

THE FORMATION OF KYRGYZ FOREIGN POLICY 1991-2004

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty

Of

The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University

By

THOMAS J. C. WOOD

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2005

Professor Andrew Hess (Chair)

Professor John Curtis Perry

Professor Sung-Yoon Lee

Thomas J.C. Wood  
tomacbyg@gmail.com

## **Education**

2005: Ph.D. Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University  
Dissertation *Formation of Kyrgyz Foreign Policy 1992-2004*  
Supervisor, Professor Andrew Hess.

1993: M.A.L.D. Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University

1989: B.A. in History and Politics, University of Exeter, England.

## **Experience**

08/2014-present: Associate Professor, Political Science, University of South Carolina Aiken, Aiken, SC.

09/2008-07/2014: Assistant Professor, Political Science, University of South Carolina Aiken, Aiken, SC.

09/2006-05/2008: Visiting Assistant Professor, Political Science, Trinity College, Hartford, CT.

02/2005 – 04/2006: Program Officer, Kyrgyzstan, International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) Washington DC

11/2000 – 06/2004: Director of Faculty Recruitment and University Relations, Civic Education Project, Washington DC.

01/1998-11/2000: Chair of Department, Program in International Relations, American University – Central Asia, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

08/1997-11/2000: Civic Education Project Visiting Faculty Fellow, American University-Central Asia, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

## **Languages**

Languages: Turkish (advanced), Kyrgyz (intermediate), Russian (basic), French (intermediate).

## ABSTRACT

## The Evolution of Kyrgyz Foreign Policy

This empirical study, based on extensive field research, interviews with key actors, and use of Kyrgyz and Russian sources, examines the formation of a distinct foreign policy in a small Central Asian state, Kyrgyzstan, following her independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Lacking foreign policy traditions as a separate entity from the USSR, Kyrgyzstan synthesized a foreign policy from anew. In Chapter 1, I examine the literature on nationalism, ideology and nation-building in a post-imperial context and evaluate Kyrgyzstan as a case study from the perspective of small state literature. In Chapters 2 and 3, I analyze the arrival of the modern state and nation-building efforts in Kyrgyzstan after 1991. I argue that Kyrgyz nationalism is restrained by the need to reconcile her large non-Kyrgyz minority population, dictating a typical small state foreign policy eschewing construction of a capsule state, or irredentism.

In Chapter 4, I describe the Kyrgyz foreign policy establishment, her foreign ministry, and various roles of president, parliament, and opposition, in foreign affairs. I present the sources of Kyrgyz foreign policy and recount its emerging shape, arguing Kyrgyz elites synthesized a foreign policy by grafting small state needs onto a Soviet template. In Chapter 5 I outline her relations with former Soviet neighbors since independence. In Chapter 6 I describe relations with key non-Soviet neighbors in her foreign policy, demonstrating how Kyrgyz have prioritized relations with certain states like Iran and Turkey as part of a broader foreign policy strategy, although ideological attractions of Turkish or Iranian models are negligible. In Chapter 7, I trace Kyrgyzstan's unfolding relations with China via a case study of the disputed Kyrgyz-

Chinese frontier settlement. I conclude that Kyrgyz elites successfully created a strategic outlook surmounting numerous challenges since 1991, contradicting the widespread image prevalent in the literature on Central Asia of Kyrgyzstan as semi-failed state lacking any strategic foreign policy. Overall I argue that Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy is directed toward recreating a stable state system in her neighborhood to replace the vanished Soviet precursor. Kyrgyz elites have built upon the Soviet template operationalizing a new strategic outlook oriented around small state behavior but rooted in the past, arguably better at coping with conventional challenges than newer transnational threats.

To my mother, Susannah W. Wood.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend particular thanks to Professor Andrew Hess, whose wise counsel, support and patience over the years was key to this endeavor.

Many of the views presented in these pages have their origins in intensive discussions in the Friday faculty seminar of the American University-Central Asia Politics Department, in the *Steinbrau*, Bishkek, 1998-2004.

I would like to warmly thank my friends and colleagues at AUCA, Bishkek, for their support in this project over the years, including Askat Dukenbaev, Bill Hansen, Martha Merrill, Barrie Hebb, Talatbek Masadykov. Askat Dukenbaev arranged interviews and introductions that led in vital directions, and for answering many miscellaneous questions that cropped up. I am also indebted to Bill Hansen for his severe editing recommendations. Chong raxmat, dostlar!

I am very grateful to Ambassador Muratbek Imanaliev for his kind help in arranging interviews and access to materials.

AUCA graduates Azamat Sakiev, Kyialbek and Kumar Bekbolotov, helped at various times with valuable research assistance.

## PREFACE

This dissertation examines the way in which a small and relatively isolated former Soviet Republic, Kyrgyzstan, coped with the challenge of creating an independent foreign policy from scratch. After almost fifteen years after independence, Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy has departed the theoretical realm of possible, expected behaviors, and has left a track record meriting examination. I evaluate Kyrgyz foreign policy in the light of almost fifteen years of Kyrgyz independence, 1991-2004, with particular emphasis on the foreign policy legacy of President Askar Akaev and his administration, incumbent throughout this period and ousted in a revolt in March 2005. I wish to examine a set of inter-linked questions about Kyrgyz foreign policy behavior. Contrary to any image of being a candidate failed state, I will argue that a Kyrgyz foreign policy establishment has both developed and been able to leverage Kyrgyz independence and their new place in the international order successfully. They have formulated a discernible foreign policy outlook and behavior that is generally pragmatic and shaped only indirectly by nationalist ideology. I argue that it is unlikely to be altered by the 2005 regime overthrow in Kyrgyzstan, especially given that the origins of most of the new interim government that took power in March 2005 are from within the Akaev political establishment.

I examine different foreign policy options open to Kyrgyzstan at independence and contrast them to the final actual options chosen by foreign policy makers. The collapse of Soviet power allowed new ideas and influences to be felt in what had been one of the more isolated places on earth, from the viewpoint of exposure to influences outside the USSR. After 1991, some newly-felt ideological alternatives for external-orientation ranged from Islamic identity, and Pan-Turkism, to some form of “reintegration”; the continuation of the Soviet Union under some other guise. Another possibility included the western liberal-democratic model, or the local Turco-Persian authoritarian-tribal tradition which antedates the Soviet experience. A different but important direction after independence was orientation toward an ‘Asian model’, understood by Kyrgyz leaders as market economies guided by strong governments. China was the main inspiration for this view, but Kyrgyz leaders also began to look with great interest at Korea, Malaysia, and Indonesia. None of these orientations and models of course are or were mutually-exclusive, but they helped to frame a debate about policy choices.

I will assess to what extent these ideologies/policy choices/operating codes have influenced and shaped post-independence Kyrgyz national identity, and to what degree they are manipulated by Kyrgyz élites to further their own aims. This is a topic of special relevance as the new state system in Eurasia continues to be challenged by massive strains unleashed by nationalism and the fragmentation of the old constituent parts into independent republics in the post-Soviet era. Kyrgyzstan is an example of a fragile, developing state that has no strong traditions of a cultural nationalist ideology underpinning the political unit.

At the same time however, Kyrgyzstan is simultaneously a microcosm of internal and external challenges that confront many of the other former republics of the USSR, and also many of its larger Central Asian neighbors. Of very recent vintage, Kyrgyz statehood is neither well institutionalized, nor is it possessed of widespread cultural memory of any autonomy that might bolster the legitimacy of independent statehood. Kyrgyzstan has large populations of non-titular minorities, to the extent that in 1991 Kyrgyz were barely a majority in the Kirghiz SSR (ca.52%).<sup>1</sup> Like other former Soviet states, Kyrgyzstan's economy faced wrenching obstacles calling for radical solutions that led only to further economic disaster. As with its Moslem Central Asian neighbors, Kyrgyzstan balanced the rediscovery of a wider international Islamic community with its own internal commitment to maintaining the secularism firmly implanted during the previous seventy years. Kyrgyzstan also found itself freer than in the past to explore new foreign policy orientations and directions with more powerful states, near and distant, whose contacts had formerly, where they existed at all, been mediated and controlled by Moscow.

After independence, Kyrgyzstan faced enormous challenges in reorganizing and reforming an administrative apparatus suitable for the role of its predecessor, the Kirghiz SSR within the large Soviet state but not appropriate to the new circumstances. The shape of government and the economy was dramatically ill-suited to its new status as a small independent country that quickly became embroiled in a catastrophic economic crisis. The situation of Kyrgyzstan in the 1990s differed from rapidly decolonized states in Africa in the 1960s. A stable and experienced

---

<sup>1</sup> I use 'titular' in the Soviet sense of denominating of the nationality primarily identified with the state unit, e.g. Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan.

administrative apparatus already existed, as did a tradition of notionally autonomous self-government. Ethnic Kyrgyz were well-represented in administrative and professional jobs, and nominally controlled the Kirghiz SSR. Civil servants and government actors had the education and experience to do their jobs, even if they were in need of retraining and had been isolated from currents outside the former Soviet Union. Again, this contrasts with the experience of newly independent states elsewhere in the developing world, such as East Timor, with absolutely no administrative infrastructure intact.

One challenge in Kyrgyzstan similar to the situation of all newly independent states was the novelty of foreign policy. In other areas of government, pre-independence patterns of decision-making and cadres remaining in control are all features observed in the CIS States to a greater or lesser degree – commonly summed up in the phrase the ‘Soviet Legacy’. I am interested in assessing whether this is also true of Kyrgyz foreign policy, an area where the state had an opportunity to start afresh, especially since there were few structures specific to Kyrgyzstan as an independent unit already in place in 1991. If internal administrative institutions, and also constitutional features, retain strong ‘Soviet’ features, how might this be the case in the realm of foreign policy? A ‘Kyrgyz’ or an ‘Uzbek’ or a ‘Kazakh’ foreign policy certainly exists after a decade of independence. This in itself is a dramatic break with the Soviet experience, yet how much of a change is it really? To what extent are the Kyrgyz hampered by their Soviet past, lack of experience, and present existence as a small state?

Many features of the Central Asian States contain structures inherited without alteration from the Soviet Union. In Kyrgyzstan, independence did not even result in a radical recasting of the shape of government – today’s Kyrgyz Constitution, and the model employed in the structure of government, is essentially molded by earlier Soviet templates from before 1988. Indeed, arguably, almost the entire bureaucratic apparatus of the republican administration is remarkably unchanged except for staff cutbacks and changes in job titles. The blueprint of the state conforms closely to a model of reorganization introduced in the *Perestroika* era in the late 1980s. Despite constitutional experimentation with a bicameral legislature from 1993-2003, the structure of government is rooted in continuity rather than radical departures from the past.

The foreign policy of newly independent Kyrgyzstan under President Akaev reflected this continuity. Innovation was to occur with strong reference to a broader Soviet foreign policy tradition as I describe below in Chapter Four. The pre-independence era however, was one wherein Kyrgyz elites had neither decision-making input, nor policy-implementation ability and only very limited involvement. Disbarred by a sophisticated nationalities policy designed to keep Central Asian cadres in their own republics, but a handful of Kyrgyz were actually even involved in the opaque and rather elite world of Soviet foreign affairs. Consequentially state classes within the small Kyrgyz foreign policy arena emergent after 1991 were rooted in the Soviet foreign policy establishment or tangential areas, although without much experience of designing or shaping a foreign policy. New directions offered by

independence were always to be balanced against the need to solidify state legitimacy that stressed linkages to the Soviet past in the design of external relations.

Comparative post-imperial studies are essential to framing this question. The international behavior and political culture of states emerging from the Ottoman Empire after 1919 suggest comparisons with the newly independent states from the Soviet Union in 1991. The collapse of both yielded political legacies in successor states shaping internal political, economic and foreign orientations. For example, elites governing Syria and Iraq in the 1920s and 1930s had an essentially Ottoman background, world outlook, and training. Even today political culture in contemporary Iraq and Syria bear important elements of this legacy. In Syria for example, the state is dominated by a dynastic clan ruling via co-opting bureaucracies in a manner reminiscent of classical Ottoman political practice.

The common heritage of the Soviet successor states does not override local and regional differences shaping unique and contrasting patterns within the former Soviet space. Important variables mandate that no two post-Soviet regions behave in quite the same way in their international politics and political culture generally, and that Central Asia is unique. Several permutations of the Soviet experience render the five Central Asian states highly distinctive as a former Soviet region.

#### *Externally-imposed modernity*

The Soviet era wrought profound changes at every level in Central Asia. In this sense, the Central Asian states have much in common with the historical experience of the Middle East in sharing a common Islamic, Turko-Persian heritage and

experiencing enforced, externally-imposed modernization. A one-party state with essentially 'Western' political values completely alien to local society and culture irreversibly changed traditional Central Asian forms of government. In comparison to earlier Russian rule in Central Asia, the Soviets aggressively politicized the populace and expanded the size of the machinery of government in a way in which the Tsarist Russian state had avoided doing in the region.

Marxism-Leninism unleashed instability in several ways. Its application created anti-religious campaigns in a region where Islam was the primary level of self-identification. The ideology revolved around an industrial working-class that did not exist except amongst a tiny proportion of non-indigenous workers. Soviet attempts at ideologically-motivated social engineering in the 1920s (for instance, collectivization in Kazakhstan), created human tragedy and massive social dislocation.<sup>2</sup> Leninism further required the creation of 'national' territories as a precondition for the existence of more historically appropriate units. The consequent introduction of 'nativization' resulted in a complete reshaping of Central Asian identity in the growth of national units.

The ideologically-driven successor-state to the Tsarist empire essentially refused to decolonize, and retained the Central Asian territories as a laboratory for rapid programmatic socio-economic change. Central Asians elites responded by adapting to this externally-imposed political culture. In the case of Kyrgyzstan in the 1920s and 1930s, elites tended to be well-positioned in terms of knowing the Russian language and possessed locally-based authority, making them attractive to cooption by

---

<sup>2</sup> See Gregory J Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).

the Soviets. The Soviet experience defined and perpetuated native cadres who remained broadly entrenched in power at independence.

In Central Asia, this allowed for continuation of social patterns antedating Soviet rule. This contrasts strongly with the experience of say, Ukraine and Belarus, in whose case David D. Laiten argues pre-Soviet elites had little incentive to cooption and were normally replaced entirely.<sup>3</sup> The first generations of Central Asian leadership were repressed for attempting to moderate traumatic and over-rapid reforms imposed by Moscow. But after 1956, the Soviet Union essentially swapped radicalism and social engineering in Central Asia for an unwritten social contract. Carefully supervised, via the mechanism of “dual hierarchy” but generally left alone, Central Asian elites were given wide autonomy in return for observing the demands of the center in economic and security terms. In Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan elites tended to be drawn from the same broad family, clan, and tribal groupings influential in the pre-Soviet era. Social mobility was possible via a complex interrelationship of family and tribal status on the one hand, and party and official status on the other, all underpinned by preferential access to the Soviet educational system outside of Central Asia, such as Moscow and Leningrad State universities.

### *Socio-economic development*

The Soviet Union introduced socio-economic development plans controlled outside of Central Asia, predominantly in Moscow. Ruled from there, the assigned

---

<sup>3</sup> David D. Laiten, *Identity Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

role of the Central Asian republics was to supply raw materials to the center.<sup>4</sup> If we accept that Soviet rule in Central Asia possessed quasi-imperial elements, then the Soviets far exceeded other imperial powers elsewhere in building infrastructure compared to British and French efforts in their Asian territories. This complicates viewing the Soviet experience as an exercise in traditional imperial government disguised by ideology. As progressive modern republics of a socialist state, the Central Asian republics were pragmatically given the same opportunities as other Soviet republics such as schools, hospitals, social services, and factories.

Economic historians point out that the Central Asian republics received much smaller shares of infrastructural investment compared to other republics in the Soviet Union. But they also note that this compares favorably to the proportion of metropolitan investment in a typical non-settler colony of Britain or France prior to decolonization.<sup>5</sup> Soviet leaders at the time were aware of this. Stalin backed the creation of Central Asian national units in the early 1930s as examples of Asian socialist development that would hopefully provoke revolution in British and French-dominated South Asia.

Today, Kyrgyzstan has an impressive if crumbling infrastructure of roads, schools, scientific research institutes and hospitals. In contrast to many post-colonial regimes where the absence of economic and social development constituted a rationale for national-self-determination, Central Asia achieved rapid infrastructural

---

<sup>4</sup> For a comparative discussion of the ‘imperial’ nature of the Soviet Union, see Bruce Parrot, “Analyzing the Transformation of the Soviet Union in Comparative Perspective,” in *The End of Empire? The Transformation of the USSR in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (New York: ME Sharpe 1997), 3-29.

<sup>5</sup> Stringer points out that while Central Asian living standards were higher than neighboring countries, they compared poorly to other parts of the USSR. See Alex Stringer, “Soviet Development in Central Asia: the classic colonial syndrome?,” in *Central Asia: Aspects of Transition* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 146-166.

development prior to independence. The Central Asian republics are more developed than most of their ‘non-Soviet’ Asian neighbors. The Soviet experience deprived elites of a key justification for post-colonial nation-building. Elites in contemporary Central Asia have difficulty elaborating a progressive development plan to replace the Soviet template.

Transition to market economies produced tangible poverty and decreased standards of living throughout the region. For example, Kyrgyz GDP in 2004 is roughly thirty percent of 1991.<sup>6</sup> This belied Central Asian government’s self-promotion as harbingers of the world market economy. In Kazakhstan, Nazarbaev’s ‘Kazakhstan 2030’ development campaign is plastered on tattered billboards throughout that country. It is a good example of attempts by Central Asian leaders to emulate the Soviet model by articulating development plans.

### *Narrating the nation*

Soviet nationality policy demarcated and divided Central Asians into ethno-territorial states. Shaped by the center, by the latter part of the century the Soviet experience solidified national identities amongst key urban Central Asian elites, if less so among the rural population. Importantly though, Central Asian nationalisms did not develop in opposition to anything, (e.g. such as recent Eritrean secession from Ethiopia or Irish nationalism earlier in the century). There was no independence struggle as in Algeria and Indonesia; realistically no one could claim the vast legitimacy of having secured national liberation. Central Asia lacks a Simon Bolivar

---

<sup>6</sup> The World Bank, *Little Green Data Book 2003* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2003), 126.

or a Kwame Nkrumah. This explains why figures from the early history of the region are currently resuscitated as symbols of independence despite dubious association with the modern state, for example, Amur Timur in Uzbekistan. Even the Caucasus experienced nationalist stirrings prior to independence, and had memories of earlier autonomy in the short period of fragmentation during the Russian Revolution. Central Asian elites on the other hand owed their positions entirely to Moscow and were unenthusiastic about building local legitimacy and power bases anew when independence loomed.

In the post-independence period, elites increasingly tried to identify national independence with their own political positions. Soviet-era elites were challenged to replace their previously centrally-determined legitimacy. In addition, because of the depoliticization of the bulk of the citizenry, with the exception of Tajikistan, the Central Asian leaders were under little pressure to diversify the sources of their legitimacy. They usually alighted on the rather stagnant idea of maintaining political stability. The only time when entrenched Soviet-era élites were seriously challenged by an extra-establishment political force for their legitimacy, in Tajikistan, a violent civil war erupted.

#### *The ethno-national conundrum*

All of the Central Asian states have significant populations of non-titular nationalities. Before the Soviet era Central Asian polities were not organized around ethnic or national identification. In the Soviet period inhabitants were assigned nationalities, and internal frontiers drawn up that placed non-titular minorities inside

neighboring republics, such as the Uzbeks in the Kyrgyz Ferghana. The Soviets transferred large numbers of Slav settlers to the region and imported 'undesirable' nationalities from elsewhere, adding to the mixture (for instance Koreans, Meshketian Turks, and ethnic Germans). In addition to forced migration, the Soviet Union had a high degree of professional labor mobility. There were economic incentives for voluntary relocation in certain occupations, (e.g. engineering, medicine), adding to the inflow of population from other areas of the USSR.

Central Asia's complex demographic mixture could be seen to have the potential for protracted interethnic conflict given tensions brought about by the newly independent national units; yet nationalism seems to be restrained rather than destabilized by national independence. Inter-ethnic clashes have so far been the exception rather than the rule. Unrest in the region occurred as the imperial center was falling apart 1986-92, not afterwards. From then, realizing the fragile nature of their own positions, leaders have been reluctant to play the 'national card' too heavily. The resulting upheaval would probably remove them from power in one way or another. Presidents Akaev in Kyrgyzstan, and Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan, rely heavily on the political support of minorities. In Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, minorities often have conservative political views supportive of the titular government policies unrelated to minority issues. For instance, Akaev enjoys considerable support in the northern Chuy oblast of Kyrgyzstan among non-Kyrgyz farmers and market gardeners.<sup>7</sup>

But national minorities are in an ambivalent position. In titular-dominated states they are effectively disenfranchised in the new power structures that emerged in

---

<sup>7</sup> *Oblast*: (Russian) a province.

the guise of ethno-national states in the region. The role of neighboring states with cross-border minority groups is now complicated by the constraints of sovereign-state relations. Absence of an overarching center has removed basic security guarantees for these minorities living outside of their republics. Whilst ethno-nationalism has not in fact proved the source of instability some commentators initially predicted, it looms in the background structure of Central Asian politics.

The experience of national states and the approach of governments to minority populations vary widely across the former Soviet Union. In the Baltic states, for example, economic success and a very different political culture - slowly becoming more pluralist and based on mass-participation – contrasts with the economic stagnation and authoritarianism in Central Asia. Minority inclusion in Central Asian politics is based on the whims, sensibilities and predilections of the titular controlling elites, whereas in the Baltic states, mass participation and more transparent political bargaining processes have laid the foundations for the genuine integration of minorities in politics.

#### *Authoritarianism and Democracy*

Central Asian native political traditions are mainly hierarchical and authoritarian, except perhaps amongst steppe nomads where it is sometimes argued that this was mitigated by a consensus tradition arising from the fluidity of nomadic society. Although a vestigial consensus tradition continues in both modern Kazakh and Kyrgyz society it is no longer uppermost in politics where economic, regional and family considerations have more impact. Neither the Russian Empire nor the Soviet

Union fostered anything other than authoritarianism, although the latter imposed new, complex and radically different political traditions within an authoritarian framework. The Soviets created institutions that are the preconditions for a modern pluralist state. Important procedural-institutional forms of pluralist government became permanent features, such as bureaucracy and local and republican assemblies with regular elections. The shape of government in Central Asia was therefore modeled on modern institutions rather than older indigenous traditions. As Michael Ochs argues in the Turkmen context, this explains the continuing preference in Central Asia for superficial observance of democratic forms and adherence to institutional processes, even if unrelated to real political power structures.<sup>8</sup>

Most Asian countries that are either democracies or are moving in that direction, (Taiwan, Korea, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia), have done so slowly and painfully over thirty or forty years: only at the point where democratic institutions were seen by a majority as the most efficient way to control and redistribute power were they accepted. Central Asian states are nowhere near this point and are not likely to be in the near future.

On the other hand, if Central Asian states are going to remain essentially oligarchic in the near future, then they also have to retain legitimacy at least by being only as or less oppressive than the Soviet Union was: Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are headed dangerously towards a standard of social and political oppression that would not have been tolerated in the USSR in the 1970s and 1980s.

---

<sup>8</sup> Michael Ochs, "Turkmenistan: the Quest for Stability and Control," in *Conflict Cleavage and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, ed. Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 312-360.

This emergence of historically unprecedented levels of state authoritarianism in the region, rather than interethnic conflict, could be one of the major forces for instability in the region. Many post-colonial states manage to balance authoritarianism against their ‘national-liberation’ credentials in legitimacy terms, (such as Pakistan or Indonesia). As pointed out above, Central Asian states have a central crisis of legitimacy unusual in a post-colonial context that has deprived them of this source.

The pre-annexation Khanates and polities in the region had limitations on state power exercised by Islamic political theory and the idea of the role of justice in the state. The Soviet Union eventually settled for a social contract allowing local elites limited power on Moscow’s terms. Both these checks-and-balances have ceased to exist in contemporary Central Asia.

The Central Asian conundrum lies in creating new political structures which could cope with genuine institutionalized opposition that is really representative, while not unleashing a massive amount of political and social energy that would destroy the fragile state. In Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan at least, a sort of legitimacy has been maintained by the capital cities acting as patronage ‘clearinghouses’ for power and government in the provinces, usurping the previous function of Moscow. This cannot be taken as the same as the idea of popular legitimacy in a Western sense, except that since politics is still confined in the region to exactly the same tiny proportion of the population, it might be seen to have a ‘representative’ character in its continuity.

Any of the individual elements discussed above can be detected in former Soviet Republics outside of Central Asia, and the presence of all of these intertwined factors makes the political and developmental situation of Central Asian states unique

when compared to both other post-colonial state systems and also other areas of the former Soviet Union.

*Differing small state experiences compared*

Polar opposites in terms of their small state experience since 1991, Estonia and Kyrgyzstan share many similarities yet have radical differences. Both states have pursued similar policies since independence, yet the success and failure of these policies are worth noting to highlight some things I will examine in this dissertation. Apart from a brief interlude of independence in the 1920s, Estonia shared with Kyrgyzstan submersion in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. After 1991, they were both newly independent and struggling to secure their place in the post Cold War world.

Kyrgyzstan and Estonia differ radically in their geopolitical and geo-cultural situations. Estonia edged toward a forgotten greater Scandinavia, and is an integral part of a Baltic community poised to take its place as a sub-region of the European Union. In terms of religion and culture, Estonia is part of the North European Protestant world and remains outside the very different Orthodox culture of its neighbors. Unlike Estonia, Kyrgyzstan is simultaneously an Asian country and nominally Islamic in culture, things generally viewed as precluding 'Europeanness'. While Estonia is on an edge of Europe, Kyrgyzstan is firmly within what Zbigniew Brzezinski has characterized as the "Eurasian Balkans," a zone he describes as being of 'paradigmatic instability.'<sup>9</sup> Proximate to geopolitical areas of instability such as

---

<sup>9</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

Xinjiang, Tajikistan, Kashmir and Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan came to independence in a much less stable neighborhood, or put another way, its distance from the European core makes it less likely that the West would view it in quite the same way as Estonia.

Yet ironically, Kyrgyzstan *is* partially European by virtue of being subjected to an essentially European model of development in the Soviet period. Marxism-Leninism was completely alien to Central Asia, imposed firmly from European quarters by Europeans accompanied by a substantial amount of European immigration into the region, leaving the country with a non-Asian population of almost twenty-two percent at independence in 1991. Russification, at times intentional and at others unintentional, in the Kyrgyz context can only be understood as Europeanization. In comparison with the Kemalist project in Turkey, Kyrgyzstan represents a more complete model of some form of ‘Europeanization’. On the other hand, Estonians, ironically, saw Russification as the total reverse of Europeanization, illustrating of course that the European idea itself is far from being well-defined and tends to be contextually dependent. A substantial Slavic settler population continues to give Kyrgyzstan a European flavor. Even the international community can appear a little confused about Kyrgyzstan’s nature, as seen in the less-choosy Euro-Atlantic clubs, such as the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, (OSCE), offering it membership.

Both Kyrgyzstan and Estonia embarked on ambitious programs of economic liberalization, fiscal ‘shock therapy’, but with very different outcomes. In Estonia, it worked well, creating a prosperous economy and a stable currency so rapidly that Estonia has leap-frogged the queue for admission to the EU as its economy converges

on criteria for admission. Kyrgyzstan had a collapsing rural economy even before independence and overall it was the second least-developed Soviet economy.

Kyrgyzstan lacked a Finland as a source of sympathetic investment by a developed 'big brother'. Neighboring states did not support the economic liberalization policies pushed by the Kyrgyz government, seen in its being the first regional country to float a national currency in 1993 and join the WTO in 1998. They closed ranks against Kyrgyzstan, and imposed tariff barriers damaging to nascent trade. China acquired many valuable agricultural assets, (such as equine bloodstock), through illegal sales soon after independence, and China's demand for scrap metal has subsequently led to the physical dismantling of the communication and transport sectors as an illicit economic activity to feed this demand. Kyrgyzstan saw its agricultural export markets inside the CIS crash as it could not compete with EU or antipodean lamb, the primary export commodity. Liberalization and shock therapy have only ushered in the painful realization that what Estonia could do in a decade will take at least five decades in Kyrgyzstan, and that due to very differing circumstances economic shock therapy is more shock than therapy in Central Asia.

Kyrgyzstan and Estonia differ radically on their policies toward non-titular nationalities. Simultaneous to, and clashing with, mono ethnic control over the levers of the state, Kyrgyzstan has attempted to cobble together a 'Kyrgyzstani' identity to reassure minorities. Citizenship was extended to all residents upon independence. Despite this, initial exuberant Kyrgyz self-discovery (or nationalism), the economic disaster since 1991, and an uncertain geo-strategic situation caused the exodus of approximately forty percent of the Slavic population since 1991. Yet Kyrgyz policy

toward its non-titular minorities has arguably been the mildest in Central Asia and also the former Soviet Union with the exception of Lithuania. There was no Kyrgyz language requirement for citizenship, and Russian has continued to enjoy some sort of official status, most recently achieving legal status as the official second language (even before this occurred in 1999, Russian was formally the official language of inter-ethnic communication).

Estonia, by contrast pursued a path of denying citizenship to large swathes of her population on the basis of their non-Estonian-ness. Dubious legal arguments, (such as the fact that *de jure* Estonia had not been part of the USSR and that therefore non-Estonian immigrants after 1945 were illegal), were coupled with Estonian language requirements for citizenship. Explaining the absence of secessionist movements among the Slavic population in Estonia, most external analysts agree that Estonia's economic success has led to quiescence among her disenfranchised population, materially better off in Estonia than Russia. Another important point is that the Estonian government since 1991, although formally adhering to exclusionist policies, in reality quietly extended citizenship to key members of the Slavic community to head off a secessionist crisis.<sup>10</sup>

For the student of international relations, this rather superficial comparison I have roughly sketched out above highlights important questions about differing paths taken by two independent post-Soviet states of similar size with similar proportions of titular and non-titular nationalities (around fifty percent upon independence in both cases). Why is it that Estonia has successfully forged a strong vision of state identity, thrown off a Soviet past in a remarkably short period, and now pursues a vigorous and

---

<sup>10</sup> Laiten, *Identity Formation*, 276.

arguably successful foreign policy? Why is Kyrgyzstan's state identity remarkably fragile and married to many negative aspects of the Soviet past, with a drifting foreign policy increasingly mired in dependency on foreign aid? Many theorists of nationalism would suppose the conditions surrounding the formation of Kyrgyz and Estonian national identity to be quite similar, and the answer does not lie in the 'Asianess' or 'Europeaness', nor in their cultural differences. Estonia could choose from ideologically-laden foreign policy choices in the form of Western European or Scandinavian orientations. Likewise, Kyrgyzstan also encountered no shortage of ideologically-laden foreign policy orientations to pursue in forging a global orientation and reinforcing state identity.

The Estonian and Kyrgyz experience highlights the extent that Soviet nationalities policy, although applied in roughly the same way in every Soviet republic, resulted in very different outcomes when connected to the emergence of independent foreign policy. This difference has a massive impact on the behavior of Kyrgyzstan as an independent actor in the international arena. Although both must face common small state challenges, they do so under very different circumstances and in very different geopolitical circumstances.

The Central Asian states have a package of problems including factors such as ethnic conflict, economic underdevelopment, poor levels of politicization or institutionalized pluralism, an authoritarian tradition, artificiality of state frontiers, and fragile state identity. This last problem particularly underpins my research. Writing in 1904 in Egypt, an exiled Tatar intellectual, Yusuf Akçura, outlined some identity and

ideology options for the Ottoman Empire in a brief article.<sup>11</sup> The policy alternatives facing independent Kyrgyzstan today are similar, albeit in a slightly different context, given its post-Soviet (and by comparison, ‘post-Ottoman’) origins. Reading Akçura originally led me to start thinking about this issue.

One of the main challenges for the modern Kyrgyz state after independence has been the search for a stable national ideology providing legitimacy for political elites in the post-independence period, and wider rationale for its post-Soviet independent existence. Soviet Central Asia was ideologically a syncretic organism where state legitimacy derived from Marxism-Leninism, and the centralist Soviet idea, but in reality much of Central Asian society was controlled using cultural-nationalist symbols. Nationalist symbolism in Central Asia was the means of mobilization and to some extent social control, but never the official source of state legitimacy. Indeed, an important difference between say, the Estonian case and the Kyrgyz is that Estonian nationalism was essentially a populist folk-movement, whereas Kyrgyz ‘nationalism’ such as it developed in the Soviet period was an elite ‘high-culture’ which did not and cannot presently serve as the basis for the formation of a populist national identity.

Following independence, this elite cultural identity, nurtured by the Soviets but never widely disseminated or fully in control of the state, became married to political power in new ways. An additional complication to this process of rapid change is the grip of the recent past. Barely a decade on, the disintegration of the USSR has not yet finished. Large and historically powerful empires do not collapse overnight, in reality

---

<sup>11</sup> Yusuf Akçura, “Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset,” *Türk Gazetesi* 24-34, (1904; reprinted Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi, 1991).

they may take decades to unravel completely. As we have remarked above, new states with flags and governments emerge, but less tangible features, such as economic systems, the background and political culture of elites, and a common imperial culture fade away rather than disappear immediately. The collapse of the USSR is often seen as ushering in a transitional period laden with rapid departure from the past, yet this sometimes obscures how little change has occurred in this sense, especially in Central Asia.

After independence external models associated with a particular foreign country or region grew in relevance in shaping debate about new external affiliations. For the Baltic republics foreign policy orientation was a source of elite consensus. Westward orientation and membership of powerful and sympathetic organizations such as the EU and NATO were easy goals on which to agree on, and the benefits of escaping Russia's orbit seemed clear. Kyrgyzstan lacked strong neighboring regional organizations to provide focus and structure to macro-policy. Over-emphasis on Islamic or Asian identities would create tensions with the West and Russia. The rediscovery of Turkic identity threatened Kyrgyz nationalism, (since it emerged as an attempted Turkish cultural and political domination), and undermined the possibility of reconstructing a 'Turkestani' identity. Russia continued to be a vital partner for Kyrgyzstan in the security and economic spheres, and could not be abandoned in the same manner as Estonia.

There was a flood of debate and interest among Kyrgyz elites in these various alternatives in the period after independence. Nascent political groupings and various interest groups inclined toward different alternatives. Foreign observers often

confused the enthusiasm and excitement of Kyrgyz elites upon discovering that they actually *had* other choices with genuine or deep commitment for those choices. Eager participation in the annual Turkic summits gives quite a different picture from the unease that Kyrgyz elites privately feel with the way their relationship with Turkey is developing. Western concern at the recent ‘rapprochement’ between Bishkek and Moscow obscures the fact that there was no significant cooling of their relations in the first place to make such an orientation a particularly surprising or divergent foreign policy action for the Kyrgyz.

In summary, my argument is that the Kyrgyz leadership after a decade of independence successfully suggested a coherent foreign policy, related to the Soviet past. While influenced by various external orientation debates that opened up after independence, it did not commit to one direction over another, but has come to be balanced and a definitively Kyrgyz foreign policy.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE .....	vii
Externally-imposed modernity.....	xii
Socio-economic development.....	xiv
Narrating the nation .....	xvi
The ethno-national conundrum .....	xvii
Authoritarianism and Democracy .....	xix
Differing small state experiences compared .....	xxii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	xxx
CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF STUDY .....	1
Literature on Central Asia.....	5
The Literature pre-1991 .....	6
Literature since 1991.....	8
Nationalism .....	12
Nationalism as ideology.....	20
Foreign policy, ideology and nationalism.....	26
Post-imperial comparative perspective .....	31
Small state foreign policy behavior .....	32
Domestic politics, foreign policy and democratization.....	36
Methodology .....	43
CHAPTER 2: THE ORIGINS OF MODERN KYRGYZSTAN.....	46
Islam.....	53
History from the 1800s .....	55
The Kirghiz SSR .....	65
Urbanization and collectivization .....	70
Politics and society from the 1930s .....	75
The impact of the Soviet experience on Kyrgyz culture and identity.....	80
Independence .....	83
Politics after independence .....	84
Economic collapse after independence .....	89
The overthrow of the Akaev regime .....	91
Conclusion .....	94
CHAPTER 3: BUILDING AN INDEPENDENT NATION .....	95
<i>The Kirghiz SSR legacy</i> .....	102
The minority groups.....	103
<i>Language policy since 1991</i> .....	111
Civic nationalism, ‘our common home’.....	116
The external ethnies and nation building.....	119
History in post-independence Kyrgyzstan .....	125
State symbolism .....	127

Border posts and frontiers .....	130
Conclusion .....	139
CHAPTER 4: THE STRUCTURE OF KYRGYZ FOREIGN POLICY .....	140
The institutional context .....	150
The Presidency .....	152
Parliament .....	156
Kyrgyz Ministry of Foreign Affairs .....	163
Foreign Ministry personnel .....	168
Structure of the Foreign Ministry .....	171
Overseas Embassies and Consulates .....	173
Foreign Ministers .....	175
Ambassadors .....	180
The generation gap .....	183
Other ministries and local administration .....	184
Think tanks, institutes and universities .....	188
Opposition political parties in Kyrgyzstan .....	189
The sources of Kyrgyz foreign policy .....	194
Conclusion .....	207
CHAPTER 5: KYRGYZSTAN'S INNER CIRCLE .....	210
Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations .....	215
Kyrgyz-Russian relations .....	230
Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations .....	240
Kyrgyz Tajik relations .....	244
Conclusion .....	249
CHAPTER 6: KYRGYZSTAN'S OUTER CIRCLE .....	251
Kyrgyz-Turkish relations .....	252
Kyrgyz-Iranian relations .....	264
Kyrgyz-US relations .....	268
American University in Central Asia .....	276
Not an island after all .....	281
Emerging players in Kyrgyz bilateral relations .....	290
Conclusion .....	292
CHAPTER 7: KYRGYZ-CHINESE RELATIONS .....	293
China in Kyrgyz foreign policy strategy at independence .....	304
Uyghur nationalism .....	306
Frontier crisis explodes .....	312
Negotiations and settlement 1991-2000 .....	319
Shanghai Cooperation Organization .....	327
Conclusion .....	330
CONCLUSION .....	335
Theoretical considerations .....	344
Nationalism and state identity .....	348
Globalization and Central Asia .....	350
Recommendations for further research .....	353
WORKS CITED .....	357

## CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF STUDY

My thesis is that almost fifteen years of independence has seen the construction of a coherent foreign policy in Kyrgyzstan that can be explained as a strategy evolved to guide Kyrgyz foreign policy makers. An evaluation of Kyrgyz foreign policy, inevitably closely identified with the administration of President Akaev 1991-2005, is particularly timely given his flight from Kyrgyzstan and then resignation following widespread political unrest in March 2005. I evaluate the evolution of this strategy from several different theoretical perspectives, some having more explanatory power than others. Describing the evolution of a foreign policy, I will show how no one view really helps us explain the totality. As a newly independent state whose identity is still in formation, nationalism and nation building could be thought to play a great role. After independence we may have expected nationalism to have an impact on its foreign policy, as arguably it did in neighboring states, such as Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. I argue that the unique intermix of ethnic balance within Kyrgyzstan combined with the post-imperial mind set and origins of the elites prevented the construction of a foreign policy driven by nationalism. Although one can see initiatives within Kyrgyz foreign policy definitely connected to an internal nation building agenda, they did not drive the broader strategic agenda. The function of nationalist ideology is primarily aimed at mollifying internal nationalist constituencies having limited ability to control foreign policy in the first place.

Another theoretical view of foreign orientation in post Soviet Central Asia is that the newly independent, inexperienced states with fragile national identities would be absorbed into, or be too unstable and weak to resist, competing external ideologies such as those advanced by would-be regional powers determined to create new client states or blocs in the region. Namely, that, Pan-Turkism (sponsored by Turkey) or Pan-Islamism (nebulously sponsored by Iran or Pakistan) might gain a toehold in shaping the ideologies and identities of the newly independent Central Asian states. My argument here using the case of Kyrgyzstan is that certainly elites have been glad to play upon historical commonalities with regional powers such as Turkey and Iran to leverage security, trade and investment ties. However by and large they are cool about any wholesale adoption of a new external ideology that interferes with Kyrgyz state-building internally. The Central Asian states resisted the return of Pan-Turkism and remained secular. In Kyrgyzstan in particular there has been a fair degree of religious reconstruction congruent with a religious establishment in service of the state, albeit it has little impact on politics. Enthusiasm for continuing close relations with Russia, and developing ties to China, Turkey and Iran, is motivated mainly by a pragmatic desire to court larger-regional powers into offsetting and balancing the threat of Uzbekistan, as I will show in my discussion of the development of Kyrgyz relations with Uzbekistan and Iran.

This balance of power view and instinct of Kyrgyz foreign policy actors, I further hypothesize, stems from the career origins of Kyrgyz foreign policy elites in the Soviet Foreign Ministry. I demonstrate that they have been adept at shaping a foreign policy reflecting the very different realities of steering the Kyrgyz state from

the USSR. To a great extent their foreign policy modus operandi remains determined, as in many other independent countries emerging from a quasi-colonial or colonial context, by the experience as part of the predecessor state. Perversely, in its bureaucratic culture and cognitive norms, Kyrgyz foreign policy is rooted in Soviet foreign policy more than it is paradigmatically novel in its approaches to the foreign policy challenges of a small underdeveloped country of five million people.

Additionally we will see that Kyrgyz foreign policy is increasingly triangulating itself against the strategic patronage and security guarantee of three major global powers, Russia, China and the United States. This process is driven by the need to secure itself from the threat of Uzbekistan. All three of these global powers represent ideological models that have their own profound implications for her foreign policy formation. Geopolitical interest in Kyrgyzstan of the three together, on the other hand, has created a balanced niche wherein the Kyrgyz constructed their own policy that blends this reality without fully accepting the orbit of one global power.

The post-imperial legacy is represented by continued relations with Russia, proximity to whom is required for vital security and economic considerations. This competes with the simultaneous desire to build and invigorate relations with China, seen by the Kyrgyz to represent an intriguing model of Asian development. On the other hand, gravitation to the free-market security umbrella of the United States, whose patronage comes with perhaps the most dangerous ideological strings attached of any outside player for influence over Kyrgyzstan, is a temptation for Kyrgyz policy makers with profound implications for the sort of independent state Kyrgyz elites are trying to build.

Offsetting this deliberate triangulation to preserve its sovereignty from larger and regionally hegemonic neighbors such as Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy has followed strong theoretical conformity to small state behavior. This is seen in inclination toward multilateralism, active membership of international institutions and a commitment to international law. The Soviet Union gave birth to a few leviathans, but a plethora of small states as well. As a small state we must also, therefore, evaluate her foreign policy in that light. While Kyrgyzstan has been forced to achieve many foreign policy goals through bilateralism, the failure of ambitious multilateral and supranational groupings in the region should not detract from the success of bilateral initiatives. An emerging trend in Kyrgyz foreign policy is as a small state broker in regional initiatives and multilateral groupings demonstrating a Kyrgyz commitment to multilateral institutions as the literature on small state behavior would suggest.<sup>12</sup>

In this chapter, in order to advance a theoretical framework of reference for this study, I will examine several different aspects on post-Soviet states particularly related to a theoretical understanding of Kyrgyz international state behavior: first, the literature on nationalism, second that on small state international behavior and foreign policy, and third, the literature on institutions in post-imperial states in comparative perspective. Central Asian states are currently engaged in a nation-building phase particularly as nationalism now underpins official state legitimacy and identity in all five republics. Within the five Former Soviet Central Asian states, this nationalism moves along a continuum from an extreme and xenophobic variant as manifested in

---

<sup>12</sup> See for example Robert O. Keohane, "Lilliputians' Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics," in *International Organization* 23, no. 2 (Spring 1969): 291-310.

Turkmenistan to a looser, less-consistently articulated and enforced version in Kyrgyzstan; a nationalizing but not terribly nationalist state. Does nationalist ideology in these states have a role in their foreign policy behavior? In the case of Kyrgyzstan one must reach beyond the literature on nationalism for the answer and also address state size as well as the idea of the imperial legacy inside state institutions. Of the various theoretical ways of looking at former Soviet Central Asia, it is through the combined elements of all viewpoints that we can synthesize a theoretical framework with the necessary explanatory power. Before turning to these however, it is useful to survey the general state of writing on state identity and nationalism in Central Asia.

#### *Literature on Central Asia*

Following the collapse of the USSR scholars have wrestled with the role played by nationalism and ethnic conflict in this process. It was not widely believed, right up until the years immediately before the collapse, that the Soviet delineation of nationalities and constituent republics would ever have substantial implications for internal politics in those regions. Indeed, the “Fainsodian” view of Soviet government downplayed the role of national groups and non-Russian republics in the government of the Soviet Union.<sup>13</sup> Scholarship since then has tried to reexamine the role of nation building in the Soviet period and evaluate the implications of this for the independent units created by the fragmentation of the USSR. Literature on Central Asia has also focused on integrating and adapting theoretical work on nationalism more widely to the specificity of the Central Asian cases. At the same time, it has grappled more recently with two particular problems. Nationalism did not unleash endless

---

<sup>13</sup> Merle Fainsod, *How Russia is Ruled* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953).

secessionist nationalisms in the region, nor the major ethnic turmoil predicted in the early 1990s.

The theoretically rich literature that developed on the experience of Central and Eastern Europe after 1991 has had difficulty explaining Central Asia, where democratization and transition economics have been signal failures even when compared to other former Soviet Republics. Study of Central Europe and Central Asia seems to be multiplying rather than unifying our views of the post-communist world. Another important aspect strand to the scholarship on Central Asia since 1991 is growing interest in the idea of a 'post-imperial legacy' particularly viewed from a comparative perspective.

#### *The Literature pre-1991*

Obviously, Central Asians themselves were writing and publishing before 1991, and have continued to do so afterwards. This discussion however will focus on the main academic debates in the West. Central Asia was not widely studied from 1945, although both British and American scholars produced enduring studies during this timeframe. Owen Lattimore's *Inner Asian Frontiers of China* remains a classic study of the border dynamics between the urban Chinese state and its frontier nomad societies.<sup>14</sup> Many studies dating from the 1960s and 1970s, have stood the test of time, and are still outstanding (and the more so because the authors generally had little access to field research or archival material). Theresa Rokowska-Harmston's study of Soviet nationalities policy and the formation of the Tajik SSR 1920-50 is a good

---

<sup>14</sup> Owen Lattimore, *Inner Asian Frontiers of China* (Washington DC: The American Geographic Society, 1940; reprint Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

example.<sup>15</sup> Rokowska-Harmstone traced the impact of the Leninist policy of “*korinizatsia*” (nativization of cadres) on the region formed into Tajikistan. She argued that Soviet nationalities policy resulted in the creation of cadres possessing genuinely territorial sympathies and policies. In the context of Stalinism in the 1930s and 1940s, this led inevitably to a backlash as the center reasserted control with purges of the first generations of indigenous Soviet leadership in all of the republics in the 1930s. Massel’s *Surrogate Proletariat* is an insightful study of Soviet social engineering in Uzbekistan in the 1920s.<sup>16</sup> Looking at the implementation of communist ideology manifested in social engineering in the region, Gregory Massel charts Soviet attempts to weaken traditional society in the Ferghana valley and the ways in which the Soviet state confronted conservative Islamic society. Rakowska-Harmstone and Massell laid the foundation for studies seeking to explain the singular way wherein the Soviet template adapted at the peripheries of the state.

Edward Allworth’s edited volume on Central Asia is also an essential starting-point for a student of the region with essays on the formation of political culture in the region, and useful articles on the Tsarist era and the early years of Soviet rule.<sup>17</sup> Allworth’s later addition to the post-1991 edition of the volume discussing the failure of modern leadership in the region advances an interesting and accurate set of assumptions on difficulties local bureaucracies experienced in making the shift from dependent to autonomous governing entities.

---

<sup>15</sup> Teresa Rokowska-Harmstone, *Russia and Nationalism in Central Asia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970).

<sup>16</sup> Gregory J. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974).

<sup>17</sup> Edward Allworth ed., *Central Asia: 130 Years of Russian Dominance: A Historical Overview* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1994).

Prior to 1991 the Hoover Institution series on Nationalities published several very useful monographs on the history of various Eurasian groups. Martha Brill Ollcott's *The Kazakhs*, and Edward Allworth's *Modern Uzbeks* are good introductions to the ethnogenesis and recent history of these nationalities.<sup>18</sup> James Critchlow's work on nationalism in Uzbekistan is a good account of the breakdown and erosion of Soviet authority in a Central Asian Republic, while Boris Rumer's edited volume on the region also provides some insights into the upheavals in the region in the late 1980s caused by the relaxation of central authority in the region immediately before the Soviet collapse.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Literature since 1991*

Central Asia emerged into the spotlight after independence as an area of new interest for scholars. The novelty of the countries, combined with their potential geo-strategic value and natural resources, produced something of a renaissance in Central Asian studies throughout the 1990s. Indeed, in North America this has been reflected in the establishment of a separate Central Eurasian Studies Society (CESS) as distinct from the overlapping wings of the older American Association for the Advancement of Slavonic Studies (AAASS) and the Middle East Studies Association (MESA). There has been in the past several years a plethora of introductory survey monographs focusing on the politics, economics and international relations of the Newly Independent States of the region for the non-specialist. Among the best of the

---

<sup>18</sup> Martha Brill Ollcott, *The Kazakhs* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1987). Edward Allworth, *The Modern Uzbeks: From the Fourteenth Century to the Present* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1990).

<sup>19</sup> James Critchlow, *Nationalism in Uzbekistan: A Soviet Republic's Road to Sovereignty* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1991). Boris Z. Rumer, *Soviet Central Asia: A Tragic Experiment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

introductory monographs are Gregory Gleason's *The Central Asian States: Discovering Independence* and John Anderson's *The International Politics of Central Asia*, both of which contain sections dealing with Kyrgyzstan.<sup>20</sup> A good survey of the regional and international challenges faced by the new states in the region can be found in Brill Olcott's *Central Asia's New States: Independence, Foreign Policy and Regional Security*, although this work tends to focus mainly on Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and the Uzbek role in the Tajik civil war.<sup>21</sup>

There have been some excellent edited volumes on the post-Soviet states and Central Asia containing important contributions on political developments, institutionalization and civil society in the region since 1991, such as Graham Smith, *et al's* edited volume *Nation-Building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands: the Politics of National Identities*.<sup>22</sup> Smith makes a convincing argument for cautiously assessing the 'colonial' nature of the Soviet experience and advances a more accurate typology (which he terms "federal colonialism"). Allworth writes an excellent piece on historiographical trends within the region, and Annette Bohr looks at the way in which the states in the region have adopted nationalist symbolism since independence.<sup>23</sup> An edited work with an interesting chapter on Kyrgyzstan includes Eugene Huskey's

---

<sup>20</sup> John Anderson, *The International Politics of Central Asia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997). Gregory Gleason, *The Central Asian States: Discovering Independence* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, *Central Asia's New States: Independence, Foreign Policy, and Regional Security* (Washington D.C.: USIP Press, 1996).

<sup>22</sup> Graham Smith, "Post-Colonialism and Borderland Identities," in *Nation-Building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands: the Politics of National Identities*, ed. Graham Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1-22.

<sup>23</sup> Edward Allworth, "History and Group Identity in Central Asia" and Annette Bohr, "Language Policy and Ethnic Relations in Uzbekistan," *ibid.*, 49-67 and 197-223.

account of Kyrgyz domestic politics in Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott eds. *Conflict, Cleavage and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*.<sup>24</sup>

Works dealing with the broader historical context of the pre-Soviet era and its impact on and relationship to modern Central Asia include R.D. McChesney's *Central Asia: Foundations of Change*, and Adeb Khalid's *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia*.<sup>25</sup> McChesney provides an analysis of the historical relationship between urban economies and Islam, as well as drawing attention to the impact of pre-Soviet Central Asian culture on the independent states in the region. Khalid's masterful work recounts the influence of the Jadidist movement (the name comes from '*usul al jadid*' - new method) in Central Asia in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He discusses the influence of this movement in the formation of Central Asian identity in opposition to Russian and other extra-regional groups. The most comprehensive work contextualizing recent developments within a broader historical and geographic picture can be found in Svat Soucek's *History of Inner Asia*.<sup>26</sup> His treatment discusses the region's Islamic legacy in Central Asia viewed more broadly in the context of its being a geo-strategic component of south Siberia and China as well as the Islamic world.

Seeking to explain continued transnational cooperation and interdependence since independence, Ericka Weinthal focused on the survival and mutation of Soviet-era bargaining structures using the example of water negotiations in the Aral Sea

---

<sup>24</sup> Eugene Huskey, "Kyrgyzstan: The Fate of Political Liberalization," in *Conflict, Cleavage and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, ed. Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 242-276.

<sup>25</sup> Adeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia*, Comparative Studies on Muslim Societies no. 27, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). R.D. McChesney, *Central Asia: Foundations of Change* (Princeton NJ: Darwin Press, 1996).

<sup>26</sup> Svat Soucek, *A History of Inner Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

region, draining most of Central Asia's water-systems.<sup>27</sup> Weinthal's insightful work challenges assumptions that the nation-building processes within the five Central Asian states necessarily undermine elite cooperation. She shows how such cooperation over water- resource management has occurred via elite interaction inherited from previous Soviet cooperation, wherein the mediating role of the vanished Soviet center is replaced by side-payments supplied by international donor agencies such as USAID and the World Bank.

Literature on the international politics of the independent Kyrgyz state is sparse. Rafis Abazov's comparative examination of the emerging foreign policies of the Central Asian states in 1999 is a useful preliminary survey.<sup>28</sup> The literature dealing with foreign policy issues of the emergent states in the region, such as Anderson and Brill-Olcott, of necessity tends to be broadly-focused and introductory in nature and does not describe the growth of institutions and policies.<sup>29</sup> Anderson's introductory volume on Kyrgyzstan included a useful brief chapter discussing foreign policy but did not move substantially beyond the sponge model of assessing the likely interim impact of Kyrgyz relations with its larger neighbors.<sup>30</sup> In addition Anderson's study, limited to 1997, is out of date.

---

<sup>27</sup> Erika Weinthal, *State Making and Environmental Cooperation: Linking Domestic and International Politics in Central Asia* (Cambridge MA, MIT press, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> Rafis Abazov, *The Formation of Post-Soviet International Politics in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan*, (Seattle WA: The University of Washington Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, 1999).

<sup>29</sup> Anderson, *International Politics*, 1997. Brill-Olcott, *Central Asia's New States*, 1996.

<sup>30</sup> John Anderson, *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Island of Democracy?* (London: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999).

### *Nationalism*

In assessing the qualities of nationalism as a theoretical historical process, and then nationalism as an ideology, a good starting point is the dichotomy between 'organic' or primordial, and 'instrumentalist' theories of nationalism. These constitute probably the two most controversial schools in the nationalist theory debate. This will provide a theoretical grid against which we can analyze the meaning and content of nationalist ideology in the Kyrgyz context.

Perhaps the best-known and most often-discussed instrumentalist views of nationalism are advanced in the work of Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson.<sup>31</sup> They tend to stress the entropic, constructed, quality of modern societies and cultures when compared to the “organic” or “traditional” societies from which they have emerged. They attribute the causal origins of nationalism to rapid advances and changes involving language, print culture, and technological development. Both advance theories explaining the transformation of organic or traditional societies into the modern condition consisting of societies whose state uses ethnic identity as an organizing principle.

These theorists posit nationalism as a form of state organization most consistent with industrialization and the idea of technological modernity. Gellner, in *Nations and Nationalism*, argues that the nature of the state itself changes radically during the shift from agrarian to industrial society. From a small élite dominating literacy and acting as a clerical class in the agrarian age, the technological demands of the industrial age produce the requirement for a society where everyone is literate, and

---

<sup>31</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983). Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983).

shares a common culture and language. Industrialization and technological modernity, according to this argument, require unification between culture, literacy, and the state. The structure of society in the agrarian-feudal phase is highly compartmentalized and specialized, with movement from one area to the other being very difficult. In the post-industrial model, on the other hand, national identity and culture assume the structural tasks previously performed by religious, military or clerical castes in the old order as the old compartmentalized supporting structures of society are demolished.

Gellner points out not all potential nationalisms are realized and that the successful nationalism, by his definition, is one which sprouts a political culture based on a territorial unit. This, he argues, is actually quite rare if one regards every linguistic group as a potential nationalism. For Gellner, the process is somewhat random. It also allows him to propose historical models describing the development of ethnic nationalism in the context of a large Central-European Empire as well as nationalism in the non-European colonial context.

The successful nationalism then will be the product of a haphazard formula of determinate circumstances and historical trends strongly influenced by overarching societal factors classified as “wild” and “garden” cultures. Within the Hapsburg empire, for example, Czech culture moved from being an unwritten peasant vernacular to a serious rival in organizational terms with the official Germanic culture of the Hapsburg state through the cultivation of romantic nationalism.<sup>32</sup> Nationalism is not an inherent entity, but one created via shaping a culture devoid of prior connection to power politics, the state, a particular language and literary heritage. This is the rough general outline of the Gellnerian thesis.

---

<sup>32</sup> Gellner, *Nationalism*, 58-62.

When compared to the Hapsburg and Ottoman Empires, the Soviet Union stands out as one of the most unusual ‘imperial’ entities in history. Rather than suppressing nationalism the Soviet Union actively encouraged it and even made it a cornerstone of the process of administrative reform in the 1920s and 1930s. Recent scholarship has shown that far from being a cynical fig leaf, the empowerment of non-Russian national groups within the USSR was taken very seriously indeed, and manifested itself in areas as diverse as minority quotas for college intakes and sponsoring the use of previously unwritten local languages for administrative purposes.<sup>33</sup> While the intensity of the nation-fostering phase in the USSR burned out by the 1940s and eventually was subordinated to an unofficial Russification policy, the institutional roots of nation building had nonetheless been laid and cemented. The Soviet experience shows Gellner’s theory at work in a non-random environment.

Gellner’s work is complemented by Benedict Anderson's powerful work *Imagined Communities* outlining the relationship between national élites and print capitalism in the development of modern nation states. For Anderson, the nation is a construct made possible by the development of print-language, and the formalization of the vernacular. This allowed for an “imagined community,” which once realized in the West could be imitated in other areas. Anderson cites the example of the alphabet change in Kemalist Turkey as the conscious application of the established model in order to seal-off secularist Turkey from the wider Islamic world.<sup>34</sup> The Soviets too, were enthusiastic promoters of mass-literacy and modern education systems. Alphabets were likewise manipulated to create both republican communities and a

---

<sup>33</sup> Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union 1923-1939* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

<sup>34</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 45.

sense of Soviet community. Five years before Turkey, Soviet Azerbaijan was the first Islamic state to Latinize its alphabet.

By contrast, organic theorists, such as Smith, place less emphasis on grand paradigm shifts in the structure of human society.<sup>35</sup> They argue from the point of view of nationalism as an integral component in the psychology of human identity. This identity has undergone shifts in its relationship to power structures and changing organizational abilities of human society. Smith argues: "...nations might still be constructs, but ancient elites or medieval ones might be as adept at inventing them as their modern counterparts..."<sup>36</sup>

In terms of assessing the nationalist experience outside Western Europe, the Gellner-Anderson viewpoint was succinctly critiqued by Prasenjit Duara.<sup>37</sup> Duara is troubled by the Western-oriented "Modernization Thesis" idea inherent in this type of theory:

"...To see the nation as a collective subject of modernity obscures the nature of national identity. I propose instead that we view national identity as founded on fluid relationships; it thus both resembles and is interchangeable with other political identities..."<sup>38</sup>

The idea that nationalism is the product of a globally-applicable and standardized modernization process and of modernity in general presents enormous problems in the applicability of these theories in non-European contexts. Duara analyzes the Chinese case, but his argument is interesting to consider in the Central

---

<sup>35</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1986).

<sup>36</sup> Anthony D. Smith, "The Origins of Nations," in *Becoming National: A Reader*, ed. Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 107.

<sup>37</sup> Prasenjit Duara, "Historicizing National Identity, or Who Imagines What and When," in *Becoming National: A Reader*, ed. Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 151-177.

<sup>38</sup> Duara, *National Identity*, 151.

Asian context. Instrumentalist views of Kyrgyz nationalism point to similarities with the growth of nationalism in the West. Yet Kyrgyz nationalism was not simply an alien importation of western nationalism, but emerged as a specific consequence of Soviet state identity.

For the bulk of its existence the Soviet Union was essentially an ideological state. It produced a sense of citizenship identity that aspired to be supra-national, and assumed some of the prerogatives of the nationalist state. These included the idea of common culture, language, educational system and an officer corps in the military drawn from all ethnic groups in the Empire. The Soviets attempted to establish this as a realistic alternative to the ethnic level of identity. Local cultures were carefully managed to give them a subsidiary role in the overall hierarchy. There is strong continuity in contemporary Kyrgyzstan between the Soviet idea and the principle of Kyrgyzstan as '*Nash Obsitsia Dom*' (our common home), the slogan the Kyrgyz government relies on when fostering broader unity and identity than just a Kyrgyz *ethnos*. This policy clearly has its roots in Soviet management practices of interethnic relations. Soviet propaganda murals depicting the harmony of various Soviet nationalities remain in place throughout Kyrgyzstan. Essentially the ethnic mix of nationalities in Kyrgyzstan resembles the former Soviet Union in microcosm. Elite "national" culture is nourished by simultaneously Soviet Kyrgyz elites; Soviet culture permeates many other areas of the independent state.

This leads us to another important question regarding the nationalist experience of Kyrgyzstan following independence. Kyrgyzstan is a developing Islamic country, important because theorists of nationalism grapple with the differing

experience of Islamic society from other regions. For instance, Tibi, in the context of a critique of modernization theory in social science, argues against seeing nationalism in the non-European world as essentially the transference of a development ideology from Western or colonial sources to colonial elites:

“...the processes of nation formation in the 'Third World' are neither the result of the diffusion of Western Institutions nor an imitative and hence futile replay of a 'history that has not taken place.' In fact, in each case, a process is taking place under precise historical circumstances, conditioned by both subjective and objective internal factors, as well as by the national state structure of the international system...”<sup>39</sup>

The instrumentalist Gellner deals with this issue of the history of nationalism being different in Islamic societies by extrapolating from the unique inter-relationship between religion and society in the Islamic state. He argues that Islamic society historically contained low and high cultures. These centered on the tensions between rival urban and popular frontier versions of religion and society. It was these tensions that gave Islam a permanent reform impulse periodically triggered by crises emerging from these dichotomies.<sup>40</sup> This reform dynamic manifested itself by preventing nationalist, secular elites from establishing national units that had extra-religious legitimacy. The cultural elite were already in place. For Gellner, despite the fact that the secularization thesis predicts the diminishing of religion in the modern state, this tends not to occur in Islamic societies. When there is a choice between state reform via “Western” national models, or through reapplying fresh interpretations of Islamic

---

<sup>39</sup> Bassam Tibi, *Arab Nationalism: A Critical Enquiry* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 62.

