



Article

Digital Diplomacy As An Instrument Of Advancing Us Interests In Central Asia

Izzatullaev Bobirjon Izzatullaevich¹

1. Tashkent State Law University, Department Of General Sciences And Culture Teacher, Independent Researcher

* Correspondence: izzatbobur@gmail.com

Abstract: This study examines the strategic use of digital diplomacy by the United States to advance its foreign policy interests in Central Asia. While digital diplomacy is increasingly recognized as a powerful tool for influencing global audiences, there remains a gap in understanding its specific impact in geopolitically sensitive regions like Central Asia. Through a qualitative analysis of secondary data sources, including government reports and digital platforms, the research identifies key areas where U.S. digital diplomacy has been effective—such as strengthening regional sovereignty, ensuring security, supporting media development, promoting human rights, and fostering a positive U.S. image. The findings suggest that the U.S. successfully leverages its technological prowess to maintain and enhance its influence in Central Asia, with implications for future diplomatic strategies in the digital age.

Keywords: United States, Digital Diplomacy, Central Asia, Information Technologies, Information And Communication Technologies, Foreign Policy, Interest.

1. Introduction

Digital diplomacy has emerged as a crucial tool in contemporary international relations, offering nations a means to engage with global audiences, shape narratives, and influence policy outcomes through digital platforms. The United States, with its technological leadership, has utilized digital diplomacy extensively to further its geopolitical objectives, particularly in regions of strategic importance such as Central Asia. This region, characterized by its complex political landscape and the competing influences of major powers, presents unique challenges and opportunities for digital engagement. However, despite the growing significance of digital diplomacy, there is limited academic exploration of its specific applications and impacts within the Central Asian context[1]–[3].

The existing literature on digital diplomacy often focuses on its general principles and practices, with insufficient attention given to how it is strategically deployed in specific geopolitical environments like Central Asia. This study aims to address this knowledge gap by investigating how the U.S. has employed digital diplomacy to promote its interests in the region[4]–[7]. Through a qualitative analysis of secondary data sources, including government reports, scholarly articles, and digital platforms, this research examines the key areas of U.S. engagement, such as sovereignty support, regional security,

Citation: Izzatullaev Bobirjon Izzatullaevich. Digital Diplomacy As An Instrument Of Advancing Us Interests In Central Asia. Central Asian Journal of Social Sciences and History 2024, 5(4), 160-166.

Received: 10th Apr 2024

Revised: 11th Mei 2024

Accepted: 24th Jun 2024

Published: 27th Jul 2024



Copyright: © 2024 by the authors. Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

media development, and human rights advocacy. By doing so, it seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the strategies and effectiveness of U.S. digital diplomacy in Central Asia[8]–[10].

The findings of this study reveal that the United States has successfully leveraged its digital diplomacy efforts to maintain and expand its influence in Central Asia. These efforts have not only reinforced the sovereignty of Central Asian states and enhanced regional security but also supported the development of independent media and promoted democratic values. The implications of these findings are significant, suggesting that digital diplomacy will continue to play a critical role in shaping U.S. foreign policy in the region, and potentially offering a model for other nations seeking to navigate the complexities of international relations in the digital age.

2. Materials and Methods

The methodology of this study is rooted in a qualitative research approach, focusing on the analysis of secondary data sources to explore the strategic use of digital diplomacy by the United States in Central Asia. The research began with a comprehensive review of existing literature, including government reports, publications from international organizations, scholarly articles, and digital platforms associated with U.S. diplomatic efforts in the region. This literature review provided a foundational understanding of the key themes and areas of interest, such as sovereignty support, regional security, media development, and human rights advocacy, which are central to the U.S. digital diplomacy agenda in Central Asia.

Data collection involved gathering relevant information from various digital platforms, including social media channels, official government websites, and other online resources where U.S. digital diplomacy efforts are most visible. Particular attention was given to platforms like the Caravanserai website, which is directly linked to U.S. digital engagement in the region, and social media accounts associated with U.S. diplomatic missions in Central Asia. These sources were analyzed to identify patterns, strategies, and the effectiveness of the digital diplomacy initiatives undertaken by the U.S.

