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**Regional Security Cooperation in Central Asia: the Influence of Uzbekistan's
Leader Change on the Rogun Dam Project**

MA Thesis

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Regional Security Cooperation in Central Asia: the Influence of Uzbekistan's Leader Change on the Rogun Dam Project

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Abstract

In Central Asia, the past three decades have been characterised by a lack of cooperation in security matters, despite the strong incentives for states to cooperate to solve their common security issues. One of the main sources of tension is the Rogun Dam project pushed forward by Tajikistan and historically met with strong opposition from Uzbekistan. Yet, the recent power change following the ascension of Mirziyoyev to the presidency has led to a political U-turn in the Uzbek foreign policy towards the dam project which cannot be explained by rational system-level theories. This thesis aims to question the supremacy of the rationalist approach and system-level theories in explaining interstate cooperation and addresses its limitation in providing comprehensive explanations in the case of Central Asia. Rather, this research seeks to provide a complementary individual-focused approach to the study of states' relations that focuses on the influence of leadership perceptions in shaping foreign policy decisions towards security cooperation. The chosen method of analysis is the conduct of a content analysis on speeches and statements made by key actors of the two respective administrations. The thesis concludes by stating the key findings that have been established from the analysis, and are presented in two categories: cooperation-adverse and cooperation-prone perceptions. The findings confirm the existence of diverging perceptions between the two leaderships and shed light on their relation with the respective foreign policy carried by the each leadership, therefore demonstrating the value of an individual-level analysis.

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Abbreviations

CAPS - Central Asian Power System

HPP - Hydropower Plants

IR - International Relations

NTS - Non-Traditional Security

RSCT - Regional security complex theory

TPP - Thermal power plants

UN - United Nations

UPS - Unified Power System

WB - World Bank

1. Introduction

Environmental security challenges among other non-traditional security issues are often seen as minor compared to traditional threats posed by the possible use of force by another state against the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of a state. However, challenges like the question of water resources have been at the centre of many conflicts throughout the centuries and still to these days water issues threaten to bring states to war all over the world (Homer-Dixon 1994). Central Asia is no exception and tension are particularly high between upstream states (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) and downstream states (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and to some extent Turkmenistan) of the two main regional waterways, the Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers (Phillips et al. 2006: 16-17). The question of regional security through the lens of water management is central in this research project and serves as a frame of analysis to study the larger concept of security cooperation in the region.

Water takes on special importance in Central Asia. Agriculture, the pillar of the region's economy and the largest water user, is only made possible through irrigation. The introduction of new irrigation technology made the production of cotton on a larger scale possible and was further intensified under the Soviet rule with little regards for sustainability and resource protection. Water resources which until then seemed inexhaustible, started diminishing in the 1960s, the desertification of the Aral Sea being the most tragic manifestation of dysfunctional water management policies. The fall of the Soviet Union brought fundamental changes to the management of shared waterways among Central Asia republics. The consequent decentralisation of power and the unravelling of tightly linked basin-wide system of water management resulted in the emergence of adversarial relations. With the loss of the cohesiveness established and enforce during the Soviet times, competition started to increase between the water use for hydropower generation in the upstream countries and the irrigation of downstream agrarian states. Striving for self-sufficiency the Central Asian republics went on pursuing national, sometimes incompatible interests when it comes to the exploitation of waterways. Nowadays, the worldwide environmental crisis and growing shortage of global water resources put an increased pressure on the region that will intensify with each passing year. The increasing demand and

decreasing supply lead to many challenges including advancing desertification, degradation of ecosystems, food security problems, concerns over sanitation and increasing health concerns. Ultimately, it risks to lead to forced migration and the depopulation of certain area in Central Asia, also rendering unthinkable the idea of any economic activities taking place in these areas. The efforts of individual countries are falling short of addressing the issues of water deficit in the regions, illustrating the failure of the current management system of transboundary waters. While some exchange mechanisms and quotas have been put in place following the collapse of the USSR, they mostly reproduced the soviet regulations and have not been updated ever since, therefore they poorly reflect the current needs of some states. In order to achieve tangible results, joint actions need to be taken in order to ensure a sustainable management of the resources that they share and prevent water usage-associated conflicts in the region (Mayer 2021: 211; Zimmerman 2014: 151). Given these uniting factors, one should have expected much closer relations among states. However, we can see that, despite strong incentive for regional cooperation on water-related issues, not much has been done and cooperation remains moderate between the Central Asia republics; the measures set up in the early 1990s proving to be insufficient and outdated.

This research concerns itself with the questions of regional security cooperation in Central Asia. It is attempting to explore the gap between the apparent need for security cooperation and its moderate development in Central Asia, focusing on states' reluctance to develop regional infrastructure of water governance. The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the empirical discussion on security cooperation in Central Asia by trying and addressing the limitations of the rationalist approach.

The rationalist approach has traditionally been one of the dominant approaches in international relations studies. (Snidal 2002: 100). When it comes to cooperation, it presupposes that states are motivated by the maximisation of their own gains and usually struggle to cooperate with each other because, in an anarchic system, distrust in their counterparts' intentions is influencing decisions in favour of defection (Aminjonov 2015: 21; Bicchieri, Jeffrey, and Skyrms 1997: 222). Accounting for the state of security cooperation within Central Asia, the literature is characterised by the preeminence of international politics as the most relevant level of analysis. There are several reasons commonly mentioned as being behind the predominance of

non-cooperation in the central Asian security landscape, those include states' antagonism and general lack of trust which cause a general reluctance among states to open up to competition and to share sovereignty as well as the assumption that regimes of a certain type are less prone to cooperation. (Mayer 2021). However, cooperation between states is considered achievable on the account that it can be made more advantageous for states than defection (Jervis 1999). Non-traditional security issues such as water can constitute an incentive strong enough to alter the payoff structure in favour of cooperation. As common issues are expected to generate common interests, many researchers have expected cooperation to emerge in Central Asia, bolstering regionalism (Bohr 2004: 486; Laruelle and Peyrouse 2012: 6, 50). Yet, empirical evidences show that - despite the strong incentives and the interdependence of Central Asia states when it comes to water related issues - cooperation had remained weak in the regions. Furthermore, Central Asian countries have traditionally taken different stances on regional issues. Both Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have proved reluctant to join initiatives for cooperation while the other Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and to some extent Tajikistan, have usually been more inclined to advocate for regional integration initiatives (Mayer 2021). These unanswered questions point out the limitation of this approach and the international level of analysis in explaining the complexity of security cooperation challenges in Central Asia, pointing out towards a potential gap in research. This thesis intends to address these limitations by relying on another theoretical approach that considers the individual level as a more appropriate level of analysis.

The importance of the individual level in shaping a state's international behaviour and its direct relation to foreign and security policy has been widely discussed, highlighting the importance of considering both levels in order to properly explain the complexity of states' policy and behaviour (see Tsebelis 1990; Ayoob 1995; Putnam 1988). It emphasises the need to consider states and decision-makers as more than rational unitary actors but rather as the sum of many factors and biases that need to be uncovered to make sense of the foreign policy choices of said states (Gvalia, Lebanidze & Iashvili 2011; Jervis 1976). Accordingly, this study aims at "opening the black-box of the state", study internal political constraints and individual leaders to allow us to make sense of states' international behaviour towards security cooperation. Many IR scholars have stressed, in various ways, the centrality of the individual

decision-maker in shaping the foreign policy of a state and how it might defy rationalist expectations (see Kaarbo 2017; Holsti 1962; Goldstein and Keohane 1993). The main idea is that, since policies are designed and carried out by people, they should be studied with an actor-centric approach. Decision-makers have their own belief system and values that ultimately shape their perception of the world around them and frame their understanding of the situation they face (Boulding 1959; Holsti 1962). In security cooperation, the decision-maker reading of the game, their perception of gains and losses is critical to the inclination of the actor towards either defection or cooperation (Hermann and Hagan 1998). Accordingly, one cannot explain policies without moving beyond the rational-actor assumption in order to consider to the determinism of decision-maker's views on the world and others (Jervis 1976). Following this lead, the objective of this research is to focus on the individual level and discuss the relationship between the leadership subjectivity and foreign policy decisions regarding regional security cooperation.

To sum up, while much of the literature has focused on international relations and external factors, internal politics of Central Asian states have traditionally received less interest. This dimension is still understudied but appears to possess significant relevance for any discussion on security cooperation and the failure to come up with viable regional solutions. Consequently, this research attempts to answer the following research question:

How do leader perceptions impact the state of regional security cooperation in Central Asia ?

In order to answer this question, a case study is conducted on the Rogun Dam project. This enduring water management project involving Uzbekistan and Tajikistan has been the source of many tensions in the region, crystallising many of the security challenges I address. Uzbekistan, which has traditionally been strongly opposed to most attempts at deepening the cooperation in the region, has recently displayed a more positive attitude towards the questions following the leader transition of 2016 (Muratbekova 2018). This U-turn in foreign policy is at the centre of this thesis: by explaining the dynamics behind that change, I intend to provide valuable insight on the obstacles to further cooperation in Central Asia. Since different policies suggest different perceptions of the situation, variations should be observable between the two

leaders regarding the dam project. To carry out such observation, this research applies a qualitative interpretative methodology. Content analysis was applied to analyse both Mirziyoyev's and Karimov's speeches on the dam, focusing on how the language in use reflects the perceptions of the two leaders and comparing them. Therefore, this thesis intends to test if, as theorised, Uzbekistan's drastic turn towards more a cooperative behaviour can be related to the new leader's different perception on the project or in other words, if leader's perceptions can be considered as one of the determining factor in bolstering or hampering cooperation in Central Asia. The relevance of this research resides in the adoption of a different level of analysis to try and identify other explanations as to why, to date, such cooperation remained modest in Central Asia. Ultimately, the aim of this research is to contribute to the larger literature on interstate security cooperation by providing with a complementary leadership-focused approach to the study of states' relation towards cooperation and common security challenges; as well as researching the region of Central Asia which is often overlooked.

The structure of this thesis is as follows. In the next chapter, a thorough background of the key concepts of cooperation and non-traditional security challenges is provided, introducing the essential element of the rationalist approach and its limitation with regards to this research project. Following that chapter, the theoretical framework of the individual level of analysis guiding this research project is introduced, providing with a theory-based approach to leader's perceptions and their impact on a state's behaviour. The third chapter explains the research design, case selection, methods, and data used in this study. Finally, the theory and methods discussed in the first three chapters are applied to the empirical case of the Rogun Dam in the analysis which is composed of two sections. The first section presents the complex puzzle of water management in Central Asia providing the essential knowledge on the tensions and political stakes of the Rogun Dam. The second part presents the analysis of the leaders' speeches separately evaluating the discourse of non-cooperation and the discourse in favour of more cooperation, and then discusses the key findings. Finally, this thesis concludes with a summary of the research findings concerning the relation between leaders' perceptions and security cooperation in Central Asia.

2. Rationalism, Cooperation and Non-Traditional Security in the context of Central Asia

This chapter is dedicated to the introduction of the key concepts that have informed this research. First, I introduced the concepts of regionalisation and regionalism research will first be made. Then I elaborate upon the rationalist approach to security cooperation which help understand the key dynamics at play. In doing so, I highlight the limitations of such approach in explaining the limited cooperation in Central Asia thus describing the gap that my research intends to fill by complementing this rationalist approach with a leadership-focused one. In the third section, I introduced the literature on Non-Traditional Security and its application to the case of Central Asia, explaining how it relates to security cooperation in the region.

2.1 Region and Regionalism - Laying the Foundations

While this study principally concerns itself with the phenomenon of cooperation in security matters, the aim is to study this phenomenon within a specific region focusing more specifically on relations between neighbouring states and on security issues concerning the entire region. To explore regional dynamics of cooperation and how states engage or do not engage in regional projects, one first needs to clarify what qualifies as a region in international relations and what it entails in our context. While the term region is most commonly used as a geographical label, it can also refer to cultural, historical or economic realities. In many cases these criteria can overlap, for instance territories with common history may share cultural similarities as well. Focusing on the spatial perspective, the term region and by extension regionalism, which I further explain next, can be used to describe three types of territorial spaces. There are sub-state regions, supra-state regions and transnational regions, which respectively locate below, above or across the nation-state (Keating 2011: 4). I will be focusing here on supra-state regions, located in between the 'national' and the 'global' (Börzel and Risse-Kappen 2016), which means that the sub-unit constituting our region are nation-states and therefore are the main actors of what I here call regionalism. When a 'region' becomes a politically infused item, we start talking

about regionalism. Over the past decades we can see that regionalism has boomed all over the world, leading to an increasing regionalisation of international politics and therefore it has become an important feature in world politics to the point that Katzenstein predicted that we were entering a ‘world of regions’ (Katzenstein 2005). Yet regionalism is an elusive and multifaceted concept which can mean very different things according to the context and therefore needs to be further specified.

According to Joseph Nye’s definition, a region is ‘a limited number of states linked by a geographical relationship and by a degree of mutual interdependence’, and international regionalism is ‘the formation of interstate associations or groupings on the basis of regions’ (Nye 1968: vii). Several criteria are used to define regionalism. I already explained that a geographically restricted boundary was the basis of most conceptualisations, yet it is more complex than just the geographical contiguity of states. Regions are not natural entities; they are socially constructed in the sense that they are not given but result from contingent human interaction and identity formation (Söderbaum 2013: 11; Börzel and Risse-Kappen 2016). It is a space where proximity is made relevant through the social practices of local actors, their shared perceptions of (in)security and their patterns of interaction, all together generating a sense of identification in relation to a geographic area. Institutional initiatives may or may not happen but, on that ground, preference is made over other spatialities and geographic areas, making sense of a region and thus creating possibility for cooperation to occur (Oliveira 2017: 103-104) Here, I would like to underline that I acknowledge that states, as much as regions, are social constructs however I establish these boundaries in order to conduct the case study in a more feasible manner. In theories that presuppose the predominance of states, regionalism is then defined as operating on a top-down approach based on the political will of clearly identifiable actors (Mayer 2021: 208) to advance both economic and security-related challenges within the region (Hagelund 2015: 57). Approaches to regionalism have diversified with time and mention of ‘New Regionalism’ is now the most prevalent in the literature. It is characterised by a detachment from the state-centric ontology as it gives more importance to non-state actors, informal practices and bottom-up dynamics in understanding region-making processes on the account that focusing on the state negates the complexity of the processes at stake. Yet Mattheis & Lorenz-Carl, while acknowledging the inherent value to such approach, still stress the necessity of understanding the exclusivity and unity of the state and government in region-making

(Mattheis and Lorenz-Carl 2013: 50-51). As it developed at the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the bipolar world order, this current especially acknowledges the existence of the multidimensionality of regionalism and is attuned to the changes occurring regarding political systems and the changes in security relations in the developing countries as well as in the post-communist countries (Söderbaum 2016). It was acknowledged that 'the importance of regional relations has expanded with the end of the Cold War, and that regions are a substantially more important venue of conflict and cooperation than in the past' (Lake and Morgan 1997: 7).