<sup>40</sup> Gellner, 81.

religious precepts in a reformist mode, Gellner argues that clerical élites in Islamic societies opt for the latter.<sup>41</sup>

In the specific case of Kyrgyzstan, an example of the comparatively successful enforced secularization of an Islamic society, Gellner would probably see the Soviet establishment as unconsciously performing the old task of the Islamic clergy in society guarding a conception of orthodoxy versus an externalized threat, the reemergence of Islam within the state.<sup>42</sup> To develop his argument here, the modern Kyrgyz state defines orthodoxy via an ideology enforcing itself using mechanisms that are hardly 'new' at all. For Gellner, in socio-anthropological terms Kyrgyzstan can never completely move beyond its inherent Islamic identity. The structure of the state will always reflect it despite the neo-colonial experience.

The Soviet state bequeathed a state tradition in Kyrgyzstan that has influenced nation-state building of the independent state. They did not, as is often mistakenly assumed, achieve this in a European fashion by separating religion and the state completely. Rather they completely subordinated religion to the state through the domination of religious institutions such as the religious endowments (*vaqf*) and the religious administrative and educational apparatus (*muftiyat*). Kyrgyzstan continued this tradition of state-enforced secularism after independence. Islam remains under careful state control. This has not substantially altered the framework of Soviet oversight beyond permitting more liberal mosque building programs and the addition of limited religious studies to secondary higher education.

---

<sup>41</sup> Ernest Gellner, "The Turkish Option in Comparative Perspective" (Paper delivered at the Conference Rethinking the Project of Modernity in Turkey, at The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, October 1994).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

However, for the purposes of this discussion, the Gellner-Anderson argument is useful for understanding the broader background to the development of nationalism as ideology in terms of modernization and technological change. In Kyrgyzstan, the Soviets imposed an ideology involving alphabet and linguistic reorganization, and the creation of a national identity as an auxiliary source of legitimacy to Soviet rule. Undoubtedly, part and parcel of the Soviet experience is the concept of technological modernity introduced into a traditional society by a Westernizing, secularist elite. The formation however of nationalism as a mode of political expression in Kyrgyzstan is not only explained in purely those terms.

Particularly in Central Asia, post-Soviet nationalisms often lack what John Breuilly would argue is the main mobilizing feature of nationalism as an ideology in the historical European context.<sup>43</sup> This is the ability to claim a natural right to governance, a way of cementing legitimacy with a permanent endorsement implied by the presence of the group that the nationalist ideology claims to represent. After independence nationalism in Kyrgyzstan was, however, weakly articulated rather than a potentially mobilizing systematized ideology. In this regard it compares poorly even to its own Soviet predecessor, the Kirghiz SSR, and other states with well-institutionalized nationalist ideologies such as Kemalist Turkey. The gap between the elite culture and the Gellnerian wild or garden culture is still too large to produce a true nationalist ideology understandable to the entire ethnic and to support, even superficially, the nationalist social contract.

The Soviet educational establishment in Kyrgyzstan, as Laiten observes in the Kazakh context, gave secondary consideration only to the titular national compared to

---

<sup>43</sup> John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).

the non-national state ideology.<sup>44</sup> The manipulated limitations of Kyrgyz nationalism in the Soviet period allowed for few high schools teaching subjects via Kyrgyz (only three in Frunze [Bishkek] before 1991). There were poorly-trained teachers and inadequate materials in the titular language. The consequence was to make Russian education and culture the language of career success and prospects beyond the Kirghiz SSR. The bulk of the Kyrgyz nationalist establishment in the Soviet period lay in university ethnography departments and institutes, in which the tiny Kyrgyz elite nurtured a literary, official language very different from the spoken vernacular.

We now have an explanatory point of reference in the corpus of theory, and a preliminary sense of the way in which the Soviet nationalities policy could stop nationalism from having political content while simultaneously encouraging it. We also need to understand at an abstract level why there are features of modern nationalism, however constructed, that could allow it to become a powerful ideological force inside the state *or not*. Without digressing into myriad examples, nothing is more diverse than the relative complexities of nationalist ideology. It can be as unsophisticated as not to qualify for classification as “ideology” in the accepted sense of a complex, well articulated set of political beliefs which have a guiding role in the political apparatus of a state.

### *Nationalism as ideology*

The concept of ideology is the subject of enormous debate in social science. There are a multitude of schools of thought about the definition and rôle of ideology in

---

<sup>44</sup> David Laiten, *Identity Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

politics and society. However a useful definition may be seen in Seliger's analysis of ideology in politics.<sup>45</sup> Seliger argues against what he terms 'the restrictive' conception of ideology. Ideology should not just be seen in political movements that are revolutionary, or those, as he points out via critiquing Arendt, that finalize themselves in totalitarian modes of control.<sup>46</sup> Seliger sees definite functions regulating behavioral norms in ideology inherent to all types of complex political discourse. This he calls "the inclusive conception." For Seliger politics as an activity is always at some level ideologically influenced.

In Seliger's model it is the differing composite nature of technical implementation that separates a given ideology into two modes of behavior.<sup>47</sup> In this bifurcation argument ideology is divided into that dimension which is fundamental, and guided by moral prescriptions, and on the other hand that dictated by the efficiencies of implementation or operative.<sup>48</sup> Operative ideology emerges from the fundamental in the sense that each is a different facet of the same. It necessitates certain permanent features as a function of its role as a referential value system.

Bearing this model in mind, nationalist ideology might have the following features. There is an intellectual tradition disseminated in print that has definite political objectives based on control of political norms and value systems. Further, in conformity to Seliger's theory of ideology, there could be some degree of systematization, articulation and integration between the ideology and power structures in the state apparatus. Some features of a state reliant for the source of its

---

<sup>45</sup> Martin Seliger, *Ideology and Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 1976).

<sup>46</sup> Seliger, *Ideology*, 32.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 108-112.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

political behavior and political culture on a highly organized official ideology may be seen as follows.

There is a coherent, legitimizing political theory claimed by elite cadres able to control government and the branches of state to enforce this ideology coercively and to the exclusion of other competing ideologies. The state will seek to perpetuate the ideology via the definition of orthodoxy and the creation of establishment tradition. Bureaucratic cadres and the military will have a culture that closely identifies with this and the way in which a state uses ideology as an instrument of power beyond regime legitimization. While all of these features were created in the Kirghiz SSR by the Soviet experience, the collapse of the overarching meta-state has left only some of these perimeters in place.

The tradition of ideological adherence is generally created in a historical-referential fashion following a reformist-revolutionary phase. In this, a radical or revolutionary movement institutes systemic change with the aim of destroying the previous political order, and competing political ideologies that may have been present under the old system. In Central Asia this happened to Pan-Turkist and modernizing Islamicist Jadidists who found themselves under assault in the 1920s. Once created, the ideology is perpetuated via the educational system, and the media. In a country with a large state and public sector such as in Kyrgyzstan the bureaucracy has high incentive to use rents and patronage as a mechanism to ensure conformity to state doctrines.

Central to the Duara-Smith thesis is that nationalism as a historical process is essentially a mutating phenomenon. In looking at the mechanics of modern

nationalism and identity, Anderson posits that an expression of cultural and political identity based on an idealized group self-image cannot be static unless the group is frozen in time.<sup>49</sup> In modern state identity often there occurs the crystallization of nationalism into a static state identity, an official nationalism subsuming other traditions of identity. It tries to provide a static definition, through coercive means or otherwise, which is atemporal and in which society can be reshaped to an ideal. This results in the “freezing” of a particular cultural and linguistic identity in terms of its political relationship to the power apparatus of a particular state and territorial unit. Indeed, for Tibi, it is this quality of nationalist ideology which might render it, beyond an initial phase of revolutionary fervor, in the long run hostile to development and modernization, since a commitment to these concepts would imply the rejection of historicist ideas, constructed or not, of the territorial nation's immutability.<sup>50</sup>

Breuilly's argument about how this national ideal becomes transformed into an ideology is persuasive because of his particular focus on modern nationalism as a movement reordering political power in a given historical political unit in such a way as to strip systematically older non-'national' élite structures of that political power. In other words, nationalism in this sense is entirely a political phenomenon and has less to do with culture and identity than power and the control of power. This also allows us to see nationalist ideology in a manner moving us beyond the development-modernization problem with reference to nationalism in non-European contexts, as critiqued by Tibi.

---

<sup>49</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 188.

<sup>50</sup> Tibi, *Arab Nationalism*, 68-71.

Both Breuilly and Gellner observe that nationalist ideology is also fundamentally different from other types of political ideology, beyond the atemporal idealism mentioned above. One of these is a use of symbolism which differs from other ideologies. As Breuilly argues, nationalist symbolism can do this in particularly effective ways because it has a: "...quality of self-reference which is largely missing from socialist or religious ideology..."<sup>51</sup> The history of Soviet Central Asia shows certain carefully-controlled and monitored national symbols used for mobilizing purposes. These self-referential symbols emerged from the way in which socialist ideology needed to utilize decidedly non-Marxist modes of political control there. In the 1960s and 1970s Soviet Uzbekistan increasingly used national symbols and the idea of a romanticized past in order to secure regime legitimation.<sup>52</sup> In all of the Central Asian states during the Soviet period, these symbols were carefully vetted to make sure that they were not challenging to the Soviet order. Yet Moscow permitted sufficient symbols to foster national sentiment and motivation. This creation of state identities in Soviet Uzbekistan and other Central Asian Republics presents an excellent example of how artificially defined national identities were used as a means of assimilation and control. This allowed the Soviets to manage their empire behind a façade of ideological potential.

As Breuilly argues: "...the historicist concept of community is linked to political demands..."<sup>53</sup> Importantly, he points out the fundamental illogic of this connection. The idea of the nation in nationalist ideology is used severally to define

---

<sup>51</sup> John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 64.

<sup>52</sup> See James Critchlow, *Nationalism in Uzbekistan* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1991), 17-52.

<sup>53</sup> Breuilly, *Nationalism*, 62.

citizenship, culture, and a relationship to “universal political principles.” The meaning changes in context and this is the reason why nationalism, in Breuilly's thesis, tries to create legitimacy and political mobilization based on symbolism, historicism and the creation of a foundation myth.

Breuilly also highlights the nationalism-development problem. His argument is that nationalism differs from socialism, another ideology traditionally associated with modernization and development. Unlike Socialism, the historicist, self-referential nature of nationalist ideology restricts its effectiveness as a modernizing force. Echoing Tibi, he points to the syncretic nature of nationalist ideology in non-European contexts. He cites the example of Zia Gökalp, an important Turkish nationalist thinker, as reconciling modernity to traditional modes of identity to produce the nationalist synthesis.<sup>54</sup> Returning to the idea of static atemporalism in nationalist ideology, this quality may inhibit progressive or innovative ideas. We see this challenge very vividly in Central Asia after independence where the revival of the glorious nation brought with it little in the way of a development road map.

However, for Breuilly, nationalist ideology is inseparable from politics because the ideology of nationalism only acquires a particular programmatic agenda in response to involvement in politics. That political agenda uses the institutions of the modern state in order to claim and defend a new legitimacy against the old political order.<sup>55</sup> It is aided in this by the uniqueness of the nationalist vision, and its ability to

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 270.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 387.

generate a stereotype. Nationalist ideologies synthesize different intellectual traditions and make use of various historical events for their assertions.<sup>56</sup>

Breuilly's view of nationalism as an ideology has a number of features that help to explain its general success in political terms and why cultural nationalism becomes translated into nationalist ideology. This is useful to bear in mind when considering independent Kyrgyzstan and the Soviet legacy. In Kyrgyzstan aspects of the national ideology are still insecure, such as the idea of the state being represented by a national society. Soviet nationalities policy created the appearance but not the actuality of a national society. At the same time large parts of the nationalist program, either the Soviet or the post 1991 variant, have yet to be successfully transmitted beyond urban elites. The historicization of identity is well accepted, but secularization and other aspects of the program are hardly universal. In the Kyrgyz context the program of Soviet nationalities ideology succeeded in forming an establishment in politics and society. Yet it is poorly institutionalized and challenged from several areas ranging from regionalism, ethnic minorities. There is tension between the need to generate a civic nationalism to bind these disparate elements together and the crisis of legitimacy wherein sovereignty can seemingly only be reinforced by Kyrgyz nation-building.

#### *Foreign policy, ideology and nationalism*

Foreign policy in many states is often described as nationalistic in the sense of therefore being necessarily irredentist or wishing to alter state frontiers in order to include members of the national ethnies. By contrast two of the three Central Asian

---

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 388.

states run by nomadic or semi-nomadic titular groups (Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan; Turkmenistan is the exception) opted for an internal national-building that rejected irredentism. We must problematize the role of nationalist ideology in foreign policy behavior and explore whether one can separate the function of a nationalist ideology operative in foreign policy from a non-ideological national interest per se.

In his assessment Duara states that: "...what is novel about modern nationalism is not political self-consciousness, but the world system of nation-states..."<sup>57</sup> Modern nationalism, in other words, is different because it makes specific national-territorial claims as opposed to earlier forms of state organization that maintained territorially-specific claims above other criteria. The Westphalian state system was formed before modern nationalism. This aspect leads us to consider the implications of nationalism for the post-Soviet state system in Eurasia; would it disrupt or conform to the Westphalian order?

Certain Soviet foreign policy actions seemed inconsistent with the notion of being ideologically-driven or indeed conforming to the precepts of the state ideology as it shaped accepted foreign policy traditions within that state. If we accept the argument that elites and bureaucrats in the former Soviet states will continue to follow a Soviet model in terms of their standard operating codes and models of decision-making, then we may wonder to what extent the change of state ideology will influence foreign policy conduct. A resurgent, nationalist Kyrgyz state might have been expected to try and pursue a divergent foreign policy from the *ancien regime*. Indeed there were some signs of this, especially in the first couple of years of independence. President Akaev initially sought a neutral Kyrgyzstan with very

---

<sup>57</sup> Duara, *National Identity*, 157.

minimal armed forces as the basis of foreign policy, emulating an Irish model of relations with the former imperial power.

Instead, rejecting such radical departures from the past, Kyrgyzstan's foreign orientation ultimately conformed to a generally pragmatic conception of the national interest. On the other hand it has never renounced, and indeed cannot, the role that nationalist ideology might have in underpinning the general outlines of foreign policy conduct. In Kyrgyzstan the need to create a nationalist state for regime legitimization lives with a parallel track rooted in a legacy of Soviet nationalities policy blunting the edge of post-independence nation-building. The extent or impact of ideology on the foreign policy of ideologically-driven states such as the former Soviet Union is sometimes hard to assess. Foreign policy was often given an ideological gloss to justify or retroactively explain actions primarily motivated by *realpolitik*. This applies equally to the nationalizing successor states regarding the relationship between nationalism and foreign policy.

The significance of nationalism internally for the newly independent states has been a key topic of debate since 1991. Jack Snyder argued for the relationship between the intensity of nationalism and the success of the state; that intense nationalist ideology results when the security and economic concerns of elites were not being met. The literature on the political economy of elite control has addressed this question to some extent stressing the ways in which elites have their economic needs met by illicit rents from state control. In his view, nationalism becomes co-opted as legitimizer, rather than a threat to, elites.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Jack Snyder, "Nationalism and the Crisis of the Post-Soviet State," *Survival* 35, no.1 (Spring 1993): 5-26.

Apart from the Baltic states, Armenia, Ukraine and perhaps to a lesser extent Russia itself, nationalism had a very ambiguous role in bringing about the Soviet collapse and as a causative factor is hard to pinpoint. Edward Walker has recently argued for shifting the focus from nationalism and onto sovereignty in searching for causations of the collapse in 1991. He postulates that the constitutional norms created by the evolution of the Soviet administrative structure were powerful enough to shape bureaucratic attitudes and popular expectations by the time of collapse.<sup>59</sup> In this view the legal force of the constitutional position of the constituent republics was paramount as opposed to the fact that these legal units were nationally-based. In the legacy of Soviet-generated identity politics on the new international system emerging in its place in Eurasia, secessionist nationalism and ethnic conflict still seem the exception rather than the rule. This highlights the insufficiency of attributing instability to Soviet identity derivatives in the form of secessionist movements and splinter nationalisms.

A review of the complexities and differences emerging from the collapse of the Soviet Union in the form of different typologies of nationalism shows us a recent example, and perhaps the last, of a new state system emergent predicated on the basis of ethnic identity. The varying nature of the internal regimes of the CIS states helps to shape the impact of their national revival upon their foreign policies.

The Baltic countries, with a history rooted in Nineteenth Century Western European romantic nationalism, contrast with Central Asian States whose national identities had been a product of Soviet Rule. In Tajikistan seventy years of Soviet rule

---

<sup>59</sup> Edward W. Walker, *Dissolution: Sovereignty and the Breakup of the Soviet Union* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).

was insufficient to cement a strong sense of national identity. Religious, clan and ethnic rivalries combined with regional instability to prevent that. In Belarus, nationalism has not been a strong enough force to replace an essentially vestigial Soviet regime that has an ironically ambivalent attitude to Belarusian nationalism. The former Soviet states are bound to a great extent by the tradition of the system from which they emerged yet challenge this very system with their presence. The differing spectrum of national states implies uneven impact from nationalism on the Eurasian system. As James Mayall points out, nationalism has adapted itself to an international system essentially predating nationalism, rather than having shaped the system itself.<sup>60</sup>

The transition had a profound impact on territorial and geo-political relationships in Eurasia. The geo-political environment and international relations system existing around Kyrgyzstan is the result of the Soviet collapse. Though nationalism in Western Europe was mainly of the unification model or an expression of constitutional sovereignty, nationalism in the area of the Ottoman Empire was secessionist and ultimately irredentist in the Balkans. On the other hand the colonial experience of the Near Eastern provinces under the mandates determined the fragility and volatile nature of both Iraq and Syria as neighbors of the Turkish state. In theory, the nationalist state can create problems in the international system because nation states rarely conform to the exact distribution of an ethnic or national group. The states which emerged from the Soviet Union typify this to the extreme.

---

<sup>60</sup> James Mayall, *Nationalism and International Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 26.

*Post-imperial comparative perspective*

The idea of an inherent national interest automatically guiding theoretical and practical approaches to the conduct of the foreign policy in a country irrespective of the ideological beliefs of the regime or government in power may be understood as a response to immutable features such as geography that serve as constants in the foreign policy of any state. The relationship between politics and geography creates both a historical legacy and has consequences for the foreign policy of the modern nation state and its ideology.

In a recent revival of Mackinder's theories of power geography in the Eurasian landmass, Paul Kennedy argued for envisioning the southern tier of Central Asian states, among others, as one of a select group of “pivotal” states that should be seen as keystones in their regional geopolitical order and accorded commensurate importance in American foreign policy.<sup>61</sup> This approach to geo-politics is seriously flawed because it fails to address adequately the destabilizing potential that less obviously central regions can and do continue to exercise in an increasingly interdependent international order.

However, it highlights a geo-political view that Kyrgyz leaders tend to share, a conception based on the continued awareness of the older Soviet geo-political legacy and the dynamics inherent in that to her place in the international system in Eurasia. The central and varied position of Kyrgyzstan in different and even disparate regions is common to its Soviet predecessor. No longer part of the imperial power, Kyrgyzstan

---

<sup>61</sup> Paul Kennedy, et. al., “Pivotal States and US Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs* 75 (January 1996): 16-32.

is still neighbored by different regional international systems including the Caspian Sea region and South Asia.

Independent Kyrgyzstan tapped into established patterns in foreign policy thought and behavior. Motifs and patterns of foreign policy decision-making and behavior persisted as a common heritage of the Soviet Union and its successor states. An important comparative method for looking at the Soviet Union has been the post-imperial comparative perspective. Crawford Young argued that the African colonial state can only be understood in terms of the institutional legacy of the state-forming period, and this view applies also to the Central Asian States.<sup>62</sup>

#### *Small state foreign policy behavior*

The existing literature on small states and foreign policy underscores the potential for Kyrgyzstan as a case study. Small state impact on the international system rising out of the Soviet collapse is less-studied. Miriam Elman, for instance, in her study of small state foreign policy from a neo-institutionalist perspective, breaks fresh ground that would lend itself well to a study of a small former Soviet republic. However she devotes her case study to an analysis of the early American Republic.<sup>63</sup> Jeanne Hey, in a recent edited volume looking at small state foreign policy behavior utilizing Rosenau's pre-theory of foreign policy analysis, does not include a single case study of a former Soviet state from among examples from every other region.<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

<sup>63</sup> Miriam F. Elman, "The Foreign Policies of Small States: Challenging Neorealism in Its Own Backyard," *British Journal of Political Science* 25, no. 2 (April 1995): 171-217.

<sup>64</sup> Jeanne A.K. Hey ed., *Small States in World Politics: Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior* (Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003).

Yet of the former Soviet states, fully eleven out of the fifteen could be considered small states, whether one applies definitions centered on population, resources or military and economic weakness. Arguably, the post-Soviet state system is composed primarily of small states. In addition to this these small states are for the most part either authoritarian regimes or fragile democracies. The three Baltic States were the only ones achieving stable democratic rule soon after independence.

As Keohane wrote in his classic study in 1969, small state definition presents almost insoluble problems.<sup>65</sup> Seen purely from the viewpoint of dependency on larger states or as he termed it “system shaping states,” many states that could be defined by any reasonable stretch as “great powers” were in fact dependent on outside states for security, such as Japan and Britain after 1945. The reliance of even powerful states on systems and hegemons cast into relief the subjectivity of small state definition only by the extent of its dependency.<sup>66</sup> Keohane suggests a usable small state definition as: “...a small power is a state whose leaders consider that it can never, acting alone or in a small group, make a significant impact on the system...”<sup>67</sup> Examining organizations of small states from Keohane’s point of view, we may even explain the CIS itself as a mechanism for: “promoting attitudes favorable to their survival.” Keohane further sub-categorizes states into system-determining, system influencing, system affecting, and system-ineffectual states.<sup>68</sup> Small states fall into the last two categories. Kyrgyzstan writ large in the Eurasian state system could be seen as a system-ineffectual state. Yet again, certainly within the regional subsystem of Central Asia it could be counted as

---

<sup>65</sup> Robert O. Keohane, “Lilliputians’ Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics,” *International Organization* 23, no. 2 (Spring 1969): 291-310.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

system-affecting in this sense by virtue of its possession of the key natural strategic resource of water.

The cohesive nature of the post-Soviet state sub system is demonstrated by the fact that only three of the fifteen republics have seriously succeeded in leaving the subsystem. Entrance to the EU and NATO assure that Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia are firmly part of the Euro-Atlantic community. The Baltic States succeeded in part, as I stressed in the preface in the case of Estonia, because an alternative state system was willing to accept them for cultural and historical reasons. The remaining small states in the NIS could be seen as more reluctant members of a *salon de refuse* from which escape, though slow and unsteady, would be the primary goal. Perhaps, but the key role of the small state in the post-Soviet system lies exactly in the factors motivating small states to remain part of the sub-system voluntarily, despite the centrifugal attraction of neighboring systems.

Since 1991 Russia has shown that it can be persuasive in retaining small state loyalty through economic and military coercion as well as manipulation of domestic politics. It has brought pressure to bear upon Georgia, Azerbaijan and Moldova at various times 1991-2004, and forced them to back away from policies that challenged its perceived geo political interests. It is interesting that Russia has been somewhat less successful in this regard with the non-contiguous medium power in Central Asia possessed of regional hegemonic capabilities, Uzbekistan. Despite coercion as a powerful explanation for small state loyalty to the post-Soviet system, other factors mitigate against it as the sole explanation for small state loyalty to the system. Sovereignty, strategic location, fear of medium small powers within system non-

contiguous to hegemon plus the common culture of post Soviet elites all contribute to the strength of the post-Soviet system ensuring a powerful place for the role its small states. Russia, seldom needing to rely on coercion because of this, has demonstrated a basic interest in maintaining the sovereignty of the system units. This is not only because of the reciprocal principle at stake, but also because Russia has since the 1930s viewed these units as technically sovereign. Further, most small states in the system are in a strategically vital place for Russia. Indeed in the Soviet period they viewed as, and to some extent actually created to be, buffer states around the core. For this reason these states are geo-strategically vital for Russia. Kyrgyzstan's fear of Uzbek dominance or hegemony within the Caspian 'micro-system' causes it to seek Russian support and strategic support. At the same time, Moldova's concerns about Ukraine also give Russia a key role as the guarantor of sovereignty and also underpin local balances of power in specific micro-regions.

The Kyrgyz case illustrates the essential role that a system referential to the Soviet past is for small state legitimacy. There is an important vein of legitimacy from the shared common Soviet past that small state elites need, making membership in the post imperial Russian state system vital. Their own post-Soviet national ideologies are usually not strong enough to ensure citizen loyalty to the state. This is important to the conceptual framework of this study in explaining Kyrgyz foreign policy behavior. It has a close persistent orientation toward Russian and the CIS, a function of the states' crisis of legitimacy. This shows that Kyrgyz foreign policy makers are unlikely to ever distance the country far from Moscow however much heartland geopolitics create avenues for other powers.

The NIS is a contrast to other post-imperial subsystems one might refer to such as the post-Ottoman Middle East or Balkans wherein the metropol did not continue to exercise a significant hegemonic role in the system. Using Keohane's analysis of foreign policy choices facing small states as a starting point, we can see that his framework for the systemic role of a small state is relevant to the student of Kyrgyzstan. Keohane suggests in the context of his analysis of small state foreign policy behavior that it is important to focus on the systemic role that their leaders see their states as playing, rather than focus on state capabilities within a system. As we will see in looking at Kyrgyzstan's independent foreign policy, it is the reconstruction of a stable system that Kyrgyz leaders see as the key strategic challenge.

*Domestic politics, foreign policy and democratization*

Focusing on domestic politics as a factor in small state foreign policy, Elman advances a theory challenging realist assumptions, grounded in neo-institutional approaches to state analysis, showing that domestic regime choices affect the foreign policies of small states. Her theory is helpful for allowing us to understand exactly how domestic variables might exert significant influence in small state foreign policy. Under this viewpoint, domestic political actions in a newly independent small state create new institutional frameworks of power following upheavals in power structure and subsequent rearrangements and realignments. Newly reshaped or reformed institutions in a small state that has recently acquired independence, she argues,

inevitably empower the foreign policy agendas of certain elites by “privileging some groups at the expense of others.”<sup>69</sup>

The institutional role of political and societal change is more easily viewed when evidence of power transfer and policy choice are transparently apparent in the shape of mechanisms allowing pluralist government forms, as in Elman’s study of nineteenth century US demonstrates. It is more difficult to see this, though, when authoritarianism remains the dominant state structure paradigm, as in Kyrgyzstan. There the relationship between power shifts and institutions as envisioned by Elman is less apparent due to the stagnation of regime transfer. Despite this, in the context of her case study, she posits that presidential control of foreign policy is likely as at least a short-term outcome, as new states need clear leadership on pressing foreign policy issues, even if this creates a legacy of strong presidential control of foreign policy subsequently.<sup>70</sup> This is also seen in the Kyrgyz case, where I argue that is highly unlikely that democratization per se would dismantle the legacy of presidential oversight and related bureaucracy overseeing the foreign policy apparatus. Regarding democratization as a variable though, an institutionalist view is difficult to sustain in the Kyrgyz context as formal institutions overlie and do not necessarily reflect real power management structures within society. Formal institutions did not yet capture this role after independence.

Elman’s analytical framework sheds light on how Kyrgyz foreign policy might be prone to influence from domestic factors and how institutionalist views can be a useful counterpoint to the prevailing neo-realist grip on small state theory. Her

---

<sup>69</sup> Elman, “Foreign Policies of Small States,” 215.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

argument that: "...rather than pursue foreign policies which contradict embedded institutions, actors will tailor their policy choices to accord with them..." allows us a starting point to begin to explain why nationalist ideology in Kyrgyz nation-building has failed to supplant essentially Soviet modes of foreign policy making since independence.<sup>71</sup> Yet at the same time, Elman points out that we may expect, as was demonstrated in the political opposition's reaction to the regime's handling of the Kyrgyz boundary dispute with China, that: "...actors who succeed in linking foreign policy options to the legitimacy of the domestic institutional framework will increase their bargaining leverage..."<sup>72</sup> Elman then, provides us with a valuable perspective on the likely linkages between domestic politics, institutions and foreign policy in a newly independent small state, though we need to be cautious in applying such a framework to an authoritarian small state such as Kyrgyzstan.

Hey, by contrast in a more traditional analysis, utilizes Rosenau's 1966 pre-theory of foreign policy analysis,<sup>73</sup> to compile a list of commonly expected small state behaviors that are a useful framework.<sup>74</sup> Expected behaviors range from "a low level of participation in world affairs," to a preference for non-military foreign policy, to a commitment towards multilateralism and international law.<sup>75</sup> Kyrgyzstan conforms well to this albeit with the exception of "choosing neutral positions," that has not been a cornerstone of its foreign policy, although at early neutrality it did flirt with non-

---

<sup>71</sup> Elman, 174.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>73</sup> James N. Rosenau, "Pre-Theories and Theories of Foreign Policy," in *Approaches to Comparative and International Politics*, ed. R. Barry Farrell (Evanston Ill: Northwestern University Press., 1966), 27-93.

<sup>74</sup> Jeanne A. Hey, "Introducing Small State Foreign Policy," in *Small States in World Politics: Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior*, ed. Jeanne A.K. Hey (Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003), 5.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 6.

alignment. Finally Hey poses three questions that she views as key in understanding small state foreign policy. We will refer to them in looking at Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy establishment in Chapter Four: is policy determined by actors and influences at the system level externally? At the state level, what is the influence of legislative, elites, population etc.? At the individual level, do leaders have more influence than in other types of state?<sup>76</sup>

In considering various theories and schools of nationalist thought, we have touched on some of the problems raised in their applicability to Kyrgyzstan and her special historical context. These views of nationalism and nationalism as ideology form the general background, or basis, to the viewpoint that I would like to advance here. The impact of nationalist discourse in Kyrgyzstan's post-independence foreign policy is related to the way in which nationalism is the formulation of an ideology from a particular geo-political idea of territoriality based on the ethnies. The consequences are seen in nationalist ideology interacting with other political traditions within structures of the nationalist state.

Kyrgyzstan provides an excellent case-study because its modern political establishment is deeply rooted in a Soviet past. Unlike the Ottoman state, which discouraged national consciousness, although employing proxy ethno-religious structures to govern non-Muslim groups, the Soviet state actually encouraged the formation of national identity albeit one not related to the state structures except in terms of nomenclature and terminology. In reality, the Kyrgyz SSR was not a state-reflection of the ethnies, but a reproduction of the structures of the Soviet state in miniature. The result, in the Kyrgyz case, is that the present rationale for her

---

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 10.

independence, the idea that the Kyrgyz nation should be the same as the state, produces an entity very different from that which one would assume in, say, the Western European tradition.

While the idea of an ancient and primordial French state has been shown by Weber and others to be a by-product of the process of ‘imagining the nation’, at least the state itself was forming the nation and thus was able to define the meaning of the nation. In the Kyrgyz case, the state was not interested in a nation-defining project beyond those features of the nation consistent with Soviet nationalities policy. Nationalism as the Soviet experience defined it was strongly related to the self-definition of Russifying elites. Rural-urban migration did not produce a mass-based nationalist “garden culture,” since that was Soviet and not Kyrgyz. The process was heavily controlled exactly to stop this from emerging. Kyrgyz nationalism as an ideology has yet to develop this aspect whereby the elite view of the nation shapes the ethnic into a mass-ideology. Nor, as it exists, can it provide much of a blueprint for changing state structures, or for framing long-range policy options.

Therefore, in light of these strains and tensions surrounding Kyrgyzstan internally and externally, we need to assess Kyrgyzstan’s foreign policy in a manner allowing us to understand likely policy directions, and how they are affected by the dissonance between the national ethnic as an ideology and the actuality of inherited state structures. This dissertation will advocate an analysis of Kyrgyz foreign policy that emphasizes the influence and persistence of a pre-independence tradition in a nationalist state. Broadly, we will view the evolution of an independent Kyrgyz

foreign policy in historical perspective as a case analysis to determine the persistence of an ideological tradition.

Within the context of the Soviet state, the Kyrgyz SSR, in common with the other constituent republics, had been dependent on a clearly articulated and systematized ideology that variously claimed a monopoly on political identity and political power. This shaped the boundaries of the political spectrum following the birth of pluralist politics in many of the former SSRs. A problem to be considered by this dissertation is the extent to which the conduct and direction of modern Kyrgyz foreign policy has been influenced by this legacy. That is as opposed to the presence of ideology as a legitimizing instrument having little cognitive impact on policy conduct.

We have seen that while theoretical studies of nationalism have a lot of explanatory power in terms of highlighting why earlier last century the Soviets were successfully able to create and nurture five different nations from one Turkestan. However they have less to say about state behavior in foreign policy. One can argue that weakness in terms of legitimacy and state identity, at least in the Kyrgyz and Central Asian case, creates great strains and challenges for these former Soviet republics in fitting into a pre-existing international society of states, whether one defines that society in terms of realist anarchy or as a society of states with a moderating culture and shared values. It is simply very difficult given the internal crises of legitimacy and the crisis of identity for states like Kyrgyzstan to articulate clear lines of foreign policy action, or a national project. In a sense the weakness of the national idea, while it has the advantage of keeping the door open to the creation of

a civic multi-ethnic identity in Kyrgyzstan, also forms a backdrop against which the state finds it hard to function normally in the international system. Here we should draw a distinction between an internally oriented nationalist ideology, as in Kyrgyzstan, broadly rejecting irredentism and revisionist nationalism that is externally directed, as in Uzbekistan.

In looking at the Kyrgyz case as a model of nationalism from a theoretical perspective one is instantly presented with a number of factors that highlight the unusual nature of Kyrgyz nationalism after independence, but at the same time coexist with general historical processes described by theoreticians of nationalism, often in seeming contradiction. If many of the factors present in the formation of a specifically Kyrgyz nationalism so closely resemble the theoretical framework, why is Kyrgyz nationalism not more successful as an ideology? I have outlined above in the preface why the Central Asian experience has been different in terms of arriving at independence in a political unit whose state identity and formal ideology was to some extent nationalist. Kyrgyzstan was formed as an ethno-national unit to some extent, but was expressly not constituted as a nation-state, although its experience as a Soviet Republic laid many of the foundations of nationalism built on following independence. The demographic balance in Kyrgyzstan presents clear constraints on state use of ethnic nationalism as a unifying and state building ideology anyway.

Addressing institutionalism and small state foreign policy conduct, the independent variable of nationalism in the Kyrgyz case complicates that of democratization in the case of early American Republic emphasized by Elman. The Kyrgyz state is balancing alternate foreign policy options open to influence from

internal domestic political actors while simultaneously trying to strengthen Kyrgyz legitimacy for controlling state nationalism. Another simultaneous process is found in the construction of 'Kyrgyzstani' identity, itself in permanent tension with state nationalism, and an influential ideological determinant of foreign policy in Kyrgyzstan since 1991.

### *Methodology*

Underpinned by the conceptual framework outlined in this chapter, my overall methodological approach consists of a historical treatment of the subject utilizing Russian and Kyrgyz language primary and secondary sources on Kyrgyz foreign policy combined with interview research to present a picture of the contemporary situation that shows how the Kyrgyz are following a well-mapped strategy in their foreign relations. To gather supporting data for this study I conducted empirical field research, and learned Kyrgyz while living and working in Kyrgyzstan continuously from August 1997- November 2000, as well as numerous subsequent follow-up visits 2002-2004. In compiling an overall picture of the evolution of Kyrgyz foreign policy and her international relations from independence, I relied upon in-person interviews and discussions with Kyrgyz political leaders, diplomats, politicians, and academics. Analyzing public speeches and policy statements published after independence, I utilize Kyrgyz and Russian language sources to trace the growth a post-independence foreign policy tradition.

Laying the foundations for explaining the relationship between foreign policy and national identity in Kyrgyzstan, Chapter Two is a historical excursus into the

origins of modern Kyrgyzstan. In Chapter Three, I look at official nation building since independence. In Chapter Four, informed by Hey's strategy for examining the domestic framework of foreign policy in a small state, I describe the institutional framework of foreign policy in Kyrgyzstan and the growth of a foreign policy establishment, as well as extant attempts of Kyrgyz leaders to articulate foreign policy goals and strategies. In Chapter Five, I outline the development of balancing as Kyrgyzstan has sought to counter the Uzbek threat with Iran, Turkey and other regional powers, while inviting the great power protection of Russia. In Chapter Six, I look at Kyrgyz relations with Turkey, Iran and the United States. In Chapter Seven I examine Kyrgyz-Chinese relations, accounting for Kyrgyz attempts to remove a major threat on her eastern frontier and simultaneously create a third point in her great power triangulation that could guarantee her sovereignty. This also illustrates how Kyrgyz foreign policy can seriously be influenced and shaped by the domestic level of analysis and how the nation-building project can still run headlong into pragmatic foreign policy initiatives.

In conclusion, we have seen how theories of nationalism are well developed, but being essentially internal or comparative, they have less to say about international state behavior. To address this gap, I have examined a theoretical relationship possible between state ideology and foreign policy. At the same time, while the literature on small states has not focused very much on the former Soviet Union, a veritable incubator for small states, writing on small state foreign policy behavior has important theoretical perspectives so I will try to site Kyrgyzstan in the literature on small state behavior. This dissertation hopes to illustrate the complex linkages between

nationalism, nation-building and international behavior in Central Asia, relating an analysis of Kyrgyz foreign policy as considered from its sources and statements showing it in light of nation-building and official nationalism.

## CHAPTER 2: THE ORIGINS OF MODERN KYRGYZSTAN

The origins of the Kyrgyz will always be shrouded in mystery. The Kyrgyz have been nomadic or semi-nomadic for most of their existence. This means that there is little archaeological evidence of them extant on the Eurasian steppe. Their collapsible wooden dwellings and mainly woolen and leather-based forms of cultural and artistic expression have left few traces. Nor did the Kyrgyz use writing with any regularity until the late nineteenth century, and there are no extant written documents by Kyrgyz before the seventeenth century. Another problem with pinning down the origins of the Kyrgyz is that neighbors writing about them (Arabs, Persians, Chinese and later the Russians and Khokand) did so while in conflict with them and have a hostile point of view. These sedentary centralized states worried about unruly marcher regions populated by threatening nomadic societies, much as Roman historians viewed the Germans of the first century.

Attendant with this is the fluidity even of names on the Eurasian steppe. The Bulgarians, for instance, started out as a Turkic group somewhere in the Transcaspian region, and finally arrived in the southern Balkans as a Slavic people. Similarly, there is no certainty that medieval Chinese references to Kyrgyz are really the same as today's Kyrgyz. As Karl Menges points out in his discussion of the origins of the Kyrgyz, references in early Chinese records to Kyrgyz having non-Asian features (i.e.

references to red hair and green eyes) shed further doubt on the continuity of the label being shared consistently by the same group in the course of its early history.<sup>77</sup> This imprecision is reflected in modern times by frequent Russian nineteenth and early twentieth century confusion between the Kazakhs as Kirghiz, the Kirghiz as Kazakh and differentiation between the Kirghiz and Kara-Kirghiz. The confusion was not entirely an intentional part of Russian *divide et imperium*, but reflects a process of tribal differentiation in the period 1600-1700 in the South Siberian Steppe that a time lag applied to contemporary groups, accurately or not.

All of this has created fertile ground for the claims and counter-claims of Kyrgyz historiography and its detractors. Arguments that Central Asian nationalities and states were entirely a Soviet construct contrast heavily with the official Kyrgyz Soviet and post-independence historiography of the Kyrgyz as an ancient people with an uninterrupted experience of collective identity as Kyrgyz.<sup>78</sup> There is little room for compromise between those views, as the official Kyrgyz stance of over 2,200 years of statehood shows. At the same time, contemporary Kyrgyz have had over eighty years of exposure to a modern state that relied in some form or other on identity politics; as long as many European states. Nationalist claims to antiquity as legitimacy are hardly new but should not obscure the reason why those claims are being made; an established state's desire that history ought to reinforce its legitimacy.

---

<sup>77</sup> Karl H. Menges, "People, Languages and Migrations," in *Central Asia: 130 Years of Russian Dominance: A Historical Overview*, ed. Edward Allworth (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 88.

<sup>78</sup> For an excellent discussion of this issue in the context of Turkmenistan, see Adrienne L. Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press), 2-6.

The view advanced in this chapter, straddling the middle ground, is that the Kyrgyz have long had some sort of collective historical identity as an *el* (people) transcending purely tribal identity; a supra-tribal identity, although the shift to a national and then nation-state identity is certainly very recent and a product of the Soviet experience. Like other Central Asians, the modern state as an organized expression of a particular nation is very new for the Kyrgyz in the sense that it arrived in the twentieth century. At the same time, the antiquity of Kyrgyz collective pre-state identity is reasonably certain. Despite dubious attempts of post-independence Kyrgyz historiography to claim ancient statehood for ideological reasons, most sources, nationalist or otherwise, mention the following views about the origins of the Kyrgyz.

All commentators point to the Altaic origins of the Kyrgyz. The name “Kyrgyz” itself may derive from a conflation of “forty tribes” (*kirk juz*), or, “forty women” (*kirk kiz*) but this is speculative and will never be certain. The Altai region, now in the South Siberian portion of the Russian Federation, sandwiched between Kazakhstan and Mongolia, is believed to be the common originating area of most Turkic peoples in Siberia.<sup>79</sup> This area, now an autonomous republic within the Russian Federation, is still inhabited by Turkic tribes whose language is very close to Kyrgyz and Kazakh. Linguistic evidence strongly confirms that Kyrgyz became differentiated from some common Altaic-Turkic language around the first century.<sup>80</sup> The Kyrgyz vernacular itself is fragmented into several differing regional dialects, some being strongly influenced by neighboring languages (Uzbek in the south,

---

<sup>79</sup> President Akaev made a pilgrimage to the Altai Autonomous Republic in Russia as part of the ‘2,300 years of Kyrgyz statehood’ celebrations of 2002, and even jovially suggested that Kyrgyzstan send the Altai, suffering depopulation, some Kyrgyz bachelors to buoy up the demographics.

<sup>80</sup> Karl A. Krippes, *Kyrgyz-English Dictionary* (Kensington, MD: Dunwoody Press, 1998), xi.

Kazakh in the north). The Soviet synthesis of a high literate variant complicated rather than unified, as it was incomprehensible to many outside an academic, urban elite and did little to establish a truly national language.

The Kyrgyz appeared in the historical record as part of the first Turkic tribal confederations, the Gök Türk Empire, established in the region between the seventh and ninth centuries, before the Arab conquest and Mongol unification. Kyrgyz displaced Uyghurs to gain control of the Empire for several decades in the ninth century.<sup>81</sup> Subsequently ejected in turn, the Kyrgyz are mentioned as peripatetically located in southern Mongolia, the area along the Chuy valley (now in southern Kazakhstan and northern Kyrgyzstan) and southern Siberia.

The Kyrgyz were forced to leave the northern steppes after a struggle within one of the Mongol-Nogoy confederations.<sup>82</sup> How or why the Kyrgyz migrated to where they are now is unclear. The Kyrgyz' own origin myth, recounted in the half-million line oral epic poem *Manas*, tells of scattered tribes unified by a Beowulf-like individual, Manas, some time in the later ninth century. The *Manas* epic is unreliable as historical record though, as the poem was recast several times to reflect the most pressing developments of the subsequent centuries. However most sources agree that the Kyrgyz in what became Kyrgyzstan did finally settle permanently in the region roughly of today's Kyrgyzstan by about the fourteenth century, although it should be noted that the Kyrgyz had inhabited adjacent areas since the ninth century.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> Svat Soucek, *A History of Inner Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 81.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>83</sup> For sources on the early history of the Kyrgyz, see S.A. Oljobaev and Ö Karaev, *Kyrgyzstandin Tarixi: Eng Bayirki Mezgilerden XIX Kilimdin Sonuna Cheyinki*, (Bishkek: "Kyrgyzstan-Soros" Fondunun Basma Borboru, 1998).

The Kyrgyz ceased to be true nomads many centuries ago, and the populations settled in the area of present-day Kyrgyzstan practiced transhumance, in contrast to the classic nomadism of the neighboring Kazakhs. Transhumance patterns persist throughout much of Kyrgyzstan today of seasonal migration in summer to upland alpine pastures (*jailoo*), then winter descent to lower sheltered valleys. The eventual Soviet experience with collectivization preserved rather than destroyed traditional transhumance, with trucks replacing horses. As with many nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples in Eurasia, wool and mutton consumption has always played a key role in Kyrgyz society. Wool felt is used in making the traditional home of the Kyrgyz nomads, the *boz uy* (yurt).

The contemporary linguistic geography of the Kyrgyz language gives us some idea that their migratory range across Eurasia once greatly exceeded the borders of the present state though, as pockets of Kyrgyz-speakers survive in as diverse places as Anatolia, the Wakkan corridor of Afghanistan, and, most inexplicably, a couple of villages in Eastern China. Today's Kyrgyz may perhaps best be thought of as a surviving concentration protected from conquest and absorption by the Tien-Shan mountains (similar perhaps, to the Basques in the Pyrenees or the Kurds in Anatolia), a left-over from a once larger tribal confederation or migratory area. Nomadic groups in the Steppe tended to absorb rather than displace earlier inhabitants, such as Indo-European Sogdians, Persians and Mongols in the area from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries.

As an '*el*' the Kyrgyz had common tribal and cultural traditions, common oral histories and ancestral origin-myths distinguishing them from neighboring but similar

Kipchaks and Kazakhs. Kyrgyz identity expressed itself in regular *kurultai* (sports and singing festivals not dissimilar to the Welsh *eistefodd*). Collective group identity was reinforced by the tradition of marriage between members of different clan groupings (i.e. intra-clan marriages were and are against social convention), so it was necessary to know all the clans and have an extensive knowledge of everyone's genealogy, helping to reinforce a macro-level identity. There were of course, no political institutions associated with this other than shifting tribal alliances and intermarriage. Yet the Soviets had some foundation upon which to lay their fostered nationalism, the Gellnerian cultivation of "wild" cultures into "gardened" cultures.

#### *Structure of Kyrgyz society*

The broadest identity division in Kyrgyz society is the geographical divide between North and South. This is expressed through the terms *ong* and *sol* (right and left) with the left *Sol* branch being the southern, if we visualize the map of Kyrgyzstan being two horizontal lines pointing outward west from a connecting point behind lake Issyk-Kul in the East. This divide is an important cultural and political fissure in the country and in terms of the identity of the Kyrgyz. The two regions tend to view each other as having been negatively-influenced by the cultural and linguistic traits of non-Kyrgyz contiguous peoples. A third branch, the *Ichkilik*, comprises Kyrgyz scattered in the Pamirs, Afghanistan and China.

There is historical competition between Northern and Southern groupings. Southerners are characterized negatively for their association with the period of Kokhandi domination over the Kyrgyz, while Northerners are viewed with suspicion

among Southern clans for their putative role in admitting Russian military forces and ultimately Russian rule, in the later nineteenth century. Popular prejudices based on intensely felt regionalism are not easy to quantify, but we shall see subsequently that this regional bifurcation in Kyrgyz society contributes to simmering political and cultural tensions in contemporary Kyrgyzstan. As set against this, the North-South divide is not the sole cultural-historical prism through which to understand modern Kyrgyzstan and it would be a mistake to view Kyrgyz politics and society from the standpoint of regionalism alone. Despite differences in dialect and popular perceptions, there remains a high degree of intermarriage and cooperation between political elites in both areas. This mitigates regionalism and explains Kyrgyzstan's avoidance of the fragmentation seen in Georgia or neighboring Tajikistan after independence. Political elites from North and South understand that the country is ungovernable without each other's support, and each group in power throughout the Soviet period tended to accommodate and work with patronage networks in the opposing side, a practice that has intensified and continued after independence.

Originally Kyrgyz tribes were regionally specific and in practice the larger clans do still tend to be associated with one area, such as the *Saroo* tribe and the city of Kara-Balta. However, the impact of urbanization and the migration of rural Kyrgyz into cities meant that most clans now have an urban element. Urban Kyrgyz still return for marriages and funerals to their ancestral tribal village even when they may not have lived there for a generation or more, assisting the perpetuation of important rural-urban networking that tends to blur the distinction between the two modes of settlement identity. Certain clans are even associated with particular occupations, such

as the *Sayak*, (sited in Jumgal, and Naryn) who are seen as traditionally engaged in commerce and trading. Clan and tribal politics are a persistent motif in Kyrgyz identity and society.

The sept (clan subdivision) is a less-understood fragmentation force at the intra-clan level. Clan and tribal identities have a tendency to split along inheritance patterns and also for individuals to branch off into their own septs. This social phenomenon somewhat weakens the force of tribalism as a macro-level identity in Kyrgyzstan, as tribalism is not a fixed, permanent identity structure in itself. Rather it is a fluid, imprecise structure, interpenetrated by sept division and rivalry. Shifting relations may cover a large urban area, and several rural regions simultaneously with other tribal groupings in a perpetual state of disintegration and coalescence. Regionalism, tribalism and clan identity are important to our understanding of the modern Kyrgyz but one should be cautious when attributing explanatory power to these social structures.

### *Islam*

The Arab conquest of Central Asia in the eighth century involved several clashes with China on what was eventually to become Kyrgyz territory. Most notably, the Battle of Talas in 751 established the limit of Arab conquest in the region and set the stage for the spread of Islam among the oasis cities of Transoxiana along the Silk Road. However, the Kyrgyz at that time were hundreds of miles to the northeast. Few details are known about the religious beliefs of the early Kyrgyz but shamanism with some Buddhist influence was probably widespread. Sometime in roughly the sixteenth

century the Kyrgyz converted to Islam (specifically, the Hanafi School of Sunna). At that time they were closer to the currents of the urban Islamic oasis cities that were conduits connecting the internal Islamic world to the periphery. From the north, they were also exposed to Tatar missionaries active from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries among the Kazakh hordes. Yet it is more likely that the main source of conversion was nearer, as the semi-nomadic Kyrgyz had a symbiotic relationship with many of the Ferghana cities, where they sold surplus and bought manufactured goods.

Formal urban Islam lay loosely over and coexisted with older shamanist practices. This remained an important factor in the modern Soviet experience. The Kyrgyz were arguably less disturbed by subsequent Soviet anti-religious campaigns in the twentieth century compared to nearby lowland Ferghana city dwellers. They were never within the ambit of the mainstream, formal Islamic world anyway, and had long lived with an outward obedience to the prevailing organized religion in the area but privately practiced folk religion and shamanism. The Kyrgyz were perfectly used to distinctions between private and public orthodoxies in confession. Organized variants of Islam, such as Sufi orders that gained a toehold among the Kyrgyz, tended toward the mystical and internal and were in any case local in origin. As with other Central Asians, the cult of saints (*pir*) and the ritual of pilgrimage (*ziyarat*) were, and remain, firmly part of Kyrgyz religiosity, as do inputs from Buddhism and shamanism; the worship of trees and sacred springs.<sup>84</sup> The overall effect as far as the modern Kyrgyz are concerned is that their Islamic identity is complex, variegated and highly unorthodox.

---

<sup>84</sup> For a treatment of the pilgrimage and cult of saints in Central Asian Islam, see R.D. McChesney, *Central Asia: Foundations of Change* (Princeton NJ: The Darwin Press), 1996.

*History from the 1800s*

During the eighteenth century the Kyrgyz clan confederations resisted encroachment onto their territory from Kalmyk hordes occupying an area now in Western Xinjiang in China. By the late eighteenth century many Kyrgyz tribes formally acknowledged the overlordship of the Kokhand Khanate. Kokhand had very few garrisons or fortifications in the area however and its control was weak and often rather notional, much in common with other traditional Timurid Emirates in the area. The three Timurid Khanates in Central Asia, Bokhara, Khiva and Kokhand shared common characteristics of extreme conservatism, and slow decay during the period from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries as the Silk Road collapsed to European sea lanes. It is worth noting that Kokhand herself occasionally acknowledged overlordship of the Chinese state when it suited.<sup>85</sup>

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Central Asia the idea of suzerainty or overlordship was not so much a surrender of sovereignty as it was seen as a strategic alliance or friendship treaty. The very different interpretation put on these acknowledgements by the European Russian state was to have profound consequences for Central Asians, as whatever they meant by allowing Russia to be involved in their affairs would retroactively be interpreted by the Russian state as a Hobbesian social contract. In the Soviet period and beyond this would be used as the legal basis for the rationale of control from, or at least influence from, Moscow.

By the 1820s Russia began to expand southwards into the Kirghiz steppe, establishing garrisons in Tomsk and Orenburg. By the later nineteenth century the Western Kazakh tribes had acknowledged Russian suzerainty, motivated as much by

---

<sup>85</sup> Soucek, 189.

the desire to acquire a powerful partner in the constant intra-tribal fighting as because of the external threat of the Nogois and Chinese. The Kyrgyz clans were attracted into the advancing orbit of Russian power in much the same manner. Some of the earliest surviving written records in Kyrgyz are communiqués in the Russian archives from different tribes requesting Russian support and intervention in tribal disputes.

Russian expansion into Central Asia seems logical in historical hindsight. There was a geo-strategic imperative dictated by worries about the British-controlled territories to the south (a rivalry which was famously to spark the ‘Great Game’ between the two empires in the later nineteenth century for control over the region). In reality it should not be forgotten that St. Petersburg was always hesitant and reluctant to expand the orbit of Russian rule in the area.<sup>86</sup> Apart from worries about sparking competition with Britain in India which many Russian elite in fact saw as dangerous and unnecessary, there was the cost of administering and policing a region of dubious economic value. Sixteenth century Russian fables about Central Asia’s gold and mineral wealth had long been proven fictitious, and control over a group of economically depressed Khanates was not tempting to St. Petersburg, explaining why Russian expansion into the region had not occurred earlier.<sup>87</sup> For example, eighteenth century expansion eastwards into Siberia and Alaska was considered a net mistake in early nineteenth century Russia, whose government long resisted the acquisition of another seemingly valueless tract of territory purely for the sake of it.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> Edward Allworth, “Encounter,” in *Central Asia: 120 Years of Russian Rule*, ed. Edward Allworth (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1989), 1-59.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>88</sup> For an original view on Russian expansion into Siberia tracing the impact on various Siberian Turkic peoples see Anna Reid, *The Shaman’s Coat: A Native History of Siberia* (New York: Walker and Co, 2002).

Eventual Russian expansion seems to have been driven by the dynamics of the military frontier. Ambitious soldier-administrators pursued aggressive policies contrary to the instructions of the center. Peoples on the periphery would be brought into alliances to secure the frontiers, but then would be absorbed as the alliance turned sour and gelled into annexation. Later in the nineteenth century, following the emancipation of serfs in Russia, land-hunger on the part of peasantry from other areas of the empire became a significant factor. These are the more mundane, but more usual, causations of imperial expansion and rather mirrored in the American experience of continental expansion occurring at the same time. Following shortages created by the American Civil War (1861-1865) Central Asia acquired an unanticipated importance as a potential cotton producing region, centered on the Ferghana valley, and by the 1880s and 1890s provided a strong economic rationale for colonial control *post ipso facto*. The area of modern Kyrgyzstan was geo-strategically vital as a flank for the Russians to hold eventually to assure control of the desert plains and oasis cities between the Aral Sea and the Tien Shen mountains.

In 1863 the Kokhandi fort of Pishpek (Bishkek) was seized by a detachment of Russians from the nearest Russian garrison of Vierney (Almaty). The Russians were acting on, or claimed to act on, the request of Chuy valley Kyrgyz clans to help them against Kokhand, which was in the midst of a periodic attempt to reassert its weak control in the region. Pishpek subsequently became one in a line of new Russian forts which moved the Russian military presence across the Chuy River and into the Tien-Shen, around Issyk Kul also. By the 1890s formal Russian protectorate over Kokhand brought the Southern and Ferghana Kyrgyz into the orbit of indirect and direct Russian

administration with the formation of a Turkestan *gubernia* after the annexation of Tashkent in 1865.

The Kyrgyz tribes were not grouped by the Russians into one administrative unit in the Empire. Annexation split them between the Syr-Daria Oblast in the West, Semirchie Oblast, Turkestan's Ferghana Oblast and a small sliver in the south still within the orbit, formally, of the Bokhara Protectorate. Russian imperial governance before the Soviet era did not create territorially discrete units corresponding to ethnic groups, in contrast to the later Soviet obsession with ethnically-based demarcation.

Rather like the creation of Arab states from the Ottoman Empire after 1919, Soviet Kyrgyzstan was to be formed out of chunks taken from several disparate provinces having little previous direct relationship with each other as administrative political units. Their dissimilar demographic and economic geography was to hinder the emergence of a strong and unified Kyrgyz state, both as a Soviet republic and an independent country. It contributes to the centrifugal and weak national cohesion prevailing today as much as the north-south regional divide in culture. In that sense the creation of "Kyrgyzstan" on a map was an entirely Soviet experience.

The northern Chuy area and the Issyk Kul region (in Semirchie Oblast, part of which became Northern Kyrgyzstan) possessed agricultural land best suited to intensive crop and cereal cultivation in the area of Kyrgyz habitation. As such there was an influx of peasants and settlers from the Russian Empire in the 1880s and 1890s, making this region even today the locus of Slavonic and European settlement in the country. Further south, the Ferghana region had strongly mixed populations wherein largely urban Farsi and Chatagai Turkic speakers lived in a symbiotic

relationship with largely rural, transhumance-practicing Kyrgyz, Kazakh or Kipchak speakers.

The rough establishment of permanent frontiers between China, Russia and the British Empire in the period 1864 to 1882 saw a portion of the traditional range of the Kyrgyz *El* assigned to the Chinese side of the border. This created confusion and division that contributed to the Sino-Soviet frontier disputes in the region, as examined in Chapter Seven. The 1908 treaty ceding the Wakkan corridor to Afghanistan created a buffer zone in the Pamirs between Britain and Russia. It stranded several Kyrgyz clans inside Afghanistan. Thus Kyrgyz disunity was increased on two levels: administratively within the Russian state and then internationally due to the extension of the imperial European border idea into the region.

The Imperial Russian style of government in Central Asia generally was to have as little to do with what was considered ‘native’ (*tuzemtsy*) culture and society as possible.<sup>89</sup> Interference with structures of Kyrgyz internal governance was minimal as long as the Kyrgyz respected the Russian military primacy and did not challenge Russian power. There was little attempt to involve native Central Asians into a Russian school system or to try and extend literacy in Russian via compulsory universal education, as happened at the same time in the Ottoman Empire with the introduction of Turkish into the education system by 1909. Indeed, the well-known *Jadid* educational movement begun locally by Central Asian progressive intellectuals in this period was in part a reaction against this official disinterest and neglect.<sup>90</sup> As Adeeb Khalid argues, Jadidism presented an alternative to the widespread but

---

<sup>89</sup> Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Moslem Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 74.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 80-93.

extremely conservative Islamic educational establishment that rejected innovation and progress.<sup>91</sup> The European school system of the Russians potentially offered these but inferentially threatened local culture. Jadidism made few inroads in the area of Kyrgyzstan, although Pishpek, Osh and Karakol had Jadidist secondary schools by 1901.<sup>92</sup> The result was that the first Russian settlements in the region, such as Pishpek, were essentially Russian islands with little in common with even parts of the near countryside, a state of affairs that persisted into much of the Soviet era.

The Kyrgyz were successful farmers. It is estimated that the area of modern Kyrgyzstan may have contained about 2,800,000 head of sheep before the 1920s.<sup>93</sup> Oral narratives of the pre-Soviet period in Kyrgyzstan exaggeratedly relate how rivers would run dry when certain wealthy tribal farmers would water their flocks. This gives a sense of the large scale of pre-Soviet sheep farming and its importance in local society. One issue leading to increasing friction between the Russian and Kyrgyz was the problem of European immigration from the West. By the 1860s and 1870s an estimated 3,500 families had moved into the Northern Chuy region.<sup>94</sup> Despite attempts by the local Russian authorities to stop this, such as the *prikaz* of the military governor of the Jedi Suu district forbidding Russians to settle on land to which Kyrgyz had clear title, the process was a difficult one for the authorities to control.<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 163-167.

<sup>92</sup> Aidarkul Kaana, ed. *Kyrgyzstandin Tarixi (Jogorku Okuu Jaylarina Tapishiruuchu Abiturientter Uchun Okuu Kurali)*, (Bishkek: Erkin Too, 1996), 56.

<sup>93</sup> Anthony R. Fitzherbert, *Kyrgyzstan: Food and Agriculture Organization Grassland and Pasture Crops: Country Pasture/Forage Resource Profiles* (accessed May 11, 2004); available from <http://www.fao.org/WAICENT/FAOINFO/AGRICULT/AGP/AGPC/doc/Counprof/kyrgi.htm#7.1%20Cultivated>.

<sup>94</sup> John Anderson, *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Island of Democracy?* (London: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999), 5.

<sup>95</sup> C.A. Oljobaev ed., *Kyrgyzstandin Tarixi: Eng Bayirki Mezgilerden XIX Kilimdin Sonuna Cheyinki* (Bishkek: "Kyrgyzstan-Soros" Fondunun Basma Borboru, 1998), 265.

However, by the 1880s and 1890s the Russian authorities gradually switched to a policy of encouraging settlement by immigrants. This became desirable as land-reforms and famines elsewhere in the Empire created a demand for land in Turkestan and Semirchie. Further, the Russian army required reliable suppliers of horses and cattle cultivation in proximity to their garrisons in the region. Confiscation of land from the *Kirghizii*, became considerable and more frequent up to 1916. In 1914 authorities planned to expel almost 37,000 native households from the Chuy and Issik Kul region.<sup>96</sup> Illegal immigration was poorly controlled also as the authorities lacked the willpower to enforce quotas. One impact of the 1905 Revolution for the region was increased numbers of settlers arriving to seek land in the Pishpek (Bishkek) region.<sup>97</sup>

The settlement was a recipe for interethnic conflict due to the overlay of essentially European property rights onto a semi-nomadic society practicing transhumance. Even apparently ‘empty’ pastures were of course really lying fallow or subject to strict rotation and management via tribal custom. This phenomenon is mirrored in the conflict between indigenous peoples and migrants in the settlement of the American West at the same time. Arable land suitable for non-indigenous intensive farming was a small percentage of the land available, even creating land-pressure and competition within the Slavonic settler group itself.

Although European travelers and spies in the region had long worried about the potential for Russia to add the superbly skilled Kazakh and Kyrgyz cavalry to their

---

<sup>96</sup> Katsunori Nishiyama, “Russian Colonization in Central Asia: A Case of Semirchye 1867-1922,” in *Migration in Central Asia: Its History and Current Problems*, ed. H. Komatsu, Chika Obiya and John S. Schoeberlein, (Osaka: JCAS Symposium Series 9, Japan Center for Area Studies, 2000), 70.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 72.

regular army units, thus vastly increasing its cavalry strength.<sup>98</sup> Yet Russia never did so, probably in the belief that arming the Kyrgyz and teaching them modern tactics was likely to backfire. In addition the Kyrgyz showed scant interest in military service, at least regarding any ventures unconnected with their immediate affairs and interests, a contrast to the Slavic *Cossack* cavalry units that made up the backbone of Russian frontier troops and settlers in the region.

The entry of the Russian Empire into World War 1 in 1914 was to make this issue a catalyst to the tensions created by immigration and land-hunger. In the years before 1914, wealthier Kyrgyz landowners and tribal elites had been generally successful in getting the authorities to recognize their title claims to land officially. At the same time many less-powerful Kyrgyz clan groups and smaller farmers had been displaced upwards by the consolidation of wealthy Kyrgyz clan land ownership. This process, combined with settler appropriations resulted in farming of marginal land at higher altitudes more intensively than the ecosystem could sustain. This meant that food shortages and the threat of famine became an increasing problem for many upland Kyrgyz at this time.

