to facilitate strong economic growth;
- The fostering of a political culture of diplomacy;

- The development of a cooperative relationships with international partners;
- And to assure that Turkmenistan's foreign policy matches the principles enshrined in the UN Charter.

The final point takes on the greatest prominence in elite discourse, with neutrality repeatedly positioned as enshrining the humanitarian values of the country. Shikhmuradov, for example, stated that "Turkmenistan recognizes and respects human rights and freedoms, accepted by the world community and adopted as norms of international law, and creates political, economic, legal, and other guarantees for their effective realization" (Anceschi, L; 2009: p29).

The Doctrine of Positive Neutrality is a bizarre concept, distinguished by its inconsistent operationalization and lack of theoretical clarity. In addition, the declarative text, particularly in regard to human rights, is filled with clichés and ambiguous, pseudo-philosophical statements. In order to fully understand the nature of this rhetoric, it is crucial to analyze the role human rights plays in the international arena; particularly, why authoritarian regimes formulate discourse around the "script" of human rights but without the substance of implementation.

(0.10) The International Human Rights Regime and Legitimizing Frameworks

As discussed above, norms pose an important challenge for scholars of international relations, particularly the existence of a growing acceptance of liberal democratic values. The normative agenda of the human rights movement is therefore aimed at the promotion of individual liberty, and by extension, focused on restricting the excesses of state power. Paradoxically, autocratic states have been among the most vocal supporters of this normative agenda, despite their vested interests in maintaining the primacy of the state in political affairs.

Berdimuhamedow's Turkmenistan is a compelling example of this trend, having announced a commitment to democratic reforms, as well as ratifying numerous human rights treaties as well as allowing several UN monitoring bodies to operate inside the country. Indeed, some scholars have noted that since the 1980s, repressive states have ratified human rights treaties at rates which surpass their liberal counterparts (Hafner-Burton, E, M & Tsutsui, K & Meyer, J. W; 2008: p119). It can be assumed then that an autocratic states commitment to liberal norms provides it with certain advantages.

Much like with neutrality, realist scholars dismiss human rights norms as being irrelevant within an international state system concerned with a material balance of power and military capability (Waltz, K; 1979: p44). Realist scholars argue that liberal norms offer no tangible strategic or material benefits on the international stage and so should be discarded as a research focus (Wotika, C, M & Tsutsui, K; 2001: p12). The main agreement among realists is that states are likely to commit to liberal norms only when coerced by powerful hegemons.

Although hegemonic states have often coerced repressive regimes into ratifying human rights treaties or implementing domestic reforms, an increasing number of authoritarian states have outpaced the U.S. This is highly unusual seeing as the U.S. functions as the world's hegemonic liberal state. In fact, legal scholars have noted that throughout the Cold War, the U.S. only ratified three human rights treaties: the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the Convention against Torture (Wotika, C, M & Tsutsui, K; 2001: p12). Realist scholarship thus fails to adequately account for this curious phenomenon.

A second approach to this research puzzle is provided by the "liberalist" theories of Andrew Moravscik (2000), who argued that governments gain diplomatic advantage by making the international sphere more predictable (Moravscik, A; 2000: p220). Moravscik argued that newly established states commit to liberal values as a strategy through which to institutionalize democratic transition (Moravscik, A; 2000: p223). Although this theory is useful for exploring the

transitions made by autocratic regimes such as Spain and Portugal, it still fails to describe the cooptation of liberal norms by heavily centralized regimes such as Turkmenistan's.

To overcome this theoretical gap, "ideational" approaches came to describe processes of socialization (Katzenstein, P; 1996: p12). The theory argues that repressive regimes are convinced of the utility of democratic reforms by normative entrepreneurs and thus seek to implement such changes in the national interest (Katzenstein, P; 1996: p12). The ideational approach thus argues that autocratic elites democratize once they become convinced of the value of liberal norms.

The findings of this paper counteract the ideational approach, since the emerging Berdimuhamedow regime failed to adequately implement any of its democratic and human rights commitments. Indeed, the severe decoupling of rhetoric from practice, as will be discussed extensively in the following chapters, suggests that human rights rhetoric is a crucial factor of regime legitimization and consolidation. In this sense, normative policies play a crucial role in maintaining autocratic stability, regardless of whether they actually impact on policy implementation.

The concept of legitimacy is itself problematic. The definition used in this research is inclusive of all regime types and is not burdened by potentially misleading normative interpretations of the concept that reduce its analytic value to studying democratic regimes alone. Indeed, according to Lipset: "legitimacy, in and of itself, may be associated with many forms of political organization, including oppressive ones" (Lipset, M. S; 1981: p28). This raises methodological limitations however since it is difficult to analyze the extent to which citizens support an authoritarian political order. Indeed, how can legitimacy be quantified or measured when public opinion is repressed, hidden, and actively distorted by the state? Autocratic leaders are also uncertain of legitimacy, often over-estimating their claims to the concept or under-estimate their own legitimacy to such an extent that they use heavy-handed measures to keep the population in line. This paper is not focused on public compliance however, it is a study focused purely on how states create and maintain a sense of legitimacy. This information can be readily understood from public statements,

national symbols, architectural projects, the regime's interpretation of history, and other key indicators of state policy.

This research adopts Lipset's symbolic approach toward the concept, which assumes that leaders deliberately solicit consent by framing their rule as benevolent. As Lipset (1981, p83) writes: "legitimacy involves the capacity of the system to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for society." Rulers thus embark on a process of legitimization by attempting to construct a sense of common interest between themselves and the population (Beetham, D; 1991: p59). This dissertation explicitly questions this process of constructing legitimacy. It does not question whether the Berdimuhamedow regime is itself 'legitimate.' utilize the advantages of legitimacy – enhanced order, stability, effectiveness – as key elements in a regime narrative presented to the population as evidence of its own necessity (Beetham, D; 1991: p59).

Migdal (2001) argues that the state is the dominant political idea in the modern international system (Midgal, J. S; 2001: p 17). State-building is thus a central component of the legitimization project. In the case of Turkmenistan this can be readily understood from its emphasis on predictable elections, national historiography, and addresses to the nation. In addition, the international arena has taken on enhanced importance with transcripts of foreign meetings taking on prominence in official state media. This paper argues that Lipset's definition can be extended to the construction of legitimacy in an international context. Regimes of all types, including autocratic ones, may attempt to solicit consent from the international community by framing their regime as benevolent, in particular, by discursively adhering to liberal norms even if they do not implement reforms in practice. Before understanding the role democratic rhetoric and human rights norms play in the process of autocratic consolidation it is crucial to first understand the literature on democratization and autocratic consolidation.

(0.11) The Process of Authoritarian Consolidation

The study of Central Asia through the lens of democratic transition theory has been extremely problematic for developing a nuanced understanding of regional dynamics. Instead, it is best to explore these systems in terms of autocratic stability and the mechanisms through which they have resisted both endogenous and exogenous pressures for political reform. Indeed, some scholars have even argued that we should "discard the transition paradigm" entirely (Carothers, T; 2002: P17).

The purpose of scholarship on democratic transition was to explain the dynamics through which centralized, autocratic systems liberalized their political and economic spheres (Gobel, C; 2011: pp176-190). This framework has distorted academic perception, creating research that is overly focused on dynamics that hint at liberalization, at the expense of processes that result in autocratic entrenchment (Lynch, D; 2004: p347). This case bias is even evident in the names of some of the important journals in the sub-field: *Journal of Democracy*, *Democratization*, and *Democratizatsiya* (Ambrosio, T; 2014: p470).

Nevertheless, the transition literature identified several factors necessary for liberalization of the political sphere: (1) divisions within the rulings class; (2) mass mobilization of the population; and (3) linkages between pro-democracy activists and external democratic actors such as the European Union (Ambrosio, T; 2014: p470). In Turkmenistan, there has been no evidence of any of these features. Indeed, following Nyyazow's death, the ruling elite rapidly organized a transition, demonstrating the stability of the political elite.

Following the arrest of the head of Nyyazow's Presidential guard, Rejepov, Berdimuhamedow's regime quickly consolidated its authority (Peyrous, S; 2012: p114). In addition, practically no large-scale protests have taken place in the country, and most are quickly suppressed, never extending beyond their regional context (RFE/RL; August 23, 2014). Finally, Turkmenistan's

political opposition have been banished from the country, and very little external engagement with local politics is tolerated (Anceschi, L; 2009: p124-138). Despite the regime's construction of a "multi-party system," the parties remain entirely loyal to the central regime and mass mobilization is kept to a minimum (Peyrous, S; 2012: p114).

Silitski argued that the Color Revolutions acted as a form of regional Darwinism toppling the more brittle regimes (Silitski, V; 2010: p345). The regime's that survived were far more successful at preventing protests before begin, such as Turkmenistan (Peyrous, S; 2012: p125); or they were willing to use military force. The violent response to protests in Andijan, Uzbekistan, is an obvious example of the latter (The Guardian; 13 May, 2015). In addition, the stronger regimes were able to insulate themselves from external democratic forces. Autocratic regimes are increasingly aware that NGOs are integral for the construction of linkages between transnational democratic activists, and thus threaten regime consolidation. To curtail their activities, Vladimir Putin introduced new legislation during his 2004 address to the Duma, designed to curtail their activities (Ambrosio, T; 2009: p49). Soon afterwards, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan adopted similar measures.

The primary controversy within the consolidology literature is whether the concept should be understood as a "threshold" or as a "process" (Schedler, A; 1998: pp91-107). Earlier work on the phenomenon argued that consolidation was a dependent variable sustained by independent variables such as elite legitimacy, and the internalization of democratic norms (Di Palma, G; 1990: p141). Perhaps the best-known example of this research is Huntington's "two-turnover test," which favored an events-based approach to consolidation (Huntington, S; 1991: pp266-267).

Other theorists argued that the consolidation threshold was reached when elections were stable (Huntington, S; 1991: pp266-267); the elite developed a democratic outlook (Morlino, L; 2004: p17); or a specific economic threshold had been reached (Schedler, A; 2001: p80). The most obvious flaw in the threshold based approach to consolidation is identifying suitable indicators (Ambrosio, T; 2011: p481). Failing to do so can result in setting the bar too high, such as the two-

turnover test, which results in long-established democracies such as Japan's being discounted (Ambrosio, T; 2014: p481).

The alternative to the threshold approach is that of a process-oriented conceptualization with the dependent variable of regime survival. The consolidation as process approach overcomes the binary set of predictions inherent in the threshold literature by allowing for outcome gradations (Ambrosio, T; 2011: p478). The process tracking literature also opens up the possibility of more nuanced analysis focusing on the shifting objectives of regime survival at key political junctures (Ambrosio, T; 2011: p478). Although this literature emerged during analysis of democratic regimes, it is conceptually useful for understanding the various mechanisms used to strengthen authoritarianism.

Both the threshold and process-tracking literature agree that institution-building, intra-elite relations, and economic efficiency are important elements of regime survival (Gandhi, J & Przeworski, A; 2007: p1292). For autocratic regimes, "infrastructural power" (security forces) is an additional element of survival (Slater, D & Fenner, S; 2011: p19). Coercion is just one dimension of autocratic stability however. Equally important are the regime's capacity to extract and distribute rents; eliminate alternative power bases at the local level; and establish a system of political and economic dependence among the most powerful factions in society (Slater, D; 2009: P1).

Finally, the international level of consolidation is another crucial avenue of research. There is an increasing awareness that states without strong Western connections were better positioned to resist democratic pressures emanating from the Color Revolutions (Ambrosio, T; 2011: p379). In some cases, autocrats in one country may provide political, economic, or diplomatic assistance to like-minded leaders elsewhere in order to ensure the recipient regime remains in power (Ambrosio, T; 2011: p379). These avenues of research are all integral to the study of Positive Neutrality, and it is to the interplay between the domestic and external environment the research turns in order to establish a robust theoretical framework.

This paper argues that Turkmenistan's regime transition is an important case study for understanding the linkages between democratization, the international human rights regime, and the methods by which autocratic elites both legitimize and consolidate power. Rather than liberalization, Berdimuhamedow's regime has demonstrated an extremely complex policy process, creating faux reforms as a strategy through which to legitimize his rule and reduce the extreme levels of isolation Nyyazow's excesses incurred. Paradoxically then, democratization, in its most carefully calibrated form, can be a crucial mechanism for the strengthening of autocratic systems of governance.