Regionalism can relate to many different areas, it can include trade and economic integration but also political, environmental or security cooperation. When exploring the literature on regional cooperation, I noted that it tends to be dominated by an economy-based outlook and to focus on trade, and more specifically through the study of international economic oriented organisations (EU, Asean, SADC, Mercosur..). On the contrary, this research is rather focusing on security in the matters of regional cooperation, which I further develop in the following parts. Cooperation is a wide concept that exists on a spectrum which can range from quite an informal cooperation between states with sometimes narrow fields of action to the establishment of international or supranational institutions (Hänggi, Roloff and Rüland 2006: 4). Börzel (2016) specifically stresses the distinction between regional cooperation and regional integration. She defines the former as the intergovernmental commitment to jointly exercise state-based authority with the purpose of solving collective issues. Regional integration is what Lindberg defined as 'the process whereby nations forgo the desire and ability to conduct foreign and key domestic policies independently of each other, seeking instead to make joint decisions or to delegate the decision-making process to new central organs'(Lindberg 1963: 6). Contrary to Obydenkova (2011: 88), who presents cooperation as the initial stage of what is meant to become integration, van Klaveren argues that regional integration can be conceptualised as a special type of regional cooperation or regionalism (van Klaveren 2017). Ultimately regional integration emerged as a concept to explain the specificity of the European case which, on many aspects is an exception rather than the norm. Even though it is often taken as a benchmark to evaluate other regionalism, most alliances outside of Europe lean towards cooperation rather than integration (Obydenkova 2011: 89).

2.2 The Rationalist Approach to (Interstate) Cooperation and Its Limitations

In the first part of my chapter, I established that the existence of a region, in the political sense, depends on the presence of cooperation between the states that compose it. Yet cooperation is a broad concept that can be studied employing many different approaches. In this second section, I introduce the rationalist approach to state cooperation and use game theory to illustrate the underlying logic of it. As underlined by Duncan Snidal, rational choice is one of the major approaches to the post-war study of international relations (Snidal 2002: 100) and should therefore provide with a valuable approach to the question. This approach serves as the starting point of my research process, contributes to explain my take on cooperation and provide useful insights on which I develop my theoretical framework in the following chapter. Therefore, I now intend to focus on states' interactions and their behaviour regarding cooperation within the region. How can we expect states to behave, how do they engage with each other or more specifically how does what Söderbaum (2013: 11) calls the 'becoming' of a region occur? To try and answer these questions, I first define cooperation as a concept and then I use game theory, specifically the prisoner's dilemma, to illustrate actors' behaviour in a given setting. Game theory is a framework for understanding choices in situations among competing players which also permit to develop some predictive assessments of agent's behaviours. It allows for a simplification and modelling of states' interactions through schematic simulation of the behaviour and strategy of decision-makers. The prisoner's dilemma itself is particularly suitable with regard to this research since it deals with situations of interdependence, where the actions of agent X ultimately affect agent Y. It also gives the possibility to integrate non zero-sum game situations or so to say, "win-win" situations where compromise and cooperation are involved. Since my prime focus is the occurrence of cooperation between states in situations of strategic interdependence, it should therefore be our starting point.

In the most basic sense, cooperation refers to the joint action or decision-making taken by two or more actors with the final aim of achieving common benefits. According to game theory, no cooperation can take place if at least one actor favours unilateral defection, because cooperation requires participation of all parties involved whether it be active participation or merely refraining from defection. Here, as I am

focusing on regionalism, cooperation is understood as a goal-oriented process with states as the main actors. As Keohane pointed out, 'Intergovernmental cooperation takes place when the policies actually followed by one government are regarded by its partners as facilitating realisation of their own objectives, as the result of a process of policy coordination' (Keohane 1984: 51-52). Following on this general reasoning, and similarly to what I mentioned above regarding the exercise of state-based authority, cooperation has to be the result of the active and voluntary commitment of each party and its transposition into concrete actions. These are important points to stress as they exclude any form of coercive behaviour: by definition states have to enter into cooperation willingly. It relies on the determination of the states in question to pursue both individual and collective goals. While technically true in the theory, it does not mean that coercion and systemic pressures can be fully excluded in a real-world cooperative environment. This needs to be acknowledged and taken into consideration when studying inter-state cooperation, not solely to disqualify but to nuance the realities in accordance to potential power struggles that could influence the terms of cooperation. It raises the question of the endemic nature of regional cooperation and the influence that foreign countries can have on a regional ecosystem. The second implication is the transposition into concrete practices, meaning that interstate cooperation needs to materialise and therefore cannot be limited to formal engagements. Ultimately, the intent here is not to deny the significance of such engagement as being the necessary first steps towards any deeper forms of cooperation but rather to consider the eventuality of not seeing its transposition into the measures needed to make it effective and not remain a façade of cooperation. As I further explain in the case study, Central Asian states have effectively reached agreements and signed treaties throughout the years, pointing in the direction of bolstering regional cooperation between these states. Yet, in most cases the reality on the ground has proven the limits of such commitments as cooperation remains minimal.

Since the fundamental principle of rationalist theory is its understanding of states as unitary and rational actors, it is considered to be well-equipped to investigate matters of state cooperation. This rational actor approach postulates 3 central assumptions. First states are selfish which, secondly, means that they are driven by the possibility of advancing their preferences and ultimately maximising their interests.

Thirdly, they act independently based on clear and full understanding of the situation and its consequences (Choi 2015: 111-112; Wittek 2013: 688). In this vision little attention is given to the agents themselves, or in our case, to the states. Since actors are considered to be rational, taking decisions according to objective interests maximisation, then it matters not who they are because it presupposes that any actors (or any states) would consider the same rational choice if they were to be in the same situation. That being said, interstate cooperation is typically perceived as afflicted by uncertainty and by states' concerns with the distribution of cooperation gains. In an anarchic international system, there is no authority or organisations that can enforce agreements, therefore there are no guarantees that states will stand by their promises and not choose to follow their own interests. Because states are aware of this state of affairs, anarchy encourages cautious behaviour since unrequited cooperation can easily turn mutual reward into a costly situation (Jervis 1978).

The prisoner's dilemma is a well-suited abstraction to better understand cooperation between states and one I chose to build on to expose some of the initial assumptions of this research. Prisoner's dilemma is a cooperation game in which the main concern is how to get the players to cooperate when there are high incentives to cheat, yet defecting will result in a suboptimal outcome for both parties. Defection is not always the result of an active intention to cheat; most often is it determined by the parties' lack of trust in each other (Aminjonov 2015: 21) or as Cristina Bicchieri argues, 'if each player is rational and knows that the other is rational, but neither knows that the other knows that he is rational, then nobody is cheated, but everybody has an interest in acting as if he were being cheated' (Bicchieri, Jeffrey, and Skyrms 1997: 222). If an actor has no confidence that the other will not cheat or will simply be tempted by the fact that they may gain the most by defecting, then cooperation will most definitely fail. Therefore, it would be expected for states to be reluctant to enter into cooperation since they can never be sure that each party will cooperate and not opt for unilateral defection. That premise would prove especially true for autocracies which are usually described in the literature as simply lacking the necessary trust and therefore are reluctant to cooperate with other, especially in security affairs (Mayer 2021: 206). On that account of the prisoner's dilemma, the most logical conclusion would be that states usually don't engage in cooperation but rather choose defection over any riskier option presented. Yet as Kenneth Oye (1985: 1-5) exposes, states do

regularly bind themselves through cooperation in order to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes and there are clear empirical evidences throughout the world proving so. In Central Asia the signature of the Semei treaty in 2009 resulting in the establishment of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone that encompass all five Central Asian states and includes no extra-regional parties is a clear example of achievable results, even though it is often considered as a formalisation of the status quo rather than an ambitious concession (Mayer 2021: 215). Oye goes further by explaining that, just like in game theory, interstate cooperation is desirable but not automatic. The question would then be, why do states cooperate or rather what circumstances favour interstate cooperation?

Robert Jervis offers an interesting take on that question in his exposition of defensive realism. He argues that mutual security is achievable on the same ground that mutual cooperation can be made more advantageous for states than defection. Jervis goes a little further with the game theory analogy. He explains that if the gain from mutual cooperation is increased as the cost of defection is reduced then the likely Prisoner's dilemma outcome can shift because the payoff structure is altered which means that the absolute gain from mutual cooperation outbalances the relative payoff of defection (Jervis 1999: 51-52). It thus places the payoff at a central point when it comes to states willingness to engage in cooperation with other states. Based on Jervis' argument, I argue that common security issues can lead to this shift in the payoff structure and therefore constitute an incentive strong enough for states to consider cooperation as the most beneficial outcome. It suggests that in such situations, absolute gain is more important than relative gain and that the cost of uncooperative behaviour would outweigh the potential gain of defection (Powell 1991: 1306). However as Gleason pointed out, having similar interests is not a guarantee for inter-state cooperation: although desirable, it is not always easily attainable because it requires for state leaders to acknowledge their converging interests and the resulting need for cooperation (Gleason 2001). In summary, security-oriented cooperation is more likely to materialise on the account that the states of a given region collectively identify a common threat (Walt 1987). These conclusions are also shared by institutionalists such as Keohane who see cooperation as being the result of the welfare-maximising behaviour of states willing to rationally engage with others in order to solve common issues. It highlights the existing interdependence between

states at the regional level and the rational interest they have in dealing with common issues together (Börzel 2015).

Based on the approach I just laid out, one should expect interstate cooperation to occur in Central Asia on the account of the strong incentives of having salient common security interests which tilts payoff structure favour of cooperation. Yet the past three decades have mostly been characterised by failed attempts and weak cooperation between the five states. The rationalist approach of system-level theories and one-level game theory focusing on the inter-state relations does not explain the disparities between extreme incentives to cooperate and the absence of sustainable security cooperation. More importantly and since states are already assumed to act according to their best interest, it does not provide satisfactory explanation for the variation of a state's position towards cooperation while its environment remains unchanged. Ultimately, the rationalist approach is useful for laying foundations, but appears ill-equipped to explain the occurrence of changes (Snidal 2002: 116). It needs to be clarified that I do recognise its value as it helps to understand the importance of gain and losses in states' approaches to cooperation. However, it appears to be insufficient to properly study the question of security cooperation in Central Asia and indicates the need for another approach to be developed which I theorised in the next chapter.

In the following section I introduce these regionally-specific incentives for states to cooperate, thus justifying my claims on an altered payoff structure due to the salience of common security threats and I further discuss the specificities of security cooperation in Central Asia

2.3 Non-Traditional Security and the Increased Interdependence of States

According to interdependence theories, awareness of common transnational challenges does result in an increased demand for cooperation among states. In short, common issues require a pooling of resources to achieve common solutions (Kubicek 1997: 639). Keohane's central argument is that 'the emergence of cooperation among egoists' can develop on the basis of a 'harmony of interests' and the active

participation of states in negotiation to achieve the necessary ‘mutual adjustment’ (Herbert 1996: 225-229). The Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) is a good example of security interdependence within a regional unit, as it helps to understand how the regional can be the level where national and international security overlap. The regional security complex has been theorised by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver as *‘a set of units whose major processes of securitisation, desecuritisation, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another’* (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 44). Their work was one of the first to focus on the region as an object of study in itself and to address security from a regional perspective and not solely through the lens of the state. They approach regional security in terms of a relational model between the members of the security complex and therefore highlighted the interdependency of states with their direct neighbours (Le Gourellec 2018: 85-86). The concept of security in this context is composed of five interlinked sectors: political, military, economic, social and environmental security issues, which together form different focal points of the regional security agenda (Buzan 1991: 432-433; Buzan and Wæver 2003: 45). The benefit of regional security cooperation stem from the trans-boundary nature of security threats.

Here, I largely draw from the literature on non-traditional security (NTS) to underline the relevance of studying security cooperation in Central Asia and to further explain which aspect I focus on, since security cooperation is a broad concept composed of many spheres of operation. The concept of NTS developed over the idea that security debate was too narrow because focused on solely military threats between states while what can be called ‘softer’ issues were disregarded (Swanström 2010: 38). NTS has become more prominent in the ongoing discussion about security, especially since the end of the Cold War and the following change in the security landscape as it introduces a new and broader perspective on threats to national security (Caballero-Anthony 2016: 4-5). Traditional security paradigms refer back to external threats coming from other states, it has mostly focused on interstate military conflict while threats label as non-traditional arise primarily out of non-military sources such as resource scarcity, infectious diseases, drug and human trafficking, transnational crime. Swanström (2010: 40) argues that these threats are not new but the changes in international politics that accompanied the end of the Cold War made it possible for the discussion on security to diversify. It was then possible to see beyond

the communist/capitalist cleavage and military focus to take into consideration issues such as environmental degradation and societal security that until then were pushed into the background. While non-military in nature, it is important to underline that NTS does not proscribe the use of force nor the implication of state's coercive agencies (police, secret services, military...). The evolution in the paradigms relies on the fact that those security issues are usually not directly threatening state's survival but rather challenge its capacity to protect its population and ensure its well-being (Hameiri and Jones 2013: 462-463; Booth 1991: 317-119). To some extent, it changes the reference point of security issues towards the individuals and integrates questions from the economic, political and societal realm. A distinctive feature of NTS threats and one that is especially important for this research is the transnational aspects of such threats both in their origins and effects, an ever-increasing dimension as globalisation advances and interconnectedness increases (Allison and Taylor 2017: 1-3). Considered to be of international nature, threats are caused by problems of common concerns and not by an hostile power. This dimension proves true in the case of Central Asia where most of the security concerns since 1991 have been regional in nature, such as resource scarcity, drug trafficking, violent extremism or the Tajik Civil War (Allison 2004: 482; Collins 2009). Indeed most of the current threats faced today by Central Asian states are transnational (neither purely domestic nor purely inter-state), they have been internationally securitised and are concerned with the activities of non-governmental actors (Burnashev 2015: 111).

One salient aspect of NTS challenges in Central Asia, a key element in today's security discussion is the question of water resources and their management. Availability of water resources is one of the indispensable components of national security. Water scarcity also increase the likelihood of conflict over the resources as riparian states compete to acquire control over a finite resource - a dimension even more salient when, as it is the case in Central Asia, water issues are highly political and are part of larger political challenges (Phillips et al. 2006: 16-17). Homer-Dixon (1994) clearly explains that environmental scarcity, including depletion and pollution of fresh water supplies, is linked to high risk of violent conflict and theses conflicts are bound to increase as scarcity worsen. Over the past three decades, numerous disputes and violent clashes were observed in the region demonstrating that Central Asia is a region prone to transnational conflicts over water (Peña-Ramos, Bagus, and Fursova 2021). Transnational implies that, by definition, challenges are not confined

to one territory but rather can easily transpose from one state to another which also proves true when looking at the direct and indirect consequences of water crisis—such as migration, food shortages and general social unrest— which always transcend national boundaries (Iceland and Otto 2017). Furthermore, Central Asia states share the same basin composed of many transboundary waterways, any activity undertaken by one of the riparian state as repercussion on the other states sharing the same resources. Because of their specific features, NTS threats are not to be dealt with unilaterally which would produce little result, but rather requires proper governance at the regional level and joint measures to be taken in order to achieve both relevant and effective solutions in tackling them (Mayer 2021: 211; Zimmerman 2014: 151).

