Competing perspectives on democracy and democratization: assessing alternative models of democracy promoted in Central Asian states

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Abstract   *This study examines alternative understandings of democracy and democracy promotion advanced by the US, EU, Russia and China in Central Asia using frame analysis. In the context of this study, 'frames' refer to the relatively cohesive sets of beliefs, categories and value judgments as well as specific ways in which these ideas are packaged for the targets of international democratization. The study assesses the implications of alternative representations of democracy promotion and competing models of governance for the prospects of democratization in Central Asia. It concludes that the substance of the US and EU democracy promotion in Central Asia has neglected the cultural and political contexts of these states, while the Russian and Chinese models of governance and development have provided a better match to the interests of the ruling elites.*

Introduction

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and emergence of the newly independent states, the Western governments, non-governmental agencies and international organizations launched multiple assistance programs in the region in pursuit of varied foreign policy aims. There were legitimate concerns about the new governments' ability to cope with the plethora of social, economic and security problems. There were also hopes that, with the Western help, these countries would transform themselves into open market economies and democratic states. In practice, however, the outcomes of international efforts at democracy promotion in the post-Soviet territory have not tallied with the donors' expectations. The republics of Central Asian clearly manifest this trend.

It has long been assumed that the main sources of resistance to democracy in the region are rooted in the Central Asian authoritarian regimes (Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe 2004; USAID 2011). The leaders of these states view genuine democracy as the gravest threat to their authority, and, therefore, resist all efforts at democracy promotion from abroad. While acknowledging considerable obstacles to democratization inhering in Central Asia, the study shifts its focus on the nature of democracy promotion policies themselves. It examines the substance of external initiatives of the United States, the European Union, Russia and China seeking to exercise their influence on the Central Asian states. The idea is to spotlight differences in perspectives on democracy and democracy promotion among Western donors and to show how the elasticity of these concepts enables even non-democratic governments to claim adherence to democratic norms. Furthermore, democracy and democracy promotion can be contested through the propagation of alternative governance forms. Which perspective dominates policy debates at any given time can substantially influence the outcomes of international democratization.

To discern alternative ways in which democracy and democracy promotion are construed, presented, and contested in Central Asia, this study relies on the theoretical and methodological particulars of frame analysis, a theoretical perspective and methodological

approach for examining people's perception and representation of social and physical reality. In the broadest meaning, the notion of 'frames' denotes relatively cohesive sets of beliefs, assumptions, categories, and value judgments as well as specific ways in which these are packaged for the targets of international democratization (Entman 1993; Schön and Rein 1994). Discussed at greater length in section two, these two aspects of frames – as conceptual scaffolds and discursive representations - are consistent with the conceptual and discursive dimensions of the substance of democracy promotion featured in this special issue (see introductory article). Since the practices of democracy promotion are informed by the language that imparts them with meanings and implicated in their social representations, this study also overviews the implementation priorities pursued by the US and EU in Central Asia. This analytical angle is consistent with the implementation dimension of the substance of democracy promotion.

The study begins with the introduction of the framing perspective and a brief discussion of the methodological aspects of research. Next, it presents the US and EU democracy promotion frames established on the basis of some common aspects of representation of democracy promotion in the language of their policy statements. This is followed by the analysis of views and perspectives on democracy and democratization advocated by Russia and China along with their discursive presentations of the alternative models of governance. The last section of the study provides a summary and comparative analysis of the alternative interpretations of democracy and international democratization and assesses their implications for the prospects of democracy promotion in Central Asian states.

Framing Perspective on Democracy Promotion

The ontogenesis of the framing perspective is credited to Erving Goffman, a Canadian-born sociologist who argued that individual experiences were organized around basic cognitive structures imparting meanings on events that would otherwise be meaningless to people (Goffman 1974). What Goffman termed 'frames,' modern psychologists often refer to as 'cognitive models', 'schemas', or 'scripts' rendering an occurrence meaningful and shaping future expectations. In other words, frames, cognitive models, and other mental models are ways to describe the nature of thought processes that underlie individuals' perceptions, views and decision-making.

Over the course of development of the framing perspective in multiple disciplines – psychology, management and organizational studies, linguistics, sociology, communications and media studies, to name a few - frames as 'mini-theories' assisting individuals in interpreting the world have been theoretically differentiated from frames that are deliberately manufactured for making some aspects of reality more salient than others (Entman 1993, 52; Goffman 1974, 10). It is in this second meaning that the framing perspective has been predominantly utilized in political science research exploring the role of political issue definitions for agenda setting and formation of voters' preferences (Daviter 2007). Despite gaining increasing popularity in the literature on policy making and public opinion, framing perspective has been underutilized in the studies of international relations. The topic of democracy promotion, however, is particularly suitable for frame analysis.

Democracy and democracy promotion are organized set of ideas reflecting social experiences with certain political processes and institutions, meanings that have been ascribed to these practices over time, and expectations of certain types of behaviour

consistent with these concepts. The contributions to this special issue convincingly demonstrate the importance of donors' own experiences with democracy and the secondary role of recipients' needs in shaping their understanding of democracy and democracy promotion. As the democratic experiences of societies differ, so do the meanings of democracy and derivative terms. Today, there exist a range of theoretical perspectives and meanings of these terms reflected in different political models of democracy. The concept of frames is meant to discern the structure of meanings that concepts, such as democracy and democracy promotion, carry with them to provide the content to these concepts.