Following the major arguments outlined in the literature, the next section seeks to construct a theoretical model which adequately explains the role of normative commitments as a form of autocratic legitimization. The framework also seeks to understand the decoupling between rhetoric and implementation, arguing that this process is conditioned (1) by the goal of regime consolidation; and (2) is magnified by the extent to which the ruling regime has achieved a hegemonic position in domestic affairs.

The key arguments then are as follows:

(1) Autocratic regimes co-opt liberal democratic norms as a means of legitimizing their leadership.

(2) The more centralized and hegemonic the regime, the more evident the de-coupling is between rhetorical commitments to liberal norms and actual implementation.

(3) Autocratic regime's express their liberal credentials via a democratically oriented symbolic landscape; cooperation with international organizations and democratic external actors; and faux elections.

(4) Each of these elements contains an external and an internal dimension. For example, regimes which hold elections are likely to domestically circulate positive assessments by external actors. In addition, regime's which hold elections are also likely to make

regular reference to their domestic elections as a means of gaining external diplomatic access to democratic actors.

(0.12) Theoretical Framework

Legitimizing Frameworks and Regime Consolidation

“”The King is, I see, only the first magistrate of the country […] such a condition of power has permanence but it has no enjoyment: mine is enjoyment. There you see Suleiman Khan Khajir, and several other first chiefs of the Kingdom – I can cut all their heads off can I not?” ‘That is real power,’ responded the King; ‘but then it has no permanence.’” – (The Iranian Shah’s exchange with Britain’s King George III)

This chapter argues that Berdimuhamedow’s regime is closer in nature to its Central Asian counterparts than his predecessor’s as a result of his commitment to building stable relationships with western actors. The end result has been the manipulation of democratic and humanitarian norms for the purposes of regime consolidation. In particular, the chapter draws attention to the linkages between domestic politics and international relations, thus providing a comprehensive lens through which to analyze Turkmenistan’s leadership succession and its approach to policy-making. In order to achieve this, the paper adapts the institutionalist approach in sociology, applying it to international affairs.

The first section outlines the theory of autocratic states and the international human rights regime. The second section outlines the international sphere of Turkmen consolidation, while the final section views the domestic arena. The end resulted is an integrated approach toward understanding the policy-making dynamics of autocratic states.

(0.13) Authoritarianism and the Human Rights Regime

The global human rights movement has been a dramatic success in constructing a highly influential normative framework for states and societies to follow. It has achieved these goals using a complex

network of NGOs and political activists, as well as a vast array of international treaties and the use of states who act as norm entrepreneurs. However, despite the movement's successes, recent analysis suggests that human rights violations continue to occur at alarming rates worldwide (Hafner-Burton, E, M & Tsutsui, K; 2007: p409).

This scenario is paradoxical, since the increase in treaties and global commitments to liberalization have resulted in declining standards (Hafner-Burton, E, M & Tsutsui, K & Meyer, J. W; 2008: p117). Scholars have attributed this outcome to the gap between rhetorical commitments and the capacity of states to implement progressive reforms (Hafner-Burton, E, M & Tsutsui, K & Meyer, J. W; 2008: p117). Another question emerges however: If states lack the capacity to implement reforms, why would they commit to them in the first place?

As argued in the literature review, the most important factor is legitimacy. Liberal norms act as a benchmark for good governance. Subscribing to these norms provides a vital source of legitimacy for modern states (Goodman, R & Jinks, D; 2004: p622). This factor is crucial for understanding the paradoxical centrality of human rights within autocratic discourse. Indeed, speaking at a conference marking 15 years of Turkmen neutrality, Berdimuhamedow stated that:

"We firmly believe that today, against the background of the new realities, the lofty humanistic ideals and principles of the UN Charter continues to be a moral and legal foundation for the international order." (Internet Gazeta Turkmenistan.ru; 14 December 2010)

The main argument here then, is that (1) the emergence of an international human rights movement has produced a powerful benchmark which modern states are ascribe to; and (2) the response to these norms varies dependent on the regime-type in question.

Sociologists refer to these policy variances as "institutionalist." According to this approach, states follow "global scripts" in order to project a sense of both domestic and international legitimacy (Meyer, et al; 1997: p150). Human rights, humanitarianism, and liberal ideology are at the heart of the current international system. Regimes which subscribe to these norms gain international support (Meyer, et al; 1997: p150). This paper argues that in order to effectively analyze these dynamics, a hybrid approach combining international relations with a study of domestic politics is crucial to understanding the variation among sovereigns' compliance, or lack thereof, with liberal democratic norms.

A major assumption in this research is that violating human rights is a crucial aspect of authoritarian consolidation. Therefore, without a strong intervening variable, autocracies are prone to continue violating human rights whether they have rhetorical commitments to liberal norms or not. The primary intervening variable then, is likely to be the penalty given for violations. Penalties are rare however, since the international system places higher priority on sovereignty than domestic human rights (Ancheschi, L; 2008: p125).

Indeed, Turkmenistan has long used its position of neutrality to resist what it perceives as intervention in its domestic affairs. For example, Turkmenistan opposed the UN's passing of Resolution A/59/206 (2004); a resolution that was critical of Nyyazow's systematic political repression. During the report's plenary discussion, Turkmenistan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ataeva, emphasized "the active, open, and constructive approach taken by Turkmenistan to resolve issues pertaining to the advancement of human rights," and demanded the Assembly "consider other ways of achieving human rights goals than the biased, politicized use of such resolutions to interfere in the domestic realm of sovereign states" (UN Doc. A/59/PV.74; 20 December, 2004). Following this series of events, Nyyazow called for reform of the United Nations, arguing that the core mandate of the organization is to protect the sovereignty "of all nations, big and small" and not to fixate itself on domestic affairs (OSI; 22 April, 2004).

Non-compliance is therefore relatively cost-free for autocratic states. Repressive states have thus co-opted liberal norms as a strategy through which to pacify their populations and deflect criticism. In addition, regimes utilize piecemeal reforms in order to gain diplomatic favor on the international stage. An important example of this latter phenomenon is that when repressive states implement moderate reforms, they are usually rewarded in the media and international forums for demonstrating normative compliance (Hafner-Burton, E, M & Tsutsui, K & Meyer, J. W; 2008: p123).

A stronger case for penalty is at the domestic level. This paper argues that a sovereign's degree of autonomy from civil opposition is the main determinant of its willingness to rhetorically embrace liberal norms (Hafner-Burton, E, M & Tsutsui, K & Meyer, J. W; 2008: p123). The reason for this is that regimes which are constrained by opposition movements may fear that embracing liberal norms and signing human rights treaties may lead to enhanced criticism, ultimately destabilizing the leadership (Hafner-Burton, E, M & Tsutsui, K & Meyer, J. W; 2008: p123). In addition, legal treaties may provide domestic social forces additional leverage in their criticism by allowing them to appeal to international human rights monitoring bodies. By contrast, states which lack domestic opposition have less concern about such internal threats since they can quell unrest relatively easily (Hafner-Burton, E, M & Tsutsui, K & Meyer, J. W; 2008: p124). Highly centralized regimes therefore have less to lose from subscribing to liberal norms.

Before analyzing the empirical data from Berdimuhamedow's time in office, it is crucial to demonstrate the level of detachment the incumbent regime has from civil society. The next section will argue that Berdimuhamedow's Turkmenistan fits the most authoritarian typology for autocratic regimes: sultanism. By interpreting Turkmenistan is a sultanistic regime, the analysis can present its first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: The regime's monopoly on power means that there will be an extensive decoupling of democratic rhetoric and implementation.

Following this, the analysis can progress to proving the paper's additional hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2: The decoupling of rhetoric and implementation means that the regime's international commitments to democratic norms have become a cost-free legitimization strategy for domestic propaganda.

Hypothesis 3: Human rights cooperation serves as an important mechanism for reintegrating Turkmenistan into the international community. This reintegration in turn plays a crucial performative role in domestic propaganda.

(0.14) Elite Detachment in the Turkmen Model of Authoritarianism

Turkmenistan is consistently listed as one of the most repressive states in the world and thus operates with little to no domestic constraints on its activity. In the Turkmen political system, the president holds enormous power. Typical of such dictatorial polity, suppression of domestic opposition from activists, labor unions and Islamic activity is commonplace.

In order to assess the degree of regime detachment, the next section will compare Turkmenistan with the sultanistic model of autocracy; one of the most extreme models of elite autonomy. Max Weber argued that "models" immediately cast political discourse within the realm of heuristic reasoning. At its core, a model is intended to organize complex data within an engaging theoretical framework that can be used as a discursive reference point. A model's success is thus contingent on carefully pinpointing the core elements necessary for the reproduction of strictly defined socio-economic practices.

Turkmenistan has widely been considered in past as representing one of the more extreme forms of authoritarianism known as "sultanism" (Cummings, S & Ochs, S; 2007: p115). Sultanism, a term coined by Max Weber, denotes a particularly extreme form of patrimonial regime, characterized by the leader's arbitrariness and irrationality. The etymology of the term "sultanism" strikes some scholars as "orientalist," with some suggesting the term "discretionary neo-patrimonialism" as a more nuanced term (Chebai, H, E & Linz, J; 1998: p23). At the time, Weber had identified the Near East as the location in which sultanism could flourish most favorably (Anceschi, L; 2009: p43).

This geographic contextualization originally limited the concept, however, it became popular again in recent years and has since been applied extensively outside the orient to regimes such as such as Lukashenko's Belarus, Batista's Cuba, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina's Dominican Republic, and even Kim Jong Il's North Korea (Chebai, H, E & Linz, J; 1998: p12). In addition, the choice of the Arabic concept Sultan (indicating both the power and the person who wields it), is a fitting term, particularly since the sultanate was a secular office unlike the caliphate (Anceschi, L; 2009: p44).

The "state authority structure" of a sultanistic regime, or, the patterns of how state authority is organized and how power is used relies on the following features:

1. **Power Monism**

In systems of personal rule, political power is concentrated in the hands of one person rather than some collectively-run institution such as a party (Geddes, B; 1999: p124). Oftentimes the leader organizes a clique to support his rule: "during and after a seizure of power, personalist cliques are often formed from the network of friends, relatives, and allies that surround ever political leader"

(Geddes, B; 1999: p124). But since any clique's survival depends on access to the ruler, cliques do not usually act as a check on the ruler's powers.

Berdimuhamedow relies on a small clique inherited from his predecessor. This clique includes figures such as Aleksander Dadaev, head of the opposition party, The Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (Horák, S; 2011: p12). The clique also includes figures such as Kramov, Nyyazow's former propaganda advisor who retains his position in the current administration (Horák, S; 2011: p12).

2. Neo-patrimonial Administration

This phenomenon refers to the condition of subordination of the state's coercive and administrative apparatuses to the individual executive on the basis of the "loyalty and rewards" principle. A patrimonial administrator's loyalty to his office is based not on "his impersonal commitment to impersonal tasks," but to a "personal relationship with a ruler" (Weber, M; 1978 [1922]: p36). A patrimonial administration is maintained by the ruler's granting of benefits (for example, allowances) and fiefs to his staff (Evans, P; 1989: p568). The ruler recruits his staff according to particularistic, rather than merit-based, criteria - family membership, inheritance rules, and personal loyalty - to serve mainly the private ends of his leadership (Evans, P; 1989: p570).

Berdimuhamedow's consolidation heralded a new pattern in Turkmenistan's intra-elite relations: clan politics. In contrast to his orphan predecessor, who had limited contact with distant relatives, Berdimuhamedow is much more involved in the regional and family structures of Turkmen society (Kunysz, N; 2012: p1). Office holders among the security apparatus tasked with protecting the regime (the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Interior) are almost exclusively tied to the President through regional or family bonds (Kunysz, N; 2012: p1). Ata Serdarov, a cousin of the President, was Health Minister until 2010 when he was demoted to

the position of Ambassador to Armenia (Horák, S; 2012: p380). Gurbanmyrat Hangulyyev, the President's brother-in-law, has been the minister of transport since 2008 (Horák, S; 2012: p380). Yaylym Berdyyev, another relative of the President was promoted to the position of Minister of Defense and head of the State Security Council and in 2011, was appointed Minister for National Security (Horák, S; 2012: p380)/

3. Patron-client networks.

In tandem with neo-patrimonial administrations are the lightning rods through which power is channeled: patron-client networks. By appointing retainees to the top administrative-bureaucratic positions, the ruler creates an informal network whereby he stands as the chief patron (Jackson, R, H & Rosberg, C, G; 1984: p421). By the same functional logic, the top-level clients use their status and access to state resources to benefit themselves and distribute the spoils of the office to their cronies, relatives, and friends. The system thus operates "on the exchange of political support for material benefits between patrons and clients […] via a hierarchical structure in which multiple clients are connected to each patron" (Snyder, R; 1998: p51). The patron-client network thus provides the institutional infrastructure of power. The reach of the patronage network varies and can be highly consequential for the fate of the regime (Snyder, R; 1998: p57).