Cooperation is needed to collectively address the increasing scope and complexity of NTS challenges since states acting alone have shown limited capacity in dealing with such transboundary problems. This is something Central Asian states acknowledged quite early on and as a result, took measures to try and address it by repeatedly committing to regionalist initiatives throughout the years. As early as 1995, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan (later joined by Tajikistan) established a joint Council of Defence Ministers whose goal was to create a platform to discuss regional security issues and organised coordinated military exercises between the different armies (Allison 2004: 473). Yet it has never actually been used in any practical context so far. Similarly, in 2003 the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO) committed to cooperate in tackling issues related to terrorism and drug trafficking which also hasn't led to any significant measures from any of the members. Overall empirical evidence demonstrates that states have been showing reluctance to implement cooperation plans or enhance existing structures of regional cooperation, even more so in the security domain (Collins 2009: 250). How come the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, who were so interconnected for decades have split so far apart and since then have shown little improvement in establishing any regional cooperation system? In the aftermath of the Soviet Union disintegration, there were expectations to see regionalising dynamics take place in Central Asia even though the region hasn't been devoid of tensions which are especially salient between the different local ethnic groups as the escalation of the Tajik Civil War demonstrated. According to Marlene Laruelle et Annette Bohr, there are several factors justifying this regionalizing assumption. First, their common pre-Soviet history as well as their Soviet historical background and the legacy of its collective administration had made

them economically and politically dependent upon each other for a long time. Second, the countries are geographically proximate and share some commonalities in their culture, social structure and history. Thirdly, since the fall of the Soviet Union the Central Asian states having been facing shared problems and issues that are intrinsically transboundary in nature such as water, energy, transport, and potential Islamic insurgency. These issues need to be dealt collectively through regional cooperation since they by-pass political borders. (Bohr 2004: 486; Laruelle and Peyrouse 2012: 6, 50). Yet, the current literature finds that in the main policy arenas, regional cooperation has been unproductive and limited (Costa Buranelli 2021: 3) to the extent that scholars have argued that “Central Asia as such is nevertheless one of the very few world regions which has not managed to establish a regional organization on its own.” (Krapohl and Vasileva-Dienes 2020: 348). In most cases and despite the benefits it would generate, cooperation is lacking, or rather resembles a form of ‘virtual regionalism’ (Collins, 2009; Cornell & Starr 2018; Allison 2008: 187-189) in the sense that they fail to materialise and remain characterised by mostly declaratory engagements with no deeper impulse behind.

This assessment points out at a potential caveat when dealing with these questions. Aminjonov explains quite well that the binary way in which cooperation/non-cooperation is often treated tends to be harmful to the analysis as it does not consider variations in the degree of implementation and the different forms cooperation can take. He argues that Central Asian states do cooperate to some extent, just not as much as they could, especially if measured according to European standards (Aminjonov 2015: 46). The success of regional integration of the past decades in Western and Central Europe has certainly given rise to higher expectations of seeing similar security-related processes occur among post-Soviet states, including Central Asia (Allison 2004: 466). Ayoob explains that Third World or post-colonial states are observed from the perspective and expectations of Western states often without taking into consideration that the latter themselves had centuries to reach their current state of development and that, while doing so, didn’t undergo the constraints from the system that the post-colonial states face. As Ayoob stresses, this is not a new phenomenon and ‘European state makers had to overcome the same problems in their efforts to extract resources, build institutions, acquire political legitimacy, and deepen and broaden the state’s penetration of society’. Yet they benefited from considerably more time and could rely on coercion while Third World states have to play the part

in conforming to the international expectation while simultaneously handling the domestic challenges of newly established states. (Ayoob 1995: 28-29). These elements are to be acknowledged and kept in mind while conducting research on the region but shouldn't however be made the principal reason behind all forms of cooperation stalling. For instance, a recurring argument in the literature explaining the stalling in Central Asia is what Sebastian Mayer called the 'autocratic hesitance' argument which is the assumption that autocratic regime and by extension leaders, are by nature less willing to cooperate. This assumption is tinged with what Nourzhanov (2009: 88-89) described as the euro-centric obsession with liberal democracy and focuses on regime type as a necessary criterion for security cooperation to operate. Mayer proceeds with demonstrating that this argument is flawed given the recurring preferences for security cooperation expressed by some Central Asian states as early as in the 1990s even though no successful attempts were made. It especially came from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, who had expressed ambitious integration projects laid out such as the creation of joint military units that could conduct peacekeeping missions in the region (Mayer 2021: 224). The recent U-turn carried out by Uzbekistan towards increased cooperation effort with the change of leadership is another testimony in favour of states' demand for cooperation. Since Shavkat Mirziyoyev became president following the death of President Karimov in 2016, he has worked to improve relations with neighboring countries, multiplying meetings with neighboring heads of state and signing agreements on strategic partnerships and extended cooperation on economic, trade, transport and communication (Rakhimov 2018: 5). His willingness to work with his Central Asian counterparts suggests a different vision from his predecessor's policy of self-isolation (Putz 2018) and could be the beginning of a new era for cooperation in the region. Overall, it demonstrated that states preferences are more complex than the 'autocratic hesitance' argument suggests and autocracy is not preventing cooperation, the same way that democracy does not guarantee it because Central Asian states have displayed very different policy tendencies from the start.

In this subsection, I have discussed the topicality of NTS challenges in the contemporary political scene, presenting incentives and obstacles. The increased independence that comes with these transnational challenges raises the cost of non-cooperation and therefore would lead us to expect an increased propensity of

states to consider cooperation as a desirable outcome. Referring back to the previous subsection on cooperation and especially to game theory, NTS features contribute to altering the pay-off structure in favour of cooperation. Transnational issues suggest transnational solutions, yet evidences show that cooperation has been limited in Central Asia despite the visible necessity to develop a region-wide approach. However, the five republics have displayed quite different positions on the question, suggesting different strategies. The question of water management more specifically, has been a central topic in post-soviet Central Asia security discussion and cooperation talks. For the past three decades it has been a source of heightened tension and disagreement between the five republics. Yet, recent evolutions of foreign policy have been quite significant and should be further studied as to understand the dynamics and changes behind a state's cooperative or uncooperative foreign policy.

3. Theoretical Framework: the Individual as a Level of Analysis

In this chapter, I layed out the theoretical framework of this thesis, placing the core concepts within the relevant scholarship of this research and wider theoretical background. The introduction of the theoretical framework is the subject of a separate chapter that follows the review of the existing literature because it was necessary to clarify the difference between the two sections. The rationalist perspective introduced previously serves as a starting point of this research and contribute to the introduction of key concepts relating to security cooperation. It also allows to identify the contradictions, 'silences', and gaps of the rationalist approach and present the gap that this research intends to fill. On the contrary, this chapter presents the theoretical framework adopted in order to answer my research question and explains how it is expected to fill the gap in the literature. It presents the relevance of the individual level of analysis to the study of the state of security cooperation between Central Asian states and introduce the causal relations between leader's perceptions and decision-making in politics.

In the previous chapter, I have explained that the rationalist approach to cooperation, although insightful, does not suffice to explain the lack of cooperation when common interests are significant, nor does it explain the variation in state's policy within a similar environment. Rationalist theories usually focus on the international system and its constraints. They presuppose that governments and political leaders are capable of thinking and acting rationally because they perceive the world in an accurate manner which allows them to take the most advantageous decision for their country. On that account, the decision-maker whether it is an individual or a group, matter less than the environment because it is suggested that no matter who is the state leader, they would have act in a similar, rational manner based on a similar intellectual process. The international system as a level of analysis seems to not suffice in providing a satisfactory explanation of cooperation and non-cooperation at the regional level and what might lead states to choose apparent suboptimal strategy when it comes to foreign policy and security cooperation. Referring back to our case study, a purely structural analysis is insufficient to answer the research question as it fails to account for the complexity of Central Asia with

regards to the stalling state of cooperation between states, the disparities of expectations displayed among states and the variation of policy within a state. That being said, it appears that the a large part of literature on cooperation suffers from the primacy of the international level of analysis in explaining state behaviour and from the recurrent neglect of domestic factors (Milner 1992: 467). State actors are treated as unitary entities and therefore the explanations tend to focus on the power distribution at the international level. By resting upon a series of unexamined assumptions about domestic politics that would be crucial to consider, it cannot account for the complexity of states' behaviour (Gvalia, Lebanidze & Iashvili 2011: 20). This next subsection is devoted to discussing alternative approaches that take into consideration the domestic specificities of states and therefore setting the theoretical ground necessary to understand the scope and the goal of this research project and the relevance of the focus on individual leaders.

Ayoob's post-colonial take on security addresses the domestic, regional and global dimensions of security yet stressing the primacy of the domestic dimension on the account that third World regional security is usually 'inextricably intertwined with domestic issues of state making, state breaking, and regime legitimacy' (Ayoob 1995: 49). His idea is that states' interest in cooperation might be explained not primarily with regard to external threats to the state (i.e. the conditions of the international environment), but rather internal threats. Putnam wrote, 'the politics of many international negotiations can usefully be conceived of as a two-level game. At the national level, domestic groups pursue their interest by pressuring the government to adopt favourable policies and politicians seek power by constructing coalitions among those groups. At the international level, national governments seek to maximise their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimising the adverse consequences of foreign developments.' (Putnam 1988: 434). It highlights the entanglements between the two, where the domestic influence the international which consequently impact domestic politics. Regarding Central Asia, Collins (2009) adopts this level of analysis and presents a possible explanation for the observed stalling of most regionalist initiatives by demonstrating the existence of a connection between regime-type — here patrimonialism — and the poor state of regional integration. She explains that although economic cooperation would be more beneficial than security regionalism, the ruling elite will tend to oppose such cooperation. She argues that their reluctance is due to the degree of liberalisation both politically and economically

that its implementation would require and which ultimately would jeopardise the patrimonial structure of their regime, thus their ability to retain power. However, contrary to economic regionalism, security-oriented regionalism shouldn't suffer from the same obstacle since it does not require the same type of liberalisation and reforms. Security regionalism can progress because it does not threaten the patrimonial structure of these regimes and, in some cases, can go as far as to bolster it. The study of the causal relations between regime type and regionalism gives an important insight by focusing domestic politics and its interrelation with the state of cooperation however, it does not suffice to explain why security regionalism isn't successful in Central Asia. While contributing to the explanation of why one form of regionalism is more likely to occur than the other, it falls short of explaining why security-oriented regionalism is still stalling. Assuming that the stalling of cooperation is due to the regime-type of states involved also disregard the disparities within the region, ignoring the fact the some states have been pushing forward various initiatives for cooperation throughout the years. Yet, Collins' approach does take that extra step and begins to look at the internal dynamics within the states in order to shed light on foreign policy decisions. It coincides with Bohr's argument that 'internal politics have placed serious constraints on regional projects' (Bohr 2004: 498) and thus clearly indicate the need to study further the influence of domestic specificities on the development of regional security cooperation.

Following a similar logic, George Tsebelis argues that the apparent irrationality of actions from an actor considered to be rational — in our cases, not engaging in security cooperation when evidences indicate that it is the most beneficial outcome — is most likely the result of an inadequate frame of reference. He notes that 'if, with adequate information, an actor's choices appear to be suboptimal, it is because the observer's perspective is incomplete. The observer focuses attention on only one game, but the actor is involved in a whole network of games – what I call nested games' (Tsebelis 1990: 7). Tsebelis explains that if states display behaviour that appear to negatively impact their security in the long term thus making an apparent suboptimal choice, it is because we – the observers – do not possess the complete interpretative framework that would allow us to understand the decision-making process of actors. Sharing a similar understanding, Gvalia, Lebanidze & Iashvili developed a critical approach whose core focus is to explain and understand the foreign policy choices of states. To do so, they build upon the notion of the 'Black

Box of the state', which refers to ideas, identities and belief systems of the ruling elite in a given state. They argue that this "black box" has to be unpacked to search for elements in domestic politics that would allow us to make sense of states' international behaviour. In their research they specifically focus on ideas, and more specifically elite ideas, an emphasis they judge particularly relevant when dealing with patrimonial and personalistic regimes. They argue that, since elites are directly involved with the issues related to the foreign and security policy of their country, they are the most relevant focus when it comes to understanding and explaining states' behaviours. Ultimately, they argue that ideas shape states' foreign policy and behaviour towards others because it influences an actor's perception and understanding of the external environment but also serves as road maps for policy drafting (Gvalia, Lebanidze, and Iashvili 2011: 13-36). By doing so, they highlight the limitation of the systemic level of analysis in explaining policy decisions of a given state, especially when they appear to be irrational or self-deserving. The approach developed by Gvalia et al. stresses the importance of the domestic factors and leadership's perception in shaping foreign policy decisions and in our cases, disposition towards security cooperation. Their approach to the state as a black box followed with an attempt to open it to find and explain the correlation between the two is part of a larger literature that intend to stress the importance of examining the individual involved in the policy-making process. Such an approach is more fitted to account for the differences in decision-making within similar environment and to explain what can lead a government or a leader to pursue a suboptimal approach. It moves beyond the rational-actor assumption that all decision-makers operate with the same approach to rationality and intend to discuss the relationship between the individual subjectivity and foreign policy decisions.

Many scholars such as Juliet Kaarbo(2017), Klaus Brummer (2016), Steven Spiegel & Louis Cantori (1970), Ole Holsti (1962), Robert Jervis (1978; 1999), Richard Herrmann (1998) and Stephen Walker (1977; 1999) have claimed that the person – or group of persons – who leads matter when explaining the decision-making process of different states and how it might defy rationalist expectations. Adopting different approaches on the matter at hand, they have stressed the centrality of the individual decision-maker in shaping the foreign policy of a state by exploring how the decision-makers perceive and interpret their environment, and how these perceptions, beliefs and values shape their political decisions. Questioning the rational

actor assumption, Chakrabarti explains that by focusing only on the state and the international system as a level of analysis, researchers will fail to account for the influence of individuals in shaping policies and that a state-as-the-sole-actor approach therefore proves inadequate. Since policies are elaborated and carried out by people, it should be researched from a "man-centred" approach taking into consideration "the living realities of human minds, wills, and hearts" (Chakrabarti 1988: 337-338). Robert Jervis argues that a decision-maker is not just a generic rational actor but rather an individual located in a particular setting with their cognitive limitations and biases. Different people put in the same situation would most likely behave differently because they operate on different grounds therefore, one cannot explain policies without referring to the decision-maker's view on the world and others (Jervis 1976: 28). Leader perceptions are even more relevant when the decision-making power is restricted to one predominant leader like it can be the case in Central Asia partly for the fact that leaders in non-democracies can more easily insulate their policy from challenging perceptions (Kaarbo 2017: 21; Hermann and Hagan 1998: 128) which makes the individual level of analysis especially suitable for this research since I dealt with autocratic regimes. According to Boulding, actors are not influenced by objective elements as they do not perceive the world as it is but rather, he explains that 'the people whose decisions determine the policies and actions of nations do not respond to the "objective" facts of the situation, whatever that may mean, but to their "image" of the situation' (Boulding 1959: 120), therefore material factors alone cannot explain the actions of states. For my purposes, I will use the term perception instead of Boulding's image and define it as the subjective interpretation of reality in which an individual makes political decisions. It operates on the assumption that perceptions are important defining factors of behaviours as actors react in accordance to their "image" of the situation they face and not in response to reality itself.

On these accounts, perceptions matter because when it comes to policy choices, they affect the approach and strategies that the leader employs to pursue their state's interest. They are significant in shaping how leaders will respond to political constraints and opportunities and, because they differ from person to person, it contributes to the heterogeneity in the decision-making process (Kaarbo 2017: 25). Holsti argues that, because they are dependent on the decision-makers' belief system, identity and values, it can occur that these images are not accurate representation of the "reality". When put in terms of cooperation or conflict, he suggests that conflict

between states are principally between images of the states distorted by the perceptions and beliefs of decision-makers. The belief systems shape and organise perceptions by posing as sets of lenses placed between the “reality” of the social and political environment and the actors, effectively shaping their perceptions (Holsti 1962: 244-246). Ideas and beliefs also influence policy decisions in the sense that they limit the scope of an actors’ perceptions which is what Goldstein and Keohane described as putting “blindness on people, reducing the number of conceivable alternatives” (Goldstein and Keohane 1993: 12). Enunciating their argument according to game theory and the wording of the prisoner’s dilemma, they challenge the rational agent assumption at the basis of such representation. They argue that prediction of the game’s outcome cannot be solely generated by taking into consideration objective constraints, interests and payoff structures. Rather, the outcome of the game is heavily defined by the players’ ideas, beliefs and expectations which can give rise to virtually any outcome (Ibid.: 17). In doing so, Goldstein and Keohane expose the importance of perceptions in guiding the decision-maker’s actions and the influence they hold over policy outcome. They shape the decision-maker’s frame of reference within which they design policy that will advance what they see as their interests.