The shortage of manpower for the Russian army by 1916 drove authorities to announce a general conscription in Turkestan and Semirchie for natives to join auxiliary and labor battalions in the army. The announcement led to anti-Russian riots throughout the Ferghana and snowballed into attacks on Russian settlers especially in Semirchie. Disaffected Kyrgyz tribes became swept up in the revolt and seized the opportunity to vent long-held grievances against the European settlers. An added

---

<sup>98</sup> See for instance Frederick G. Burnaby, *On Horseback to Khiva*, (London: Cassell, Petter & Galpin, 1876; reprint Santa Barbara CA: The Narrative Press, 2003), 120.

incentive for the Kyrgyz to revolt was the fear that conscription was merely a device to remove males of fighting age from the area who might resist confiscation of land planned by the Imperial authorities.

Subsequent Soviet historiography, wishing to impute a Marxist analysis to the events of 1916, claimed that it was a class-uprising of the Kyrgyz poor against wealthy-bourgeois Kyrgyz landowners, but the absence of intra-Kyrgyz conflict during the events of 1916 does not bear out this interpretation. Eyewitness accounts of the rebellion suggest an ugly inter-ethnic settler versus colonized conflict rather than any centrally-led, politically-directed and motivated movement.<sup>99</sup>

The disorganization and sporadic nature of the revolt made it comparatively easy to crush, achieved by Tsarist force with great brutality in December 1916. Estimates vary, but about one third of the entire Kyrgyz population in Russian Turkestan and Semirchie appears to have fled to China following the events of 1916.<sup>100</sup> The 1916 rising, appropriated by Soviet textbooks as evidence of intra-Kyrgyz class warfare, was to have enormous significance for independent Kyrgyzstan in the 1990s when it was reinterpreted as evidence of a national struggle against foreign domination. Indeed contemporary Kyrgyz history textbooks refer to 1916 as the *Uluttuk-Boshtunduk Kötörülüş* (National Freedom Rebellion).<sup>101</sup> Ultra-nationalist historiography today argues that the 1916 events could only be viewed as genocide against the Kyrgyz, lending a legitimacy and authority to Kyrgyz statehood analogous

---

<sup>99</sup> Pavel S. Nazaroff, *Hunted Through Central Asia: On the Run from Lenin's Secret Police* (London: Blackwood & Son, 1932; reprint Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>100</sup> The ghosts of 1916 continue to linger. I was once warned against swimming from a particular beach on Lake Issik Kul by Kyrgyz relatives who insisted it was haunted by Kyrgyz massacred in 1916.

<sup>101</sup> For example Aidarkul Kaana, ed. *Kyrgyzstandin Tarixi*, 61.

to the Armenian case: our community, that foreigners tried to physically exterminate, is only safe in the form of a strong national state.

The eruption of the Russian Revolution in 1917 had profound consequences in remote Turkestan. In some of the major cities later incorporated in Kyrgyzstan, mainly Russian immigrant workers responded to events by setting up worker's committees in Osh and Pishpek. However, the area inhabited by Kyrgyz was peripheral within Turkistan to the center of momentous events unleashed by the first collapse of the Russian Empire. Local activism included limited Bolshevik and Menshevik mobilization among the immigrant European community and proto-nationalist elements in Kokhand and Bokhara in the Ferghana. There were also Kazakh intellectuals in the amorphous *Alash Ordu* party in Orenberg. These all represented political movements that created possibilities, inchoate and ultimately unrealized, of advancing a new agenda for Turkistan. In some of the more radical thinking this involved secession and statehood akin to the movements across the Caspian at the time in Georgia and Azerbaijan. The tide of these currents had no relationship with the Kyrgyz as a group, although some individual Kyrgyz were involved in these various movements in the Ferghana.

By the mid-1920s the Soviets had consolidated power in the area of Semirchie and Turkistan. Bolshevik military leaders such as Mikhail Frunze energetically crushed resistance to Soviet power in the area and ensured Turkistan was closed off as an avenue for the Whites and their British allies across the Caspian in Baku. Local rebellions, continued by poorly organized and equipped guerilla groups in the hills, the *Basmachilar*, were eventually extinguished by the Soviets in the region by the late

1930s. From 1923 onwards, the Soviets undertook four projects having enormous and long-lasting impact on the creation of the modern Kyrgyz state. The first strand was the radical dismantling of the Tsarist administrative partition of the region. The second was the formulation of a nationality policy. The third was the creation of a modern economic unit whose rationale was integration within the overall Soviet economy. A fourth was the creation of a local government and bureaucracy as sub-units of the Soviet state. All were to undergo changes of direction and impetus. Because events on the periphery were actually of infrequent interest to Moscow, these processes were often determined locally. By the 1960s the unwritten constitution would allow the Kirghiz SSR a great measure of latitude in interpreting and applying Moscow's fiat.

### *The Kirghiz SSR*

In the initial phases of the Russian Revolution revolutionary sympathies extant in the Central Asian region were found in the immigrant European community. Tsarist authorities were in the habit of exiling dissidents to the region, compounding activism in the migrant communities. Indigenous political movements associated with anti-Tsarist politics at the time of the Revolution rarely cooperated with Europeans involved in the Kerensky Government and the Revolutionary Soviets of the period. The two were often in conflict with each other; as is illustrated by the tensions arising between the Kokhand Moslem Congress and the Tashkent Soviet in 1917. From 1919-21 the anti-native character of the Tashkent and Transcaspian local Soviet administrations had sparked revolt in much of the Ferghana region and parts of Semirchie.

From 1918 the tactic of the Bolshevik leadership was to mobilize Moslem Central Asians into joining the new power structures, and to oppose actively obstruction from Russian-dominated local governments. The *Basmachi* revolts led Moscow to drop its initial establishment of a *Turkestanakaya Avtonomia Sovyetskaya Sotsialisticheskaya Respublika* (Turkistan ASSR). The new direction enabled them to encourage deeper Central Asian participation in government while preventing opportunities for Pan-Turkic movements arising in a unified Turkistan administrative unit.

The new Soviet Central Asian administrative frontiers were largely demarcated in the 1920s and 1930s. Recent research on the frontier issue of the 1920s has shown that frontiers delineation was not imposed exclusively by the fiat of Moscow, but was the product of a complex multi-lateral bargaining process. In this the new autonomous republican units negotiated both with each other, with Moscow, and within Moscow itself there was competition between rival central bureaucracies that also played a significant role. Another strand in the process was lobbying and petitioning from villages and towns to be included in or excluded from in a new unit.<sup>102</sup>

There was an inevitable arbitrary quality to the delineation process. The major Ferghana city of Osh, a historic center of Uzbek settlement, wound up in the Kirghiz ASSR. Several valleys traditionally Kyrgyz were incorporated into the Gorno-Badakhshan ASSR. Despite this, a topographic map of Kyrgyzstan shows a high

---

<sup>102</sup> For a full account of the process of delineation and bargaining between the Central Asian republics in the 1920s, see Arslan Koichiev, "Ethno-Territorial Claims in the Ferghana Valley During the Process of National Delimitation, 1924-7," in *Central Asia: Aspects of Transition*, ed. Tom Everett-Heath, (London: Routledge-Curzon, 2003) 45-56. On the role of popular protest and local level maneuverings over the delineation, see Jeremy R. Smith, "National Conflict in the USSR in the 1920s," *Ab Imperio* 3, no. 21 (August 2001): 221-265.

degree of conformity between upland mountainous areas, the main areas of Kyrgyz settlement, and the frontiers drawn up and negotiated in the 1920s. The delineation of the Kara-Khirghiz Autonomous Oblast created a unit wherein a rough majority of the population was Kyrgyz in 1924. This was perhaps, a best-possible outcome of the administrative decision creating a homogenous Kyrgyz area, extremely difficult given the peculiar challenges posed by Kyrgyz semi-nomadic range and dispersal.

In summary, a number of factors went into Soviet thinking about administrative reforms in Central Asia in the early 1920s. There was a desire to form national units in tune with Lenin's *koronizatsia* (nativization of cadres) policy. A concomitant wish was retarding the potential for emergence of a greater Turkestan as an politico-administrative unit (as had been demanded by some Central Asian Bolsheviks and elites in the early 1920s) and a need to efface the old Tsarist administrative units completely and create politico-administrative units that would both fit into and facilitate central planning within a command economy.

The incongruity between Soviet-era boundaries and nationalities also needs to be understood in the context of ideology. Under the communist system, ethnicity and nationality was not meant to be the basis for political institutions. People within the institutions were supported, in theory, by a network of educational and cultural preferences based on minority and titular group empowerment. Republics were certainly designed with titular nationalities offset by large minority populations to make potential secession difficult. At the same time, Soviet nationalities policy expected that groups situated outside their titular republic would enjoy the same cultural protections as other minorities. Internal boundary markers and not external

ones were being demarcated in the early Soviet period. In Africa many colonial-administrative units abutted those administered by a separate colonial power and therefore can be said to be external or international in nature. In Soviet Central Asia the external frontiers of the Tsarist state remained those of the Soviet state.

From 1923 to 1925 therefore, the national delimitation process advanced. New administrative units were drafted in conformity with the process of national description and division suggested by *koronizitsia*. The Kara-Kirghiz Autonomous Oblast began life on 14 October 1924 as part of the Russian SSR. The newly-hatched unit was subsequently transferred to the Turkistan ASSR for a brief period from 25 May 1925, before becoming an ASSR in its own right on 01 February 1926. Kara-Kirghiz,<sup>103</sup> the old Tsarist term used to differentiate Kyrgyz and Kazakhs both hitherto confusingly referred to as “Kirghiz,” was shortened to ‘Kirghiz’ by decision of the Central Committee in Moscow, while Kazakhs became officially Kazakh.<sup>104</sup> Why the decision was taken to differentiate finally between the two groups probably lies in the detailed ethnographic research carried out by the Turkestan Nationality Committee in charge of the national delimitation process. Kyrgyz, an eastern Turkic language, is very closely related to Kazakh with which it is for the most part mutually-intelligible. The Soviet manipulation of identities in Central Asia emphasized and exaggerated existing linguistic differences in the region after 1923. Kyrgyz and Kazakh moved from being probable dialects of the same broad language toward being written, taught and perceived as different languages.

---

<sup>103</sup> *Kara* means ‘black’. Some northern Kyrgyz clans do refer to themselves as ‘Kara’ as an adjective. It has overtones of purity and authenticity, but does not refer to a specific group per se.

<sup>104</sup> B.U. Ustanbekov and T.K. Choroiev, *Kyrgyz Tarihi: Kisaja Entsiklopedialik Sözdök Mektep Okuuchulari Üchün* (Frunze: Kyrgyz Soviet Entsiklopedianin Bashki Reduksiasi, 1990).

In 1936 *Kirghizia* was promoted to full SSR status, and thus theoretical equality with the Russian SSR itself. The overall strategic reason for promoting the Central Asian units to quasi-sovereign partially lay in the propaganda value of the Soviet model of development in Central Asia versus British India. There was nothing inevitable about *Kirghizia's* ascent to formal All-Union sovereignty however. Two other ASSRs in Central Asia, the Ngorno-Badakshan and Karakalpak ASSRs, were not so lucky. This random ascent to sovereignty permitted Kyrgyz independence in 1991, that otherwise would have seen Kyrgyzstan being an island of Russian territory perhaps akin to the Kaliningrad oblast now. The new Kirghiz ASSR was organized into five *oblasts* (regions) with a central administration in a purpose-build capital, renamed Frunze from Pishpek.

It is interesting to see a Kyrgyz sense of statehood becoming apparent even from the early Soviet period and differentiated from earlier identities such as *el* (people) or clan. The early Soviet administration referred to itself in communiqués as a state (*mamleket*) engaged in solving “border issues” as early as 1925.<sup>105</sup> The use of the term *mamleket* is significant because the actors involved must have understood the subsidiary nature of *oblast* status. However they emphasized the idea of a self-contained administrative apparatus complete enough to arrogate to itself the idea of being a state. *Mamleket* as a word in both Persian and several Turkic languages has very precise overtones of ‘state-ness’, referring to the polity and its structure rather than the specific level of government.

---

<sup>105</sup> Joldosbhai M. Malabaev, *Kyrgyz Mamleketinin Tarixi* (Bishkek: Kyrgyz Respublikasinin Bilim, Ilim jana Madanyat Ministeriiligi Bekitken, 1999), 124.

Compared to regions with a greater urban tradition and a pre-existing cultural infrastructure in the indigenous language, the challenge of finding literate and educated cadres able to administer the new unit was acute in the Kirghiz ASSR. In 1927 only thirty-seven percent of deputies elected to the ASSR Supreme Soviet were literate.<sup>106</sup> Aggressive Soviet expansion of regional primary and secondary education systems combated this problem throughout the 1920s. In 1929 alone thirty Party-Soviet evening schools opened throughout the Kirghiz ASSR to provide remedial education to adults. Doubtless the education was both propagandistic in content and rough-and-ready, but the ninety-five percent literacy rate in Kyrgyzstan today traces back to this period and argues for some sort of effectiveness. Educational system expansion was attended by deliberate moves on the part of the center to ensure that literacy, much like the experience of Republican Turkey after 1928, would have the effect of compounding the new identities and sealing the bulk of the newly-literate population from the heritage of the past, while exposing them to information sympathetic to the new regime.

#### *Urbanization and collectivization*

Urbanization and sedentarization in the twentieth century wrought as profound changes on Kyrgyz society as the impact of rapid modernization in the Middle East in the same period. The Soviets rigidly controlled rural-urban migration through a residency permit system, as elsewhere in the USSR. The Party allocated and controlled access to jobs and education in the capital. Therefore urban growth was controlled and cities did not acquire the sprawling growth of Cairo or Istanbul. A

---

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 130.

difference of the Kirghiz SSR from neighboring republics was the impact of collectivization in its rural districts. This settled existing tribal units in villages and farms on land they already cultivated, a contrast to the massive displacement unleashed by collectivization in the Kazakh SSR. Frunze grew into a city of 800,000 by 1991, Tokmok to 200,000 and Osh in the south to about 100,000; large cities for a country previously with virtually none. The blueprint for the modern Soviet city was closely followed with carefully stratified housing developments according to status in society. The Soviets took care however to mix ethnic groups in the large housing estates that sprang up; every family was randomly assigned from the ethnic viewpoint. Their neighbors could be anyone.<sup>107</sup>

Major urban development centered on the Chuy Valley and Frunze, flanked by the urban centers of Kara Balta to the West and Tokmok to the East. In the South Osh served as an urban hub for a large area. The urban spaces were Soviet in the sense that large communities of non-Kyrgyz immigrants constituted the workforce for all-union enterprises and most technical and manufacturing industry. Higher education was also dominated by non-indigenous nationalities except where that would have been inappropriate in terms of Soviet nationality policy. For example, ethnic Kyrgyz dominated the academic fields of Kyrgyz history, culture and language. Numbers of Kyrgyz admitted to universities and institutes were very strictly and carefully controlled and subject to quota as with other nationalities in Kyrgyzstan. Light industry situated in the Kirghiz SSR was usually under the administrative direction of Moscow and often staffed by immigrants. The net result of this by the 1970s was that

---

<sup>107</sup> In my apartment in a 1950s blue collar development in Bishkek from 1997-2000, my landlady's family were Ukrainian, and my neighbors across the vestibule were Korean and Kyrgyz respectively.

urban areas in Soviet Kyrgyzstan were predominantly populated by non-Kyrgyz, and Kyrgyz themselves confined to rural areas and occupations. The *propiska* system, whereby citizens had to receive special permission to change towns or jobs and hold a license to reside in cities, gave legal reinforcement to this.

During the 1970s, the Kirghiz SSR faced a high rural birthrate. Local government in rural areas demanded the extension of more modern transport, education and industry into their regions. Since this was consistent with the rhetoric of Soviet development and seemed a good way of stemming illegal urban in-migration the quota of rural Kyrgyz admitted to pedagogical and scientific institutes was raised in this period. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, in the context of a more relaxed and benign Soviet center (or perhaps, a center no longer interested in enforcing its social engineering projects on the periphery) it seems that many of these people managed to stay in the capital and in other urban centers as well following graduation. There they found jobs, and established their own patronage networks, and often brought rural relatives to join them. By the late 1980s and just prior to the Soviet collapse, the demographic balance was beginning to shift in favor of ethnic Kyrgyz in the larger cities. One of the few protest movements articulating ethnic discontent on the eve of independence was a pressure group lobbying the Bishkek city administration to build more housing for ethnic Kyrgyz. This reflects this history of Soviet-controlled rural-urban migration and remains an issue today.

The Soviet center also mandated educational quotas for the best and brightest, (although connections mattered too). These went to Moscow and other cities in the Soviet west for further education and training in various fields. Back in their republics

they would then, in theory, represent the Soviet elite as well as furthering the Soviet agenda. By the 1960s Kyrgyz were admitted in tiny numbers to the Soviet diplomatic service's graduate schools including the Institute of Foreign Relations in Moscow, Kiev University and some of the closely allied military and KGB institutes. Although small in number, this internal foreign exchange experience was to produce elite cadres able to act at the advent of unexpected independence to establish the new structures of a sovereign state.

In rural districts the higher mountain pastures (*jailoo*) were not suitable for intensive mechanized agriculture. These were left to traditional agricultural techniques mainly apportioned on the basis of traditional social structures and functioned behind the fig-leaf of the collective. For this reason it could be argued that Sovietization did not have the same traumatic impact on the structure of Kyrgyz society as collectivization of agriculture had in neighboring Kazakhstan. The Kazakhs by comparison were a truly nomadic people whose entire way of life and social fabric was seriously damaged by sedentarization. Collectivization in Kazakhstan in the same period led to a massive famine 1927-1933 as in Ukraine. It is estimated that as much as fifty percent of the ethnic Kazakh population perished during this time.<sup>108</sup> Significant numbers of Kazakhs fled into the Kirghiz ASSR creating a sizable Kazakh minority in the northern Talas and Chuy oblasts.

After 1945 the image of Kyrgyz expertise in sheep farming was promoted by local party bosses anxious to comply with central demands for increased meat and wool production; pasturage area rapidly expanded. As a result by the 1950s the primary role of the Kirghiz SSR economy in *Gosplan* was sheep farming. Consistent

---

<sup>108</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs* (Stanford CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1987), 184.

with Soviet planning for its peripheral economies the Kirghiz SSR was deliberately assigned a function as a predominantly agricultural republic with very little investment in non-agricultural industries or manufacturing by the center.

During the next forty years delicate but more productive foreign breeds such as the Merino, the Lincoln and others replaced the hardy native Central Asian fat-tailed sheep. Soviet technocracy enthusiastically introduced the latest artificial insemination techniques to boost livestock fertility. Unable to survive on the sparse upland grazing, Merino sheep farming relied on imports of fodder (up to 160,000 tons per year) from the Russian SSR. As a result sheep herds exploded from 92,800 head in the late 1950s to 8,325,000 head by the 1970s.<sup>109</sup> The eventual agricultural crisis in the 1990s was in a sense unavoidable, and would have happened whether the USSR collapsed or not since the delicate alpine environment was reaching its limits after decades of misuse. By the 1960s permanent over-stocking had been established as the normal state of affairs throughout the whole seasonal grazing cycle, twice exceeding the natural carrying capacity of the mountains. Year-round pasturage of sheep disrupted older, ecologically appropriate transhumance patterns.<sup>110</sup>

Very similarly to Bulgaria and other Soviet entities after 1945, political elites in the Kirghiz SSR pushed for industrialization to be situated in their region. They read Lenin too and wanted to diversify and magnify their niche in the centrally planned economy. The center was reluctant to do this except where some plausible excuse could be found for doing so. The main combine harvester factory in the USSR was placed in the Kirghiz SSR presumably due to its agrarian character. Apart from

---

<sup>109</sup> R.K. Sadykov, *Perfection of Sheep Breeds and Types of Goats Bred in the Kirghiz SSR* (Frunze: State Agricultural Academy, 1987), 7.

<sup>110</sup> Fitzherbert, *Kyrgyzstan: Country Pasture/Forage Resource Profile*, 7.1

livestock farming, cotton and tobacco were important in the south and elsewhere opium poppies were grown for the Soviet pharmaceutical industry. There was some coal production in the Ferghana, such as at Sölüktüü in the Southwest, and several large gold mines. Two five year plans between 1928 and 1937 established the electrification of Frunze and surrounding regions. Hydroelectric power was also extensively developed as the main river system with its glacier melt water supplied the whole Transcaspian area and originated in the Kirghiz SSR and neighboring Tajik SSR.

The discovery of uranium in the 1950s, a geo-strategically vital priority resource for the Soviet nuclear defense industry, transformed the Kirghiz SSR's economic status. As uranium mining grew in importance closed scientific communities were established near Frunze (Bishkek) in places like Kara Balta. The resulting economic boom of this period created infrastructural investment. In the memories of Kyrgyz now, it is remembered as the time when tarred roads and paved streets arrived in the capital, along with widespread telephones and new high rise apartments to accommodate the technocracy of the defense establishment.

#### *Politics and society from the 1930s*

Consistent with many other Soviet republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus, lengthy tenure of party bosses whose unquestioning subservience to Moscow allowed them a large degree of informal autonomy and latitude in the government of their republics characterized the Kyrgyz administration in the period 1960-80. Prior to that Stalinist Terror had gripped the region in the 1930s. On 3 November 1938, the entire

leadership of the Kirghiz SSR government was arrested in Bishkek. Over one hundred people were driven to the nearby valley of Chong Tash and shot. This included eminent founding Kyrgyz communists such as Yusup Abdurakhmanov. Many of the Central Asian native cadres were similarly liquidated around that time as they came to be identified with the interests of their national units then the center. This experience set the stage for political stagnation in subsequent decades of Soviet rule.

From 1961-1986, Turdukan Usupaliev led the Kirghiz SSR as First Secretary of the Kirghiz Communist Party. A northerner from the Naryn Oblast of undistinguished traditional connections but excellent Party credentials from his prior spell as local First Secretary in Frunze, he ran the republic as his fiefdom. He was extensively criticized after 1991 for encouraging Russification during his tenure. For example the current edition of the *Kyrgyz Encyclopedia* reviles him for allowing the end of Kyrgyz language teaching in Russophone schools. It cites his introduction of slogans into Kyrgyz schools such as “*Orus tili – ekinchi ene tilim*” (The Russian language - my second mother tongue) and recounts that the 1978 Constitution was not even translated into Kyrgyz.<sup>111</sup> Despite the marginalization of titular culture and quasi-official encouragement of Russification, living standards rose markedly throughout the postwar period. As elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, the Brezhnev era is fondly remembered today by many Kyrgyz as an era of employment security and economic progress. For all this relative progress, however, it was still the second poorest republic of the USSR in 1991.

---

<sup>111</sup> Kyrgyzstan Entsiklopedia, “Tarixi,” in *Kyrgyzstan Entsiklopedia* (Bishkek: Mamlekettik Til Jana Entsiklopiya Borborou, 2001), 147.

Usupaliev and his cohorts understood the Brezhnevian social contract between the center and the republics in force after Khrushchev's ouster. They possessed autonomy to implement policy as long as economic outputs were met. Mindful of the fate of their predecessors in the 1930s, they had little interest in being closely identified with pro-Kyrgyz policies. Russification was the inevitable consequence.

In 1986 there was a purge of Central Asian leaders. The accession of Yuri Andropov and Mikail Gorabachev began a central drive to counteract socio-economic stagnation by returning to ideological purity and Lenin's New Economic Plan of the 1920s. Of course, this fresh radicalism rendered void the security of the pre-existing informal social contract between the center and peripheries, and took Central Asian leaders by surprise. Usupaliev was ousted for his cronyism and corruption. He escaped execution however, the fate of his peer in the Uzbek SSR under Gorbachev. Absamat Masaliev, a solid candidate in the eyes of Gorbachev's government due to his doctrinaire Marxism, in turn replaced him.<sup>112</sup> In his brief reign however, Masaliev made no moves to implement the winds of reform sweeping elsewhere over the USSR and eventually even allied himself with anti-Gorbachev elements in the army and KGB plotting a Brezhnevite coup.

The legacy of these years for independent Kyrgyzstan was, as elsewhere in the USSR, one of weak institutions functioning in the shadow of a strong executive whose longevity did not create any mechanisms or traditions for regime transfer. Elections were regularly held, but with closely controlled candidate lists and became a form of communal endorsement for a system rather than a means of changing it, another legacy to persist after the Kirghiz SSR. The pre-Soviet Kyrgyz tradition that politics as

---

<sup>112</sup> As leader of the Kyrgyz Communist Party today, he remains true to his principles.

an act belonged to the private, not the public sphere, later merged with the Soviet system of moribund, superficial, institutions and personalist power. It would continue to lurk in the background of post-independence politics.

Gorbachev permitted economic liberalization in the late 1980s allowing Kazakh and Azeri local leaders some contact with foreign investors unchaperoned from Moscow. However this did not happen in the Kirghiz SSR since it had few resources attractive to foreigners. Outsiders indeed were usually forbidden access to the Kirghiz SSR because of its part in the Soviet military-industrial complex. This included sensitive uranium mining and processing plants, flight training and torpedo testing stations and its proximity to the sensitive border with China. Some foreigners did do business there. For instance Genoese wool merchants mysteriously managed to buy the best wool and visit regularly; a tradition continued today and the origins of the sizable Italian business community in Bishkek. Overall however the Kirghiz SSR was one of the more isolated republics of the USSR, and this isolation continued directly up to 1991.

The presence of civil society and its meaning in the post-Soviet context is fiercely contested. Many discussions of post-Soviet politics take the view that there is no meaningful civil society created by the Soviet experience, and that ergo, the grafting of Western models is a necessary precondition for socio-economic development and democratization today.<sup>113</sup> My view is that the Soviet experience created a civil society albeit a passive one oddly nourished by the state and manifesting itself as a social culture, if not in independent institutions. This explains

---

<sup>113</sup> For a good discussion of civil society in the context of foreign assistance see Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve* (Washington DC: The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999), 207-251.

why states such as Kyrgyzstan were able to withstand the massive socio-economic pressures and forces for fragmentation after 1991 in light of economic collapse and the challenge of minority groups.

Eventually the currents of social mobilization and a civil society that began to feel freer to question the state awoke in the USSR in the late 1980s and also in the Kirghiz SSR. The mild form it took is interesting. Violent social protest was by no means unknown in the Kirghiz SSR, although carefully suppressed and unreported in the foreign or even Soviet media. There had been violent riots in Frunze as a result of police persecution and bribery of Bazaar traders in 1969 and also 1973 that were put down by the armed forces. However, the liberalism of the 1980s in the Kirghiz SSR took the form of a polite, if vigorous, debate. This centered on the declining status of the Kirghiz in the Usupaliev years. Intellectuals began to point out the equation in the educational system between Sovietization and Russification, and the contradictions inherent in this given the supposedly prominent role of Kyrgyz in the republic. In 1989, the Chamber of Deputies reinforced Kyrgyz as the official state language. Radical venting of ethnic grievances seen in Armenia and Azerbaijan in this period was missing in this process however. Certainly many Kyrgyz felt discriminated against yet were unlikely to advance their careers without knowing Russian fluently. They saw the safeguarding of Kyrgyz as redressing a balance rather than a matter of eliminating Russian.

*The impact of the Soviet experience on Kyrgyz culture and identity*

Much of 'Kyrgyz-ness' seems to be bound up in a strong nomadic identity, but this has undeniably been changed by the experience of rapid sedentarization and urbanization in the twentieth century. In addition, an important legacy of the Soviet period was the creation of a literate Kyrgyz culture transmittable through a network of republican schools and institutes and through publications, newspapers and books. Kyrgyz even had their own state-sponsored opera and drama theaters in a shiny new Soviet capital, Frunze. Literate Kyrgyz was shaped in order to differentiate itself both from related Turkic languages such as Uzbek and Kazakh.

The extent to which this was actually necessary is very hard to ascertain. Was the process really so much about differentiation as it was simply creating a literary idiom that had not previously existed? Whatever the reality, the elite language formed as the "national" literate language was markedly differentiated from the rural, "ethnic" language by virtue of complexity, formality, pronunciation and discourse. Literary Kyrgyz gave a cultural identity to elites simultaneously subject to Russification. The role of this elite literary idiom in Kyrgyz was to provide an indigenous cultural milieu in which there could be national expression without at the same time creating a discourse that could reach across the divide to mobilize the wider ethnic.

As a result, in general, Kyrgyz urban elites, at least, felt perfectly in touch with their national identity and culture, and thus did not feel greatly threatened by Russification. Russian was the key to career promotion within the Communist Party and in most other spheres and, in the absence of other choices of cosmopolitan lenses

through which to view the world, most Kyrgyz embraced Russian.<sup>114</sup> For Kyrgyz elites however, strong cultural restraints imposed externally and internally reinforced their own identity. Disagreeing with other recent commentators on Kyrgyzstan, therefore, I would argue that Soviet-era Russification did not lead to an automatic loss of national or ethnic identity.<sup>115</sup> Externally this was because Russophone Kyrgyz were prevented from complete assimilation, even when this was desired, by the strong racism of Russian society and culture that imposed a clear ceiling on the possible extent of assimilation. Kyrgyz could not assimilate as Russians. This identity marker is so deep that Slavic people from Central Asia migrating to Russia are seen as having lost their “Russian-ness” and become “Asian.” Kyrgyz rural populations certainly felt disadvantaged by the pervasiveness of Russian. Access to Russophone urban islands with enticing career opportunities were restricted by language barriers as well as by the residency permit system.

For ethnic Kyrgyz some knowledge of the language and culture remained vital to functioning in wider Kyrgyz society. It continued to be highly endogamic in the Soviet period. Elites superficially Russified often were perfectly “Kyrgyz” at one level even when Russian had permeated to the extent of being the household language in the same way that few Irish understand monolingualism in English as affecting their “Irishness.” In the later Soviet period, and especially after independence, many Kyrgyz urban families having become monolingual in Russian reversed this trend.

---

<sup>114</sup> David Laiten’s comparative study of language politics in post-Soviet Estonia and Kazakhstan show striking overall similarities to the Kyrgyz experience. David D. Laiten, *Identity Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press), 1998.

<sup>115</sup> Such as Robert Lowe, “Nation-Building in the Kyrgyz Republic,” in *Central Asia: Aspects of Transition*, ed. Tom Everett-Heath (London: Routledge-Curzon, 2003) 106-131.

They began to take aggressive steps to ensure bilingualism in their families. This would be done, for example, by sending children to stay with rural relatives for extended periods. The problem with monolingualism in Russian was that it served to cut off an urban Kyrgyz family from its rural clan and patronage networks. While advancing careers, perhaps, those reliant on wider clan networks for food during shortages as well as other forms of support saw the advantages of both. Bilingualism prevailed in Soviet Kyrgyzstan as a norm. Russian was simply an urban public language and a useful interethnic language. Kyrgyz meanwhile had three separate functions as an urban intra-Kyrgyz elite language (high literary Kyrgyz as developed in the Soviet period), an urban private language (that Slavonic colleagues were not inclined to understand), and also an urban-rural language. Each mode of Kyrgyz had different functions, reinforcing the Kyrgyz elite, private Kyrgyz identity, or rural-urban clan networks depending.

The Soviet state at the same time enforced clear limits to the extent to which the cultivation of an elite Kyrgyz-oriented identity was permissible and took energetic steps to prevent the emergence of a national idiom or ideology that might have an overtly nationalist, anti-Soviet mobilizing potential.<sup>116</sup> This was most visible in the period of the Stalinist terror, when many “national” intellectuals simply disappeared overnight. Often, they were not mentioned even within families for generations.

The Soviet legacy was one of secularization that imposed state control on religion. Islam in Central Asia was rigidly controlled through a system of licenses and a bureaucratic apparatus with a small number of approved medresa. *Mejitter*

---

<sup>116</sup> See Terry Martin. *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.

(mosques) were closed and few built. Frunze in 1990 had only two, for instance. On the other hand, as we have seen, since Kyrgyz Islam was rather marginal anyway it adapted itself quite easily to Soviet religious policy. Arguably the rigid Soviet religious hierarchy, with its academically-credentialed staff, was the most formal structure the Kyrgyz had ever known. Aside from the anti-religious campaigns of the 1920s and 1930s, after 1945 the policy became one of benign neglect wherein observance of religious forms was unlikely to get anyone into serious trouble, even if it was officially frowned upon. In the 1980s the state even allowed the Frunze Muftiat to remind people about major religious holidays on television. Undoubtedly two effects of Soviet secularization were disruption and isolation. Religious literature and textbooks in schools were generally absent, and particularly in rural areas the result was an acute shortage of trained religious scholars to guide on theological matters, provide religious education for youth, or interpret Islamic law.

### *Independence*

That the Central Asian States were unprepared for independence is a truism particularly apt in the case of Kirghiz SSR. The centrally planned economy was coordinated on the basis of complete interdependence on neighboring republics. Kyrgyz water irrigated Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan while its cities were heated in winter with Uzbek gas. The main roads and rail links ran through Kazakhstan in the north and into the Ferghana in the south, but there were few roads connecting the provinces of the Kirghiz SSR to Frunze not running through neighboring territory. Cast adrift from the Soviet Union, and renamed Kyrgyzstan, the new country faced

formidable challenges. Before turning to a discussion of nation building, and foreign policy in the next chapters, let us briefly focus on the main outlines of political and economic events from 1991.

### *Politics after independence*

Among Soviet Central Asian leaders, Askar Akayev was one of those appointed immediately before the collapse, gaining control in 1990. An academic who had spent most of his career as a physics professor in St. Petersburg, he was often presented as an outsider or compromise candidate, and as an enlightened progressive thinker. In fact his solid Northern clan connections represented a power shift back to the North and away from the Southern predecessors or ideologically appointed non-entities from Naryn. The leadership of the first fifteen years of the independent state was to be more traditionally reflective of Northern aristocratic clans and in that respect was a departure from the Soviet trend to try and undermine pre-Soviet northern domination.

Less progressive than merely dependent on a broad and fractured set of traditional interest groups and thus usually unable to control the political space in Kyrgyzstan, Akaev's regime nonetheless tried to use traditional Central Asian patterns of state control to maintain power from independence until its overthrow in March 2005. This included the continuance of Soviet style manipulation of elections and pluralist forms to ensure apparent domestic mandates for its rule. Its weakness though was that Kyrgyz society and politics shifted decisively in the fifteen years following independence, and rooted in Soviet control techniques in domestic terms (and a sharp

contrast to foreign policy) it was unable to perpetuate its grip on power. Akaev's political base became steadily eroded by the late 1990s. His regime, dependent as it was on a broad coalition of traditional Kyrgyz regional interests that had been alienated at various stages throughout the 1990s, quietly dissolved by 2005.

In 1991 however, state weakness in institutional terms remained the great challenge after independence. The Government of the Kirghiz SSR controlled only certain aspects of the republic and there were many economic and defense related entities, such as the KGB, controlled from Moscow directly. Trends significant to our study include the contraction of the state after independence with diminished security for the state bureaucracy, and the way in which elites felt nervous about relinquishing state control of the economy. Building tension resulted from the diffusion of state power and the growing realignment of political forces and civil society groups as the country endured massive economic crisis, pressure that grew stronger as the population slowly became more exposed to the outside world. Throughout this the state was trying to forge its identity through nation-building, and the Akaev regime tried to closely identify the nation-building with its own legitimacy. Ultimately though, compared to Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, this identification did not result in a cult of personality around the image of the leader, although attempts in this direction were frequently made.

In common with its neighbors, in Kyrgyzstan independence bequeathed a brief period of political liberalism wherein genuine innovation seemed possible. In Kyrgyzstan this phase lasted longer than in neighbors, until 1997 or 1998. The comparatively livelier opposition, commitment to free market liberalization, and more

outspoken press in Kyrgyzstan created the illusion, in particular nurtured by the United States looking for a regional success story, that Kyrgyzstan was the only Central Asian state pursuing a democratic path. Well-educated government members with an impressive command of English and ability to pay lip service to democratization were good spokespeople for the country externally.

However, traditional Soviet governance patterns, the need to reward support with patronage, specific to the Kirghiz SSR experience, continued in independent Kyrgyzstan. The Akaev regime often subverted the very reforms they were supposed to be implementing. As in Russia, it benefited from privatization on advantageous terms to supporters and thus elites tied to the regime ended up in control of many state assets and resources for patronage. Also similarly to Russia, many profitable and efficient enterprises that could have continued as viable economic concerns were sold off and looted.<sup>117</sup> Even with privatization, the reach of state ownership in Kyrgyzstan remained enormous. Within the large remaining state sector the government retained its own patronage networks and ability to co-opt potential opposition. The political opposition in any case soon shattered into numerous splinter groups and single-issue parties unable to call on a real grassroots following. They were often representative only of particular personalities or regionalist groupings who did slowly develop mobilizing ability often under political party labels. To some extent this tendency for the political opposition to fragment made it possible for the Akaev government to control and shape the nationalist agenda for fifteen years despite its growing unpopularity. The Akaev administration also retained the loyalty of minority groups by seeming to restrain Kyrgyz nationalism and offer a civic nationalist vision. A well-

---

<sup>117</sup> For instance the blood stock of Kyrgyz thoroughbred horses was sold off to China.

organized lobby of moderate Kyrgyz nationalist opponents of the regime was not able to gather sufficient strength or coherency to oppose government soft-pedaling on aspects of the nation-building agenda, although eventually in 2005 they swept Akaev out of office.

The sheer inability of the state to prevent a lot of the opposition 1991-2005, be it regional, within the press, or political, was more indicative of a damaged and much-frayed system of coercion in the post-Soviet years than any genuine change in political culture or commitment to democratization. Privately, Kyrgyz leadership in both the government and the opposition worried about the seemingly incongruous challenge of state-building; holding things together and forging the independent nation while introducing an adversarial, open political system to a society that is completely unused to it.<sup>118</sup> I am not arguing that eventual democratization should not be attempted. The Kyrgyz state badly needs open mechanisms for transferring power and better ways to manage decision-making. Modern societies eventually tend to discover that pluralist forms of government are preferable for the political oversight of complex modern societies. I merely emphasize that there was no fall from grace from a democratic idyll flourishing in Kyrgyzstan in the 1990s. On the contrary it never really existed at all, and will not for another several decades at least. The interim government that took power after March 2005, although composed of populists simultaneously reliant on regional clan networks, is unlikely to respond to this challenge very differently from the Akaev regime.

---

<sup>118</sup> The idea of open, public disagreement especially over political issues is very shocking for many Kyrgyz, particularly rural, traditional groups whose society is still rigidly hierarchical and based on the principles of *beteng* (face, appearance). During my time living in Kyrgyzstan I heard far more criticism of the Akaev regime for being 'weak' compared to the neighboring strong dictatorships than calls for democratization.

While foreign aid poured into Kyrgyzstan, the net impact of much of the aid has been to replace the role of Soviet patronage and coercive side-payment ability with the foreign donor community.<sup>119</sup> It often unwittingly repeated many of the same donor-dependency mistakes made in Latin America and Africa in the postwar period. As political and economic powers were closely intertwined in the Soviet period, they continue to be in the independent regime. Political opposition is often sited in groups who had been shut out of certain economic patronage networks. For instance the Ar Namyz party is supported by many mid-ranking former KGB officials and police who did not have title to property that could be privatized, and they lost their own economic support systems with the departure of the Soviet state at independence.

Overall, the independent state was weaker in many respects than its predecessor in Kyrgyzstan. For a country with strong regionalist tendencies, this was particularly dangerous to state-building in the aftermath of collapse. Bishkek fought vigorously to try and maintain control of the provincial governors and patronage apparatus. At independence, Kyrgyzstan comprised only five regions: four smaller northern units and then the huge Osh oblast comprising the south of the country. Between 1991 and 2002 the large Osh oblast was subdivided into three, beginning with the creation of the Jalal Abad oblast in the northern Ferghana rim in 1991. The Batken oblast was further carved from the western portion of Osh in 1999 following the incursions by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, (IMU), and Tajik insurgents in 1999 and 2000. The purpose behind this trend was to weaken Osh elites, be it Kyrgyz or Uzbek, creating rival local networks that looked north for their patronage. Local

---

<sup>119</sup> Although I would not argue, as others have, that all foreign aid to Kyrgyzstan is wasted – many organizations have been careful and learned rapid lessons.

clans in the newly created oblasts were poised to take the helm of local power satisfying these peripheral areas and creating avenues for more direct government control. Ultimately the attempt to dilute the influence of the South by dividing it did not work – the Akaev administration only found itself harder pushed to retain control over three different Southern provinces that used autonomy against the regime.

### *Economic collapse after independence*

After 1991, the Kyrgyz agricultural sector plunged into a traumatic crisis from which it has not yet emerged. Total Kyrgyz agricultural production fell by one half between 1991 and 1996.<sup>120</sup> Kyrgyz lamenting the sad state of their economy today often point to bare and empty hills that in Soviet times were replete with sheep, traditionally a symbol of wealth and plenty in Central Asian society. The most ubiquitous feature of post-Soviet livestock industry is the reversion to subsistence agriculture, operating largely through a non-cash system of barter, and sheep numbers collapsed by two-thirds.<sup>121</sup> A particularly vivid memory of this author traveling in a remote region near the Chinese border is of a conversation with a village elder pointing to the bare pastures and remarking that ninety years of development were all gone. Farmers were forced to eat their flocks as fodder imports and subsidies evaporated precluding winter support. At the same time, as imports of food and fodder from the center ended, the amount of land farmed for food crops grew, creating new pressure on the limited available arable land.

---

<sup>120</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, *Central Asian Republics: Industrial Development Review 1* (London: Economist Intelligence Unit, 1996), 76.

<sup>121</sup> For figures on the livestock collapse, see *Transhumant Grazing Systems in Asia: Stock Numbers in Kyrgyzstan*, table 2.2 (accessed June 09 2003); available from [http://www.fao.org/documents/show\\_cdr.asp?url\\_file=/DOCREP/006/Y4856E/y4856e07.htm](http://www.fao.org/documents/show_cdr.asp?url_file=/DOCREP/006/Y4856E/y4856e07.htm).

In addition, it can be argued that the badly thought-out land privatization process, sometimes encouraged by foreign donor advice, caused great damage in keeping the livestock at the sustainable level to provide enough meat for the increasing local demand. By 1993 about 511,000 land certificates were issued. However, there was no mechanism of managing access to communal equipment as with the old *kolkhoz*. Rapidly declining fodder production meant hay became the only source of feed during the winter. Demand for lucern, sainfoin, barley and silage declined as the large Soviet sheep flocks disappeared and the irrigation systems broke down after 1991. The sudden need for the country to feed itself also resulted in a dramatic increase of wheat acreage at the expense of planted fodder crops.<sup>122</sup>

The overall collapse of the Soviet economy was also the final blow. The mechanisms for marketing and transporting Kyrgyz lamb and wool to Russia and the rest of the former Soviet Union have broken down so that New Zealand lamb is cheaper in Moscow than Kyrgyz meat. The new states are all anxious to protect their own agricultural sectors and levy high tariffs despite customs union agreements that are not worth the paper they are written on. Government inability to provide support to herders led to declining transhumance practices of utilizing remote *jailoo*. Smaller numbers of sheep are no longer moved to upland pasturage, thereby causing even more damage to the already overgrazed lower land pastures. As such the collapse was not an environmental reprieve although the contraction of agriculture has allowed a comeback for wolves and snow leopards at higher altitudes.

---

<sup>122</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, *Central Asian Republics*, 38.

*The overthrow of the Akaev regime*

Although beyond the scope of this treatment, it is worth briefly looking at the end of the regime that shaped the foreign policy of the independent Kyrgyz state. By March 2005, the regime had alienated important political allies and was increasingly isolated as from the late 1990s it became reliant on minor notables attached to on Akaev's family's patronage but without themselves possessing the key element of widespread support in traditional Kyrgyz society. Several of the figures who were to emerge as leaders of the coalition that overthrew Akaev had been important figures in his governments since independence, but who were purged according to traditional methods (extra-judicial persecution, dormant allegations of corruption dusted off) as they themselves grew into powerful potential opponents. As we will see in Chapter Seven, President Akaev's prestige also began to evaporate following the demonstrations and protests that the opposition exploited over the border agreement with China 1996-2002.

In the massive political unrest that shook the country following the February 2005 parliamentary elections, the North-South divide was particularly apparent. The Akaev regime had clumsily attempted to manipulate many Southern parliamentary constituencies through arbitrary de-registration of genuinely local candidates and vote-buying in favor of members of the Akaev patronage machine who tended to lack real local support. It is notable however that the Southerners did not secede or resort to civil war in March 2005, but saw their option as bringing their discontented rural supporters to the national capital, Bishkek. On March 24, 2005, a few thousand demonstrators, some from the South but others also from alienated northern Kyrgyz

groups, surged onto the main square in Bishkek. In less than an hour, the Akaev government fled the country as the crowd faced down a desultory police presence and stormed the main presidential administration building. Large drafts of young rural Kyrgyz brought into the state security forces throughout the 1990s as a nation-building measure ultimately backfired on the regime, as most of the police and security services in Bishkek during the mini-revolution were extremely unwilling to resist crowds of demonstrators who might prove to consist of near or distant clan and family members.

As a shocked and unprepared opposition hastily scrambled to take the reigns of power, it is interesting that no one was renouncing the independent Kyrgyz state, whose nation-building in that sense, as we will see below in Chapter Three, seemed to have succeeded quite well. Rather the issue was southern opposition insistence that Akaev and his government was not synonymous with their vision of the Kyrgyz state in contradistinction to official propaganda that tended, unsuccessfully, to try and superimpose the first president onto the Kyrgyz state as a symbol of statehood and nation. The general absence of ethnic tension and conflict in the March 2005 turmoil showed both increasing opposition sophistication in muting Kyrgyz nationalist elements and suborning the government's own civic nationalist message.

It is unlikely that the Kyrgyz revolt of 2005 signals the beginning of democratic revolutions in Central Asia. Recent events will not result in the democratization of Kyrgyzstan nor usher in the "central Europeanization" of its political institutions and actors, the formation of political parties with widespread membership base and well-articulated platforms, the rule of law and a free electoral process. More likely, is that these events were more a "Risorgimento," an intra-elite

struggle where adept elite opponents leveraged genuine southern provincial discontent to oust a regime that had been growing steadily weaker since 1998.

The ouster of the Akaev government, however, created limited possibilities to break the mould of post-Soviet authoritarianism in Kyrgyzstan. There is now the precedent for a more active opposition, and a feeling of optimism: even if the “Tulip Revolution” does not result in overnight democracy, it has been established now that there are limits to corruption and that the common people matter - in this sense the significance is enormous. Another significant change is that the leaders of the interim regime that took power in March 2005, although rooted in the Akaev administration itself (Kurmanbek Bakiev the new interim President and Feliks Kulov both served extensively in prior Akaev governments) are populists if not democrats. They orchestrated the ouster of the regime by mobilizing their grassroots support and forging alliances with opposition politicians who could also mobilize large local followings. This is a very new element in Kyrgyz politics, and it remains to be seen how this will shape Kyrgyz domestic politics over the next decade.

The role of regionalism in Kyrgyz politics was highlighted in the March 2005 revolt against Akaev’s rule. Yet the southern dimension needs to be understood in the broader context of modern Kyrgyz history. Kyrgyz politicians since the 1950s have recognized that any national government has to include even token southern representation. Moscow during the Soviet period had exacerbated differences for *divide et imperium* purposes by cultivating direct links between the Osh oblast and Moscow that by-passed Frunze, especially, as we have mentioned, in the security services, and all-union enterprises. To some extent the cyclical rotation pattern of

regional dominance apparent in the Kirghiz SSR has simply reasserted itself against the unexpected northern primacy that emerged with independence in 1991. It is also worth noting that the new leadership represents a western as well as southern shift in the geo-political power axis of the country, examined more below.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter I have traced the historical background to the emergence of independent Kyrgyzstan, emphasizing the forces that organized and changed Kyrgyz identity as well as shaping Kyrgyz nationalism such as it was. As a motif, I have recounted the example of the collapse of sheep farming in the republic to illustrate the gravity of the economic situation facing the republic in the 1990s, although a comprehensive description of the economic situation would require more space to do justice. I conclude with a brief treatment of the overthrow of the Akaev regime. The Soviet experience, despite its quasi-colonial nature, ushered in the arrival of the modern state. In Kyrgyzstan however it was not simply one state, but two states: a local, ethnically-based republic controlled by and institutionally interpenetrated by, the Soviet central Leviathan.

### CHAPTER 3: BUILDING AN INDEPENDENT NATION

In the previous chapter we charted the arrival of the modern state among the Kyrgyz. At independence the Kyrgyz had a territorialized concept of their national area and an implied connection between the rationale of their status as a sovereign republic within the USSR and their prominence as a titular nationality in their homeland. Independence retroactively made this connection a lot more serious. The Kirghiz SSR was eligible for independence and international recognition because it was a constituent Soviet republic. Therefore hitherto nebulous connections between titular nationality, legitimacy and sovereignty suddenly had to move from passive, theoretical and dormant status in the Soviet era to activation, reality and widespread acceptance. The surprise gift of an independent, sovereign state and national homeland was balanced by the near-minority status of ethnic Kyrgyz in the republic; fifty-two percent at independence. Of other Soviet republics, this low percentage of the titular nationality is seen only in Kazakhstan, Latvia and Estonia. Like these three, and unlike Lithuania (eighty-one percent Lithuanian) or Uzbekistan (about seventy-five percent Uzbek), the potential for the near-majority of non-Kyrgyz minorities to destabilize the state if they so chose lurks in the background of nation-building efforts.

Another challenge for the Kyrgyz lay in ideology. In contrast to other imperial states the Soviet Union was very unusual and perhaps more similar to the Ottoman and Hapsburg states in their propagation of a non-national unifying idea. The state

ideology of the USSR was synonymous with development in Central Asia. Casting aside the reality of environmental disaster and wasteful economic planning, the perception among all segments of the population in the Kirghiz SSR was that something had worked and that was the USSR.<sup>123</sup> The independent Kyrgyz state had a difficult legacy to exceed.

Our discussion of nation-building, minorities and power in post-independence Kyrgyzstan will highlight the way Kyrgyz nationalities policy has shifted from careful manipulation by Moscow to something internally regulated by the variables of Kyrgyz domestic politics. There is also an essential continuation of the Soviet balancing of the titular nationality's cultural rights with those of minority groups similarly empowered though not territorially recognized within the unit. The crucial difference being that the Soviet management of nationalities was designed to lend popular minority group recognition to the legitimacy of the Soviet political order yet keep cultural rights separate from political power.

Following independence, the Kyrgyz tried to legitimize their existing position as *primes inter pares* of their state and as ultimate guarantors of state independence and its *raison d'être*. In the post-Soviet states more explicit connections formed between ethnic groups and internal political power, a definite break with the past. At the same time state elites and the Akaev regime, well-versed in the complexities of nationalities policy, were sensitive to the risk of alienating large number of minority groups in a state where the Kyrgyz were barely a majority. This impetus in post-Soviet states for the continuation of aspects of old mechanisms for managing ethno-national

---

<sup>123</sup> The large votes in the Central Asian republics in favor of maintaining the USSR in 1990, usually over 90%, is symptomatic of this.

politics at least partially explains why there has been less inter-ethnic conflict than predicted in 1991.

In some post Soviet states such as Moldova until 1995, or Estonia, Latvia and Georgia up to present, the old nationalities policy quickly broke down and the newly independent state regime rejected any continuation of it in miniature. In Central Asia, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan opted against civic nationalism. Both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, by contrast, continue to operate in a framework of cultural and social control very similar to Soviet nationalities policy and administration which is presented as civic nationalism.

In this section therefore, we relate the interrelationship of national formation (or nation building) to the minority issue. The issue of the national minorities has influenced many aspects of Kyrgyz foreign policy behavior shaped by the Akaev government since independence. While each case has its singularities, broadly speaking, in common with other post-Soviet republics Kyrgyzstan has gone through several distinct nation building directions since 1991. The nation building has varied in intensity and area of focus and, of course, mirrors the interethnic complexities of each state. The first phase was generally characterized by immediate moves to assert ownership of political sovereignty by the titular nationality.

As research by Terry Martin has shown, Soviet nationalities policy was not only a propaganda tool in a totalitarian state that disregarded nationalism, but was also used as a carefully thought-out mechanism for social control to ensure that nationalism did not become a rival mobilizing force to the state ideology. Quite simply,

nationalism was used to restrain nationalism.<sup>124</sup> In comparative perspective a staggering achievement of the Soviets was their ability to confront nationalism head on and use it as part of their development strategy. Soviet nationalities policy deliberately de-emphasized the connection between ethnicity and political power, although for modern nationalism elsewhere, by contrast, this emphasis is the key connection. Instead it opted for a symbolic connection between titular group identification of a state while in reality promoting the rights of all other ethnic groups resident in an SSR to assert the same stake. They did this by either having their own “eponymous-autonomous” unit or, in cases where minorities did not have a convenient or permissible territorial identification, by applying affirmative action-style protections to them. Ethnic Koreans in Central Asia are an example of an ethnic group allotted quotas of university places although they did not have a specific administrative territory.

The consequence of this was that once sovereignty became reality, titular nationalities in many post Soviet States felt they needed to act quickly to deepen that intangible connection between the state, power and the titular nationality. They were further empowered by congruent international recognition for states bearing the titles of these peoples. Apart from the desire to ensure group primacy within the state, the new connection stemmed inevitably from a pragmatic reaction on part of state elites to this Wilsonian view inherent in international recognition of the post-Soviet states in 1991. In Estonia and Latvia, for instance, arguably the most extreme cases of titular assertion of political control seen in the post-Soviet break up, one sees a phase of

---

<sup>124</sup> Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

aggressive differentiation between non-titular national groups and minority groups through legally mandated restrictive definitions of citizenship with mandated titular language ability. In Kyrgyzstan these extremes of Estonia and Latvia never happened, but here took the form of legal and constitutional protections for the state language, Kyrgyz. The government mandated its use and study in the school system as well as use for public business and urban administration. Kyrgyzstan's language politics since 1991 bear closer similarities to Quebec than the Baltics.

The second phase, seen also in Kyrgyzstan, could be characterized as a retreat from the most overt nationalism. Post-Soviet states engaged in locking in the relationship between the titular nationality and independent sovereignty quickly ran into a limit. David Laiten, in his comparative work on ethnicity and language policy in Estonia and Kazakhstan, showed that political opposition and economic destabilization increase as a result of minority opposition to loss of (or perceived loss of) status, language rights and economic opportunity.<sup>125</sup> According to Laiten, to avoid this problem the Estonian state informally contradicted itself by selective application of legislation empowering the titular nationality thus reconciling minorities. In Kyrgyzstan, minority frustrations with Kyrgyz nationalism were largely expressed through increased emigration. As the economic crisis worsened through the 1990s the need to retain professional urban cadres, often minorities, contributed to backpedaling on the nationalist agenda. A decade after independence, minority outflow resulted in ethnic Kyrgyz becoming sixty-four percent of the overall population in 1999 as

---

<sup>125</sup> David D Laiten, *Identity Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

opposed to forty-eight percent in 1990.<sup>126</sup> This more comfortable majority also influenced moves to soften nationalism. Most of the concerns of Kyrgyz nationalist intellectuals expressed in the cultural angst of the 1980s, such as demands for increased state protection for and promotion of the national language, were quickly satisfied in first years following independence. Most Kyrgyz nationalists really sought a policy of genuine bilingualism as opposed to an Estonian-like attempt to marginalize the Soviet era informal state language, Russian.

Elites in Kyrgyzstan generally benefited from Soviet nationalities policy and therefore were rarely extreme nationalists in an ideological sense. For them, nationalism was arguably more a question of pragmatism in order to perpetuate their control over the state. Bahvna Dave has succinctly described the conundrum that Kyrgyz elites are caught in: they need to satisfy the demands of nationalist lobbies who redefine the national agenda while reassuring minorities that they have a place in a state committed to multi-ethnic civic nationalism.<sup>127</sup> The most intense “nation-building” phase was seen in the first couple of years after independence through to the introduction of the national currency and peaked with the withdrawal of Russian frontier guards in 1998. Intertwined with this was a sense of optimism and novelty, now largely dissipated, about the halcyon possibilities unleashed by independence.

From 1998-2004, by and large the nation building settled into a “civic phase” wherein the government sought to placate minority groups by recognizing rights such as, for example, the promotion of Russian to an official state language in 2001.

---

<sup>126</sup> National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, *Results of the First National Population Census of the Kyrgyz Republic of 1999* (Bishkek: National Statistical Committee, 2000).

<sup>127</sup> Bahvna Dave, “A Shrinking Reach of the State? Language Policy and Implementation in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.” in *The Transformation of Central Asia: States and Societies from Soviet Rule to Independence*, ed. Pauline Jones-Luong (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 120-158.

Foreign policy played a role too as Kyrgyzstan placed Russia at the core of its new foreign policy, again a contrast to the Baltic States. However, nationalist urges coexist uneasily with civic nationalist reconciliatory impulses. The two often clashed, as seen in heated debates in the Kyrgyz parliament over formalizing the status of Russian as a state language 2000-2004.

While there has been a broad swing away from the most intense features seen in the early phase of independence, twitches of Kyrgyz nationalism routinely appear in the discourse of government. An example is the designation of 2003 as the 2,200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kyrgyz Statehood, pointedly exaggerating the antiquity of Kyrgyz sovereignty. Billboards and buses throughout the country that year were plastered with the slogan “*Kyrgyz Mamlekettikin 2,200 Jili*” (2,200 Years of Kyrgyz Statehood). Clearly the authorities and elites are caught in a delicate balancing act, one that will persist even beyond the end of Akaev’s government in 2005. They must remain legitimate in the eyes of the largely Kyrgyz rural population, the constituency hardest hit by the economic collapse and the failure of privatization. Rural Kyrgyz frequently perceive that independence has disproportionately benefited urban, ethnic minorities. This perception is reinforced by Soviet occupational streamlining that resulted in Kyrgyz dominating the rural agricultural sector and non-Kyrgyz urban occupations. At the same time government cannot alienate minority groups with the potential to destabilize the state. In that sense any Kyrgyz government has a double challenge. Not one, but two national identities require nurturing in the post-Soviet context.

*The Kirghiz SSR legacy*

As we have seen with our survey of Kyrgyz history in the previous chapter most nation building was, unusually for many post-imperial scenarios, actually achieved before the advent of formal independence. Indeed, as we argued elsewhere, this became a legitimacy issue for the Central Asian states. Their leaders could not easily link independence and national existence as a basis for their legitimacy as was the case with many African and Asian post-colonial states. The unique nature of the Soviet system, in comparison with other Empires, was that there was a formal equality accorded toward union republics whose territorial, and for want of a better term, spiritual actuality was very real to their inhabitants after sixty or seventy years of continuous existence. As Benedict Anderson would argue the imagined community of the nation was fostered by the Soviet experience.<sup>128</sup>

Kyrgyzstan at independence possessed a government with ministries and the whole apparatus that one would associate with a modern state. There was an entire educational system within which one could progress from primary school to doctorate without leaving the Kirghiz SSR. Manhole covers in Kyrgyzstan frequently bear the stamp “Kirghiz SSR” – a small example to illustrate the pervasiveness of state symbolism during the Soviet period. In conversations about independence with Kyrgyz intellectuals it seemed that there was always a certain sense of confusion as to the very meaning of independence. Most Kyrgyz believed that *they had been* an independent state within a true international society, the USSR. Describing events post 1991 Kyrgyz often preface discussion with “when we became fully independent” or “when we became fully sovereign.”

---

<sup>128</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1983).

*The minority groups*

In August 2002 a large media campaign celebrated the birth of what the authorities purported to be the five millionth Kyrgyzstani citizen, who just happened to be an ethnic Kyrgyz.<sup>129</sup> The minority groups can be divided broadly into two. First are other Central Asian groups included into the territory of modern Kyrgyzstan as a result of the national delimitations of the 1920s. This would comprise ethnic Uzbeks, Dungans, Uyghurs, Tajiks and Kazakhs.<sup>130</sup> The second group is a consequence of labor mobility and economic in-migration in the Soviet period including Russians, various other Slavonic peoples such as Ukrainians and Belarussians as well as non-Slavonic peoples from elsewhere, (Balts, Moldovans, Tatars). Included here are groups deported to Central Asia against their will during the Stalinist era; particularly Volga Germans, Crimean Tatars, Meshketian Turks and Koreans. A result of this attempt to engineer a Soviet identity is that in a small city like Bishkek it is possible to find representatives of virtually every sizable ethnic group in the former Soviet Union.

Geographically, one can further subcategorize the presence of these groups in Kyrgyzstan. Russians are largely urban, and mainly live in the larger cities, (Bishkek, Osh, Tokmok, Kant, Karakol and Naryn). Dungans and Uyghurs live principally in northern Kyrgyzstan, although there are significant Uyghur communities in the Ferghana rim regions also. Koreans and Germans reside almost completely in Bishkek

---

<sup>129</sup> Named “Tinchikbek” (Harmony) and the son of a veteran who had fought the IMU in 1999-2000.

<sup>130</sup> Moslem Chinese who immigrated into the region in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Uncertainty surrounds exactly why, but many think it was a refugee movement connected to the Boxer Rebellion. They speak Russian although maintaining a distinct identity. Although Moslem, they have separate mosques and ulema.

and the Chuy oblast. Meshketian Turks are found mainly in villages in the Northern Talas oblast. Tajiks and Uzbeks are located for the most part in the southern Ferghana rim oblasts, Jalal Abad, Osh and Batken.

The percentage of Russians fell between 1979 and 1999, declining from twenty six percent to twelve percent of the total population, the most dramatic decrease of any ethnic minority.<sup>131</sup> Although Russia has periodically made statements in defense of the rights of ethnic Russians in the “near abroad,” Kyrgyzstan has rarely been the target of Russian ire in this regard. Since 1991 Kyrgyzstan has been careful to maintain close and cordial relations with the Russian Federation, as the lodestone of its foreign policy of great power triangulation emergent by 2002. As we examine in more detail in Chapter Five, Kyrgyzstan has been anxious to avoid the Azeri or Georgian experience of the early 1990s. These overtly nationalist states were perceived by Moscow as being anti-Russian and a threat to its geo-strategic interests. Their attempts to move into the orbit of other powers caused the Russian government to support forces and movements within those states to weaken their sovereignty.

Many ethnic Russians left Kyrgyzstan fearing their loss of primacy or indeed had suffered from some of the ugly discrimination that occurred during the early years of independence. For instance, less motivated by Kyrgyz nationalism than given the pretext to expand their own clan-patronage networks, Kyrgyz university administrators in the early 1990s fired many of the ethnic Russian faculty and replaced them with ethnic Kyrgyz clients at the main campus of the state university. Arguably, the bulk of Russian emigration from Kyrgyzstan was motivated by economic factors although it is difficult to entirely separate this from the issue of discrimination.

---

<sup>131</sup> National Statistical Committee, *1999 Census*, 3.1.

Kyrgyzstan slid into economic crisis almost immediately upon independence. Despite an aura of inevitability as we have argued earlier, this hit particularly ethnic Russians employed in light manufacturing, the public sector (such as health, transport) and education sectors hard.