President Berdimuhamedow's closest relatives and inner circle have also taken control over the most important industries and profitable sectors of the economy, including the gas sector. The most prominent example is Berdimuhamedow's son-in-law Dovlet Atabayev who was appointed Chief Representative of the State Agency for Management of Hydrocarbon Resources in 2008 (Horák, S; 2012: p380). Since 2011 Berdimuhamedow's son, Serdar, has concentrated substantial parts of the Turkmen economy in his own hands and also attempted to take control of former Presidential son Murad Nyyazow's business empire (Horák, S; 2012: p380).

4. Institutionless Polity

The ruler acts with unchecked discretion because there is no rule of law and a low degree of institutionalization. The sultan is "above all unencumbered by rules, or by commitment to an ideology or value system" (Steven, M, E & Kuzio, T; 2000: p531). The binding norms of bureaucratic behavior are subverted by the arbitrary decisions of the ruler, who feels no need to justify his actions by reference to a coherent ideology.

Berdimuhamedow continues his predecessor's tradition of using extra-judicial bodies to transcend the formal order. For example, the President constructed an "Elders Council," designed to diminish regional autonomy. The Elders Council is controlled by the Presidential Administration and has full control over local council appointments (Peyrous, S; 2012: p115). In addition, the 2008 Constitution introduced by Berdimuhamedow continues to grant Presidential decrees the full force of law.

5. Centralized Decision-Making

Political plurality is treated with utmost skepticism and the powerful state-security forces do not tolerate any form of political organization. Unlike totalitarian regimes, society is completely immobilized and discouraged from joining vanguard political movements (Steven, M, E & Kuzio, T; 2000: p532).

Turkmenistan under both Nyyazow and Berdimuhamedow exhibits all five of these characteristics. However, Nyyazow's sultanism was less pronounced than his successor's regime. In particular, it lacked the leader's blood relatives in the top echelons of the ruling elite (Anceschi, L; 2009: p51). Nyyazow's immediate relatives were not involved in domestic politics, nor did they play any

significant role after his death. Nevertheless, though the leader's family circle wielded no power, emphasis on it was a recurrent element in the regime narrative. For example, Nyyazow's late parents, Atamurat and Gurbansoltan Edzhe, were both presented as national heroes of Turkmenistan (Anceschi, L; 2009: p51).

Total personalization of the regime, however, seemed to be a relatively accurate image of Turkmenistan at the time of Nyyazow's death. In fact, even though the late President needed the support of an extremely restricted elite to take "all major and minor decisions," he appeared to exert his almost unlimited powers entirely on the basis of personal charisma and widespread fear (Anceschi, L; 2009: p51). Despite the absence of dynastic tendencies, Nyyazow's regime predominantly matches with the features of the sultanistic model. Indeed, as Linz and Chehabi observed: "no empirical reality fully matches all the characteristics of an ideal type regime" (Anceschi, L; 2009: p51).

Nyyazow's death in 2006 brought an interesting shift to the country's sultanistic model, completing its evolution. All the original features of the regime remained firmly in place, however, Berdimuhamedow began rapidly moving his relatives into powerful positions across the state apparatus as has been argued above.

In addition, Turkmenistan's petro politics grants the regime extensive revenue and detachment from financial dependency on the population. Such a state is an 'allocation state' as distinguished from a 'production state', which relies on taxation and the domestic economy for its income (Frank, A & Gawrich, A & Alakbarov, G; 2009: p112). In the allocation state, oil rents accrue directly in the hands of the state, and political loyalty is created through patron–client networks (Smith, B; 2004: pp232-246). Turkmenistan's revenues from the export of natural gas were concealed from the public by "deceptive accounting practices, non-transparent swap arrangements and under-the-table transactions" (Gleason, G; 2010: P78).

During his presidency, Nyyazow personally appropriated $1.5 billion from the sale of natural gas between 1992 and 1993 (Oge, K; 2015: p97). Berdimuhamedow has followed a similar rent-seeking logic and established a new stabilization fund in October 2008 in response to the global economic downturn (Nichol, J; 2009: p7). However, there is very little information on this fund, its board of directors, location, and management (Crude Accountability; 2011, p11). Consequently, the Resource Governance Index ranks Turkmenistan 57th among 58 resource-rich countries as one of the worst in terms of governance of natural resources (Oge, K; 2015: p97). Many international organizations have noted that corruption has enhanced markedly under Berdimuhamedow (Crude Accountability; 2011, p11).

(0.10) Conclusion

So far the discussion has argued that Berdimuhamedow's regime exhibits an extreme level of detachment from civil society and so this internal structure means that rhetorical commitments to liberal norms are a cost-free legitimization strategy. The paper will now move on to analyze the specific commitments of the regime and its primary legitimization strategies. The three primary strategies identified by empirical analysis are: (1) a democratically oriented symbolic landscape; (2) legitimizing external partnerships; and (3) faux-elections.

By examining each of these dimensions in turn, the paper will argue that Turkmenistan displayed an integrated approach toward policy-making. In order to achieve this the regime made use of two concepts: Positive Neutrality and the Great Renaissance. The next chapter will explore the domestic application of Positive Neutrality, an international concept, as well as the Great Renaissance, demonstrating that Turkmenistan uses its international relations as a central component in its democratically oriented symbolic landscape.

(1) Chapter One

Democratic Rhetoric and Autocratic Nation-Building: Interpreting Turkmenistan's Symbolic Landscape

"Unlike for people in the West, the state is not a 'night-watchman' for Turkmens. They see it as a paternalistic organ, which displays father-like care for them, transforms the population into a single nation. It also takes care of its unity, ensures its security, makes them happy, and provides them with a free life. This is the reason why the Turkmen people adore with devotion the state and its President, believe in it, support it, and are willing to die for it." – Saparmurat Nyyazow (Khalliev, T; 2000: p131)

The durability of Berdimuhamedow's successor regime has to be understood not just in terms of its coercive power, but in respect to the degree of international and domestic legitimacy it has managed to obtain for itself. The majority of autocratic regimes rely on a carefully constructed symbolic landscape as a strategy of legitimization (Matveeva, A; 2009: p1097). These symbols are designed first and foremost to convince the population that the regime does not serve "merely the interests of the powerful, but those of the subordinate also, or else make possible the realization of larger social purposes of which they have no concern" (Beetham, D; 1991: p17).

Some scholars have argued that symbolism functions as a display of state power: "in exercising its capacity to appropriate meanings and to insist on the momentary stability of signs, the regime advertises its power. By representing this power the regime creates it anew, continually upholding the circumstances that produce citizens' compliance" (Wedeen, L; 1999, p157).

This chapter advances the claim that Berdimuhamedow's regime relied on a delicate balance between justifying its legitimacy based on maintaining Nyyazow's political legacy while simultaneously detaching itself from that legacy and positioning itself as a new democratic order.

Berdimuhamedow thus created a rhetorical paradigm based around liberal norms, legitimizing himself and enhancing the population's compliance with the regime's autocratic trajectory. In this sense, democratic rhetoric acted as a key mechanism for decoupling the new regime from that of its predecessor.

Indeed, the post-Nyyazow elite had genuine fears of political instability. Upon the announcement of Nyyazow's death, both an agricultural crisis as well as a number of major prison riots occurred (Jamestown Foundation; 26 January, 2007). Other signs of unrest were the new regimes decision to immediately restrict freedom of movement, as well as seal off the border with Uzbekistan in the early stages of transition (Eurasianet; 17 October, 2007). There are thus good reasons to suspect that Berdimuhamedow's obsession with projecting – both internally and externally – an image of discontinuity with the Nyyazow regime was a strategy carefully orchestrated to quell these signs domestic unrest.

The first section of the chapter explores the importance of personality cults and their associated symbols in the Turkmen political system. Secondly, the chapter explores symbolic nation-building under the two regimes and the importance of national myths in the preservation of power. Thirdly, the chapter explores Berdimuhamedow's national narrative, that of the "Great Renaissance" of Turkmen democracy. The final section looks to international sources of domestic legitimacy, namely, the United Nations' recognition of the Doctrine of Positive Neutrality and its symbolic continuation in post-Nyyazow Turkmenistan.

The chapter thus advances the model developed in the previous chapter by arguing that the Turkmen regime's extreme detachment from civil society meant that it could use democratic rhetoric extensively in the national project without fear of popular reprisal. In addition, the chapter argues that in using Positive Neutrality as a key component of domestic propaganda, the regimes effectively integrated foreign and domestic politics in a bid to construct a stable legitimizing framework.

(1.1) Regime Rhetoric and the National Project in Post-Soviet Turkmenistan

In Turkmenistan, the nation-building project is a bizarre process designed to match the Turkmen nation with the post-Soviet regime. In this context, the President is positioned as the unifying element of Turkmenistan's identity, and the guiding presence in the country's so-called "national revival" (Kuru, A; 2002: p73). Both presidents featured prominently in public life with numerous portraits, slogans, TV appearances and celebrations filling the public space.

The cult of the president serves two functions. Firstly, it allows the President to transcend tribal and ethnic tensions, thus overriding potentially destabilizing tribal currents. Nyyazow frequently expressed concern with the state of the country's tribal unity (Anceschi, L; 2008: P38). And secondly, by maintaining an artificial state of transition, the regime positions itself as the guardian of Turkmenistan's path to prosperity, and concurrently, oppositional views are framed as disruptive and dangerous (Sabol, S; 2010: p6). The second point is worth further elaboration.

In the turbulent times of the Soviet Union's collapse, Central Asia's leaders were left to construct new states and navigate a rapidly shifting geopolitical environment. Legitimacy was granted to regional leaders on account of their claims to the title "father of the nation" and earning "independence" for their peoples (Matveeva, A; 2009: p1113). This fact is particularly intriguing in the case of Turkmenistan, where Nyyazow had been one of the most conservative leaders in the Soviet Union. Firstly, he had failed to condemn the August coup, and secondly, he strongly opposed any political action aimed at dissolving the USSR (Anceschi, L; 2008: p33). More curiously, Nyyazow was instrumental in pressuring the Slavic republics following the signing of the Minsk Agreement to accept the newly independent Central Asian republics into the Commonwealth of Independent States (Anceschi, L; 2008: p33).

Nevertheless, Nyyazow's propaganda, in bestowing him the title of Türkmenbaşy (Father of all Turkmen), continued a regional legitimization trend. By contrast, Berdimuhamedow's regime is a unique case study in the region on account of being a second-tier succession and thus lacking the same claims to greatness as his predecessor. Nevertheless, since 2011 the Turkmen press has routinely referred to Berdimuhamedow by the name "Arkdag" (the Protector), showing methodological continuity between the two autocrats. Before discussing leadership cults in more detail, it is important to first outline the national myths of post-Soviet Turkmenistan, and their role in constructing a new nation-state out of fragmented tribal groupings.

According to Anderson, the process of writing a nation's history emphasizes unifying historical events, whilst omitting any details which might threaten national solidarity (Anderson, B; 1983: p188). The Gökdepe War serves as an important tool in this regard.

Historically, Gökdepe was the battle through which Turkmenistan's most powerful tribe, the Akhal Tekke, came to be under Tsarist occupation (Horak, S; 2015: P153). However, in regime discourse, the battle has been reformulated as involving all the major tribes of Turkmenistan, not just the Akhal Tekke. This is problematic since some tribes came under Russian protection without a fight (western Turmenistan, Mary velayat), or were not under Tsarist administration (eastern and northern Turkmenistan were ruled by the Bukhara Emirate and Khiva Khanate respectively).