When it comes to decisions related to security matters – in this case, inter-state cooperation – perceptions of gains and losses or threats are important elements. Referring back to Goldstein and Keohane’s account of the prisoner’s dilemma, questions of cooperation and defection cannot only be discussed in terms of objective loss and gain as the players’ reading of the game needs to be taken into consideration. Decision-makers act in terms of the vulnerability they feel and the interests they have, therefore each actor’s definition of the situation is different and this is what matters. Within the boundaries of this research project, I argue that the perception of loss as expressed above, can be associated with the perception of threat in the sense that I am referring to losses or threats to the interests of the state and that they are both determining factors when decision-makers are faced with the possibility of cooperation or defection. Here, I adopt Cohen’s use of threats which is mostly understood in the passive sense, referring to the anticipation of danger and to situation that could harm the interests of the state rather than a direct action taken by state A against state B with the aim of harming (Cohen 1978: 95). Meyer and Miskimmon clearly explain that threats are not self-evident realities. They are mediated by the

perception of the actors and therefore they are the results of their interpretation and construction which, they stress, often pass through the means of language (Meyer and Miskimmon 2009: 625-626) Herman and Hagan explain how a leader's assessment of the situation is critical in policy-making since, through a dual process of observation and interpretation, their perceptions of threats and opportunities serve as a basis for planning strategies and initiating actions (Hermann and Hagan 1998: 126). The subjective vision of threat and gains ultimately affect the inclination of the actor towards either defection or cooperation. They further argue that leaders' perceptions are even more determinant and volatile when the interactions with their counterpart are low, which is often the case in conflictual situations or when diplomatic relations are weak (Ibid. :134).

For my research I assume the importance (however not the primacy) of the individual level of analysis and seek to consider the perception and the role of leaders and decision-makers in shaping a state disposition towards security cooperation. Ultimately, I seek to provide some insights on an empirical puzzle that is the state of security cooperation in Central Asia by effectively "opening the black box of the state" to observe the leaders' specificities. In this chapter, I presented a theoretical explanation as to why I choose to take leader's perception as an independent variable that can be useful in making sense of a state's policy choices by introducing the correlation between decision-maker's perceptions and interpretation, and the policy decision that are being made. I further stress the importance of the leader's perception of gain and losses when faced with opportunities for security cooperation. The aim of this research project is to find out if the variation that can be observed in the Uzbek position towards cooperation on the Rogun Dam project accompanying the change of leader, can be related to changes of perception with regard to the project. In more general terms, by putting the policymakers at the centre of our analysis, observing the actor-specific perceptions, I intend to provide for an explanation of the policy changes following the change of leader.

4. Research Design

This chapter establishes the methodological considerations of this study, explaining how the question of leader's perception and its potential relation to the stalling of security cooperation within the Central Asia region will be empirically studied. In this sense, it is very important to underline from the beginning that this thesis does not intend to provide an all encompassing vision on why Central Asian states struggle to establish deep and long-lasting cooperation on water governance but rather to shed the light on the role of perceptions in this general dynamic and the importance of the individual level of analysis. To answer this question and in order to find out if there is a relevant causal relation between leadership perception and security cooperation in Central Asia, a case study is conducted. This is followed by a justification of the research design applied where I also demonstrate the relevance of water management with regard to security cooperation research, thus justifying my case selection. Then, I develop on the data selection and the method of qualitative analysis I applied on the data.

4.1 Case Selection

In order to answer the research question, I decided to conduct a single case study due to the fact that the focus of the research is specifically set on Central Asia water management. Generally used when trying to account for one individual case, a case study requires to examine multiple pieces of evidences about a single unit and analyse many variables pertaining to that case (Toshkov 2016: 286-288, 294). In comparison to other types of research design, a single case study allows for more depth of analysis through the intensive, multi-faceted study of one unit and by exclusively relying on within-case evidences (Ibid: 287; Gerring 2004: 348) while evading the common problem of a lack of time and resource. Case studies are particularly able to investigate into a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context especially when the boundaries between the two are not clearly evident, meaning the research has to encompass important contextual conditions which are highly pertinent to the phenomenon of study. (Rowley 2002: 18). Gerring describes a case study as “an in-depth study of a single case unit” (Gerring 2004: 341), which particularly suit the purpose of this research. Furthermore, case studies are especially useful when trying

answer How? questions because it allows to establish causality and more specifically causal mechanisms within the boundary of that specific case (Toshkov 2016: 315-316; Gerring 2004: 347-348; Rowley 2004). A single case study will therefore be the most suitable option to investigate the causal relation between leadership's perceptions and the state of security cooperation. Ultimately, a single case study is particularly suitable for "generating valid theory" or to "refine existing theory" (Odell 2001: 169-170). While the results of my research are specific to Central Asia and more specifically to the bilateral cooperation around the Rogun Dam project, and therefore cannot be generalised, these case-specific findings are embedded in the larger theoretical body of literature around security cooperation and thus indirectly contribute to the larger discussion on these phenomena. A case study research can play a significant role in advancing a field's body of knowledge and add to the established theory (Rowley 2002: 20), here security cooperation. Furthermore, the insights arising from case-based research can subsequently be used as hypotheses or propositions in further research.

Having established the basis for this research project to be a single case study, the question of selecting an adequate case arises. Studying Central Asian security cooperation as a whole was not materially possible, therefore I narrowed down the scope by focusing on one aspect of NTS: the question of water management. To probe the question of the relation between leader's perceptions and security cooperation with regard to water management, this thesis adopts a single case study of the Rogun dam project. First, because of its scope, this case is expected to serve as an epitome of the challenges surrounding water management in Central Asia. Secondly, the change in Uzbekistan's position toward that project in an environment that remained unchanged constitutes a strong case to compare leaders' perceptions and study how those perceptions relate to the two diverging foreign policy displayed. Narrowing down to one particular case also allows me to conduct an in-depth analysis and to achieve relevant results by avoiding getting tangled in the complexity of the region and the multiplicity of actors. The choice of water management and more specifically the study of the Rogun Dam as a case study is informed by several factors, notably its relevancy in the region. As mentioned in the previous chapter, water is a salient security issue and is extensively discussed among NTS specialists. Water is a fundamental resource for the survival of populations and plays a key role in supporting all kind of human activities from ancestral practices like agriculture, all the

way to more modern uses such as hydropower. No society can develop and prosper without first securing a stable access to fresh water. On that account, the management of water resources becomes an all-encompassing concern since almost all aspects of societies rely on its proper functioning including industry, tourism, health, sanitation, energy and food production. Any threats posed to the safe and stable supply of water, therefore, threatens the very stability of society at all its levels (Yoffe et al. 2004: 3) therefore one can assume that it constitutes an existential threat sufficiently salient to cause substantial political effects. With the rapid climate imbalance being witnessed worldwide, more and more pressure is put on dwindling water resources and the uncertainty regarding the quantity and quality of water resources over time increases while demand continues to grow (UN 2010: 4). In these conditions, ensuring a proper access to water for the populations is becoming one of the greatest challenges of our societies. The increasing demand for water, especially in the states already grappling with issues of water scarcity and threatened by desertification, is bound to intensify tensions and Central Asian states, having already witnessed the desertification of the Aral Sea, are no exception. As UN Secretary-general Ban Ki-moon already pointed in 2008 during a session of the General Assembly, 'many of today's conflicts around the world are being fuelled or exacerbated by water shortages and climate change is only making the situation worse' (UN News Center 2008). Some studies are predicting that by 2040, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan will be part of the 30 most water-stressed countries in the world (Maddocks, Young, and Reig 2015), thus highlighting the salience and urgency of the issue for the region where water is the backbone of economic and agricultural development. The issue of water management is an all encompassing question as it cuts across all disciplines and sectors as it connects to aspects of environmental, economy and even political security. Just like most NTS threats, the question of water is transboundary in nature since rivers and other bodies of water do to not follow border considerations. By virtue of crossing national boundaries, waterways force riparian States into a situation of inter-dependence which can result in a conflictual situation when states feel constraint in their use of the resources or are over the impression that co-riparian states are unilaterally exploiting the finite resource (Phillips et al. 2006: 15-16). Moon (UN News Center 2008) had warned, "Water is a classic common property resource. No one really owns the problem and so no one really owns the solution", which stresses its relevance with regards to investigating question of cooperation. The

transboundary factor is even more salient in the case of the Central Asian states due to their Soviet past and the nested water-energy system they inherited which add another level of interdependence. To implement the ambitious agricultural plans and turn the Central Asian republics into suppliers of primary products, the Soviet union developed a complex infrastructure system of canals, dams and reservoirs. Water-intensive mono-cultivation in downstream countries like Uzbekistan was only made possible by the large irrigation system and the over-commitment of water resources to agriculture through an imbalanced quota system (Abdolvand et al. 2015). The overall management of resources was subjected to collectivism and Soviet planning where both water and energy were centrally allocated by the Central government in Moscow who also bore the water-management costs. It established a unified basin-wide water-energy system in the region where each republic played a part, and resources were exchanged freely with little concern for administrative borders. Upstream countries were required to allow most of their water to flow downstream for irrigation since the dams were primarily built for better water regulation not for energy production. In return, downstream countries rich in gas, coal and fuel oil would compensate in an energy-for-water trading scheme. (Russell 2018). After the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the consequent restructuring of resource management system, competition between the newly independent states increased rapidly, ultimately leading to the current conflictual situation where states have struggled to maintain the old supply networks and failed to build a viable regional approach to replace the Soviet system of management.

As I indicated previously, in order to study the question of water management in a way that is feasible within the constraints of this master thesis, I conduct a single case study focusing on one water management project in Central Asia. The case of the Rogun Dam project has been chosen for several reasons. To begin with, it is an infrastructure project that were initially launched during the Soviet era, prior to the unraveling of the integrated water-energy system which means that it was supposed to fit within a larger regional structure of resources management. However, the Rogun Dam is a source of many tensions within the region, mostly between Tajikistan where the dam is being built and Uzbekistan located downstream. While the Tajik government perceives the hydro-energy project as an economic opportunity, Uzbekistan on the other hand, has been strongly opposed to the project because of

concerns over the potential increase in droughts and the increase control it gives Tajikistan over the water flows. Yet, with the change of the leadership in Uzbekistan following the death of Islam Karimov in 2016, the long-lasting opposition to the construction of the Rogun dam was dropped and negotiations talks have been on the agenda (Muratbekova 2018) with Uzbekistan recently committing to buy power from Tajikistan's Rogun plan (Eurasianet 2022). This political U-turn toward the project that occurred with the change of leadership in Uzbekistan is a second element justifying the choice of the Rogun Dam as it provides the opportunity to study the variations between two completely different policies within the same country, toward the same project. Aside from the relevance with regard to the research question, one of the reasons I chose to focus on the Rogun dam is because of the data availability which I need to conduct my analysis and their relation to cooperation/non-cooperation. It is a colossal construction project spans over several decades and received significant attention, both international and local. The first chapter of the empirical section is dedicated to provide with the necessary background to understand the stakes around the Rogun Dam project and explain in more details how it aligns with the topic of this research.

4.2 Data Selection

To conduct my case study of the Rogun Dam and compare the manifestation of leader's perception in their discourse, I analysed the official statements both in English and Russian made by Islam Karimov and Shavkat Mirziyoyev and their respective administrations that focus on the water management project of the Rogun Dam. This research also considers declarations made by Minister of Foreign Affairs on the account that they transmit foreign policy directive established by the president, acting as the voice of their own policy strategy. The sources include public speeches, interviews, and press releases and are retrieved from governmental websites. Some news sources are also used in order to retrieve speeches and official statements. The reason that this thesis is also relying on news sources is because sometimes, statements are not available anymore on the official pages of the governments. However news media still quote statements that have earlier been made by the governments. The data is organised chronologically and divided into two period corresponding to the two different policies carried out by Islam Karimov (1991-2016)

and Shavkat Mirziyoyev (2016 - Ongoing). The period analysed in this thesis begins in 2008 and finishes in 2022. This chronological scope was chosen specifically because 2008 marked a turning point with regard to the Rogun Dam project. It corresponds to the year where Uzbekistan pulled out from the common Central Asian Electricity Grid which prompted Tajikistan to move forward with its construction plans and accelerated the development of the dam. Overall, it marked the moment when the Rogun Dam project became a more salient issue in the political scene.

4.3 Method – Content Analysis

This thesis is built on an interpretive single case study as it takes on an existing theoretical framework of leader's perception and aim to apply it to a new event in an effort to illustrate that the framework can indeed be extended to account for such event. In order to do so, I am conducting a content analysis on the official statements made by Islam Karimov and Shavkat Mirziyoyev and their respective administrations that focus on the water management project of the Rogun Dam to try, through the generated findings, to answer the research question introduced previously. As Cleland (2017: 63) argue qualitative research especially addresses the research questions concerning 'how' and 'why' and focuses on understanding a phenomenon or a context.

My method requires the gathering and analysis of already produced material which make it particularly fitting with this research's goal of observing existing causal mechanisms and inquiring for variation over time. Like other qualitative analytical methods, it requires the researcher's intervention and the interpretation of data in order to elicit meaning and build empirical knowledge, yet aims at study behaviours and beliefs in their natural environment. It allows to focus on the perspective of the participants involved in the social phenomenon without affecting it during the data gathering process since documents are already 'out there', they have already been produced. As a corollary of this anteriority, documents are produced independently of a research agenda. They are therefore said to be 'unobtrusive' and 'non-reactive'—that is, they are unaffected by the research process (Bowen 2009: 31). Although the research is ultimately involved in the interpretative process, the data are stable and thus behaviours can be observed in their natural environment. The coverage provided by this method makes it particularly suitable to observe variation over time since documents are fixed in time.

My approach is guided by elements emanating from discourse analysis literature and its approach to textual interpretation. In this research, the emphasis is put on how perceptions manifest in speeches and official statements and what they tell us about foreign policy choices. An important theoretical commitment of discourse analysis resides in the discourse as being productive of things defined by the discourse, relying upon subjectivities constructed by the discourse itself (Hansen 2006: 15). The use of language is political, and not an objective tool since it produces and reproduces specific construction and identity while marginalising others (Ibid.: 16). It generates a specific understanding of the world, defines a certain way of behaving that is considered acceptable or valid and exclude other mode of consideration or action (Milliken 1999: 229). Discourse is not just a declaratory act but it influence the environment in which the speaker/actor can operate by generating paths and setting boundaries. Therefore, discourse analysis is about explaining the production of this world view and how it renders logical and acceptable certain policies (Ibid.:236). Jutta Weldes explain its centrality in the political realm. The discourse is an integral part of the construction of a state's national interest and of the legitimation of the pursuit of said interest. Events happen, but it is their construction in the discourse that define them and define the realm of 'acceptable' consequences. Those representations generated by the discourse are central in shaping a state's national interest and its resulting political behaviour (Weldes 1996). These are main aspects that guided the conduct of the analysis done on the speeches and statements produced by the Karimov's and Mirziyoyev's administration.

In my content analysis, I focus on how the Rogun Dam project is discussed by each president and what it can tell us about the overarching opinions of the leader. There are many ways to conduct content analysis. Since I am focusing on questions pertaining to security cooperation, my analysis is guided by the central themes of gain and threat perceptions introduced earlier in order to test out our approach. The data are analysed and coded focusing on two over-arching aspects: positive perceptions and negative perceptions of the project. Those two categories are not value judgement but rather they reflect the theoretical expectations that cooperation needs intention. Positive perceptions correspond to a cooperation-prone discourse and relate to the project in term of gain and mutual interest. What I label negative perception refers to cooperation-adverse discourse and relates to perceptions of the project in terms of loss,

threat and conflicting with the state's interest. In the analysis, I search for the type representations emerging from the aggregation of sources. I look for continuity and rupture regarding these elements between the discourse of the two presidents.