Since many firms in the Kirghiz SSR were administered as All-Union enterprises from Moscow, many Russians had little exposure to the government or bureaucracy of the Kirghiz SSR in their lives except as geographical residents. Employers in the USSR usually provided education and social services, meaning that employees of all-union enterprises would not necessarily have had much interaction with the Kirghiz SSR state. Their niche was particularly vulnerable to the funding collapse of the central USSR command economy after independence. Further, the massive contraction of the public services sector wherein most non-Kyrgyz typically worked also hit hard. Relative to the Kyrgyz economy the stronger south Siberian economy proved a magnet for ethnic Russian emigration from Kyrgyzstan from 1995 to 1997 and then 1999 to 2004, principally to the Yekaterinburg and Novosibirsk regions.

This emigration is striking given the difficulties that ethnic Russians face after leaving. Kyrgyzstan has not allowed dual nationality, a measure principally taken due to concerns over the Uzbek minority. Ethnic Russians encountered difficult bureaucratic obstacles gaining residency permits in Russia if they chose to emigrate. This is compounded by the fact that many Russians in Kyrgyzstan, as elsewhere in Central Asia, have been there for generations and in many cases no longer have relatives in the “homeland” able to sponsor their return. A final challenge that Central

Asian Russians discover upon moving to Russia, and perhaps cruelest of all, is that in common with settler-subcultures in other colonial and post-colonial contexts (for example, Algerian French and British Rhodesians) Central Asian Russians are perceived differently and negatively by Russians in Russia, and find it difficult to assimilate into Russian society.

Germans in Kyrgyzstan originate in the mass-deportations of Volga Germans initiated by Stalin in 1943. Some also descend from settlers in the late nineteenth century. Most speak Russian as their first language and many do not speak German at all. Germany's automatic "right of return" for individuals claiming German ancestry has meant that the Volga German community in Kyrgyzstan (100,000 in 1979) mostly immigrated to Germany (76,000 had left by 1999).<sup>132</sup> This is despite efforts from the German government to stem the flow by offering cheap credits and loans for the ethnic German community to start businesses and remain in situ.

Politically the ethnic German community has been broadly pro-President Akaev. The regime has been active in leveraging the presence of a German community to engage Germany in Kyrgyzstan. The ethnic German presence is the main reason why there is a German Embassy in Bishkek, one of the few EU countries to maintain an embassy in Kyrgyzstan. The German tie has allowed for foreign aid and investment that might otherwise not have occurred. Germany allocated DM 4.2 million for the community 1998-2000.<sup>133</sup> As its size dwindles however, it is questionable whether Germany will see it worthwhile to maintain its presence.

---

<sup>132</sup> National Statistical Committee, *1999 Census*, 3.1.

<sup>133</sup> Elena Rubanova, *Program for the political, social, economical, cultural development of the German ethnic minority in the Chui and Sukuluk districts, Kyrgyzstan, OSI Local Government Initiative*

The 18,000 or so ethnic Koreans in Kyrgyzstan were deported to Central Asia from the Russian Far East (Primorski Krai) in the period 1929-1935.<sup>134</sup> They are uniformly Russophone and speak Korean only if they have learned it as a second language. Their economic niche encompasses market gardening and the business sector. Unlike the Germans, whose *patria* holds the door open for return, South Korea has not welcomed ethnic Koreans from the former Soviet Union and the attractions of North Korea do not entice.

Although European minorities in the republic have declined, non-Kyrgyz Moslem minority numbers have increased. The number of Uzbeks increased by one-third from 1989-1999, while the numbers of Uyghurs, Tajiks and Kazakhs doubled.<sup>135</sup> The doubling in population reflects the higher birthrate of Moslem nationalities in general, although in the case of the Tajiks refugees from the civil war in Tajikistan have augmented their numbers. There has also been informal migration of Tajik farmers into sparsely inhabited areas in the south of the country adjacent to Tajikistan in the 1990s. The Russian exodus has made the Uzbeks the largest minority in Kyrgyzstan, a particular problem given the complicated relations between the two states and the proximity of their language and culture. The Osh oblast has seen some of the most intense sparring since independence between ethnic Uzbeks and the largely Kyrgyz local government over the primacy of Kyrgyz in politics. While Russians and Europeans may resent the primacy given to Kyrgyz, ultimately it is not a

---

*Database* (accessed December 13, 2004); available from <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=264>.

<sup>134</sup> Elena Rubanova, *Program for the Rebirth of the Korean's Ethnic Culture, Language, and Traditions in Kyrgyzstan, and for the Strengthening of Contacts with the Republic of Korea and the NKDR, OSI Local Government Initiative Database* (accessed May 20, 2004); available from <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=230>.

<sup>135</sup> National Statistical Committee, *1999 Census*, 3.1.

threat to the Russian language or culture. In the Ferghana rim Osh and Jalal Abad oblasts on the other hand, Kyrgyz is competing with Uzbek, mutually-intelligible languages in their border zone dialects and shared by both communities.

Tension between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities, while real, has been contained since the turbulence of 1990 when interethnic rioting followed in the wake of dissolving local power structures and rumored land reallocations. Predictions that the Ferghana would erupt into interethnic strife since then have not occurred. The likely reasons for this are beyond the scope of our discussion here, but they include a misdiagnosis of the original events in 1990, which were probably not in fact national conflicts but local land-tenure conflicts that happened to have an interethnic character. The 2005 revolt against Akaev's rule included significant minority Uzbek support whom the opposition to Akaev carefully nurtured. Local bureaucracy expanded due to subdivision of the Osh oblast into three parts (Osh, Batken, Jalal-Abad) though it also created places for local Uzbek patronage networks. The relative liberalism of the Kyrgyz economy and general laissez faire approach has given the local Uzbek community a stake in the Ferghana rim economy. Finally, nation-building in Uzbekistan has detached ethnic Uzbeks residing in the Kyrgyz Ferghana. Uzbek nationalism under Karimov has sought tight border controls to define the state and shut out the "non-Uzbek" counter-state. Ongoing border delimitation and demarcation has divided villages and communities throughout the Ferghana ironically isolating and distancing the Uzbeks living in the Kyrgyz Ferghana.

Historically there have been Uyghur communities in all cities along the Ferghana valley and surrounding regions as well as in their core regions in Xinjiang.

Within the Uyghur community there is a strong relationship between separatism from China and their Islamic identity, more so arguably than any other group in Central Asia. Falling firmly into Olivier Roy's Islamo-nationalist category of Islamic modernist movements, it is hard to classify Uyghur separatist feeling as being purely secular or purely 'Islamic'. Inside the Uyghur nationalist tradition, many of the figures associated with Uyghur nationalist thinking have also been religious scholars. As a result some Uyghurs gravitate to factions espousing a more overtly Islamic agenda; others to factions supporting the older and more established secular nationalist tradition. However it is difficult to disentangle the two and categorically say that there are Islamic groups on one hand and 'non-Islamic' groups on the other.<sup>136</sup> The Uyghurs then are caught between persecution in Xinjiang and an increasingly intolerant attitude of the Kyrgyz authorities. Inter-ethnic relations between Kyrgyz and Uyghurs have never been very good, for much the same reason as the underlying causes of Kyrgyz-Uzbek tension. Uyghurs are linguistically and culturally very close to Uzbeks. While Turkic, they speak Western Turkic rather than the Eastern Turkic, the Kyrgyz/Kazakh variant. They are an urban, oasis, trading culture and have a long history of clashes with the mountain and steppe nomads.

The Akaev regime courted minority support for solidly pragmatic reasons beyond reconciling numerous minorities to Kyrgyz stewardship of the state. Many minorities supported the Akaev regime politically. While electoral returns cannot be taken completely at face value in Kyrgyzstan due to the manipulation of votes by

---

<sup>136</sup> For a good treatment of the development of Uyghur nationalism in Xinjiang, see Justin Rudelson, *Oasis Identities: Uyghur Nationalism Along China's Silkroad* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), and more recently, Sean R. Roberts, "A Land of Borderlands: Implications of Xinjiang's Trans-border Interactions," in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed. S. Frederick Starr (New York: ME Sharpe, 2004), 216-240.

central and district electoral committees, there is no doubt that the Akaev regime enjoyed its greatest support in the Northern oblasts of Talas, Chuy and Issik Kul. In part this is due to factors such as the proximity of these oblasts to the center of state power and therefore better ability to coerce support and dispense patronage, as well as the northern extraction of Akaev. However, in part this also reflected the fact that most non-Uzbek titular minorities in Kyrgyzstan live in these three oblasts. This is especially the case regarding ethnic Russian and other Slavonic groups, Koreans and Germans, who tended to endorse the Akaev regimes' moderate conservatism.

Fully aware of this, the Akaev government was always sensitive to the limits of minority tolerance for nationalist policies. Since independence it has been careful to give continuous lip service to the idea of an all-inclusive Kyrgyzstani identity packaged as civic nationalism. That said, both officially and unofficially, the Akaev government took definite steps to strengthen the connection of the Kyrgyz to state sovereignty and to foster a sense of national identity among the Kyrgyz themselves. The rate of increase in Kyrgyz as a majority percentage of the overall population due to minority outflow has been slowed by a commensurate outflow of Kyrgyz migrant labor to south Kazakhstan and Siberia.<sup>137</sup> A sense of security lent by achievement of a firm majority has yet to occur, and the government vacillated between Kyrgyz nationalism and civic nationalism. This balancing act would not be possible without a great deal of moderate territory existing between the polar extremes of threatened minority groups and Kyrgyz nationalists who felt equally menaced as potential minorities in their own country. The Akaev government was quite adept at satisfying the demands of both groups and

---

<sup>137</sup> Numbers of Kyrgyzstanis working in the Russian Federation are estimated to be c. 500,000. About 100,000 are thought to be ethnic Kyrgyz. See Irinnews.org, *Central Asia: Special Report on Labor Migrants in Russia*, March, 2004 (accessed April 14, 2005); available from [http://www.irinnews.org/S\\_report.asp?ReportID=40107&SelectRegion=Central\\_Asia](http://www.irinnews.org/S_report.asp?ReportID=40107&SelectRegion=Central_Asia).

balancing a concession to one with lip service to the other. The definition of this moderate space lies in the potential application of vestigial Soviet nationalities policy to satisfy respective group demands as well as in the continued strength of Soviet civil society that offsets the new nationalism.

*Language policy since 1991.*

Since 1988 Kyrgyz was reconfirmed several times as an official language, which indeed it had supposedly been, at least technically, in the Soviet period. However, despite the official status of Kyrgyz during the *ancien regime*, as we have seen, Russian was the key to educational and career advancement. This manifested itself in enrollment in the most prestigious universities locally and also the chances to go elsewhere in the USSR for study. Studying solely within the local language system was automatic relegation to a second-class education and a very limited career usually in rural areas. Along with this, as I related in the previous chapter in the context of the Sovietization of the Kyrgyz, urban Kyrgyz successfully carved out a comfortable accommodation in both languages. Kyrgyz identity was fragmented between an elite high cultural discourse of state titular identity, a vernacular language of urban-rural communication and then on the other hand Russian as the language of education and career opportunity.

Despite this, during the Soviet period Kyrgyz never found itself remotely endangered or in the near-extinction position of Irish in Ireland, for example. About 1.5 million people continued to use it as their sole everyday language. The official cultural status of Kyrgyz was the basis for a thriving film industry and a whole literary and arts sector. These received state-funded support throughout the Soviet period. The

extent of Russification of the Kyrgyz population is not easy to gauge as often in surveys ethnic Kyrgyz are reluctant to admit to a poor knowledge of their native language. Conversely, many Kyrgyz are also embarrassed to admit to lack of fluency in Russian, considered by urban middle classes a sign of poor education. Consequently it is difficult to get to the bottom of this issue by relying on survey research.<sup>138</sup>

Indeed, the gap between literary Kyrgyz and vernacular Kyrgyz makes it notoriously difficult to measure what fluency in Kyrgyz really means in any case, as compared to Russian, wherein there is an old relationship between the literary and vernacular tongues making the benchmark of fluency quite easy to measure. I would disagree with views on nation-building in Kyrgyzstan, such as those of Bahvna Dave or Robert Lowe, tending to relegate Kyrgyz simplistically to the role of a peasant language in terms of its evolution in the Soviet period. The picture is more nuanced and complex.<sup>139</sup> Certainly, a generation of urban Kyrgyz, particularly in Bishkek, grew up in the 1960s and 1970s speaking largely Russian and with a very cursory ability to speak Kyrgyz, usually with rural or elderly relatives. By the 1980s, as elsewhere in the USSR however, it again became fashionable to learn the titular language and this trend began to be reversed even before independence. The most Brezhnevian of party bosses in Soviet Kyrgyzstan had been careful to pay lip-service at least to the role of the Kyrgyz language in the republic. Indeed, the tendency since the 1970s was for Kyrgyz Soviet elites to expand the size of the bureaucracy to create

---

<sup>138</sup> The National Statistical Committee *1999 Census* claims 70% of population are fluent in Kyrgyz, whereas the following survey shows 68.5% of urban residents polled use Russian primarily in everyday usage: Arstanbek Berdaliyev, *Use of the Mother Tongue by the Russian Minority in the Local Self-Government in Bishkek*, OSI Local Government Initiative Database (accessed May 20, 2004); available from <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/csdb/results.asp?idx=no&id=125>.

<sup>139</sup> Dave, *Shrinking Reach*, and Robert Lowe, "Nation-Building in the Kyrgyz Republic." in *Central Asia: Aspects of Transition*, ed. Tom Everett-Health (London: Routledge-Curzon, 2003), 106-131.

patronage opportunities for their relatives and clan members. This process foreshadowed events following independence and ensured that at independence in any case, Kyrgyz were in control of most of the apparatus of the Kyrgyz state.

The status of the Russian language in Kyrgyzstan in contrast was left in limbo for several years before being made official language of interethnic communication in 1996 and then an official second state language in 2001. This was not so much symptomatic of state weakness or vacillation on the issue, as suggested by Dave, but rather that the Akaev regime was faced with higher priorities and wished to avoid confronting a highly sensitive and potentially divisive political issue.<sup>140</sup> During the 1990s it displayed skill in supporting different language constituencies. Kyrgyz linguistic nationalists were reassured by a government commitment to an oft-vaguely defined 'Kyrgyzification' program, whereas the Slavophone community was mollified by the incrementally raised status of Russian throughout the 1990s. Basically by 2004 the regime had successfully managed a delicate balancing act; moving toward what is to all intents and purposed an official policy of bilingualism wherein, ideally, both languages are given equal weight and status. This was unlike the previous Soviet bilingualism that gave Kyrgyz genuine cultural support, but little official weight as a state language. Apart from areas of the country where the battle is not Kyrgyz versus Russian, but Kyrgyz versus Uzbek as in the Ferghana rim oblasts, based on my experience in Kyrgyzstan I would argue that a Canadian style policy of bilingualism enforced with genuine impartiality has a good chance of success. Extreme Kyrgyz nationalists are a small minority of the Kyrgyz political spectrum, and most of the nationalist groupings are moderates who would be satisfied with genuine bilingualism.

---

<sup>140</sup> Dave, 2003.

Kyrgyz courses were mandated taught in all schools and colleges although shortages of materials and teachers mitigated the seriousness and impact of this. Many universities for instance offer non-Kyrgyz students what is essentially a course in Kyrgyz literature taught in Russian in order to fulfill this requirement. Unlike Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the Akaev regime did not insist that some level of Kyrgyz proficiency be a prerequisite for citizenship or membership of the civil service. In common with many bilingual countries including for instance Ireland, Kyrgyz proficiency was however a requirement for high political office. In the Kyrgyz and Kazakh context, one reason for the halting extension of 'Kyrgyzification' was that large numbers of the titular nationality were far from proficient in their native tongue. This was unlike Estonia, where large numbers of ethnic Estonians continued to speak fluent Estonian. In 2000, the former Mayor of Bishkek, Feliks Kulov, was disbarred from running for President as he failed a language exam in Kyrgyz. Even the Kyrgyz language media criticized the outcome as the product of a needlessly difficult test.

After independence, in common with Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan was also gripped by a post-independence debate on the alphabet. Like other Turkic republics of the Soviet Union, in the early 1920s the prevailing print alphabet was changed to a modified Latin script. Following the lead of Azeri and Tatar Soviet intellectuals, this was done to distance their print alphabet, and therefore cultural discourse, from the Arab alphabet of Ottoman Turkey. In 1928 Mustafa Kemal emulated their change and Ottoman Turkey itself moved to Latinization. Partially this change reflected the belief then current among Turkic linguists that a modified Latin alphabet was more suitable to the pronunciation and orthography of

Turkic languages then Arabic. In 1940 the alphabet was changed to a modified Cyrillic script, probably to foster a sense of Soviet unity and conformity in the face of impending war. What is less likely is the assertion by some historians that Cyrillicization was imposed to make the learning of Russian easier. Cyrillic itself has to be modified for use by Turkic languages. The necessary modifications are the same in Latin and Cyrillic: basically lots of extra vowel signs and a few other consonant signs. Kyrgyz written in Cyrillic is still Kyrgyz, and incomprehensible to a Russian speaker without a knowledge of the language and vice-versa. Cyrillic is a slightly modified Latin alphabet in any case.

Whereas in Tajikistan the discussion was centered on Latinization versus the reintroduction of the pre-Soviet Arabic-based alphabet, in Kyrgyzstan, although Arabicization was tentatively raised in some quarters, in reality the debate hinged on the merits of Latin versus Cyrillic. Latinization held out the possibility of easing some of Kyrgyzstan's international isolation and making the place more accessible to foreign trade and investment. The prospect of close ties with Turkey was also a strong argument in favor of Latinization. The practical reality of Latinization is that it requires a substantial commitment of resources, for instance, to fund reprinting of books, changing signs etc. It could also potentially antagonize minority groups who might view the switch as indicating that their own language was officially invisible. Neighboring Uzbekistan's commitment to Latinisation was more extensive and determined by comparison. Street signs, school textbooks and even handwriting have all by and large been transferred to Latin. By 2002 surviving signs and notices in Uzbek-Cyrillic were unusual.

In Kyrgyzstan the project was quietly allowed to drop by the mid 1990s. No textbooks in schools, newspapers or public documents were ever printed in Latin. Government business was not recorded in the Latin alphabet, and very few street signs have Latin letters. Where they do, it is an English subtitle aimed at internationalization rather than “Kyrgyzification.” Indeed, a greater agent of Latinization has come from the commercial sector. The pervasive fashion is to use English words for commercial signs and advertising. This, along with the popularity of learning English, has ensured that the younger generation particularly is well-versed in the Latin alphabet for that purpose.

*Civic nationalism, ‘our common home’*

In the context of multi-ethnic states, civic nationalism may occur when the titular nation has surrendered the exclusionary connection between their ethnic group and political power. This grows within the framework of the titular identity actually co-opting minority groups as part of a strengthened meta-identity. This identity may locate itself in the provision of a common cultural space wherein other ethnic groups can participate without surrendering their own identity or threatening the ‘founding’ nation. As mentioned above, the Akaev regime was fully aware of the delicate balancing act it had to strike between satisfying, and fostering, ethnic Kyrgyz nationalism, and also not alienating powerful national minority groups. Perhaps civic nationalism is the wrong label however. For what has happened in Kyrgyzstan since independence under the guise of civic nationalism was really the continued application of Soviet nationalities policy in miniature.

Minority group dissatisfaction with civic nationalism in Kyrgyzstan relates to this. The Akaev regime fully believed that it was fulfilling its responsibilities toward ethnic minorities in the Soviet sense. Minorities felt on the other hand that they were being shut out of state power rather than offered a genuine form of civic nationalism owed them by post-Soviet realities. In this view they are often supported by definitions and training supplied by the foreign donor community.

The Kirghiz SSR was one of the few Union-Republics that did not have autonomous republics (ASSRs), rayons or oblasts on its territory. Therefore Kyrgyz government officials are used to applying the non-territorial variant of Soviet nationalities policy toward national minorities. The non-territorial variant emphasizes cultural associations, language rights in education and in the legal system, but does not give these groups the sorts of things that would attend territorially-based recognition: legislatures, titular governing councils, etc. Minority groups have their own “House of Minorities” in central Bishkek. They also have cultural associations with their own festivals and educational activities. The biggest difference seen after independence is that minorities with external connections potentially useful to the regime were more encouraged, such as in the case of Germans and Koreans. Akaev went so far as to allow ethnic Germans their own assembly, the *Volksrat*, which attracted a lot of criticism from within and without the establishment. By contrast ethnic organizations whose external ties the Akaev regime perceived as embarrassing or dangerous, particularly Uyghurs and Chechens, found themselves under close government scrutiny and often harassed or shut down.

Civic nationalism, therefore, remained an idea to which lip service was paid. The real source of regime policy on handling minorities, though, was the framework of the pre-independence nationalities policy. The most visible effort to promulgate the Kyrgyzstani idea is seen in the “Our Common Homeland” campaign (*Nash Obsitsya Dom* in Russian, *Bizdin Ortaklik Jurttabiz* in Kyrgyz) enunciating the idea that Kyrgyzstan is a multi-national state in which all groups have a stake. This campaign has certainly taken a back seat to more overtly Kyrgyz nationalist exercises over the years, but is still visible in slogans painted around Bishkek and elsewhere. Various public-health commercials and the like usually end with a shot of a yurt surrounded by representatives of all the various ethnic groups turned out in hard-to-mistake national costumes followed by a rendition of the common homeland slogan. There is also the tendency in official pronouncements and slogans to be civic nationalist in their Russian translations or versions whereas the Kyrgyz version is more unambiguously nationalist in content. In the public media the promotion of the civic-national idea was particularly noticeable in 1999 and 2000 when the Kyrgyz Army was engaged in confronting insurgents in the Batken region. Segments on the evening news were careful to profile Slavic conscripts fighting as well.

Certainly the civic nationalist idea is unpersuasive to most minorities as the steady out-migration of Slavic groups attest. On the other hand, there have been instances of attempts by the state to accommodate minority concerns since independence. Not least the decision of the committee on designing the national flag to choose a red background as opposed to blue (preferred by most Kyrgyz on the committee at the time) in deference to the feelings of Uzbeks in the south who regard

blue as an unlucky color. Additionally, the Manas epic is usually cited by Kyrgyz civic nationalists as approval from the founding father himself for a multi-ethnic society. Manas himself had non-ethnic Kyrgyz followers, particularly Chinese. The 2002 decision raising Russian to a state language coequal with Kyrgyz, reassured non-Kyrgyz that Kyrgyzstan is committed to remaining a Russophone state. The willingness of the Kyrgyz Government to naturalize Tajik and Slavic refugees from Tajikistan, Afghan refugees and even Iranian *Bahai* refugees further demonstrates a commitment to the civic national idea.

However, a whole range of symbolism and discourse in the independent Kyrgyz state is predicated on Kyrgyz rather than Kyrgyzstani nationalism. The official name of the country is the “Kyrgyz Republic” creating an impression of primary ethno-state affiliation. Kyrgyz passports still mention a specific ethnicity as the bearer’s nationality, although reputedly this will be phased out in new passports introduced in 2005 or 2006.<sup>141</sup> Non-ethnic Kyrgyz remain understandably skeptical about the sincerity of the civic nationalist project in light of efforts and campaigns clearly directed at enforcing the message of Kyrgyz primacy in the country.

#### *The external ethnics and nation building*

Irredentism is a classic feature of the nationalist state wherein unsatisfied national demands inform the content of foreign policy. In Central Asia this can be seen mainly in the foreign policy of Uzbekistan since independence. As Brill-Olcott points out in the context of Uzbekistan’s attempt to exert control over the Tajik Khojent

---

<sup>141</sup> The old passports had acquired an unpleasant reputation for being easy to forge; they are being replaced by supposedly securer documents printed in Moldova.

oblast and its large Uzbek minority, Tashkent's policy has veered between the poles of a wish to exercise informal control and occasional threats of annexation.<sup>142</sup> It would be wrong to paint a picture of Uzbek foreign policy as consistently irredentist throughout the 1990s and beyond. In fact there are strong instances and overtones wherein official Uzbek nationalism has decreed that the Uzbek nation should be created within the frontiers of Soviet Uzbekistan. However, of the five Central Asian states, Tashkent has been the most prone to exercising its desire for regional hegemony.

Out of the three Central Asian states built on a nomadic titular nationality Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan both opted during the 1990s to encourage expatriates to relocate in the nation state since independence albeit with differing degrees of intensity.<sup>143</sup> As a foreign policy it had the strongest connection to nation-building efforts short of irredentism, the reverse action. In the Kyrgyz case the policy stayed in the background of nation building efforts and can be traced back to the optimistic phase of independence back in the early 1990s.

Since 1991 Kazakhstan followed an unofficial policy of resettling ethnic Kazakhs, particularly from western Mongolia, in north Kazakhstan. This policy was a very overt act of nation-building designed to do two things. One was simply to increase the number of ethnic Kazakhs in the north of the country, the main area where Kazakhs are a minority. The other, ancillary, objective was to expose the Kazakhs to authentic "outside" Kazakhs untainted by the Soviet experience. These

---

<sup>142</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, *Central Asia's New States: Independence, Foreign Policy, and Regional Security* (Washington DC: USIP Press, 1996).

<sup>143</sup> Turkmenistan, the third nomadic state, followed the Uzbek capsule state pattern of discouraging in-migration from ethnic Turkmen in surrounding states.

tended to maintain a very traditional lifestyle, and speak only Kazakh. This has been done in other countries at other times. An example is the resettlement of Gaelic speakers from western Ireland into the central midland counties under De Valera in the 1930s. Thus the “pure” strain of the ethnics would rekindle the use of the Kazakh language and pre-Soviet customs. Large numbers of ethnic Kazakhs did resettle in Kazakhstan, particularly from Mongolia (and China, where a sudden population exchange had left many ethnic Kazakhs on the wrong side of the border in the 1960s). But the resettlement policy was unsuccessful. In-comers were viewed with hostility by all parts of the local communities. The minorities correctly saw through the demographic game played by the government thus intensifying pressure on Astana to repackage itself as a net defender of non-titular rights. Resident Kazakhs also viewed their repatriated kin as odd throwbacks with rural mannerisms suitable for inclusion in museums and cultural events but not as neighbors.

The Akaev regime flirted with exactly the same sort of policy but in a very limited fashion and only sporadically since 1991. In part this can be explained by the fact that resettlement and relocation requires economic resources that the cash-strapped Kyrgyz state simply does not have. More broadly though, the soft-pedaling of Kyrgyz initiatives in this regard were consistent with the government’s general approach of maintaining its credentials with Kyrgyz nationalists while in reality not wanting to upset minorities. For this reason the government allowed in ethnic Kyrgyz caught in political instability in nearby states yet shied clear of explicitly promoting in-migration from ethnic Kyrgyz from elsewhere as a nation-building initiative.

Kyrgyz outside of Kyrgyzstan elsewhere in Central Asia are principally found in Xinjiang (c. 200,000), Afghanistan (c. 1500), and Eastern Uzbekistan (60,000 according to the Uzbek government, 160,000 according to the Kyrgyz government), and finally the Ngorno-Badakhshan oblast of Tajikistan (c. 80,000). A Government immigration fund was set up in 2001 to help ethnic Kyrgyz coming to Kyrgyzstan as a result of the Tajik civil war.<sup>144</sup>

There have been virtually no efforts made by Bishkek to promote relocation from Kyrgyz populations in China or Uzbekistan. In both cases, these are powerful neighbors who would be very threatened by such a policy. Uzbekistan pursues a policy of assimilation with its ethnic Kyrgyz; possible given the proximity of Uzbek to Kyrgyz culture and language. China, with a minority nationalities policy not dissimilar to the former Soviet Union, assigned the main pocket of Kyrgyz habitation its own territorially-based oblast. Any encouragement of Chinese Kyrgyz to join Kyrgyzstan would be uncomfortably close to a territorial demand, unthinkable for Bishkek, for reasons we explore in more depth in Chapter Seven below.

So the Akaev government focused its concern mainly on resettling Kyrgyz Tajik and Afghan Kyrgyz refugees (c. 13,000 in total) in Kyrgyzstan. Since 1991 it naturalized over 5,000 of the 12,000 or so ethnic Kyrgyz seeking refuge.<sup>145</sup> In 2002 the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry distributed guidebooks about migration to Kyrgyzstan among ethnic Kyrgyz in northern Tajikistan. This was probably aimed as a reassurance to them that they had the option in event of deteriorating conditions

---

<sup>144</sup> Figures are usually imprecise given the politicization of the figures. See for example International Organization on Migration, *Return and Reintegration of Ethnic Kyrgyz* (accessed May 10 2004); available from <http://www.iom.elcat.kg/ethnickyrgyz.htm>.

<sup>145</sup> Times of Central Asia, "Kyrgyzstan: Repatriated Kyrgyz Counted," *Times of Central Asia* February 24, 2005 and IRIN, "Tajik Refugees Celebrate Naturalization," *IRINnews* June 21, 2004.

locally. Kyrgyz resident in Tajikistan also have special privileges in crossing the border and have the right to attend Kyrgyz schools and universities. Kyrgyz in Tajikistan live very close to the contested and very porous frontier and were a useful bargaining chip in frontier disputes involving pockets of land leased in the 1930s. These disputes frequently hinged on debates about the ethnicity of the current users, perhaps explaining Bishkek's overall preference for the Tajik Kyrgyz remaining in situ. While approximately 12,400 Kyrgyz entered Kyrgyzstan as refugees during the Tajik Civil War, the Akaev government did not encourage blanket resettlement of all and gave assistance for the repatriation of some back to the Gorno-Badakhshan border districts. Kyrgyz villages in disputed regions of the Uzbek Ferghana have petitioned to be allowed to join Kyrgyzstan, providing ammunition to offset Uzbek counter claims and making it desirable for the state to encourage the external group to remain in situ in the case of bordering states.

The Kyrgyz in China by contrast became a motif in nation-building that drew upon the legacy of the 1916 uprising and the flight of many Kyrgyz to China at that time. Among nationalists it was popularly supposed that the Kyrgyz émigré community in Xinjiang, unexposed to Russification and Sovietization after 1922, constituted a purer time capsule of the ethnos. They were viewed as useful for independent nation-building as a source of authentic, unpolluted Kyrgyz-ness. That the Kyrgyz community in China was itself exposed to a vigorous Chinese equivalent of Soviet nationality policy from 1958 seems not to have occurred to the purists. Various words that continued to exist in Xinjiang Kyrgyz were readopted in Kyrgyzstan. For instance the names of the month, (e.g. *Birdin ay* instead of the

Russian *Fevral*). The (re) introductions were never popular though, and have not caught on outside of the official lexicon. Kyrgyz officials have been publicly careful to stress the satisfactory situation of the Kyrgyz in Xinjiang and China's respect and encouragement for their cultural rights.<sup>146</sup>

Afghan Kyrgyz from a non-neighboring country surface in media discussions of resettlement initiatives from time to time, but only a few dozen families have been relocated in the Osh oblast. A large portion of the Kyrgyz in Afghanistan resettled in Turkey in the early 1980s.<sup>147</sup> Continued political instability in Afghanistan keeps the subject of the remaining 2,000 or so Afghan Kyrgyz of interest to the Kyrgyz press.<sup>148</sup> Still, in a limited way the Akaev government occasionally acted on their behalf. Kuban Mambetaliev recounted the Kyrgyz UN Delegation in Geneva working behind the scenes for their amelioration.<sup>149</sup> Their resettlement in Osh, as opposed to the northern Chuy location for most Tajik Kyrgyz, might have indicated an attempt to change the delicate ethnic balance in the Osh oblast. Yet the numbers of Afghan Kyrgyz resettled were simply too few to have a serious impact.<sup>150</sup>

---

<sup>146</sup> For instance, Imanaliev in an interview while he was serving as Ambassador to China, was careful to extol the way in which Xinjiang Kyrgyz had high administrative office, and also that China had recognized the Manas epos as one of its national literary treasures. Muratbek Imanaliev, *Ocherki o Vneshney Politike Kirgizstani* (Bishkek: Sabir, 2002), 50.

<sup>147</sup> 3,000 were displaced by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, fleeing to Pakistan, and were relocated to Turkey in 1983 after a scheme to settle them in Alaska fell through. M.N. Shahrani, "Afghanistan's Kirghiz in Turkey," *Cultural Survival* 8, no. 1 (1983).

<sup>148</sup> See for example Kuban Mambetaliev, "Afgan Kyrgyzdarinin Tagdiri," in *Kyrgyz Tuusu*, 7-10 April 2000, 13.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> Imanaliev, the former foreign minister, denied this when I asked him about it, saying that most vacant land happened to be in the south. Ambassador Muratbek Imanaliev, interview with author, 15 August 2002, Bishkek.

*History in post-independence Kyrgyzstan*

Official historiography in contemporary Kyrgyzstan strongly emphasizes the primordial characteristic of the origins of the Kyrgyz as a national group. In this discourse, the Soviet experience resurrected a community that already possessed national consciousness prior to its formation as a Soviet Republic but that had been suppressed by Tsarist domination. The Kyrgyz perception of their national development influences the current bifurcated trend at the state level in the post independence era. There is the pressure of guarding a pre-existing ethnic ideal and building a civic national identity strong enough to attract the support of ethnic minorities.

Kyrgyz historiography in the Soviet period had emphasized the ancient, organic origins of the Kyrgyz people usually within a Marxist-Leninist framework. In this view there was a progressive idea of the Kyrgyz advancement through Marxian social stages culminating in the national idea and membership of the Soviet state. Post independence nationalist historiography has simply followed the Marxist-Leninist idea of historical progress and organic, ancient origins while replacing the end point of socialist utopia with internationally recognized independence. The consequence of this is that history-in-the-service of national ideology in Kyrgyzstan has a stale odor. The historical progression of the Kyrgyz people is now presented as being toward freedom

(*erkindik*) rather than socialism as previously. Despite this the manner of understanding that progression has not changed.

The writing of history in Kyrgyz has changed little from Soviet historiography rooted in a view of history as a progression from backwardness to enlightenment via the discovery of, and adherence to, an appropriate ideology. During the Soviet regime, this was of course Marxism-Leninism. After independence nationalism and sovereignty were clumsily substituted for this. The progress rationale for the ideology remained the same, though, as did the view of ethno genesis and national identity. Broader historical treatments of the Kyrgyz written in Kyrgyz, are generally designed to emphasize a supposed continuity between the present Kyrgyz state and previous Kyrgyz entities in history. Historians such as J.M. Malabaev for example, in *Kyrgyz Mamleketinin Tarixi* present the extreme nationalist viewpoint that the history of the Kyrgyz state cannot be properly written unless by an ethnic Kyrgyz: "...ar bir eldin tarixin özünün çikkan tarixçisi, ene tili menen jazgan bolso, al tarixtin sözdörü büzülbayt..."<sup>151</sup>

Certainly what has changed is that formerly taboo areas of inquiry have been dusted off in service of nation building. Particularly, the 1916 uprising is now portrayed as an independence struggle in contrast to an intra-Kyrgyz class war as described in the limited coverage of official Soviet historiography. The historical discourse of independent Kyrgyzstan now tackles hitherto hidden episodes such as the 1930s purges, discussion of which would have been unthinkable in the Soviet period.

---

<sup>151</sup> J.M. Malabaev, *Kyrgyz Mamleketinin Tarixi* (Bishkek: Kyrgyz Respublikasinin Bilim, Ilim jana Madanyat Ministeriiligi Bekitken, 1999). "Every people with their own published historians, if they write in their mother tongue, cannot spoil the words of their history." Malabaev, *Kyrgyz Tarixi*, 3.

Forgotten figures lost in that period have now been rehabilitated. The 1916 uprising has overt Kyrgyz nation-building potential because it is associated purely with the Kyrgyz whereas the events of the 1930s were equally traumatic for non-Kyrgyz. Thus historical discussion and reappraisal of that era is perceived as being more part of a reevaluation of the Soviet experience than the construction of Kyrgyz historiography although, of course, it is that as well.

Since 1991 the state has favored methods of using millennial anniversaries as a method to underscore the historical continuity of the Kyrgyz, their cities, their heroic figures and their state. Under this logic formal independence in 1991 becomes less a milestone or the base-line from which Kyrgyzstan as Kyrgyzstan exists, and more a historically inevitable recognition of the pre-existing Kyrgyz nation and the position of the Kyrgyz people within it. The 2,200th Anniversary of Kyrgyz Statehood in 2003 was one in a long succession of historical anniversaries celebrated since 1991, beginning with the 3,000 years of Manas in 1995, and the 2,000 year anniversary of the city of Osh in 1996 (somewhat incongruously followed up in 1999 also with a 3,000 year anniversary).

#### *State symbolism*

One of the most noticeable aspects of nation building has been the renaming of cities, streets and the erection of monuments and statues in towns and cities all over Kyrgyzstan. Indeed the renaming of the country from Kirghizstan to 'Kyrgyzstan' is in line with Kyrgyz pronunciation and away from Russian. As with many other post-Soviet states, independence saw the renaming of many street and city names. Frunze

became Bishkek, a Kyrgyzification of its pre-1917 name Pishpek. Prezhnev'sk, named after the nineteenth century Russian explorer, became Karakol although everyone had always called it that, even during the Soviet period. One of the main avenues in Bishkek was renamed Erkindik (Freedom) from Dzerzhinskaya after Felix Dzerzhinsky, the notorious founder of the Cheka precursor to the NKVD and KGB.<sup>152</sup> However, the spate of renaming had trickled out by the mid-1990s in the first flush of independence. Since then, the authorities slowed this process.

Until August of 2003 Lenin's statue, erected in 1986, remained in the Central Square in Bishkek, and was even protected by a 1999 Act of Parliament. Periodic rumors of his imminent displacement would attract small crowds of protestors, usually from the Kyrgyz Communist Party. The statue's future was sealed when Lenin's plinth was crowded by a nearby monument to independence erected in 1999 and guarded by soldiers. Finally by 2003 the Akaev government felt confident enough to remove Lenin and replace him with a statue of *Erkindik* (Freedom). Lenin moved to the back of the museum. The legislation had not specified which side of the museum Lenin could grace in perpetuity, thus creating a loophole. The slow and cautious approach to the removal of a fairly ubiquitous piece of Soviet symbolism erected in the very recent past clearly underscores the cautiousness of Kyrgyz authorities in attacking symbols associated with minority groups.

In the 1993 decision to introduce a national currency, the Som, the Government was motivated primarily by economic factors rather than nationalism. The International Monetary Fund, (IMF), offered expertise and a bridging loan to help

---

<sup>152</sup> Although it was not in fact for this job that he had a street named after him. Briefly Commissar for Transport, he is fondly remembered locally for extending the railroad to Frunze.

float the new currency. Unfortunately, preliminary studies underestimated the difficulties involved and the economic shock caused by this. In addition they failed to anticipate neighboring states' hostile reactions in the form of retaliatory tariffs and export freezes. Later, the Som suffered inflation in the wake of havoc wreaked by the Russian economic crisis of 1998. Despite that, between 1999 and 2003 a mixed float carefully managed by a competent Central Bank has helped keep the value of the Som steady; no mean accomplishment given the economic difficulties the country is experiencing.

Finance aside, the introduction of the Kyrgyz Som was an important supplement to the newly independent identity. For the first time, Kyrgyz appeared on their own bank notes, an important part of the symbolism of independence. The Kyrgyz featured on the new notes were for the main part famous cultural personages from the recent past such as the composer of the current national anthem and a prominent ballerina, both active in the 1940s. Kyrgyzstan chose not to depict national minorities nor did they adopt globally-renowned Central Asians from the distant past, such as the extensive use of Timurlane on Uzbek bank notes. Uniquely in the region the Kyrgyz depicted women on their banknotes including Kurmandanjatka, a late nineteenth century southern tribal leader. The currency was accompanied by a television advertising campaign explaining to the public who exactly the figures on the banknotes were, in little dramatized vignettes of the characters' lives.

*Border posts and frontiers*

The new nationalist state in post-independence Kyrgyzstan was faced with the challenge of non-ethnically co-terminus frontiers that were no longer to be a functional part of a traditional inter-state order but, as Anderson argued in the context of Thailand, was to be a static, western-style, representation of a nation-state idea.<sup>153</sup> Soviet nationalities policy became, above all else, the new skeleton around which to hang the territorial flesh of the new order in the Kyrgyzstan which otherwise lacked any cogent historical, geographical, ethnic or legal precedence for its existence.

Kyrgyzstan is landlocked and surrounded by landlocked states, with the exception of China to the West. She has had border disputes at one time or other with all of her former Soviet neighbors from the inception of the Kyrgyz ASSR in the 1920s. These became more serious after 1991 as previously internal administrative boundaries became external and international frontiers. For a landlocked state with numerous minorities near to their ethnic cores on the other side of the frontier the issue raised pervasive fears about national identity and national security. Even urban minorities living far from border areas create problems across frontiers as the experience of Kyrgyz authorities dealing with the Uyghur community in Bishkek shows. In 1996 city authorities concerned about China's reaction quickly dispersed demonstrations by pro-independence Uyghur groups outside the Chinese Embassy.

In addition to issues of identity the border must be considered from the perspective of degrees of actuality. The border existed in Soviet times in the same place. The Kirghiz SSR border with China was a military zone in which, apart from

---

<sup>153</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 287-209.

nearby farming communities, ordinary citizens were not allowed. With neighboring Soviet republics, the border was also patrolled in different guises. Environmental and oblast police usually maintained checkpoints nearby the unmarked frontiers of each republic, and motor traffic would be stopped, questioned and searched. Soviet internal borders resembled the Schengen area of the European Union. Checks were informal and not an obstacle to inter-republican trade.

The general trend in the region following the collapse of the Soviet Union was to establish even more rigid border controls. Frontier posts were built with great formality since 1991; some even complete with duty-free shops and currency exchange booths. Frontier guards and customs now separately check each vehicle and inspect passports. Retaliatory tariffs and the introduction of national currencies have done as much to help strengthen frontiers as fences and cement bolsters in the road. Ironically, a lot of the computerized visa-processing in the region and equipment deployed to keep these boundaries in place were supplied with foreign aid money and technical advice from foreign donors such as the US and British governments and the EU. For example in 1999 British Crown Agents sent advisors to facilitate the effectiveness of Kyrgyz customs.

Visa regimes between the Central Asian States are strict and retaliatory. Following the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) the 1993 Bishkek Agreement was supposed to allow visa-free travel of all member nationals throughout the CIS. This has slowly unraveled leaving Kyrgyzstan, oddly, as one of the last CIS members to honor it. Kyrgyz citizens now require visas to visit Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. This is particularly painful to the many families caught

on either side of a seemingly arbitrary border. The Kyrgyz customs service is fraught with corruption and commercial vehicles are often stopped more out of interest in the value of their cargoes than what portion of duty they owe.

The net effect of this regional trend on Kyrgyzstan was to compound economic dislocation and the chaos caused by the collapse of the central Soviet economy. Put another way the Soviet economy did not actually collapse rapidly following 1991. However, these new frontiers, reinforced as a means of bolstering national identity, helped it collapse more rapidly than might otherwise have been the case. The attempt to construct a supranational framework with the CIS in order to continue some of the obvious benefits of scale supplied by the Soviet economy was undermined from the start by the nation-building impetus of the Central Asian states and other former Soviet republics.

Administratively for Kyrgyzstan the move to rigid state frontiers with strict delineation and demarcation has been a nightmare. Kyrgyzstan's major road system connecting the northern and southern portions of the country runs through slices of Uzbek territory in the Ferghana. The main highway linking Bishkek to the western province of Talas is routed through Kazakhstan. As it is a tiny secondary road snaking internally through perilous mountain passes, is now the only road connecting Bishkek to much of the South. This has exacerbated tendencies for the regions to feel more disconnected from Bishkek, particularly as the Kyrgyz government has been able to achieve little in getting its neighbors to desist from tough customs regimes and harassment of Kyrgyz citizens crossing the border. It creates a security problem of huge proportions as well since there is no coherent military strategy for defending

frontiers that are indefensible by their nature, especially given the undermanned, under-funded and under-equipped state of the Kyrgyz armed forces.

There is a direct relationship between state ideology and issues of frontier demarcation and, indeed, the very question of how the frontier idea is treated in the independent Kyrgyz state. The modern state by contrast is literally defined by its frontier. From Anthony Giddens's idea of the nation-state as being a "bordered power-container" to Benedict Anderson's view of the relationship between national identity and the modern demarcation of national frontiers, the idea of the border and the frontier is central to contemporary discussions about the state.<sup>154</sup>

As we discussed in the previous chapter Central Asian inter-republican frontiers demarcated in the 1920s did not create homogenous units, and often cut across ethnic lines. Soviet nationality policy applied in a discrete republic was as good at creating minorities as it was majorities. Following the subdivision of the region, there was no impediment to minority ethnic groups resident in one republic from identifying with another republic across the new frontier. Similarly there was no barrier in the Soviet period to groups moving from one republic into another, as is seen by the history of Kazakh immigration into northern Kyrgyzstan between 1930 and 1950. The policy of equal cultural rights meant that identity expression was always, to some extent, a matter of choice for minorities.

However, the creation of the state frontier and the frontier post resulted in the definite strengthening of national identity and weakening the choice of individuals to opt out of being national. Stronger and less-porous borders, accompanied by tighter

---

<sup>154</sup> Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism II: The Nation State and Violence* (Cambridge: The Polity Press, 1985), 119. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 170-78.

border controls, have imposed a sense of territoriality on populations living close to border areas. Madeleine Reeves, in her anthropological study of a small market town divided by the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border, Kara Su, has argued for the state imposition of the frontier on local people as being the true arrival of the modern state in a very blunt and brutal form.<sup>155</sup>

### *Armed forces*

The role of the military in newly independent developing countries is well documented in the literature.<sup>156</sup> One might expect that in many former Soviet states with authoritarian political traditions where national identity is weak; where simultaneously state legitimacy is poorly institutionalized, that independent militaries might represent a source of national ideology and unity. Would this lead to strong military interference in government, in other words, a Nigeria model? In fact, in the Kyrgyz case, as with the rest of Central Asia, the reverse if anything is true. The experience of the Central Asian states falls more in line with India where the military establishment is older than the state, whose professionalism generally precludes interference in politics. This became dramatically apparent in March 2005 when the Kyrgyz armed forces refused to intervene to support the Akaev regime and even evacuated government buildings they had been ordered to defend against opposition demonstrators. However, the role of the military in Kyrgyzstan is worth examining briefly since it is illustrative of the nation-building complexities in Kyrgyzstan.

---

<sup>155</sup> Madeleine Reeves, "Dis/locating the State" (M.Phil. thesis, Cambridge University, 2002).

<sup>156</sup> Such as S.E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback* (London: Penguin Books, 1971), and Samuel P. Huntington, *Soldier and the State: Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press, 1998).

Concerns voiced under *Glasnost* in the 1980s Central Asian media focused on the treatment of Central Asian conscripts in the Soviet military. There was particular discontent with posting of conscripts outside of the region as it was argued that this was more difficult for societies with close kinship networks to endure, in contrast to the more urbanized Slavic nationalities. Protests also objected to the brutal hazing of Central Asian conscripts in the Soviet armed forces. It is noteworthy that these strong feelings of dissatisfaction were truly regional. Complaints usually referred to Central Asians as opposed to specific nationalities.

Against this backdrop upon independence Kyrgyzstan initially pushed for a continued pan-CIS armed force. However, once this was ruled out by Russia in 1992 the government considered cutting back its military establishment to a small professional force whose main mission would be border security and disaster relief. The geopolitical uncertainty of the new country combined with lack of funds to make this an attractive option. The collapse of the Soviet Union left Kyrgyzstan with a diverse assortment of Soviet military equipment on its soil. Nothing was coherently emplaced except as part of an imperial defense strategy that no longer applied. In 1992 jet fighters based in Kyrgyzstan flew to Russia, and in 1995 remaining tactical aircraft were given to Uzbekistan in a debt settlement swap. The Soviet Union's main submarine torpedo secret testing unit on Issyk Kul was now in one of the most landlocked countries on Earth. One of the most prestigious Soviet fighter pilot schools was now located a country barely able to afford aviation fuel.

In spite of this, by 1993, the Akaev government took the decision to maintain a 10,000 strong conscript army modeled very much along the lines of the Soviet

military. As the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry could be accused of being the Soviet Foreign Ministry in miniature so the Ministry of Defense and the structure of the Kyrgyz armed forces remained true to a Soviet model. Membership in the CIS and pressure from Russia had much to do with the decision. The CIS required contributions to collective defense that was based very much on Soviet military doctrine; although a doctrine hamstrung by the sovereignty of the constituent members, a variable it was not designed to cope with. The CIS has never managed to move to a NATO-style doctrine of flexible defense taking into account the abilities and strengths of member countries. The CIS could only envisage contributions in terms of manpower numbers rather than geo-strategic pieces in the defense puzzle.

Another reason for the decision was very much to do with nation-building. As military service was a right of passage for citizenship in the USSR, so the same had to be true of the newly independent country. The strong equation between military service and citizenship in the Soviet Union meant that the Akaev government risked the loss of one of the few tried-and-tested avenues of legitimacy building it had access to in constructing loyalty to the new state.

The CIS experiment has not worked as a method of collective security for Kyrgyzstan. Greece and Turkey in NATO would be an excellent analogy to the collective security paralysis prevalent in the equation of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in post-Soviet collective-defense arrangements. Between 1998 and 2000 the CIS contributed little to combating the greatest crises in Kyrgyzstan's independent defense history, incursions from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). This lesson led

Kyrgyz policymakers to court aggressively US security commitments after 2001, as we will consider more fully in Chapter Six.

Foreign military attaches in Bishkek often point to the urgent need to steer Kyrgyz defense policy back on the track not chosen in the early 1990s. This included a compact volunteer border patrol/disaster relief force which would be far more relevant to the security needs of the country. Almost despite itself the Kyrgyz Army fought well against Tajik insurgents between 1999 and 2000. However there was little or no help from the collective security mechanism supposedly determining the logic of its military structure.

The military's contribution to nation-building has been mixed. The Kyrgyz Army relied upon conscription throughout the 1990s. Hazing and bullying of conscripts remained a cancer in the force; it was an unwelcome imperial collective memory in the NCO corps discouraging many from military service. Poor pay and abysmal barracks living conditions contributed further to the scramble to evade service. It is easy to pay bribes in return for medical exemptions and college students have an automatic loophole in the form of a painless ROTC-type option, (tertiary education enrollment has skyrocketed since independence). This has rendered military service the burden of the rural poor and the connectionless. Ironically, the military is now predominantly ethnic Kyrgyz within the enlisted ranks, reflecting the poorer and more disadvantaged segments of Kyrgyzstani society overall. A further irony is that since non-Kyrgyz rural poor have even fewer clan or family networks likely to create avenues to avoid military service, there is still a high percentage of Slavic and German rural conscripts haplessly trapped in the national army. Here they serve along with

Kyrgyz rural poor conscripts who often do not speak the language of interethnic communication, Russian.

Superficially, though, the military has a role in the new national identity. Kyrgyz insignia and badges gradually replaced their Soviet counterparts throughout the 1990s. While one sees the odd conscript here and there still wearing Soviet military uniform and insignia, generally all soldiers sport the newly-designed Kyrgyz eagle-over-mountain insignia and 'Kyrgyzstan' shoulder flashes. Service uniforms are gradually departing from the Soviet template. Rather smart white Ruritanian dress uniforms were introduced for officers. A tidal wave of donated military surplus uniforms from various NATO members, (including Turkey), is making the appearance of the ranks less Soviet and more eclectically Kyrgyz. The army parades formally on Independence Day, and guards the monument to independence on the main square in Bishkek, the *Ploschad Lenina*.

In spite of the misbegotten grand mission strategy and problems with funding and enlisted ranks the Kyrgyz army retains from its predecessor a thoroughly professional officer corps. Soviet subsidies in the form of food, schooling for children and accommodation for families have continued, maintaining the officer corps as an attractive career option despite low and frequently unpaid salaries. From 1994 to 1999 the Kyrgyz government guaranteed minimum housing and pay scales for Russian officers seconded to the Kyrgyz army. A high proportion of Slavonic officers at independence gradually decreased, although an estimated thirty to forty percent of the officer corps is still non-Kyrgyz.<sup>157</sup> Notably the officer corps has never interfered with

---

<sup>157</sup> Estimate of Askat Dukenbaev, lecturer in politics at the American University-Central Asia in Bishkek, in correspondence with author.

the political processes in the country in a single instance since independence, nor has it taken any position on debates such as the respective role of the Russian and Kyrgyz languages.

One way in which the army has enforced national identity is as an avenue for cooperation with other states. Kyrgyz cooperation with the NATO partnership for Peace program 1996-1999 created a template for an American military presence in 2002 and was also a public-relations coup for the government. The Kyrgyz armed forces were presented as potential allies courted by world powers outside of the CIS. The Shanghai Cooperation Forum is now assuming the mantle of an international stage where Kyrgyz military cooperation can be showcased to demonstrate state power internally.

### *Conclusion*

Nation building in Kyrgyzstan since independence in some respects resembled the shape of its neighbors. There was greater cultural and political prominence accorded to the history of the titular nationality along with the adoption of state symbolism typical of newly-independent states, particularly in a post-colonial context. Where Kyrgyzstan differed was in aspects of nation-building policies applied since 1991 that were generally more muted than those of her neighbors. In common with Kazakhstan, Latvia and Estonia, other Soviet republics wherein the titular nationality was around fifty percent of the population in 1991, Kyrgyzstan faced the challenge of maintaining the position of the titular nationality yet needing to retain the support of extensive minority groups at the same time.

#### CHAPTER 4: THE STRUCTURE OF KYRGYZ FOREIGN POLICY

In the previous chapter we saw that nation-building in Kyrgyzstan was bifurcated between simultaneous efforts to construct a state anchored in civic nationalism, based on a community defined by its multi-ethnic character, and alternately satisfying the demands of Kyrgyz nationalists. This latter direction was reinforced by the penetration of sovereign norms into the independent state structure. Principally this consisted of novel symbolism, manipulation of the education system and the politics of language. The extent to which foreign policy was influenced by ‘nation-building’ is easy to see in the following sense. Without independence and the establishment of sovereign bilateral relations the nation could not be externally represented, therefore, the existence of a foreign policy at all is both an acknowledgement of sovereignty and of national independence. I also argued that Kyrgyz elites and urban populations were actually quite content with formal lip service to nationalist symbolism in the service of nation-building while concentrating efforts in reality to maintain the delicate preconditions for civic nationalism. This duality has created a backdrop against which the Akaev regime was able to construct a remarkably pragmatic, successful and stable foreign policy over the past fifteen years that allowed Kyrgyzstan to weather some serious crises.

In this chapter I will survey the mosaic of elements constituting Kyrgyz foreign policy; after over a decade the Akaev regime evolved a distinct strategic

outlook. This ideological roadmap in foreign affairs represented at the very least a marked shift from the *tabula rasa* in 1991 and became a guide to foreign policy determination. My focus here is to relate the evolution of traditional policy; i.e. bilateral diplomacy and geo-strategic thinking as opposed to concentrating purely on examining Kyrgyzstan's foreign relations through the prism of foreign aid. Although foreign aid and dependency on donor aid is an important reality and explains many of its foreign policy initiatives, an over-focus on it as sole causation obscures the evolution of traditional foreign policy approaches in Kyrgyzstan. My approach to foreign aid is to use it as an index of a country's interest in Kyrgyzstan rather than viewing it as the sole purpose of involvement on either side.

Here we examine the institutional context for foreign policy formation in Kyrgyzstan, including a survey of actors and the role of key parts of the bureaucratic apparatus. Following that we will look at the alternative, independent sources of policy that might be found in arenas such as political parties and think tanks. We will survey the foreign policy thinking of major political parties and groupings in light of the regime's ouster in March 2005, since a new government will take power following elections in July 2005. We will examine the issue of whether the post-Akaev regime will adopt a dramatically different foreign policy approach, making it more important than ever to understand the context wherein foreign policy is made in Kyrgyzstan.

Finally I will highlight and analyze main policy sources and statements that have emerged in the past decade that could be construed as the ideological determinants of policy; I will try to evaluate how much they, in fact, inform Kyrgyz diplomacy. When telling Kyrgyz friends and colleagues in Kyrgyzstan about this

research topic the usual reaction was often a wry smile with the comment: “What foreign policy?” As the former Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Muratbek Imanaliev acknowledged: “...in Kyrgyzstan...the systematized national interest has not been formulated very clearly, as independent internal sources for foreign policy formation have not been created...”<sup>158</sup> Imanaliev succinctly touches on the presidential-bureaucratic policy-making apparatus that lacks as yet input from independent sectors such as the media and civil society. One effect of this is that very few Kyrgyz themselves know very much about their own foreign policy establishment and therefore commonly ignore it or assume it is non-existent. Building upon this is the tendency of governments in Central Asia to reap prestige from their control of foreign policy without explaining, or needing to defend its rationale, to their citizens. Kyrgyzstan’s sovereign status and participation in the international community is used by the regime to build up legitimacy and foster the impression of unqualified external support for the regime on part of foreign governments. Explaining policy would pierce this veil. Even when the Akaev government condemned external pressure for democratization as foreign meddling in the internal affairs of a sovereign state, it acted from this assumption that the foreign community has a symbolic role.

All this creates several problems for any Kyrgyz regime that even in an authoritarian context needs to be perceived as effective in foreign policy as part of its legitimization process. One consequence of an obscured foreign policy is that events and challenges are perceived by the public, and also many Western commentators, as catching Kyrgyz governments by surprise. Kyrgyz foreign policy is thus viewed as a mish-mash of guileless reactions to a series of crises. The impression presented is that

---

<sup>158</sup> Ambassador Muratbek Imanaliev, interview by author, 16 August 2002, Bishkek.

Kyrgyzstan does not have a well-defined national interest or foreign policy that informs its international behavior; indeed that its “foreign policy” consists of randomly inviting various states to meddle in its internal affairs.<sup>159</sup> Alternatively, other writers on Kyrgyzstan have viewed its international behavior entirely through the prism of the political economy of foreign aid dependency, practically ignoring other motivating determinants of state behavior.<sup>160</sup>

I argue that by reviewing the structure of the Kyrgyz foreign affairs establishment, and major foreign policy sources, it is possible to divine a collective bureaucratic and governmental approach to foreign relations constituting a coherent policy, one of the better legacies of the Akaev regime. This policy is rooted in the ability to graft small state behavior needs onto a Soviet template, even if it is not often clearly or consistently articulated. It is also primarily designed to address geo-strategic and security challenges.

The student of Kyrgyz foreign policy needs to approach the topic aware of several caveats. It should be stressed that foreign relations are very new both for elites and the general public. Next, foreign relations are often conflated with, and viewed through, the prism of Soviet nationalities policy in the popular consciousness; the idea that a national interest might inform Kyrgyz international behavior is still unfamiliar territory for many Kyrgyzstanis today. Finally, as part of the Soviet legacy and the authoritarian context of Kyrgyz politics, foreign policy is generally perceived as the

---

<sup>159</sup> For a good example of the numerous genres of op. ed. articles from Western commentators arguing for directionless or non-existent Kyrgyz geo-strategy and foreign policy, see James Purcell Smith, *Is Foreign Presence in Kyrgyzstan Negatively Affecting Regional Cooperation in Central Asia? Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, May 05, 2004 (accessed May 06, 2004); available from [http://www.cacianalyst.org/view\\_article.php?articleid=2339](http://www.cacianalyst.org/view_article.php?articleid=2339).

<sup>160</sup> See for instance Alexander Cooley, “Depending Fortunes: Aid, Oil, and the Formation of the Post-Soviet States” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University 1999).

narrow purview of elites trained as experts in the field and a function that is the exclusive right of the executive to conduct and act within. This is part of the technocratic Soviet legacy of the rule of the expert. Civil society has little to say about foreign policy, and is in any case arguably overburdened with an essentially domestic agenda. Massive donor aid investment in the civil society sector has certainly created a relationship between external and domestic constituencies aside from government. This relationship is defined more by ideological battles and money than ideas about foreign policy, geo-strategy and security. Foreign policy formation, and the input into that formation, is not often seen even by populist segments of political and public opinion as an area within the domain of civil society or public discourse.

After fifteen years of independence, I contend that the Kyrgyz foreign policy establishment, the formation and content of which is examined below, has within itself come to a broad consensus, a *weltanschauung*. This is influenced by interrelated factors such as personnel rooted in the Soviet era absorbing the style and traditions of Soviet diplomatic practice and geo-strategy, the experience that they have had with independence, and the power vacuum that became apparent in the regional state system in the 1990s. The new geopolitical thinking following independence constructed the overarching principles directing Kyrgyzstan's foreign relations. I show that one can deconstruct this framework to reveal the underlying modus operandi in the worldview and the policy decisions motivating it. Furthermore, I suggest, it is highly mistaken to think that the foreign relations of Kyrgyzstan occur inside a conceptual vacuum or that Kyrgyz foreign policy is essentially reactive without being informed by an overall strategy or prioritization.

We will see that Kyrgyz foreign policy actors have indeed been moderately successful in constructing a foreign policy deploying the methods most familiar to them from the Soviet experience. They have used bilateral relations and balance of power politics to surmount the collapse of the regional state system in Central Asia, meaning the collapse of the USSR and subsequent non-coalescing of an alternative regional system, to address small state sovereignty and security concerns. A legacy of the USSR is a strong integrationist approach; an intuitive preference for supranationalism that is found, to a greater or lesser degree, in all post-Soviet small state foreign policy behavior. The new foreign policy is imperfect and reflects its traditional Soviet origins in many ways. This is particularly true in that the approach has been less successful by contrast toward non-traditional foreign policy headaches suddenly confronting Kyrgyzstan and her neighbors in the late 1990s and beyond. In this category are transnational threats such as public health issues (for instance, the spread of HIV/AIDS in Central Asia), human trafficking, migrant labor and narcotics shipment and production. Related to this is the difficulty that the government has had in dealing with foreign INGOs working in Kyrgyzstan.

Kyrgyz foreign policy has evolved and shifted from its zero hour in August 1991 with the declaration of sovereignty that led to independence up until the March 2005 ejection of the Akaev regime. For the sake of convenience, we could divide the various shifts and broad developments into three phases. However, we must take into account that these are rough dividers whose characteristics crop up in or influence subsequent eras. The period from 1991 to about 1995-96 represented a period of institutional formation and boundless optimism. Independence was by definition seen

as heralding the path to prosperity and the novelty of joining the plethora of international organizations that are the purview of the sovereign states - from the UN to the International Postal Union - was rendered more delicious by the employment options opened up for various Kyrgyzstanis serving in, liaising with, or employed in local field offices, thereof. International organizations such as the UN, the World Bank, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and numerous other groups opened large offices with local staff in Kyrgyzstan.

Many new embassies and consulates opened shop in Bishkek flying, for many Kyrgyzstanis, exotic foreign flags reinforcing the image of their country's independence. Underpinning all of this in the early 1990s was the genuine popularity of the elected government that appeared to be breaking the mould of post-Soviet politics and aggressively liberalizing society and economy. Major foreign policy initiatives in this phase were directed at joining new international organizations, acceding to treaties, and simultaneously trying to preserve the crucial old inter-republican agreements by which the bulk of the interdependent energy supply systems, water usage, and local trade were regulated. Kyrgyzstan enthusiastically joined the CIS and all successor regional organizations in an effort to stall or defray confronting the absence of Soviet precursor institutions.