The inconvenience of tribal disunity has thus been erased in favor of presenting the Turkmen as a historically united, anti-Russian nation striving for independence. Indeed, Nyyazow stated that: "by forming an independent and totally neutral Turkmen state; by uniting a number of tribes into a whole, we did not create a new nation; what we did was return our national pivot, which used to be strong and powerful, but has been shattered by the blows of historical fate" (Horak, S; 2015: P155).

Furthermore, the Gökdepe War provides an interesting example of the way in which the personality cult of the President has featured as an important mechanism in the nation-building process. A monumental opera about the Gökdepe War was presented in January 1993, and quickly became a central play of the Nyyazow era. The President himself became the key hero of the performance, appearing at the conclusion as the unifier of Turkmenistan (Horak, S; 2015: p157). As Denison succinctly puts it: "Nyyazow's own predilections and idiosyncrasies materialized the organic, primordial, and mystical connection between land and people" (Denison, M: 2009: p1176). Berdimuhamedow has also utilized Gökdepe in forming his own cult, since he was born in the region. In 2011 he constructed a new museum dedicated to the battle of Gökdepe, placing his name in the title.

The term *vatan* (homeland) is also important in terms of creating a historical connection between people and land, with the concept used to identify the current geographical borders of the state as the ancestral homeland of the Turkmens (Anceschi, L; 2009: p50). After the national-territorial delimitation of Central Asia in 1924, the concept of vatan grew in importance and became a key literary symbol throughout the 1960s and 1970s among the intelligentsia (Edgar, A, L; 2006: p72). Post-Soviet Turkmen elites re-elaborated this tradition, with reference to Oghuz Khan, a mythological ruler from the third millennium BCE who is said to be the source of the Turkmen race (Türkmenbaşy, S; 2002: P80).

Crucially, the land that Oghuz Khan ruled is situated, according to Nyyazow, exactly within the boundaries of the modern Turkmen state. These claims were taken so seriously that in September 2000, Nyyazow ordered the destruction of 25,000 new history textbooks (Kuru, A; 2002: p77). The source of dissatisfaction was the author's claim that the Turkmen tribes originated in the Altai Mountains, contradicting the regime's narrative (Kuru, A; 2002: p77). In addition, the other Central Asian states are rarely acknowledged in Turkmen history, and more blatantly, the ethnic Turkmen communities in western Afghanistan and northern Iran are completely ignored. The existence of these communities contradicts the elite's narrative on Turkmen unity.

The culmination of Oghuz Khan's dynasties was the current independent state of neutral Turkmenistan. The president would lead neutral Turkmenistan to a Golden Age, with the Prophet Gorogly supposedly writing that:

"The nation that travels a straight road is happy. The happiness of the nation is the basis of the brave preservation of the country and the territory. Today, the happiness of your nation is in your hands. Saparmurat, show the way of the golden life to the Turkmen nation. This will be your task; this will be your way" (Türkmenbaşy, S; 2002: P148)

(1.2) Imagined Democracy –Berdimuhamedow's Ideological Transition

The strong personality cult established by Nyyazow played a prominent role in the state apparatus of the Turkmen political system, and as a result, Berdimuhamedow was structurally bound to his predecessor's ideological legacy. Indeed, Nyyazow's Russian ideologue - Viktor Kramov - has retained his position in the new system (Neytralyi Turkmenistan; September 19, 2007). The consolidation of Berdimuhamedow's regime thus obliged the new leadership to construct an innovative policy framework that would both consolidate Nyyazow's institutional legacy, whilst creating a sense of political reform requisite to constructing a new leadership cult to replace Nyyazow's.

The ideological themes of the Berdimuhamedow era first emerged during his inauguration ceremony. Unlike Nyyazow, Berdimuhamedow utilized democratic themes as his primary ideology, with his main motto being "State in Service of the Common Man!" However, the new regime was structurally bound to the Nyyazow legacy, and so during his inauguration ceremony the new President swore an oath to protect Nyyazow's legacy (Neytralnyi Turkmenistan; January 21, 2008).

Despite this, Berdimuhamedow sought to distance his leadership from that of his predecessor as a carefully calibrated move to legitimize his leadership. The first stage was to deconstruct Nyyazow's vast personality cult. The most internationally publicized maneuver was his decision to replace the ideological names for months of the year with a standard international format in 2008. Equally important was the removal of the ubiquitous golden silhouette of Nyyazow from the upper corner of television screens in 2007, replacing them with a photograph of himself addressing the UN General Assembly.

The metanarrative of the Berdimuhamedow regime emerged during the 20th session of the People's Council at the end of March 2007 and came to be known as the "Great Renaissance" (Beyik Galkynys). In 2008, the concept became detached from the Nyyazow era, with all references to his ideological text Ruhnama gradually vanishing from the regime's discourse (Neytralnyi Turkmenistan; September 12, 2008). The Nyyazow era came to be gradually re-branded as a "transitory period from Soviet to democratic social order" (Neytralnyi Turkmenistan; January 21, 2008), which allowed Berdimuhamedow to place "democratization" at the forefront of his ideology:

"The Great Renaissance policies are spectacular, all-embracing reforms initiated by our highly valued President of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow […] emphasizing progressive thinking, professionalism, and an innovative approach to everything touching on the interests of the people […] *The President of Turkmenistan is leading the way to a cardinal transformation, receiving the warm support of his citizens and positive feedback from all over the world"* (Neytralnyi Turkmenistan; May 23, 2008)

In addition, Berdimuhamedow's personality cult has gradually grown, being known in the state media as the "Founding Father and Leader of the period of Great Renaissance and Grand Achievements." Achievements such as the increase in national living standards are linked by

propaganda to Berdimuhamedow's persona, being presented as an enthusiastic servant of the people (Neytralnyi Turkmenistan; May 5, 2007). As noted above, since 2011 he has predominantly been referred to in state propaganda as Arkadag – "the Protector." Berdimuhamedow continued other absurd elements of the Nyyazow era such as forcing teachers to purchase his portrait at their own expense to adorn their classrooms (Chronicles of Turkmenistan; April 25, 2008). These portraits frequently require replacement each time the president creates a new official portrait.

Crucially, neutrality remained a core symbol of the new presidential cult, as can be seen from the construction of the Monument to the Constitution in 2011, which was 185 meters tall, reflecting the number of countries who supported Turkmenistan's neutral status in 1995 (Turkmenistan.ru; May 19, 2011). According to official sources, this monument symbolizes the "celebration of democracy and indivisible entity of the Turkmen nation, which enters into a new era in its history, an era of peace, development, prosperity, and bliss" (Neytralnyi Turkmenistan; May 18, 2008). More tellingly, on May 25 2015, a new 21 meter tall statue of Berdimuhamedow was unveiled in the center of Aşgabat, and included a dove in his hand representing Positive Neutrality (RFE/RL; May 25, 2015).

The political culture of Turkmenistan favors personality cults as validating and legitimizing factors of the ruling regime. President Berdimuhamedow has been both pragmatic and cautious in this respect as he gradually dismantled old ideological concepts without causing major disruptions to the autocratic structure of the state. Select elements and institutions of the Nyyazow era that lend support to the ideology and personality of the current president were preserved. The most notable of these symbols to be retained was the Doctrine of Positive Neutrality. Nevertheless, by constructing a new ideology based on democratization, the new leadership has been able to both distance itself from the shadow of its predecessor, and establish a new foundation on which to construct the cult of Arkadag.

(1.3) Positive Neutrality as a Core Component of the National Project

Following the groundwork of Anceschi, this section places neutrality within the domestic rhetorical paradigm, and more specifically, the context of the sultanistic nation-building project (Anceschi, L; 2009: p49). Two findings emerge. Firstly, the vague content of the Doctrine of Positive Neutrality was continually manipulated to reflect changes within the regime's shifting rhetoric. And secondly, the policy has been closely linked with Berdimuhamedow as its guardian. Crucially, Positive Neutrality is a source of international legitimacy, having been bestowed on the Turkmen state by the UN. By associating himself with this policy, Berdimuhamedow continues a key legitimizing discourse of the Nyyazow era.

To begin with, in tandem with the propaganda surrounding the mythical Oghuz Khan, Positive Neutrality has long been presented as both a "purely Turkmen" concept, and as "the outcome of the entire course of development of the Turkmen nation" (Anceschi, L; 2009: p55). Nyyazow consistently detached Turkmen neutrality from the experience of more established neutrals such as Switzerland, and attributed it to the supposedly historical idiosyncrasies of the Turkmen people (Anceschi, L; 2009: p49). Indeed, a publication at *the State Institute of the Cultural Heritage of the Peoples of Turkmenistan, Central Asia, and the Orient in Aşgabat*; argues that neutrality is a dream of the Turkmen people, and dates back to the Seljuk reign over Central Asia in the 10th century (Kiepenheur-Drechsler, B; 2006: p133).

Furthermore, the erstwhile Foreign Minister Shikhmuradov maintained that the policy was a modern re-elaboration of the traditional interactions between the Turkmen tribes and the outside world (Anceschi, L; 2009: p49). This contradicts the belligerent history of the Turkmen, famed for their historical slave markets, raids, and their destructive impact on the development of an urbanized culture throughout the region (Hiro, D; 2009: p207). Nomadic violence was side-stepped in official propaganda by arguing the Turkmen are of Parthian origin, and were a peaceful,

sedentary people. Neither of these claims are backed by archaeological evidence, and most accounts trace Turkmen roots to the Altai Mountains (Anceschi, L; 2009: p56). This politicized history is still controversial today, and on August 24 2015, Berdimuhamedow tightened restrictions on foreign academics working within the country in order to restrict archaeological research (Chronicles of Turkmenistan; August 8, 2015).

In addition, Berdimuhamedow has sought to utilize Turkmenistan's core foreign policy concept as a mechanism of his democratization strategy. Speaking at the UN he argued that:

"The foreign policy of any state is inseparable from the domestic policy. By proclaiming and implementing the principles of peace, harmony, tolerance and humanism in society, the Turkmen state projects these concepts onto its relationships with the external world. In this sense, neutrality of Turkmenistan is based on the firm moral framework of the state." (Internet Gazeta Turkmenistan.ru; 14 December 2010)

Neutrality has also been a crucial component of both presidential cults. For example, Nyyazow's iconic "neutrality arch" featured a revolving gold statue of himself at the top. Berdimuhamedow repeated this practice by featuring a dove in all statues dedicated to himself (RFE/RL; May 25, 2015). Neutrality bolstered the presidential cults by providing an air of legitimacy. The UN's recognition of Positive Neutrality on December 12 1995 is presented not only as a benchmark in Turkmenistan's independent politics, but is considered to be "an unprecedented event in the 50-years' history of the United Nations" (Anceschi, L; 2009: p27). The policy thus featured continuously as a symbol of Nyyazow's innovative approach to international relations, and of his skilled diplomacy and supposed international backing (Bohr, A; 2015: p43). Indeed, the Turkmen press routinely claims that the UN sought out Nyyazow on account of his diplomatic talent and sought to aid him is his quest to establish Turkmen neutrality (Bohr, A; 2015: p43).

To further the propaganda machine, the symbolic reproduction of neutrality has been quite extensive across the country. To name but a few: the Arch of Neutrality in the center of Aşgabat, the introduction of the month Bitrap (Neutral) to replace December. The renaming of the Soviet era *Turkmenskaya Iskra* to *Neytralnyi Turkmenistan* (Neutral Turkmenistan) on December 14 1995, two days after UN recognition (Neytralnyi Turkmenistan; 16 December, 1995). In addition, television and radio broadcasts frequently repeat the phrase: "The first country, which was accepted as permanently neutral by the UN, is our fatherland Turkmenistan. All Turkmens have the right to be proud of their fatherland. Therefore, it is compulsory for all of us to serve our fatherland" (Polese, A & Horak, S; 2015: p469). And finally, the celebration of Neutrality Day each year on 12 December. In respect to the latter, Anthony D. Smith wrote that national ceremonies are one of the most "potent and durable aspects of nationalism" (Smith, A, D; 1993: P9). Turkmenistan's annual celebration is no exception.

The year 2015 was heralded as "The Year of Neutrality and Peace" in honor of the 20th anniversary of the United Nations General Assembly on 12 December 1995, with over 427 official parades organized across the country (RFE/RL; December 12, 2015). During a televised national speech the President announced that:

"Neutrality is the culmination of Turkmen democracy and will continue to guide our peaceful relations with the international community. More importantly, Positive Neutrality is the embodiment of our cooperative relationship with the UN and our continued support for the spread of peace and democracy to the outside world" (BBC Monitoring Service; December 12, 2015).