Since conceptual meanings are inseparable from experiences that both inform and embody them, ideas manifest themselves through behavioural and verbal communication. Democracy and democracy promotion 'exist' through the day-to-day practices of democracy and democracy assistance and discourse. It is through the language as a complex system of words, rules, structures and associated meanings that strategies and instruments of international democratization become intelligible for targets and agents of democratization. Frame analysis is a method for analysing communications or discourse. It is premised on the idea that any issue described in the language of concepts can be approached from different perspectives and conveyed in different ways, and these varied representations can appeal to different sets of values, considerations, and audiences (Druckman 2004).

For the purpose of this study, I consider frames as unconsciously used 'mini-theories' about democracy or alternative forms of governance, but also conscious efforts at representing these issues with the purpose of influencing perceptions and actions of other states. This is because foreign policy statements often contain direct appeals to the targets of communication issued with the goal of effecting a behavioural change in them. These deliberate attempts at presenting an issue in certain ways are also reflective of the 'broadly shared beliefs, values, and perspectives familiar to the members of a societal culture' (Schön and Rein 1994, p. xiii). In other words, the discourses of democracy promoters are not independent of their ideas about international democratization. Although these two aspects of frames are interrelated, I differentiate them for the analytical purposes and greater consistency with the conceptual dimensions of the substance of democracy promotion adopted in this special issue. 'Frames' will denote the mental conceptual scaffolds of democracy promoters, whereas 'framing' will be used to designate a discursive process by which the agents of normative influence promote a particular understanding of democracy and democracy promotion by selecting some normative claims, assumptions, and causal explanations and packaging them in such ways as to affect perceptions and actions of the targets of communication.

Frames are commonly analysed from the actual language of official documents using techniques of discourse analyses. I content analysed a sample of 54 speeches and documents pertaining to the topic of democracy and democracy promotion from the US and EU, and 36 – from Russia and China. To ensure the comparability of documents, I selected foreign policy and security concepts, strategies toward Central Asia, and major speeches of the key foreign policy makers from each international actor. Several search strategies were used to identify the documents. Lexus-Nexus Academic search engine was used to identify texts with high relevance to the topic of democracy and democratization and also select those texts that were widely cited in international and local press. The lists of speeches and documents were triangulated through citations appearing in Western, Russian, and Chinese publications on the US and EU strategies of democracy promotion and resistance to international democratization by Russia and China.

The conceptual understanding of frames as conceptual scaffolds and discursive representations guided my content analysis of the documents. To discern the mental frames, I examined whether the agents speaking on behalf of states converge on a particular understanding of democracy, what this understanding entails, and what differences, if any, transpire in the official discourse on democratization. Using a popular conceptualization of democracy as consisting of two basic components – electoral (free and fair elections) and liberal (rule of law and human rights) – I asked what practices and institutions go into the making of democracy and democracy assistance, whether those practices are treated as universal or not, and what beliefs and values underpin these understandings. To study discursive representations of these issues, I read the documents with the view of discerning those aspects of the understanding of democracy that are prioritized in the discourse as evidenced from the sheer number of references to certain dimensions of democratization and interpretations used in reference to them.

In terms of the agents of democracy promotion speaking on behalf of the US, I selected the US presidents, US Congress and Department of State, and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). These are the institutions that together define, communicate, and implement initiatives associated with democracy promotion (for further discussion, see Melia 2005). The majority of texts examined for this study were published after 2000, a year that brought to power a new administration of President Bush in the US, and President Putin in Russia. The former, an outspoken proponent of democracy promotion, articulated a position that has become associated with the US perspective on international democratization. President Putin, whose first two terms passed under the banner of restoring Russia's great power status in global politics, reinvigorated Moscow's foreign policy in Central Asia. His administration launched ideological crusade against the Western efforts at promoting democracy worldwide.

In the context of the EU, where the main competences for the design and implementation of democracy promotion programs reside in the European Commission and the Council of Ministers, I analysed the key policy documents related to democracy promotion in Central Asia issued by these agencies and their representatives since 2005. A shorter timeframe is selected due to a major overhaul of the instruments of the EU cooperation with Central Asia that began happening around that time.

Neither Russia nor China is a democracy promoter in the same sense as the EU and US. However, both Moscow and Beijing have stated openly their positions on democracy and international democratization and disseminated their own views and ideas about the proper forms of governments to domestic and international audiences. Some of these ideas and expectations have been embedded in Russian and Chinese foreign policy expressions toward the Central Asian states, or included into their own security doctrines and national policies (Bader, Grävingholt, and Kästner 2010; Kavalski 2007). To discern the Russian and Chinese perspectives on democracy and democratization, I examined statements of the Russian and Chinese leaders – presidents, prime ministers, and foreign policy ministers in Russia, and General Secretaries of the Communist Party of China (CCP), members of Politburo, presidents, and vice-presidents in China. Despite the emergence of new forces affecting politics and foreign policies in these states, foreign policy decision-making is still centralized in Russia and China and decisively shaped by the president or leaders of the CCP in tandem with a small circle of political elites.