By 1996 and 1997, however, independence fatigue began to set in. This characterizes the second era of the decade. The regime became less popular the more it created a track record and grew distant from its promises in the 1991 elections. The panacea of foreign aid and membership of numerous international organizations and accession to countless treaties yielded chimerical results. Large tranches of donor

investment did not solve the country's dire economic situation, but instead substituted the side-payment capabilities of the Soviet center with that of the international community. Kyrgyz officials replaced discontinued subsidies from Moscow with those of the international donor and lending system to developing countries. With decades of experience in bargaining for subsidization and side payments with a distant center, Kyrgyz elites were very comfortable with this familiar process.

Alarmingly, it became clear that attempts to extend or revitalize Soviet inter-republican agreements as international institutions among sovereign regional states were not going to work. One customs union, economic cooperation area and water-energy sharing organization after the other failed to get off the ground, and the dynamic of imperial collapse continued to send shockwaves into the immediate future. The Tajik civil war, growing Uzbek hostility and intransigence over frontier delimitation, water sharing and trade issues brought into stark relief the painful reality that Kyrgyzstan was going to have to build its international position from scratch. It was one thing to have a plethora of cooperation agreements, multilateral treaties and a busy schedule of state visits; and yet another entirely to have a strategic map against which to understand and better chart the direction of the orphan ship of state floating rudderless in a sea of sovereignty.

The failure of the CIS to create a ruble zone or a proxy ruble zone similar to French efforts in Africa put Kyrgyzstan in the vanguard of states to introduce an independent currency in 1993. While this had nation-building consequences, as discussed in the previous chapter, it also hastened the construction of frontiers and customs barriers. Suddenly many Kyrgyz discovered that independence and

sovereignty could usher forth isolation and hostility from previously benign neighbors, with unpleasant economic results.

By the late 1990s the Akaev regime worried about sorting through this Gordian Knot, and for the first time needed to assure the public that it had a foreign policy vision for the country. This ushered in the third phase of Kyrgyz foreign policy from 1998 to 2004: the Russian financial collapse and onward. The Russian financial and banking crisis of 1998 was a key psychological turning point. Until 1998 it seemed that massive injections of foreign aid, combined with robust investment from and trade with Russia, offset the collapse of the local Central Asian Soviet intra-republican system and the failure to find alternative replacements. The Russian financial collapse however caused massive inflation and unemployment in Kyrgyzstan, and forced many to question its foreign policy. Particularly hard hit were the numerous petty businessmen, known as suitcase traders, reliant on importing consumer goods from Russia.

Critics alleged that foreign policy such as it was relied on cultivating foreign aid, but had little in the way of strategic positioning to wean the country away from dependence on Russia. Several years on, there has been rapid Russian economic recovery and commensurate return of Russian investment in Kyrgyzstan. But in 1998 the dramatic and sudden nature of Russia's crisis presaged to many in Kyrgyzstan, and the West, the failure of the Kremlin's privatization program and the end of Russia as an economic force in Eurasia. At around the same time, increased tension with the United States concerning the regime's supposed backsliding on democratization and elections after 1998 gave greater impetus for Kyrgyzstan to develop closer relations

with China. Against this background, Bishkek's trilateral initiatives to great powers began to cement into a policy.

In 1999 the official regime response was delivered on an ideological level with the guiding *Silk Road Doctrine*. Practically, the institutional nexus of the expanded Foreign Ministry and the President's Security Council developed an outlook that sought to normalize relations with neighbors, and court great power protection. An important dimension in the crystallization of Kyrgyz independent foreign policy thinking was also seen in the government's commitment to courting secondary power protection including Iran, Turkey and latterly Pakistan and India throughout the 1990s. Later Japan too emerged as an important player in this category, with its considerable international lender support and direct foreign aid. A major strategic threat for Kyrgyz policy makers necessitating these initiatives was tense relations with Uzbekistan throughout the decade from independence. They were also to a lesser extent motivated by attempts to find counterweights to Russia and Kazakhstan, and bolster an independent Kyrgyz sphere of action. Other sources of insecurity in the decade since independence were grounded in violent developments within Tajikistan and Afghanistan to the south. The Tajik civil war spilled over into Kyrgyz territory, and the Afghan conflict that cast a long shadow over the Pamir Mountains.

As well as overtures to secondary, medium Eurasian powers outside the former USSR, the Akaev regime also tried to stabilize these internal and external challenges with security commitments from all three great powers who have traditionally defined Central Asia as an area of competition. These traditionally consisted of China, Russia and Britain. In the post-colonial era, the informal inheritor of Britain's global imperial

mantle was the USA. Yet Central Asia in the 1991 was virtually the only area of the globe that was *terra incognita* for the American foreign policy establishment. It would take over a decade from the collapse of the USSR for the US to define its interests in the region and act.

Initially Russia and China were the mainstays of Kyrgyz great power support; however by 2002 this was expanded to a *troika* including the United States. The Akaev regime saw fresh geopolitical vistas in the re-engagement of the US in Central Asia following the terrorist attacks in the US of September 2001. For the first time, the US viewed the region not just as a hydrocarbon repository or potential democracy experiment, but also as geo-strategically vital alternate base to the Persian Gulf and to control events in Afghanistan. Its perceived potential role as an incubator for radical Islamic movements also underscored Washington's new-found fascination with the area. Kyrgyzstan is an excellent example of a small state response to the Great Game paradigm of superpower competition in the region via proxy states. In a sense it has tried to shape the game as well as construct its own answers to the challenges.

#### *The institutional context*

The Kyrgyz government at independence inherited a constitutional form of state structure that was slightly modified in the 1980s but otherwise a very direct descendent of the Soviet blueprint of the 1930s. The 1993 Constitution, the first promulgated for an independent Kyrgyzstan, retained this model although it allotted Parliament a policy-coordinating role in both approving presidential policy and the appointment of ministers. As Askat Dukenbaev and William Hansen argue, the state

has produced a very top-heavy executive with a powerful French style presidency. In addition an equally large and powerful prime ministerial apparatus shadows this. It has often clashed with presidential structures in competition for executive functions.<sup>161</sup>

Despite bullish powers accorded Parliament in the 1993 constitution, one might expect that a legislature lacking independent policy-making experience would be unlikely to evolve as a strong counterweight to the executive. It has not. The Presidency has used amendments and referenda throughout the 1990s to restrict most of the policy and appointment oversight of Parliament. We might impute this to growing or entrenching authoritarianism, but I would stress that the Soviet legacy of formal structures devoid of autonomous political power combined with an executive tradition, itself completely unused to the idea of oversight or accountability, to make the ambitious 1993 Constitution unworkable anyway.

Yet again, following fifteen years of struggle between President and Parliament, the *Jogorku Kengesh* began to sense its power. Upon occasion it challenged the Akaev regime on domestic and foreign policy issues. The attacks are often led by ‘pro regime’ deputies as well as those from the opposition, demonstrating a gradual institutional loyalty. Another key problem, touched upon in Chapter Two, is the weakness of the independent Kyrgyz state. A top-heavy executive does not translate into a powerful one. Beyond Bishkek, the government rules through the patronage networks of the *Akimiyat* who run their oblasts as fiefdoms.<sup>162</sup> Central government control diminishes in proportion to distance from Bishkek. In this context

---

<sup>161</sup> For an excellent overview of recent developments in domestic Kyrgyz politics, see Askat Dukenbaev and William W. Hansen *Understanding Politics in Kyrgyzstan*, DEMSTAR Research Report no. 16 (Aarhus: University of Aarhus September 2003).

<sup>162</sup> *Akim*, (Kyrgyz), a provincial governor. An *Akimiyat* is a provincial administration.

Parliamentary deputies have become an avenue for petitioners seeking to circumvent local authorities or central government. In this way they acquire representative character anyway despite the fact that many attain seats via tainted elections.

In interviews while trying to get a sense of how foreign policy was debated, formed and applied in Kyrgyzstan, I would ask: “who makes Kyrgyz foreign policy?” The usual answer given, for instance by Lydia Imanalieva, Deputy Foreign Minister in 2003, was that foreign policy emerged from a consensus between the Presidential Administration, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, input from the Prime Minister’s apparatus, from Parliamentary deputies, with the media and independent experts usually mentioned last.<sup>163</sup> Let us now review the foreign policy functions of these entities in the formation of Kyrgyz foreign policy.

### *The Presidency*

During his tenure up to 2005 Akaev’s handling of foreign policy acquired him the public reputation of being a ‘loose cannon.’ He attracted considerable criticism from within the state bureaucracy and particularly the political opposition for his conduct of foreign policy, portrayed as impulsive, vacillating and over conciliatory thus damaging the national interest. Colorful gossip concerning Akaev and his entourage did the rounds in Bishkek describing Yeltsinesque episodes wherein liquor and graft allegedly motored foreign policy conduct. Although it is impossible to determine the veracity of such tales, they indicated a popular perception of capricious and irresponsible leadership. As elsewhere in the region it is challenging to separate the idiosyncratic presidential impact on foreign policy from the constitutional

---

<sup>163</sup> Deputy Foreign Minister Lydia Imanalieva, interview by author, 6 February 2004, Bishkek.

presidential role in foreign policy as shaped by the system itself. Regime change without orchestration by Moscow is an entirely new precedent in Kyrgyzstan, and the new interim presidency that took over in 2005 has yet to establish a sufficient track record.

We have noted that foreign relations in Central Asia are commonly used by the state as a way of fostering government legitimacy in the absence of effective internal mechanisms such as economic performance and electoral support. The importance of the Presidency was emphasized by regular meetings between Akaev and international leaders on an equal footing. All of the newly independent Central Asian states use the modern media to project these sorts of independence symbols as a leitmotif to bolster the internal legitimacy of the regime. Akaev accorded prominence to visiting dignitaries, widely covered on the both the Kyrgyz and Russian language television channels and given a high profile in the media generally. A state reception room complete with gaudy velvet chairs and an enormous oil painting of a midnight yurt as backdrop was commonly used on the evening television news to showcase Akaev and the diplomat *du jour*. To some extent these exhibitions flow from the nation-building instinct; reinforcing the image of the Akaev regime as interacting with international equals. Another dimension lies in the fact that the regime was sending the message that it arrogates to itself the power to communicate with the representatives of foreign sovereigns.

Within the Presidential Administration the President was counseled by a national security advisor together with a small team of between five and eight advisors and assistants, grouped within a unit known as the Foreign Policy Department. All

these were required to have a background in foreign affairs and usually studied in Moscow. They advised the President on foreign policy and coordinated foreign policy matters with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).<sup>164</sup> Askar Aitmatov, the National Security Advisor before he became Foreign Minister in 2002, had a Soviet diplomatic background. His successor up to 2005, Alikbek Djekshenkulov, was previously Kyrgyzstan's ambassador to the OSCE.

The Foreign Ministry resented a competitor organ in the conduct of foreign affairs; an area it feels is its natural bailiwick. Meanwhile, there was a tendency within the presidential administration to view the Ministry purely as a protocol and representative organ. On several occasions Akaev himself intervened in rivalries between this unit and the Foreign Ministry. In this light, the 1999 Presidential Decree endorsing the primacy of the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry in conducting foreign policy represented an effort to smooth ruffled feathers. Rafis Abazov convincingly explained this tension as stemming from the weakness of independent foreign ministries in Central Asia due to their rapid expansion from small preexisting protocol departments. He traces this institutional competition back to the old republican first secretary administrations, later to become the presidential administrations.<sup>165</sup>

In the Kyrgyz case this competition has been mitigated despite obvious tensions between the two. In the period after independence, although the Foreign Ministry and Presidential administration were policy-making rivals at various times, regular interchange of staff and the strong reliance on the incumbent Foreign Minister

---

<sup>164</sup> The Prime Minister also has a small unit that is similar in function, the *Otdel Mezhdunarodnovo Sotrudnichestva* (Department of International Cooperation).

<sup>165</sup> Rafis Abazov, *The Formation of Post-Soviet International Politics in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan*, The Donald W. Treadgold Papers no. 21, (University of Washington: The Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, 1999), 39.

has allowed considerable Foreign Ministry input into foreign policy. The 2002 appointment of Aitmatov to the Foreign Minister position directly from the Presidential Administration led to concerns that he would settle old scores within the Ministry.

As already mentioned above, the Kyrgyz political system in common with most post-Soviet countries opts for a strong presidential system akin to the French model. Any President and his or her administration would have a very strong foreign policy hand anyway, even without contributing factors such as the erosion of Parliamentary oversight in foreign affairs (discussed in detail below) and the general authoritarian reality of the regime; not to mention the novelty of the entire system. Because of this one has to grapple with the extent to which, as critics and his detractors in the political opposition frequently alleged, Akaev's personal control over foreign policy matters was really absolute. Supposed absolutism could equally be shaped by the constitution as by the authoritarian nature of the informal, but more actual, structures of power management. On the other hand, Akaev's presidential style was anecdotally reported to be very autocratic. Ministers were frequently not consulted on decisions and cabinet meetings were rare. The style was amplified by a presidential administration used to the Soviet model of issuing orders to a First Secretary's cabinet as opposed to a collegial idea of collective membership in a government and consensus decision making.

What we can be certain of is that the informal authoritarianism, and the presidential nature of the system intended by design, together contributed to the reality of a presidential monopoly on foreign policy during Akaev's tenure. This began to

have serious domestic political consequences, particularly on issues such as frontier negotiations that presented an opportunity for focusing discontent with the regime, discussed in Chapter Seven below. Presidential domination of foreign policy is not unusual in states with strong presidencies. However for Kyrgyzstan, a country building a foreign policy from scratch, the drawback is that a limited, small circle of elites in the foreign ministry and presidential apparatus continue to guide, advise and set policy. The interim foreign minister of the post-Akaev 2005 government, one of the leaders of the coup that overthrew him, was also foreign minister for a long period in the 1990s. There is little room in this establishment for other views or voices, creating the impression of a lack of transparency. The template for Kyrgyz foreign policy since independence was decisively shaped by the Presidency of Akaev in tandem with a bureaucracy that was tightly controlled by the regime. It will be hard for the new government to alter radically foreign policy institutions and traditions instilled during his tenure.

### *Parliament*

The Kyrgyz Parliament (*Jogorku Kengesh*) has been sidetracked in its foreign policy power since independence.<sup>166</sup> Parliament overall has had its authority undermined and circumvented not only by the Akaev regime, but also the bureaucracy. Potential Parliamentary power in foreign affairs diminished as a result of constitutional amendments in 1996 which removed the consultative policy-making role and also extinguished its right to oversee ministerial appointments. The structure of Parliament was radically altered also at that time via splitting the legislature into

---

<sup>166</sup> *Jogorku Kengesh*, (Kyrgyz), literally ‘supreme council.’

bicameral chambers and introducing non-political patronage networks into the upper chamber particularly. A 2003 referendum, widely criticized as poorly explained and forced through by the government, endorsed a shift back to a pluralist unicameral Parliament in 2005, a shift so far accepted by the post-Akaev leadership. In a sense, the more independent lower house is now being replaced by the government-controlled upper house. This will allow the 2005 Parliament to remain very open to executive control and manipulation. This does not augur well for any resumption of Parliamentary autonomy in oversight of foreign affairs.

The direct foreign policy powers of Parliament under the current constitution limit its role essentially to declaring war and peace. Additional areas that are clearly meant to be under Parliamentary supervision, and that remained unaltered by subsequent amendments under the terms of the 1993 Constitution, include ratification of treaties and, crucially, approval for border changes. Parliament also retains influence upon foreign economic treaties via supervision of the public budget. The Akaev government pushed through a revised constitution in 2003 that tried to create a greater fig leaf of Parliamentary involvement in foreign affairs, for instance by creating a confirmatory role in the appointment of Kyrgyz ambassadors abroad. Otherwise it did not do much to counteract the dilution of Parliamentary power by previous amendments.

Despite truncated powers, after 1996 the *Jogorku Kengesh* made tentative progress in asserting its authority in the foreign policy process, contradicting its image as the rubber-stamp body of an authoritarian regime. True, it is conceptually a strange mish-mash of government patronage networks, holdovers from the patronage

networks of the previous order and new political groupings. At the same time, the *Jorgorku Kengesh* has developed its own esprit de corps and definite institutional identity, causing it to flex its muscles occasionally. During the past decade, the Soviet rubber-stamp legacy has slowly begun to erode. The emerging role of deputies as alternative centers of local patronage networks gives them a power base less dependent on the state. Foreign assistance has been active in providing trainings to deputies about the sorts of things they should be doing.

Parliament is, oddly enough, bolstered by the past too. Soviet formalism placed importance on the dignity and visibility of public institutions. This legacy allows it to assert its collective identity in a way unique in comparative terms beyond being a forum simply wielding power and dispensing patronage. While devoid of much procedural and informal power, the formal-institutional power of Parliament is quite real and bolstered by the very nation-building processes that benefit the state generally. Parliament periodically exercised its authority to demand hearings on topics, such as in 2001 on labor migration to Russia, or in 2002 loans from the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

The *Jokorku Kengesh* also actively asserted its power to monitor the budget and expenditures of government as a method of informal oversight over foreign relations. The sorts of things falling into this category include expenses for defense and security and for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After independence Kyrgyzstan hurried to join a horde of international organizations, to the extent that no one was keeping track of how many. Steep membership fees and renewals now trigger retroactive Parliamentary discussion on the utility of inclusion to Kyrgyzstan.

Expenses related to servicing international debts and credits, as well as on-going trade negotiations, attracted attention from Parliament also. However, Aynura Cholponkulova, researching the constitutional basis for Kyrgyz foreign policy, asserts that deputies generally lack the expertise to review complex financial matters such as international trade negotiations.<sup>167</sup>

There have been many instances where the Parliament was sidelined or ignored by the Akaev executive. In response the Parliament called for an expansion of its procedural remit, and took government to task when it was not properly consulted. One contentious area was the right of Parliament to consider and debate treaties prior to Presidential signature. The tendency of Akaev's government was to present treaties for endorsement as an afterthought irritated deputies. For instance, Parliamentary ratification of International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans in February 2000 was *ex post facto*, and the same went for the memorandum of the same year between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan over the Sokh enclave. A function of the small size of Kyrgyzstan's political and bureaucratic elite is that the Akaev regime could rarely keep something secret from Parliament for long, compounding its resentment when sidelined.

Ignoring the constitutionally-sanctioned Parliamentary role in approving changes to state frontiers was the most controversial area of government circumvention. Other examples were found in relatively minor issues as well, such as in government negotiations surrounding the establishment of the American University in Central Asia (AUCA). The 1998 text of the agreement between the Akaev regime

---

<sup>167</sup> Aynura Cholponkulova, interview by author, 17 August 2002, Bishkek. For aspects of Kyrgyz constitutional law impacting foreign policymaking in Kyrgyzstan, see her *Kandidatskaya* dissertation: Aynura Cholponkulova, *Konstitutsionnie Osnovi Bneshnepoliticheskoi Deyatel'nosti Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki*, (Bishkek: Biyiktik, 2000).

and the US State Department over the status, funding and special privileges of AUCA was not presented to Parliament. Although a letter informing Parliament of the agreement was eventually submitted, the text did not accompany it. Parliamentarians argued that their approval was necessitated by customs privileges and tax exemptions promised to the university in the agreement.

Alisher Abdymomunov, a career KGB officer in the Soviet period, chaired the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs and Inter-Parliamentary Committee (*Komiteta Po Mejdunarodnym y Mejparlamentskym Svyazyam*) 2000 - 2005. He was previously Deputy Head of the Belarus SSR KGB in the late 1980s. Representing an Osh constituency, the pro-Government Abdymomunov's foreign policy experience consisted of a spell in Afghanistan, also with the KGB, in the early 1980s. The KGB background is of interest as Kyrgyz security cadres tend to have conservative pro-Russian leanings and maintain extensive contacts with the Russian security service, the FSB. Although Abdymomunov was a pro-government man, he managed to establish a modest reputation as a critic of Akaev.

His committee, the principle forum for review of international affairs in Parliament, reviews legislation in preparation for ratification that pertains broadly to international affairs. This includes accession to new organizations and treaties and watching over the budget and commenting on the strategy of the MFA. It also devotes time to forging inter-Parliamentary relations with sister Parliaments of other countries. In this last guise, giving the Kyrgyz Parliament something in common with Parliamentary democracies, it organizes junkets and fact-finding trips abroad for deputies. A glance at the (internal) 1997 Report on the previous year's Activities of

the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee (*Otchet o Deyatelinosti Komiteta Po Mejdunarodnum i MejParliamentskim Svyazyam Sobranya Nardoni Predstaviteley Jogorku Kenesha Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki za 1997 God*)<sup>168</sup> gives us a good idea of its range of activities and also shows how the Committee has sought to carve out a space for itself in Parliament.

In the course of 1997 the Committee reviewed over one hundred pieces of draft legislation, dissected the budget of the MFA, and made several recommendations to government on salaries, allowances and diplomatic property rentals. Additionally it critiqued the job and quality of Kyrgyz diplomatic representatives in soliciting investment in Kyrgyzstan as well as lambasting the Government for over-reliance on the Ministry of Finance as a solution to marketing investment in Kyrgyzstan internationally. The report notes in a satisfied tone that it has forced the Government to stop presenting items for its oversight in the form of final, agreed drafts pending only Parliamentary ratification, and in future to include the Committee on intergovernmental committees and brief the Committee on projects in progress. The picture that emerges from this report is one of a Presidency unused to dealing with autonomous institutions and reluctantly working with a committee that is quite assertive despite its lack of an oppositional orientation, an instance, perhaps, of bureaucratic politics within an authoritarian regime.

The *Jorgorku Kengesh* has few sources of information for foreign policy especially as the vast majority of deputies have virtually no foreign relations

---

<sup>168</sup> G Asanaliev, *Otchet o Deyatelinosti Komiteta Po Mejdunarodnum I MejParliamentskim Sviyazyam Cobraniya Nardoni Predstaviteley Jogorku Kenesha Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki za 1997 God* (Bishkek: Komiteta Po Mejdunarodnym y Mejparlamenskim Svyazyam Sobraniya Narodnyah Predstaviteley Jorgorku Kenesha Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki, 12 Yanvarya 1998).

experience. Supporting the Committee is a modest research unit consisting of three people, equivalent in American terms to the Congressional Research Service. The unit chief until 2005 was a former deputy without any foreign affairs specialization and his background was in business. His two assistants were graduate students. The unit writes position and policy papers when requested to do so such as in event of a debate triggering specific Parliamentary interest in a topic, for example the debate on controversial loans from the Islamic Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank in 2002. In the absence of meaningful independent sources of information for policy debate in the context of weak university departments and think tanks in Kyrgyzstan, Parliament has few alternate sources of advice to seek out other than Russian language media content and literature from the Russian Federation.<sup>169</sup>

Interaction between Parliament and the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry is lent poignancy by the fact that in Bishkek they are immediate neighbors facing each other across a narrow street leading off of the Old Square (*Starii Ploschad*) a ten-minute walk from the *Ak Uy* (“White House,” of the Presidential Administration). For this reason the discomfited Foreign Ministry makes periodic noises about relocating. The MFA is easily closest to Parliament, although the National Security Service is situated three blocks away. Firmly in its gaze across the street, Parliament has used its budgetary oversight to gain influence over the Foreign Ministry via threats to restrict or deny approval for certain budget lines and through its oversight of the salaries of Foreign Ministry employees.

---

<sup>169</sup> Nurjan Shailybekova, Research Assistant to the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee, interview by author, 12 August 2002, Bishkek.

*Kyrgyz Ministry of Foreign Affairs*

Opened in February 1992, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is an institution central to the fledgling foreign policy establishment navigating the rearrangement of the old order and the arrival of new political institutional arrangements.<sup>170</sup> While dealing with a vastly different series of challenges from the Soviet Foreign Ministry, the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry relies heavily upon tradition from the perspective of both the shape of the organization and in its general approach to policymaking and outlook. In that regard, the MFA may be viewed as a bastion of the old order and somewhat of a paradox. The ministry owing its very existence or at least institutional autonomy to Kyrgyz sovereignty and independence is the institution least-influenced by the post-independence nationalist discourse. The only exception is the ethnic make up of its personnel who are overwhelmingly Kyrgyz.<sup>171</sup>

Formally the MFA has a coordinating role in foreign policy matters, in advising the President, as well as an operational role in traditional diplomacy. Unlike many institutions in independent Kyrgyzstan that emphasize their novelty and innovation, the MFA and its personnel prefer to invoke the past. In its official history the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry emphasizes its pedigree as part of the old Soviet Foreign Ministry going back to the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>172</sup> Also in interviews with Kyrgyz diplomats, 1944 was often mentioned as the ‘real’ beginning of a Kyrgyz Foreign

---

<sup>170</sup> In Russian it is the *Ministerstvo Inostranniah Del (MID)*, in Kyrgyz *Tishki Ishter Ministri, (TIM)*.

<sup>171</sup> Efforts to gauge minority representation in the Foreign Ministry were unsuccessful – respondents either ducked the question or assured me that minorities were well-represented. An indicator is that, as far as I am aware, at time of writing there is no one of ambassadorial rank or above in the MFA from a minority.

<sup>172</sup> *Ministerstvo Inostranniah Del, Istoria Obrazovania Ministerstva Inostranniah Del Kirgizskoi Respublikii, Portal Gosudarstvennix Slujb* (accessed December 10, 2003); available from <http://www.gov.kg/cgi-bin/page.pl?id=1129>.

Ministry. One diplomat even suggested to me that the 2003 Government proclamation of 2,200 years of Kyrgyz statehood imbued the organization with an even longer collective memory. This is an example of nation-building historiography augmenting the imperial legacy; the MFA can simultaneously be the incarnation of two millennia of statehood and also partake of the prestigious Soviet heritage.<sup>173</sup>

So the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry compensated for its lack of precedent by making deliberate association with the predecessor Soviet Foreign Ministry and also the embryonic Foreign Ministry of the Kirghiz SSR. The Kyrgyz stake a claim to share of ownership of the Soviet diplomatic heritage as much as that of other Soviet successor states, such as the Russian Federation, and thus draw upon a rich vein of legitimacy for its existence. Most other Soviet successors, by contrast, are keen to distance themselves from the past. An extreme example is the Latvian Foreign Ministry that condemns the Soviet legacy and rejects any association with the Soviet annexation of independent Latvia between 1920 and 1940. The Kyrgyz historical synthesis here is interesting to note. The MFA's view is that intermittent Kyrgyz independence of great antiquity was finally submerged in the nineteenth century following annexation by Russia. However the 1917 and 1918 Soviet grants of autonomy to sovereign peoples, beginning with Ukraine and Finland, laid the basis for the subsequent *restoration* of Kyrgyz sovereignty in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>174</sup> Rather than being an artificial institution for an invented nation, the Foreign Ministry sees itself as part of a statehood renaissance enabled by the Soviets.

---

<sup>173</sup> Muratbek Azymbekiev, Counselor, Policy Planning Department Kyrgyz Ministry of Foreign Affairs, interview by author, 04 February 2004, Bishkek.

<sup>174</sup> Ministerstvo Inostranniah Del, *Istoria Sozdania MID KR*, 1.

The Kyrgyz are technically correct in asserting that their Foreign Ministry predates 1991. In the 1920s members of the Soviet Foreign Ministry were stationed in cities such as Alma Ata and Frunze. Initially the cabinets of the Central Asian Union Republics did not have foreign ministries or foreign minister positions. In 1944 this suddenly changed in response to Stalin's lobbying to have all twelve Union Republics included in the United Nations (UN) as a gambit for weighting the nascent supranational entity in its favor. As with so many Soviet innovations relating to the sovereignty of the republics, a legal-rational precedent created by an authoritarian state as a negotiation chip, and to shape international appearances, would linger in hibernation until 1991.

On 1 February 1944 Soviet Foreign Minister V.M. Molotov formally stated at the plenum of the Supreme Soviet that the Union Republics had, in the Party's view, reached a cultural and economic level of development where it made sense that they be allowed to enter into sovereign relations with foreign countries. He also pointed out that it would be convenient in many cases for the republics to be able to trade with their foreign, non-Soviet, neighbors as sovereign states.

As a result, a foreign minister position was created in all five Central Asian Soviet republics. The Kirghiz SSR Supreme Soviet adopted a law proclaiming the right of the Kirghiz SSR to enter into diplomatic relations, appoint diplomatic representatives and present credentials. A building was appropriated from the Osh-Bishkek highway police to serve as the new Foreign Ministry. The first Foreign Minister of the Kirghiz SSR, Kizi Dikambaev, was previously a functionary in the Department of State Control. Expansion of the Ministry was slow and they found it

difficult to persuade people to work there. Reluctance to join was, perhaps, due to fear of association with the Foreign Ministry or international community, as the purges of the late 1930s had particularly targeted those involved in foreign relations. From September 1944 only four of the twenty-five people planned had been recruited including (Dikambaev aside) a resource manager, a chief accountant and a cashier.<sup>175</sup>

Dikambaev even requested extra staff to come from the parent Foreign Ministry in Moscow in order to help train its surrogate. Several staff journeyed to Moscow to take courses from Bolshevik diplomatic luminaries such as Maxim Litvinov. In spite of these developments, the KSSR Foreign Ministry remained purely ceremonial and without executive authority. The tiny Foreign Ministry, at most ever consisting of the titular Foreign Minister plus a couple of assistants, was mainly concerned with protocol and visible only on the rare occasions that delegations from developing countries passed through.<sup>176</sup>

By 1945 the brinkmanship over UN representation was settled by allowing the USSR an extra two seats in the form of Belarus and Ukrainian representation. This raises the question of why the decision was made to retain the institution of local ‘mini’ foreign ministries in the republics through to 1991, complete with an elaborate system of ranks, uniforms and medals. In part this had to do exactly with Belarusian and Ukrainian representation. We might conjecture that if these republics were represented, then the others also needed to demonstrate such capacity as they were technically the constitutional peers of the two SSRs with UN representation.

---

<sup>175</sup> Ministerstvo Inostranniah Del, *Istoria Sozdania MID KR*, 9.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

In the case of the Kirghiz SSR the fluidity of the situation in neighboring Xinjiang during the resumed Chinese civil war post 1945 may also have sparked Soviet interest in the forward extension of buffer states regionally. Soviet provision of the trappings of sovereignty could help lure non-Soviet neighbors into closer relations with the Central Asian republics. Parts of Xinjiang had been subject to informal Soviet military occupation from 1934–1941 when Soviet troops aided a local warlord in controlling the enormous remote province.<sup>177</sup> This forward policy recurred in Soviet-occupied Northern Iran 1945-46 with the creation of an autonomous Soviet-controlled Azeri region along with plans for it eventually to join the Azeri SSR across the Oxus River, ultimately faced down by President Truman. Waning British power in India and the desire to create an international profile for the Central Asian SSRs as a model for the larger South Asian area also could have been a motive.

After the death of Stalin, by 1956 the Kirghiz SSR Foreign Ministry was downgraded in status and put under the umbrella locally of the Academy of Sciences. The title of Foreign Minister became an additional portfolio for another minister. During the 1950s, and onwards, the small office of the Kirghiz Foreign Ministry dealt mainly with citizenship and naturalization questions related to refugees from China and other foreign states. By the 1970s perhaps again with the Soviet Union wishing to publicize its Central Asian states as models for the post-colonial southern hemisphere, the protocol department in Frunze became very active in coordinating numerous visits

---

<sup>177</sup> For more on this period in Xinjiang see James A. Milward and Nabijan Tursun, “Political History and Strategies of Control,” in *Xinjiang: China's Moslem Borderland*, ed. S. Frederick Starr (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), 79-81.

by diplomatic delegations to the republic from an assortment of developing African and Asian countries ranging from Iraq to Mongolia.<sup>178</sup>

With the sudden demise of the USSR in 1991 there was, therefore, some institutional memory, however slim, to draw upon. The emphasis placed by the now independent Foreign Ministry on the scanty history of its largely inactive and theoretical predecessor helped bolster an impression of institutional competence and longevity, and inferentially highlighted the legitimacy of Kyrgyz sovereignty. Underpinning this was the key idea that the Bolsheviks recognized a pre-existing tradition of Kyrgyz statehood rather than inventing the unit from scratch. All of the above lent an aura of institutional pedigree to Kyrgyz foreign relations based on the Soviet experience. Whatever the benefits of descent from it, practically the importance of the KSSR Foreign Ministry was that it allowed some Kyrgyz access to Soviet diplomatic careers based on secondment from the Kirghiz SSR ministry. There had been a steady back-and-forth between the two ministries, as seen in the instance of one Almazbek Tilebaliev. In 1966 he became the Kirghiz SSR Foreign Secretary from being the Soviet Third Secretary in the consulate in Islamabad.<sup>179</sup>

#### *Foreign Ministry personnel*

During the Soviet period international careers of Kyrgyz were largely within the Soviet Foreign Ministry. Sometimes, as we have noted already, they were technically seconded from the dormant Foreign Ministry of the Kirghiz SSR. Many also served abroad in the armed forces and navy. Comparing their pre-1991

---

<sup>178</sup> Ministerstvo Inostrannih Del, *Istoria Sozdania MID KR*, 21

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. 20.

international affairs experience to Russian or Western USSR nationalities, Kyrgyz commentators argue that few Kyrgyz served in the Soviet Foreign Ministry or had access to careers that would have involved exposure to some aspect of international affairs. This is presented as evidence of the purported unofficial Soviet bias against Moslem nationalities. However, the dearth of Kyrgyz might also lie in the smaller size of the Kirghiz SSR with proportionally fewer eligible, as well as in the lower proportion of labor mobility even within Central Asian elites during the Soviet period. Central Asian elites tended to prefer careers and postings near to or within their home republics as compared to European nationalities of the USSR.

Assessing the isolation of the Kirghiz SSR is difficult given the complex and variegated manner in which Kyrgyz elites understood their position in relation to the Soviet Union. 'Abroad' had a very contextual meaning and it is uncertain to what extent the ideas of the current Kyrgyz elite were influenced by exposure to the diplomatic corps and Soviet foreign policy apparatus. In this sense, the career of the former President, spent as a physics professor in Leningrad (St. Petersburg) and exposed to the most liberal currents and cosmopolitan influences to be found in the USSR, is a good example of the way in which many Kyrgyz are viewed in Kyrgyzstan as cosmopolitan and well-traveled by virtue of having lived in or studied in other corners of the USSR. Assignment to the sheltered Soviet Diplomatic Corps, on the other hand, was not necessarily a more horizon-expanding experience. The deeply conservative Soviet Foreign Ministry produced few radicals or proto-liberals from those sent outside of the USSR. Kyrgyz diplomats when questioned about the Soviet period consistently referred to a policy of assigning Kyrgyz in the Soviet Foreign

Ministry to developing countries in Africa and Asia. This was in line with the Soviet policy of touting Central Asia as a development model showing what communism could achieve, to other developing nations in the southern tier.

After independence a small but sufficient coterie of Kyrgyz bureaucrats trained in the Soviet Foreign Ministry apparatus was available to staff the upper echelons of the MFA. Examples of this handful of not more than a dozen individuals include Muratbek Imanaliev, previously First Secretary of the USSR Embassy in Beijing, and Ishenbay Abdyrazzakov, who was based in the Embassy of the USSR in Tokyo for over a decade. Not all chose to work with the new state. Several Kyrgyz diplomats in the USSR foreign ministry elected to stay on with the Russian Foreign Ministry. The Russian diplomatic service is far bigger, with commensurately more opportunities for advancement. Some preferred not to stay in a CIS bureaucracy at all. One acquaintance, a graduate of Moscow State International Relations Faculty and fluent Pashto speaker, with diplomatic experience in Afghanistan in 1979 and also prominent in *Gosplan*, turned down several invitations to join the MFA in favor of entering a Ph.D. program in London. Later he began a UN career that took him back to Afghanistan. His reasons for rejecting a career in the MFA included intense dislike of the former government and long term plans to enter politics.

Drawn from the ranks of those opting to switch their career to the service of the newly independent state, all Kyrgyz foreign ministers since independence have been Moscow-trained career diplomats or foreign affairs specialists who began their careers in the Soviet Diplomatic Service. Within the MFA one can distinguish between these upper-echelon personnel shaped by their Soviet career experience, and

then middle cadres with one leg in the Soviet era and another in the events surrounding independence. Lastly, those least impacted by the Soviet Union are the junior cadres whose formative experience was only indirectly molded by the Soviet diplomatic training framework, and whose adult working lives are shaped by independent Kyrgyzstan.

### *Structure of the Foreign Ministry*

The MFA is one of the smaller ministries. It is six times smaller than, for instance, the Ministry of the Interior. Including overseas embassies its staff comprises almost three hundred of whom about one third are based abroad in consulates and embassies.<sup>180</sup> Structurally it has evolved along a basic organizational model followed by many foreign ministries worldwide with a division between the home ministry and foreign missions. Departments within the home ministry further subdivide into territorial and functional units.

Functional departments include a Diplomatic Training Academy, a Legal Department, the Protocol Department, the Department for UN and UN organizations and the Policy Planning Unit. The small Policy Planning Unit is one of the few offices devoted to research and advice, supplying policy recommendations to the Foreign Minister. The office evaluates concept plans, an example being the 1998 proposed nuclear-weapons free zone for Central Asia. Territorial departments comprise three main bureaus. One department is devoted to Russia and the CIS. Of the other two, the Western Section is subdivided into desks for North and South America, Western

---

<sup>180</sup> This view of the structure of the MFA is based on author interviews with Muratbek Azymbekiev, Counselor, Policy Planning Department, Bishkek, 4 February 2004, and Deputy Foreign Minister Lydia Imanalieva, 6 February 2004, Bishkek.

Europe and Africa. An Eastern Department covers China, the Southeast Asian states, Australia and Japan. Personnel within these departments specializing in thematic country groups are small in number. For the entire Middle East there is one desk officer, the same for Southeast Asia. The largest sections are for Russia and also the CIS, itself subdivided into a section focusing on bilateral relations among CIS countries, and another for multilateral relations and the CIS secretariat.

In the late 1990s spurred by a feeling that post-independence Kyrgyz diplomats suffered from a lack of familiarity with the international system, the MFA began modest efforts to offer instruction to Kyrgyz diplomatic personnel. It aimed especially at junior cadres with little formal training in international affairs. In 2000 the Center for the Training and Retraining of Diplomatic Personnel opened as an in-house school offering workshops on regional studies and international relations. The Center is headed by Nurgazy Kemelbaev, a career diplomat and formerly Soviet consul in Nigeria in the 1980s.<sup>181</sup> The Center launched a series of seminars on topics such as US Foreign Policy or relations with the European Union, drafting in lecturers from the next-door American University as faculty. In 2001 the school was expanded and formalized as the Diplomatic Academy (taking over the emptied building of the moribund Central Asian Union). It now provides in-house training in language and international relations for draftee MFA personnel and offers graduate degrees. These modest efforts, however, are hampered by dearth of funding. The Academy struggles with inadequate resources in terms of teaching staff, books and language training.

---

<sup>181</sup> Kemalbaev also has a modest literary reputation for his translations of the Scottish poet Robert Burns into Kyrgyz. Ambassador Nurgazy Kemalbaev, interview by author, February 08 2002, Bishkek.

Quite normally for a developing country with a collapsed economy, high unemployment, traditional extended family social structures reordered by urbanization and nourished by comparatively huge injections of foreign aid, government in Kyrgyzstan has its share of rent-seeking cadres. In 2000, for example, the Governments' own internal auditors estimated that thirty percent of the state budget was lost to malfeasance. Distinguishing the MFA from other Kyrgyz bureaucracies is its reputation for being relatively free of corruption. This is partially due to the fact that it does not directly handle or receive any donor money (although it has received in-kind donations, for instance of furniture, from the Turkish Overseas Aid Agency [*TIKA*]). Another factor, as we saw above, is the basilisk gaze of Parliament across the street.

#### *Overseas Embassies and Consulates*

Diplomatic representation abroad is expensive for developing countries, especially in Western capitals where rents and real estate are prohibitive for an impecunious nation. For this reason, for example, Turkey subsidizes Central Asian embassies in the fashionable Çankaya diplomatic district of Ankara. Maintaining staff abroad is also difficult given higher living costs in the West particularly. The Kyrgyz Embassy in Moscow runs a hotel to defray expenses. The Ambassador to the United States as of 1999 was paid \$2, 112 per month, with the First Secretary in Washington DC Embassy making a paltry \$1,890.<sup>182</sup> Partially for that reason Kyrgyzstan has

---

<sup>182</sup> For an informative list of salaries, numbers of diplomatic staff and embassy expenses, see for instance the 1999 law approving their payment: *Jokorku Kengesh, 1999/ N626 Postanovlenie Pravelstva Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki O Reorganizatsia zagranuchrejdenei Ministerstva Inostranniy Del Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki*, (Bishkek: Dom Pravitelstva ot 15 Noyabrya 1999).

expanded its diplomatic posts abroad cautiously and slowly. Despite this, its diplomatic presence abroad, as well as the timing of expansion, does give a sense of its growing foreign policy interests. For instance, the 2004 opening of an embassy in Japan reflected the growing dependence of Kyrgyzstan on Japanese donor aid during the decade.

In the early 1990s, Kyrgyzstan's foreign representation was limited to Washington, Moscow and Brussels. The Embassy in Beijing opened in 1993 and, since then, has expanded to encompass twenty one postings including New Delhi, Kuala Lumpur, Tehran and Tokyo. Significantly, Bishkek has also opened embassies in many CIS and former Soviet States, symptomatic of the shift to bilateralism within the CIS framework rather than relying on the supranational nature of the CIS as an organization itself. Existing representation in Ukraine and Belarus was augmented in the late 1990s by embassies opened in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. This expansion of representation to CIS countries, particularly nearby states, reflected Kyrgyzstan's gradual acceptance that relations with its neighbors would, after all, require a strong bilateral component given the inadequacy of successor multilateral institutions.<sup>183</sup> Labor migration and the need to defend the interests of Kyrgyz workers abroad became an additional reason for expansion of CIS missions. For instance, copious Kyrgyz migrant labor to Russia influenced the decision to open a consulate in the Siberian city of Yekaterinberg in 2000. From 2003 the Russian authorities, concerned about their high unemployment rates, began to crack down on casual migrant labor. Soviet passports were no longer accepted and all non-Russian CIS

---

<sup>183</sup> This reluctance to establish formal, visible diplomatic missions to near neighbors was mirrored in the tardiness of neighboring countries opening embassies too. The Uzbek embassy in Bishkek finally opened its doors in 2002.

citizens were required under new legislation to have national passports, necessitating new consulates.

### *Foreign Ministers*

Since independence, Kyrgyzstan has witnessed remarkable longevity in foreign minister appointments. The slow turnover has seen policy shifts mirroring the Russian tension between ‘Atlanticists,’ who view the future of former Soviet States as part of the web of West European, Transatlantic alliances; and ‘Eurasianists’ who see their foreign policy future as being defined by Russia’s gravitational pull toward Asia. Fortunately for Kyrgyzstan, two very talented and experienced individuals have dominated the office since independence: Roza Otunbayeva (1992, 1994-1997, 2005) and Muratbek Imanaliev (1991-1992, 1997-2003) with brief interregna by acting ministers punctuating their succession and alternation in the early years of independence.

Otunbayeva is that *rara avis*, a Kyrgyz woman within the Soviet Foreign Ministry establishment. In the 1980s she served as the nominal Kirghiz SSR Foreign Minister and was eventually appointed USSR Ambassador to UNESCO. Just before Soviet collapse, she was reportedly in line to be the next Soviet Ambassador to Malaysia. Widely seen as a liberal and a protégé of the Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, she is viewed as having steered Kyrgyz foreign policy in a Western, ‘Atlanticist’ direction during a tenure that emphasized membership of international organizations and promotion of Kyrgyzstan in the West. Domestically Otunbayeva was involved in the founding of *Respublica*, a rather dry liberal

intellectual paper that eschews photographs in favor of biting analysis of the regime. The paper was cyclically shut down and reopened following various government legal challenges since the early 1990s. Otunbayeva was eventually exiled to the ambassadorship in London in 1997, where she remained for several years. Following a brief spell as a senior UN official in the Caucasus she returned to Kyrgyzstan and immersed herself in opposition politics. Prominent in the opposition coalition that overthrew the Akaev regime in 2005, she has again filled the foreign minister position in the post-Akaev interim government.

Muratbek Imanaliev was the first Foreign Minister of independent Kyrgyzstan, and returned for a long period in the late 1990s following a spell abroad as Kyrgyzstan's first ambassador to China. Imanaliev's orientation during his second period in office was more firmly inclined to the former Soviet space and to China. While no reactionary, and indeed a Gorbachevian liberal in his political views as well as a major strategist on Kyrgyzstan's geopolitical orientation, he was not pro-Western by inclination. He was one of the few Kyrgyz ministers to voice objections in cabinet to the invitation to American forces into Kyrgyzstan in 2002. He worried that the US presence would upset the delicate great-power balance Kyrgyzstan was trying to forge with Russia and China.<sup>184</sup>

Imanaliev specialized in Chinese studies at university in Moscow and wrote a Ph.D. dissertation on the history of eighteenth century Kyrgyz-Chinese relations. He speaks fluent Chinese. As a member of the Soviet diplomatic service he was posted to

---

<sup>184</sup> Ambassador Muratbek Imanaliev, interview by author, 12 August 2002, Bishkek.

Beijing in the 1980s.<sup>185</sup> This extensive experience led Akaev to ask him to quit the Foreign Minister position to open the Kyrgyz Embassy in Beijing and lay the broad foundations of independent Kyrgyz-Chinese relations, a major preoccupation of the Government since 1991. In 2002 Imanaliev resigned along with the rest of the Cabinet following the Ak Suu massacre.<sup>186</sup> This was widely expected as the Akaev regime made him a scapegoat to deflect public anger over the Chinese border negotiations. His conduct as Foreign Minister was widely portrayed in the media as clouded by his Sinophilia. Subsequent to his ouster Imanaliev pursued the time-honored retired diplomat's path of teaching college, founding a think-tank, and dabbling in politics. Based on his experiences he also wrote one of the few books on Kyrgyz foreign relations, *Ocherke o Vneshney Politike Kyrgyzstana*, a slim collection of previous newspaper interviews and essays.<sup>187</sup> In 2003 he started a moderate, centrist opposition political party and entered the fray for the 2005 elections. In terms of the evolution of a stated, coherent Kyrgyz foreign policy position Imanaliev has undoubtedly contributed most to the conceptual development of the geopolitics of independent Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy and also to the *Silk Road Doctrine* (discussed below).

Foreign Minister from 2002-2005, Askar Aitmatov was previously been Soviet attaché in the Bonn embassy before 1991.<sup>188</sup> Like Otunbayeva and Imanaliev he was also one of the cadres inherited from the Soviet Foreign Ministry, despite his being no

---

<sup>185</sup> Imanaliev related an anecdote about his being mistaken for a member of the home team due to his fluency in Chinese at state banquets in Beijing when he was Soviet diplomat in the 1980s (ibid., interview by author).

<sup>186</sup> In 2002 Kyrgyz police opened fire on demonstrators in the south who were protesting the dismissal of a local opposition politician. I discuss this below in full, and also in Chapter Seven in the context of Kyrgyz-Chinese relations.

<sup>187</sup> Muratbek Imanaliev, *Ocherki o Vneshney Politike Kirgizstani* (Bishkek: Sabir, 2002).

<sup>188</sup> He is the son of Chingiz Aitmatov, one of the most famous contemporary authors in the USSR, noted for his novel condemning the de-traditionalization of Central Asian society, *The Day Lasts Longer Than a Thousand Years*.

more than a few steps into a Soviet diplomatic career at the time of independence. Prior to becoming Foreign Minister in 2002, he was Akaev's principle advisor on foreign affairs within the Presidential Administration from 1996. Seen from the prism of clan politics prevailing in Kyrgyz power structures, he represents somewhat of a contrast to Otunbayeva and Imanaliev. Despite differences in policy orientation, they could both be described as career diplomats; civil servants who were essentially apolitical in terms of traditional power structures. Despite their subsequent involvement in opposition politics, neither Otunbayeva nor Imanaliev possess a real power base in Kyrgyz society due to their clan connections, although both are Northerners like Aitmatov. Their authority rests on their prestigious career reputations forged during the Soviet era as international civil servants. Aitmatov, by contrast, was simply a clan politician and a power broker within an authoritarian regime. His appointment was symptomatic of the weakened Akaev regime's increasing dependence on a small circle of northern notables who lacked the connections and influence to forge broader coalitions with southern and central Kyrgyz political patronage networks. His family had publicly backed the Akaev regime despite a period of fence-sitting in the mid-1990s.

His background in the Presidential Administration might suggest that he would have managed competition with the Foreign Ministry more effectively, since he had the necessary experience in both bureaucracies. Even so, Aitmatov was accused of purging his opponents in the Foreign Ministry who resented his rival influence in foreign policy decision-making while he was acting as Akaev's advisor on foreign policy. An anonymous and vitriolic attack on his Foreign Minister tenure came from

the “Letter from a Group of Diplomats” circulated anonymously to, and gleefully reproduced by, several Bishkek newspapers in 2003. It purported to be from unemployed junior cadres who had not been offered assignments following their recall from abroad. The letter alleged that he had engaged in the sale of offices, cut back key positions, including his own father’s assistant in Belgium, and pursued vendettas against Foreign Ministry staff opposed to him while he was working in the presidential administration.<sup>189</sup> Other attacks in a similar vein surfaced in the media since then, including a controversy in 2003 over the appointment of his wife as head of the newly-established OSCE Academy in Bishkek.

These attacks were partially a response to budget cutbacks from a nervous bureaucracy as Aitmatov struggled with a shrinking budget and increasing demands. Yet they were also the response of professional diplomats to having a clan politician lead the foreign ministry establishment as opposed to a career diplomat. Aitmatov junior was certainly a controversial figure. His essentially authoritarian outlook was suspicious of US democratization efforts in the region and he viewed foreign relations in pragmatic *realpolitik* terms.<sup>190</sup> While firmly in the Eurasianist school of preferring close links with Russia and China over the United States, the opportunity to divert the US from an ideologically-motivated democratization campaign in Kyrgyzstan largely determined his pragmatic support for the 2002 establishment of the American airbase.

---

<sup>189</sup> Letter from Group of Diplomats, Pismo Gruppi Diplomatorov Napravlennoe Na Dnyax v Dom Pravitelstva (Bishkek: 10 February 2003).

<sup>190</sup> Ambassador Askar Aitmatov, interview by author, 11 December 1999, Bishkek.

*Ambassadors*

There were several trends visible in ambassadorial appointments abroad during the Akaev regime. One particular direction was the appointment of people from the arts or literature as ambassadors, clearly with the aim of profile-raising and publicizing Kyrgyzstan. An example is the former Ambassador to Turkey, a film-director of international repute, Tolomush Okeev. Another is the continued assignment of the Soviet literary giant, Chingiz Aitmatov, as Ambassador to Luxembourg, Belgium and the EU. As one of the more obscure countries to emerge from the USSR, Kyrgyz elites keenly feel the need to popularize Kyrgyzstan and so appoint celebrities prominent in the old Soviet cultural elite who may be internationally known. This trend looks set to continue, as the new Kyrgyz ambassador-designate to the US in 2005, Zamira Sadykova, is a prominent opposition newspaper editor – although an old associate of Otunbayeva.

As with any other diplomatic service, the career diplomats raise eyebrows at appointments from literature and the arts and tend to respect most the careerists who make ambassador. The Kyrgyz ambassador corps has several important careerists. Imanaliev's protégé, Erlan Abduldaev, formerly Deputy Foreign Minister and currently Kyrgyz Ambassador to China, is an excellent example of the younger cadres still trained largely under the Soviet experience who chose to continue their careers in the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry. Young for his position (born in 1966) he studied at the prestigious Moscow University Institute of International Relations and is a fluent Han Chinese speaker as well. Abduldaev started as a staff assistant in the Asian Department of the USSR Foreign Ministry. Kyrgyz independence in 1991 found him

working as an attaché in the Soviet Embassy in Beijing. He stayed on in the Russian Foreign Service, becoming Third Secretary in the Beijing Embassy in 1995. Inveigled home by family responsibilities and the offer of a fast track within the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry, from 1996 he rose steadily through several policy analyst jobs to become Deputy Foreign Minister in 1998 and, in 2002, was appointed Ambassador to China.

Many other Ambassadors have academic or technocratic backgrounds outside of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Kyrgyz successor. They were sometimes connected to the regime through prior acquaintance with Akaev in his academic career in the 1980s. The connection to academia is accentuated by the Kyrgyz political tradition for rising politicians, civil servants and senior public figures to become university rectors or department/institute chairs during career lacuna. Bakytbek Abdrisaev, Ambassador to the US from 1994-2005, was a physicist and colleague of Akaev during his university years. Another example of this species would be Askar Sarigulov, the current Ambassador to Germany. An economist with a background in *Gosplan* and working in 1989 at Kyrgyz State University, he became an advisor on foreign investment to the President in 1992. He then joined the EBRD in the mid 1990s, before his subsequent appointment as Ambassador to Germany in 2003. Omurbek Sultanov, a history professor at Moscow State University from 1984-1990, after a spell on the Presidential Administration Foreign Policy Department became Ambassador to Germany, Austria and finally the Permanent Representative of the Kyrgyz Republic to the UN in Geneva.

The ambassadorship was also used by the Akaev regime quite often as an *oubliette* to distance people beginning to present an inconvenient potential or actual

challenge to the regime, but too powerful or popular against whom to deploy the usual mechanism of judicial persecution. As we saw, Otunbayeva, following her ouster as Foreign Minister in 1997, was posted to London, a safe distance from an official Bishkek increasingly vexed by her liberal anti-establishment connections and outspoken views on human rights issues. The current ambassador to India, Bakyt Beshimov, formerly a popular and highly respected Rector of Osh State University, was forced into exile in 1999 because the regime felt he was engaged in building a power base in Osh. A less-talented placeman was appointed in his stead at Osh State. Camilla Sharshekeeva, after alienating many powerful people through her higher education reforms as Minister of Education, was ousted in the 2002 cabinet reshuffle.<sup>191</sup> She was offered the vacant Ambassadorship to the Court of St. James. Sharshekeeva declined the offer.

In November 2004, with politicking for the elections planned in February 2005 heating up, the regime attempted to exclude former ambassadors from running as presidential and Parliamentary candidates. The problem with the ambassadorship as *oubliette* is that individuals eventually return. The government asserted that several ex-diplomats prominent in opposition politics, including Roza Otunbayeva and two other former ambassadors, could not stand as candidates in elections because their absence from the country for an extended period prior to running invoked an obscure constitutional provision that candidates must be resident of Kyrgyzstan. Imanaliev, himself running for office, led the counter-attack with the crushing retort that, as far as he was aware, Kyrgyz embassies abroad were Kyrgyz territory. The Kyrgyz Supreme

---

<sup>191</sup> Sharshekeeva introduced standardized testing for university admissions, thus depriving rectors of significant portions of their informal income. Additionally she insisted on the constitution of boards to govern universities, threatening rector's fiefdoms even more.

Court, in a rare burst of judicial independence, overturned the government move on appeal. Despite this the Akaev regime excluded irksome ambassadorial candidates from the February 2005 Parliamentary elections by various creative technicalities in the electoral registration process.

### *The generation gap*

Although the upper echelons of the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry are shaped by cadres forged in the smithy of the Soviet foreign affairs apparatus, the middle levels and junior staff present an interesting institutional change illustrative of bureaucratic evolution in the newly independent small states in the former Soviet Union. In the MFA there is a gulf separating those senior people whose careers were largely spent working in the Soviet Foreign Ministry, those with a foot both in the Soviet era and independence, and finally most junior cadres entering the Ministry from an entirely Kyrgyzstani educational background. The average age of an MFA employee, according to Muratbek Azymbakiev, Counselor in the Policy Planning Department, is thirty.<sup>192</sup>

Another aspect is that the career experience of those inherited from the *ancien regime* was essentially meritocratic and competitive. In the climate of rent-seeking and clan politics predominating in contemporary Kyrgyzstan, it is difficult to see how meritocratic access to a Foreign Ministry career can be maintained. Junior staff are shaped by a very different educational experience from their elders. Some have had

---

<sup>192</sup> Azymbakiev interview. Azymbakiev is a good example of those with a foot in both eras – graduating from Moscow State University, he left graduate studies there in 1991 to join the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry, subsequently working in various postings from the UN Mission in New York to the Embassy in Moscow and now heads the Policy Planning Unit.

access to training at western colleges due to foreign exchange programs or wealthy family connections. Others have influential connections but substandard educations obtained locally. Although the MFA is a very young institution in human resource terms, youth does not always translate into superior qualifications or a more liberal outlook than that of the old guard. Cholponkulova, for instance, has critiqued the absence of open public exams for entry to the Foreign Service and, although entry and subsequent promotion is supposedly based on merit, the lack of formal structures could negatively affect the MFA in future.<sup>193</sup> From the foreign donor perspective, a very modest amount of technical assistance to the MFA in the form of short-term training programs would greatly assist the Ministry whose Soviet era leading cadres are beginning to retire, enter politics, or go onto greater things in the UN system after over a decade of independence.

#### *Other ministries and local administration*

The Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry by no means has a monopoly on foreign contacts and interaction with the wider world inside the government apparatus. This needs to be factored in, especially in the context of small state foreign policy behavior. Avenues for other government interactions occur on two levels. Firstly, there are ministries whose competency involves foreign affairs by definition, such as, for example, the Ministries of Foreign Economic Relations and Defense. On the other hand is the plethora of international contacts afforded to other ministries with tangential relevance to the external world by foreign donor assistance programs. These institutions do not set policy, but certainly in their interactions with the international

---

<sup>193</sup> Cholponkulova, *Kontitutsionnye Osnovy*, 144.

community from a functional perspective, they have furthered a distinct atmosphere of internationalization helping erode the sense of isolation Kyrgyzstan felt in the early 1990s. As we noted, the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry receives comparatively little foreign aid and has not been subject intensive donor restructuring efforts as a new institution, as well as a very sensitive one from the point of view of sovereignty. By contrast the list of ministries and state commissions working with some arm of the international community on extensive institutional reform projects are myriad and would be too long to recount in detail here. A sufficient example to illustrate my point is the Ministry of Disasters and Emergencies.

An alarming legacy of Soviet uranium mining in the Kirghiz SSR was enormous, wobbly hillocks of uranium tailings precariously poised near vital watershed regions in the south. The government had lobbied the international community since 1999 for funds to clean up and stabilize the tailings located at Mailu Suu near Osh. Earthquakes and mudslides created a worse-case scenario of hundreds of thousands of tons of uranium tailings sliding into the Aral Sea basin. In 2003 the World Bank (IDA) overcame internal opposition to becoming in any way involved in an aspect of the post-Soviet nuclear industry, and committed itself to surveying for a potential project. In 2004 the project was approved, mainly using Japanese funding, to clean up a small area of the tailings, and also to provide resources to restructure the Ministry of Emergencies as a pilot project into which other international donors could subsequently be brought on board to enlarge the process.

Unchaperoned by the Foreign Ministry or the Presidential Administration, mid-level officials of the Ministry were in weekly contact with the Bank in

Washington DC to discuss details of the projects, as well as hosting frequent delegations. For some ministry officials this was their first time dealing with representatives of the international community. The issue of World Bank projects in Kyrgyzstan, donor funding and the mess left by Soviet uranium mining in the south is another long story. For our purposes it is illustrative that even an internally-focused Ministry was busy in 2004 with a schedule of meetings and interactions with the OSCE, the World Bank, the Japanese Embassy and delegations from the neighboring province of Uzbekistan.

In addition to ministries remote from foreign policymaking yet still enjoying greater foreign interaction due to the erosion of Kyrgyzstan's Soviet isolation, are the intelligence services. As reviewed in the context of nation-building in Chapter Three, the military has eschewed a role in politics. This is not true, however, of the National Security Service (NSS) the KGB's successor in Kyrgyzstan. Although shadowy and difficult to obtain information about by definition, the agency is widely seen as being pro-Russian and anxious to impede democratization. Many former KGB staffers were active in prominent positions in Kyrgyzstan, as seen in the career of the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Abdymomunov. This despite the fact that Abdymomunov himself was scathing about the role of the NSS in the context of the Parliamentary wire tap scandal in January 2004, when it emerged that the NSS had bugged Parliamentary offices of opposition leaders. The Kyrgyz successor organ has a reputation for representing pro-Russian interests and was especially concerned by the arrival of US forces in 2002. Despite that in the past couple of years, it seems to have been galvanized by the new international profile of Kyrgyzstan to seek a more public

profile and, in an odd turnaround, has actually become more supportive of the Coalition presence. Recently it was prominent in claiming to foil various attacks on the US airbase at Manas from purported plots by religious extremists. In July 2004 it arrested several bureaucrats on espionage charges for selling confidential state documents to an unnamed foreign power.

All seven oblasts (provinces) of Kyrgyzstan now have international frontiers and, as such, the necessity for oblast administrations (*akimiyats*) to deal with their equivalents across an international border has become a prominent feature of local government activity particularly in the three Ferghana oblasts (Batken, Jalal-Abad and Osh). In the case of the Ferghana, a hitherto internal boundary is now external and, in the case of China, an external boundary is largely unmediated by Moscow. Contacts occur on a range of levels including formal protests to neighbors that are not channeled through Bishkek. A case in point was the Osh regional government's acerbic statement on the 2003 Uzbek shooting of Kyrgyz nationals in the frontier town of Ak Suu. Examples of more confrontational actions are seen in episodes where local police and authorities have arrested Uzbek police or military who strayed onto Kyrgyz territory; on other occasions they have colluded with them. During the Tajik civil war, for instance, Bishkek's neutrality policy was challenged by the Jalal-Abad *Akimiyat* whose Deputy-Governor, against the wishes of the central government, allowed the Tajik opposition to import flour into regions they controlled to forestall famine in the mid 1990s.<sup>194</sup>

---

<sup>194</sup> Amurbek Tekebayev, Chairman of Ata-Meken Party, interview with author, 6 February 2004, Bishkek.

*Think tanks, institutes and universities*

Efforts to start independent entities studying foreign affairs with policy orientations and recommendations have been halting. Academics and retired government officials have indeed founded some, but their orientation and the constituency served is really the external English-speaking academic and policy world and, as such, have negligible influence on internal policy debate or formation within Kyrgyzstan itself. Extreme scarcity of funding for these endeavors is another obstacle. One example in Bishkek would be the Institute for Regional Studies, headed by Anara Tabyshalieva, a Kyrgyz political scientist working on topics of interest to the Washington policy community. In fact she is more usually resident in Washington as a research fellow at the Johns Hopkins Central Asia and Caucasus Institute. Muratbek Imanaliev tried to start a think tank in 2002 upon his departure from the Foreign Ministry. The Foundation for the Future, staffed with a returning Kyrgyz Fulbright scholar, had a promising agenda focused on political economy and starting scholarship and debate on issues such as Kyrgyzstan's WTO membership. Unfortunately, for lack of funds it closed its doors in 2003.

In the Soviet era there had been a monopoly on the academic study of international affairs, the study of which was restricted to two institutes, Moscow and Kiev state universities. The legacy of this is that upon independence there were no such programs in Kyrgyz universities (or indeed, anywhere else in Central Asia). A decade on most universities offer programs, but tend to suffer from reproduction of the Soviet conception of international studies: essentially diplomatic history, languages and protocol. Most programs are of limited value excepting one at the American

University-Central Asia offering an American curriculum and teaching methodology. A generation of Kyrgyz students who have studied abroad independently or on various exchange programs, including political science and international affairs, are slowly trickling back, but mainly into the private sector or well-paying international organizations rather than academia or government.<sup>195</sup> The picture is slowly beginning to change for the better after a decade, but the net effect is still that a strong academic/policy community has yet to coalesce either in universities, think tanks or the media that could really engage public debate in foreign policy.