4.4 Limitations

As mentioned in the previous chapter, I agree that states and regions are the product of social construction and also need to be studied as such. I do not intent to adopt a dogmatic vision on what constitute a state or region, however for the sake of the feasibility of this master thesis and the necessity to identify players, I adhere to the principle of Westphalian state boundaries when referring to the regional sub-units. Meaning that I do believe that Westphalian borders are constructed and arbitrary, however using the level of analysis of nation state helps the practicability of the process and without establishing those boundaries of state, it would be impossible to study the phenomenon of interstate cooperation. As to the question of how can I address the question of regional security cooperation while not studying all states within the region, I would argue that first, it would be an enormous endeavour reaching far beyond the scale and capacity of this research project. Second, regional cooperation is a multifaceted puzzle of interests, national policy and international agreements, therefore providing explanation on one piece of this puzzle can already contribute to making sense of the larger picture. If one wants to provide with explanations that do not limit themselves to the systemic level of analysis, one need to understand the importance more narrow and case-specific outlook on the question.

Similarly, this research mentions the importance of belief system and ideational framework in the shaping of a leader perception, yet does not explore these and their influence in shaping leaders' perceptions on the project or what they tell us about the leadership and its cognition of reality. Perceptions are taken as they can be observed without further developing on how they were shaped and constructed over time. Arguably the complexity and multi-faceted aspect of belief system make it arduous to successfully generate results. Belief systems and identities are influenced by many factors such as culture, preferences, individual and collective identities, norms and practices and power relations, which are in constant evolution therefore making them complex to be integrated in the limited capabilities of this thesis. Focusing on individual actors invites the questions of other constraints such as national identity

and memory politics (e.g. memories of past conflicts). However considering the short time period of my study, it is fair to assume that none of the above could have significantly changed which means that effectively, I could observe a policy change in a situation where other factors remained constant.

The study may also face some empirical limitations that should be discussed in this section, first with regards to the data collection methods. The main limitations reside in the difficulty to gather a large amount of data because the material is poorly available online and transcriptions of speeches are not systematic. To compensate that shortcomings I integrated quotation of speeches and meeting by news sources in the dataset. Furthermore, due to the narrow scope of this research, the amount of existing speeches and statements on the topic are limited, however I believe that I provided with the full sample of data available.

The research is limited in selection of the cooperation as I chose to focus on water management, an established security issue. I assume that the replicability of my research process to other NTS threats would confirm my work. However, the findings of this thesis might also be too case-specific and thus prove inadequate for other security threats. As of today, my research has no way to account for this discrepancy. Yet, in post-positivist epistemology like my own, not every finding needs to be reproduced in order to be valid. The question of water security is one of the main security issues in Central Asia, if not the most important one and thus is worth studying individually.

5. Analysis: Case study of the Rogun Dam Project

This chapter is dedicated to the case study focusing the Rogun Dam project. In a first section, I introduce the empirical case study and its challenges by presenting the political and historical context of water management in Central Asia and further explain what place does the Rogun Dam occupy in this regional equilibrium. The second section is dedicated to the presentation of the content analysis' findings. First, I present the two leaders' discourse on the project and what it reveals about their perceptions. I organise the results separately; the first part refers to the period where Islam Karimov was in power which was a time characterised by little cooperation between the states and high tension regarding the Rogun Dam project. The second part focuses on Shavkat Mirziyoyev's presidency which is marked by a political turn in favour of a more cooperative attitude toward the project and the initiation of dialogues with Tajikistan. In a second phase, I compare and contrast these findings by looking for elements of rupture and continuity and how they relate to the change of foreign policy behaviours.

5.1 The Birth of the Rogun Dam Project: an History of Water Management in Central Asia

5.1.1 The Soviet Period: the Creation of the Water-Energy Nexus

Central Asia is crossed by two main waterways, the Syr Darya and the Amu Darya which, with their many tributaries, form the Aral Sea Basin. The Syr Darya River is the longest of the two and originates from the mountains of Kyrgyzstan and then flows through Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan where it ultimately flows into the Aral Sea. For its part, the Amu Darya located south, has the highest water bearing capacity in the region. It rises in the Pamir mountains and flows through Tajikistan, borders Afghanistan and continues towards Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan where it used to discharge into the Aral Sea. The Aral Sea is a terminal lake, historically dependent on the inflow from its two rivers, the Syr Darya in the north and the Amu Darya in the south. For these reasons and although the Aral sea lies between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the entire five Central Asia states share the Aral Sea Basin. Water sources have been of high significance for the development and

history of the region, as it evolved throughout the centuries around this resource. The majority of the population has historically been concentrated along the waterways and, with time, extended further towards desert area as they were practising an indigenous form of agriculture based on traditional methods of rotation and irrigation. Archaeological evidences suggest that inhabitant of this region were among the first civilisations to develop quite extensively irrigated agriculture. Medieval Central Asia already had large-scale irrigation systems of canals and dams that they kept developing and perfecting over time (Zhiltsov et al. 2018). Remnant of an ancient dam dating back from the sixth to seventh centuries was discovered in modern-day Uzbekistan, attesting to the construction of sophisticated water infrastructure and knowledge of hydraulic engineering already centuries back (Abdullaev and Rakhmatullaev 2015). In fact, water has remain a central element when discussing Central Asia throughout the centuries and has been tied to the establishment of agricultural practices, from nomadic tribes to sedentary people. In terms of historical development, one of the main turning points is the arrival of the Russians in the regions with the tsarist conquests of the 18th and 19th century. Aware of the agriculture potential of the region's warm climate, cotton cultivation was of key interests for the imperial government. Under tsarist rule the local agriculture started to become much more developed and organised with vaster sown area. It turned Central Asia into a major supplier of raw material for the Russian Empire, elevating it to one of the world's leading cotton producers at that time (Whitman 1956: 201). However, it really reached another scale under the Soviet regime as huge amount of water were diverted from the major waterways to allow for the intensification of agriculture production.

Decision makers in Moscow realised that the climate and topography of the region, rich in upstream water storage and vast downstream steppes, was favourable to the development of large-scale agriculture and thus the Aral sea basin became very important for the Soviet agricultural ambition (Bernauer and Siegfried 2012). The intention was to turn Central Asia into Russia's raw material-producing region by replacing subsistence farming of settled rural style of life with production oriented monocultures, mostly the cultivation of water-intensive crops such as cotton to would supply the growing textile industry and military (Glantz 2004). Thus cotton farming was given the priority at the expense of other production and territories, making Central Asia the “cotton belt” of the USSR. Yet, contrary to the tsarist government

who mostly preserved the existing system, the soviet government had decided to replace traditional land and water practices in the agricultural sector. The region's arid climate makes more complex irrigation systems a requirement for the development of such large-scale monoculture. For these reasons, the Soviet system and their ambitious plans considerably altered the tradition of water management and agricultural development in the region within a few decades (Han et al. 2022). There has been centuries of irrigation practices in Central Asia to sustain subsistence farming and later on export-oriented agriculture. However under the soviet central planning, desert or steppe areas were intensively irrigated through the implementation of many irrigation and drainage schemes, which resulted in mass movement of population who came working in the agricultural sector and thus support the intensive production goals. The Bolsheviks were eager to increase cotton production and already in May 1918, Lenin issued a decree “about the organisation of irrigation work in Turkestan” thus providing with the basis for the introduction of large-scale irrigation projects aiming to expand and achieve self-sufficiency for the cotton production. (Weinthal 2002: 82). As soon as 1926, the implementation of several irrigation projects was initiated in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan (Zhiltsov et al. 2018: 19). The expected quotas of cotton production in the republics of Central Asia were increased from year to year, and for these quotas to be met there was a need for the extension of land devoted to cotton (Glantz 2004: 161). As a result, an intensification of the production and an increase in the portion of the land dedicated to this mono-cropping agriculture were witnessed which ultimately relied on large-scale construction of irrigation networks contributing to the ever growing use of water resources from the Amu Darya and Syr Darya and further pushed back the limits of the natural environment. As of today, the greater part of existing hydraulic infrastructure in Central Asia was built in Soviet times, especially from in the 1960s under Khrushchev when many of the large-scale project of canals and reservoirs where started.

One of the major changes that came with the Soviet administration was the centralisation of decision making and water allocations which until then had remain locally managed (Weinthal 2002). Decision-making and institution of quotas on the distribution and use of water depended only on the USSR Ministry of Land Reclamation and Water Management in Moscow, on the basis of the single plan of economy development in the region and in the USSR as a whole (Zhiltsov et al. 2018;

Glantz 2004). Therefore, the Aral sea basin was administered as a geographical entity under Moscow's direct control and managed as an integrated and interdependent system. Since water was a domestic resource within the USSR, there were little concerns for ownership rights over the trans-boundary water or regarding who possessed the legal rights to use the freshwater resources, everything was managed according to the centralised planning. Regional resources were pulled together into one water-energy system meant to support the agricultural expansion. Energy-poor upstream Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan would release enough water for the cotton-producing countries in spring and summer. In return, the energy-rich downstream countries would provide them with gas and coal to meet their higher energy demands in winter as part of an energy-for-water trading scheme imposed by Moscow. Wegerich explains that regional interdependence was largely encouraged within the Soviet system, which he calls the policy of 'integrate and rule' rather than 'divide and rule' (Wegerich, 2008: 85). In these circumstances, the Central Asian Power System (CAPS) was established by the Soviet Union in the late 1960s and was meant to operate independently from the Russian electricity grids. Eventually the CAPS was integrated into the Unified Power System (UPS) of the USSR in the sense that it had been physically connected to the Soviet UPS, also implementing the technical and regulatory norms issued by Moscow; however it was not synchronised with it (Westphal, Pastukhova, and Pepe 2022: 30). The goal being the CAPS was to ensure energy supply within the region through a jointly operated network pooling together Central Asia's diversified energy resources without regard to borders. It was meant to compensate seasonal variations and the increased release of water required by the agricultural sector in the summer months. Therefore, the regional system was organised around the availability of energy resources throughout the seasons, in order to optimise the exploitation of these natural resources (Boute 2016: 381). For instance, the electricity produce by releasing water for irrigation during summer time would be shared among the republics through the regional energy pool and would be replaced in winter by supplies of coal, oil and gas (Bernauer and Siegfried 2012: 231). The system consisted of mainly 30 percent hydro power plants (HPP) of Central Asian upstream and 70 percent thermal power plants (TPP) of downstream countries (Aminojov 2016). Moreover, this regional interdependence was further accentuated by the Soviet power artificially linking the majority of the basins through the construction of the various canals (Allouche 2004). The dams were initially

constructed by the Soviet government to meet the need for better water regulation for irrigation purposes in the downstream countries rather than with the not goal of producing energy (Abdolvand et al. 2015: 900). The power grid was administered as one system therefore resources were shared commodities and there was no need autonomy within the system.

This system allowed for cotton production to become the main form of agriculture in the region and from 1940 to 1980, Soviet cotton output rose from 2.24 to 9.1 million tonnes (Kumar 2002). To achieve that goals, hydraulic infrastructures were built to divert unprecedented amount of water from the main rivers in order to provide for the increasing surface of arable land. With this sharp increase in the volume of water taken from the two main rivers, as well as from several of their tributaries resulting in most of their flows to be consumed by irrigation processes and no longer reach the main rivers. By the end of the 1960s, the discrepancy between the demands of the soviet economy and the available water supply in Central Asia had become evident. Indeed, Central Asia was internationally put back on the map following what became known as the “Aral Sea Catastrophe” (Glantz 2004 : 172). The irrigation network previously mentioned had been constructed in earthen channels causing massive water losses and evaporation during its conveyance to the point that only a reduced amount of water would actually reach the fields, leading to unproductive use of water resources. For instance, by 1987 less than 10 percent of the canals network in Uzbekistan was lines with some form of polymer or concrete material (Weinthal 2002 : 94). Historically, the Amu Darya had supplied about 70% of the water to the Aral Sea, yet as agriculture developed further, significant amount of its water-flow has been diverted into the Karakum Canal (Glantz 2004: 11-12). Between 1974 and 1986 the Amu Darya did not flow into the Aral Sea, and between 1982 and 1986 none of the Syr Darya reached the sea (Weinthal 2002). The heavy use of pesticide and other chemicals, coupled with an unsustainable use of water had drastic effect on the environment and welfare of the region, especially in the downstream regions. Significant health-related consequences to the pollution of soil and water have been observed, including an increased incidence of diseases in downstream areas due to the dispersal of toxic airborne salts and high concentration of chemical fertilisers and other harmful components in the water (Russell 2018). The desiccation of the Aral Sea and the general environmental degradation had a severe economic impact on the local population as many people lost their sources of income.

The region's once prosperous fishing industry had shrunk along with the lake, effectively leaving thousands unemployed and fuelling local poverty in the region. In 1960 43,430 tonnes of fish were caught in the Aral Sea yet it had already lowered to 17,400 tonnes by 1970 and these numbers dropped to zero tonnes in 1980, remaining there for the next decade (Letolle and Mainguet 1993: 182). Besides the increased level of salinity due to the evaporation of water, the soil of the former lake bed has been polluted with chemicals residues used to boost cotton production, thus substantial quantities of salt are blowing from the dried bottom and damaging agriculture in adjacent areas. The Aral Sea was once the fourth-largest inland lake in the world, yet under the Soviet agricultural mismanagement it had lost 90% of its original size in less than a century and had split into the North Aral Sea in modern-day Kazakhstan and the South Aral Sea, which lies within Uzbekistan. While Kazakhstan, with the help of the World Bank, built the Kok-Aral Dam to preserve the remaining North Aral Sea, the continuous irrigation of crops in Uzbekistan led to the complete dried up of the South Aral Sea by 2014 (Liston 2014). The desiccation of the Aral Sea is still today considered as one of the worst human-induced environmental disasters of the past century. The experience of such an ecological disaster has shown Central Asian states the potential consequences of poor water management. The damaging effects on the environment, the economy and the health of local population already experienced by the states are bound to worsen if no improvements are made. Having this first hand experience of water issues in their region and having witnessed the increased water scarcity throughout the past decades constitute an increased incentive for the riparian states involved to find joint solution and cooperate on topical projects.

5.1.2 Independence: the Multiplication of National Policies

When the Soviet Union collapsed five newly independent states emerged in Central Asia which resulted in a dramatic transformation of the regional equilibrium and led to fundamental changes in the management of water in Central Asia. Until then the Amu Darya and Syr Darya would be administered as domestic rivers within the USSR, but with its demise, they turned into international waterways virtually overnight (Bernauer and Siegfried 2012). It turned a domestic crisis into an international

one between the newly independent republics. When the Soviet Union fell apart, this integrated exchange system also collapsed and divided the region into energy-rich and energy-deficit. Yet, seeing the need to maintain a form of cohesion, all of the Central Asian states signed the 1992 Almaty Agreement otherwise known as the Agreement on Cooperation in Joint Management of Use and Protection of Water Resources of Interstate Sources. This agreement consisted in upholding the exchange system established under the Soviet Union (Allouche 2004). In the following years several bilateral and trilateral agreements were signed between the states in order to organise and formalise the upholding of the water quotas and energy exchange. Quite quickly, it became apparent that maintaining the inherited centralised system of water allocation without the centralised authority to guide it nor the centralised budget would be difficult. The relation between signatories remained strained and was accompanied by complications in implementation since annual water quotas have not been fully implemented since and frequent suspension of the deals occurred (Libert and Lipponen 2012: 568). The most important hydraulic infrastructures such as the Toktogul reservoir were not included in the agreements and were de facto nationalised by the riparian countries (Bernauer and Siegfried 2012). Without the control mechanisms, each state started to regularly accuse each other of exceeding quotas and taking more than what they were allotted (Crisis Group 2002). Ultimately, the water-energy nexus became one of the main problems in the newly independent region due to the lack of cooperation between the states.