Western democracy promotion frames

Immediately following the breakup of the Soviet Union, both the US and EU expressed interest in engaging with the states of Central Asia. Initially, it was the US that became their prime benefactor of democracy assistance formalized in the 1992 Freedom for Russia and Emerging Eurasian Democracies and Open Markets (FREEDOM) Support Act and a series of bi-lateral agreements (Yazdani 2007). In the 1990s, the EU-Central Asia cooperation was largely limited to technical, humanitarian, and economic assistance stemming from the individual Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) signed with Central Asian states[1] (Urdze 2011).

The 9/11 attacks rekindled a flurry of American and European activity in Central Asia. Security concerns in addition to energy considerations became more prominent in the US and EU relations with Central Asian states. Despite the elevated strategic importance of the region, the official discourses of the US and EU administrations continued playing up their normative commitments to these states by rendering democracy assistance as a necessary, if not inevitable, element of their foreign policy. President Bush rhetorically elevated the goal of democracy promotion to the primary mission of the US (Bush 2005). He and the members of his administration reasserted the US commitment to the strengthening of democratic rule and market institutions in Central Asia in almost every statement addressed to the Central Asian states.

In the first six months of the new American administration, President Obama and the key members of his cabinet avoided any references to democracy promotion. Yet, the discourse of democracy assistance resurfaced later and was shaped by President Obama's speeches delivered during his trips to Cairo, Egypt and Accra, Ghana in the summer of 2009 (Carothers 2012; Muravchik 2009). The US documents that were guiding the new administration's efforts at democracy assistance reaffirmed the US government's determination to pursue international democratization (H.R. 989; White House 2010).

In the context of the EU, the advancement of human rights, democracy and the rule of law were also named as the key principles and top objectives of its foreign, security and development policy (see, for example, Council of the European Union 2005; European Commission 2006; European Council 2003) (see Bridoux and Kurki in this special issue for conceptual and ideological differences in the US and EU understanding of democracy). Although democracy promotion has been often flanked by security, energy and development policy, democracy has become an important policy commitment to which the EU has tied itself rhetorically, financially and bureaucratically (Kurki 2011).

Substance of the US democracy promotion

When used in the American political lexicon, the word 'democracy' typically denotes some combination of free and fair elections, competitive multi-party political system, independent judiciary, and civil and political rights enshrined in the Bill of Rights.[2] Under the leadership of President Bush, democracy has been portrayed as a universal value and entitlement of people in developing and developed countries alike. It has been presented as a historical destiny, the only recipe for national success, and a token for being considered as a modern

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[1] Turkmenistan never ratified the PCA with the EU.

[2] The US policy documents reiterate these same components of democracy. See, for example, Chapter 89 'Advancing Democratic Values, Sections 8201-8262' (H.R. 982); USAID, "At Freedom's Frontiers: A Democracy and Governance Strategic Framework" (USAID, 2005).

nation (see, for example, Bush 2005; White House 2006, 2010). While not relinquishing the idea of universal democracy, the discourse of the Obama cabinet underscored the universality of certain principles, including justice, progress, tolerance, education, security, and peace (Obama 2009).

A belief in the universality of democracy has informed the US government's resolve at democracy promotion in other nations. Under both the Bush and Obama administrations, advancing democracy abroad has been construed as an extension of the US's own practices and experiences with democracy, which are presumed to be universal. President Bush succinctly summarized this perspective by asserting that the 'self-evident truths' of American founding fathers were true for American people, and, therefore, 'they are true for all' (as quoted in Mullerson 2009, 51).

Embraced by both Republicans and Democrats alike, the goal of democracy promotion has been nourished by the deep-seated beliefs about the virtues of democracy and some strategic considerations. Democracy has been construed as the best form of government because its institutions create the best political conditions for enhancing individual liberties and safeguarding individual freedoms (White House 2010). Democracy has been vested with an instrumental value by linking it to security and peace (White House 2006; 2010). President Bush and his foreign policy advisors regarded the frailty of democratic institutions as the root cause of terrorism, and democracy promotion as a tool for ending tyranny and terror (Carothers 1999, 3; McFaul 2010, 1). Even the most vocal opponents of the Bush administration's measures supported the US efforts at international democratization with the understanding that 'America will be safer' in a world of democratic states (Kerry 2005).

Despite the consensus on the importance of democracy in US foreign policy, there are important differences in the understanding of democracy promotion within the American administration. The US Congress adopted a comprehensive approach to democracy assistance defined as the support for 'good governance, human rights, independent media, and the rule of law' and strengthening 'the capacity of democratic political parties, and citizens' (Senate Appropriations Committee 2005; see also H.R. 982). President Bush and members of his administration prioritized the right to conduct free and fair elections. The Bush government, for example, hailed the 'Tulip' revolution in Kyrgyzstan that unseated the first Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev, and the presidential elections that followed. It backed the OSCE's critical assessment of Kazakhstan's electoral practices and expressed disappointment with the outcomes of its presidential elections lacking genuine political pluralism. By 2005, references to human rights became less common in the rhetoric of President Bush supplanted with the frequent affirmations of strategic partnership between the US and Central Asia republics. Only the US Congress and, occasionally, the State Department continued censuring the Central Asian governments for oppressing human rights. In response to criticisms of working closely with the authoritarian regimes, President Bush once responded, 'The more people… work with the US, the more likely it is that they will work to improve the human condition' (Mukhanetrakhimova 2005).