#### *Opposition political parties in Kyrgyzstan*

In looking at the evolution and existence of Kyrgyz foreign policy, we must also take into account the potential role of political parties in Kyrgyzstan. This is especially the case given the new government in power from March 2005 that contains many figures from the old anti-Akaev opposition. The political spectrum of Kyrgyz opposition politics during the Akaev era, if there was such a thing, could be described as a collection of splintered social-democratic parties with an overlay of nationalist and regionalist-nationalist sympathies straddling the left and center-left of the spectrum. On the political center-right was the government-sponsored political coalition. In 2003-04 Akaev's network copied the example of the plethora of moderate nationalist, centre-left parties composing most of the opposition by forming a bloc,

---

<sup>195</sup> For an analysis of the impact of US-sponsored educational exchanges, see David Mikosz "Academic Exchange Programs in Central Asia: the First Eight Years," in *The Challenges of Education in Central Asia*, ed. Stephen P. Heyneman and Alan J. De Young (Greenwich CT: Information Age Publishing, 2003), 113-130. As Mikosz points out, records are imperfect as the US contractors (IREX, ACTR etc.) have failed to keep adequate track of alumni, so indicators of subsequent career choices are rough.

*Alga-Kyrgyzstan*. In the event composed of businessmen supportive of the regime for mercenary reasons and with little local political influence, it rapidly collapsed during the upheavals of March 2005. Further right is the opposition Ar-Namyz Party and, in terms of conservatism, the unreconstructed Kyrgyz Communists guard the far right wing. Kyrgyzstan is fairly typical of post-communist states in having an inverted spectrum where the former communists emerge as ultra-conservatives.

Kyrgyzstan is frequently mentioned as the most liberal state in Central Asia wherein political opposition is comparatively lively and dynamic. In reality political parties in Kyrgyzstan since 1991 suffered from exactly the same problems as their counterparts in neighboring states, up to and including harassment and proscription from the Akaev regime. The main difference was that opposition political parties continued to exist in Kyrgyzstan as independent functioning organizations, as is currently not the case in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. The persistence of a political opposition in Kyrgyzstan during the Akaev era was partially due to the overall weakness of the state and inability to coerce, and partially that the fragmented opposition represented little overt, formal threat to the regime most of the time until 2002 and indeed supported its claim of vibrant democracy in the country.

Political parties in Kyrgyzstan tend to have the following characteristics: a tendency to splinter, to be based on regions or sub regions, and to be focused on individuals, reinforcing the splinter tendency when personalities squabble over leadership. Institutionalization is usually extremely poor, and in main the parties have very low levels of grassroots membership outside of the family or clan connections associated with the leadership, although some parties represent Soviet era power

networks that have suffered comparative disadvantage, such as the tendency for Ar-Namyz, for example, to draw support from former members of the security apparatus and police force. Funding is also another difficulty as there is no tradition of donating to political parties or paying for party membership.<sup>196</sup> Numerous opposition centrist parties with similar platforms tried to ally in strategic coalitions and blocs for the February 2005 Parliamentary elections. However, this resulted only in several different blocs further confusing the electorate. This even increased the willingness of frustrated Kyrgyz to take to the streets and directly confront the regime outside of the electoral process as many average Kyrgyz came to view formal electoral party-based politics as a waste of time.

With respect to their foreign policy platforms a common characteristic of all opposition political groups in Kyrgyzstan, even with some now in power, is the absence of a coherent alternative to the foreign policy developed under the Akaev regime, although they had frequently described it as authoritarian and lacking transparency. Interviewing major opposition political party leaders before 2005, what emerged was little in the way of any foreign policy agenda or thinking beyond broadly endorsing the course charted by the Akaev government despite condemning the manner of its execution. Moreover Kyrgyz politicians' adherence to Soviet foreign policy precepts strongly suggests that none of the opposition parties' platforms have the potential to alter Kyrgyz external policy when in power with the possible exception, ironically enough, of the Communists. The Kyrgyz Communist Party is one

---

<sup>196</sup> In this climate, the work of American democratization agencies such as the National Democratic Institute (NDI) with opposition political parties in the form of trainings, workshops, trips abroad etc. was viewed by many both within and without the Akaev regime as unfair foreign interference in domestic politics.

of the few Kyrgyz political parties with extensive legitimacy, taking forty-eight percent of the vote in the 2002 Parliamentary Elections (although its Parliamentary base was removed in the 2005 elections). It has a powerful claim to a track record of organization and achievement in the Soviet context. Compared to other party leaders I spoke with, the Communists offered a coherent foreign policy alternative along with a thoughtful critique of the failure of development since independence. Their foreign policy remains an official commitment to internationalism, non-alignment and broadly speaking leans the closest to neutrality of any party.<sup>197</sup>

All political parties I contacted, however, happily offered blistering critiques of the foreign policy record of the Akaev regime even if they did not have a well-articulated foreign policy stance to back up their arguments. Their criticisms tended to reflect their regional preoccupations and concerns with nearby frontier delimitation issues. For example the Chairman of the Ata-Meken party, a centrist, liberal, nationalist-revival party with strong ties to the Jalal-Abad oblast, emphasized the way in which the incursions from Tajikistan in 1999-2000 were not so much tied to Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda and the Taliban as the regime claimed at the time. In fact, he asserted, they were the product of inept meddling in the Tajik civil war wherein the government had allowed various factions to use Kyrgyz territory at the time. This created a problem that was to revisit Kyrgyzstan following the resolution of the Tajik civil war, wherein unemployed gunmen acquired experience operating in southern

---

<sup>197</sup> Orozbek Duysheev, Deputy Chairman of the Kyrgyz Communist Party, interview with author, 5 February 2004, Bishkek.

Kyrgyzstan during the fighting and a desire to return motivated by the lucrative drug trade in the region.<sup>198</sup>

Seen in context, this lack of foreign policy thinking is not unexpected. Domestic opposition parties during the Akaev era were preoccupied by daily realities of political harassment, administering parties in a society with little understanding or interest in multi-party politics and contesting elections in an environment where the government monopolized media and other resources to drown out their campaigns. Public uncertainty regarding what Kyrgyz foreign policy actually consists of contributed to sparse analysis by the political opposition on alternatives beyond reactions to particular foreign policy episodes. Excepting the Kyrgyz Communist's vision of non-alignment and rejection of alliances apart from close ties with former Soviet states, the major opposition parties were unlikely to challenge radically the path that Kyrgyz foreign policy has so far taken, and now opposition figures are in power we should argue that this will continue. This is partially a function of inexperience and lack of alternative, and partially because none of them, the Communists excepted, had a radically differing notion of foreign policy and the national interest to offer. Additionally, shedding the carefree mantle of opposition and reinvented as the new Kyrgyz government in 2005, the former opposition found itself dealing with exactly the same international realities and responsibilities of its predecessor, and was quick to reassure the international community that there would be no changes to Bishkek's foreign policy and international commitments.

---

<sup>198</sup> Amurbek Tekebaev, Chairman of Ata-Meken Party, interview with author, 3 February 2004, Bishkek.

*The sources of Kyrgyz foreign policy*

We have examined the constitutional impact on foreign policy and outlined the institutional shape of the Kyrgyz MFA, as well as the lack of alternatives sited in the political opposition. By the late 1990s the Akaev regime began to systematize thinking on foreign policy in a more strategic manner than simply putting efforts into maintaining Soviet era international agreements, forging numerous bilateral relationships or relying on the coordinating role of the Foreign Ministry in foreign policy matters. The period immediately after independence focused on institution-building and reliance upon breathing life into regional institutions essentially as a stop gap measure to buy time while nursing the MFA and policy apparatus to a stage where they could manage the challenges of rebuilding a regional state system. Since then however, there were several attempts by the Akaev regime to articulate the broad parameters of foreign policy in Kyrgyzstan.

It can be argued that these codifications were largely symbolic, given the pragmatic inclination of many foreign policy actors in Kyrgyzstan. On the other hand, specific declarations and sources were frequently referred to by Akaevite foreign policy actors, and are often quoted in public discourse. In that sense they can be seen as having a genuine impact on the thinking of contemporary external affairs officials in Kyrgyzstan. At the very least, they form the backdrop of consciousness even if they are too inchoate to support a well-fleshed out road map. Officially the established founding documents of Kyrgyz foreign policy include the Declaration of Sovereignty, the 1993 Constitution, the 1997 Presidential Decree confirming the coordinating role

of the MFA in foreign policy and the 1999 *Diplomacy of the Silk Road Doctrine*.<sup>199</sup> The 2002 Presidential Speech on Foreign Affairs and Murat Imanaliev's writing on Kyrgyz foreign policy in *Ocherki o Vneshney Politike Kirgizstani* are also key foreign policy statements that we need to take into account.

The most publicized and oft-cited foreign policy statement in Kyrgyzstan is the *Doctrine of Silk Road Diplomacy (Jibek Jolu Diplomatiyasi Jonundo Doktrinasi)*. It was been translated in several languages, including English, and is widely accessible on several Kyrgyz government and related web sites as the official foreign policy doctrine of the country.<sup>200</sup> The Silk Road Doctrine, most probably a collective effort worked on by Imanaliev and Aitmatov as well as Akaev himself, sets forth a series of guiding principles around which Kyrgyz foreign policy is conducted. Since it was closely identified with the personage of Akaev himself, it will doubtless be revamped by the new regime, although it is unlikely, for reasons we have discussed above, to be completely abandoned. Broadly speaking this brief statement, no more than thirteen pages, argued for the restoration of the Silk Road as a mechanism to bind Kyrgyzstan regionally to other parts of Eurasia and the former Soviet Union. It also committed the country to a multilateral foreign policy founded on regional cooperation and collective action. Kyrgyzstan is a microcosm of the Silk Road, the Doctrine argued, due its peaceful multi ethnic character; at once European and Asian. This imbued it with: "the rich spiritual heritage of the East and the West."<sup>201</sup> The *Silk Road Doctrine* was held

---

<sup>199</sup> Lidya Imanalieva, "Tishki Siyasat", in *Kyrgyzstan Entsiklopediasi*, (Bishkek: Mamlakettik Til jana Entsiklopedia Borboru, 2001), 252.

<sup>200</sup> The version I consulted for the purposes of this discussion is a print edition available in English: Askar Akaev, *The Diplomacy of the Silk Road (A Foreign Policy Doctrine)*, (New York: Global Scholarly Publications, 2004).

<sup>201</sup> Akaev, *Silk Road Doctrine*, 4.

up by the Akaev regime as the international equivalent of the “Kyrgyzstan – Our Common Home” Doctrine (*Nash Obsitsia Dom*). The interethnic harmony flowing from this policy, it was argued, renders Kyrgyzstan a keystone in the Silk Road mosaic.<sup>202</sup>

Kyrgyzstan’s commitment to collective action, the Doctrine further advocated, was necessitated by the common cultural heritage with its immediate neighbors, but also by a shared stance against “extremism,” narcotics trafficking and terrorism.<sup>203</sup> Kyrgyz potential to forge linkages with South East Asia on one side and Europe, broadly defined, on the other made it a valuable bridge. In the Doctrine, the nation’s disadvantages yielded only positive possibilities. As a poor country Kyrgyzstan could contribute to collective diplomacy in the wider bloc of developing nations. As a landlocked developing country it even had an imperative to try and connect to the maritime Asian periphery, echoing Mongolian efforts in the 1990s to find a secure route to the sea. From a security perspective, the Silk Road Doctrine committed Kyrgyzstan to dismantle defense-related industries and the legacy of uranium production and processing.<sup>204</sup>

These broad ideas articulated the driving force behind Kyrgyz foreign policy efforts to 2005. Regional stability was necessary to reintegrate Kyrgyzstan and her neighbors into the Eurasian economic system, more broadly imagined here than simply the former Soviet space. Only this could help Kyrgyzstan and the region overcome the litany of transnational challenges facing them such as narcotic and human trafficking, terrorism and natural disasters. At the same time, the Doctrine

---

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 6.

recognized that the “single whole” that used to characterize the “common historical, political, economic...links” with neighboring countries now had to be replaced by a fresh network of bilateral and multilateral relations. This engendered the document’s firm ongoing commitment to the CIS and search for regional integration.<sup>205</sup>

The *Doctrine of the Silk Road* is unlikely to be much-remembered outside of Kyrgyzstan as a key foreign policy statement of the late twentieth century, couched as it is in the platitudinous and turgid language of Soviet diplomatic statements. However, it represented an effort by the Akaev regime to try to articulate the broader philosophical framework behind a foreign policy, the perceived absence of which had attracted domestic criticism. In a sense the government riposte was that broad regional goals are exactly what Kyrgyz policy strived for. Certainly, appealing to a common regional heritage via invoking the glories of the ancient Silk Road seem more likely to motivate and conciliate her near neighbors than appeals to other commonalities such as their Soviet, Islamic or Turco-Persian heritage. Simultaneously it also conveniently allowed for the inclusion of non-Soviet neighbors who were also more-or-less part of the ancient trade route; China, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and India.

All Central Asian states are trying to attract outside investment and aid to rebuild transport infrastructure on East-West and North-South axes. The *Silk Road Doctrine* supplied a fairly bland inspirational metaphor uncontroversial for neighbors with hegemonic tendencies such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Kyrgyzstan is an unlikely route for oil pipelines. Kazakh supply to the burgeoning Chinese market is routed far more easily directly into China through the Kazakh Tzungerian gap area.

---

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 7. This was contradicted by Kyrgyz moves in 2003 and 2004 to resume uranium processing in partnership with Russia and Germany, and its overtures to reopen mothballed defense plants in tandem with the Russian Ministry of Defense in 2004.

However oil and gas deposits, (c. 50 million metric tons), were discovered in Kyrgyzstan in 1999-2000 by a Canadian firm in the Alai valley of the Naryn plateau. The Kyrgyz Government granted the concession in June 2004 to a Chinese company, holding out the possibility that Kyrgyzstan itself may one day export modest quantities of oil to China, although hosting pipeline spurs is less likely. The shortest route for rail and road links connecting the populous Uzbek Ferghana and Uzbekistan to China is by crossing Kyrgyzstan's south. This is perfectly feasible from an engineering standpoint as several passes and plateaus pave the way. The Chinese railhead was recently extended to Urumchi in 2000 with the Urumchi-Kashgar portion nearing completion now. It is planned to join this up with a new line traversing Southern Kyrgyzstan into Osh, and then on into the Uzbek Ferghana.

Along with the rallying cry of reconstructing the Silk Road went a firm commitment in the Doctrine to the maintenance of sovereignty. One plank in particular emphasized equitable partnership and the idea of territorial integrity and the sanctity of borders – a frank expression of Kyrgyzstan's concern at being enmeshed in complex border disputes with all of her neighbors simultaneously since 1991. Underlying this stress on sovereignty was an old fashioned balance-of-power argument; that stated a regional subsystem needed to be kept in some form of equilibrium. In the Kyrgyz foreign policy view, this was to be supplied by economic interdependence and in mutual security and diplomacy. Imanaliev, commenting on the Silk Road Doctrine in his writing on Kyrgyz Foreign Policy, *Ocherki O Vneshney Politike Kyrgyzstana*, argued: "...positive liberalism of external relations is the opposite of conservatism...we are not supporting facts of power as the main arbiter of

relations. Balance of power is the universal regulator of relations between countries...” (“...*Mi schitaem, shto v tselom sozdana blavopriyatnaya dlya mirnogo techenia mejdunarodnii otnoshenii sreda...*”).<sup>206</sup> In other words, Imanaliev stressed the necessity for a balance-of-power rooted in liberalism, (defined as accession to values of the West), to prevail and be seen as the real foundation of Kyrgyz foreign policy doctrine, even if the balance is achieved by interdependence rather than military parity as in the past.

Imanaliev valued the *Doctrine* for assisting Kyrgyzstan in overcoming two crucial problems that he defined. One is that Kyrgyzstan must become closer to democratic states and secure foreign aid. The second issue he sees as establishing security on Kyrgyzstan’s southern borders; widely interpreted to mean China, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The two are reconcilable as Kyrgyzstan can become a bridge uniting a wider Eurasian geopolitical community from Portugal to China. This is reflected in restoration of transport, rail and pipeline linkages. Kyrgyzstan’s internal cultural values, including the commitment to civic nationalism and a multiethnic state, are to inspire her reintegration internationally.<sup>207</sup>

The *Silk Road Doctrine* was oft trumpeted by the Akaev regime and prefaced most official foreign policy pronouncements, but it is not alone. Published in Russian and Kyrgyz and unnoticed by foreign analysts was Akaev’s *Address to Parliament*, 7 May 2002. This was a long foreign policy speech outlining the justification for Kyrgyzstan’s participation in the Anti-terrorist coalition in 2002 and the subsequent

---

<sup>206</sup> Imanaliev *Ocherki o Bneshney Politka*, 56.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

leasing of an airbase to the American military.<sup>208</sup> This is worth examining in detail, for there the regime presented a well-thought out exposition of how its admission of US and Anti-Terror Coalition forces in 2002 was, from its viewpoint, a logical continuation of previous foreign policy. It clarified that these recent events did not, in fact, indicate a Kyrgyz move away from the orbit of Russia and the CIS. Furthermore, the speech deftly tried to tie Kyrgyzstan's involvement in the Coalition directly with relations with China, and present all as part of the same coherent package.

The timing of the speech is highly significant. In May of 2002 the regime was facing an intense domestic scandal played out in the press, political demonstrations and protests, due to revelations concerning border transfers to China following a secret deal that had not been approved by Parliament. This had become further wrapped up in a domestic political conflict wherein the leader of the opposition Asaba Party, Beknazarov, led protests regarding the territorial settlement supported by his southern constituents. The supposed cession to China of parcels of territory in the east of the country was thought by many to foreshadow possible further concessions to Uzbekistan.

Many discontented Kyrgyz agreed with this sentiment that the government was not being aggressive enough in border negotiations. In 2002 in allowing the US to lease an airbase, the regime needed to counter the popular perception in Kyrgyzstan that this represented a major foreign policy shift. Yet it also had to cope with the consequences that this other major foreign policy crisis might have on relations with China and the recent frontier agreements. The two crises seemed set to bring down the

---

<sup>208</sup> Askar Akaev, *Kyrgyzstan Özgörülgön Düyñödö: Kyrgyz Respublikasının Prezidenti Askar Akaevdin Kyrgyz Respublikasının Jogorku Kengeshinin Kosh Palatasının Birgeleshken Jyymında Süylögön Sözü (7 Mai 2002 Jil)*, (Bishkek: Uchkun, 2002).

government, whose nightmare was common cause between opponents of the US airbase and those protesting cession of territory.

The speech attempted to calm a nervous Parliament by clarifying Kyrgyzstan's role in the Afghanistan Coalition, and ventured to address Government action over the Ak Su massacre. The regime argued that its handling of relations with China over the border agreements had been an integral part of their emerging foreign policy strategy. As such this claim illustrates very well how the trends discussed above were beginning to gel into a roadmap for Kyrgyz foreign policy elites for handling major international crises that impinged directly on Kyrgyzstan's security. The speech advanced several important thematic arguments for Kyrgyzstan's participation in the coalition.

The address began by stressing that Kyrgyzstan's membership in the Coalition was done in full consultation with, and assent of, Russia and her regional partners. Akaev noted that even prior to the September 2001 events that struck the US, Russia and Kyrgyzstan were already struggling against terrorism from an unstable south. Russia had grappled with Chechnya, and Kyrgyzstan combated terror that emanated from Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Thus the CIS bloc had anticipated the post 2001 security preoccupations of the world community, and the United States in particular, through its far-sighted engagement of global terrorism. Kyrgyzstan would continue to be a "reliable regional partner" for Russia, holding fast to strategic declarations of friendship and partnership ("*...Kyrgyzstan bil, est y budet nadejnim strategicheskim partnerom soyuznikom Rossii, tverdo priverjennim deklaratsii o vechnoi drujbe, soyuznichestva y partnerstva...*").<sup>209</sup> The speech carefully implied the timing of

---

<sup>209</sup> Akaev, *Kyrgyzstan B Izmeniyshemsia Mire*, 18.

Kyrgyzstan's decision to join the coalition as being in lockstep with Russian encouragement to do so.

Russia aside, Akaev argued that Kyrgyzstan's participation in the Coalition represented a logical continuation of her lone anti-terror efforts that had been pointedly ignored by the international community before the events of September 2001. Akaev stressed that when they were warning the world of the new threat, the world did not listen to Kyrgyzstan before 2001 (“...*Nashi obrasheniya k mirovomu soobshestvu, preduprejdeniya o novoi ugroze, kotoraya sposobna priobresti globalniy karakter, v polnoi mere togda ne byli uslyshany...*”).<sup>210</sup> This is symptomatic of the bitter memories Kyrgyz leaders had of the lukewarm international response garnered from the West, as well as the CIS, following their appeals for aid when they were battling southern incursions from elements of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in 1999 and 2000 from Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

One other major thematic objective in the speech was to stress the small state benefits that accrued from participation in the Afghan Coalition. Akaev argued that their involvement increased Kyrgyz bargaining power for debt reduction, for foreign aid and more importantly, perhaps, her general diplomatic profile in general. Akaev recounted how Kyrgyzstan had been rewarded with restructuring of her considerable foreign debts by the Paris Club (“...*O visikoy otsenke mirovim soobshestvom nashey pozitsii ubeditelino svidetelstvuet prinyatoe «Parijskim Klubom» reshenie o restrukturizatsii nashih dolgov na samyh vigodnih dlya Kyrgyzstana usloviah...*”).<sup>211</sup>

---

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 19.

Recalling recent state visits to Germany, Sweden and Turkey, he sensed that Kyrgyz participation in the Coalition had enhanced its stature with these powers.

The next strand interpolated through the sixteen page speech was that an active Kyrgyzstan would serve as a conduit to involve her new friend and strategic great power partner China in the Afghan Coalition. Akaev argued that China was the missing piece in two existing vectors of Kyrgyz foreign policy. Bishkek's good offices and partnership with China would in turn help the Coalition enlist China, contiguous to Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan, in balancing the Afghan equation.<sup>212</sup> The speech then moved away from the subject of the Afghan coalition to address the thorny issue of the political disagreement over the Chinese border negotiations, examined in detail in Chapter Seven below.

To lend substance to the idea that membership in the Coalition was a logical continuation of pre-existing foreign policy initiatives was the argument that it afforded a mechanism for advancing the diplomacy of the *Silk Road Doctrine*. Akaev argued that the pre-existing doctrine perfectly suited the new international circumstances. This further validated Kyrgyzstan's decision to become part of the Coalition (“...*ideii doktrinii «Belikiy Shelkoviy Put» predusmotrennii v ney proekti v picalis ninii v mejdunarodniya jizn, obrely nadlejetsee mesta...*”).<sup>213</sup>

Specifically, the priority within the doctrine given to the revamping of transport infrastructure, Akaev noted, is reflected not only in the American refurbishment and upgrading of the Manas airfield near Bishkek, but also seen in Japanese investment in the ongoing construction of the key Bishkek-Osh highway that

---

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 20.

will finally connect the two halves of the country. He did not add that it will obviate the necessity for crossing Uzbek territory in the process. A spur of the Bishkek-Osh highway would further Central Asian regional integration by connecting the isolated Ngorno-Badakshan Oblast of Tajikistan to a good north-south highway system. Badakshan is very near China's Karakorum highway, and he mused, a better connection to it from Central Asia would be another conduit for Afghan post-war reconstruction ("*...kotoria budit prodoljena do Xoroga...*").<sup>214</sup> Related to his argument on the revitalization of transport infrastructure that could be brought about by Coalition membership, he advanced that a renewed interest and focus on Central Asia could lead to the revitalization of dysfunctional regional organizations. Perhaps, he mused, this would spur the renaissance of the Economic Cooperation Organization, the latest in a long line of failed integration initiatives among the five Central Asian republics.

Akaev concluded the 2002 speech with a long exhortation warning that domestic harmony is necessary for a coherent foreign policy and that domestic disharmony indeed gave the foreign community a murky impression of Kyrgyzstan and undermined its foreign policy efforts.<sup>215</sup> Akaev blamed populist politicians for the unrest but promised that the Ak Su events will be thoroughly looked into by a commission (in the event the report of the commission was a whitewash). Akaev also singled out his own bureaucracy for some criticism pointing to the tendency of Kyrgyz foreign policy actors not to coordinate on foreign policy matters.

---

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 29.

The speech represented a remarkable effort to lend coherency to the twists and turns of Kyrgyz foreign policy in the 1990s. It rationalized the decision to join the Coalition as a logical continuation of, rather than a massive shift in, Kyrgyz foreign policy direction. The *Silk Road Doctrine* could soldier on unchallenged as the lodestar of the Kyrgyz foreign policy map. Its agenda would be all the better served for the increased amount of foreign aid that Kyrgyzstan would receive and her improved international profile in bilateral and multilateral diplomacy.

The immense significance of this speech lay in the elements mustered in the argument. The idea of a great power triage of the US, Russia and China as the necessary world power triangulation in Kyrgyz affairs is a frank statement of the use of great power involvement in order to underpin Kyrgyz sovereignty and rebuild the regional state system. The assertion that the *Diplomacy of the Silk Road Doctrine* supplied a pre-existing framework for addressing the emergent security landscape in Central Asia showed an effort to view Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy challenges in the context of some sort of roadmap. The opportunities for Kyrgyzstan to raise its international profile as a prominent regional small state presaged her aims as become a small but important part of a regional security area stabilized by great power involvement.

The next foreign policy source is, by contrast, an unwritten, procedural geo-strategic approach, almost a rule of thumb, that evolved within the MFA. It compliments the more sophisticated strategizing of official foreign policy pronouncements such as the *Silk Road Doctrine*, and later, Akaev's *Kyrgyzstan B*

*Izmenivshemsia Mira* speech to Parliament.<sup>216</sup> Unelaborated as a doctrine, it demonstrated the preoccupation of Kyrgyz with triangulating their security and the application of Soviet foreign policy conceptions of regional systems in international affairs. This approach, reflected in the thinking behind the two major foreign policy statements, envisions around Kyrgyzstan three concentric circles of states crucial to her security and stability.

The first circle consists of the immediately contiguous Central Asian neighbors and more broadly the rest of the former Soviet space. This represents the most immediate challenge in the construction of a stable regional state system. The second concentric circle is composed of Turkey, China, Iran and other non-Soviet states that Kyrgyzstan regards as key to her regional security interests and potential anchors for a new post-Soviet regional state system. The third circle consists of the EU and North America; able to exercise influence through provision of foreign aid principally, although the importance of the United States changed as its geo-strategic engagement in the region changed dramatically after 2001. The three concentric circles, a conceptual hierarchy of proximity and strategic importance for Kyrgyz foreign policy actors, could be well compared to the Soviet template from which it is ultimately derived, of the Soviet East European satellite and allied states, nonaligned sympathetic states and the rest of the world.

The priority of Kyrgyz foreign policy towards the inner circle of CIS countries is to develop remaining cultural ties and a common cultural space. This gives the CIS special prominence in Kyrgyz diplomacy as a forum for maintaining close links with all former Soviet States and especially Russia, the *primes inter pares*. The key

---

<sup>216</sup> Ambassador Muratbek Imanaliev, interview with author, 15 August 2002, Bishkek.

objective is for the preservation of Russian language and culture in a common area, something of particular concern to state elites who are overwhelmingly Russophone and often educated at Moscow State University and other prominent Soviet-era institutions.<sup>217</sup>

This conceptual geography in Kyrgyz official thinking on foreign policy is geared to proximities. Priorities consist of “securing good relationships with the closest states;” or put another way, regional stability. The need for Kyrgyzstan, as Imanaliev put it, is: “always to be half a step ahead of its neighbors.” This relates to her ultimate weakness in the region: “...foreign policy activities should be predicated on the realization that Kyrgyzstan is a weak state considered from all viewpoints, demographic, economic, and political...” Consciousness of state weakness and its vulnerability in the context of the search for stability and security informs Kyrgyz foreign policy practice.<sup>218</sup>

### *Conclusion*

We have surveyed institutional formation and strategic thinking that contributed to foreign policy formation in Kyrgyzstan during the Akaev era. There was also minor input from ancillary players such as Parliament and organizations such as the State Security Service. The whole was underpinned by skimpy but important policy-guiding statements. All contributed to a foreign policy reliant on a traditional Soviet balance of power view, wherein bilateral relations are foremost. International organizations were viewed mainly for their value of representing a chance to improve

---

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

relations with whichever state is ascendant in the organization, be it Russia in the CIS, or China in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, (SCO). In 2004 Foreign Minister Aitmatov summed up the approach: ...“not all countries like Kyrgyzstan manage to maintain balanced relations with states having their own interests in our region”...<sup>219</sup>

The traditional Soviet origins of Kyrgyz geopolitical thinking also contributed to weaknesses in effectively exploiting the membership of regional groupings, although this is slowly beginning to change as Kyrgyz leaders saw possibilities for small state band-wagoning. Examples are the Kyrgyz rapprochement with Tajikistan from 2002-2004 or the behind-the-scenes promotion explained to me by the Deputy Foreign Minister of Mongolian membership of the SCO in order to increase the number of Eurasian small states represented.<sup>220</sup>

Comparatively, Kyrgyz foreign policy has equivalents within the post-Soviet sphere. Possessing a Soviet-influenced foreign policy direction in tandem with the growth of an increasingly self-realized small state behavior template, it has much in common with Moldova and the Caucasus, Georgia and Azerbaijan. Yet again, the greatly differing geo-political challenges among this group limit the utility of comparing their foreign policies too far. Arguably, small states of the former Soviet Union which have developed pragmatic foreign policy establishments in contradistinction to establishments broadly informed by the nation-building process, have compelling external motives to do so. For instance, Estonia and Latvia's desire for full acceptance by the EU led them to soften their hard-line stance on minority rights since the mid-1990s.

---

<sup>219</sup> Ambassador Askar Aitmatov, interviewed in *Vecherniy Bishkek*, 9 March 2004.

<sup>220</sup> Deputy Foreign Minister Lydia Imanalieva, interview by author, 5 February 2004, Bishkek.

In this chapter we have seen that despite the poor job that Kyrgyz elites did in explaining Kyrgyz foreign policy to their own public during the Akaev regime, yet it developed in a coherent and systematized form. It was based on a framework of institutions, cadres, attitudes and policy statements. It was very much a presidential foreign policy, yet lent structure and coherency by key Soviet-era personnel. They, in turn, drew from their prior experience with Soviet diplomacy and international affairs a predilection for symmetry and hierarchy as well as a deep yearning for stability.

The first generation of independence established a foreign policy framework that will have a palpable influence on future Kyrgyz regimes, whether democratic or autocratic after 2005. It is unlikely to be radically altered given the confluence of foreign policy interests, small state behavior, nation-building challenges and the background of the bureaucracies involved. Conversely, even if democratization takes root and Parliament becomes more effective, the strong predisposition of the system toward presidentialism is likely to remain. In that case, the Presidential Administration and the MFA will doubtless continue to dominate foreign relations and the overall framework of policy.

## CHAPTER 5: KYRGYZSTAN'S INNER CIRCLE

In the previous chapter we examined the institutions supporting, and major policy sources of, what could arguably be labeled an evolving and coherent Kyrgyz foreign policy and strategic outlook under the Akaev presidency. In this chapter we shall turn to look at the application of this policy to the actual dynamics of bilateral relations with its regional neighbors, Uzbekistan, Russia, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan up to the end of 2004. Continuing Kyrgyzstan's diplomatic response to challenges of bilateral relations in the next chapter, I will then focus on more distant states that Kyrgyzstan has tried particularly to engage through its international diplomacy during the Akaev era, Turkey and Iran, and the United States. China, I deal with separately in Chapter Seven below.

As we touched on previously, Kyrgyzstan has found that regional integration, arguably the easiest route for assuring the security of a small and weak state, was difficult as Soviet dissolution disrupted interest asymmetries between Kyrgyzstan and its former Soviet neighbors. As it became apparent that these could not be realigned by building upon the common Soviet past, throughout the 1990s Kyrgyz foreign policy actors shifted to a balancing approach rooted in Soviet foreign policy procedure (integration internally, but balance externally). Soviet foreign policy methods, previously applied to the wider world, now had to be adapted for use in regulating the

post-collapse state system. In this approach, foreign policy goals were achieved through issue oriented, strategic, shifting alliances. By virtue of isolation and regional geopolitical instability, it should be stressed that Kyrgyzstan had fewer options open to it than other small states emergent from the Former Soviet Union; such as the Baltic States for example. Throughout the 1990s, Kyrgyzstan had to balance post-imperial dysfunctional relations with near neighbors as compared to forging strong relations with outside, non-Soviet powers in order to bolster sovereignty.

Another strand to address in examining bilateral relations between Kyrgyzstan and other states is the assumption that Kyrgyzstan's foreign relations are somehow inconsistent. The interpretation presented in this dissertation challenges this mainstream view by presenting an analysis of Kyrgyz foreign policy as it developed 1991-2004 as part of a coherent strategy predicated on engaging several different countries in Kyrgyz affairs, either through the normalization of relations or forging strong alliances with them, consistent with the foreign policy doctrines examined in Chapter Four. The major exception to this is Uzbekistan, the motor of Kyrgyz foreign policy as opposed to strategic partner. For this reason my treatment of their bilateral relations will be more discursive than adhering to a thematic matrix. In our examination here I will stress the way in which Kyrgyzstan deliberately seeks to engage as many external powers as possible.

We assess the history of her bilateral relations in the 1990s through the following framework: the ideological threat posed by the opposite state – be it by a competing version of identity politics or the possibility that the opposite state could exert ideological influence by posing a widely-accepted ideology that would be

sympathetically absorbed for cultural or historical reasons in Kyrgyzstan. Next we shall look at the post-imperial context – the geopolitics of the post-imperial space viewed in terms of the cognitive legacy thereof. The next analytical tool to deploy is an assessment of the responsiveness of the particular state to Kyrgyzstan's efforts to pursue a small state diplomacy and the application of Kyrgyz foreign policy principles.

Kyrgyzstan has so far successfully negotiated quite formidable challenges thrown up by the local geo-strategic situation into which it was thrust at independence. The foreign policy template evolved by the late 1990s has been carried out with a fair degree of success, albeit international events have gone in its favor. It is one of the most landlocked states on Earth with three of its surrounding four neighbors also themselves landlocked. A glance at a map shows that Kyrgyzstan along with neighboring Tajikistan are the Lilliputian states of the region, especially as they are surrounded by positively Brobdingnagian states such as China and Kazakhstan. However, it would be misleading to assume that Kyrgyzstan is an Andorra or a Luxembourg. In terms of physical area (198,000 km<sup>2</sup>), it is more than twice the area of Portugal (92,390 km<sup>2</sup>) and similar in size to Belarus (207,600 km<sup>2</sup>). In terms of population though, five million, Kyrgyzstan certainly falls into the small state category.

One determinant of Kyrgyzstan's outlook on the world is what might be termed the 'Canada effect'. Like Canada, most of Kyrgyzstan's population is sited in frontier regions. The prosperous Chuy valley in the north is split between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan on opposite sides of the narrow Chuy river. Bishkek, the capital, is

fifteen minutes drive from the Kazakh border. Osh, the country's second official capital, is so close to the Uzbek frontier that aircraft take off and almost immediately enter Uzbek airspace as the boundary fence is just at the edge of the airport.

The remaining large provincial cities, Talas, Tokmok and Naryn are also frontier cities (Kazakhstan and China respectively). Tokmok is set right against the boundary Chuy River. The central plateau city of Naryn, although 191 kilometers from the frontier, lies directly on the only possible road going into China and is the first (or last) Kyrgyz city. Portions of the road from Naryn to the border are deliberately wide and straight, a legacy of Soviet engineering for dual-use as runways for Soviet military aircraft. Although it lacks any major population centers, the entire Batken province is essentially a narrow peninsula extending down the rim of the southern Turkestan mountain range, surrounded by Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. This effect is compounded by the presence of exclaves of Tajik and Uzbek territory within the oblast.

Like other mountain peoples, traditionally the Kyrgyz view the rugged, impassable terrain of the central Tien Shan Mountains as a strategic asset. However, Kyrgyz leaders are painfully aware and sensitive to the fact that the major population centers are in very exposed frontier areas. In addition, most of the arable land in the country is similarly situated in frontier zones; either around Bishkek, or in the south, around the rim of the Ferghana valley. The only agrarian zone sheltered from a neighboring country is the narrow belt encircling Issik Kul. Even there the extension of a new road through to Issik Kul from nearby Almaty in Kazakhstan, crossing the

high yet narrow belt of mountains separating the two countries, has created new avenues for the extension of unwelcome Kazakh economic influence.

Related to this is the cultural interpenetration of neighboring peoples. Justin Rudelson noted in his examination of the origins of contemporary Uyghur nationalism that the overall historical context of Xinjiang's worldview was best understood by examining the impact of contiguous areas that have contributed to a sense of regional identity.<sup>221</sup> Similarly with Kyrgyzstan, much of the core of the country faces inward into the Ferghana valley with which it is strongly bound just as the North, open to the Kazakh steppe, has traditionally been strongly influenced by the Siberian and Kazakh influences.

As Soviet isolation had created very little contact, but at the same time, few problems with the world outside, the reverse was true in creating steady bilateral relations with its immediate post-Soviet Central Asian neighbors, the three neighboring successor states that Kyrgyzstan is arguably most preoccupied with in its foreign policy, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. Since independence, building on the Soviet template, Kyrgyzstan has wrestled with the problem of whether to direct its diplomatic energies into multilateral institutions or into efforts to construct genuine bilateral relations. Kyrgyzstan has generally found Soviet-derived multilateral institutions such as the CIS (although useful for relations with Russia and Ukraine), the ECO and the CAU have not worked well as mechanisms for kick-starting diplomatic or political progress regarding relations with near neighbors. Consequently, it was necessary to try new avenues; sometimes these were anchored in non-Soviet

---

<sup>221</sup> Justin J. Rudelson, *Oasis Identities: Uyghur Nationalism Along China's Silk Road* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

successor states such as China in the case of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), or Turkey in the case of the annual Turkic Conference.

### *Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations*

Of any neighboring country or former Soviet republic Kyrgyzstan has, without doubt, the most strained relations with Uzbekistan. Indeed the security premise of her entire foreign policy since independence could be described as an effort to deal with her larger neighbor. Poor relations stem from numerous sources, but the historical tension between urbanized oasis city-dwellers and upland nomadic Kyrgyz underpins a cultural antagonism predating independence. Divergent paths of economic development, serious frontier disputes, large minorities of each group on opposite sides of the border and the politics of water and water-sharing all contribute to serious bilateral tensions between the two states.<sup>222</sup> Kyrgyzstan's overall foreign policy on Uzbekistan has been to try to remain tied to that country through several multilateral regional organizations, most of which are very new and do not have very much economic or strategic power. A parallel track has been to lock Uzbekistan in a drawn out bilateral negotiation process over border and security issues. Simultaneously, Bishkek sought channels to escape the Soviet heritage of dependence on her downstream neighbor, through forging energy deals with Russia and Kazakhstan. In

---

<sup>222</sup> Uzbeks are thirteen percent of the population of Kyrgyzstan overall, and up to forty and fifty percent in the Osh Oblast. Estimates vary on the number of Kyrgyz in Uzbekistan, but although under 200,000, they are concentrated in contested border districts and thus have an influential impact on the negotiations. Fault lines are not necessarily ethnic in the Ferghana - due to the deteriorating Uzbek economy, in 2003 several ethnically Uzbek villages in the Uzbek Ferghana petitioned to be transferred to Kyrgyzstan! See RFE/RL, "Uzbeks in Ferghana Valley Want Their Villages Transferred to Kyrgyzstan," *RFE/RL Central Asia Report* January 10, 2003.

this way Kyrgyzstan has enhanced its negotiating stance despite insurmountable weakness in comparison to its vastly more powerful neighbor.

Uzbekistan is the most populous Central Asian nation with a population of twenty five million people. Ethnic Uzbeks number roughly nineteen million. Significant minority groups include Karakalpaks and Tajiks/Persians, with the usual Soviet smorgasbord of nationalities found in major cities such as Tashkent.<sup>223</sup> Uzbekistan's path since independence has been a sharp contrast to that of Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan opted early for economic shock therapy and free market liberalization. Uzbekistan has been reluctant to decentralize the state grip on its economy, maintaining a non-convertible currency and becoming steadily more autarkic as it has tried to insulate its frontiers from the free market reforms of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Where Kyrgyzstan's nationalist ideology after independence was tempered by a shadow ideology committing to some continuation of Soviet nationalities policy as civic nationalism, Uzbekistan has opted for strong state ideology that does not allow for civic nationalism. Uzbek is the sole official state language and, effacing Soviet-imposed Cyrillic, there has been a strong official commitment to alphabet Latinization in order to create a definitively Uzbek state. An assertive nationalist ideology centered on the personality cult of Islam Karimov is widely disseminated in the Uzbek educational system and media. It is quite a contrast to the rather insipid Kyrgyz efforts at constructing a national ideology that have failed to produce a personality cult or alter the alphabet.

---

<sup>223</sup> Located by the Aral Sea, Karakalpaks ('Black Hat People') inhabit their own territorially-based autonomous province. Like the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs, they are an East Turkic people with a closely related language.

Like Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan has its own internal fracture zones and forces that render its more extreme form of nationalism a fragile facade. It is a conglomeration of strung out oasis cities beginning with Khiva in the west, to Tashkent in the middle, with the Ferghana attached to it in the east. Two of the major oasis cities, Samarkand and Bokhara, are ethnically and historically more Persian (Tajik) than Uzbek. In that sense Uzbekistan very much resembles modern Iraq more than any other country in the region. It is a post-imperial state formed by gluing cosmopolitan oasis cities and provinces together that had no historical commonalities apart from shared rule by their imperial masters. The Soviet experience bequeathed a sense of Uzbek national identity transcending the fault lines of tribe and ethnicity. Yet exactly as the B'athists found Iraq ungovernable but through a brutal authoritarian ideology fostering loyalty to a minority dynasty, very much the same pattern of repression has occurred in post-Soviet Uzbekistan. Karimov and his clan dominate the most authoritarian government in the region barring perhaps Turkmenistan. While opposition political parties were harassed in Akaev's Kyrgyzstan and often given an uneven playing field politically in terms of opportunities for media access, they were allowed to function and exist. In Uzbekistan, apart from a brief period of multi-party politics in the early 1990s, Uzbek opposition parties remain either as government-sanctioned puppet alternatives or exile groups.

Demographically, Uzbekistan shares with nearby Iran a very high proportion of population under age twenty-one. Combined with economic decline and high unemployment, this creates formidable future challenges for the regime. Another major contrast between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan is the role of religion and the state.

Sedentary Uzbek society is traditionally closer culturally, historically and geographically to the orbit of mainstream Islamic world. The territory of Uzbekistan contains significant Islamic heritage sites and pilgrimage destinations such as the Shah-i-Zinda tomb complex in Samarkand, where a cousin of the Prophet is buried, and the tomb of the Sufi *Pir* Naqshbandi near Bukhara. Uzbek society in general is more religiously conservative than Kyrgyz. Such conservatism, however, should not be equated with fundamentalist political Islam any more than the conservatism of traditional rural Egypt has anything in common with urban intellectual Salafism.

Like Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan vigorously opposed Islamic political groups and attempted to maintain control over the Soviet era organizational structure the *Muftiyat*. It became apparent in the early 1990s that moderate Islamic leaders in the Ferghana, as opposed to the fringe groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, were prepared to speak out on the lack of progress in socio-economic reforms. As a popularly respected source they were genuinely influential and dangerous to the regime. The response to this was a government blanket theory that all Islamicists in Uzbekistan, barring the state-controlled *Muftiyat*, were extremists bent on terrorism and the overthrow of the state. This became symptomatic of the secular fundamentalism embraced by the Uzbek regime from the mid 1990s. The proscription of moderate Islamic views in politics, combined with the destruction of the nascent secular opposition, eventually produced inchoate groups prepared to use violence.

In 1999 and 2004 government targets in Tashkent and Bokhara were bombed with a deliberate focus on domestic government symbols, government buildings and police. Bombings near the US and Israeli Embassies in July 2004 may signal a change

of tactic or be the work of a separate group. To the extent that anything concrete is known about these Uzbek groups employing political violence (excluding the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan that based itself in Afghanistan 1998-2002) one should agree with Olivier Roy's analysis that they appear to have draped themselves in Islamic symbolism more than Islamicist politics per se that motivated the attacks.<sup>224</sup> Ironically this may have more to do with the government inadvertently educating a generation that any authentic political opposition to the regime must necessarily be Islamic than it is due to the influence of nebulous international Islamic groups such as *Al Qaeda*.

The Ferghana valley area in particular is, generally speaking, more traditional than surrounding mountainous regions or other parts of Uzbekistan. This is not Gulf Arab Salafism or Wahabbism, but conservative Hanafi Sunnism, or rather conservatism with a small "c." It is important to note that conservatism as practiced in the Ferghana is actually from a liberal school of Sunni interpretation. The issue is less one of degrees of radicalism and more one of degrees of tradition, religiosity and spirituality. Despite the brief period of liberalization on religious policy back in the early 1990s, the Uzbek Government, not without cause, came to perceive the Ferghana Islamic elite as an unwelcome source of criticism and opposition. Throughout the 1990s the Government banned and brutally crushed Ferghana-based opposition groups in Uzbekistan, many of whom deployed rather moderate religious language.<sup>225</sup>

---

<sup>224</sup> Olivier Roy, *OSI Forum on Islamic Terrorism, the Middle East, and Central Asia: the Elusive Connection, May 10, 2004* (attended by author; web report accessed August 03, 2004); available from <http://www.soros.org/initiatives/cep>.

<sup>225</sup> In 2003 the British Ambassador in Tashkent, Craig Murray, spoke out against this process to the great chagrin of a US anxious to avoid confrontation with their new regional ally. In 2004 Murray was later recalled and dismissed. See *UK Removes Uzbekistan Ambassador* (accessed January 04 2005); available from [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/3743052.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/3743052.stm).

This excursus into Uzbek domestic politics demonstrates that like Turkmenistan, it is experiencing extremes of post-independence authoritarianism that hint at a deep-seated malaise. Ironically the main American ally in the region is potentially one of the most unstable. Its instability lies in its internal geopolitics. The threat to Tashkent from the Ferghana province in the east is not found in ethnicity but rather in its isolation from the rest of Uzbekistan. It is attached to the body by a narrow isthmus pass and one internal road. The Ferghana possesses distinctive political traditions of dissent and innovation in the past century.<sup>226</sup> On the other side of the country around the Aral Sea, Tashkent must also deal with an increasingly assertive and territorially autonomous Karakalpakstan chafing at the lack of central investment and public health disaster caused by the Aral Sea destruction.<sup>227</sup> These two restive provinces are linked by a belt of ethnically Tajik oasis cities through which most of the country's communication links run. Tajik minority sentiment about Uzbek rule has been muted so far. An independent Tajik state across the border and active repression of the Tajik language in Uzbekistan leads one to question how much longer this will be the case.

Uzbek foreign policy in the 1990s has centered in theory upon much the same broad objectives as its neighbors: forging ties with non-Soviet states to bolster sovereignty and investment opportunities (in the Uzbek case, particularly South Korea), while searching for a new template for relations with nearby former Soviet Central Asian states. In practice, the Karimov regime remained aloof from regional

---

<sup>226</sup> In the nineteenth century it was a hotbed of Jadidism, and subsequently one of the few regions that experienced genuine local radicalism in the context of the 1917 Revolution.

<sup>227</sup> Under the current Uzbek Constitution, Karakalpakstan has the right of secession. Soviet legal-formalist window dressing perhaps, yet future political tumult in Uzbekistan might well realize this.

organizations such as the CIS and SCO. To the annoyance of its neighbors, Tashkent has steered an idiosyncratic course of perfunctory participation in these groups. Its method of dealing with the irreconcilable clash between the indefensibility of the country on the one hand, and looming internal instability on the other, is seen in a densely-promulgated ideology of state nationalism and the construction of an enclosed state. Uzbekistan is the only former Central Asian state lacking fresh avenues to outside powers sharing a common frontier as result of the Soviet collapse, excepting a border with Afghanistan that unlike the Kyrgyzstan-China equation holds but dim possibilities for its economic recovery.

Karimov's response to these centrifugal challenges, a strong and aggressive unifying Uzbek national ideology, has indirectly served Kyrgyz interests in the Ferghana by constraining the desire of ethnic Uzbeks in the Kyrgyz oblast of Osh to join the patria. This is because Uzbekistan has prioritized the delineation of the frontier and therefore the capsule state. Uzbeks outside those frontiers, holding Kyrgyz passports or driving cars with Kyrgyzstan license plates, are treated as foreigners and subject to equal-opportunity harassment from Uzbek border guards when trying to cross into Uzbekistan to visit relatives or do business. Uzbekistan has, on occasion, asserted the rights of exogenous Uzbeks, but for the most part in Turkmenistan and south Kazakhstan's Chimkent oblast. Tashkent rarely comments on the situation of the Uzbek community in the Kyrgyz Ferghana.

The situation in the Kyrgyz Ferghana is hardly ideal for the Uzbek minority either. Following independence the Akaev regime launched a nation-building program, (examined in Chapter Three). Rather than fostering civic nationalism, the

variant imposed by the Osh Akimiyat, distant from Bishkek, fostered distrust and resentment among the Uzbek population in the South. The Uzbek minority in Osh disliked their children having to learn Kyrgyz in school, or the fact that Osh politics under Akaev was increasingly rigged to exclude Uzbek candidates and marginalize Uzbek parties and groups.<sup>228</sup>

Despite this the Uzbeks of the Kyrgyz Ferghana are less restricted in many ways than their compatriots across the border. Kyrgyzstan's free market liberalization means they can at least own property and do business. The relative lack of censorship in Kyrgyzstan allows them a freer press than they would have in Uzbekistan. This partially explains why there is no Uzbek secessionist movement in the Kyrgyz Ferghana despite very apparent tensions. The March 2005 revolt that overthrew the Akaev regime in Bishkek enjoyed considerable Kyrgyz Ferghana Uzbek support rather than the opposite. This explains also why Uzbekistan has increasingly distanced itself from the Uzbek community in Kyrgyzstan, treating them as Kyrgyz citizens for official purposes. Another factor to consider is that despite interethnic riots in 1990 in which dozens of people died, Kyrgyz-Uzbek ethnic relations in the Kyrgyz Ferghana have been reasonably good – as put to the test in March 2005. It is an area characterized by bilingualism where border dialects slur into each other and cross-influence each language. A common border culture, not dissimilar in its atmosphere to the US-Mexican border region, binds both communities. There are long-established patterns of economic interdependency and the two communities intermarry.

---

<sup>228</sup> I vividly remember one ethnically Uzbek cab driver in Osh complaining about that in particular during a visit there in 1999.

The mutual frontier and the issue of exclaves within Kyrgyz territory are a running sore in bilateral state relations, however. Dating from the 1940s there are two exclaves (or from the Kyrgyz perspective, enclaves) of Uzbek, and one Tajik, territory sited within the southern Batken oblast. There is also the tiny Kyrgyz exclave of Barak, with six hundred inhabitants, sited within Uzbekistan.<sup>229</sup> Newly constructed border fences, passport controls and disputes over access rights created serious tensions between Bishkek, Tashkent and Dushanbe. Ferghana international frontiers were delineated but never demarcated in the Soviet era. They meander with seeming randomness partly as a result of a bureaucratic fight between the State Economic Planning Ministry and the All-Union Nationalities Ministry in Moscow in the 1920s. The borders reflect a messy bureaucratic compromise. In any case at the time they were internal frontiers and no one thought it was very important. Until late 1990s, even after independence, the Kyrgyz-Uzbek frontiers remained theoretical and on paper.

In late 1990s Uzbekistan began unilaterally demarcating borders with her neighbors as she simultaneously imposed strict border crossing controls, often arbitrarily sealing off frontiers. This happened in 2002, for example, when the entire Kyrgyz-Uzbek border was shut for several months due to purported Uzbek official fears about SARS. At the time, Bishkek was delivering vocal public protests concerning the mining of frontier areas, suggesting other motives. Since then, unresolved border claims in places vigorously guarded by Uzbekistan have led to

---

<sup>229</sup> Mirlan Kimsanov, *Residents of Kyrgyz Enclave in Uzbekistan Feel Like Castaways* (accessed June 03 2004); available from <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav010803.shtml>.

several violent clashes between Uzbek frontier guards and unarmed inhabitants of Kazakh and Kyrgyz border districts concerning cross-border access. Tashkent's aggressive border demarcation stance stems from its insecurity about the almost impossible defensibility of Uzbekistan. Major roads into the Ferghana run through Tajik and Kyrgyz territory. Driving westward from Tashkent to Samarkand the main highway passes through a twenty kilometer spur of Kazakh territory. Tashkent itself is sited in a narrow neck of the country pinched between Tajikistan and Kazakhstan.

While borders appeared on high-scale maps nobody was sure where they really were on a meter-to-meter basis on the ground. This meant that uncertainty could benefit the party seizing the initiative on this issue. Uzbeks have tended to interpret frontier lines in their favor, translating on the ground to unilateral erection of fences or border markers inside disputed territory. A very human dimension to this perhaps inevitable process was that as the border areas of the Eastern Ferghana are heavily populated districts, the frontier often slices through villages and towns. Families of whatever ethnicity were cut off from their relatives by border fences, sealed off roads and dismantled bridges. As Madeleine Reeves recounts, in 2003, for example, the Uzbek authorities dismantled the bridge across a tiny canal connecting the Uzbek Ferghana town of Qarasu with its Kyrgyz half, Kara Suu. Uzbekistan banned all imports from Kyrgyzstan and shut the border to trade entirely. The consequence is that Kara Suu has become one of several major informal market towns for illicit cross-

border trade where depending on their inducements Uzbek border guards alternately connive with or shoot at smugglers.<sup>230</sup>

Another source of tension between Tashkent and Bishkek has been the Uzbek land mining of border districts. For several years Tashkent has refused to cooperate on the issue. Official diplomatic protests from Bishkek culminated in the Uzbek Ambassador being summoned to the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry for an official protest in 2003. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have successfully pressured Tashkent in such places as the OSCE and SCO to commit to a mine removal program in 2004. The principle cause of the mining had to do with the incursions of insurgents into the Batken area of Kyrgyzstan 1999-2000. I discuss this below in the context of Kyrgyz-Tajik relations.

In the late 1990s there was greater Kyrgyz flexibility toward Uzbekistan. This was seen, for example, in Bishkek's effort to find a constructive solution to Uzbek access rights to the Sokh and Shaymardan enclaves. By 2002 Bishkek's stance hardened in response to growing internal protest over border issues combined with Uzbek intransigence. Several instances of Uzbek police incursion into the Osh and Batken oblasts 1999-2004, to apprehend supposed Islamicists, further contributed to a less-conciliatory mood in Bishkek as Kyrgyz local authorities demanded that the central government do something about it.

Border negotiations from 2001-2003 have made little progress. The Uzbeks, at time of writing, have refused to ratify draft agreements concerning 1,040 km of the frontier already discussed by the intergovernmental commission.<sup>231</sup> In March 2004 the

---

<sup>230</sup> For a superb account describing the cross border situation at Kara Suu, see Madeleine Reeves, "Dis/locating the State: Making, Crossing and Contesting Borders in Kyrgyzstan" (M.Phil. thesis, Cambridge University, 2003).

<sup>231</sup> RFE/RL "Kyrgyz-Uzbek Negotiations," *RFE/RL Kyrgyz Daily Digest*, February 14, 2001.

Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry, infuriated by the Uzbek construction of a border fence sixty meters into Kyrgyz territory in an area already discussed and agreed on in principle by the bilateral commission, harangued Tashkent for its foot-dragging. It further dismissed Uzbek proposals for the remaining two-hundred kilometer disputed frontier segment as “unacceptable.”<sup>232</sup> This signals a definite move away from Bishkek’s strategy throughout most of the 1990s in which it downplayed Uzbek provocation while maintaining a public face of bilateral amity, as evidenced in the 1996 Treaty of Eternal Friendship between the two neighbors.

Water resource management also emerged as a major area of tension between the Central Asian states after independence, and is worth briefly examining in the context of bilateral Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations. Although essentially a multilateral issue wherein all five Central Asian republics are involved, and a topic beyond the scope of this study, this remains a source of bilateral tension between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Failed barter negotiations have often resulted in extended power shortages and blackouts in the winter months in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbek citizens falling victim to drought and flooding in summer and winter respectively. Understandably these episodes have nurtured popular resentment and anger toward the state portrayed as at fault, thus complicating negotiations. Although water was supplied with little consideration for long-term environmental impact, prior to independence the Soviets managed to balance inter-republican disputes, and created a template that has since been difficult to leave. The Soviet-designed system catered to the larger agrarian downstream republics, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, over the mountainous Tajik and

---

<sup>232</sup> RFE/RL “One More Statement by the Foreign Ministry on Uzbekistan,” *RFE/RL Kyrgyz Daily Digest*, March 08, 2004. See also BBC Monitoring Service, “Kyrgyzstan Hits Back at Uzbekistan over Border Registration,” *BBC Monitoring Service/AKI Press* March 03, 2004.

Kirghiz SSRs that had smaller agricultural sectors, but held most of the region's water in their mountainous glaciers.

Relying on the continued functioning of pre-collapse institutions, the Central Asian states at first tried to maintain the Soviet-era status quo ante in water allocation. This was formalized in the February 1992 Almaty Agreement. Over the subsequent decade, the decision became path-dependent and difficult to change.<sup>233</sup> The institutions created to support irrigated agriculture did not compensate for disruptions in grain imports as the Central Asian economies unraveled after 1992. Both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan began to break with their older Soviet agrarian niche as livestock producers and started increasing cash crops available to raise urgently needed foreign exchange. The grain harvest has often been used to pay Uzbekistan in kind for world-market price provision of natural gas, thus increasing Kyrgyz need for water to grow the grain.

Meanwhile downstream countries, faced with similar economic pressures due to the loss of the Soviet common economic space, had exactly the same impulse; to expand their farming sectors to compensate for sharp decline in other sectors such as industry. Uzbekistan increased the amount of land given over to grain production although this has been achieved by reducing the amount of land sown to cotton. The overall result regionally has been rapid expansion of water use. In addition increased hydro-electricity production on the Syr Darya in Kyrgyzstan reduced water available for summer irrigation and caused severe flooding in Uzbekistan during the winter

---

<sup>233</sup> For an informative in-depth discussion of Central Asian water resource management disputes after independence, see International Crisis Group, *Central Asia: Water and Conflict* (Osh/Brussels: International Crisis Group Asia Report 34, 30 May 2002).

months. The entire situation was indirectly exacerbated by barter payment disagreements.

In her excellent treatment of environmental interstate politics, Erika Weinthal has persuasively argued that water negotiations among the five Central Asian states can be interpreted to show considerable inter elite cooperation encouraged by side-payments funded by donors such as USAID and the World Bank.<sup>234</sup> Weinthal is certainly correct about the possibility of inter-elite cooperation. Otherwise the Soviet framework would not have been maintained without cooperation from small upstream states signing onto the Almaty and subsequent agreements. In terms of illustrating the erosion of the Soviet regional inter republican system it seems however that the various water sharing agreements since independence were a net failure anyway. Kyrgyzstan in particular has sought a way out in the form of diplomacy with Russia, Kazakhstan and China. By abandoning its strategy of multilateral coordination of water sharing agreements in 2003, even the World Bank has recognized the futility of coercing five states with differing agenda into frameworks that are only propped up by considerable side bargaining.

Uzbekistan represents a multi-faceted threat to Kyrgyzstan. Primarily it is an uncooperative hegemonic neighbor that has been unilaterally demarcating its frontiers and periodically closing its frontiers to Kyrgyzstanis. It constitutes a major threat to Kyrgyz security as well as further isolating Kyrgyz communications with the outside world. The Ferghana valley is a major route westward to the Caspian that has been essentially shut to Kyrgyzstan for the past decade. Closed frontiers also stymie Kyrgyz

---

<sup>234</sup> Erika Weinthal, *State Making and Environmental Cooperation: Linking Domestic and International Politics in Central Asia* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2002).

plans to serve as a connecting corridor between the Uzbek Ferghana and China in future. As Kyrgyzstan's three upland Ferghana provinces are historically interconnected socially and economically with the Uzbek Ferghana the economic impact has been interesting. These three provinces are suppliers for a thriving Uzbek black market arisen in response to shortages. Uzbek traders looking for Chinese goods cross into Kyrgyz frontier towns like Kara Suu where enormous bazaars have sprung up to cater to Uzbek consumer demand.

Kyrgyz officials sometimes acknowledge that Uzbekistan with its population, strategic location and resources would be a serious contender for regional leadership. Yet the aggressive stance over frontiers, autarkic and bizarre economic policies and extreme nationalist rhetoric of a government publicly dismissive of Kyrgyz concerns makes Kyrgyz leaders very nervous. In March 2000 Chingiz Aitmatov, incumbent Ambassador to the EU and Belgium, sparked a debate in the Kyrgyz press about the potential for the historical Turkestani model as a unit to inform current regional integration efforts. He even suggested that Uzbek leadership in a revived Turkestani unit would be obvious. The press debate ranging across several official newspapers was interesting as it did not refute this idea. Despite this, concern was expressed about the *current* regime in Uzbekistan. In his analysis of the episode, Nick Megoran recounted that one editorial jocularly noted that such an effort one hundred years in the future would be just fine.<sup>235</sup>

---

<sup>235</sup> See Nick Megoran, *Chinggis Aitmatov And The Geopolitics Of Kyrgyzstan* 2.18.00 *Eurasianet.org* (accessed June 03 2002); available from [www.eurasianet.org](http://www.eurasianet.org).

Uzbekistan's foreign policy toward her smaller neighbors clashes with the idealism of the *Silk Road Doctrine*. Of the five Central Asian states a rift is opening between the Uzbek and Turkmen models of autarkic, xenophobic, authoritarian nationalism versus the economic liberalism and integrationist instincts of the weaker authoritarianism prevalent in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The Soviet inter-republican economic structure mandated that for much of the 1990s Kyrgyzstan was heavily dependent on Uzbek energy and locked into water sharing agreements modeled on the Soviet predecessor. Kyrgyzstan has been slowly moving away from its dependence on Uzbekistan via energetic pursuit of good relations with Russia and Kazakhstan as well as in construction of close relations with China.

#### *Kyrgyz-Russian relations*

One mistaken assumption often made by Western commentators about relations between Russia and the Central Asian states, including Kyrgyzstan, is reliance upon one view. This is that Russia constantly seeks to reassert its influence while the Central Asian states for their part, although generally trying to escape Russia's orbit, ritually draw closely to Russia whenever they wish to signal retreat from the West. Such moves are thought to be especially triggered by tensions with the US over human rights and democratization issues, or other supposed complications in forging ties outside of the former Soviet Union.<sup>236</sup> The mistake of this simplistic framework for looking at Russia's relations with the region is that Moscow has consistently maintained mutually-unswerving close relations with the Central Asian

---

<sup>236</sup> For a recent example of this sort of analysis see Gregory Gleason, "Central Asian Countries Close Ranks with Russia," in *Central Asia and Caucasus Survey*, Wednesday June 30, 2004 (accessed August 8, 2004); available from [http://www.cacianalyst.org/view\\_article.php?articleid=2491](http://www.cacianalyst.org/view_article.php?articleid=2491).

states since 1991. This is seen particularly with Kyrgyzstan. There have never really been any serious strains on the relations between Russia or any of the five Central Asian republics so far, although there have certainly been family spats over membership in the CIS (for example, with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, 1992-95 and over the issue of dual nationality with Turkmenistan in 2003).