Following the collapse of the integrated system, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan started asking for market prices in exchange for supplying oil and gas resources to the upstream states, which at that time couldn't meet the increased prices (Russell 2018: 7). As a consequence, payments were frequently missed or delayed, resulting in cuts of energy supplies which made it necessary for upstream energy-poor states to find alternative sources of supply in order to prevent their countries from having energy shortages in winter. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan were increasingly frustrated to be charged market price for oil and gas while their own natural resource – water – was still given no monetary value. The reluctance of downstream countries to participate in the maintenance cost of the water infrastructure also exacerbated the tension over water management (Abdolvand et al. 2015). For lack of other means, the upstream states of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan started to exploit their hydropower potentials and relied more and more on their HPP for energy production. Hydropower infrastructures

located in the head waters ultimately affect the water flows of the main rivers and clashing with the interests of downstream agrarian states heavily reliant on irrigation to sustain their production. For hydropower production the water needs to be stored in reservoirs during the summer period and then released during winter to meet the increased energy demands of the colder season. Downstream states on the other hand, need a larger flow of water during the summer for irrigation purposes and suffer from the substantial amount of water released during the winter and the associated flood risks (Mosello 2008: 158-159). For instance, the Toktogul Reservoir was design mainly for irrigation purposes but following the new situation, Kyrgyzstan started operating it for energy production purposes which for Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan had resulted in water shortages during summer, flooding in winter and damaged infrastructures down the stream (Zakhirova 2013: 2007, Peña-Ramos, Bagus, and Fursova 2021: 10). Despite the disastrous record of Soviet water management policy in the region, Central Asian leaders have not, apart from declarations of good intentions, really put the water problem on the agenda (Allouche 2004). Since the nineties, a clash between optimal use of the resources and the national states willingness to carry out their own national policies has been witnessed. Shared resources are regularly used as a way of exerting pressure on the political scene whether it comes from Uzbekistan turning off the energy tap or Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan exerting control over the rivers flow. When it comes to water management, evidences show that the cooperation between up-stream countries (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) and downstream consumers (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) is required for the development of any sustainable policy but in practice states have mostly been pursuing their own approach (Plottka 2015: 137).

5.1.3 The Dilemma of the Rogun Dam Project

By pursuing their own strategy, Central Asian states have been aiming for self-sufficiency and upstream states are especially adamant about decreasing their reliance on their neighbours (Mosello 2008: 159). Having Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan successively pull out from the common Central Asian Electricity Grid in 2008 effectively left the upstream, more dependent, countries stranded and only further compelled Tajikistan to go ahead with the Rogun Dam project despite strong

disagreements from Uzbekistan (Patnaik 2019). Uzbekistan has occupied a central position within the CAPS as the pipeline system and electricity grid crisscrossed its territory (Olcott 2010 :4) therefore its withdrawal from the unified system de facto prevented energy from transiting through its grid and reaching the two upstream states (Patnaik 2019: 151). This precipitated decision in late October isolated Tajikistan by making energy import from other Central Asia state impossible, especially from Turkmenistan and led to serious energy shortages in the upcoming winter months (Parshin 2009). In order for Tajikistan to become more independent in its energy supply, the Tajik government decided to resume the construction of the Rogun Dam, a HPP located on the Vakhsh river basin, a major tributary of the Amu Darya River. Conceptualised by Soviet engineers in the 1950-60s, the edification of the Rogun Dam started in 1976 but the construction was halted because of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the lack of financing and the breakout of the Tajik Civil War. However, ten years later the project was brought back to the foreground by the Tajik president (Rahmon 2006), raising high concern for Uzbekistan. The Rogun Dam plans were developed with mutual agreement of both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, however with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the views on the construction plans of the dam have drastically changed. Upstream and downstream states have diametrically opposed demands and interests for water management, which is illustrated by the clash in the use of resource between hydropower and irrigation. This project bring Tajikistan farther down the path of energy independence. Once completed, it would be the world tallest dam at 335m and the largest hydroelectric power plant in Central Asia, effectively doubling energy production of Tajikistan (Muratbekova 2018). This increased production would enable the development of energy-intensive industries and generate enough for electricity for export. Tajikistan, being the most upstream states on the Amu Daria, controls 80% of its water flow thus occupies a very important strategic position, especially for the agrarian downstream states (Allouche 2004). The completion of Rogun Dam will inevitable affect the water flow for the downstream countries which is why a proper agreement needs to be reached because the project has the potential to escalate tensions once again. Over the year, the government in Tashkent has raised concerns over the reduction of water resources and has been vocal in its disagreements with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, over their plans to complete major new hydropower schemes, respectively the Rogun and Kambarata power plants. Agriculture is the largest water consumer in the region and a

major employer of the region's workforce, remains one of the prime source of income for Uzbekistan. Reduced water flow from the Amu Darya could lead to the collapse of Uzbekistan's agricultural sector, resulting in a dire social crisis that would affect the broader region (Patnaik 2019; Bologov 2016). Uzbekistan has been adamant to block the construction of the dam and has been accused of putting a lot of pressure on upstream states by frequently halting energy supply to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and restricting the transit of goods to the landlocked country (Patnaik 2016 ; Bologov 2016). Uzbek President Karimov has declared on several occasions that serious interference with water management would not be left unanswered and warned that construction of large HPPs in the region may "lead not only to confrontations, but also to war." (Aminjonov 2015: 116, 189). In September 2016, Islam Karimov passed away and Shavkat Mirziyoyev became the new president of Uzbekistan which resulted in dramatic changes in Uzbekistan's relations with its neighbours and a drastic change of policy when it comes to the Rogun Dam project. During his visit to Dushanbe in 2018, he announced that Uzbekistan no longer objects to the construction of the Rogun HPP and was ready to negotiate on the effective implementation of the project in the interest of both sides (Muratbekova 2018).

This drastic change towards cooperation on water management issue is the focus of this thesis. By focusing on this foreign policy U-turn following the power-transition in Uzbekistan, this research intends to uncover how leader perceptions can impact the state of regional security cooperation in Central Asia ? By observing what changed with regard to how the Rogun Dam project is discussed by leaders, I intend test out if leaders' perception of the project - the way they talk about it - is reflected in their policy choices and therefore confirm if there is a visible correlation between the two.

5.2 Empirical Analysis

This section is dedicated to presenting the finding of the content analysis I conducted and is divided in three parts. I first present separately the two phases of foreign policy, explaining what the discourse reveal of the leader's perceptions on the project and its causal relations with the foreign policy pursued at the time. Finally in the third part, I discuss the key findings and compare them in term of continuity or rupture in the discourse.

5.2.1 Perceptions during the Phase of Opposition

Through the post-Soviet era, relation between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have remained tense, partly due to the involvement of Uzbekistan in the Tajik Civil War but also due to long-lasting disagreements over border demarcation, water and energy supply, transportation. This conflicting attitude has been reflected in the bilateral relations between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan since Tajikistan has announced its plans to resume the construction of the Rogun Dam in order to solve the country's energy shortages and reduce its reliance on Uzbek energy imports. President of Uzbekistan since 1991, Islam Karimov has been consistent in his opposition to the development of more hydro-infrastructure upstream. The issue carries such a weight in the relation between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, that Karimov found necessary to mention it on a state visit to Kazakhstan (Nurshayeva 2012). Although separated by five years, virtually identical speeches were given by the Uzbek minister of Foreign Affairs at 62nd and the 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly, stating and re-stating the opposition of Uzbekistan to the pursuit of the construction by engaging with the same themes (Norov, 2007; Kamilov 2013). He was already raising the alarm when the hydroelectric installation of Toktogul in Kyrgyzstan and Nurek and Kayrakum in Tajikistan — which were primarily intended for irrigation — have been converted to the production of electricity in order to sustain national needs for energy, declaring it a '*unilateral violations of the principles of shared utilisation of the water resources of transboundary rivers*' (Norov 2008). Based on the salience of the political tensions and the constancy of this radical opposition, it can be expected to detect traces of these political tensions in the way the Rogun Dam project is portrayed

in Karimov's speeches, thus reflecting his position towards the project. Although it is clearly in both parties' interests to find a common solution to the ongoing dispute, tensions had remained acute with both sides holding their grounds on hydropower development. Going back to the abstraction of the prisoner's dilemma, I tried and explained earlier that states attitude towards cooperation – whether they would choose defection or cooperation when face with a common issue – was defined by question of gains and losses. This logic of gain and losses is not a specificity of a rationalist conception of international relations as one gain assume that states can act according to their perceived gain and loss, based on their perceptions of the game. Therefore, the question would be: how is the Rogun dam perceived by the Uzbek leadership, and what does it tell us about its policy? The aim is to find connections between how an 'issue' is discussed and the decision-maker's strategy that by examine the underlying perceptions that transpire in the discourse.

Once having analysed the general discourse of Karimov regarding the dam, it can clearly be seen that the project is perceived as a considerable loss for Uzbekistan's interest, jeopardising its economic and environmental security. This view is substantially based on the articulation of the Rogun Dam as a threat to the state by relying on several processes of securitisation, politicisation and othering in the discourse. For the sake of clarity, I present these aspects one after another however it should be made clear that they are simultaneous and deeply interrelated.

First, the question of politicisation refers to the framing operated through the discourse. It reflects on the defining action of the language in use, the way the leader talk about the object ultimately inscribe this object in a specific context, a frame. Examining the example of the Cuba missile crisis, Jutta Weldes explained that the representation of a situation or an object consists in placing it into different ideological frameworks, by the use of different "systems of representation". Therefore, a threat is never "by nature" like the Soviet missile deployment was not an evident aggression but rather, it is always a construction which could then be represented differently. Ultimately, the interpretative actor plays the main role in making sense of the element they perceive (Weldes 1996). In the case of the Rogun Dam, observations show that Karimov undeniably inscribes the project within a deeply political frame, as a matter '*discussed by the United Nations*' (Lillis 2012). Although it may seem obvious that the question of water is deeply political, and I have made that argument

previously it, the dam could be framed many other ways. While it could be discussed solely in term of development project or infrastructural achievement since it is expected to be the tallest dam in the world, it appears to be exclusively seen through the lens of the political. This view of Karimov that the construction of the dam is essentially a political issue can be further illustrated through the following texts:

‘This fact is the essence of the project – to obtain a mechanism, or a tool in other words that will enable its owner to dictate unilaterally the harsh terms of water discharge to downstream countries, especially during vegetation of agricultural crops. Furthermore, taking into account the extreme water scarcity in Central Asia, this mechanism can be converted into explicit tool of political pressure on downstream countries, provoking escalation of confrontation and growth of conflict potential in the region.’ (Azimov 2014)

‘Everything can be so aggravated that this can spark not simply serious confrontation but even wars.’ (Lillis 2012)

The dam is described as a way for Tajikistan to exert control, a political instrument in the making, which at the same time highlights Uzbekistan’s concerns about the dam regarding the potential effect on the flow of water needed for the harvest of the countries. Once the last stage of the construction is completed, Dushanbe would have total control over the flow of the Amu Darya, a fact that is known and dreaded by the Uzbek regime. It constituted one of the main drivers of its opposition as they do not want Tajikistan to be able to exercise such control. The growing self-reliance of Tajikistan also means that Tashkent’s political leverage in Central Asia is diminishing.

Second, the question of securitisation refers to the how the completion of the Rogun dam construction is framed as a threat, a challenge to the security of Uzbekistan from an economic, environmental and social point of view. This aspect is dependent on the politicisation axis mentioned above, on the account that a deeply political issue can easily be further associated into a security discourse. Buzan and Waever explain that securitising actors - here foreign policy elite - make political choices in their understanding of threats, subjectively creating and sharing meaning. Therefore, security is to be understood not through its substance but through its performance, which is the making of security through the speech act. This performance of security through the construction of something as an existential threat to the referent agent is securitization ((Buzan and Wæver 2003: 491; Guzzini 2011: 330-331) The dam project has been deeply securitised and perceived as a threat

through the discourse of the Uzbek leader and his government. This threat perception is being conveyed through several meaningful articulations within the discourse, one of them being that the construction of the dam creates a situation of security emergency for Uzbekistan. Almost every speeches or statements on the topic have been mentioning the Aral Sea, actively drawing implied parallel between the continuation of the dam construction and the occurrence of one of the most dramatic ecological disasters. This recurring occurrence is a testimony of the psychological impact the desertification of the sea had on the mind of the people however it also utilise the event to conjure the threat of seeing a similar tragedy happening again. Hence, any new actions on the rivers are related back to the deterioration of the sea which raises the stakes of the project and press for the urgency of preventing the construction. This association can be better observed in the following statement:

‘The drying up of the Aral Sea is directly related to the rational use of water resources in the region of two major rivers - the Amu Darya and Syr Darya. Any change in the volume and the flow regime of the rivers threatens with an irrevocable disruption of the fragile ecological balance in Central Asia. That is why we cannot agree with some of the approaches to the use of water resources in Central Asia. Any attempt to implement projects on construction of large hydro-structures at the upper reaches of these rivers bearing serious security risks in terms of environmental, social and technological hazards is counterproductive and dangerous.’ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan 2014).