In the first year of the Obama administration, the official discourse arising from the government officials integrated democracy with other less politically sensitive subjects, such as development and good governance, fight against corruption, support for religious freedom, and gender equality (Muravchik 2009). Over time, the discourse of democracy promotion has again zeroed in on the competitive political process and accountable and transparent government as the two primary dimensions of democratization. Following the 2010 parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan, President Obama declared that an orderly and

peaceful transfer of power in the Kyrgyz parliament was a hallmark of a 'true democracy'' in this country (Obama 2010). In his congratulatory statement, President Obama stressed that the outcome of parliamentary elections was still not known on the day of the vote, and this fact alone was sufficient to assert a democratic breakthrough in Kyrgyzstan (Obama 2010).

The Obama cabinet has softened the language of its condemnations of human rights practices in Central Asia and waived the Bush-era restrictions on military aid to Uzbekistan. The latter sanctions were imposed on the country in the aftermath of the 2005 massacre in Andijan. The Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, defended the government's decision by invoking moderate improvements in Uzbekistan's human rights situation and pointing out the importance of strategic partnership with Uzbekistan (IA Rosbalt 2011). Overall, the US discourse toward Central Asian republics under the Obama administration has become increasingly focused on their stability, prosperity, and security. The emphasis has shifted from democracy to mutually productive relations between the US and Central Asian states. Despite the narrow framing of democracy promotion by the American administrations, the policy implementation priorities have been in line with the US Congress regulations. In addition to the competitive political process dimension, the practical side of the US democracy promotion encompasses three other pillars: human rights and the rule of law; civil society; and democratic and accountable governance (USAID 2005). In the context of Central Asia, democracy promotion activities have been scattered across these four dimensions.

Since the political space for promoting competitive political processes has been closed in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, this implementation priority has been ascribed to Kyrgyzstan and, to a lesser extent, Kazakhstan. In Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, governance projects constitute the cornerstone of democratic engagement by the US administration. Substantively, the US assistance along this dimension has focused on the development of electoral capacities and election monitoring skills of political parties and civil society groups. This emphasis corresponds to the discursive frame of democracy promotion emphasising elections. Although the documents published by the US government and USAID demonstrate growing awareness of the importance of fostering a democratic citizens' culture, the majority of proposed and implemented initiatives aim at the people's mobilization for elections rather than nurturing the sustainable culture of citizen participation in democratic processes. Human rights have also been de-prioritized in the democracy promotion initiatives in Central Asia and promoted through scattered projects focusing on religious freedom and the rights of children and women.

Substance of the EU democracy promotion

Whether or not the EU should adopt an official definition of democracy to guide its democracy promotion efforts has been a subject of continuing debate within the Union (Meyer-Resende 2009). To this date, however, there is no a formal definition of democracy in the EU. Instead, the Union's 27 members feature their own varieties of democratic governance shaped by their unique historical circumstances, politics, and culture (this is exemplified in Petrova's contribution to the special issue). The Union's founding documents, foreign policy instruments and official communications typically mention 'human rights and fundamental freedoms', 'democratization processes', 'the rule of law', and transparent, effective, and accountable government as essential elements of democracy. Beyond what has been formally stated in the Union's documents, the discourse and practice of democratic governance in the EU members reviewed in the UK Foreign and Commonwealth paper

(2008) identified regular, free and fair elections, constitutionalism, freedom of political expression, media, and association, access to information, rule of law, basic human rights, and support for democracy promotion as the elements of governance that are common to all democracies within the EU.

Beliefs in the importance of democracy to the EU's own development and integration shaped its conviction that democracy represents the best form of government. The EU officials insist that since the EU itself stands for democracy, it is only 'natural' for the Union to promote this system of governance in other states (Pace 2009). Consequently, the development and consolidation of democracy worldwide has become a key objective of the EU foreign and security policy and its development cooperation. Similarly to the US, democracy promotion in the EU is instilled with both normative and strategic considerations. The Resolution on Human Rights, Democracy, and Development adopted by the Council of the EU in 1991 states that democratization is not only desirable in itself but also necessary for sustained socio-economic growth. In 2006, the Council reiterated that 'the embedding of democracy and democratic process in third countries' offers 'the best prospect for the development … of effective policies related to global issues of particular concern to EU citizens' (General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union 2006). Furthermore, democracy has been regarded as an effective way of dealing with security problems (European Council 2003).

The EU's commitment to democratization was reaffirmed in its 2002 Strategy Paper for Central Asia, which explicitly listed democracy, human rights and free market as the basic principles for a deeper EU-Central Asia cooperation. Democracy is named as one of the seven priorities in the Council's 2007 'Strategy for a New Enhanced Partnership with Central Asia' (European Council 2007) but is mentioned only indirectly as part of the 'good governance and economic reform' package in the European Commission's Regional Strategy paper for assistance to Central Asia over the period of 2007-2013 (European Commission 2007). The latter document reflects a change in the discursive framing of EU's democracy promotion where the goal of democracy now frequently appears together with or interchangeably with 'good governance' (European Commission 2006). The new EU Special Representative for Central Asia Ambassador Patricia Flor, similarly to her predecessor Ambassador Pierre Morel, underscored good governance along with human rights, the rule of law and democratization as priority areas in her mission of deepening EU-Central Asia cooperation (Delegation of the EU to Uzbekistan 2012).