The attempts to include foreign policy within institutions of higher learning throughout the country also suggest the regime was particularly eager to appeal to younger generations. All history textbooks, for example, stressed: "Dear students, you can be children of different nations; Turkmen, Uzbek, Russian, Kazakh, Armenian, Byelorussian, and Azeri; but you are all the young citizens of independent and neutral Turkmenistan. Independent and neutral Turkmenistan is your country" (Denison, M: 2009: p1178).

Across Central Asia, nation-builders have predominantly adopted symbols located in the country's ancestral history, such as Uzbekistan's reverence for Tamerlane. Turkmenistan is unusual, because unlike the other states in the region, the symbolic references allude to the post-independence era, and by extension, the regime, re-organizing political life around the cult of both presidents. Both Positive Neutrality and the Great Renaissance have been instrumental in this regard.

(1.4) Conclusion

This chapter has argued that second tier successor regimes face a unique challenge since they both have to maintain the symbolic landscape built by their predecessors, including their vast personality cults as a building block on which to construct their own stability; as well as paradoxically emphasize their political detachment from it. Berdimuhamedow navigated this dilemma by gradually deconstructing Nyyazow's personality cult, and by emphasizing a new political ideology based around the notion of a renaissance of Turkmen democracy.

This chapter has argued that liberal democratic rhetoric became a cost-free legitimization strategy for the new regime allowing it to detach itself from the excesses of the Nyyazow era, as well as present itself to the public as a legitimate successor. The democratic symbolic landscape created by both Positive Neutrality and the Great Renaissance were crucial mechanisms in legitimizing the new regime.

Part 2

The Operationalization of Positive Neutrality and the Great Renaissance in Berdimuhamedow's Turkmenistan

(2) Chapter Two

The Monopolization of the Domestic Political Landscape: Autocratic Elections and Regime Legitimization

'Citadel of the Corrupted Chieftain; here every little piece of shit will shit on you, steal and sell all of your possessions, and get away with it!' – A prisoner's graffiti from the walls of the MNS prison in downtown Aşgabat, 1995. Known colloquially as "The KGB Prison."

Autocratic elections are one of the most overlooked aspects of regime legitimization and symbolic state-building. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Central Asian elites utilized referendums and elections as a crucial mechanism to consolidate the independence of their new states from Moscow (Beachain, D, O & Kevlihan, R; 2015: p496). Like the rest of Central Asia's leaders, Nyyazow minimized electoral competition by creating obstacles to candidate registration, leaving him the sole competitor. In addition, Nyyazow had almost complete control over civil Society, leaving little scope for any mobilization of opposition movements.

Similar to the previous chapter on symbolic power projection, autocratic election function as a powerful signal to both the domestic population and the international community (Magaloni, B & Kricheli, R; 2010: p125). Indeed, inflated electoral turnout figures are used to reinforce a feeling of public acceptance of the status quo, while internationally they are used to construct a false sense of political reform (Magaloni, B & Kricheli, R; 2010: p125). Susan Hyde argues that "by organizing periodic elections, autocrats try to obtain at least a semblance of democratic legitimacy, hoping to satisfy external as well as internal actors" (Hyde, S; 2011" p270).

This section builds on the claims of the previous chapter by continuing the argument that second-tier successor regimes are more vulnerable than their predecessors. By comparing the electoral practices of the Nyyazow era with those of the Berdimuhamedow era, it becomes highly evident

that the façade of democratization is more crucial to the latter regime than the former, since the former based its legitimacy on the construction of a new Turkmen state. The first section of the chapter analyses presidential and parliamentary elections in the Nyyazow era, arguing that elections were only crucial in the early years of the regime, after which the monolithic cult of personality became the keystone of its national project. The second section argues that as a successor regime, Berdimuhamedow has been much more reliant on constructing a democratic façade around which to derive his legitimacy. This is crucial, as it demonstrates the practical extension of Berdimuhamedow's "Great Renaissance" political platform.

(2.1) analyzing the Nyyazow era: L'etat C'est Moi

The newly independent Central Asian republics utilized a number of competing strategies in order to navigate the transition process. Nevertheless, results across the region were relatively uniform, with a well-entrenched culture of authoritarianism emerging to define the region. The least understood of these transitions was that of post-Soviet Turkmenistan.

Independence was an unexpected outcome for Turkmenistan's leadership. After supporting the failed August coup in the USSR, Turkmen elites were suddenly forced to implement a series of nationalizing policies crucial to their survival. The highest priority for the new state was the construction of a new institutional framework. In 1992, Nyyazow's regime began constructing a strong presidential system through which to negotiate the state's transition. The legitimacy of this model was enshrined in the constitution of 18 May 1992.

Turkmenistan's autocratic practices were a deeply ingrained impulse from the Soviet era, with the regime having obliterated opposition movements. Unlike its counterparts in Ukraine and the Baltic states, Turkmenistan lacked a Popular Front with a broad program of nationalist objectives.

Turkmenistan's only nationalist movement had been Agzybirlik, a small group of intellectuals dedicated to preserving the Turkmen language. Nevertheless, the movement attracted the wrath of Nyyazow after it mobilized support around Gökdepe on 12 January 1990. The Soviet era elites responded by arresting its leading figures and outlawing the organization (Anceschi, L; 2008: p32). Turkmenistan's civil society failed to recover, and the regime began to use increasingly repressive methods to maintain its hegemony.

The first step in Nyyazow's consolidation process was to distort the electoral process by depriving elections of significance and replacing them with an institution of symbolic value. Nyyazow ran unopposed on 21 June 1992 for Turkmenistan's first presidential election (Turkmenskaya Iskra; 23 June, 1992), and his party – the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan (DPT) – was the only political party allowed to register for the three parliamentary elections that took placed after 1994. In effect, Turkmenistan remained a one party state.

Remarkably, the 1992 presidential election was the only one held in Turkmenistan throughout the Nyyazow era, which spanned 14 years. The primary reason for this was that Nyyazow cancelled the election scheduled for 1997 by holding a referendum on 15 January 1994 to prolong his term in office up until 2002 (Turkmenskaya Iskra; 17 January, 1994). The referendum was highly symbolic, with the Central Electoral Commission claiming that 99.99 percent of the voters agreed to prolong Nyyazow's first term, with just 212 across the entire country expressing their opposition (Turkmenskaya Iskra; 17 January, 1994). The 1994 referendum marked the point at which Nyyazow began to rapidly personalize power, imbuing himself with personalized legitimacy as the father of the nation.

Referenda: results and turnout

Stay in the USSR	98.3% (98%)
Independence	94.1% (97.4%)
1994: Prolong Presidential Term	99.9% (100%)

In 1999, Nyyazow staged a bizarre televised pantomime and broadcast it across the country. Nyyazow feigned his resignation, stating that he was resigning "for the good of the country" when suddenly, delegates from the People's Assembly – an assembly he personally appointed – begged him to remain in office. The Assembly then suggested that he should be relived from the pressure of elections and appointed President for Life so that he can focus on building a Golden Age for the Turkmen (Akbarzadeh, S; 1999: 280). These developments make Nyyazow's Turkmenistan a very unique development in Central Asia, being the only state to avoid a facade of multi-party politics for an extensive period of time. Nyyazow justified this state of political affairs by arguing that the lack of democracy was actual symbolic of the success of his leadership. During an interview in Washington DC on 9 April 1998 for example, Nyyazow was asked why the political opposition parties were banned from organizing themselves; the president stated that there is no such thing as an opposition in Turkmenistan since oppositions only emerge when leadership is failing (Akbarzadeh, S; 1999: 275).

Nyyazow's extreme level of personalism, and the legitimacy he channeled from his role as "father of the nation," made a democratic façade irrelevant for his consolidation of power. As we shall soon see, Berdimuhamedow's position as a "second tier" successor meant that his regime was far more unstable and thus prone to seeking "democratic" channels of legitimization. In addition, Berdimuhamedow relied on a new ideological foundation with which to consolidate his position. The introduction of controlled multi-candidate elections was a major innovation of the new administration.

(2.2) "Managed Democracy" Under the Berdimuhamedow Regime

The Turkmen state media announced the death of Nyyazow on 21 December 2006 (Internet Gazeta Turkmenistan.ru; 21 December 2006). On the same day, Turkmenistan's Security Council and the

Turkmen Cabinet of Ministers announced a joint resolution in which they appointed G.M. Berdimuhamedow as Turkmenistan's Acting President. The role of Nyyazow as father of the nation was still crucial however, and in his early days of transition, Berdimuhamedow had to build his own legitimacy upon Nyyazow's. A striking example of this was his speech prior to electoral preparations in January 2007:

"As you know, one of the main issues to be discussed at the Khalk Maslakhaty (People's Council) today is a Turkmen presidential election. Our great leader built a firm foundation for our country. That is why candidates to be nominated must be devoted to our great leader, to the motherland and to the people" (BBC Monitoring Service; 26 December, 2006).

Despite his overwhelming majority in the February 2007 Turkmen elections, Berdimuhamedow's acceptance speech reveals an explicit propaganda campaign to use Nyyazow and the primordial claims of the Turkmen people as a platform on which to base his new regime:

"*I will devote all my efforts and energy to the cause of preserving national accord and the unity of the Turkmen people and their tranquil life, creating every condition necessary for the present and future generations of Turkmen to become well-educated, skilled and honest descendants of Oghuz khan. I take oath to ensure the permanent triumph of Türkmenbaşy the Great and our forefathers and to protect wholeheartedly the interests of the Turkmen nation and every citizen of my fatherland"* (BBC Monitoring Service; February 2007).

From the outset of his regime, Berdimuhamedow was fixated on projecting – both externally and internally – an image of discontinuity with the Nyyazow regime. Berdimuhamedow's election campaign speeches indicate a rhetorical commitment to liberalization and the implementation of democratic norms (BBC Monitoring Service; February 2007). The most significant step taken to achieve this goal was the establishment of multi-candidate elections, as well as issue carefully

crafted international statements which signaled the regime's commitment to the principles of the UN Charter to Western actors (RFE/RL; 4 January, 2007).

In addition, in January 2007, the new administration accepted the deployment of a Needs Assessment Mission (NAM), which would operate under the guidance of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) (OSCE; 11 January 2007). However, due to time constraints, the NAM could not be followed by a standard Electoral Observation Mission (OSCE; 11 January 2007).

Despite positive political statements, the early stages of the post-Nyyazow transition revealed a continuation of autocratic political methods. Firstly, Berdimuhamedow's accession defied constitutional procedure, which stated that in the case of the death or incapacity of the President of the Republic, the speaker of the Mejlis (Parliament) would be assigned the role of provisional leader (Article 61 of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkmenistan; 1992). This protocol was disbanded with the arrest of Ovezegeldy Ataev – speaker of the Mejlis – on charges of "abuse of office to protect his relatives' illegal activity" (Neytralyni Turkmenistan; 22 December, 2006). Following this maneuver, a new Constitutional Law was ratified on 26 December 2006, making Berdimuhamedow the new interim leader (Neytralnyi Turkmenistan; 27 December, 2006). The constitution thus became merely retrospective document, adapting to legitimize the decisions of the inner circle who appointed Berdimuhamedow.

An equally important signifier of Berdimuhamedow's authoritarian intent was the flawed nature of the electoral campaign. Although the February 2007 ballot represented the first multi-candidate elections to be held in post-Soviet Turkmenistan, the election was a façade, with the results carefully organized in advance by the elite. Besides the interim President, the five other candidates running for office were (Neytralyni Turkmenistan; 27 December, 2006):

- A. Atadzhikov, First Deputy Hakim of the Tashauz velayat;
- M.S. Gurbanov, Hakim of the Karabekevyul province (Lebap velayat);
- O. Karadzhaev, Mayor of Abadan (Ahal region);
- I. Nuryev, Deputy Minister for Oil and Gas.
- A.A. Pomanov, Mayor of the city of Turkmenbashi.

The six candidates were all former apparatchiks of the Nyyazow administration, and in addition, genuine opposition figures were banned from registering on the ballot. The competitive element of the election was non-existent, suggesting that the faux election was crucial for both international and domestic legitimacy rather than signaling an impulse toward genuine reform. In addition, regional variation among the candidates suggests a concern for national stability. Each of the six candidates heralded from one of Turkmenistan's six major districts, suggesting the importance of tribal groupings on local politics (OSCE/ODIHR; 11 February, 2007). Each of the candidates in fact represented one of the five major Turkmen tribes.