This aspect is regularly repeated throughout several speeches and statements, see also (Kamilov 2014; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan 2016; Norov 2007; 2008; Zhigarev 2014). Even though the name ‘Rogun dam’ is not explicitly mentioned, it is possible to assert that the *‘construction of large hydro-structures at the upper reaches of these rivers’* is referring also to the Rogun dam construction. Weldes described the process of articulation as the binding together of linguistical resources and notions in order to produce contingent and specific representation of the world. Through the process of articulation, events or objects are instilled with meaning and its through the repetition of this articulation that these associated elements come to appear naturally connected, as an accurate representation of reality (Weldes 1996: 284-285). The environmental threat constitutes a nodal point of this rhetorical axis of emergency and in the general discourse. In speeches and statements, the Rogun dam completion is painted as a environmental disaster that would have a far-reaching impact on the entire region. Through the recurring

speeches the dam is being linked with ideas of ‘*irreversible deterioration*’, ‘*disrupt the ecological balance*’, ‘*man-made disasters*’ or ‘*ecological catastrophe*’ with threats of ‘*water deficit*’, ‘*floods*’ and ‘*drought*’ by the mean of repeated associations. By doing this, he brings together the Rogun Dam project and the idea of ecological disaster making them the two sides of the same coin. It also needs to be mention that the speeches are always very one sided, overlooking the potential positive aspects of the dam for upstream population as much as the environmental impact of the large-scale irrigated farming in Uzbekistan. On another aspect, evidences show that the repeated opposition of the Uzbek leadership has not been enough to bury the project. Constant references have been made in the discourse to the upholding of the international standards particularly the UN Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes of 1992 and the Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses of 1997, as they repeatedly state that they ‘*adhere to the principle position of unacceptability of constructing hydropower facilities at the international watercourses without a preliminary endorsement by all interested countries*’(Kamilov 2013). This aspect is regularly repeated throughout several speeches and statements, see also (Kamilov 2013; 2014; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan 2014; Norov 2007; 2008) This repeated reference to necessity of consensus appears at being just a way to indicate that the project should not happen for Tashkent is opposed to the idea therefore no consensus can ever be considered. Variations of that aspect are repeated through the discourse, effectively fuelling the image of emergency by suggesting a blatant non-compliance with principles of international law. This idea of emergency serves the framing of the project as a security issue and a pressing matter. In our case, Karimov securitises the dam project the way he perceives it affecting Uzbekistan’s interests and well-being by equating the loss of water to a matter of national security if not national survival. It is perceived as an economic threat because, since they see evident that the water flow will be badly affected, it would jeopardise the entire agricultural sector which is a recurring theme in the discourse. Uzbekistan’s apprehension is understandable considering that the country is considered as one of the ten states with the lowest freshwater supplies on the planet but a largely agrarian economy (Bologov 2016). Yet, it uncovers the hierarchy in water use that seems clear from Tashkent and enunciated as such:

'First, limited water resources of the region should be used for drinking and sanitary needs, secondly, to ensure food security and environmental needs, and then for industry and energy.' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan 2014)

The argument constantly put forward is the protection of the interest of the people concerned but it never goes all the way as to include the interests of Tajikistan's people in the equation. Yet, as mentioned previously, the status quo of water allocation has not been changed in order to reflect the evolving situation. Only 16-18 per cent of the water is used by Tajikistan itself while downstream countries use the rest of the water. (Abdolvand et al. 2015). The quota are favouring Uzbekistan's interests more than Tajikistan's, reflecting the historical priority given to agriculture in the region. The strong dependence of Tajikistan to energy imports from and through Uzbekistan has given Tashkent leverage to exert political pressure and has resulted in cutting the energy flow several time in the past. Therefore it appears that the protection of parties' interests is closely related to the protection of Uzbekistan's interests through the upholding of the status quo. However, the economic argument is largely related to the question of human security which is actually more salient in the discourse and serves to emphasis the negativity by painting it as a humanitarian catastrophe. The articulation of the dam project with the connotative chain of 'water deficit', 'floods' and 'drought' relates to both ecological and humanitarian repercussions associated with the additional hydropower facility. Due to the large agrarian sector in the Aral sea basin, large segments of population live around waterways which means that accidents or mismanagement on an infrastructure of that scale would jeopardise their physical security and livelihood, causing hunger, unemployment and the mass displacement of millions of people (Zhigarev 2014; Azimov 2014; Norov 2008) . This securitising behaviour can be further understood by looking a Karimov's statement when he was describing the project as a symbol of the old Soviet Union 'megalomania' :

'They're going for the Guinness world record, it would seem, but we're talking here about the lives of millions of people who cannot live without water.' (Nurshayeva 2012)

Going further with the completion of the Rogun Dam is therefore perceived as a threat to the regional stability. Aside from being a threat to Uzbekistan and a challenge to its interests, it would constitute a threat to the stability and peace in the region as a whole

by generating conflicts between population who would then clash to access potable and irrigation water (Avimov 2014; Norov 2007; 2008). The interest of Uzbekistan regarding the non-construction of the Rogun dam is therefore framed as a quest for internal and external security.

The third arc of the threat perception is the notable case of othering which can be noticed in the clear distinction being made between the ‘us’, Uzbekistan and the ‘them’ of Tajikistan and supporters of the project, making them two clearly separated groups with unreconcilable interests. Blame is assigned on Tajikistan for pursuing a project that has been deemed so dangerous and in conflict with international norms. The World Bank (WB) is associated with Tajikistan in the ‘them’ category for their validation of the project, which put them in the opposite camp. The WB agreed to undertake feasibility studies on the dam project, which took several years of assessment and were finalised in 2014. In June of that year, the WB delivered a positive opinion on the construction of the Rogun Dam in its draft report on the Dam’s feasibility which Uzbekistan has deemed unacceptable and strongly condemned on several occasions. The Uzbek leadership made strong accusations about the lack of in-depth studies, the minister of foreign affairs describing it as:

‘anything you want — an essay, a pre-project review, a student assignment — but certainly not professional, skilled and valued expertise.’ (Eurasianet 2015)

The report results have been discredited on scientific ground and their legitimacy questions, as the experts were deemed to not possess the necessary skills nor the experience required, judging their work shallow and unprofessional. On the contrary, Tashkent experts who are better trained for such assessment only needed two days to figure out it was a high-risk construction while the WB consultants could not in several years. It must be mentioned here that I am not judging the validity of the scientific arguments put forward nor the result of the study but merely pointing out the rhetorical mechanism in the Uzbek official discourse. Somehow it suggests that the favourable assessment of the Rogun Dam carried out by the World Bank is wrong because disagreeing with Uzbekistan. Despite the constant reference to international norms used to prevent the project from moving forward, the intervention international organisation is not treated with the equivalent degree of authority. Aside from the incompetency, a nodal point in the discourse is the mistrust towards the other and the harmful intents attributed that has led the Uzbek leadership to perceive ‘them’ as an

adversary with clear intention to harm Uzbekistan's interest. The WB is not just condemned for the scientific discrepancy of the report but mostly for what was perceived as a collusion with Tajikistan in order to push forward the project despite the adverse evidences. The report produced is perceived as not meeting the criteria of impartiality and equal treatment as the WB was siding with Tajikistan from the preliminary stages. On that account, the transparency and the objectivity of their work is heavily questioned because they are said to be actively influencing the results. This articulation is conveyed in the discourse through the repeated iteration of intentional bias and by recurrently using of terms like 'consciously ignored'; 'omission' or 'intentionally misleading'. This view is better illustrated by the following statement:

'It is difficult to interpret this logic other than as intentional desire to hide the project's real threats to the fragile environmental balance of the Central Asia region' (Azimov 2014)

Therefore, the completion of the dam, in the eyes of Karimov, is not longer just an infrastructure project but is rather perceived as a threatening endeavour pushed forward by adversaries willing to harm Uzbekistan's interests in order to pursue their project. The perception is deeply coloured by mistrust, deception and unreconcilable interests, which further fuel and justify their refusal of the report and their opposition to the construction of the dam.

Overall, the way that the leadership perceives the Rogun Dam project relates to the foreign policy choices that were made and plays a role in the justification of said policy choice. Such perceptions, because of its many articulations and connotation, allow for the establishment of one form of foreign policy that exist in the frame of the perception. Weldes clearly explains that once we open the metaphorical black box associated with the state, we see that subjective representation plays a direct role in shaping the national interest of a state and then understanding the representation process helps to understand international politics and foreign policy decisions (Weldes 1996: 279-283). Those representations, or perceptions of the object in our case, enable the state to gain some understanding of its surroundings and its goals thus allowing to make decision and to act in a specific setting. For the Rogun Dam project, it is the representation of a security issue that is characterised by strong threat dimension, deep distrust and conflicting interests which shapes the foreign policy of Uzbekistan. By solely seeing the project in terms of potential loss — loss of control

over Tajikistan, loss of political autonomy, loss of water flow — Karimov put at the centre of the discourse the view that their interests are essentially opposed which includes framing Tajikistan's claim over water usage as illegitimate and overall not acceptable. The impossibility to considering the existence of common ground between the two parties points towards the opposition to the project as the only logical position to adopt for the Uzbek leadership. Furthermore, the process of othering, showing that Tajikistan and its associations are adversaries, creates the image of an enemy that needs to be stopped. The 'them against us' rhetoric points to a need of safeguarding our interests because the other is actively operating against us and cannot be trusted. The increased political power that Tajikistan would have at the expense of Uzbekistan is further reason that make the project unacceptable in the eye of Tashkent because it means being tributary of a country with which it already happens to have sour relations. It was clearly stated on several occasions that:

'Uzbekistan never, and under no circumstances, will provide support to this project' (Azimov 2014)

The idea of cooperation is rendered unthinkable, by the deeply conflictual and threatening perceptions that the leaders hold on the Rogun Dam project. The Uzbek leadership does not seem capable of accepting the possibility to find common ground, and that cooperation might be the best way to not be the loser of the game as the dam project is going forward. None of these speeches contain any actual practical solutions other than refusing the continuation of the project. The overall discourse clearly assigns blame to Tajikistan for being the source of every insecurity and potential negative fallouts. However, he never mentions how his government failed to address the growing water scarcity in the region or the impact of water-intensive cotton production which may also be an important issue to acknowledge. Moreover, the perception of the completion of the Rogun Dam as a threat to the security of the state and the region and the salient emergency connotation it has, paves the ground for strong position to be taken. Apart from fuelling the general opposition, painting the project as a security threat and a "sword of Damocles" also allows for the development of a more belligerent rhetoric from the Uzbek leader in order to face the threat that is the infrastructure project. This can be found in the recurring menacing tone of the allocutions on the topic for instance when the Minister of Foreign Affairs declared that:

In the case of infliction of damage all measures must be taken to liquidate or abate such damage (Norov 2007)

However, it was mostly noticed when Karimov himself enunciated the barely veiled threat of resorting to force if the dam was completed when he declared in 2012:

“I won’t name specific countries, but all of this could deteriorate to the point where not just serious confrontation, but even wars could be the result. (Nurshayeva 2012)

Overall, the absolute opposition from the start and the articulation of the project only in matters of loss, threats and adversary intention contributed to render any idea of agreements impossible. How could the Uzbek leadership come to accept to compromise on something that had been made a national threat over and over throughout the years? Above all, it appears that the perception of the leader regarding the Rogun dam project echoes the clearly observable isolationist and cooperation-adverse position that has been adopted on the international scene. The entire frame of reference that transpire from the discourse does not leave much ground for the possibility of cooperation between the two states.

5.2.2 Perceptions during the Cooperation-Prone Period

When he became president in 2016, Shavkat Mirziyoyev could have followed the footsteps of his predecessor but instead he has cautiously worked on the de-escalation of tensions and committed to the improvement of relations with Tajikistan. Improvements in the relation with Kyrgyzstan also followed even though tensions around resources and border demarcations have remained a constant in the past. These improvements in the bilateral relation with Tajikistan have been illustrated by Tajikistan’s President Emomali Rahmon’s first visit to Uzbekistan in almost two decades. It has been regarded as an historical visit that could change the relation between the two states and Mirziyoyev himself described it has “an important political event in the new history of Uzbek-Tajik relations, demonstrating a firm commitment to further expand our cooperation” (Sorbello 2018). It was followed with the resumption of transport links and easing of visa regulations which have undoubtedly contributed to the normalisation of the relation and to the building of a

partnership between the two states, as well as benefited Tajikistan's economy which had suffered from the punitive measures adopted by Uzbekistan's government (Lemon 2016). Although the relations have considerably improved in the past years, it is difficult to predict how far can the partnership go.

The perception of the Rogun Dam project by Tajikistan's President Emomali Rahmon has been characterised by its constancy throughout the years. The main elements constituent of said perception is the view that the Rogun dam is a national project a) necessary to guarantee energy independence from its neighbours, b) to meet the needs of the population and c) constitute an opportunity to achieve economic prosperity (Rahmon 2008; 2011; 2012; 2017; 2020; 2021). Repeatedly throughout the years, he described the dam as a way to *'provide the population with electricity and gas'* (Rahmon 2008) as Dushanbe *'intend to achieve complete power self-sufficiency in the country'* (Rahmon 2012) and its completion would give an *'impetus to developing and expansion of all economic spheres of Tajikistan'* (Rahmon 2011). In this regard, evidences show that there has been no significant changes when it comes to the project being carried out. Observable changes reside in the relation with the Uzbek leadership. As a relation always implies at least two parties, shifts occurring on one side (here the change of leader in Uzbekistan) is expected to trigger changes within the whole relation because the actors of this relation have changed. Rahmon's statements following the power transition indicate that Tajikistan has welcomed the new impetus given by Mirziyoyev and has a positive outlook on the possibility to develop further cooperation with Uzbekistan. As illustrated by the following statement:

'We warmly welcome your decisive steps towards forming an atmosphere of friendship and good-neighborliness in our common home.' (President of the Republic of Tajikistan 2018)

It seems to indicate that the Tajik position on the relations with Uzbekistan evolved with the power transition which ultimately is to be expected for the reason I mentioned just above. While it does not affect the Tajik position towards the construction itself, it seems to allow for a restart in the relation between the two states. Evidences have shown that the relation between the two states was deeply personal and significantly filtered by their respective leaders, and was characterised by a

mistrust that has been fuelled by successive incidents of cutting gas supplies or blocking shipments. As illustrated by that statement made by Rahmon in 2009:

'We used to call him 'otamiz' ('our father' in Uzbek), but then a lot of stuff came to the surface. This man was fighting against the entire Tajik people ... he doesn't want the development of our nation, he blocks roads, cuts off our electricity during the winter.' (Eurasianet 2016)

Following the power transition, the long-lasting tensions that characterised the relation between the two leaders do not seem to perpetuate with Mirziyoyev in power. Rahmon has welcomed this change from his predecessor and specifically acknowledged the role of Mirziyoyev in operating such change. As illustrated by the following statement:

'In this regard, I would like to emphasize the important contribution of His Excellency Shavkat Miromonovich to the creation of prerequisites and the formation of the necessary conditions for the transfer of our interaction to a qualitatively new direction of development.[...]Shavkat Miromonovich, as a faithful supporter of strengthening cooperation with his neighbors in the region did everything in his power to create the basis for the consistent and multifaceted development of our relations.' (Rahmon 2018)

It has to be taken into consideration that Tajikistan remains the poorest country in Central Asia with a high dependence on labour remittances and whose main wealth is its water resources and hydropower capacity (USAID 2022). On the contrary, Uzbekistan is way more powerful both in terms of economy and political influence within the region and beyond, resulting in a significant power asymmetry in the relation between both states. While Rahmon's position towards Uzbekistan might have change, it becomes more arduous to study the evolution of leaders' perceptions when the very object of the perception (here the leader of Uzbekistan and its policy towards the dam) has changed.

Regarding the question of water-related tensions of the Karimov era, evidences show that drastic changes were operated with the accession of Mirziyoyev to the presidency of Uzbekistan. This change of policy has been accompanied by a perceptible change in the official discourse regarding the Rogun dam project, the questions of water management and the regional attitude in general. The rhetoric coming from Mirziyoyev's government is certainly less confrontational. Firstly, the underlying process of othering disappear from the discourse as the leadership does not describe relation as a them against us anymore. Rather, a common thread of unity is

present in the discourse as Uzbekistan is made part of a regional framework, emphasising the ties it has with its neighbour states within the region and can be seen in several statements, see (Khakimov 2022; Mirziyoyev 2018). Uzbekistan is part of a system, which is further illustrated by this statement pronounced by Mirziyoyev at the occasion of Emomali Rahmon's first visit to Uzbekistan in 2018:

'Uzbekistan and Tajikistan people are like two branches of one tree, two tributaries of one river. We have one religion, common land and water. We are together in joy and sorrow, united by one destiny. Continuing good traditions of our ancestors, we must strengthen and preserve the friendship of our people.' (Mirziyoyev 2018)

Noticeably, the use of strong metaphors to conjure up the closeness of Tajiks and Uzbeks, and the repeated use of the terms 'we', 'common' and 'united' emphasise the idea of shared resources, shared territory as well as common history and culture. As it is a joint statement, it also indicates that there has been a similar turn of rhetoric on the Tajik side. Occurrences of such vocabulary can be found in Rahmon's speeches when he calls Mirziyoyev *'my dear friend and brother'*, talks about *'the great joy of our brotherly nations'* (Rahmon 2018) and of *'our peoples with a shared history and culture.'* (Rahmon 2022). This point is further illustrated by the following statement pronounced by Rahmon during this visit:

'Our peoples are bound by centuries-old traditions of friendship, good-neighborliness and mutual respect.' (President of the Republic of Tajikistan 2018)

More generally, the themes of the region, regional initiative and Central Asia as a whole are recurring elements in the speeches and statements analysed from the Taskent administration, further reinforcing the perception of Uzbekistan as part of a system. These inter-relations with other Central Asian states are presented in the light of their common security issues such as drug trafficking, transnational organised crime, illegal arms trade and illegal migration, and the resulting need to strengthen regional peace and stability (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan 2018). Rather than being a source of tensions, these common issues are associated with the idea of common interests and a resulting need to develop a regional cooperative approach to tackle them. This proves especially recurrent when the case of water management is discussed, see also (Eurasianet 2017; Ministry of Foreign

Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan 2018; Mirziyoyev 2017; 2018). For instance Uzbek foreign minister, Abdulaziz Kamilov said that:

‘There is no alternative to regional cooperation in water use. [...]We must come to such a regional agreement, when each country will clearly understand its rights and obligations.’(Gazeta 2017, translated by the author)

The portraying of the Aral Sea is also part of this representation even if its importance in the discourse appears less salient than in the past. The Aral Sea is under different articulation process and is not associated with the completion of the Rogun Dam. Rather than a threat of history repeating itself, it serves as incentive for developing and implementing international initiatives. Referring back to the prisoner’s dilemma and mirroring explanation of the previous section, it appears that in the discourse conveyed by Mirziyoyev and his government the question of cooperation is perceived in terms of gains as it associated with the best way for the state to advance its interests.