Both the rule of law and human rights represent the key elements of the conceptual understanding of democracy in the EU as expressed in the Union's formal documents and statements. In its communications with the governments of Central Asia, the European Parliament has repeatedly pointed out the regrettable departure of their practices from these normative commitments. The EU representatives called on the Central Asian leadership to make sincere efforts in improving the deteriorating situation with human rights. In recent years, however, the themes of development, security, and energy cooperation superseded the rhetoric of human rights (see, for example, Ashton 2012a, 2012b). As High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, explained ahead of her trip to Central Asia in November 2012, the key issues of mutual interest for the EU and states of Central Asia include, "security and regional cooperation, energy, environment and water as well as other priority areas […] such as education, rule of law, human rights […] By supporting reform and transformation we [the EU] hope to encourage trade and investment' (Ashton 2012a).

Consistent with the findings of other contributions in this issue, this study found that the EU's strategies for Central Asia place considerable emphasis on good governance, particularly assistance to administrative and financial capacity building of Central Asian administrations (European Commission 2007; European Council 2007). The emphasis on governance is not surprising as it is viewed as a tie-in between the EU economic and energy interests and commitments to the principles of democracy and human rights. It also tallies with the Union's underlying beliefs and values that democracy, development and security are mutually reinforcing (European Council 2003). The rule of law is another implementation aspect that is conspicuous in the Union's documents. The importance attached to this goal is evidenced in the agreement on a special Rule of Law Initiative negotiated by the European Council and Commission and a series of Ministerial conferences that sprang from this initiative. Substantively, the EU's rule of law dimension of democracy promotion has stressed efficiency and modernization of adjudication, reforms in the area of commercial jurisdiction, and changes to criminal and administrative law (Schuster 2011).[3] As such, the official language of the rule of law initiative harmonizes with the overall emphasis on good governance as an effective public management and public administration.

Human rights have not been included as a separate priority area in the EU's Strategy for cooperation with Central Asia. Instead, they have been framed as almost a by-product of the rule of law initiatives and judicial reform. The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) is a specialized EU programme launched in 2006 for providing direct support to democracy, civil society and human rights protection[4]. The EIDHR, however, is a global instrument, which is not geared specifically for Central Asia. In the Central Asian countries, it has followed an established human rights agenda, which emphasizes judicial and procedural, civil rights and freedoms, rights of defenders and human rights activists, and cooperation with the relevant international organizations (Axyonova 2011a, 2011b; Emerson and Boonstra 2010). This agenda has been implemented in the format of the human rights dialogue with representatives of the Central Asian administrations.

This is not to suggest that the Union relinquished its assistance to political processes in Central Asia. The EU continues sending election observers to the region, implement projects on parliamentary reforms, and provide limited direct support to civil society groups. However, these 'traditional' dimensions of the EU democracy promotion have been de-prioritised in the key policy documents of the EU for Central Asia. Overall, the EU democracy promotion frame appears to be following a model underlying European integration, namely, it is expected that support for a market-based economy, a managerial culture, and regional economic integration will provide for the eventual democratic transformation in Central Asian states. Even more so than the US, the EU has been 'blind' towards local cultures and traditions relying, instead, on the 'off-the-shelf' initiatives approbated in different contexts.

Non-Western frames of democracy and alternative models of governance

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[3] Judicial reform also entails measures aimed at the optimization of legal procedures, improvement of working methods of law enforcement agencies, and greater accessibility of citizens and businesses to legal system.

[4] The EIDHR should be distinguished from the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Neither Russia nor China has promoted their views on governance as actively as the US and EU. Still, a greater predictability of Central Asian politics and securing the region for realizing their own economic and political goals has been desired by both states (Kerr 2010). Moscow and Beijing, therefore, have sought some convergence between their own and Central Asian states' perspectives on governance and international relations (Bader, Grävingholt, and Kästner 2010; Kavalski 2007). Russia and China have espoused a set of competing ideas for political and economic development, and presented attractive models for maintaining stability and generating prosperity without democratization (Jackson 2010; Kavalski 2010a, 2010b).

Russia's views on democracy and governance

References to democracy are a rare occurrence in the Russian foreign policy discourse. When the word 'democracy' was mentioned in the recent foreign policy declarations, it was used in reference to 'democratic world order' and 'democratic international relations'. These idioms along with the words containing the prefix 'multi-' (as in multi-channel and multi-dimensional) convey a vision of the multi-polar world older and a system of collective mechanisms for addressing global problems where Russia plays an important role recognized by other states (Lavrov 2005). 'Democratic' in the expression 'democratic world order' implies Russia's equal right to take part in the decision-making processes in the global realm. It also denotes a form of resistance to any form of ideological or cultural hegemony and American unilateralism (Ambrosio 2008).

