

CASI Research Project Description

International relations and geopolitics within Central Asia have predominantly been examined through the lens of external actors (Russia, China, US), otherwise known as Great Game politics. While this is nonetheless important, little is written on foreign relations between the Central Asian states themselves. This leaves a glaring hole in academia as to how Central Asian governments, in particular the Kyrgyzstan-Kazakhstan relationship, communicate and interact with each other. Also, this typical relationship between nation-states has an interesting dichotomy. Since both nations' governments are patrimonial in nature, the informal institutions and means of conducting statecraft are just as critical, if not more so, than the formal institutions identifiable in all countries. This use of formal and informal structures in regards to international relations in Central Asia is an area that is important for analysis, as it will assist others in understanding the evolving regimes in the area.

The aim of my research at CASI is to examine the Kyrgyzstan-Kazakhstan relationship in regards to international relations. This has taken on all new prescience with Kyrgyzstan's accession to the Eurasian Economic Union, of which Kazakhstan is a founding member. This adds a new wrinkle in already vibrant regional political setting. My research will seek to bring to light how the two countries use formal and informal structures to communicate and conduct normal affairs in the realm of economics, politics, and regional cooperation. Likewise, it will identify old and new players in the national settings that have been or are integral to state relations, as personalities are at times more important than government agencies or other institutional bodies. This work will draw inspiration and partial framework from Henry Hale's most recent publication, *Patronal Politics*, in which he highlights and outlines the degree to which patronal tendencies and structures influence governance and interactions in these countries.

A few of the questions I seek to ask and answer are: Through which channels (formal and informal) are state relations conducted and to what degree? Do vertical relationships of patrimonialism allow for bridging in regards to foreign relations? To what extent do international organizations (SCO, CIS, EEU, CSTO) provide a venue for bilateral relations?