Secondly, and based on what was previously exposed, it seems that the perception of the Rogun Dam has shifted from being constructed as a threat to being seen as an opportunity. With the new President Mirziyoyev, it seems that there is a will to improve the relation with Tajikistan, to forge a stable and cooperative partnership. As demonstrated earlier, the president has on several occasions stressed the ‘special ties’ and the ‘friendship’ bidding the two countries together (Khakimov 2022), shaping the relation in a way that makes possible to consider common ground and the development of a partnership. However, what is more important to see are the elements that are not in Mirziyoyev’s discourse. Many structural and recurring elements that were characteristic of Karimov’s discourse, as I presented them in the previous section, have disappeared from the new presidency’s rhetoric. This absence is quite significant in itself as it first means that the discourse of threat, danger and mistrust is not perpetuated anymore and therefore marks a discontinuity between the past and the present discourses. This silence was equally interpreted by the Tajik leadership as a possible sign of an agreement towards the construction of the Rogun Dam and the end of Tashkent previously uncompromising position (Crisis Group 2017). This interpretation was further confirmed when Uzbekistan stated its support to the continuation of the dam construction. It included the issue of signing a joint statement during Rahmon first visit, which mentioned that:

‘The Uzbek side expressed its readiness to comprehensively consider the possibility of participating in the construction of hydropower facilities in the Republic of Tajikistan, including Roghun HPP.’ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan 2018)

This discursive shift has also been illustrated by action. While so far there is not any explicit declaration that would confirm the decision to build the Rogun dam together, official agreements have recently been signed between both parties where Uzbekistan commits to purchase electricity from Tajikistan’s Roghun plant. The electricity would be delivered from the plant over the summer months, when hydroelectric power generation peaks due to the seasonal release needed for irrigation (Eurasianet 2022). The Uzbek leadership has been stressing the importance of cooperation and the development of regional partnership in question of water management issues, highlighting the centrality of hydropower construction in this endeavour. Indeed, a structural element of the official discourse conveyed by Mirziyoyev and his government is the overarching theme of cooperation and dialogue which is repeated throughout speeches and statements. It is stressed that they are committed to a ‘constructive political dialogue’ that is ‘based on mutual trust’, and that they want to ‘raise bilateral relations to a high level’ and develop ‘long-term cooperation’ in order to address intra-regional problems and common security issues as well as to promote the interests of both countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan 2018; Mirziyoyev 2018).

This view on cooperation is tightly articulated around concepts of international law, its norms and standards and the necessity to uphold them in order to guarantee respect of the interests of all states of the region. This articulation is better illustrated by the statement made by Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Komilov’s when asked about Uzbekistan’s position towards the dam in 2017:

‘The position of principle remains that during the construction of such dams, the interests of both upstream and downstream countries should be considered. We do not say that our Tajik friends should stop the construction of the Rogun Dam. Go ahead and build it, but we hold to certain guarantees in accordance with these conventions that have been signed by you.’ (Eurasianet 2017)

This statement clearly shows that the promotion of national interest is still central in the discourse, and Uzbekistan is maintaining its position on the points that are perceived as key in the interests of the state. But in that case, and against the

background of the other aspects I exposed, we can say that if national interest remains central, the policy adopted to pursue it is different. The reference to international law is not used as an obstacle to block any new hydropower infrastructure to be build upstream but rather as a guarantee to equal distribution of water and a reminder that all parties' interests, not just Uzbekistan's, must remain one of the main concerns throughout the whole project. While in one case the advancement of the state's interests could solely be considered through the lens of isolationist policy, under Mirziyoyev it is perceived as better served through the promotion of cooperation with regional partners which ultimately gives way to two diametrically different foreign policies.

When comparing with Karimov's two decades of presidency, the new presidency of Mirziyoyev is shorter and more importantly, still on-going, therefore talks about drastic and long-lasting changes need to be qualified. Yet we can see that the new discourse of the Uzbek leadership is framing the topic of the Rogun dam in a way that render cooperation and the pursuit of common interest a possibility, if not the most desirable outcome to further the pursuit of national interests. It partly relies on constant association of common regional issues with the need to find common solution for the benefit of all parties which is a new dimension in the Uzbek discourse. The new policy that seems to be adopted by Tashkent regarding the promotion of dialogue and the bolstering of partnership in the region can be associated with this new framing. Indeed, the shift in the discourse reflects a shift in the perception of the Rogun dam by the Uzbek leadership: if before the dam was clearly perceived as a threat to be eliminated, now it can be considered as an opportunity to build a stable partnership, thus putting the relation between the two states at a turning point. While the perception of the dam might have changed with the new president of Uzbekistan, its recentness and the ongoing aspect of the project lead to some uncertainty as to whether the dam can be a point of reconciliation or can return to be a point of conflict. However, it is clear that this shift is also associated with changes in the way Uzbekistan perceives Tajikistan. While it is clear that Tajikistan was previously seen as a menacing neighbour that could turn off the water tap and jeopardise the state's security, it is now it is mostly as a potential partner with whom Uzbekistan can develop a mutual beneficial relationship, despite the remaining risks.

5.2.3 Key Findings & Implications

This section is dedicated to summarising and comparing the key findings of the discourse analysis conducted on speeches and statements of the two Uzbek leaderships. The findings have previously been presented chronologically with a difference made between the two major periods which make it easier for the researcher to identify elements of continuity and rupture in the leaders' perception of the Rogun Dam construction plans between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. We previously established that perceptions are expressed through the discourse and shape a state's foreign policy. Therefore, these are the two main aspects that emerge from this analysis with respect to Karimov's and Mirziyoyev's discourse and are central in making sense of the apparent policy changes because it is through their discourse that both countries construct their political reality according to their perception and interpretation of the word.

To begin with, we can notice some continuity between Karimov's and Mirziyoyev's discourse when it comes to presenting the question of water management as one of the main security challenges in the region. In that regard, national interests remain a nodal point of both discourse and is centred around the upholding of Uzbekistan access to water for sanitation and mostly irrigation in order to sustain the country's large agrarian sector. The protection of downstream countries continuous access to water is a common thread and is presented as a necessary guarantee for the project to carry on. In both cases this argument is made on the ground of the norms and standards of international law. There is a constant reminder that the water sharing agreements shall be respected and that no project should go forwards without securing the interests of all the countries impacted by the project in question and guaranteeing a fair access to freshwater. These claims are legitimised because they respect the general principles of international law which gives them a character of universality and objectivity. Yet the denotation did not change as much as the connotation did, where the most significant variation can be observed. In the case of Karimov, the rhetoric is employed as an obstacle to prevent any additional hydropower infrastructures to be built upstream while for Mirziyoyev it is used an international guarantee that Uzbekistan's interest shall be taken into account

throughout the realisation of the project and the operating of the plant or compensation will be required.

Ultimately the way national interests are regarded by the Tashkent administration has not changed with the change of presidency however we see that the clear rupture resides in the policy adopted to pursue these interests. The change of behaviours is fundamentally related to the perceptions of each leader regarding the completion of the dam and what policy is made acceptable by the leader's perception of the Rogun Dam project. Through Karimov's discourse we can see that Uzbekistan is perceived as an island whose national interests are better served by an isolationist foreign policy. The dam is a deeply securitised project that is essentially perceived in terms of threats and hostility towards Uzbekistan which gives rise to a belligerent rhetoric where Tajikistan is an enemy. Because no common interests are perceived and the players cannot be trusted, the question of cooperation is completely dominated by a perception of loss. On the contrary in the discourse conveyed under Mirziyoyev's leadership, we can see the pursuit of national interests is articulated around the idea of common regional issues and the resulting necessity to develop regional solution if one wants to achieve any conclusive results. Therefore, cooperation is perceived in terms of gain because there are the opportunity (not the guarantee) and the incentives for players to collaborate in the advancement of common interests. It is interesting to note that, as Prime Minister of Uzbekistan, Mirziyoyev also took part conveying Uzbekistan's opposition to the project. A representative example is the letter he addressed on July 19, 2016 to his counterpart, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Tajikistan K.Rasulzoda (Mirziyoyev 2016). The letter restated that Tajikistan should refrain from pursuing this project for risk of damaging its relationships with neighbour countries and further risking the environmental, social and economic security of the region. The general tone and the wording used appeared more moderate than the other speeches and statement analysed during that period, however it is not significant enough to make any conclusions on the Prime Minister intents or opinions at that time however it further indicate the dominance of the leader in shaping the official discourse. When it comes to question of cooperation, we see that both perception are deeply polarised between view of loss and gain, producing cooperation-prone and cooperation-averse frame of reference. In the first case we can see that the perception of the Rogun dam shape the reality in a way where the idea of

cooperation is rendered unthinkable because ultimately threatening the state's interests and security. In the second period, the changed perception of the dam is generating a frame of reference where cooperation appears as a rational choice and potentially the best way to safeguard the national interests.

Taking everything into consideration, we can conclude that there is a visible connection between a leader perception and the likelihood of seeing the emergence of security cooperation therefore confirming our initial hypothesis that decision-makers perception are defining factors in a the shaping of foreign policy. In this case, the two distinct perceptions that the leaders have of the Rogun dam give way to the construction of different frames in which they can act and draft policies which contribute to shape what is acceptable, what reactions and interpretation one can have, and on the contrary what is unthinkable in this frame reality. These processes are not separated but rather simultaneous, in the sense that the foreign policy shaped by perceptions is directly affecting the reality in a way that further reinforce the perceptions in a self-sustaining circle. However, there is one significant aspect to take into consideration which qualifies the polarity of the findings. When Mirziyoyev came to power in 2016, the dam construction was further along. We were not talking about the potential revival of a soviet project as it started under Karimov and which was still very hypothetical at the beginning. In 2016, the WB had already published a favourable report several years ago, European investors were involved and the beginning of the construction had already begun thus it appears that it was becoming too late to actually opposed the construction of the dam. Therefore, Mirziyoyev's policy can also be seen as being mostly an acceptance of the status quo and an attempts play the cards he was given in order to maximise his state's interest in an already existing situation. However, it is important to underline that those major changes had already occurred or where far underway under Karimov leadership, yet they did not appear to have trigger the same changes which further seem to indicate that changes in the payoff structure are not enough to account for such situations. The death of Karimov and the resulting change of leader after twenty-five years constituted an unexpected occasion to make a fresh start and mend the relationship with Dushanbe as it was increasing its influence over the Amu Darya. One can imagine that such U-turn would have been harder to undertake without the clear change of leader.

6. Conclusion

The primary aim of the thesis was to investigate the stalling of regional security cooperation in Central Asia and more specifically, to study the relation between leader perception and the likelihood of security cooperation in a setting where incentives to cooperate were high due to the salient of transboundary issues and the significant interdependence of the states forming the region. The study engaged the literature on security cooperation starting with the rationalist approach and the dominance of the international system as a level of analysis. Finding that this approach has significant limitations when it comes to explaining the low level of cooperation in Central Asia even though it appears as the rational expected outcomes, another complementary theoretical approach was adopted for this research. This more-fitted theoretical framework intended to address the limitations of this rationalist approach and to provide with a complementary leadership-focused approach by shifting the focus towards the individual level of analysis and its relevance in making sense of the Central Asian case. This approach stressed the impossibility for actors to objectively grasp their reality which implies that they cannot be considered as unitary rational actors but rather the sum of their own subjectivities, their belief system and ideational framework. In the case of decision-makers, it meant that no decision can be taken objectively as they always operate according to their perceptions of the reality. Therefore, it presupposed that foreign policy decision are being shaped by the perceptions of the decision-makers. In order to better understand the questions of cooperation and make sense of political behaviour, one shall open the black box of the state and study the perception of the decision-makers on the issues in questions.

In order to test out that theory, a case study was conducted on the case of the Rogun Dam which touched upon the question of water management and security. Being a controversial topic, this infrastructure project has first been vehemently and consistently opposed by the Uzbek leadership. However, the position drastically changed following the death of the leader of twenty-five years as the new president started to show acceptance towards the construction of the dam and pushed for more cooperation with their Tajik neighbour. The study aimed at analysing each leader perception of the Rogun Dam and identify how they relate to the different foreign policy behaviours displayed. To do so, a discourse analysis was conducted on the

speeches and statements produced by each leadership regarding the Rogun dam project, looking for themes and patterns in the discourse that would reflect two distinct perceptions of the dam, mirroring the two different policies carried out by the Uzbek presidents. The analysis aimed at determining what type of discourses and perceptions are associated with the Rogun Dam project by each leader and how it leads to either cooperation or the absence of it.

The results of the discourse analysis show two drastically opposed perceptions that can respectively categorised cooperation-adverse and cooperation-prone. The official discourse under Karimov's presidency is characterised by the dominance of threat perception as the dam is perceived as a security threat and Tajikistan as an adversary. The profound distrust and the view of their interest as being unreconcilable renders any form of cooperation a matter of loss and can jeopardise the interests of the state. On the contrary, the official discourse under Mirziyoyev's presidency proves to be devoid of this threat articulation as the Rogun Dam is seen as an opportunity to develop partnership with Tajikistan over the central issue of water management. The question of common security issues is central and leads to regional cooperation being seen as the most suitable outcomes to advance common interests and ensure the pursuit of Uzbekistan's national interests. That being said, we identified that leader perception shape foreign policy by generating the subjective frame in which the leader can operate. The frame generated by the leader's perception effectively guides the leader's possibilities of actions by indicating what is conceivable and what is not. It identifies what are the acceptable or the most optimal outcomes, not according to rational interpretation of the situation but rather based on a deeply personal perception of the reality. Overall the analysis has confirmed our initial expectation by proving that there is a correlation between a leader perception and the likelihood of cooperation occurring on the basis that the leader need have a perception of the security issues that allows for cooperation to be an acceptable outcome and for common interests to be considered.

This research contributes to the general scholarship on security cooperation and gives further insight on the specific of Central Asia and water management challenges. Yet, water management and more specifically the case of the Rogun Dam are quite narrow topics that logical generates case specific results. In order to improve the validity of this research, it would be necessary to replicate it by focusing on leader

perceptions in other settings than the Rogun dam project which could include focusing on other transboundary security challenges such as the question of terrorism or drug trafficking that are also quite significant in Central Asia. The aim would be to see if the variations of leader perceptions observed in this study and their relation to the generation of a new policy approach towards cooperation, holds for other security challenges.

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