The top down management of the election was also evident in other aspects. For example, Berdimuhamedow enjoyed both exclusive coverage in the state-run media, as well as public approval and political statements from key political figures. This was in stark contrast to the other candidates, who received practically zero attention. In fact, careful analysis of speeches by the other candidates reveals their true purpose. Their goal was to encourage the electorate in their constituent areas to vote for Berdimuhamedow (Neytralyni Turkmenistan; 27 December, 2006). These elements raised legitimate questions about the overall fairness of the electoral campaign, which concluded with Berdimuhamedow's landslide 89 percent victory with a participation rate of 99 percent (Neytralyni Turkmenistan; 15 February, 2007).

Unsurprisingly, the international response was lukewarm, with both the U.S. and EU refusing to comment on the elections (EU, PC.DEL/21/07; 18 January, 2007). More controversial was the UN, which praised the election as being a "fateful step in the history of Turkmenistan" (Neytralyni Turkmenistan; 12 February, 2007). Nevertheless, Albert Jan Maat (Chairman of the EU Inter-

parliamentary Delegation to Turkmenistan), denounced the non-democratic nature of the vote. In pointing out that all candidates were part of the former regime, he concluded that the vote of 11 February was "not a good start for a more open society" (RFE/RL; 7 February, 2007).

Berdimuhamedow's re-election in February 2012 was even more remarkable, with the Central Election Committee (CEC) announcing a 97 percent turnout rate and 97 percent of voters in favor of his continued rule. Conditions for a competitive vote were so lacking that the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, part of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), declined to send an election observation mission (OSCE; 12 February 2012).

This time around, Berdimuhamedow ran against 15 candidates, all of whom were nominated by state-controlled industrial or civic groups (Neytralnyi Turkmenistan; December 27):

- K. Abdyllayev, Managing Director, Mary Oil Refinery Turkmengaz.
- S. Batyrov, Director, Geoktep Cotton Spinning Factory.
- R. Bazarov, Deputy Mayor, Dashoguz velayat (region).
- B. Borjakov, Mayor, Gurbansoltan-edje district in Dashoguz velayat.
- M. Charykulyev, Managing Director, Mary-Ozot chemical company.
- E. Gayipov, Director, Ministry of Construction.
- M. Jumageldiyev, Mayor, Halach district.
- A. Kakabayev, Mayor, Baba Dayhan District.
- G. MollaNyyazow, Manager of Turkmennebit (state oil).
- Y. Orazov, Director of Scientific Research Institute for Cotton Cultivation.
- Y. Orazkuliev, Minister of Energy and Industry.
- N. Rejepov, Managing Director, Turkmen Oil Geophysics Company.
- R. Rozgulyev, Director, Lebab Water-ways.
- A. Yazmuradov, Minister of Water Management.

Much like with the February 2007 elections the candidates had a dual function: (1) to construct an illusion of electoral competition conducive to the Great Renaissance ideology, and (2) to promote Berdimuhamedow's economic reforms. Bazarov, for example, proposed policies to mechanize Turkmenistan's grain harvests whilst simultaneously praising Berdimuhamedow's supposed efforts to curtail hand-picking cotton

Presidential elections under Berdimuhamedow

Number of Candidates	2007: 6
	2012: 8
Incumbent Vote	2007: 89.23%
	2012: 97.14%
Opposition Vote	2007: 11.77%
	2012: 2.86%

Berdimuhamedow's inner circle have realized that distancing themselves from the image of a one-party state is politically advantageous for increasing linkages with western actors. The first stage of domestic rebranding occurred in February 2010 with the founding of the regime-backed Agrarian Party (Daikhan), which was constructed primarily to act as a mouthpiece for Berdimuhamedow's agrarian reforms (Eurasianet; June 9, 2010).

In addition, the government launched a new Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs in August 2012 to further the reformist image of the new administration. The Party competed in the December 2013 parliamentary elections alongside state-sanctioned trade unions and youth groups (Bohr, A; 2015: p44). Much like the Agrarian Party, the Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs is run by figures close to the president, such as Ovemammed Mammedov, a businessman within Berdimuhamedow's inner circle (Bohr, A; 2015: p44).

Despite these severe limitations, the parties have allowed President Berdimuhamedow to argue that the country possesses a multi-party system representing the diverse interests of the nation. In addition the parties are presented to the international community as a significant step in Turkmenistan's path to democratization. An example of this was an official press release on December 15 2015 stating that: "Today's election is an event of extraordinary significance that is taking place amid the growing civic self-consciousness of the nation. The socio-economic development of the country is the result of the consistent implementation of political reform" (Eurasianet, December 16, 2013).

Parliamentary elections	
2008	93.87%
2013	91.33%

Interestingly, Turkmenistan uses its faux democratization as a strategy through which to disseminate the regime narrative. For example, electoral candidates were encouraged to address their constituents at approved corner meetings and the media (entirely state controlled) was instructed to cover these meetings (Beachain, D; 2010: p225). This combination of muted campaigning followed by high voter turnouts on Election Day provides an opportunity for the regime to demonstrate citizen's commitment to the state and governing regime while ensuring control over electoral mobilization.

(2.3) Conclusion

Elections and democratization are not, in the Turkmen context, synonymous. The elections function merely as symbolic rituals, performed to legitimize the regime and demonstrate allegiance to the President. The regime under Berdimuhamedow has thus borrowed the form – but not the substance – of liberal democracy.

Berdimuhamedow's regime has constructed a careful democratic façade as demonstrated in the previous chapter. In tandem with this, calibrated multi-party politics and multi-candidate elections have become an important strategy for legitimizing and by extension consolidating the new regime. As its position becomes more secured, and the Nyyazow era becomes more distant in the public consciousness, it is likely that the ritual of democratic elections will become less prominent.

(3) Chapter Three

Externalizing the Great Renaissance: Human Rights Rhetoric in Berdimuhamedow's Foreign Policy

"I've seen torture behind these walls,

I've seen cruelty behind these walls,

I've seen death behind these walls…"

- (Words by the poetess Annasoltan Kekilova, who from 1971 until her death in 1983 was held in one of the psychiatric clinics in Turkmen SSR after writing letters of complaint to the Communist Party).

Turkmenistan is widely considered to be "the most repressive of all post-Soviet regimes," and one of the top ten most authoritarian in the world (Cummings, S & Ochs, M; 2007: p115). The frequency with which the international community has expressed its outrage at the deplorable human rights situation in the country attests to the gravity of the situation.

According to Amnesty International's March 2012 report, methods of torture deployed by Turkmen security officials included: "asphyxiation; rape; forcible administration of psychotropic drugs; depriving prisoners of food; and exposing prisoners to extreme weather conditions" (Amnesty International; 1 February 2012: p5). Other NGOs have drawn attention to Turkmenistan's excessive incarceration rates, one of the highest prisoner-to-population rations in the world (Institute for Criminal Policy Research; 2013). Prisoners live in extremely dirty and overcrowded cells where tuberculosis epidemics frequently occur (Peyrous, S; 2012: p77).

In recent years, Human Rights Watch have grown increasingly concerned by the forced relocation of some 50,000 citizens since 2011 (Human Rights Watch; 2015) to make way for the 2017 Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games (RFE/RL; 14 May, 2015). Finally, freedom of movement has been gradually curtailed over the years, undermining religious expression. For example, the number of people authorized to make the hajj has decreased from a lowly 188 out of 5,000 applicants in 2008, to 0 in 2010 (Corley, F; 2010).

Turkmenistan's political evolution since the collapse of the Soviet Union has been one of consistently growing autocratization and the use of oppressive methods of political control. These methods grew increasingly violent as the regime completed its process of autocratic consolidation. Indeed, the wave of repression following the attempt on Nyyazow's life led to the routinization of international condemnation (Anceschi, L; 2009: p124). In 2003, for example, the Parliament of the European Union approved a resolution in which it "deplore[d] the deterioration of the human rights situation in Turkmenistan, […] urge[d] the Turkmen authorities to respect Turkmenistan's obligations under international law and stop attacks on, and torture and ill treatment of, political opponents" (Anceschi, L; 2009: p124). More devastatingly, in April 2004, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights issued a resolution condemning "the persistence of a governmental policy based on the repression of all political opposition activities" (UN; 15 April 2004).

Following the death of Nyyazow on December 21, 2006, many regional analysts expected his successor to introduce a "Khruschevian thaw" for Turkmen politics (Peyrous, S; 2012: p108). However, as noted in the previous chapters, Berdimuhamedow has largely adhered to the internal logic of an authoritarian regime. In the political and institutional realm, few changes are noticeable and no liberalization of the domestic political landscape has occurred. Since its establishment then, Berdimuhamedow's leadership has utilized two distinct responses toward internal and external pressures for democratization.

Regarding the endogenous dimension, the leadership considered de-centralization akin to destabilization, and opted therefore, for a policy of total domination. Unlike the Nyyazow era

however, Berdimuhamedow employed more sophisticated political technologies; namely, the liberalization of regime rhetoric, and the introduction of multi-party/candidate elections. Both of these strategies aimed at providing the regime with enough legitimacy and ideological distance to dismantle the cult of Nyyazow and consolidate around the authority of the new leader. However, the exogenous dimension of Berdimuhamedow's faux reformism is vital if we're to fully understand the internal logic of the new administration.

This chapter seeks to analyze the regime's response to the changing international environment in which it found itself embedded. The environment was distinguished by western actors seeking new energy resources, with the Turkmen regime carefully deploying human rights rhetoric and piecemeal domestic reforms as a fig leaf for permanent human rights abuse. One of the major strategies in this respect is a continuation of Nyyazow's Doctrine of Positive Neutrality.

The first section of the chapter examines the rhetorical discourse through which Turkmen propaganda has presented the international promotion of human rights as one of the major objectives for the Doctrine of Positive Neutrality. The final section argues that Turkmenistan's faux domestic reforms have made it much easier for western actors to engage the new regime for their energy strategies, with Turkmenistan's internal propaganda acting as a legitimating international strategy.

The main purpose of the chapter is to demonstrate that in line with literature on autocratic consolidation, the Turkmen regime has pursued an active integration into the international community using human rights rhetoric as a vehicle; whilst simultaneously de-coupling rhetoric from implementation and continuing to present itself as a reforming regime. The methods through which this was achieved were as follows: Firstly, the regime emphasized the human rights rhetoric enshrined in Positive Neutrality; secondly, the regime has attempted to use neutrality as a means of building international prestige through small-scale peace-building initiatives in the region; and finally, using authoritarian elections and the signing of human rights treaties as mechanisms

through which to attract both Western support for the regime as well as potential sources of investment.

(3.1) Human Rights Rhetoric in the Turkmen Foreign Policy Paradigm

The new Turkmen regime has consistently presented its emergence as the point at which the supposed transition toward a state of democratic consolidation occurred. The regime proclaimed its affinity with "humanism, and the civil rights of the people and their basic interests" (Anceschi, L; 2009: p126). These values came to build upon the well-established rhetorical component of Positive Neutrality.

The MID document, *the Foreign Policy Concept of Turkmenistan as a Neutral State,* stressed that "the human dimension […] represents the central feature of the reform of Turkmen society and of its foreign policy course, which is identified in human values, humanitarian ideals, and universal justice: the basis of the policy of Neutral Turkmenistan" (Neytralnyi Turkmenistan; 16 December 2004: p1). Furthermore, *the Declaration on International Commitments Assumed by Neutral Turkmenistan in the Area of Human Rights*, approved by the Khalk Maslakhaty in December 1995, insisted that Turkmenistan is "aware of the responsibility to safeguard and protect the basic human rights and freedoms coming out of the country's acceptance as permanently neutral" (Anceschi, L; 2009: p126). The most important theme however, was that Turkmenistan's neutrality would reinforce the content of the UN Charter (Neytralnyi Turkmenistan; 21 July 1999).