The notion of democracy has also appeared in references to Russia as a democratic state and used for an explicit purpose of legitimation of Moscow's governing regime. By calling their state democratic, the Russian authorities make no pretences to the Western idea of liberal democracy. Rather, their policy statements refer to the 'unique and indigenous' model of democracy developed in the context of Russia (Shlapentokh 2007 as cited in Jackson 2010, 105). This model of 'democracy' is premised on the idea of the strong state as a fundamental condition for Russia's national survival and an important factor in the success of its political, security and economic reforms. The Russian leadership has advocated this perspective by stating, repeatedly, how the establishment of a strong state was a prerequisite for the revival of Russia's great power status (Jackson 2010). Strong state has been framed as an enduring feature of the Russian political tradition, which has also favoured a popular leader personifying the sovereign state irrespective of his democratic credentials (Smith 2006). The legality and efficacy of the strong state has been defended through discursive linking of the state-controlled government to stability and prosperity in Russia.

In parallel to their efforts at promoting Russia's own model of governance, the Russian leadership has portrayed democracy promotion programmes sponsored from the West as illegitimate and perilous. The Russian government's discourse has tinged the revolutionary changes in several post-Soviet countries with pejorative connotations, framing them as an on-going process of colonization and domination of the former Communist states by the West (Silitski 2010). In place of public criticisms of the growing authoritarianism of Central Asian governments, the Russian authorities have granted approval to political processes in these states by endorsing the results of elections and assisting their leadership in countering Western pressures to democratize (Jackson 2010).

What lies beneath the Russian ideological model is the conviction of the Russian leadership in the pre-eminence of security and order and indisputable role of the strong state in accomplishing these aims. Although the issue of democracy was brought up in Vladimir

Putin's 2012 inaugural speech, it was the themes of stability and continuity that were foregrounded in the address (Belyaeva 2012). The prioritization of order, security and stability in the Russian discourse is further reinforced by its foreign and domestic policies and actions. Domestically, the 'Putin model' has become associated with an effective, if underhand and illegal, use of administrative resources to ensure the desired electoral outcomes. It has come to denote an unquestionable state authority over the country's institutions, strict control over mass media and civil society, and suppression of civil liberties and dissent.

China's views on democracy and governance

Unlike the US and EU and even less so then Russia, China has not aspired to transpose its political values and views on other states. The strategic interests of China, rather than ideological affinity, have determined Beijing's foreign relations (Nathan and Scobell 2012). Still, the ever-expanding Chinese global interactions and a desire to play a greater role on a range of economic and security questions have increased transparency of Chinese politics allowing other states to learn some lessons from Beijing (Sutter 2005, 2008). China's soft power has also risen in conjunction with its growing economy and political stature in international relations. Although, the core of China's soft power is still its art, literature, philosophy, and culture, Chinese officials and diplomats have become more adroit in promoting their country's international status (Nathan and Scobell 2012, 321; Sum 2012). The ideas of peace, harmony, tolerance, solidarity, and unity have been foregrounded in Beijing's foreign policy discourse. The Chinese strategists have also pointed out to Beijing's success in maintaining political stability and persistent economic growth that have shown some appeal to authoritarian governments, including those of Central Asia states.

In the rhetoric of Chinese leaders, China's foreign image and legitimacy of the CCP have been discursively linked to the sustained development and modernization of Chinese economy and political stability, rather than adherence to democratization. The scant references to democracy in the official speeches of Chinese leaders fade in comparison to the volume of security-related topics and economic themes.[5] Discussions of democracy by the Chinese leaders are typically provoked by the Western censure of the human rights situation in China and derailment of democratic reforms. Similarly to Russia, the Chinese communist regime has defended China's own path to democratic development and modernization determined by the unique national conditions (Nathan 1990, 193). Consistent with the Marxist doctrine, democratic reforms are viewed as part of the superstructure that cannot develop in isolation from the material conditions constituting the country's economic base. Therefore, premature and rapid political reforms are framed as disastrous for China.

The Chinese embassies around the world dedicate pages to the discussion of the 'democratic mode of China' portrayed as different from that of Europe and US because of their country's history, economy, traditions, and culture. It is argued that simply because Chinese democratic practices differ from those of the US and EU, it is unreasonable to accuse China of lacking democracy. Similarly to their Russian counterparts, Chinese leaders deny the existence of the 'universal' democratic models. They also repeatedly accuse the hypocrisy of the Western capitalist democracy tolerating human rights violations and

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[5] It should be noted, however, that democracy has become a more popular topic of discussion on Chinese social forums on the Internet.

condemn it for excessive individualism responsible for the rise of immoral behaviour and violence.

The Chinese strategists also articulated a number of theoretical positions designed to push back against what is perceived as the Western use of democratic arguments to wield control over China. Since the 1980s, Beijing has been supporting the idea of culturally unique Asian values promoted by East Asian semi-authoritarian regimes, such as Singapore and Malaysia. The thrust of this position is that Asian values do not give freedoms and liberties the same importance as it is accorded in the West, but prioritize obedience, thrift, industriousness, respect for elders, and authority (Nathan and Scobell 2012, 331). Given important difference between Western and Asian value systems, Asian states, including China, must be faithful to their own political and normative priorities. The counter-model of governance and rights promulgated by China stresses the authority of a wise and benevolent leadership and puts states' rights before individuals' rights (Bell 2000; Sen 1997). It also prioritizes social and economic progress and development over civil and political rights, the community over the individual, and social order and stability over democracy and individual freedoms. China's model of gradual neo-liberal and market-oriented development that takes place without concurrent transformation of political institutions has been dubbed as the 'Beijing consensus' that the Chinese commentators portrayed as more efficient and just version of capitalism than the formerly dominant 'Washington consensus' (Nathan and Scobell 2012, 319).