Generally Russia was satisfied to replace expensive military commitments (such as frontier troops in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) with local substitutes. In cases where there were concerns about the viability of local units, as in the Tajik case on the Afghan border, Russia arranged for a bilateral force monitored from Moscow but manned primarily by locals. Russian military strategy in Eurasia has slowly been shifting from a strong military poise on the frontiers of empire to measured strategic defense in depth. This represents a shift from a garrisoning mentality to a strategy reminiscent of the later Roman *foedarii* idea. Direct military control has also been slowly replaced by the tendrils of economic and cultural influence, both cheaper and more profitable for Russia. Periodic Monroe Doctrine-like Russian statements that Central Asia remains its backyard should not disguise this reorganization of its control structure in the region from the mid 1990s onwards. In Kyrgyzstan, Russia has consistently withdrawn most of its military and border troops. The major exception was the opening of a small airbase in the Kyrgyz city of Tokmok in 2003, a gesture aimed at the US-coalition base nearby rather than Central Asians. At the same time though, and barely noticed in the West amidst excitement over this new Russian airfield opened tantalizingly close to that of the US, hundreds of kilometers away the

largest remaining Russian border guard base in southern Kyrgyzstan, situated for control of the Chinese border, closed.<sup>237</sup>

The opening of a Russian airfield at Tokmok was encouraged by the Akaev regime. In 2003 it offered a status-of-forces agreement to Moscow mirroring almost word-for-word the agreements struck the previous year concerning the American base at Manas Airport. This could be seen as one of the most sovereignty-boosting agreements arrived at with Russia since independence. Russia had to conclude a status-of-forces agreement with Kyrgyzstan, and not just as a dismal former colony but a sovereign country. The Akaev regime had solid motives for this. Bishkek thus reassured divided domestic opinion that the American airbase did not signal an official retreat from Russia as Kyrgyzstan's primary ally and partner. This was an important signal to send segments of Russophile state classes for whom the US presence was anathema.

Another important strand, missed entirely by Western commentators, was the strategically significant location of the airbase given to Russia. It is literally but a few hundred meters from the Kazakh frontier. Kazakhstan resuscitated frontier demarcation disputes regarding a shifting thalweg in the Chuy river in that region between 1998-2003. Astana's claims had included a strategically important access road in no-man's land very near to Tokmok and the new Russian base. Similarly, the area of the US airbase at Manas is only a couple of kilometers from a contested Kazakh border, also with the Chuy River. The Akaev regime deliberately tried to create mechanisms to leverage its bargaining of these issues. Another point to consider

---

<sup>237</sup> BBC Monitoring Service "Kyrgyzstan: Russian Base in Osh to Be Transferred to Kyrgyz Jurisdiction," *BBC Monitoring Service/Kyrgyz-Press International News Agency*, March 11 2004.

is the hurried nature of the Russian base. Russia's commitment is best illustrated by the equipment it based there initially: fifteen obsolete Sukhoi fighter-bombers for which spare parts are no longer manufactured.

In Chapter Four we saw how the formation of the UN at the end of World War II resulted in the formation of faux foreign ministries lending weight to the fiction that the Soviet Republics had some notional sovereignty that was additional to the majesty of the USSR. In 1991, although the collapse of the Soviet Union was catastrophic, for Russian geo-strategists in a sense the dream was perfectly realized after all. All sixteen of the republics were granted UN membership. Perhaps this is an oversimplification, but it is worth considering the idea that Russian interests have been better served by the proliferation of her state system into the Westphalian arena and that relations with Kyrgyzstan since 1991 well illustrate this.

The pattern of post-imperial relations also suggests strong ties. In terms of metropole-colonial relations, after 1991 Russia needed a model for relations with the Central Asian States. France, with close trade and military relations with her former African colonies, encourages them to be considered part of "Le Monde Francophonie". Britain has structured relations with numerous former colonies through the Commonwealth of over fifty-three states, also a forum for trade agreements and cooperation. Although oft criticized as merely a "talking shop" it has produced some useful diplomatic and economic results as evidenced in the accession of a group of several states, such as Mozambique, that were not British colonies.

The successor states of Eurasian land-based empires such as the Ottoman Empire have, by contrast, fared less-well with their colonial dominions. Turkey has

generally poor relations with former Ottoman territories yet still considers the Balkans and the Middle East a vital part of its geopolitical space. Within the liberated portions of empire too, nostalgia can persist. In the Arab Middle East the secular-independent-nationalist state has fallen far short of its expectations, and this has created a positive cultural memory of the ancient regime. Commonalities within the Hapsburg space produced recent Central European initiatives such as the Visegrad Four grouping. Empires are inextricably tied to their colonies and vice-versa. The same ambiguous and multi-faceted relationship is true of Russia and its territories.

Scholars highlighted the failure of Soviet era institutions and the weakness of the CIS in reconstituting a new regional system after more than a decade.<sup>238</sup> Russia has been unable to tie its former territories of the Soviet Republics into a common currency area, as seen in the collapse of the ruble zone 1992-1994. However the CIS is not completely dysfunctional. It is a vehicle for Russia to communicate its security concerns to former Soviet republics. It is also a platform paying lip service to the sovereignty of the former SSRs and thus superficially neutral.

One cannot entirely agree with dismissive views of the CIS drawing upon its failure to cope with monumental economic and security concerns presented by Soviet dissolution. The CIS may be a talking shop, but its member states use the structure to reassure Russia about its primacy. Increasingly members also talk to each other in a forum approved by Russia but not necessarily imagined and controlled entirely by Moscow. During the Akaev era, Kyrgyzstan used the CIS to develop relations with Moldova, growing trade and intergovernmental contacts resulting in Moldovan wine

---

<sup>238</sup> See for instance, Martha Brill Olcott, Anders Aslund, and Sherman W. Garnett, *Getting It Wrong: Regional Cooperation and the Commonwealth of Independent States*, (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999).

being sold in Bishkek. In 2004 Moldova received a contract to print new, supposedly forgery-resistant, passports for Kyrgyzstan. Small examples perhaps, but it is true that the CIS is slowly growing bilateral relationships that bypass Moscow.

The commitment to Kyrgyzstan's participation in the Commonwealth of Independent States is seen in the creation of a department within its small foreign ministry to handle CIS bilateral and multilateral relations, as examined in Chapter Four. Bishkek has been an enthusiastic member of Russia's post imperial grouping, joining the regular quadrilateral and trilateral inner circles within the CIS. This organization has developed EU-like fast track and slow track membership streams to deal with the inclinations of enthusiastic and reluctant members alike. Kyrgyzstan, ever an enthusiastic sprinter, signed onto initiatives such as proposed free-trade zones with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan mooted on several occasions in the past decade. Unfortunately for such initiatives the CIS also appeals to some of its members exactly because of its weakness. Although yet to find its niche, its persistence over the past decade suggests that this supra-national organization will persist as a key element in shaping the relations of the former Soviet republics. In that respect it remains true to its institutional framework, the USSR.

Kyrgyzstan has consistently seen Russia as a guarantor of, rather than a threat to, its sovereignty and the most likely of the great powers to prevent Uzbek hegemony in the region. This further explains Kyrgyz devotion to the CIS since its inception in 1992, despite the failure of many CIS subsidiary organizations. For instance up to 1999 Kyrgyzstan alone respected the 1992 Bishkek agreement on reciprocity for visa-less travel between all CIS members. From a defense viewpoint, Kyrgyzstan remains

dependent on the assistance of sporadically-donated Russian military equipment. This has taken the form of second-hand Russian helicopters, transport aircraft and artillery, to list several examples from the past ten years. There is a disjuncture, however, between Bishkek's perception of need and Moscow's wish to donate. The Americans have been perceptive in exploiting this by donating purchased Russian military equipment on apt occasions when such gifts are not forthcoming from Moscow.<sup>239</sup>

Despite over 100,000 Russians leaving Kyrgyzstan since 1991, substantial numbers have remained and continue as an important factor in bilateral relations. Illustratively, during Akaev's propitiating visit to Moscow on the eve of Acting President Putin's election in January 2000, the Kyrgyz President asked for a rescheduling of the \$132 million debt owed to Russia. He explicitly linked this Kyrgyzstan's track record of promoting and protecting the Russian language and obtaining equal status for national minorities.<sup>240</sup>

More so than any other Central Asian republic except for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan has also sought to maintain close ties to Russia based on culture and language. In part this reflects the greater Russification of both states before the collapse of the USSR, but it also shows a deliberate policy of leveraging close cultural ties in order to maintain solid relations. Russia continues to accept quotas of Kyrgyz students into its university system. Like Turkey and the US, Russia underwrites a university in Bishkek. Opening a university in Kyrgyzstan has become almost *de rigueur* in the public diplomacy of states keenest to influence Kyrgyzstan. The Kyrgyz-

---

<sup>239</sup> Such as border patrol helicopters and Russian-made all-terrain vehicles also for border monitoring. See Sultan Jumagulov, "Superpowers Compete in Kyrgyzstan," *IWPR Central Asia Reports*, April 28, 2003, RCA no. 200.

<sup>240</sup> Cholpon Orozbekova, "Kyrgyzstan: Russia Calls In Its Debts," *IWPR Central Asia Reports*, April 19, 2002, RCA no. 116.

Slavonic University, in a building complex that used to be the Officer's Mess of the Red Army Barracks in Frunze, graduates students with diplomas recognized by the Russian Federation.<sup>241</sup>

Russia also supplies high school textbooks (40,000 in 2003, for example) and trains teachers for the Kyrgyz high school system. Kyrgyzstan is the one remaining Central Asian state where the Russian media are distributed without restriction. Both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan closely control the distribution of Russian newspapers that often contain unvarnished criticism of Central Asian leaders. Russian television is widely broadcast in Kyrgyzstan with viewers grateful for an alternative to the lame offerings on KRT, the Kyrgyz state channel. Other local independent TV stations, such as *Pyramida*, emulate the style of Russian channels.<sup>242</sup>

In resource terms Kyrgyzstan actually has very little that Russia needs critical to its national security and economy; excepting perhaps the availability of hydroelectricity to its mid-Siberian cities if needed. A surprising trend for intensifying strong bilateral relations since 2000, however, is private and state-sponsored investment in the Kyrgyz economy. Kyrgyzstan is attractive to Russian investment following the recovery of the Siberian economy after the 1998 collapse of the banking system. This can be explained by several factors: liberal controls on exporting profits and lower wages attracted capital from the relatively prosperous mid-Siberian belt cities of Omsk, Tomsk and Novosibirsk. A well-run Kyrgyz Central Bank has managed to keep the national currency overvalued and stable since 1998. Added to

---

<sup>241</sup> By contrast, as graduates trying to gain access to further study in Russia have found out, Moscow does not recognize degrees from the American University five blocks away.

<sup>242</sup> In 2004 however, *Pyramida*'s independent style began to irk the authorities. It was bought out by a shell company that in turn was taken over by one of Akaev's son's companies. Yulia Sevchenko, *Pyramida* journalist, interview by author, April 02, 2005, Washington DC.

this, a low inflation rate since 1999, skilled labor wages lower than the western parts of the Russian Federation, well-trained human capital, plus a good banking infrastructure all combine to draw in Russian investment.

Economic liberalization for Kyrgyzstan has proved an attractive magnet for both Russian state-owned and private enterprises. The Kyrgyz Government has been eager to encourage this trend, especially with the Russian recovery from fiscal doldrums of the late 1990s, and has cannily proposed deals that might cancel some of the heavy debt owed to Moscow while stimulating Kyrgyz industry at the same time. At various points between 2001 and 2003 Bishkek offered to hand back mothballed defense plants for reactivation to the Russian Interior Ministry and to resume uranium production under the guidance of the Russian Ministry of Energy.<sup>243</sup> This is an example of the aforementioned backtracking on the *Silk Road Ideology*'s commitment to dismantle regional defense industries.

From 2003 and 2004 Kyrgyzstan and Russia cemented agreements for Gazprom to take over a majority stake in the running and maintenance of the Kyrgyz state gas provider, *Kyrgyzneftgaz*.<sup>244</sup> This included provisions for maintaining the crumbling pipeline and relay station infrastructure within Kyrgyzstan. This augers well for Kyrgyz frustrations for the past decade over dependence on Uzbek gas and a shift northward for her energy supplies. Improved relations with Kazakhstan, discussed above, literally pave the way for her to establish a secure winter energy

---

<sup>243</sup> BBC Monitoring Service, "Russo-Kyrgyz-Kazakh deals help beef up Kyrgyz security," *BBC Monitoring Service/Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, April 20, 2001.

<sup>244</sup> *An Energy Overview of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan* (accessed December 05 2004); available from [http://www.fe.doe.gov/international/Russia\\_and\\_Central\\_Asia/kyrgover.html](http://www.fe.doe.gov/international/Russia_and_Central_Asia/kyrgover.html).

supplies and a better negotiating stance with Uzbekistan over water provision as it boosts the Kyrgyz ability to separate the issues.

The Central Asian republics continue to be solid markets for Russian manufactured goods. Cars and other consumer products have the edge of consumer brand familiarity and loyalty, plus low prices keep Russian consumer goods competitive with imports from Iran and Turkey, if not China. Kyrgyzstan still does around twenty percent of her foreign trade with Russia.<sup>245</sup> This is remarkable if compared to other post colonial states such as Ireland that was still reliant on Britain for about sixty percent of her foreign trade for several decades after independence. For now Kyrgyzstan's large external debt burden to Russia continues to assure dependence on Moscow. Yet Kyrgyz leaders also view this dependence as a vital means for retaining the engagement of an indispensable great power ally, unlike the Irish comparison where rejection characterized post-colonial relations. Overall, the past decade has shown that Russia is happy to benefit from the sovereignty of former republics that toe Moscow's line so long as they do not challenge her geo-strategic interests and respect the rights of Slavic minorities.

This is basically a continuation of the control recipe for Central Asia during the Soviet era minus a centrally planned economy. Kyrgyz foreign policy early recognized this. Bishkek pushed strongly for Russian inclusion in regional fora such as the Central Asian Cooperation Organization, an attempt to resuscitate the moribund Central Asian Union. Arguably, Kyrgyzstan's efforts to diversify its relationship foundations with great powers and medium size regional powers has more to do with a

---

<sup>245</sup> *Russian-Kyrgyz Relations* (accessed July 23 2004); available from <http://www.in.mid.ru/BI.nsf/0/0A4EA69505018FE34325699C003B6067?OpenDocument>.

recognition of general Russian retreat from the region. Added to this is Moscow's growing disinclination to retain an expensive military presence in the area. While Moscow continues to assert a Russian equivalent to the Monroe Doctrine over the region, this no more implies an intensive network of military and political control on the ground than the American original.

In Russia Kyrgyzstan has a great power ally that subscribes to the Soviet tradition of allowing the republics to govern themselves as long as they do not cause trouble. It is completely comfortable with Central Asian authoritarianism and is totally uninterested in foisting democratization on the Central Asian states. Extremes of authoritarianism producing unpredictable and bizarre personalist states, such as Belarus and Turkmenistan, probably makes Moscow nervous as their idiosyncrasies render them hard to control. The variant prevailing in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, democratic forms disguising oligarchies, is far preferable to Moscow.

#### *Kyrgyz-Kazakh relations*

Cultural propinquity between Kyrgyz and Kazakhs has not meant automatically good or trouble-free relations between the two countries after their mutual independence in 1991. As with her other Central Asian neighbors, relations have been characterized by the realization that bilateral engagement is necessary on a variety of crises that have arisen between the two states. Diplomatic crises through the 1990s began with the introduction of the Kyrgyz currency in 1993. As Kazakhstan was unprepared for the move it responded by shutting its frontiers. The 1992 Bishkek agreement on a common visa area for CIS nationals slowly eroded with Kazakhstan

leading the charge. In 2000, Kazakhstan suspended recognition of Kyrgyz transit visas for third party nationals. In 2001 Astana went even further and introduced visa requirements for Kyrgyz citizens in an effort to stop Kyrgyz suitcase traders from accessing the bazaars of south Kazakhstan.

Sources of tension emanate from trade and frontier disputes. Kazakhstan cut off natural gas transshipped through Kazakh territory on several occasions when Kyrgyzstan was unable to pay pipeline transit fees in 1994-2004. This complicated the provision of Uzbek gas that was often halted by the Uzbeks for non-payment also. The Kyrgyz Government has been critical on several occasions concerning accusations that Kazakhstan has not taken sufficient steps to counter abuse of Kyrgyz migrant labor working on the southern tobacco plantations in the Taraz oblast. The more robust Kazakh economy attracts thousands of Kyrgyz seasonal labor migrants annually. Astana has placed periodic embargos and tariffs on Kyrgyz goods, especially in 1993 when Bishkek broke with the ruble zone. In 1999 when Kyrgyzstan joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) Kazakhstan joined with Uzbekistan in imposing retaliatory tariffs to punish such precociousness.

Since 1998 Kazakhstan has claimed access roads and shifting riverbed areas of the Chuy River that divides the two countries along the northern edge of the Kyrgyz Chuy Oblast. Raising hackles in Bishkek also is the increasing Kazakh economic muscle in the Issik Kul oblast of Kyrgyzstan, wherein wealthy Kazakhs have been buying up lakefront property for vacation homes causing Kyrgyz fear of losing ownership.<sup>246</sup> Quarrels further developed as Kazakh trade-unions and factories

---

<sup>246</sup> Land ownership is a highly sensitive issue in Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan's law approved private ownership of land in a 1998 referendum, but allowed for foreign ownership of buildings, houses

insisted on associating some form of extra-territoriality with their ownership of Kyrgyz Issik-Kul resorts. A road across the steep mountains dividing Almaty in Kazakhstan from the Kyrgyz lakefront city of Cholpon-Ata has languished in semi-completion, usable only by four-wheel drive vehicles, largely due to Kyrgyz nervousness about an invasion of wealthy Kazakhs from the Almaty oblast.

Some commentators on Kyrgyz politics have taken all of these tensions to indicate a wish for Kazakh hegemony over the Kyrgyz. Certainly Kazakhstan wants to present itself as the obvious leading state in the region, superseding Uzbekistan. In this hegemonic quest, Kazakhstan has also had its share of clashes and tensions with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Some observers have considered that outright Kazakh annexation of Kyrgyzstan is a possibility. Realistically Astana has shown no desire at all to annex Kyrgyzstan in the decade plus since independence. It is unlikely that the Kazakhs would want a large and potentially restless minority group with its own experience of national independence. This is not to mention the acquisition of Kyrgyzstani minorities, whose numbers they are certainly not keen on adding to the Kazakh equivalent numbers. For example, the Kazakhs would hardly embrace the large Uyghur populations in Kyrgyzstan, given the presence of already large and restive Uyghur numbers in their own Almaty district.

Kazakhstan has no interest in radically changing frontiers due to the tenuous hold that it has over its vast Siberian and culturally Russian north. The shift of its capital to Astana after 1997 underscored the Kazakh geo-political shift in gaze to north and west. This was a focus away from the impoverished Central Asian south that most

---

etc. yet forbade ownership of land. The clash between the idea of private ownership of the national patria is so controversial that most ownership of agricultural land is permitted through long-term leasehold rather than in perpetuity.

Kazakh leaders are not concerned with. They prefer to develop strong ties to the West or to approach energy-hungry China as a market for Caspian crude. Kazakh nation-building efforts since 1991 mirror state approaches in Kyrgyzstan. The government was confronted by the challenge of simultaneously expanding the titular nationality's hold on the legitimacy of the state while retaining the quiescence of large minority groups. The Kazakh equation differs in one crucial respect as it has a large amount of oil.

For the Kyrgyz, a benign Kazakh regional primacy that allowed them access to Kazakh transshipment routes and domestic markets in return for security protections and diplomatic backing against Uzbekistan would be welcome. The wish to cement close ties to the Kazakhs was illustrated in one of the few dynastic marriages occurring in the 1990s among the Central Asian leadership when Askar Akaev's son married Kazakh leader Nursultan Nazarbaev's daughter in 1999.<sup>247</sup> The marriage was not entirely contrived. The two families are in fact distantly related to one another through various strands and are quite close. For a short time the marriage triggered numerous state visits by the Kazakh leader to Akaev's presidential compound on Issik Kul. It all fell apart in due course.

His other children's Kazakh marriages also caused political embarrassment for Akaev at various times during his presidency. Revelations emerged that his Kazakh son-in-law profited personally from several large Kyrgyz companies, including a monopoly on the sale of aviation fuel to the US base at Manas in 2002. Generally speaking, during the dynastic Akaev-Nazarbaev marriage Kazakh-Kyrgyz bilateral

---

<sup>247</sup> Not the only Kazakh connection - one of Akaev's daughters is married to a Kazakh businessman.

relations did not seem to improve very much. Although both states are influenced by clan politics and pre-modern personalist modes of governance, much about the states are modern and their bilateral problems have to do with very contemporary complexities of rival nationalisms, frontier disputes and trade disagreements beyond the salve of a dynastic marriage.

Despite simmering disputes, after 2000 bilateral relations slowly began to improve. This was signaled by agreements on joint use of hydroelectricity stations on the Chuy River in 2003 and 2004.<sup>248</sup> Further, as a result of Kyrgyzstan's increased diplomatic muscle with Russia and the United States after 2002 and the sudden appearance of two foreign military bases tied to those countries very close to its southern frontier, Kazakhstan began to downplay festering frontier disputes along the Chuy Valley, and even ratified most of the border agreements struck with Kyrgyzstan shelved since the mid 1990s.<sup>249</sup> An intergovernmental commission began to get to grips with many areas of disagreement, to the delight of Bishkek. In addition, Kazakhstan has begun to approve Russian-Kyrgyz plans for north-south energy sharing; with Kyrgyz hydroelectricity going North and Russian gas going south.

#### *Kyrgyz Tajik relations*

Tajikistan is the second of the troika of small states in Central Asia, Turkmenistan being the third. For most of the decade since independence the country was embroiled in a civil war. Soviet clans from the Kokhand area fought a broad-

---

<sup>248</sup> See V. Dobrovolsky, *Problemy "Bolshoi Vodi Reshayot V Bishkeke Predstavitel Kazakhstana y Kirghizstana*, (accessed June 03 2003); available from <http://www.cawater-info.net/news/02-2005/07.htm>.

<sup>249</sup> RFE/RL, "Kazakh, Kyrgyz Presidents Sign Border Delimitation Agreement," *RFE/RL Kazakhstan Daily Digest*, April 08, 2005.

based opposition movement representing a coalition of ideologically motivated opponents (comprising moderate Islamicists, democrats and Tajik nationalists) and other regional interests, such as Ngorno-Badakshanis. The opposition sought concessions from the newly independent Tajik state or they would withdraw allegiance. As in Azerbaijan and Georgia, where popular fronts threatened to oust Soviet-era leadership in the early 1990s, Moscow stepped in decisively to back the established authorities.

One of the quiet coups of Kyrgyz foreign policy during the 1990s was preventing the Tajik civil war from seriously disrupting the Kyrgyz south by spilling over into its southern districts, that in their mix of ethnic Kyrgyz, Tajik and Uzbek villages, were little different than the war-torn areas of Northern Tajikistan proper. Bishkek's policy was one of quiet, behind-the-scenes engagement with both sides in the civil war. It also made extensive use of and cooperation with agencies such as the UNHCR to ensure that refugees from Tajikistan were properly looked after.<sup>250</sup> The successful partnership with UN agencies during the civil war gave Kyrgyz policymakers a favorable view of non-Soviet multilateral institutions and the possibilities they offer for accommodating the process of Soviet unraveling. While a weak, small state might be seen to have a default predilection for multilateral organizations as suggested by small state literature, the fact that they positively worked for Kyrgyzstan and enhanced its security helped explain enthusiasm for

---

<sup>250</sup> During the Civil War, about 79, 000 ethnic Tajikistanis fled to Kyrgyzstan, of whom many were in fact ethnic Kyrgyz. The ethnic Tajiks were mostly repatriated, but some were allowed to emigrate with UNCHR assistance. See IRIN, "Kyrgyzstan: Tajik Refugees Celebrate Naturalization," *IRINnews* June 21, 2004.

international organizations even if they were not always comprehensible to the Akaev regime.

The Osh and Batken oblasts also have significant Tajik populations. A source of major tension between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan has centered on leasehold disputes. Border villages and collective farms routinely leased land in each other's republic during the Soviet era. Bishkek demanded back this land or sought border alterations to include leased areas into Kyrgyzstan. The collapse of Soviet-era mechanized agriculture led to year-round farming with intensive pressure on lowland pastures in the absence of organization and money to utilize uplands. This intensified pressure on the status of mainly lowland leased areas. Another cause for concern in Tajik-Kyrgyz relations has been Tajik migration into the sparsely-populated Batken oblast, large tracts of which are sparsely inhabited.

The Kyrgyz diplomatic response has been to leverage generally good relations with Dushanbe, particularly over their common stance as the small state victims of Uzbekistan, to negotiate back territory. In October 2002, Kyrgyzstan gained back fifty-seven km<sup>2</sup> of pasture land that had been lent to Tajikistan in the 1930s. Their hand was strengthened in the negotiations, according to Kyrgyz Vice-Prime Minister Bazarbai Mambetov, by the fact that the "Tajik" farmers using the pocket were in any case ethnic Kyrgyz.<sup>251</sup>

Both parties have disagreed over the border-delimitation issue at various times. In 2004, for example, Dushanbe proposed maps from the 1920s as a basis for discussions on delimiting the border between the Batken oblast and Tajikistan.

---

<sup>251</sup> RFE/RL, "Kyrgyzstan Receives Land Back from Tajikistan," *RFE/RL Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest*, April 11, 2003.

Bishkek, on the other hand, preferred a map dating from the 1950s. While border negotiations seem set to drag on for several years yet, they lack the acrimonious nature of Kyrgyz-Uzbek negotiations and the two countries have close relations within the CIS and the SCO. Bishkek continues to send food assistance to Northern Tajikistan in winter and has refrained from imposing visa restrictions on Tajik nationals like Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

Almost 9,000 refugees from the civil war in Tajikistan have been naturalized as Kyrgyz citizens. The vast majority were ethnic Kyrgyz who had lived in districts near the Kyrgyz border in Ngorno-Badakshan. Bishkek has not followed a policy of settling them in the depopulated Batken oblast that is experiencing ethnic Tajik settlement but has allowed most of them to settle in the North, implying that Bishkek is not always motivated by an ethnic political agenda. Thousands of ethnic Kyrgyz in any case remain in Northern Tajikistan, all living very close to the Osh or Batken oblasts, giving Bishkek strength to her claims on disputed regions of the frontier.<sup>252</sup>

In 1999 shadowy militia remnants, unemployed as a result of the peace negotiations that ended the Tajik civil war, were probably armed and equipped by the Afghan Taliban, possibly indeed to al-Qaeda. They planned a shortcut through the Kyrgyz Batken region to try and enter the Uzbek Ferghana with the declared intention of start a revolution in Uzbekistan. The insurgents decided to cut through Kyrgyz territory due to pre-existing familiarity with the region. During the Tajik civil war Bishkek had tacitly allowed militia groups involved in the war to base themselves

---

<sup>252</sup> For a recent analysis of the dynamics of Kyrgyz-Tajik cross-border tension, see Alisher Khamidov, "Kyrgyz-Tajik Border Riots Highlight Building Inter-Ethnic Tension in Central Asia," *Eurasnet.org* January 08, 2003.

within Kyrgyzstan.<sup>253</sup> With final aim at the Uzbek Ferghana, the IMU incursions in 1999 and 2000 were probably also motivated by the wish to muscle in on the narcotics production trade in the Osh and Batken Oblasts, usually the purview of local police forces. Between 1999 and 2000 there were several clashes with the Kyrgyz army, who ultimately defeated the Tajik insurgents after a competent and well-conducted campaign. The actions resulted in numerous casualties for the Kyrgyz including thirty-eight killed. This had an unanticipated nation building effect, as for the first time ever, caskets draped in the Kyrgyz flag were shown on national television. The insurgents disappeared back into Tajikistan and Afghanistan and melted away, perhaps eventually to be caught in the firestorm of the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2002.

Uzbekistan's contribution to the Batken campaign was to deploy its air force in support of the Kyrgyz army. The Uzbek air force failed to hit terrorist targets but infuriated Bishkek by bombing several Kyrgyz villages near the frontier, killing several Kyrgyz villagers and livestock. The next Uzbek move was to mine the frontier area. Imprecisely known in the Osh oblast, this resulted in the mining of areas in actual use by Kyrgyz farmers and a trickle of casualties resulting 2000-04.

Although promised military aid within the CIS structures little materialized for the Kyrgyz army during the two years of the crisis. Despite this, the Kyrgyz armed forces used the opportunity to train its better units in anti-insurgency warfare. The net result of the Batken conflict was to boost the confidence of the Kyrgyz armed forces. Unaided they stopped insurgents connected to the IMU from using Southern

---

<sup>253</sup> Amurbek Tekebaev, Chairman of Ata-Meken Party, interview with author, 3 February 2004, Bishkek.

Kyrgyzstan as a military base for operations in the Ferghana valley. Their, albeit brief, battle experience gives them a slight tactical advantage over the Uzbek army.

Another important organizational consequence was Akaev's decision to raise the far western rayons (counties) of the Osh Oblast to provincial status, creating the Batken Oblast in 1999. This concluded the trend begun in 1991 to dilute the power of the southern Osh Oblast in Kyrgyz domestic politics. It had already begat the Jalal Abad Oblast in 1991. The Akaev regime hived off Osh's peripheral rayons into new units, thus creating new oblast elites and patronage networks for the center to co-opt. Despite the dictates of power politics, the designation of a new oblast did have some practical administrative benefits. The inhabitants of the far west of the Osh Oblast were resentful at the lack of administrative investment. The new Batken Oblast provincial center was endowed with such oblast prerequisites as a campus of the state university and other such items of infrastructural capital, bringing in badly-needed jobs and funding from Bishkek.

### *Conclusion*

In this Chapter we have seen that Kyrgyzstan's relations with its former Soviet neighbors were complicated through the Akaev era by dealing with the collapse of the center and trying to reconstitute a regional system. Over the past fifteen years Kyrgyzstan has been successful in its diplomacy with Tajikistan and Kazakhstan in helping to overcome border disputes and trade issues, despite generally tense relations with Uzbekistan that have determined the shape of its foreign policy. While Russia remains the lynchpin of its strategy for maintaining sovereignty and security, we shall

see in the next chapter that Kyrgyzstan in this period was also successful in forging relations with non-Soviet powers too in order to bolster its position within the Central Asian state system.

## CHAPTER 6: KYRGYZSTAN'S OUTER CIRCLE

In the last chapter we outlined the responses to foreign policy challenges posed to Kyrgyzstan from relations with its inner circle, as they are viewed in Kyrgyz foreign policy thinking. Tense uncertain relations with Uzbekistan forced Kyrgyzstan to counter with a foreign policy strategy that could neutralize the threat and counterbalance Tashkent's obstreperousness. We see continuing Kyrgyz reliance on Russia as guarantor of its sovereignty and an important source of economic stability. This is contrary to the idea of Russia as a force for the erosion of its independence. Kyrgyzstan has had its share of headaches with Kazakhstan, mostly related to the continued fragmentation of the local Soviet system throughout the 1990s. By 2004 bilateral relations improved as a result of Russian influence on both countries as well as Kyrgyzstan's successful creation of a trilateral great power umbrella. This umbrella ensures that Kazakhstan can no longer mistreat her smaller, weaker neighbor with impunity and is forced to approach Kyrgyzstan as an influential small state. In Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan's only smaller, weaker neighbor, Bishkek has generally been supportive, albeit leveraging her influence for the favorable settlement of frontier disputes.

If the inner circle of Kyrgyz foreign policy consists of the above states, outer circle members Iran and Turkey constitute important players in its efforts in the past ten years to acquire regionally influential friends outside of the CIS. Of the two,

Kyrgyzstan has been closer to its supposed ethnic kin state although, as we shall see, Turkey has not outmatched Iran in importance to Kyrgyzstan. The United States, global hegemon and lender and donor of a significant portion of Kyrgyzstan's foreign aid, for a mixture of ideological and strategic reasons became more and more involved in the country throughout the 1990s. By 2004 the strategic interest remains paramount although an idealistic Washington has yet to recant its vision of a democratic Kyrgyzstan, as sort of Central Asian Senegal that could set an example to larger and more geo-strategically important neighbors.

#### *Kyrgyz-Turkish relations*

Since 1991 Turkey and Kyrgyzstan have sought close relations with each other. Given the supposed attraction of Turkey to the region in the 1990s the background to this interest is worthy of close attention. After 1991 many assumed that Turkey would be able to forge close ties, geopolitically and perhaps economically, with the Turkic Central Asian states. Turkey certainly saw Central Asia as of major importance during the 1990s. Kyrgyzstan for her part, while less attracted to the ideological dimensions of accepting Turkey as a model and also repelled by Turkic unity as an end in itself, has welcomed committed Turkish involvement in Kyrgyzstan as larger regional power able to exercise military and diplomatic muscle in the Trans Caspian area.

Turkish involvement in Kyrgyz affairs represents an important element of the overall Kyrgyz strategy to ensure that other regionally significant states are committed to its sovereignty. Kyrgyzstan's relations with Turkey since independence have gone

through various stages from an initial over-optimistic assessment of what Turkey's impact could really be in Kyrgyzstan to a more solid long-term partnership, albeit anchored in reality on both sides. By 2000 Bishkek was even ready to signal its coolness toward Ankara seen, for example, in the Kyrgyz delegation to the Turkic summit in Istanbul pointedly addressing the delegates in Russian. Despite that renewed bilateral cooperation in the period 1999-2004 gathered pace again showing a broad continuity of commitment on both sides. Turkey, for its part, sees Kyrgyzstan as one of the remotest and smallest independent Turkic states, which will never assume the importance of Azerbaijan in her foreign policy goals. Kyrgyzstan will always be only one element in Ankara's broader goals in Central Asia.

One primary goal of Soviet nationalities policy in Central Asia had been to try to minimize the potential for Turkic speaking groups to be influenced by the Turkish Republic. In the early 1920s Soviet perceptions of Turkish intentions toward the region assumed Pan-Turkism. This had emerged as a rather inchoate and poorly followed-out policy platform of the Ottoman governing Committee for Union and Progress prior to the First World War. It represented an effort to strengthen Ottoman identity by increasing its identification with Turkic Ottoman culture and language. One of the last CUP leaders, Enver Pasha, in an unlikely adventure, died whilst leading the remnants of the *Basmachi* against the Soviets in Central Asia in 1922. This fueled further Soviet fears about a potential contagion of Pan-Turkism. After 1991 there was renewed international attention for a largely forgotten ideology as it seemed possible that the five new Turkic states (Azerbaijan plus the Central Asian four) might supply renewed vigor to Pan-Turkism. Myriad other Turkic groups, from Tatars and

Bashkirs to Yakuts and Tuvans, waiting in the wings of Russia's vast Eurasian hinterland created speculation about the eventual challenge that reinvigorated Pan-Turkism might pose for continued Russian unity.

In the nineteenth century there had been a historical connection between Pan-Turkism and the Russian Empire. Many strands of reformist Central Asian political thought in the later nineteenth century had definite Pan-Turkist overtones and implications. Originating with the Volga Tatars, it was never really articulated into a coherent political ideology.<sup>254</sup> Early independence movements that flared up in the interregnum between Tsarist collapse and the establishment of Soviet power in the region often espoused 'Turkestani' identity or the union of all Central Asian peoples in one state or unit. This was paralleled in the thinking of contemporary Slavic settlers antipathetic to the Bolsheviks who also envisioned a 'Turkestan,' albeit less in control of native elements and more as a Russian Arizona, California or Florida.

Despite the Kemalist's seemingly anti-irredentist stance on foreign policy issues and conciliatory tone in Soviet-Turkish negotiations, Moscow still pursued a policy of reordering the Turkestan Gubernia in such a way as to reduce feelings of solidarity based on language and culture to fragment Turkestani identity. As discussed in Chapter Two, each titular nationality in the Soviet Union was encouraged to celebrate its uniqueness and distinctiveness from neighboring republics, in the educational systems and media. The forced-migrations of the 1940s and 1950s introduced considerable populations of Meshketian Turks and other western-Turkic

---

<sup>254</sup> The standard English-language treatment of Pan-Turkism is Jacob Landau, *Pan-Turkism: From Irridentism to Cooperation* (Bloomington IA: Indiana University Press, 1995). For primary sources, see Ziya Gokalp, *Turkculugun Easlari* (Modern Edition – Istanbul: Inkilap Kitabevi 1994), and Yusuf Akçura, *Uç Tarz-I Siyaset*, (Alexandria, 1904). Both are illustrative of efforts explore Turkic identity politics.

speaking groups into Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in particular. Entire villages were resettled in rural areas, for example, Aral in the northwestern Talas oblast.<sup>255</sup> As they were perceived as unwelcome outsiders and competitors for scarce resources, the population movements led to a strong aversion among Central Asian Turkic groups for their western kin. Decades of settlement appear to have mitigated this factor in Kyrgyzstan, where there is presently little reported tension between the Meshketian Turks and their Kyrgyz neighbors.

Meanwhile in Turkey under Mustafa Kemal Pan-Turkism was proscribed as a legal party platform. The state Republican People's Party (CHP) even pursued cordial ties with the Bolsheviks at least until 1923 in forming a common position against hostile Western powers. The Kemalist decision to renounce Pan-Turkism was based on several factors. Perhaps most pressingly, the Kemalists in 1920 needed to distance themselves from the Pan-Turkism of the CUP that had lost the war and destroyed the Empire. The ideology of Kemalism, as it was articulated by 1926, quickly rejected revisionism as a foreign policy agenda, seeking the recognition of its frontiers within the new Anatolian-based state and to bury the Ottoman legacy of Eurasian domination. As a result, Kemalists repudiated responsibility of Anatolian Turkey for the *Diş Türkler* (Outside Turks). Finally, during the Turkish nationalist struggle with Britain, France, Italy and Greece from 1919-1923, the Kemalists sought an understanding with the Bolsheviks. In an early telegram to Moscow, Mustafa Kemal offered a swap: full

---

<sup>255</sup> Meshketian Turks, indigenous to regions of Georgia adjacent to Turkey and speaking a language closely related to Anatolian Turkish and Azeri, were targets for Stalinist forced migration. Unlike the Crimean Tatars and Chechens, their relocation was more motivated purely by historical antagonism that Georgian party bosses perpetuated toward this non-Khartvelian ethnic minority.

recognition of the Soviet ownership of Azerbaijan and Georgia in return for Soviet quashing of anti-Turkish Armenian nationalism in the Caucasus.

As a result, Pan-Turkism was firmly proscribed in Turkey until the 1960s. From 1960 to 1990, Pan-Turkist parties such as the MHP (*Milli Halk Partesi*) attracted a small percentage of the vote and a high percentage of police attention, analogously to Sinn Fein in Ireland. The Turkic Soviet Republics were glossed over. In official Turkish historiography Central Asia was described in secondary school textbooks as being composed of the depopulated remnant of an earlier mass-migration to Anatolia.<sup>256</sup> By the 1960s and 1970s Turkish-Soviet relations had also thawed in the context of Turkey becoming a major economic partner for the Soviet Union. This made Ankara even less enthusiastic about the plight of the outside Turks.

The Soviet Union always remained suspicious of the intentions of Republican Turkey. Although Turkey officially repudiated Pan-Turkism, many ‘Turkestani’ dissidents and intellectuals settled in Turkey following the Soviet consolidation of power in Central Asia. Several of Kemal’s closest advisors were from a Pan-Turkist intellectual *milieu* reinforcing Soviet suspicions about the true intentions of the Kemalists. In turn their own rejection of Pan-Turkism left Mustafa Kemal and his adherents short of an ideology. The project of national reconstruction (1923-26) following the devastation of the War of Independence had filled this need to some extent. Yet from the late 1920s members of the ruling Kemalist party began to formulate an ideology (by the 1930s known in English as Kemalism or in Turkish *Atatürkçülük*) formally outlined in the Republic People’s Party Congress of 1933.

---

<sup>256</sup> For an original treatment of the creation and dissemination of this historiography in Turkey, see Busra Behar Ersanli, *İktidar ve Tarih* (İstanbul: AFA Yayınevi, 1990).

Significantly the Kemalists in Turkey borrowed heavily from Marxism-Leninism. This included elements such as the idea of a state controlled economy with central planning, a leadership cult around Atatürk and his close associates and, the primacy given to populism and the role of the state. But other policies were enthusiastically copied from the Soviet Muslim republics also including the switch from the Arabic to Latin alphabet in 1928. This closely mirrored the Azerbaijan SSR's earlier move in 1924 differing only in which Latin orthography (English versus French) the new alphabet would be based on.

Other policy directions implemented by the Kemalists in Turkey inspired by the pioneering example of the Soviet Muslim republics were the state-sponsored emancipation of women from their roles in traditional society and the adoption of Western modes of dress in place of local ones. Confiscation of *vaqf* lands and state-imposed control of the imamates were also closely modeled on Soviet precedents. Direct influence was felt in such ways as the Soviet-Moslem newspapers circulated widely among the leadership of the Turkish Republic. Many of Atatürk's closest advisors kept close links to the new leaderships in the Soviet Muslim republics. The Kemalists watched them very carefully. However, inspiration for domestic policies did not lead to any particular friendship between the Soviet Union and the Turkish Republic in the 1930s or anytime after. Turkey's transition to a limited form of democracy after 1949 was not accompanied by tolerance or understanding for the political Left.

Turkey pursued elements of a capitalist model of development as well as cordial relations with the West. The Soviet Union remained lukewarm towards

Turkish diplomatic efforts to construct a Balkan Pact in the early 1930s. The Soviet regime under Stalin began to pursue traditional Russian foreign policy goals, underwritten by the imperative to revise the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, and traditional sources of tension between Turkey and Russia grew. There were competing claims over the Bosphorus Straits and disputed provinces in the Southern Caucasus. Turkey emerged after 1950 as a staunch ally of the West and a NATO member. The military coup of 1980 was primarily aimed at the left. It succeeded in destroying the democratic left of the Turkish political spectrum, which did not endear Turkey to Moscow ideologically.

This attitude began to change only in the 1980s when Prime Minister Turgut Özal advanced the idea of closer ties to the Turkic Republics of the USSR. But this should be seen in the context of internal Turkish politics and also of the limited diplomatic rapprochement occurring between Turkey and the USSR by the late 1970s. Turkey was stung by the lack of support from the USA and the West over Cyprus, and, in addition, needed energy for an expanding heavy industrial sector in the context of poor relations with its petroleum-rich Arab neighbors. In this context, from 1976 onwards, Turkey canvassed the USSR for cheap energy and in return was allowed a few carefully supervised contacts with the republics most likely to supply the energy; including the Kazakh and Azeri SSRs. In general though, the large Kemalist Turkish bureaucratic and military establishment was not interested in Turkic Central Asia as a foreign policy objective even into the late 1980s. Further, outside of the Cyprus imbroglio, Turkey had shown an almost complete disinterest in championing the

plight of ethnic Turks and their cousins abroad, such as the Romanian Tatars, Bulgarian Turks and Iraqi Turkomen between 1945 and 1990.

Seen in this historical context a startling shift occurred in Turkish political attitudes to the Soviet Union and also the Turkic republics from 1990. This originated in the ideological vacuum in Turkey caused by the military's wholesale destruction in the 1980s of the old post-war political spectrum. New figures on the Turkish political scene after 1980 were constrained to court the popular vote without saying anything offensive to the army. Turgut Özal, a political nonentity before 1980, chose to consolidate political power in Turkey by appealing to populist sentiments of Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism. This was in its turn tolerated and even encouraged by the army who saw both as an ideological bulwark against the Left. Hitherto only a subject raised by very marginal political fringes on the right, mainstream Turkish politicians began to think seriously about the Turkic republics in the Soviet Union only when the crisis of the Soviet State, on the verge of collapse in 1991, became very obvious. The Turkish media, attuned to the Özalist liberalism on Pan-Turkic and Pan-Islamist issues, began to focus on the idea of their lost brethren in Central Asia and Azerbaijan.

The end of the Cold War caused a crisis in the Turkish establishment. NATO seemed less-relevant, the EU as distant as ever. Turkey had derived much of her Cold War importance as being geo-strategically vital in an Eastern Mediterranean that no longer seemed so strategic. The idea of a new role in the Trans Caspian area for Turkey following the Soviet collapse in 1991 seemed attractive both to the US and also Turkish policy makers. Turkey was (at least formally) supposed to be a secular

state with a free-market economy, and a security strategy that emphasized friendship with the West: what better model for the wayward Turkic Republics of the FSU?

The result of this was that Turkey was the first state to recognize officially the Central Asian States in December 1991 as independent sovereign states. All of the Central Asian States, including Kyrgyzstan, were thrilled that an important player in the NATO alliance and an ethnic-kin state had jumped to recognize and support them. The flattery of recognition, not just in a diplomatic sense but in a rawer emotional sense, continues to be one of the more positive aspects of Turkish-Turkic Central Asian relations. Turkey has ensured itself a lasting position of influence in the region via doing something that external observers, in a naïve belief that Turks were naturally Pan-Turkist, fail to appreciate as a sacrifice: the acceptance of Pan-Turkism as a legitimate plank of Turkish foreign policy decision-making, long rejected as a policy direction by the Kemalists in power in post 1945 Turkey. This is as radical by analogy as if the US suddenly were to dust off 'Manifest Destiny' and take aim at the annexation of Central America again.

Turkey as a model and patron for Kyrgyzstan and the Central Asian States has in the event proven rather imperfect and the ideological dimension of close relations is blunted in Kyrgyz-Turkish relations. The Soviet Central Asian and Turkish modernization programs were virtually identical. In Turkey political events led in time to full-fledged Kemalism emulating Soviet-style development through state industry and central planning by the 1930s and intensifying in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1990s a Turkey still reeling from the painful dismantling of its state run heavy industries under Prime Minister Tansu Çiller had little economic wisdom to offer as a

model of development. On the other hand Turkey's process of accommodation with democratic Islamic politics in the 1990s was awkward for Central Asia as its popularly elected moderate Islamicist government has not much in common with the secular authoritarian fundamentalism of the Central Asian regimes.

Ironically the Turkish connection has been the main conduit for what little Islamic modernism has genuinely permeated Kyrgyz society. This takes the form of unofficial and also quasi-official Turkish initiatives. A good unofficial example lies in the establishment in both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan of Fetullaçi schools run by the Nurcu order, a Turkish Sufi sect. The schools offer religious education in the model of reformed Jadidist educational philosophy, teaching English, modern languages and science. They are religious perhaps to no greater extent than Catholic schools in the US. Yet they nonetheless represent an uncomfortably religious model for a region that sees a grip on the educational system as important for transmitting secular-fundamentalist nationalism.<sup>257</sup> The Nurcus operate twelve high schools, mainly in Kyrgyz provincial cities, with over 2,000 pupils enrolled.<sup>258</sup> Kyrgyzstan benefits from an excellent network of high schools run by the largely benign Sufis. Students tend to be educated in critical thinking, active learning and question the established order. In short, they have much the same experience as students who benefited from access to the US educational system under various exchanges in the past decade.

Unlike Uzbekistan where all Turkish high schools, secular and Fetullaçi, were shut down in 2002 they continue to operate in Kyrgyzstan. Turkish private religious

---

<sup>257</sup> For an in-depth treatment of the Nurcu educational infrastructure more broadly in Central Asia, see Bayram Balçi, "Fetullah Gülen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia," *Religion, State and Society* 31, no. 2 (2003): 152-177.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

foundations, *vaqflar*, have also been active in higher education, funding a new theological faculty of Osh State University in 1998 with a three million dollar facility.<sup>259</sup> A less well-studied but nonetheless significant impact of Turkish social religiosity has been seen in the Anatolian small businessmen (as opposed to westernized, secular segments of Turkish society from the larger urban areas) who settle in Kyrgyzstan. Opening small businesses, restaurants, they tend to come from small towns in the Anatolian hinterland like Batman and are religiously conservative.

Official Turkish foreign aid to Kyrgyzstan is channeled through the Turkish answer to USAID, TİKA (*Türk İşbirliği ve Kalkınma İdaresi Başkanlığı*). It deals with assistance to the Turkic republics of the USSR, Northern Cyprus and other Turkic groups such as the Gag'auz in Moldova. Since 1991 Turkey has donated \$11.6 million in foreign aid to Kyrgyzstan. This is significant in comparison to other bilateral aid, yet by no means matching Japanese or United States assistance. Yet again, investment from Turkish private foundations, businesses and companies is not taken into account in this figure, and it would probably exceed the official amount. Projects funded by TİKA include \$2.5 million to purchase equipment for the Kyrgyz *militsia* (police) and a program to send junior diplomats to Ankara for short term visits to learn Turkish and English. Turkey has accepted contingents of Kyrgyz officer cadets for training at the prestigious *Kara Harp Okulu* (warfare college) in İstanbul.

Other substantial official investments include numerous subsidized secular Turkish high schools and three million dollars for the Turkish Manas University opened in 2000. This was the second Turkish college to open its doors in Bishkek.

---

<sup>259</sup> When I visited this faculty in 1999, from a glance at the curriculum, it struck the author as being primarily devoted to the study of Islam. All faculty met were Turkish.

Other contributions included purchases of furniture for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, the modest, if welcome, forms of Turkish aid are easily dwarfed in comparison by Switzerland's 102 million dollars 1991-2004 and about in the same league as aid from Great Britain (11 million for the same period).<sup>260</sup>

During the early 1990s Turkey promoted academic exchange programs that created university places for almost six hundred Kyrgyz students in Turkey. The numbers of Kyrgyz taking advantage of this free education peaked in the mid 1990s. They slumped thereafter as Kyrgyz students struggled with inadequate stipends with poor living and working conditions in Turkey. Consequentially, the number of Kyrgyz university students in Turkey has substantially decreased. Turkey remains a popular destination but for vacations and shopping rather than strong Turkish universities. Kyrgyz students would rather study in Western Europe or North America. Turkish students conversely have been attracted to Bishkek as Kyrgyz universities have less fussy entrance requirements and are cheaper. The primary magnet though has been learning Russian and hardly any Turkish students bother to study Kyrgyz.

Kyrgyz officials view Turkey as a useful ally but with clear limitations. She is too far distant and is herself a developing country. This renders the value of her support to Kyrgyzstan principally in consisting of being in the second outer circle of friendly states envisioned by Kyrgyz strategy. Thus she is viewed conceptually on a par with Iran (and in my discussions with Kyrgyz foreign policy officials, frequently

---

<sup>260</sup> Akaev declared on several occasions that Kyrgyzstan could become the "Switzerland of Central Asia." Wishful thinking perhaps, yet it has transpired that Kyrgyzstan is officially under Switzerland's wing both within the World Bank system, and the EBRD organizationally, the two funnels for most of the Swiss aid. The Swiss Development Agency, *Helvetas* has also been very active, particularly in projects to do with rural gender issues. *Donor Organizations and Foreign Assistance Rendered to the Kyrgyz Republic* (accessed April 27, 200); available from <http://eng.president.kg/president/extpolicy/kr-donorsenv>.

mentioned in the same sentence) as a medium sized power whose wing will definitely shore up Kyrgyz sovereignty and create options for Kyrgyz security. Turkey has been disinclined to become involved in regional tensions between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, remaining wary of issues that might puncture a superficial image of Turkic unity.

A key trading partner for Turkey in the post Cold War era has not turned out to be the Turkic Republics but Russia, an enormous market for Turkish manufactures and also for Turkish engineering and construction firms. Russia has not been shy in using this leverage on occasion to remind Ankara whose backyard the Central Asian Turks live in. For example, in 2000 the Russian Foreign Ministry harshly criticized a Turkish proposal that the annual summit of Turkic states acquire a collective security component.

#### *Kyrgyz-Iranian relations*

Iran has long viewed the Central Asian states as useful channels to help overcome diplomatic isolation and as potential export markets for Iranian manufactured goods. An element noticeably missing in Iran's decade or so of involvement with former Soviet Central Asia has been any real attempt to export its Islamic revolution to the region. As such it has been positively devoid of ideological potential as compared to Turkey. Iran's foreign policy, more often pragmatic than ideological, has not viewed the Central Asian states from this light. Since the 1979 Revolution, indeed, Iran has mainly reserved the privilege of revolutionary radical

export for outside regions with strong historical linkages to its Shia establishment; Bahrain, southern Iraq and southern Lebanon.

Central Asia has strong historical linkages to the Persian world. Uzbek cities still contain numerous Persian and Tajik speakers and Tajik is completely intelligible to Farsi speakers. Yet the shared religious history is absent. The oasis cities of Uzbekistan may have been culturally Persian but remained Sunni and were never under Safavid domination. There are relatively few Shia in former Soviet Central Asia (only c. 4,000 in Kyrgyzstan). The Ismaili communities of northern Tajikistan constitute the largest Shia concentration in Central Asia but they do not have links with Iran. Instead they look directly south to the Indian subcontinent for their religious heritage and inspiration. The Agha Khan, through his foundation, has been the principle donor to Ismaili communities in Northern Tajikistan.

The Akaev government at first viewed Iran as peripheral to its interests. Moreover it also perceived Tehran with some suspicion, rooted in Soviet perceptions of the 1979 Revolution. Although Iran opened an embassy in Bishkek in 1995 linkages were slow to develop. Direct scheduled flights also began in the late 1990s with Iranian flights from Bishkek to Mashad. Growing trade ties however, including floods of cheap Iranian household products and clothes, aided an Iranian-Kyrgyz rapprochement. It became evident that Iran had no ideological agenda that it wished to make apparent in the region. The absence of Iranian involvement in the Tajik civil war was proof if such were needed. Iranian attempts to reach out to Tajikistan had been slow and hesitant and also have been channeled through the expansion of trade and investment ties. The conception of Kyrgyz foreign policy began to take shape by the

late 1990s. As part of this it courted close relations with Iran. The country was another larger regional Trans Caspian power and became a logical part of the Kyrgyz strategy of cultivating strong security and trade linkages with countries likely to counterbalance Uzbekistan. Indeed, the ideal Kyrgyz objective would be some formal security relationship with Iran via a forum such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Although Iran does not have a frontier with Uzbekistan, the few hundred miles of flat desert separating the two in the form of Turkmenistan does not pose any geological obstacle to the projection of Iranian power.<sup>261</sup> This is in contrast to Indian and Pakistani interest in Central Asia. More proximate to Kyrgyzstan, they are ever shrouded behind the mass of the Tien Shan and Himalayas, precluding the realistic projection of either Indian or Pakistani military power in to the region. While the likelihood of Iranian military involvement in either Uzbekistan or Kyrgyzstan is very remote, the Kyrgyz would at least like to use the perception of Iranian-Kyrgyz partnership to send a distinct message to Tashkent that it has strong regional friends. To this end, from 2002 onwards, Kyrgyzstan has been sending regular high level trade and political delegations to Tehran, beginning with a visit from the Minister of Education in that year. Bilateral discussions in 2004 between Prime Minister Nikolai Tanaev and Iranian government delegations visiting Bishkek touched on trade and also undisclosed security agreements.<sup>262</sup> In 2004 Bishkek even began lobbying for the readmission of Iran to the Asian Development Bank.

---

<sup>261</sup> Although the Turkmen-Iranian frontier itself is composed of mountains in the western parts at least.

<sup>262</sup> RFE/RL, "Iranian Delegation in Bishkek," *RFE/RL Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest*, March 11 2002.

Tehran for its part, while Kyrgyzstan is certainly a useful albeit small market for exports, sees the primary value of such a partnership as lying in a friendly local small state willing to help advance Iranian commercial and diplomatic interests regionally. The prospect that at some point Kyrgyz hydroelectricity, whose exports are to resume to Russia and Kazakhstan in 2005, could also be made available to its industrial north is a tempting idea. A Kyrgyz parliamentary delegation that visited Iran in May 2004 held discussions on this.<sup>263</sup> A further, but very theoretical consideration might be the eventual availability of Kyrgyz water, if Kyrgyzstan ever managed the commoditization of its main regional export. To some extent the motivation for Iran is also likewise to enlist allies versus Uzbekistan, with whom it has had frictions over the geo-politics of Northern Afghanistan and Uzbek support for ethnic Uzbek groups in Northern Afghanistan.

Cash-strapped Iran, dealing with acute internal humanitarian relief issues, in 2004 committed one million dollars for the opening of a school for disabled children in the Kyrgyz Issik Kul oblast.<sup>264</sup> Particularly bad landslide seasons in the Spring and Fall in Kyrgyzstan for the past several years triggered Iranian humanitarian aid in the form of food and blankets. A commercial trade representation office of the Qazvin province is due to open in Bishkek. Prime Minister Nikolai Tanayev announced ambitious goals for increasing bilateral trade to 200 million dollars annually.<sup>265</sup> Kyrgyzstan has not been entirely uncritical of Iran and has even granted asylum to persecuted Iranian religious groups such as Bahai' refugees. Yet the fact that Bishkek

---

<sup>263</sup> RFE/RL, "Kyrgyz Legislators Visit Iran," *RFE/RL Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest*, March 16, 2004.

<sup>264</sup> RFE/RL, "Iran Gives Kyrgyzstan \$50 Million," *RFE/RL Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest*, September 30, 2004.

<sup>265</sup> Iran Daily, "Kyrgyz Electricity Cooperation Studied," *Iran Daily*, June 22, 2004.

is seeking to strengthen ties with Iran at the same time as hosting a US military base well-demonstrates a pragmatic commitment to forge strong bonds with potential counterweights to the regional hegemon Uzbekistan.

### *Kyrgyz-US relations*

The story of Kyrgyz-American relations is, of course, principally one of the United State's impacts on Kyrgyzstan. Of all of Kyrgyzstan's closest partners examined the United States is the only one with an ideological goal in Kyrgyzstan implying regime change and transformation of her political culture. Ironically, Kyrgyzstan's weaker state and liberal inclinations have allowed many of the ideologically-oriented arms of US foreign policy to operate expansive programs in Kyrgyzstan, creating concern for the regime. While publicly lauding close relations with the USA, privately and in more unguarded moments, both government and many intellectuals in Kyrgyzstan worry about the impact of democratization efforts that they fear might unleash more instability than the system can contain. Of course, this ubiquitous cavil is deployed by authoritarian regimes anxious to maintain a monopoly on power the world over. However, during my time in Kyrgyzstan what struck me in particular was that I would hear it even from well-informed ordinary Kyrgyz who disliked the regime and who accepted that eventual democratization was desirable and inevitable.

In his Speech to Parliament of 2002 Akaev hailed the arrival of US military forces under the Anti-Terrorist Coalition as signaling the missing piece of the great power umbrella jigsaw puzzle in Kyrgyz macro geo-strategic security and referred to

the “activation” of US-Kyrgyz relations.<sup>266</sup> In reality Kyrgyz American relations had been pretty energetic before 2001 although both sides suffered from fundamental misunderstandings about the other. Kyrgyz leaders viewed the US as a source of foreign aid and a generous donor and were mindful of the influence of the US in international organizations instrumental to propping up the Kyrgyz economy after independence.

At the same time the Kyrgyz suffered from inadequate appreciation of US interests in Central Asia. This partially stemmed from a very hazy grasp of US foreign policy behavior generally but was also due to the fact that the US itself had a difficult time throughout the 1990s defining what its foreign policy in Central Asia should be. As US interests in Kyrgyzstan began to gel in the mid 1990s the Akaev regime exploited its reputation to the hilt as a potential laboratory for liberal economic reform and democratic politics in Central Asia. At the same time the seeds of the poor relations characterizing the period 1998-2001 were contained in just this. In May 2004 in another speech Akaev lashed out against the ideology of exporting democracy. He likened it to the attempts of the Bolsheviks to sow global revolution; i.e., just as misguided and doomed to failure. This was a blunt message to the US, and revealed a growing animosity that Kyrgyz officials feel toward the democratization aspects of US involvement in Kyrgyzstan.

To many in the US foreign policy establishment, initially Kyrgyzstan was just another one of the numerous hard-to-pronounce “Stans” emerging suddenly in the aftermath of Soviet collapse. It had benefited from the general American policy of

---

<sup>266</sup> Askar Akaev, *Kyrgyzstan Özgörülgön Düyñödö: Kyrgyz Respublikasının Prezidenti Askar Akaevdin Kyrgyz Respublikasının Jogorku Kengeshinin Kosh Palatasının Birgeleshken Jyymında Süylögön Sözü (7 Mai 2002 Jil)*, (Bishkek: Uchkun, 2002).

support for the sovereignty of the former Soviet republics via diplomatic recognition and integration into the international community. By 1993 US embassies had been established in all five Central Asian capitals. Beyond that US policymakers were rather scratching their heads regarding Central Asia. US foreign policy is highly referential to established precedents and traditions. Central Asia simply fell between the cracks, a corner of the globe Washington had never pigeonholed.

Caspian hydrocarbon potential rapidly seized the agenda, a framework that Washington was very comfortable with given its vast experience with oil geopolitics. Objectives and methods could be quickly sketched by knowledgeable and experienced practitioners and analysts in government, academia and the private sector. Yet this new fascination left the hydrocarbon-challenged Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan beyond the policy pale and *cui bono?* unanswered. As Frederick Starr has pointed out by the mid 1990s it seemed that Washington's inability to invent a foreign policy for Central Asia was a result of its being held hostage to its desire to blockade Iran diplomatically and by its partisan stance on the Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict dictated by domestic politics.<sup>267</sup>

In 1993 with the intensification of civil war in Tajikistan Washington began to pay more attention to southern Central Asia. The instability in Afghanistan threatened the wider region. There was also the realization that Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan sat on most of the water for a huge desert region where most of the area's population lived. This triggered increased aid and advice for water-sharing agreements. Finally the legacy of interethnic strife in the Kyrgyz Ferghana earned the area a reputation as a

---

<sup>267</sup> Frederick Starr, "Power Failure: American Policy in the Caspian," *The National Interest* (Spring 1997): 20-31.

potential flashpoint and a good destination for conflict-prevention aid and practitioners.

Uniquely, Kyrgyzstan invented its own importance to the US. Washington had been flummoxed by lapse of most post-Soviet states into authoritarianism by the mid 1990s. The Akaev government's commitment to radical free market reforms, combined with the presence of a lively opposition and freer media than in neighboring states, soon impressed Washington with the potential of Kyrgyzstan to become the first democracy among the former Soviet Central Asian states. The small size of the country was alluring in this regard as well and contributed to an intuitive sense of Kyrgyzstan as a laboratory.