Turkmen officials sought to reinforce this impression by arguing that:

"The philosophy of neutrality has become an important factor for conflict-free internal development […] five years of neutrality has provided [Turkmen citizens] with the opportunity for

peaceful and constructive labor in conditions of internal harmony and stability, […] the gradual introduction of democratic standards and institutions, and the elevation of the country in the near future to the ranks of the world's most developed states." – (UN Doc. A/55/732)

The rhetoric of Turkmenistan's UN speeches has shown remarkable continuity over the years. During the 20th anniversary celebrations of the UN's recognition of Positive Neutrality on 12 December 2015, President Berdimuhamedow announced the regime's commitment to the humanitarian values, stating:

"Over the past twenty years, the neutral, peace-loving foreign policy of Turkmenistan has demonstrated compliance with national interests as well as long-term goals of the world community, the criteria of a constructive and balanced approach to building international stability and securing and establishing the principles of the UN Charter as the foundation of bilateral relations" (Turkmenistan Golden Age; 12 December, 2015).

In addition to rhetorical commitments to the UN Charter, the regime attempted to transform Aşgabat into an international center for peace talks (Shikhmuradov, B & Kepbanov, Y; 1997: pp67-75). Indeed, state media has long exaggerated the mediating role of Nyyazow during the Tajik Civil War (1992 – 1997), with Positive Neutrality having supposedly contributed to the peace-building process (Eurasianet; 30 May, 2011). To further this image, Turkmenistan agreed to host 10,000 Tajik refugees between 1992 and 1997, granting them full citizenship (UNHCR; 10 August 2005).

Berdimuhamedow has maintained this strategy, making frequent appeals to host peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government, most notably during his speech at the 65th session of the UN General Assembly on 21 September, 2010 (Turkmenistan.ru; 20 September 2010). His magnum opus however, was undoubtedly playing host to the UN's Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia (RFE/RL; 1 April, 2010).

Speaking at the 65th session of the UN General Assembly in 2010, Berdimuhamedow outlined the policy as follows:

"For us neutrality is not just a legal status. It is an active position, a full-scale involvement in the international process through peacemaking and assisting in working out effective models of economic cooperation. This also includes provision of a political platform for solving problems, both within the region and beyond, for the purpose of consolidating peace, security, and creating favorable conditions for sustainable development and progress. This is the main purpose and content of our steps and initiatives on the world stage" (65th Session of the UN General Assembly; 2010).

Through this framework, Berdimuhamedow has proposed five initiatives for an Afghan settlement. Firstly, Aşgabat is ready to host the UN-sponsored international high-level meeting to address the Afghan problem and develop effective institutions of state power.

"The capital of our neutral state became the venue for the negotiations on settlement of the Afghan conflict in the late 1990s. Turkmenistan turned into a reliable ally and useful partner of the United Nations in preserving and maintaining political stability in the region, promoting good neighborliness, friendship and cooperation. Neutral Turkmenistan still has a central role to play in resolving today's conflict" (Internet Gazeta Turkmenistan.ru; 14 December 2010)

Secondly, Turkmenistan offered to assist in training Afghan politicians in Turkmenistan, under UN patronage and programs, to assist in the construction of create "democratic institutions" (Singh-Roy, M; 2011: p673). Thirdly, Aşgabat offers humanitarian assistance, offering to develop significant transport infrastructure in Afghanistan. In addition, the Berdimuhamedow regime provides free electricity to Afghan communities in the border regions. These initiatives play a role in Turkmenistan's wider economic vanity project, the 1,680 km TAPI pipeline. This cooperation

is a crucial component of Turkmenistan's foreign strategy. The regime has emphasized its economic humanitarianism by arguing at the UN that:

"*Turkmenistan puts particular emphasis on the economic aspect of neutrality. We emphasize that we view economic projects not only through the prism of commercial and economic benefits, but also as effective factors in stabilizing the region and beyond."* (Internet Gazeta Turkmenistan.ru; 14 December 2010)

Another important strategy deployed by the regime since independence is signing major international conventions on human rights, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) signed on 19 October 1993, and the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) on October 1994. In May 1997, Turkmenistan joined the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), signed on 25 July 1999. And finally, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, signed on 12 April 2008. Data from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights provides the information for the table presented below:

HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS	RATIFICATION STATUS
INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION :1969	Signature: NA, Ratification/Accession: 1994
INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS :1976	Signature: NA, Ratification/Accession: 1997
OPTIONAL PROTOCOL TO THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS:1976	Signature: NA, Ratification/Accession: 1997
SECOND OPTIONAL PROTOCOL TO THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS, AIMING AT THE ABOLITION OF THE DEATH PENALTY :1991	Signature: NA, Ratification/Accession: 2000
INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS :1976	Signature: NA, Ratification/Accession: 1997

CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN :1981	Signature: NA, Ratification/Accession: 1997
OPTIONAL PROTOCOL TO THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OFALL FORMSOF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN :2000	Signature: NA, Ratification/Accession: 2009
CONVENTION AGAINST TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT :1987	Signature: NA, Ratification/Accession: 1999
CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD :1990	Signature: NA, Ratification/Accession: 1993
OPTIONAL PROTOCOL TO THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTSOF THE CHILD ON THE INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT :2002	Signature: NA, Ratification/Accession: 2005
OPTIONAL PROTOCOL TO THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTSOF THE CHILD ON THE SALE OF CHILDREN, CHILD PROSTITUTION AND CHILD PORNOGRAPHY :2002	Signature: NA, Ratification/Accession: 2005
CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES :2008	Signature: NA, Ratification/Accession: 2008
OPTIONAL PROTOCOL TO THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTSOF PERSONSWITH DISABILITIES:2008	Signature: NA, Ratification/Accession: 2010
OPTIONAL PROTOCOL TO THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTSOF THE CHILD ON A COMMUNICATIONS PROCEDURE :2014	Signature: NA, Ratification/Accession: NA
INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON THE PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF ALL MIGRANT WORKERS AND MEMBERS OF THEIR FAMILIES :2003	Signature: NA, Ratification/Accession: NA
INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION FOR THE PROTECTION OF ALL PERSONS FROM ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE :2010	Signature: NA, Ratification/Accession: NA
OPTIONAL PROTOCOL TO THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS :2013	Signature: NA, Ratification/Accession: NA
OPTIONAL PROTOCOL TO THE CONVENTION AGAINST TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT :2006	Signature: NA, Ratification/Accession: NA

As the Nyyazow regime consolidated its sultanistic model, the international community increasingly began to express its disapproval, prompting its voluntary disengagement. To begin with, the regime opted not to implement any of the human rights instruments to which it had acceded (Anceschi, L; 2009: p128), failing to present reports to the various treaty policies. On 12

August 2004, Turkmenistan submitted its report to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which operates under the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. The report claimed that:

"The status of permanent neutrality […], and Turkmenistan's international commitments associated with this status, have been influential in securing equality between citizens and compliance with international demands to ban all forms of discrimination" – (UN Doc. CERD/C/441/Add.1)

However, the commission noted its deficiencies, particularly its lack of consistent data relating to the ethnic composition of the country. This was long kept secret by the regime, until a government census was leaked in April 2015 (Jamestown Foundation; February 10, 2015). On examining the Turkmen report, the CERD committee issued a highly critical assessment, with 20 of the 29 chapters in the document attracting negative comments (listed in the subsection "concerns and recommendations") (UN Doc. CERD/C/441/Add.1). Since then, a report was made to the CAT on May 17, 2011 by Berdimuhamedow (almost nine years overdue) (CAT/C/SR.1015). However, the report was extremely vague, referencing the humanitarian values of Positive Neutrality. The CAT's response noted that:

"The absence of comprehensive or disaggregated data on complaints, investigations, prosecutions and convictions in cases of torture and ill-treatment by law enforcement personnel, comprehensive prison occupancy rates, and deaths in custody, as well as data on individual cases of alleged torture and enforced disappearance, including the whereabouts of such persons, raised by the Committee severely hampers the identification of possible patterns of abuse requiring attention." (CAT/TKM/CO/1)

Clearly, Turkmenistan has used both Positive Neutrality, and blatant intransigence, to great effect, sealing the country off from international civil society. The Turkmen government continued its

spirit of non-cooperation following the accession of Berdimuhamedow, and continued to deny access to UN special procedures, no fewer than nine of whom have longstanding requests for invitation (Peyrous, S; 2012: 79). A visit in September 2008 by the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion – the first UN special rapporteur to visit the country – gave rise to the hope that it would be an opening (Amnesty International; 12 October, 2012). By 2010 however, no further allowances occurred. During the Universal Periodic Review before the UN Human Rights Council in December 2008, Turkmenistan refused to accept any recommendations relating to the issue of political prisoners, making clear that it believes all these persons to be ordinary criminals (Human Rights Watch; April 30, 2011).

In April 2012 Turkmenistan was again reviewed under the UN Universal Periodic Review. While Turkmenistan accepted most of the recommendations made by the UN member states, it rejected eighteen among the most pressing ones; five of which related to the demands to release political prisoners or make known the whereabouts of prisoners who are disappeared in the country's prison system (Human Rights Watch; April 19, 2013).

At the rhetorical level, the Turkmen regime sought to present itself as a supporter and guardian of human rights. The regime has successfully used its neutrality as a means of obtaining the prestigious UN Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy to symbolize its supposed commitment toward spreading the values of the UN charter. Furthermore, despite continued human rights violations, the regime has enthusiastically signed major international conventions and unlike the Nyyazow era, has even began to submit reports and allow infrequent rapporteurs to enter Aşgabat. These maneuvers demonstrate that Turkmen elites are aware of the importance of international sources of legitimacy.

(3.2) Implementing the Great Renaissance

Since coming to power, Berdimuhamedow has maintained the centralizing tendencies of his predecessor, despite his staunchly democratic rhetoric. Many observers predicted that the twentieth session of the Halk Maslahaty on March 30, 2007 would herald a "Khruschevian thaw" for the regime, reenacting the denouncement of Stalin in 1956 (Horák, S & Sir, J; 2008: p17). However, very little liberalization has actually occurred, and in fact, the legacy of Nyyazow has remained a core foundation of the new regime.

On a surface level, Berdimuhamedow's ideological commitments to the Great Renaissance of Turkmen democracy have been crystallized in the text of the September 2008 constitution. The text affirms the right of citizens to engage in the market economy and start their own private businesses. In addition, property rights, and the right to education are emphasized. However, the country's human rights situation has heavily stagnated, with little to no improvement since the Nyyazow era.

The most significant gesture of Berdimuhamedow's regime was to close the Ovadan-Depe political prison. The compound held 150 political prisoners and disgraced senior officials of the regime. Many of these political and religious prisoners, including the supreme mufti, Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah, have since been placed under house arrest (Eurasianet; June 23, 2008). This reform was lauded in state propaganda as "clear evidence of Turkmenistan's adherence to its international commitments in protecting and respecting individual rights and freedoms" (Neytralnyi Turkmenistan; April 3, 2008).

In addition, Berdimuhamedow has retained Nyyazow's policy of granting large numbers of prisoners amnesty each year (a system that earns significant revenue for state security officials who sell amnesty to wealthy prisoners) (Peyrous, S; 2012: p126). Despite these symbolic gestures,

Soviet-era practices remain largely in place, such as internment in psychiatric hospitals. For instance, Sazak Durdymuradov, a correspondent for Radio Liberty, was interned in one of these institutions in 2008 (Eurasianet; June 23; 2008).

Press freedoms have also continued to suffer under the new administration, with all outlets remaining under strict state control. As with Nyyzaow, the broadcasting of bad news such as food shortages, poor crop yields, and factory breakdowns is strictly prohibited. In 2008, the authorities installed Chinese filters to block dissident news sites such as Alternative News Turkmenistan and RFE/RL (Peyrous, S; 2012: p120). In addition, popular websites such as Youtube and Live Journal were banned in 2009. The rationale behind these maneuvers is a law stating that internet users cannot visit websites containing information that harms "social morale, minority relations, and the prestige of the country" (Peyrous, S; 2012: p120). The phrasing of this law has left the regime with wide scope to consider practically anything as a potential security threat.

Despite the lack of political reform, Turkmenistan increasingly began to be perceived in a positive light by democratic external actors. The role of human rights rhetoric and piecemeal democratic internal shifts such as the introduction of multi-candidate elections in the country have clearly played an important legitimizing role for relationships with potential economic and political partners.