The current Chinese leadership firmly believes that the US administration aspires to weaken and eventually topple the Chinese communist regime through ideological subversion, among other means (Friedberg 2012). Beijing, therefore, has shared with Russia a sense of annoyance over Western democracy promotion and viewed any meddling into its internal affairs or domestic politics of the neighbouring states as a threat (Kavalski 2007, 50). According to the Chinese interpretation of international law and the principle of sovereignty, states are the primary subjects of international law that vests them with authority in domestic politics and responsibilities vis-à-vis their people. The interference of one state into the domestic affairs of another for human rights purpose or under other pretexts is illegitimate and tantamount to cultural imperialism.

The Chinese model is also underpinned by an assumption that there can be no development without social stability and order. The Chinese government has repeatedly stated that it will 'make progress while maintaining stability' (Xinhuanet 2012). The consolidation of political power is viewed as paramount, and a strong state is deemed to be the foundation of all progress. The main task of the state, according to the Chinese government, is not to represent the people's will, but to ensure group harmony, stability and social order (Naisbitt and Naisbitt 2010). For China, economic stability is an indispensible component of overall stability. Therefore, the Chinese government has emphasized development and economic cooperation beneficial to the economic interests of China in its foreign relations with Central Asian states.

To sum up, what emerged as an alternative to Western liberal democracy in the Russian and Chinese discourse is a unique form of governance and development where the state holds a prominent position buttressed by a viable economic base. This model gives priority to economic development and modernization prior to any political liberalization. The Chinese model of development has also become associated with gradual and incremental reforms. As the parliamentary chief and Politburo Standing Committee member Wu Bangguo explained, if China wavers under the destructive democratization forces, 'the fruits of development that we have already achieved will be lost and the country could even

fall into the abyss of civil strife' (AFP 2011). The Russian president, Vladimir Putin, also became a keen supporter of the gradual approach. In his statements, Putin spoke of political transformation as a process, not a quick destination, and stressed a path of gradual evolution of Russia toward an improved judicial system, a fully representative parliament and other political outcomes (Putin 2012).

Discussion and conclusion

Table 1 contains a summary of the results of the frame analysis presented in the study. At the formal level of the US Congress laws and EU foundational documents, the US and EU share a similar understanding of democracy as a set of institutions and procedures – elections, civil and political rights, and the rule of law. Yet, in their discursive presentations and implementation priorities, the US democracy promoters tend to emphasize competitive political processes and elections, whereas the EU's representatives, until recently, alluded to human rights and the rule of law as the counterparts and inevitable elements of democracy. However, since the adoption of the 2007 strategic documents on Central Asia references to human rights have become less frequent in the Union's statements, whereas the notion of 'governance' has been prioritized. The American and European support for democracy and international democratization is grounded in the deep-seated beliefs in the intrinsic and strategic values of democracy. The US has often framed its democracy promotion efforts as a predestined mission, whereas the EU has focused largely on the consequences of democracy for security, development and regional integration.

Table 1. Democracy Promotion Frames of the US, EU, Russia and China

	US	EU	Russia	China
Understanding of democracy	A set of democratic institutions (elections, multi-party system, civil and political rights, rule of law, etc.) based on American example	Not articulated, but references are made to the European states' democratic practices. 'Democracy' appears in a bundle with good governance, economic development, and human rights	A form of government that is consistent with national circumstances (strong state led by a popular leader for Russia). International principle allowing for equal participation of states in solving world problems and recognizing diversity of	A form of government consistent with Asian values and economic development (a model that prioritizes economic progress over human rights, community over individuals, and social order over democracy for China)

				worldviews
Values and beliefs underlying this understanding	Democracy is the best form of governance and a solution to problems of war and terrorism US is predestined to promote democracy	Democracy is the best form of governance and a precondition for development and stability	Security and order are preeminent; state is the main guarantor of security and order	Economic and political stability, security, and order. Gradual reform of institutions
Aspects of democracy prioritized in discourse	Political participation, elections	Human rights and the rule of law. Good governance since 2005	Illegitimacy and danger of Western democracy promotion. Universal democracy does not exist	Western democracy is incompatible with Asian values. State legitimacy hinges on sustained economic growth, not democracy
How democracy is framed for Central Asia	Citizen participation, democratic and accountable governance, rule of law. Less often - human rights	Good governance, rule of law and judicial reforms. Human rights are under-prioritized.	Non-interference in domestic affairs, strong state, strong leadership, economic development	Support for unique and indigenous models of democracy; non-interference in domestic affairs
What is being emphasized in practice	Electoral capacities & political participation	Administrative and financial capacity building, transparency, accountability, and fight with corruption	Support for governing regimes, political stability, security	Political stability, economic development

The Russian and Chinese discursive frames repudiate the idea of a universal model of democracy and emphasize the existence of multiple democratic models and paths to democratization. The Russian and Chinese authorities have demanded recognition of this diversity and equality of the various governance forms. Their own political systems evincing a powerful state personified by a popular leader were suggested as fully compatible with the notion of indigenous model of democracy and democratization. The Russian and Chinese perspectives are also shaped by their historical experiences, political interests, and value systems, in which security and order are given highest consideration.