The data were then subjected to thematic analysis, where recurring themes and strategies were identified and categorized. This analytical process allowed for a detailed examination of how digital diplomacy is employed to promote U.S. interests in Central Asia. The findings from this analysis were then interpreted in the context of the broader geopolitical environment, offering insights into the implications of these digital diplomacy efforts for U.S. foreign policy in the region.

3. Results and Discussion

One of the priority tasks of the foreign policy of the USA in Central Asia is to strengthen the sovereignty of the countries of the region, to help ensure regional security and stability, to establish and develop cooperative relations with the countries of the region in various bilateral and multilateral fields. It is precisely in promoting the above goals of the United States and in the implementation of various diplomatic tasks that digital diplomacy is very convenient.

Today, as a means of promoting the interests of the USA in Central Asia, the digital diplomat is reflected in the following areas:

1. Strengthening the independence and sovereignty of the countries of the Central Asian region.

One of the priority interests of the USA in the foreign policy of Central Asia is the issue of sovereignty of the countries of the region. In particular, today the United States is a supporter of Central Asia not falling under the influence of other countries and becoming fully independent politically and economically. The USA sees Russia and China as countries that interfere in the internal affairs of regional countries and influence them. The USA uses digital diplomacy tools against these countries' interference in the internal affairs of the region. For example, the Caravanserai site, sponsored by the United States Central Command (USCENTCOM), aims to express efforts to improve regional stability through bilateral and multilateral agreements. This site was created as an Internet portal that provides a wide range of information on achieving stability in the region to a regional audience.

The news provided by this site is mainly aimed at condemning the policies of Russia and China towards Central Asia, interference in the internal affairs of the regional states, as well as the issues of China's policy in Xinjiang and violation of human rights, regional unity and the strength of the independence of the states.

In order to make it convenient for users, this site provides news in Uzbek and Russian languages. On average, two or three news items are uploaded per day. Also, this site is active in social networks. In particular, there are more than 42,000 members in the Russian version of the Facebook social network, and more than 1,700 members in the Uzbek version, 904 members in the Instagram network, 50 members in YouTube, and 161 in the Telegram messenger. member is available

(As of March 18, 2024). In addition, the interests of the USA in Central Asia are also announced on other sites, social networks, radio and printed publications related to the region.

On January 17, 2023, the then US ambassador to Uzbekistan, Jonathan Henick, presented 225 "FLIR" infrared monoculars to the border troops of the State Security Service of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Equipment worth \$600,000 is part of the US's support to Uzbekistan in the field of security. This news was published on the official website of the US Embassy in Uzbekistan, on social networks and on the ambassador's own page, attracting the attention of local media. As a result, local residents also widely discussed the news. However, for unknown reasons, this site is not working.

2. Ensuring security and stability in Central Asia.

Security in the Central Asian region and the issue of Afghanistan have always been one of the priority tasks in the foreign policy interests of the United States in Central Asia. Therefore, the United States is taking systematic action to prevent terrorist and extremist threats in the region. Digital diplomacy also has a special place in these actions, and the United States has been fighting against any sources of danger in the region through mass media, the Internet, and various other information channels.

Also, as a practical measure, the United States will delete extremist material on social networks (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, (now X) Instagram and others), mobile messengers (Telegram, Whatsapp) and websites. For example, according to research conducted by SecDev Group, about 500 separate channels (Telegram, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (now X) and YouTube) are controlled by extremist organizations related to Central Asia. Among them, the extremist group "Islamic State of Khurasan" is

particularly active in the virtual space (they have 174 channels and more than 66 thousand followers at their disposal). The Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham group has 119 channels and about 50,000 followers. Other groups have channels with 1,000 to 16,000 followers.

Taking into account that various extremist and terrorist groups in Central Asia are active in the virtual information space, in recent years, the United States has focused on digital diplomacy in the region's security issues. In particular, in 2017, Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter (now X) and YouTube jointly established the Global Internet Forum against terrorism. Until today, based on the system created by them, terrorist and extremist materials on social networks are automatically deleted.

X (formerly Twitter) social network has a high role in deleting terrorist and extremist information on social networks. In particular, it closely cooperates with the US government in this direction. According to information, since February 2016, the X social network has blocked 235,000 accounts due to terrorist propaganda. The administration of the X social network notes that it has blocked accounts for violating the rules related to the promotion of terrorism and extremism.