(3.3) Turkmenistan and Democratic External Actors

Berdimuhamedow's domestic use of Great Renaissance propaganda and window dressing reforms played a crucial role in his international strategy by allowing the regime to capitalize on the EU's Strategy for a New Partnership with Central Asia. This policy was the direct outcome of the EU's strategy to diversify its energy sources away from dependence on Russia. Crucially, these

geopolitical goals undermined the EU's normative agenda of democracy promotion in Central Asia.

The European Union is consistently conceptualized in academic literature as a normative actor, with the EU promoting democratization through its use of conditionality criteria in important trade agreements (Crawford, G; 2008: pp172-191). Indeed, throughout the Nyyazow era, the EU's normative agenda delayed the normalization of EU-Turkmen relations, with the EU refusing to ratify a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with the country unless substantial democratic reforms were implemented (OSCE Doc. PC.JOUR/427; 19 December 2002). Despite these long-standing concerns, on April 22, 2009, Brussels signed an Interim Trade Agreement (ITA) with Berdimuhamedow's regime, suggesting the EU had adopted a more pragmatic strategy in the region (European Parliament; April 22, 2009). Nevertheless, the approved draft contained substantial conditionality, including a clause stating that the ITA would be annulled should the Turkmen regime fail to implement satisfactory political reforms (European Parliament; April 22, 2009).

Another crucial dimension of the EU's Strategy for a New Partnership was establishing an EU-Turkmenistani Human Rights Dialogue. The dialogue began on June 21, 2008 in Aşgabat, but nevertheless got off to a complex start. Berdimuhamedow's regime arrested Sazak Durdymuradov, a Turkmenistani journalist and regular contributor to *Radio Free Europe*/*Radio Liberty* just prior to the opening of the first meeting (RFE/RL; June 24, 2008).

Despite this, European accounts of the dialogue made zero references to Durdymuradov's arrest, suggesting that the EU was not paying serious attention to the country's human rights situation. The Turkmen press also failed to mention Durdymuradov's arrest. Indeed, Turkmen media circulated Berdimuhamedow's press release in which he stated that the European Union has given its "full support" to his Great Renaissance package of domestic reforms (EU Presidency Press Statement; June 24).

This outcome is important since it suggests that the creation of the Human Rights Dialogue failed to have any impact on the state's conduct regarding civil liberties, and indeed, even came to act as an important source of legitimizing PR for Berdimuhamedow's domestic propaganda apparatus. Even more remarkably, Pierre Morel, the EU Special Representative for Central Asia publicly stated that the Turkmen regime consistently demonstrated a "readiness to discuss difficult issues" (Nezavisimaia Gazeta; January 30, 2009).

The EU-Turkmenistani Human Rights Dialogue therefore served as a key source of international legitimacy, allowing the regime to demonstrate support for its Great Renaissance program. However, the Dialogue also performed an important function for the European Union's Central Asia policy: the application of human rights rhetoric meant that pragmatic energy security goals could be placed under the fig-leaf of normative values, acting as a political PR stunt. A careful analysis of statements issued by the EU at the time as further weight to this conclusion.

Whilst promoting the ITA with Turkmenistan, Benita Ferrero-Waldner - then EU Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighborhood Policy - argued that "[A]fter the election of President Berdimuhamedow, Turkmenistan entered a new development stage, as a significant number of positive political signs emerged" within its domestic political landscape (EU Statement; September 3, 2009). The EU's institutional sphere also provided a strong support base for the Berdimuhamedow regime, with the EU Foreign Minister's first Troika Meeting with Central Asia in September 2009 issuing a very positive report on the domestic reforms being pursued by the regime (Anceschi, L; 2010: p107).

The statements in question emerged as part of the EU's wider agenda to establish an energy partnership with the Turkmen state. In April 2008, Berdimuhamedow hosted energy discussions with the EU, announcing that Turkmenistan would deliver 10bcm of gas annually to the EU starting from early 2009 onward. Soon afterward, the initiative was placed within a more

comprehensive "Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation in the field of Energy" which aimed to develop a bilateral relationship with Europe (European Union; April 17, 2010).

A clear cut agenda has nevertheless failed to materialize. Although EU decision-makers were particularly keen to involve Turkmenistan in their Southern Gas Corridor, especially via the Nabucco project – a 3,300 km long pipeline through Turkey (RFE/RL; March 16, 2010), the project was ultimately cancelled on 28 June 2013 when the Shah Deniz gas consortium chose to construct a Trans Adriatic Pipeline instead. Nevertheless, these geopolitical interests clearly had a significant impact on the EU's human rights promotion in Turkmenistan.

Turkmenistan's relationship with the U.S. also witnessed unexpected engagement following the implementation of Berdimuhamedow's Great Renaissance policies. In the 2009 meeting between Hillary Clinton- the U.S. Secretary of State – and President Berdimuhamedow, the issue of human rights was not raised by the U.S. Administration (Statement by U.S. Secretary Clinton; April 19, 2010). Indeed, in explaining this failure to raise important issues, Richard Boucher – the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs – responded that "we've only got a certain amount of time, and so we touch on the most important things. And human rights is not as big an issue in Turkmenistan as it is in some of the other Central Asian countries" (U.S-Turkmenistan Bilateral Meeting; April 19, 2010). In addition, when commenting on Berdimuhamedow's reformist input he remarked that "[in Turkmenistan] there is some change underway; we've seen some positive steps already. What we're looking to do is to support that process of change broadly and substantively to make sure that it benefits the citizens of Turkmenistan" (U.S-Turkmenistan Bilateral Meeting; April 19, 2010).

(3.4) Conclusion

In asking the United Nations to endorse neutrality, Nyyazow was seeking a guarantee of "non-interference" in its internal affairs. However, as the regime's methods grew more violent, particularly following the coup attempt in 2002, the international community became more critical of the Turkmen regime. Berdimuhamedow has long sought to reverse these trends, utilizing the grandiloquent principles of Positive Neutrality to earn it the kind of credit that would lead the international community to turn a blind eye to its human rights violations. In addition, Berdimuhamedow embarked on a series of window dressing reforms under the conceptual framework of the Great Renaissance to attract international partners as well as enhance its legitimacy in the domestic sphere.

Berdimuhamedow's policies, combined with a changing international security environment, led to a scenario in which human rights rhetoric came to act as a fig lead for a normative actor's cooperation with one of the world's foremost violators of human rights. In addition, by attracting international partners, Berdimuhamedow was able to present international support for his policies to domestic audiences via state media.

(4) Conclusion

This thesis has argued that Turkmenistan's regime transition in February 2007 is a crucial case-study for understanding the role "legitimacy" plays in the process of regime consolidation. The thesis has argued that Berdimuhamedow's approach to legitimization was multi-leveled, with carefully calibrated domestic reforms providing vital sources of domestic and international legitimacy. The primary vehicles for achieving this goal were the "Doctrine of Positive Neutrality," and the "Great Renaissance" which acted as vague rhetorical vessels for the advancement of state propaganda.

The study's core arguments were that (1) the international spread of liberal democratic values created opportunities for autocratic regimes to display low-cost legitimating commitments to these norms; and (2) that regimes unconstrained by domestic opposition are prone to more severe forms of decoupling between rhetorical commitment to democratic norms and actual implementation. Repressive regimes then, understand that commitments to democratic reform are symbolic and virtually cost free, granting them substantial legitimacy.

The thesis explored these themes with reference to three core dimensions of Berdimuhamedow's legitimizing strategy: (1) a democratically oriented symbolic landscape; (2) legitimizing external partnerships; and (3) faux-elections.

The first insight gained from the data analysis was that Turkmenistan is a state with an extreme level of de-coupling between the regime and civil society. This was proven using the Weberian regime-type "sultanism" and matching this ideal-type model with empirical reality. It was found that Berdimuhamedow's regime displayed each of the five aspects characteristic of such a political

system: (1) power monism; (2) Neopatrimonial administrations; (3) Patron-client networks; (5) Institutionless polity; and (5) centralized decision making.

This model, along with the empirical chapters which demonstrated the decoupling between liberal rhetoric and implementation confirmed the first hypothesis of the thesis:

Hypothesis 1: The regime's monopoly on power means that there will be an extensive decoupling of democratic rhetoric and implementation.

Following this, the analysis progressed toward analyzing the second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: The decoupling of rhetoric and implementation means that the regime's international commitments to democratic norms have become a cost-free legitimization strategy for domestic propaganda.

The thesis explored the rhetorical dimension through careful analysis of policy statements regarding Berdimuhamedow's major policy frameworks: Positive Neutrality and the Great Renaissance. Positive Neutrality was critically assessed throughout the literature review, with the section concluding that Positive Neutrality is filled with empty rhetoric focused on the UN Charter and humanitarian principles. The first chapter of the thesis then explored the Great Renaissance ideology, confirming that it too is a vague political construct designed to boost domestic compliance with the trajectory of the regime. Chapter one concluded by demonstrating the extent to which both concepts are featured in domestic propaganda, forming a symbolic landscape designed to pacify public unrest.

The second section of the paper focused on implementation, arguing that the presence of multi-candidate elections is the key outcome of Berdimuhamedow's domestic ideology. The chapter argued that the implementation of multi-candidate elections lags far behind the lofty ideals of the Great Renaissance. This extreme decoupling demonstrated that although elections play a key role in legitimizing the new leadership, the norms have failed to be internalized and so the policies core objective has been regime consolidation.

The final hypothesis in the paper was:

Hypothesis 3: Human rights cooperation serves as an important mechanism for reintegrating Turkmenistan into the international community. This reintegration in turn plays a crucial performative role in domestic propaganda.

The final chapter demonstrated that although actors such as the EU may provide a useful source of normative enforcement by using economic conditionality criteria, short-term political and economic interests often displaces human rights. This situation is particularly dangerous since human rights rhetoric then becomes a tool through which democratic actors legitimize partnerships with autocratic states. This is precisely what occurred in Turkmenistan when its substantial gas reserves came to form the backbone of its relations with the outside world. Due to changing structural conditions - such as the EU's desire to diversify supplies away from Russia - Turkmenistan was able to engage with the EU without political cost, since the organization sought to prioritize its own interests over liberal democratic norms when dealing with Turkmenistan. As a result, Turkmenistan continued to be insulated from external pressures without remaining isolated from the rest of the international community.

Finally, the study has demonstrated that authoritarian states which undergo transition away from democracy can be more or less convincing in legitimizing their rule even without making many

concessions to democracy. Autocratic regimes such as Berdimuhamedow's achieve a degree of legitimacy through a combination of international engagement as a means of constructing a sense of performative accomplishment (the Doctrine of Positive Neutrality); and the manipulation of the political landscape through ideological changes and the implementation of autocratic elections (the Great Renaissance).

Berdimuhamedow has thus carefully softened Turkmenistan's image, employing democratic rhetoric, elections, and international; human rights cooperation as strategies through which to attain domestic stability while simultaneously reintegrating Turkmenistan within the international community. "Democratization" within an autocratic context then, may serve to actually bolster the structural foundations of a repressive regime rather than weaken them.

(5) Further Research

This thesis opens up extensive possibilities for future research. The first option would be to extend the scope of the research into a comparative case study. Modern-day Azerbaijan would make for a fascinating comparison in this regard since it is not only a second-tier successor regime like Berdimuhamedow's; it also happens to be the post-Soviet regions only dynastic transition. Understanding Ilham Aliyev's succession following his father Heydar's death would thus reveal some important insights into the nature of autocratic transitions. In addition, Azerbaijan's civil society is much stronger than Turkmenistan's and so it would be worthwhile exploring further the theoretical notion that regime detachment makes democratic rhetoric more prominent in non-democratic states.

One of the primary weaknesses of the current research project were the undeveloped yet implied concepts of "isolation" and "integration" within international relations. Both terms are used extensively in international relations, and yet haven't been made into fully formed, analytically useful concepts. This thesis followed the international relations trend in making assumptions based on these aspects, without adequately exploring them in detail. Understanding the role these concepts play on democratization may be the key to constructing a more theoretically robust understanding of regime consolidation.

Indeed, comparing Turkmenistan's regime transition with other regime's from different time periods and with varying degrees of isolation and integration may be the most analytically rewarding research design. The author wishes to compare modern-day Turkmenistan with a pariah state, such as North Korea; a historically isolationist regime such as Enver Hoxa's Albania; and an autocratic regime that tried to maximize its political leverage by engaging with the international community, such as Ceausescu's Romania.

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