Preface

One of the most abiding images of modern Uzbekistan and one that is regularly on the cover of books on the state is the imposing statue of Amir Timur, astride a horse, located in the Amir Timur Square in central Tashkent. While the park surrounding the statue itself has been significantly reduced in size by the addition of the Forum’s Palace—which in addition to the Amir Timur Museum now crowds the square—and the ancient *chinar* (maple) trees have been replaced by firs, the statue itself remains a point of reference for the state. Time and again the casual visitor who may remember very little of the city otherwise would refer to the statue with the assumption that Timur remains the referent for the state. And in this they are partially correct. While Amir Timur’s legacy is no longer the subject of discussion, academic of otherwise, his abiding legacy that of a strong centralized state continues to be significant for Uzbekistan’s brand equity. The most enduring image for the Kazakh state, on the other hand, was generally a combination of vast steppes, yurts, apples, and the Aral Sea. Today it is represented by the city of Astana, compared to modern cities of the oil rich states of the UAE and identified as symbolic of the Kazakh state. Eclectic in design and cosmopolitan in form, it is symbolic of the inclusiveness that the Kazakh state portrays as its essential image. While most states actively promote an international ‘image’, in the Eurasian space the Uzbek and the Kazakh cases are interesting since they provide remarkable contrasts that are largely reflective of their heritage.

The two abiding ‘images’ that the two states portray are indicative of the way they wish to position themselves in the global arena. Uzbekistan positions itself as an ancient civilization at the crossroads of history while Kazakhstan promotes itself as a significant geostrategic player and a multicultural and multiethnic society. While both images are actively promoted by the state and reinforced by diplomatic campaigns, they are also occasionally challenged by alternative reporting and reflections that influence external perception of the states. International reporting about the Andijan incident in 2005 and the British-American film *Borat* (2006) are examples that affected the image of the Uzbek and Kazakh states respectively. On the other hand there are certain enduring images of the states, the blue domes of Samarkand or the vast Kazakh steppes for instance, that are clearly identified and
utilized by the state for tourism but have very little to do with recent state propaganda. The extent to which these images have impacted on the international standing of the states, however, still remains debated. *Symbols and the Image of the State in Eurasia* is an attempt at examining how post Soviet Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan legitimized their existence as separate states, redefined themselves in a ‘new’ form and projected national images for the global arena but also in the domestic context. In the course of this redefinition, the relationship between politics and cultural symbols/images acquired multiple possibilities. It goes on to argue that this image was also largely determined by the legacy of the states—an ancient state with a ‘homogenous’ people for Uzbekistan reflected in the image of a strong centralized state and the legacy of a constant process of negotiation among the Zhuz reflected in the cosmopolitan image that the Kazakh state subsequently portrayed.

*The book went to press before 2 September 2016, the officially declared day of Uzbek President Islam Karimov’s demise and so it refers to him as President and not late President throughout.*

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