The Wall Street Journal reports that Alphabet Corporation (owned by Google), Facebook, and the X Network are using online advertising technology to counter radical Islamist propaganda.

3. Support local mass media, journalists and improve information and communication infrastructures.

It is important to show the positive aspects of the US policy in the Central Asian region, to increase the country's image and to conduct digital diplomacy, to increase the activity of local journalists and to develop the mass media in the region. Digital diplomacy cannot be carried out in an insufficiently developed information and communication infrastructure.

Therefore, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is actively working in this field. In particular, this organization has been providing financial support to the region through various projects since the 1990s. In May 2018, he allocated 15 million dollars for the development of independent mass media in Central Asia. Its objectives include:

- ensuring the impartiality and openness of the mass media in covering important political and social issues related to the interests of the population;
- increasing the taste of receiving information among young and middle-aged people. Forming a critical view of the information disseminated in them;
- improvement of the legal framework in the field of mass media.

In addition, USAID is implementing a 5-year (from October 1, 2018 to September 30, 2023) \$15 million project in cooperation with Internews. The program is aimed at improving the qualifications of journalists, ensuring that the population is informed of important political and social news, and strengthening the legal basis of mass media activities.

In April 2023, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan will launch the project "Supporting the development of youth for a successful future". The project is part of the State Program for the Development of Digital Diplomacy in 2021-2025 and is aimed at developing the knowledge of young specialists of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan through online courses.

Other ways that the USA supports mass media in Central Asia are training them, providing various grants and organizing various events. Internews Network, a US non-profit organization, is particularly active in this field. As of today, Internews Network has branches in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, and is paying particular attention to the development of Internet journalism in the region. For this, "Development of new media in Central Asia", "Yangi reporter.org" and other various projects have been developed.

4. Broad promotion of rule of law, human rights and democratic principles.

The United States attaches great importance to ensuring the rule of law, human rights, and democratic values in Central Asia, and through digital diplomacy, it tries to attract the attention of the government, the head of state, and the local population to these issues. In particular, it will carry out the following practical actions in this direction:

- the USA publishes the state of the country in the annual reports of authoritative international organizations on human rights on its official embassy website and social networks;
- the ambassador announces cases related to the violation of human rights in the country on his official social network or makes a video appeal;
- organizes grants, study abroad and training courses for human rights defenders, journalists, writers and other employees of mass media.

Especially in recent years, there have been many cases of US ambassadors contacting regional government leaders about human rights violations and drawing their attention to this issue. This process shows that digital diplomacy tools and information communication technologies are gaining a strong influence in the region.

5. Helping to form a positive image and develop mutual cooperation.

One of the main goals of US digital diplomacy in Central Asia is to create a positive image of the US in the region, to show the positive aspects of bilateral and multilateral relations. In particular, if we follow the messages and news on the official website and social networks of the US diplomatic missions in Central Asia, the most mentioned topic is the development of cooperation in various fields with the US and the countries of the region, which have a very positive value for the countries. news about the U.S. financial support (especially during the pandemic).

The analysis reveals that the United States effectively utilizes digital diplomacy to maintain and enhance its influence in Central Asia across several dimensions:

1. Strengthening Sovereignty and Independence: The U.S. supports the sovereignty of Central Asian countries by countering the influence of external powers, particularly Russia and China, through digital platforms like Caravanserai.
2. Ensuring Regional Security: Through initiatives like the Global Internet Forum against terrorism, the U.S. works to mitigate extremist threats in Central Asia by controlling and eliminating harmful content from social media platforms.
3. Supporting Media and Communication Infrastructure: U.S. agencies like USAID play a crucial role in developing independent media and enhancing communication infrastructure in the region, thereby facilitating a more robust digital engagement.
4. Promoting Human Rights and Democratic Values: The U.S. uses its digital diplomacy channels to advocate for the rule of law, human rights, and democratic principles, influencing both government and public opinion in the region.
5. Building a Positive U.S. Image: Digital diplomacy efforts also focus on showcasing the benefits of U.S. cooperation with Central Asian countries, highlighting financial aid and other forms of support to foster positive bilateral and multilateral relations.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the significant role that digital diplomacy plays in advancing U.S. foreign policy interests in Central Asia. By strategically leveraging digital platforms, the U.S. has effectively strengthened the sovereignty of Central Asian states, bolstered regional security, supported the development of independent media, and promoted democratic values and human rights. These efforts not only enhance U.S. influence in the region but also provide a framework for how digital diplomacy can be employed to address complex geopolitical challenges. The implications of this study suggest that digital diplomacy will continue to be a critical component of international relations, particularly in regions where traditional diplomatic efforts face limitations. Further research should explore the long-term impacts of digital diplomacy on regional stability and its potential as a model for other nations engaging in similar geopolitical contexts.