Both the US and EU have used their individual experiences and value systems as the benchmarks for international democratization. Benita Ferrero-Waldner, former European

Commissioner for External Relations, explained this point in her 2006 address to the Kazakh people, 'We [the EU] have build up considerable know-how about transition processes, not least thanks to our latest enlargement. We put this know-how at your disposal and encourage you to make use of it' (Ferrero-Waldner 2006). There has been virtually no discussion in either the US or EU of how the promoted practices and institutions can be secured on a long-term basis in Central Asia and whether the Western democratic models fit the circumstances of these states. Although the language of the US documents often recognizes the importance of the local contexts, neither the US implementation priorities nor discursive representations reflect the recognition of the unique historical trajectories and cultures of the Central Asian states. The same is true for the EU where the peculiar aspects of the Central Asian histories have been construed as the impediments to democratization. When the US did take the domestic context for democracy promotion into account, it used this information for designing viable measures within the pre-established democracy promotion framework.

According to the theoretical and empirical scholarship on frames, effective discursive representations of an issue can exert powerful impact on the attitudes and behaviors of the targets of communication (Druckman 2004; Schön and Rein 1994). Democracy promotion frames that are compelling for the targets of democratization can be expected to command their support and influence their preferences, attitudes and behavior. The main criteria of the frames' effectiveness are their cultural compatibility (sensitivity to national contexts), salience (importance of the themes and ideas conveyed in the discursive frames to the targets of communications), frames' internal consistency and credibility of the agents (Beford and Show 2000).

The space of the article does not allow to do justice to the national 'models' of democracy devised and actively disseminated by the leadership of Central Asian states (for further discussion, see Omelicheva, 2013). Central Asian republics have not been hostage to geopolitical rivalry of other actors, but active participants of ideological and geostrategic contestation in the region. Despite the flagrant violations of democratic principles in practice, all Central Asian states laid claims to being democratic. To reconcile discrepancies between the expectations of Western democratisers and their own political practices, the leadership of these republics have imbued 'democracy' with a unique substratum that allegedly corresponds to these countries' national circumstances. These national 'models' have distinctive features but also share characteristics that are common to all. The strong state personified by a strong leader has become the crux of the Central Asian models of democracy, which also prioritize the goals of economic development over political liberalization. It has been argued that demands for security and order had to be met before democratization. All Central Asian governments have rejected the idea of the universal forms and methods of democratization and supported the principle of gradual political reforms.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Central Asian leadership has insisted on the low compatibility of Western models of democracy with the Central Asian socio-political contexts. While the West contends that democracy and the rule of law are the best guarantees for political stability, Central Asian governments affirm that only strong states can achieve stability and peace. The pre-eminence of the strong state in the Russian and Chinese frames make them more attuned to the views of the leadership of Central Asian countries then the Western perspectives encouraging political pluralism and a robust civil society. The Russian and Chinese emphasis on strong leadership and a viable economic system corresponds to the goals of the Central Asian governments. Their appeals to the

diversity of democratic models and equality of alternative perspectives on development resonate stronger with the Central Asian leadership then the US and EU democracy promotion frames asserting a superiority of the liberal institutions. Certainly, the norms promoted by the Russian and Chinese governments match the Central Asian governments' interests in strengthening their power bases, as opposed to the Western ideas of democracy, which are perceived as threatening to the survival of the governing regimes. This interest-based compatibility of ideas promoted by Russia and China enables future learning from the expectations of Moscow and Beijing and provides the Central Asian leaders with the ideological cushion for resisting international democratization.

To increase the effectiveness of Western democracy promotion frames, greater consideration should be given to a wide range of social, political, and cultural factors in the region. Western democratization agents must commit more time and energy to learning about these countries, including through the long-term residence in these states. There must be will to transcend the excepted ways of thinking and institutional perspectives on the social and political life in these republics, and allow for the greater creativity in the programs' design. Although, it is rather unrealistic to expect the reconciling of normative and pragmatic agendas by international donors, what should be avoided is the pursuit of strategic interests under the guise of advance of democracy and human rights. In their engagements with Central Asian governments, the US and EU must clearly demarcate their support for democracy from geostrategic cooperation.

Approaching democracy and democracy promotion as contentious ideas allows researchers examine ways in which these concepts are conceived and challenged by the agents and targets of democratization. Frame analysis is well suited to the task of studying the variety of meanings and discursive representations that can be embedded in the language and practices of democracy promotion abroad. Furthermore, by focusing on conceptual, discursive, and implementation dimensions of democracy promotion spotlighted in this special issue researchers can observe how ideological contestation accompanying democracy promotion is concurrent to states' geopolitical competition. It serves as a potent ideological weapon in the armory of states' geopolitical instruments. The differences in 'mental frames' and discursive representations of democracy and alternative models of governances between the US/EU and Russia/China as well as changes occurring to the meanings of these concepts over time reflect political and socio-economic circumstances of domestic politics and ebbs and flows of geostrategic imperatives in international relations.

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