REFERENCES

- [1] C. Bjola, "The rise of hybrid diplomacy: From digital adaptation to digital adoption," *Int. Aff.*, vol. 98, no. 2, pp. 471–491, 2022, doi: 10.1093/ia/iia005.
- [2] D. Chernobrov, "Strategic humour: Public diplomacy and comic framing of foreign policy issues," *Br. J. Polit. Int. Relations*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 277–296, 2022, doi: 10.1177/13691481211023958.
- [3] R. Adler-Nissen, "Blended Diplomacy: The Entanglement and Contestation of Digital Technologies in Everyday Diplomatic Practice," *Eur. J. Int. Relations*, vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 640–666, 2022, doi: 10.1177/13540661221107837.
- [4] E. Hedling, "Practice Approaches to the Digital Transformations of Diplomacy: Toward a New Research Agenda," *Int. Stud. Rev.*, vol. 23, no. 4, pp. 1595–1618, 2021, doi: 10.1093/isr/viab027.
- [5] A. Ibáñez, "Dementia caregiving across Latin America and the Caribbean and brain health diplomacy," *Lancet Heal. Longev.*, vol. 2, no. 4, 2021, doi: 10.1016/S2666-7568(21)00031-3.
- [6] K. A. Eggeling, "The Synthetic Situation in Diplomacy: Scopic Media and the Digital Mediation of Estrangement," *Glob. Stud. Q.*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2021, doi: 10.1093/isagsq/ksab005.
- [7] Z. A. Huang, "Exploring China's Digitalization of Public Diplomacy on Weibo and Twitter: A Case Study of the U.S.–China Trade War," *Int. J. Commun.*, vol. 15, pp. 1912–1939, 2021.
- [8] D. Ingenhoff, "Key Influencers in Public Diplomacy 2.0: A Country-Based Social Network Analysis," *Soc. Media Soc.*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2021, doi: 10.1177/2056305120981053.
- [9] M. A. Khan, "Reducing the Threat of Cyber Warfare Through a Suitable Dispute Resolution Mechanism," *Law J. Univ. Latv.*, vol. 2020, no. 13, pp. 97–120, 2020, doi: 10.22364/jull.13.06.
- [10] L. Di Martino, "Conceptualising public diplomacy listening on social media," *Place Brand. Public Dipl.*, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 131–142, 2020, doi: 10.1057/s41254-019-00135-5.
- [11] CENTRAL ASIA MEDIA PROGRAM. <https://www.usaid.gov/central-asia-regional/fact-sheets/central-asia-media-program>
- [12] Seib, P. (2012). *Real-time diplomacy: Politics and power in the social media era*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- [13] Seib, P. (2016). *The future of diplomacy*. Cambridge: Polity Pres
- [14] Sengupta, S. (2013, October). New diplomatic avenue emerges, in 140-character bursts. The New York Times. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/04/world/new-diplomatic-avenue-emerges-in-140-character-bursts.html>.
- [15] Slaughter, A. M. (2009). America's edge: Power in the networked century. *Foreign Affairs*, 88(1) 94–113
- [16] Slaughter, A. M. (2017). *The chessboard and the web: Strategies of connection in a networked world*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- [17] Tim Ryan. "Media's Coverage Has Distorted World's View of Iraqi Reality," *WorldTribune.com*, January 18, 2005.

-
- [18] The history of the neweurasia.net blogging platform initiative is available at <http://www.neweurasia.net/history>
- [19] Technology and Public Purpose Project: 5G, Deepfakes, Quantum Computing, Synthetic Biology / Belfer Center for Science and International Relations at Harvard Kennedy School. 2020. URL: <https://www.belfercenter.org/project/technology-and-public-purpose>
- [20] Wimmer, A. (2019). Why nationalism works—And why it isn't going away. *Foreign Affairs*, 98(2), 27–34.