Innate Kyrgyz openness to outside influences led to the regime embracing the idea of as many foreign aid organizations as possible investing in a time of dire economic decline. This created fertile ground for the presence of many US organizations in Kyrgyzstan. By the late 1990s Kyrgyzstan was commanding thirty percent of Washington's assistance to Central Asia. The relative ease of working in the political and economic climate of Kyrgyzstan and the pleasant living conditions in Bishkek lured organizations whose Central Asian programs had floundered elsewhere. By the late 1990s Bishkek hosted the offices and programs of USAID and the Peace Corps accompanied by, to list but a few, many USAID subcontractor NGOs and companies such as Mercy Corps (agricultural reform and micro lending), Carana Corporation, Pragma, (both working mainly on SME enterprise initiatives), Counterpart Corporation (Civil Society and NGO creation), ABA-CEELI, (legal reform), IREX and ACTR (educational exchanges) and AED (technical transfer

education). Several for-profit companies that feed on USAID business also opened doors including Winrock, Deloitte Touche, and Booz-Allan Hamilton.

Despite criticisms that these agencies essentially replicated the foreign aid pitfalls of the previous two decades in Latin America and Africa, much has been achieved.<sup>268</sup> Kyrgyzstan has certainly fallen head-first into some of the donor dependency traps awaiting impoverished developing countries. Examples include amassing an enormous foreign debt, rent-seeking elites relying on donor handouts to constitute much of the national budget. These problems, however, ought not to nullify completely achievements. An in-depth assessment of US assistance in Central Asia would be a separate research study in itself and is beyond my scope here. However, a couple of examples of positive impact can be found in work of the Peace Corps and Mercy Corps.

The Peace Corps for instance, has gained widespread respect among the Kyrgyz for its huge program (the largest in Central Asia, sometimes with intakes of seventy volunteers or more) working mainly in remote rural areas to assist secondary education. A fascinating by-product of the Peace Corps program are dozens of Americans fluent in Kyrgyz, sometimes married to local people, who remain in Bishkek and elsewhere in the country beyond their service. Although the Peace Corps has worked tangentially on democratization issues, for instance trying to get new

---

<sup>268</sup> For a critique of the work of US and other donor agencies in Kyrgyzstan, see Alexander Cooley, "International Aid to the Former Soviet States: Agent of Change or Guardian of the Status Quo?" *Problems of Post-Communism* Vol. 47 No. 4 (July-August 2000): 34-44, and Alexander Cooley and James Ron. "The NGO Scramble: Organizational Insecurity and the Political Economy of Transnational Action." *International Security*, Vol. 27 No. 1 (Summer 2002): 5-39.

content into civics classes placed on the national curriculum and offered in the school system, generally their reputation is one of benevolent service.

Mercy Corps, based in Oregon but with connections to the Presbyterian Church of Scotland and mainly funded by USAID, has helped counteract the sheep farming collapse by introducing antipodean sheep breeds alleviating the fiasco of Soviet era Merino introduction. Overall the presence of American NGOs mainly funded by USAID and the State Department has been extremely visible in a small country. The extensive impact and interpenetration of the US into almost every sector of Kyrgyz government, politics and society in a very rapid space of time is striking. This is especially so, given that America is a country thousands of miles away hitherto unknown to most Kyrgyz except in terms of the stereotypes of popular culture.

Public diplomacy programs funded by the 1992 Freedom Support Act contributed to this process by sending thousands of Kyrgyzstani students to the US on high school, undergraduate and graduate study exchanges from 1993-2004. The number of places for Kyrgyz students has been tiny by comparison to the number of places allotted to Ukraine and Russia under these programs. For instance, in 2004, Kyrgyzstan had about three places compared to Ukraine's twenty or so within the graduate exchange Muskie program, sending people to study for MA degrees.<sup>269</sup> Despite the modest numbers, in a small country this created a significant impact. Related to this a startling chapter in US-Kyrgyz relations in the 1990s surrounded the establishment of a US Government funded university in Bishkek. This will be examined below. Programs such as the Freedom Exchange Act, Peace Corps and

---

<sup>269</sup> Information obtained by author when serving as Muskie Semi-Finalist interviewer, February 2003.

others have had an enormous impact for very modest (for foreign aid programs) investment.

More controversially USAID's funding of business education and accountancy reform was accompanied by a funding track to help reform democratic culture and local institutions. This steadily enlarging budget line was almost seven million dollars in 2002.<sup>270</sup> Using subcontractor organizations such as the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI), they launched various training programs that aimed at producing and institutionalizing a Western-style activist opposition. Simultaneously Counterpart Corporation, another democratization subcontractor, has tried to create a Western-style civil society by funding the emergence of countless NGOs, completely ignoring the fact that there is a perfectly functional local civic society. NDI worked closely with an umbrella Coalition of NGOs, which emerged as an important pressure group and activist organization in Bishkek if not more widely in Kyrgyzstan. Thomas Carothers has pointed to the tendency in the US democratization "template" or "standard menu," as it has evolved during the past thirty years, to try and create institutions recognizable in American civil society. This focuses on advocacy NGOs while overlooking institutions that are more typically part of civil society (e.g. cultural, tribal, religious groups).<sup>271</sup>

The Coalition of NGOs is currently led by an outspoken character, Edil Baisaloff, a former student at the American University in Central Asia. It often challenged the Akaev regime on issues to do with electoral law and constitutional

---

<sup>270</sup> USAID, *USAID Assistance Strategy for Central Asia*, (Almaty, USAID Regional Mission: July 2000).

<sup>271</sup> Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment, 1999), 210-211.

reform, leading to government charges that the outspokenness of the Coalition on subjects as wide as election reform to media freedom meant that the group was not really an NGO but a de facto political party with aspirations to political power. US non-government democratization organizations such as the National Democratic Institute (NDI) are kept at a theoretical distance from the official US diplomatic presence. However, close connections between the contractors, USAID and the Embassy in all spheres, from daily meetings to socializing, mean that this subtlety is lost on most Kyrgyz, opposition and pro-regime alike.

Related to this, close ties between the Embassy and opposition groups create the prospect, seen in Azerbaijan and first pointed out by Thomas Goltz in that context, that US democratization policy may slip into a catch-22 loop.<sup>272</sup> Designed only to foster political opposition, it is less good at aiding any party or group that gets into power, which will inevitably come under great institutional pressure to behave just as the outgoing regime did. Given that most of the political opposition in Kyrgyzstan come from exactly the same background and broad exposure to political influences in the Soviet era as the Akaev regime, it is hard to see how this could be avoided as a new generation has yet to establish itself in Kyrgyz politics sufficiently distant from the politics of the Soviet past and molded by new influences.

An early source of friction in relations between Bishkek and Washington emerged in 1996 due to the flood of American missionary organizations proselytizing in the country. They were mainly composed of Southern Baptists, but with other evangelical fundamentalist Christian groups as well. By 1998 this led to an angry response from the hierarchies of the two established religions in Kyrgyzstan, the

---

<sup>272</sup> Thomas Goltz, "Catch 907 in the Caucasus," *The National Interest* (Summer 1997): 37-45.

Muslim *Muftiyat* and the Russian Orthodox patriarchate. In several angry briefings from the Embassy, the Ministry of the Interior was given to understand that a free hand for American religious groups was a precondition for US assistance. Consequently the Government began to back down and by 2004 saw the advantage of appearing less Islamic. Bishkek even began encouraging Mormon missionaries active in the country.

### *American University in Central Asia*

American determination to become engaged in Kyrgyzstan as a potential laboratory for long-term social and political reform is best seen in the example of the unprecedented investment in, and support for, the creation of an American University in the region, that would serve as a regional equivalent to the American University in Cairo or Beirut. If sudden regime change could not be affected by the ministrations of the democratization efforts of organizations such as NDI, IRI and IFES (International Foundation for Election Systems), a longer term bet was to invest in educating a new generation in critical skills and contemporary social sciences and then unleash them to change the system from within.

Foreign high schools and universities as institutional purveyors of modernity and ideological change and revolution in the post-colonial context is, of course, nothing new. The first government cabinet of independent Bulgaria in the 1880s, for instance, was predominantly composed of graduates of Robert College in Istanbul. This was one of many American colleges established throughout the Near East during the nineteenth century as a result of the Unitarian and other evangelical protestant

belief in the value of education as a means to proselytize. In Eurasia after 1991 American universities mushroomed in places as diverse as Armenia and Bulgaria, although in contrast to their nineteenth century progenitors these were predominantly secular.

Academic exchanges were easily understandable to the Kyrgyz elites following independence as many had spent years in Moscow or other institutions elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. They were very open to the various foreign aid educational exchange and assistance programs that were established in the republic following independence. The Government even funded a program of its own to send cadres abroad for graduate degrees. Concern at the perceived isolation of the Kyrgyz within the Soviet Union contributed to its eagerness to embrace exchange programs. It also helped make universities with 'foreign' or international affiliations attractive to prospective students within the context of the poorly regulated free-for-all that characterized the Kyrgyz higher education market in the 1990s. Institutions with foreign affiliations offered the tacit idea as being one step in a chain of progress leading to employment overseas.

Indeed the idea of the university has been a leitmotif in Kyrgyz diplomacy since independence. During his period in office Akaev frequently tried to use higher education in particular as a way of marketing and internationalizing Kyrgyzstan. In 2003 he suggested that Kyrgyzstan would be the perfect host to a campus of the United Nations University. This was the latest in a long line of statements and plans to bring Kyrgyzstan to the attention of the international community by higher education initiatives, now even including an OSCE Academy in 2004. Whether a country of five

million people with over forty existing higher education institutions really needs more is debatable.

Prior to the opening of the US base, and during a period of rising tension between Washington and Bishkek from 1997-2001, the regime saw the presence of an American university run in cooperation with the US State Department as a way of portraying that Akaev was a close ally of Washington. In this manner it hoped to counteract some of the appearance of the US sponsoring opposition groups in the country.

This tendency to favor universities stemmed from his academic background and personal familiarity, as a physics professor by training, with tertiary education. Additionally it is also attributable to the general Kyrgyz diplomatic fondness for agreements and protocols establishing research and educational institutions. Akaev also used captive student and academic audiences to launch policy statements and books at various times throughout the 1990s.<sup>273</sup> These were an attempt to lend authority to his statements and also create publicity and legitimacy among a public used to a generally deferential attitude to higher education inherited from the Soviet culture. Since the early 1990s, three main players have established themselves in backing universities in Kyrgyzstan; the United States, Turkey and Russia.

AUCA was started as an experimental faculty called the Kyrgyz-American Faculty within the Kyrgyz State-National University in 1994 by an adventurous and charismatic English instructor, Camilla Sharshekeeva. Her background during the Soviet period was in the apparatus of Komsomol, the Communist youth league. She

---

<sup>273</sup> Such as the presentation of his economics text at the American University in Central Asia in April 2000.

came from a well-connected northern clan and was Moscow educated. Beyond the label, initially there was little ‘American’ in content about the institution. The curriculum remained local in design although an atmosphere of flexibility and determination to avoid the low standards and corruption plaguing other local college programs in the region certainly provided a foreign flavor. Corruption was kept at bay by paying higher salaries to local teachers.

The nascent Kyrgyz-American Faculty (KAF) made the leap to something larger and more important in the mid 1990s. It was assigned a couple of American Fulbright –Exchange Scholars one of whom remained as an administrator and eventually became the first president of the institution. KAF was not particularly strategic to local US public diplomacy and received no money. This was to change with a chance visit by the US Vice-President Albert Gore in 1993. Gore had been scheduled to visit neighboring Kazakhstan but fog in Almaty caused his plane to divert to nearby Bishkek to the consternation of unready US diplomats there. They hastily arranged a tour of the first thing they could think of, the Kyrgyz-American Faculty. Gore was impressed and promised money. Instructions were issued to the State Department’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs to disgorge funds. By 2003 this amounted to three million, plus a seven million dollar endowment drawn from USAID and an equal contribution from the Soros Foundation (Open Society Institute). Another large grant of five million dollars from the State Department was given to Indiana University to coordinate faculty training at AUCA.

The US State Department cooperated with OSI in sending out a joint evaluation team in 1998 and then a second follow up team in 2002. As a result of their

recommendations the university agreed that a board of trustees should be appointed consisting jointly of Americans and Kyrgyz. The experience with setting up a board inspired the Provost, Sharshekeeva, to extend the idea nationally once she subsequently became Minister of Education. The Akaev presidency has been central to the university also, half of the university's board being appointments approved by Akaev. The university was given exemption from Ministry of Education curricular requirements as well as customs exemption privileges on the import of equipment.

Prior to 2001 AUCA was becoming important to the regime as an anchor of US involvement that was not overtly threatening to the regime. The university represented the sort of joint public diplomacy exercise that the Kyrgyz Government preferred. It had considerable levers of control inbuilt to ensure the institution did not become a source of opposition. In 1999 a prominent opposition figure, Topchubek Turgenaliev, was hired as an adjunct teacher but quickly fired after the regime expressed its displeasure to the university administration.<sup>274</sup>

The American University has benefited from its proximity to the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry. Several prominent Foreign Ministry officials, including Erlan Abdyl daev, current Ambassador to China, taught there. Muratbek Imanaliev, the former Foreign Minister, have taught in the international relations program. Since 1998 they even share different wings of the same building on the Old Square (*Stari Ploschad*) in Bishkek.<sup>275</sup>

---

<sup>274</sup> As Chair of the Politics Department at the time, the author witnessed this episode.

<sup>275</sup> The building, containing the two institutions began as the main headquarters of the Kyrgyz Communist Party and contains many legacies of that heritage – the AUCA wing has a large meeting room adorned with portraits of Marx, Engels and Lenin, (with a matching Stalin alcove whitewashed out). A third floor office is reputed to be where the visiting Bukharin was when he received the phone call to return to Moscow – to eventual arrest and trial – in 1937.

*Not an island after all*

By 1999 the idea of Kyrgyzstan as a regional island of democracy began to tarnish in American eyes as reports began to trickle back that all was not well in America's Central Asian laboratory of political reform. It became apparent that the Akaev regime was cracking down on the media and rival spheres of political action. Several newspapers, including *Respublica* were closed down by the mechanism of civil suit and fine following government-sponsored lawsuits. Manipulation of local and parliamentary elections, such as those in February 2000, drew increasing American ire and criticism. Worse, leading opposition figures were harassed and jailed including the former Mayor of Bishkek and popular opposition leader, Feliks Kulov. The US invested in Kyrgyzstan as a potential liberal and democratically-inclined regime in a sea of authoritarianism regionally, *pour encourager les autres*. As the Kyrgyz political scene unraveled and began to reveal strong similarities to its neighbors, the unpleasant reality became apparent in Washington that Kyrgyzstan was no exception to the rule after all and patience began to wear thin.

The American University remained, from the point of view of the Akaev regime, however one sphere of positive and functional cooperation between the two countries as tensions escalated between the US and the Akaev administration 1997-2000. Relations were further soured in the late 1990s by extremely overt American involvement in supporting opposition candidates. This included instances of USAID officials escorting the entourages of opposition politicians in rural canvassing. The net effect of the efforts of NDI was to create a highly politicized bloc of NGOs and was

---

perceived by the government and many Kyrgyz elites as being artificial creatures of American financial support. As we have seen to many Kyrgyz the American idea of civil society was being conflated with an adversarial political system that many felt the country was not ready for.

The Akaev regime understood that there were very limited US interests in Kyrgyzstan counterbalancing its increasingly fragile value to the US as a poster-child for liberalism in the region. Bishkek for its part was reliant on US goodwill generally to secure foreign funding. The United States was a major source of guaranteeing aid donor dollars giving the US leverage. The University was able to benefit as it exploited the regime's increasing nervousness about its image in US eyes in order to obtain concessions on a number of issues it would probably have found difficult otherwise had the regime been feeling more confident regarding its position with the US government.

The US sought to engage the Central Asian States in the NATO partnership for Peace, consistent with the American effort to retool NATO and imbue it with a mission in the Post Cold-War era. In 1998 the military exercises launched with US troops participating in Kazakhstan helped put the region more on the Pentagon's map. Military attaches busy in Bishkek and Dushanbe were also active in raising the potential strategic value of the region. The US has donated military equipment such as surveillance helicopters to the Kyrgyz border guard forces and armed forces working on disaster relief.<sup>276</sup> This provision does not stem from an American recognition of a Russian Monroe Doctrine in the region, something that Washington has failed to

---

<sup>276</sup> RFE/RL, "US Present Kyrgyzstan with Defense Equipment," *RFE/RL Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest*, December 08, 2000.

supply in the past decade. Rather, Kyrgyzstan represents too small a market for western equipment at present and that the Kyrgyz are unable to service any other sort of equipment for now.

Even before Central Asia became part of the front line against Washington's global war on terror after 2001 there were subtle signs that Washington had noticed that tiny Kyrgyzstan was not without strategic value. Tense relations with China, over Taiwan and trade issues, caused the US to evaluate Kyrgyzstan in another light. It was proximate to the southern arc of instability in south Central Asia, yes, but it also had a thousand kilometer frontier with China. Hitherto obscure on Washington's radar, Xinjiang was pushed to the forefront by escalating US-Chinese tensions over Taiwan 1999-2001.

Bishkek sought to gain leverage with Washington by promoting its geo strategic value even before 2001. Afterwards it lost no time offering membership and its facilities in the Anti Terrorist Coalition. However this was only after extensive consultations with and a green light from Moscow. As we have seen the decision to invite in the Coalition Forces (technically a multi-national force, but popularly perceived in Kyrgyzstan as consisting primarily of Americans) was not an easy one for Akaev's cabinet. Many powerful voices in the Foreign Ministry did not like the idea.<sup>277</sup> The opponents argued that the United States had leveraged its donor influence into tendrils of control in Kyrgyz domestic politics. Benefiting from benign US public diplomacy initiatives such as the American University was one thing, but surely accepting US forces become the first of few slippery steps toward becoming a client state. The presence of military forces would surely just empower its surrogates not in

---

<sup>277</sup> Ambassador Muratbek Imanaliev, interview by author, 16 August 2002, Bishkek.

uniform. Additionally there was concern that this would squander the carefully built relations with China particularly and some were unsure how far Russia's assent to the principle really went.

Proponents believed that the US presence would increase Kyrgyz diplomatic leverage with her neighbors. This was consistent with the foreign policy framework of befriending and engaging great powers into bolstering Kyrgyz sovereignty. It was also an opportunity at last to provide the US with a solid geopolitical interest in Kyrgyzstan that could hopefully take the edge off of the democratization front. Regarding the danger of empowering US interference in her internal affairs, the feeling was that a US military commitment would blunt interference in Kyrgyz domestic politics. They would be ushering in an arm of US foreign policy, the Pentagon, universally well-known as being less motivated by the democratization mission. More sophisticated in the ways of US foreign policy after a decade Bishkek saw the opportunity to play one arm off against the other.

Initially Bishkek offered the US a choice of decrepit disused airfields in the North that would require a lot of restoration before being usable. They were offered Tokmok before the Russians. This was not entirely cynical but part of the *Silk Road* ideology of renovating transport facilities. Hosting French and US refueling tankers as well as intermittent squadrons of fighter attack jets, Bishkek has been forceful in refusing to broaden the goals of the base, and latterly the Akaev regime refused to allow the US to base long distance surveillance aircraft (AWACS) there. Its forces were only to be used for tasks relating to maintaining stability in Afghanistan.

The airbase dramatically changed the role of Kyrgyzstan as a small authoritarian country where donor aid was creating a lot of influence in internal politics to a key geo- strategic ally. Motivated more by the an extension of Mahan's thinking than Mackinder's, perhaps, the Pentagon was piloting a strategy of maintaining forward "lily pad" bases away from the immediate conflict zone. These could be equated with dry land aircraft carriers. Bishkek benefited financially from the \$13,000 fee for each aircraft take off and landing, and the military base created local employment. By 2003 statements that avoided addressing the long term commitment were contradicted by the construction of permanent facilities such as barracks and offices. Although a single base is unlikely to foster the sort of economic development that massive US military presence created in Korea or Japan, the influence of the base is becoming felt in Bishkek as an army of local contractors provide everything from food to dry cleaning for thousands of service people.

In reality the Manas Airbase is a back-up for Washington in case instability in neighboring Uzbekistan precludes long term use of the larger and more strategically useful facility in Termez on the Afghan border. The Uzbek facility, unlike Manas, does not have the inconvenience of simultaneously being used for civil aviation with everything in plain site of passengers. Given the likelihood of Uzbek instability is not so remote, Manas undoubtedly is still useful Washington. This was seen in the three year extension of the lease and elaboration of a formal status of forces agreement in 2003.

Not simply as a launch pad for operations against Afghanistan, Manas has some potential for monitoring China whose airspace lies minutes from Manas by fast

jet. For the first time in history the US has succeeded in encircling China with military installations. Growing US-Mongolian military cooperation 1998-2004 suggests that Kyrgyzstan might not be the first Inner Asian neighbor of China in this role. Yet it is unlikely, given Bishkek's nervousness toward Beijing (examined in Chapter Seven below) that any overt tactical use against China would be countenanced. 2002-03 however saw limits to Kyrgyz support for US as Bishkek made it clear that it would refuse to support military intervention in Iraq and would not allow any of the forces based on her territory to be used for this purpose. Although Kyrgyzstan has kept a low profile in the Islamic Conference she did not want to alienate any in the Islamic world. More importantly, she wanted to keep in step with Russia over the issue.

Bishkek has been encouraged by Washington to pursue bilateral contacts within the United States by cultivating linkages with particular American states. This strange state's rights diplomacy led to various visits by Akaev and Kyrgyz officials to Montana, whose National Guard has a relationship with the Kyrgyz National Guard although in Kyrgyzstan this is supposed to be equivalent to an elite unit rather than part-time augmentations. Bishkek also retreated from its cool attitude toward American missionary organizations in the mid 1990s and is now at pains to demonstrate to Washington that it allows them free rein. A delegation from Utah, including the governor, visited Kyrgyzstan in 2003 and declared itself open to providing assistance on the condition that Mormon missionaries were allowed to proselytize freely in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>278</sup> The regime gave its assurances in a statement that implied that, in a policy reminiscent of post war South Korea, diversification of the religious base of the population was to be welcomed. Other states that Kyrgyzstan has

---

<sup>278</sup> William Hansen, interview by author, 08 June 2003, Bishkek.

engaged in this odd bilateral-multilateral diplomacy include Washington State which received a USAID grant to retrain and mentor representatives from the Kyrgyz energy sector.<sup>279</sup>

The United States is not the only North American country with long-standing interests in Kyrgyzstan. Canadian firms have been prominent in the country's gold mining sector since 1992 and gold mining constitutes fourteen percent of Kyrgyzstan's GDP. Kyrgyzaltyn, the state gold company that leases the mining rights to Canadian ventures such as Kumtor, were controlled by the Akaev clan and opaque as far as the destination of profits. Canadian foreign aid to Kyrgyzstan is minute however. Relying mainly on Canadian labor and miners from the Canadian west, their presence has contributed to the rapid impact of North Americans in Kyrgyzstan. The average Kyrgyz often does not understand the difference between Canadians and their southern cousins. The North American control of a highly extractive industry has been grounds for embarrassment. In 1999 a Canadian tanker truck with several tones of cyanide took a wrong turn and plunged into a tributary river of Lake Issik Kul. Several people were poisoned before the cyanide broke down and the entire produce harvest of the local district had to be destroyed.

In conclusion, US-Kyrgyz relations have taken several twists and turns through the 1990s up to the ouster of Akaev in 2005. The most remarkable is the rapid pace of Kyrgyz-US contacts at all levels: social, economic, strategic. There has been increasing impact on a distant country that most Americans have never heard of. Prior to 2001 Kyrgyzstan was of limited value to American interests in the region. Bishkek

---

<sup>279</sup> BBC Monitoring Service, "Kyrgyzstan and US State of Washington to Cooperate in Energy Sector," *BBC Monitoring Service*, November 12, 2003.

traded on its liberalism to attract increased US donor investment. US investment, however, included ideologically-motivated agendas found in its foreign aid portfolio. After 2001, the US found an unprecedented geopolitical interest in Kyrgyzstan, albeit modest and certainly on Moscow's suffrage. The big question is whether the intensification of American democratization efforts in the country will succeed. In Uzbekistan since 2002 Washington's policy kept military assistance separate from general donor aid that has been decreased due to Tashkent's abysmal human rights record. Yet there are numerous examples of client states worldwide where the US has put its ideological imperative in service of military and strategic objectives. Washington for its part does not appear to have grasped that Kyrgyzstan is not Georgia. Superficial Kyrgyz liberalism has tended to blind US democratization workers to the features of Kyrgyz society and politics that are deeply rooted in wider Central Asian political traditions.

Bishkek has eagerly tried to engage the US on public diplomacy initiatives, such as the American University in Central Asia, that meet its interests and also accommodated US geopolitical needs. American geopolitical engagement meant increased security for Kyrgyzstan against the southern instability. This was welcome in the face of Russian retreat from the frontiers of empire. Kyrgyzstan successfully navigated its way through the Tajik civil war as well as the instability in Afghanistan. Bishkek continued close contacts with the Taliban regime and opposition groups, sponsoring talks 1997-2000. It feared the potential for northern Afghanistan to destabilize Tajikistan and spread to the Kyrgyz Ferghana. Thus, the US willingness to sort out the festering instability of the southern tier of Central Asia was very much in

alignment with Kyrgyz interests generally. Despite that, developing relations with China and Russia are more important to long term Kyrgyz foreign relations. If the economy recovers, or it becomes less dependent on US foreign assistance, Kyrgyzstan may not wish to further an alliance that has the most pronounced impact in her internal affairs.

It is not hard to see circumstances where US and Kyrgyz interests cease to overlap. Indeed this already occurred in Bishkek's refusal to support the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Collision courses are not hard to predict. Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy strategy involves developing close relations with several powers that have tensions with the United States, particularly Iran. The emerging centrality of the SCO and China to foreign policy would make it very unlikely that any regime in power in Kyrgyzstan would permit the US to focus its military presence on monitoring China. This is especially so given the demilitarization provisions of its SCO and various border settlement treaties with Beijing (examined in Chapter Seven). The Bush administration has seemed content to sit on the sidelines of Putin's consolidation of autocracy in Russia and the crushing of oligarchs in the private sector who have the ability to fund electoral challenges, as seen in the dismantling of Lukoil 2003-04. However, a more proactive approach from Washington toward Russia's very theoretical democratization might draw Kyrgyzstan into any resulting worsening of US-Russian relations.

*Emerging players in Kyrgyz bilateral relations*

The European Union has become increasingly engaged in Central Asia, and Kyrgyzstan itself has altered its view of the EU from a source of foreign aid to an entity that might play a significant role in Kyrgyz diplomacy in the next decade. EU interest in Kyrgyzstan was initially confined to donor aid aimed at stabilization through the TACIS and Food Security programs. Between 1991 and 2003, the EU gave Kyrgyzstan approximately 199 million Euros support. Although Kyrgyzstan received a miniscule share of the overall EU funding, it was significant enough to the Kyrgyz to feel that maintaining an embassy in Brussels was worthwhile.<sup>280</sup>

As it became clearer throughout the 1990s that Kyrgyzstan was not about to implode or cause regional instability in the sense of state collapse, EU engagement has refocused on Kyrgyzstan as an origin point and transshipment route for narcotics and trafficking in persons to the EU borders. The EU TACIS (Technical Assistance for CIS) fund has funneled numerous tied-aid to Kyrgyzstan to support security and police infrastructure for this reason. For instance a large project was administered by the British Customs Service to train their Kyrgyz counterparts in 1999-2003.

Another emergent plank of EU interest in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia generally has been engendered by the EU's growing proximity to Kyrgyzstan. While few West European EU members have much interaction with the Central Asian states, the newer members in Central Europe and the Baltics are much more familiar with

---

<sup>280</sup> *The EU's Relations with Kyrgyzstan: Overview* (accessed December 12, 2004); available from [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/kyrghystan/intro/](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/kyrghystan/intro/).

them and have long-standing commercial ties.<sup>281</sup> The new Central European members, like Ireland before them, are unlikely to champion further eastward extension of the EU that might threaten their own access to restructuring funds. Yet they have a better understanding of many of the former Soviet states than their Western counterparts. Bishkek has noticed with growing interest the spreading shadow of Brussels and is worried about EU policy toward its migrant labor. There have been changes to the visa regimes of many Central European countries, such as the Czech Republic. It used to permit visa-free entry to Kyrgyz as a relict of Warsaw Pact days throughout the 1990s, but stopped in 2003 after EU accession.

Japan has pursued influence in Central Asia and is emerging as a major foreign aid donor and player in the region. Japanese motivation for this would appear to be securing influence over Caspian hydrocarbons and gas although this does not explain its increasing foreign aid to Kyrgyzstan. Rather Kyrgyzstan has benefited from Japan's pragmatic view of the Central Asian states as potentially friendly Asian countries that do not have any historical difficulties with Japan, and, like Iran, sees its foreign aid as a worthwhile investment. The same policy has been in force in Mongolia, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan particularly. By 2004 Japan even emerged as the second largest donor of bilateral assistance to Kyrgyzstan after the US. Recognition of the growing importance of bilateral relations between the two countries resulted in the opening of a Kyrgyz Embassy in Tokyo in 2003 and a new Japanese Embassy opened in Bishkek also. Hitherto the Japanese had folded their Kyrgyz representation into their Astana Embassy in Kazakhstan. Most of the aid was

---

<sup>281</sup> Students of mine who went on to graduate studies at the Central European University in Budapest (CEU) were amused to find a Magyar-Kyrgyz Friendship Society of long standing in Budapest.

channeled in the form of grants supporting various World Bank projects. Examples are the clean up of uranium mine tailings around Mailuu Suu and the Osh-Bishkek highway reconstruction from 1999 to present.

### *Conclusion*

From the point of view of the Akaev regime, its foreign policy makers can look back on many solid achievements as part of its mixed overall legacy. They forged ties with distant countries that Kyrgyz never previously had developed relations with and garnered large amounts of foreign aid in the process. Yet foreign aid was not the only objective as we have seen in our examination of Kyrgyz foreign policy thinking in Chapter Four. A strategy of acquiring an outer circle of friendly states was crucial to help Kyrgyzstan break out of its isolation and also counterbalance the threat of Uzbekistan. The most delicate relationship Kyrgyzstan has remains clearly that with the US, even after the departure of Akaev and the accession of a supposedly more democratic regime. There much US goodwill is dependent on ideological issues touching squarely upon internal Kyrgyz politics. This is a universe away from the approach of Russia and China. We have seen that Kyrgyz foreign policy actors link important donor countries to their geo-strategic goals. At the same time their preferences are based on the broad foreign policy template outlined in Chapter Four. Russia and China retain their preferential position in Kyrgyz foreign policy as close great power allies. In the next chapter I look at the missing piece of the puzzle, Kyrgyz-Chinese relations since 1991.

## CHAPTER 7: KYRGYZ-CHINESE RELATIONS

Independence in 1991 distanced the Kyrgyz from Russia for the first time in over one hundred and fifty years. Additionally it also put to the forefront relations with China, the other hidden hand in the destiny of the Kyrgyz. As Russia receded to a far-removed frontier with Kazakhstan thousands of kilometers to the north Kyrgyzstan found that it shared a thousand-kilometer frontier with one of the most powerful and populous countries on earth. Also, alarmingly, China had a reputation for taking an aggressive stance on frontier issues. It also had a history of projecting military power across its borders to intervene in the internal politics of neighboring states. Examples have included Korea and Vietnam at various times since 1945. As Muratbek Imanaliev put it: "...We as Soviet republics had over a 1000 km border with China, but we did not know this country..."<sup>282</sup> In the short space of thirteen years Kyrgyzstan has accomplished an incredible amount if set against the zero hour of 1991 when extant relations were colored by Sino-Soviet tensions.

By 2004 Kyrgyzstan had peacefully agreed upon its border with China. This ended a festering dispute that dated from the 1850s and was the cause of tense Chinese-Soviet frontier clashes in the 1960s and 1970s. Bishkek is even beginning to receive Chinese foreign aid and investment. It has signed numerous deals and plans for the construction of roads and railways across its territory to connect to China. The

---

<sup>282</sup> Imanaliev, *Ocherki o Bneshney Politike Kyrgyzstana* (Bishkek: Sabir, 2002), 39.

Chinese railway system, extended to Kashgar in 2000, and ultimately planned to project into the Ferghana, will contribute to the creation of a Europe-China railway link much shorter and more direct than the Trans-Siberian railway. Chinese oil companies have been granted rights to prospect for oil and gas in the Naryn plateau adjacent to Xinjiang. Kyrgyzstan has begun to sell small quantities of hydroelectricity to Xinjiang also.

Further, Kyrgyzstan has established itself as a reliable ally of China concerning Taiwan. It votes with China on Taiwan issues in the UN, and has signed accords endorsing the One China Policy. Kyrgyzstan has also established herself as a reliable bulwark against Uyghur separatism in Xinjiang, allowing Chinese police and military onto its soil on several occasions in the past decade to pursue Uyghur separatists. Finally, Kyrgyzstan has become a major player in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the scheme Beijing and Moscow endorsed to bind Central Asia into regional security arrangements. In fewer than five years, the SCO has grown from a talking-shop into an organization with considerable potential for providing a regional security and economic structure that would replace the Soviet safety blanket in a regional system wherein Kyrgyzstan could rest secure as a small state. In short China has leapt from being virtually unknown to all but a handful of Kyrgyz working for the Soviet Foreign Ministry, and local shepherds who lived in frontier districts, to becoming a key part in its great power triangulation along with Russia and the US. Relations with China could thus be characterized as one of the triumphs of independent Kyrgyz diplomacy. Yet they have also contributed the most of any foreign policy issue to the eventual unseating of the regime, ensuring its everlasting

domestic unpopularity and presenting a strong issue for opposition challengers to coalesce around. How did this all happen?

As we saw in Chapter Two, many of the Kyrgyz tribes turned to Russia in 1862 onwards for protection against Khokandi dominance. As with many nomadic peoples the world over, accepting some form of overlordship from a powerful neighboring polity was a tried-and-tested tactic of Kyrgyz tribal diplomacy in the pre-modern era. Invariably an agreement or pact with an outside potentate would seldom involve a majority of Kyrgyz clans. At best it would be a plurality and at worst involve one or two powerful clans presuming to speak for the rest. But the model embraced by the Kyrgyz had served them well for several hundred years. It relied on them being on everyone's periphery. Although occasionally known to descend from their mountain fastness to raid the Ferghana oasis cities to the west and the Turfan oasis cities to the east in times of famine or shortage, by and large the pastoralist, fragmented Kyrgyz were unthreatening and a nuisance at worst. The major powers in the region from the sixteenth century onwards allowed the Kyrgyz tribes autonomy. Acknowledgement of overlordship could change or involve more than one party, as in the case where Kyrgyz allegiance to Khokand was in tandem with occasional acknowledgement of Chinese overlordship.

The growth of Chinese and Russian power, interested in annexation and permanent settlement, changed the equation forever. The prior century had been an era of Chinese encroachment in the region with reassertion of control over a far west that had peripatetically been in and out of its orbit for the past two thousand years. The subjugation of the Jungar polity, covering most of present-day Xinjiang, by the Qing

Dynasty had ended a period of several hundred years of autonomous Turko-Mongol states surviving on the periphery of the Chinese state. As James Millward and Peter Perdue point out, subsequent Qing control of Xinjiang was programmatic and indicative of a commitment to establishing a permanent presence. This distinguished it from previous Chinese control for the few hundred years preceding. New garrison towns appeared and, in the early nineteenth century, there was the first mass transplantation of Han Chinese settlers into the province.<sup>283</sup> Soon after this, Russia began annexing the Central Asian Khanates from the west, hemming the Kyrgyz in the Tien Shan Mountains.

Imanaliev, the former Kyrgyz foreign minister (whose graduate work was on pre-modern Kyrgyz-Chinese relations) defines this as the first phase of modern Kyrgyz-Chinese relations 1750-1863. From the second half of the eighteenth century, he argues, the Kyrgyz sought self-preservation from being smashed by ‘two gigantic pressures’ Russia and China. Both established their presence in a region hitherto fragmented between Jungar-Kalmyks, Kokhand and Bokhara with Kazakhs roaming to the North. Imanaliev even argued that evidence for a pre-Soviet Kyrgyz foreign policy can be found in their embassies to China following its conquest of the Jungar state in 1757.<sup>284</sup>

Although the Kyrgyz beat back occasional Chinese feints into Naryn and Issik Kul, relations were by and large peaceful. The Kyrgyz were paid to leave caravans alone. They occasionally sheltered Kyrgyz clans and tribes that roamed on the other

---

<sup>283</sup> James A. Millward and Peter C. Perdue, “Political and Cultural History of Xinjiang Region through the Late Nineteenth Century” in S. Frederick Starr, ed. *Xinxiang: China’s Muslim Borderland* (New York: ME Sharpe and Co., 2004), 27-62.

<sup>284</sup> Muratbek Imanaliev, *Ocherki o Bneshney Politike Kyrgyzstana*, (Bishkek: Sabir, 2002), 26.

side of the Koktau range in what had been Kalmyk territory. Particularly, at some unknown point a branch of the Kyrgyz *Chong Terek* (literally: 'Great Poplar') tribe moved into the lowlands beyond the Koktau range and into the foothills near Kashgar. Many of the inhabitants of the contemporary Chinese Autonomous Province of Kizil Su, the Kyrgyz autonomous province in Xinjiang that occupies the area immediately across the border from Kyrgyzstan, are descended from these *Chong Terek* rather than the later arrival of refugees in 1916.<sup>285</sup> Borders were not defined except insofar as Chinese power began to evaporate the closer it got to mountain ranges bounding Xinjiang to the north and west.

The Russian annexation of the Kyrgyz and the absorption of Khokhand soon raised the knotty issue of the location of the border with China. Much of the frontier areas were inhabited by Kyrgyz and Kazakhs who did not know either and most likely did not welcome efforts by two alien states to establish a fixed frontier. Moscow was anxious to settle the issue and wanted to gain recognition from China for its annexation of Semirchie and Turkistan. This was part of a wider process of frontier delineation between the two empires in the nineteenth century, encompassing not just the recently acquired Turkestan regions but also the Far East and the Pacific boundaries. The boundary of the Russian Semirchie Oblast, now part of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, was hashed out with China in a series of bilateral treaties; Chuguchak (1864) which defined the border guard and consular relations along the border, St. Petersburg (1881), Kashgar (1882), and Novomargilan (1884).

---

<sup>285</sup> Sadirbek Cherikov, "Na Stiki Imperii," in *Kyrgyz-Kitai Mamlekettik Chek Arasi Jönündö Materyalardar Jana Dokumentter* (Bishkek: Ministerstvo Inostranniah Del Kyrgyzskoy Respublicii, 2003), 151.

This process essentially created a border area that both sides recognized, but furthered confusion on the issue of where the borderline was. The treaties attempted to use the principle of mountain range crests, watersheds and rivers for attempting to fix borders. While fine in theory, the area was largely unsurveyed and both parties had extremely inaccurate maps. An area of inaccessible valleys, soaring mountain ranges and extremely rugged terrain for much of the border, both sides were forced to make a rough guess for hundreds of kilometers without visiting many of the areas of uncertainty. The Chuguchak Treaty contained vague geographical references that left a substantial area unmentioned or open to interpretation. Clause Three said sweepingly that the borderline: "...should go through Tekes, then to Naryn Kolka, then the Tien Shen crest and from there toward the southwest..." liberally engulfing a region of thousands of square kilometers.<sup>286</sup> Language vaguely referred to "crests dividing the Buruts (i.e. Kyrgyz) from China," a problematic idea in hindsight given the inconvenient reality that, as noted above, the Kyrgyz lived in and used upland alpine pasturages (*jailoo*) on both sides of the proposed border.

A joint Russian-Chinese commission traveled through the frontier region erecting border signs in 1882, but only emplaced one sign on the stretch that was to become Kyrgyzstan's frontier with China. In 1884 another commission increased the number of border markers in the Semirchie region to twenty-eight.<sup>287</sup> N. Kerimbekova and V. Galitski recount: "...two versions of the border were created, an agreed version

---

<sup>286</sup> N Kerimbekova and V Galitski, "K Probleme Kyrgyzsko-Kitaiskovo Pogranichnovo Razgranichenya," in *Kyrgyz-Kitai Mamlekettik Chek Arasi Jönündö Materyalardar Jana Dokumentter* (Bishkek: Ministerstvo Inostranniah Del Kyrgyzskoy Respublicii, 2003), 127.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

denoted roughly in inadequate documents and a few signs. Another version was the locally-known border differing from the agreed one but unacknowledged.”<sup>288</sup>

Thereafter the issue of a more precise border remained in hibernation although Kyrgyz on both sides of the border sought advantage with those authorities they thought most likely to be sympathetic. In 1882 General Kolpakovsky of the Issik Kul military area received a Kyrgyz delegation of the *Turduk* tribe living near Kashgar. They complained that the Chinese had abducted one of their *bai* (tribal leaders).<sup>289</sup> Over thirty years later the Turkestan Military District dispatched a cartographer to the vast tract of no-man’s land of the Uzengi Kush valley in July 1911. Lieutenant Lidomsky, accompanied by a few Kyrgyz and Kazakh guides, tried asking local Kyrgyz to whom the region belonged, eliciting only unsatisfactory, but probably truthful, answers that they did not know; that the valley was used by the *Chong Terek* tribe. Some of them appeared from the Russian side in summer to pasture their flocks with other members coming from the general direction of the Kashgar side who liked to use the region in winter. Eventually Lidomsky ran into a group of armed “Chinese Kyrgyz” hostile towards the hapless Russian cartographer and he returned without surveying the region.<sup>290</sup>

This episode has much in common with many imperial frontiers established in Africa and Asia and is evocative of similar vignettes taking place at around the same time between the British and German authorities in Nigeria and Cameroon or French West Africa and British Sudan. Imperial polities were engaged in establishing border lines between themselves for their own larger purposes as opposed to locally-relevant

---

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>290</sup> Sadirbek Cherikov, “Na Stiki Imperii,” *Materyaldar jana Dokumentter*, 151.

ones. Often lines ran through indigenous groups, portions of whose range or territory would be divided on a map but not in reality as far as the local inhabitants were concerned. Peripheral to imperial urban centers, few resources were put into precisely delineating the frontier as in many ways having a marcher area undefined suited both sides. The idea of a roughly defined frontier that could contain areas of friction was widely deployed by the Ottoman, Russian and Hapsburg Empires. The rugged and inaccessible terrain of the Russian and Chinese imperial frontiers before an age of aerial surveys and satellite images contributed to the problem as well.

Over 150,000 Kyrgyz from the Issik Kul district fled into China in 1916. This followed an insurrection immediately caused by the Tsarist introduction of conscription. Not being Kyrgyz from the frontier locale and unfamiliar with the mountain passes into China they chose the particularly difficult Bedel Pass to cross into Chinese territory. Choosing this dangerous route resulted in thousands perishing on the journey in the high mountains. The long-term consequence was that, although many returned after the end of the Civil War and restoration of order in the 1920s, thousands remained in China and swelled the numbers of scattered Kyrgyz tribes already living there.

Not much else happened to resolve the frontier between the 1880s and the 1960s. The issue of an inadequately defined frontier became hostage to the Russian Revolution and its aftermath from 1917. Almost as soon as the Soviet Union emerged from the ashes of the Russian Empire, China in turn plunged into several decades of internal instability. The subsequent invasion by Japan and war diverted energies away from remote Xinjiang. For much of the 1930s and 1940s Xinjiang was in the hands of

autonomous warlords as well as being under Soviet occupation for much of that period. The possibility that parts of Xinjiang might be transferred to the USSR diverted Soviet attention from the legacy of ill-defined Tsarist borders in the region at that time.

The period of amity between communist China and the USSR precluded any conflict on frontiers occurring until after the Sino-Soviet rift in 1958. Thereafter the issue of the two countries' huge frontier quickly emerged as the focus of skirmishes and flashpoints throughout the 1960s and 1970s. There were spasmodic negotiations beginning in 1964, when the People's Republic of China presented the USSR with a laundry list of twenty-five disputed areas throughout their bilateral frontier. This included many areas of the Far Eastern and Siberian frontier over which large scale fighting was to break out in 1969 and 1970. Five disputed regions, however, were on the area of the border of the Kirghiz SSR with Xinjiang, totaling an area of 3750 km.<sup>2</sup>

The five pockets included three tiny parcels each under thirty square kilometers. Yet there was one highly symbolic place and another quite sizeable. This comprised the area around Mount Pobeda and the Khan-Tengri mountains (7,439 and 6,995 meters respectively, located at the confluence of the Kazakh and Kirghiz SSRs and China). They are the largest mountains in the immediate region and, for the shamanism-influenced Kazakh and Kyrgyz, have residual spiritual associations.<sup>291</sup> Elsewhere the crest of the Kakshal Too mountain range forms the agreed frontier running southwest from the north for over two hundred kilometers. The towering

---

<sup>291</sup> S Alamanov, "Granitsa: Razreshenye Spornih Problem," in *Kyrgyz-Kitai Mamlekettik Chek Arasi Jönündö Materyalardar Jana Dokumentter* (Bishkek: Ministerstvo Inostranniah Del Kyrgyzskoy Respublicii, 2003), 143.

massif is broken by just two major river valleys flowing southeast.<sup>292</sup> These two valleys were central to the dispute because their possession determined wider strategic control of much of the entire frontier. One in particular, the geo-strategically sensitive Uzengi Kush valley region and watershed, comprises 2,840 km<sup>2</sup> and was the largest disputed area on this section of the USSR-Chinese frontier.

The Uzengi Kush valley is just wide enough to permit the possibility of projecting roads or railway into the Naryn plateau. Thus in theory, it could be used as an eventual invasion route into the Ferghana valley. The second, smaller, disputed valley was the Sary-Jaz valley on the central stretch of the Kakshal Too. Invasion routes aside, the two valleys represented a major watershed confluence draining to the east. The Uzengi-Kush and Sary-Jaz rivers flowing down from Kyrgyzstan are major tributaries of the Toxkan River in Xinjiang that waters large areas around Uqturpan and Aksu, and are attractive to thirsty desert Xinjiang's large agrarian sector. Two rapidly modernizing post-imperial states, both now had the technological capacity to understand the importance of disputed areas like Uzengi Kush.

Negotiations dragged on from 1964 to the late 1970s but no progress was made. Each side began aggressively posturing along the border, often resulting in skirmishes. Alamanov describes a typical episode around the disputed Terek Pass leading from the Kirghiz SSR into Xinxiang on July 11, 1973: "...at 7.30 am several vehicles of Chinese armed soldiers came to the border and aimed weapons at our side. Fifteen Chinese herders and sheep then entered USSR territory to 500 meters and were

---

<sup>292</sup> *Too* is the Kyrgyz word for mountain, but often redundantly incorporated by map makers as part of a proper name. Thus 'Ala Too' mountains, and Lake Issik Kul (*kul* meaning lake).

stopped by Soviet soldiers...”<sup>293</sup> The military on both sides of the frontier during this period built observation posts, pill-boxes, gun emplacements and encroached far into debatable land in their search for tactical positions. Beijing would regularly dispatch local Kyrgyz herders with sheep to see if they could provoke a response and, if not, strengthen their claim that local people on their side used the disputed land.

Somewhat ironic in the whole standoff was that the local political units on both sides of the border were labeled ‘Kyrgyz.’ On the Soviet side was the Kirghiz SSR and, from 1952, in conformity with Beijing’s policy of *divide et imperium* in Xinjiang, empowering non-Uyghur ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, the Kizil Su (Kyrgyz) Autonomous Prefecture came into being on the Chinese side. While those on the Soviet side wrote their language in Cyrillic, the Chinese side abandoned Cyrillic following the 1958 split. Beijing subsequently reintroduced a modified Arabic script, still used today. In both progressive, developing states road networks were built to connect well-organized collective farms to the central economy. This also happened in border districts, bringing the reach of the modern state, both in USSR and China, much closer to the frontier. This made it easier for both sides to access contested territory. It was *terra incognita* no more. Despite the standoff the border remained porous to local Kyrgyz who knew the ways across and could easily avoid hotspots patrolled by the military of both sides. Smuggling remained important to local border village economies even after independence in 1991. The tense standoff on the frontier only thawed in the 1980s. From 1984 to 1989 negotiations were just beginning to be resumed by two sides now eager for reconciliation. However, the talks never got past the exploratory stage before the USSR collapsed.

---

<sup>293</sup> Alamanov, 147.

*China in Kyrgyz foreign policy strategy at independence*

While the Soviet model of enforced development seemed to work in Central Asia, excepting possibly the Baltics, the former Soviet Union has yet to produce models for grafting rapid capitalist development onto this framework. Under Akaev, Kyrgyz foreign policy thinkers were excited by the prospect of China as a surrogate. Surely China, itself in a 'post-Communist' phase and given its Asian commonalities, would have much to offer Kyrgyzstan, bereft of developmental models other than the oft conflicting adages of donor agencies and sovereign lenders in the West. Imanaliev, for instance, advanced several goals for Kyrgyz-Chinese relations. China, he hoped: "...can become one of the largest partners of Kyrgyzstan in terms of trade and economics..." enabling Kyrgyzstan to overcome its developmental challenges more rapidly perhaps.<sup>294</sup> As China is one of the fastest-developing countries in the world, Kyrgyzstan might hitch a ride on her coattails.

He hoped for a system closely utilizing China in Kyrgyzstan's internal economic development. This would include linkages to the rapidly developing economy of Northwestern China. Extending Kyrgyzstan's road network and transport infrastructure to meet the Karakorum highway would allow eventual export of electricity to Pakistan and South Asia. Ultimately, he believed, China could be Kyrgyzstan's key to easing her landlocked isolation and a way to access wider South

---

<sup>294</sup> Imanaliev, *Ocherki o Bneshney Politike*, 33.

East Asia.<sup>295</sup> Akaev has also set this as a major foreign policy goal of his, reflected in a Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry statement of March 2004.<sup>296</sup>

Apart from China's potential to jump-start Kyrgyz economic development, it was also a model of political behavior for the Akaev regime increasingly irked by domestic political opposition. Imanaliev praised Beijing for: "...non interference in internal affairs and respecting internal political processes..." He further admonished that: "...China and Kyrgyzstan should not let certain powers become a source of threat for both..."<sup>297</sup> In other words, unlike the United States, China has no ideological axe to grind in Central Asia whatsoever. Indeed, vexed by democratic experiments closer to home in Taiwan and Hong Kong, Beijing was positively relieved that her new former Soviet Central Asian neighbors would not contribute to the blot of democratization already staining her periphery.<sup>298</sup>

Before its ouster in March 2005, the wider Akaev political patronage machine had planned to keep as much control of the reins of power as possible given the prospect of a hotly-contested election in October 2005. The ability of the regime in Beijing to stay in power despite unleashing untrammelled capitalism and coping with agrarian decay offered a recipe intriguing to the Akaevites. In addition to a model of development, China gathered importance in the regime's foreign policy because of its

---

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>296</sup> RIA *Novosti* Wire Report, March 10 2004.

<sup>297</sup> Imanaliev, *Ocherki o Bneshney Politike*, 36.

<sup>298</sup> The only former Soviet satellite in the Central Asian region to embrace a shaky but functional form of pluralism characterized by reasonably fair elections and constitutionally guided regime transfer since 1991 has been Mongolia, whose historical, cultural and social traditions in any case differ markedly. from the Soviet Central Asian republics, and whose experience as a formally independent satellite state was quite different to that of the SSRs.

potential to help counterbalance Bishkek's unfriendly regional neighbors. China could deter Uzbek or Kazakh regional hegemony.

Akaev devoted a substantial portion of his May 2002 Speech to Parliament to relations with China. He anointed China with the title of 'third vector' in Kyrgyz foreign policy "...our priority is partnership with the great neighbor China...(who)...has come far in securing stability in Asia...the current union of Russian, Chinese and American directions in our foreign policy will help us create a strong foreign policy fundament in a changed world..."<sup>299</sup>

### *Uyghur nationalism*

Beijing's principal worry, when confronted with the independence of the Soviet Central Asian States, was its own restive Central Asian Uyghur population in Xinjiang. Uyghur nationalism and identity politics have roots as extensive as the former Soviet Central Asian Republics. In 1934 and 1944 Uyghur nationalists attempted to secede from China in the form of the East Turkestan Republic (ETR). Despite Uyghur efforts to use a neutral territorially-specific name for their state, the ETR was unpopular with other minority groups in Xinjiang (Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks and Moslem Han Chinese) who did not relish the prospect of Uyghur rule. The experience, though, created a rich pantheon of Uyghur nationalist martyrs, poets and exile diaspora that one might associate with Central European nationalism.<sup>300</sup>

---

<sup>299</sup> Askar Akaev, *Kyrgyzstan Özgörülgön Düyñödö: Kyrgyz Respublikasının Prezidenti Askar Akaevdin Kyrgyz Respublikasının Jogorku Kengeshinin Kosh Palatasının Birgeleshken Jyymında Süylögön Sözü (7 Mai 2002 Jil)*, (Bishkek: Uchkun, 2002), 22.

<sup>300</sup> When invited to dinner at Uyghur homes it was striking that apartment walls were often devoted to portraits of prominent Uyghur religious and nationalist leaders.

The 1980s saw intensified conflict between Uyghurs and Han in Xinjiang. This stemmed in part from Beijing encouraging Han settlement in Tibet, Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang in a policy analogous to Slavonic settlement in Soviet Central Asia. Uyghurs face the same plight as the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs in their republics in 1991, of the titular group becoming a demographic minority. Largely migrating into the province along the railway lines extended to Urumchi in the 1970s, by 1998 nearly seven million Han lived in the province versus just over eight million Uyghurs.<sup>301</sup> Rudelson and other Xinjiang scholars such as Dru Gladney have cautioned however that the impact of this can be overstated. Many Han migrants into Xinjiang are impoverished transient laborers who end up working for Uyghur farmers. They argue that overemphasis on Han in-migration obscures benefits that Uyghur traders reap in the huge coastal rim market.<sup>302</sup> Having said that, while Beijing formally pursued policies in Xinjiang that mirrored almost exactly Soviet nationalities policy next door, in practice it seems to have been less successful in containing Uyghur resentment. Further, it did not prevent unofficial discrimination against Uyghurs in terms of access to higher education and jobs. This is in marked contrast to the Soviet equivalent's "affirmative action empire," as Terry Martin termed it.<sup>303</sup> As a result in the 1980s and 1990s many Uyghurs turned to religious education as an alternative to the state-

---

<sup>301</sup> Stanley W. Toops, "The Demography of Xinjiang," in S. Frederick Starr, ed. *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland* (New York: ME Sharpe and Co., 2004), 225. He numbers 159,086 ethnic Kyrgyz in Xinjiang.

<sup>302</sup> Justin Rudelson, *Oasis Identities: Uighur Nationalism along China's Silk Road* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). Dru C. Gladney, "The Chinese Program of Development and Control, 1978-2001," in S. Frederick Starr, ed. *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland* (New York: ME Sharpe and Co., 2004), 114.

<sup>303</sup> Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 2001.

controlled system that barred them, marking an increase in Uyghur radical religious politics.

An enormous Uyghur diaspora community was part of this growth of radical identity politics as well as a crucial element in sustaining the secessionist movement. Large minorities of Uyghurs have resided for centuries in Russian and then Soviet Central Asia. They still constitute entire neighborhoods in Tashkent, Almaty and Bishkek. Beneficiaries of Soviet nationalities policy, they have long-standing civic organizations and linguistic and cultural opportunities for self-expression. Many in the Uyghur diaspora eschew nationalist politics, but in any case have long-standing cross border networks. During the Soviet period the essentially closed frontier, as far as urban dwellers were concerned, precluded much influence on events in Xinjiang, but this changed dramatically after 1991 when the frontiers reopened.

One of Beijing's central foreign policy aims in the newly independent ex-Soviet Central Asian states was to enlist their help versus Uyghur separatism in Xinjiang and ensure that the Uyghur diaspora in the new republics would not become bases for the succor and supply of Uyghur separatist activities across the border. After 1991 a new generation of Xinjiang Uyghurs, with relatives in large Kazakh and Kyrgyz cities, were lured across by better educational and job opportunities. The newly opened borders created possibilities for families to renew ties, hitherto cut off from contact with each other for decades. The 1990s in Xinjiang witnessed an apparent intensification of the conflict between separatists and Beijing authorities, with bombings, reprisals and counter-reprisals; although by 1999 the situation in the province had begun to calm down. One reason for the "turbulent decade" in Xinjiang

was exactly that the Uyghur separatists were spurred on by the collapse of the USSR and the example of their cousins across the border gaining independence.

Depending on the overall state of their relations, Kazakhstan, whose negotiating leverage lies in its Caspian hydrocarbons coveted by Beijing, has occasionally vacillated from the Chinese wishes regarding the Kazakh Uyghur community. The Nazarbayev regime has permitted Uyghur nationalist groups carefully-controlled opportunities to function openly in Almaty. In the 1990s this has sometimes served as a convenient stick to beat Beijing. At other times Astana has repressed Uyghur groups in accordance with Chinese wishes. During Akaev's presidency, Bishkek, by contrast, terrified of fouling the waters of a good relationship with China, consistently pursued a hard-line policy against Uyghur groups, whom authorities viewed by definition as being involved in Xinjiang separatism. The Akaev regime vigorously hunted the extreme minority of genuine Uyghur separatists, some of whom do have religious agenda and contacts with radical networks in Central Asia and the Islamic world more widely.

Since 1997 there have been several episodes where Uyghurs were deported to China in the absence of a bilateral extradition treaty (only signed in 2004). Accompanied by superficial and hasty judicial processes, this sent a message to the Kyrgyz Uyghur diaspora that support for secession next door would result in draconian treatment. This is underscored by the fact that deportation to China of those accused of aiding and abetting separatism is tantamount to a death penalty, abolished in Kyrgyzstan but liberally employed in China. Already labeling various moderate Uyghur groups as terrorists even before the American crusade, Kyrgyz and Chinese

authorities had their hand considerably strengthened in 2002 when Washington officially promoted several Uyghur groups to its master index of global terrorism. While Uyghur nationalist movements certainly deploy political violence, the proscription of essentially national-liberation movements basically unthreatening to the US is hard to understand except in terms of propitiating Beijing.

One result of this harsh policy pursued by the Kyrgyz government was to drive Uyghur activism underground. Bishkek, home to most of the country's 46, 944 Uyghurs, continues to be a sporadic battlefield between pro-Chinese entities and Uyghur separatists, although doubtless fragmented intra-Uyghur disputes contribute to some of the violence. In March 2000 Nigmatullah Bazakov, leader of the main Kyrgyzstani Uyghur civic association, *Ittifak*, was gunned down by unknown assailants. In 2002, the First Secretary of the Chinese Embassy in Bishkek was assassinated in his car during the evening rush hour in a busy district of the city center. Two Xinjiang Uyghurs accused of the attack were hurriedly deported to Urumchi and thereafter executed in March 2004. Bishkek and Beijing seem keen on imputing a wide variety of crimes to Uyghur separatism. For instance, in 2003 a crowded bus full of Uyghur traders traveling back from Bishkek to Kashgar was ambushed on a remote stretch of highway between Naryn and the border. All thirty or so occupants were murdered. Despite most evidence pointing to a botched highway robbery both sides insisted that it was the work of Uyghur separatists. Bishkek even invited Chinese police and officials from Urumchi to come to assist the investigation.

Popular attitudes to China clashed with the elite Sinophilia in Akaev's Kyrgyzstan. These were conditioned by the Sino-Soviet rift and also built upon a

traditional Kyrgyz animus toward Han Chinese. As well, Kyrgyz absorbed Soviet historiography in the Kirghiz SSR which emphasized periods of Chinese domination over Kyrgyz territory to highlight subsequent liberation from Beijing's yoke as one of the benefits of Russian and then Soviet rule. The flood of cheap Chinese manufactured goods into Kyrgyz bazaars from as far back as the 1980s increased after independence. At least, this is the popular Kyrgyz perception since the reality is hard to gauge given that the pre-modern bazaar is unfriendly to statisticians. It is likely that Chinese goods competed with imports from Russia and Turkey as Kyrgyz manufactured products are very limited. Many Kyrgyz traders are dependent on selling imported Russian manufactures.

What is clear is that after independence Chinese goods were accompanied by increasing numbers of Uyghur and Han Chinese suitcase traders. This is due to the opening of new border crossings and shuttle buses between Kashgar, Osh and Bishkek. They have made themselves unpopular in the major bazaars in Kyrgyzstan for undercutting Kyrgyz merchants and paying higher fees for stalls to the guilds that run the bazaars than many rural Kyrgyz traders can afford. This has resulted in tense disputes, as seen at Kara Suu in the South in February 2004. This huge bazaar, sprung up just inside Kyrgyzstan to cater to Uzbek cross border demand as Tashkent levied 300-400% tariffs on foreign imports after 2003, was shut down for several weeks as local stall owners waged a coordinated shutdown to protest encroachment from Chinese competitors.

Aside from the pre-modern but still economically vital bazaar economy, China is becoming more visible also as an investor and business partner in Kyrgyzstan.

Chinese firms are buying into everything from hotels to stud farms. They have also taken advantage of the Kyrgyz government's use of Free Economic Zones (FEZ) as a device to spur business and investment. The government created several special industrial parks in the 1990s outside major cities where foreign businesses could relocate but be exempt from customs and enjoy tax holidays. Poor understanding of the FEZ concept led to many Kyrgyz in the street viewing them as the same as the Uzbek enclaves in the south.<sup>304</sup> There were concerns that FEZ would be Trojan horses around which Chinese factories would erect barbed wire fences and border posts. Most Kyrgyz, well aware of the demographic drama being played out next door in Xinjiang, (and sensitized by their own near-minority status in the Kirghiz SSR) fear the same thing inexorably occurring in Kyrgyzstan as a result of closer trade ties to China and porous borders. Explanations to the Kyrgyz public from politicians assuring them of the economic logic and benefits of Chinese investment garner much the same reaction as the overseas outsourcing issue does in the United States.

### *Frontier crisis explodes*

In 2000 the Akaev regime discovered that nation-building efforts since 1991 had been very successful, albeit this evidence surfaced in a manner not to its liking. Although the unpopular ratification of a border deal with China in 1996 was widely known, the territory involved had been the three small parcels dating from the 1964 Chinese demands to Moscow. The regime had presented it at the time as a necessary precondition for normalization of relations with China. As a result the Jorgorku

---

<sup>304</sup> Explanations are seldom forthcoming from the authoritarian post-Soviet regime with a rich tradition inherited from the Soviets of needlessly sitting on information.

Kengesh (Parliament) narrowly passed it. The Akaev regime claimed a triumph in the resolution of the three-way squabble with Kazakhstan and China over ownership of the prestigious mountains Khan Tengri and Pik Pobeda. The government argued that Kyrgyzstan had advantageously wrested control of seventy percent of the access routes to those peaks. Mainly of interest to mountain climbing enthusiasts, this was handy not only in symbolic terms but also for tourism potential. In 1999 though, a major political crisis erupted when it leaked out that since 1996 there had been parallel negotiations over the much larger Uzengi-Kush region as well. Apparently, the government signed land away to China without parliamentary involvement in the process.

The issue became intertwined in popular understanding with discontent about continued economic austerity and the increasing repression of the Akaev regime. In addition tensions simmered in the south from border negotiations with Uzbekistan that had dragged on inconclusively for many years. Southerners were incensed by the concern that a government composed mainly of northerners and happy to sign away parts their own region of Kyrgyzstan, might be equally as careless with the southern frontiers of Osh, Jalalabad and Batken. The symbolic value of the land on the frontier also clashed in the popular consciousness with the Akaev government's continuous self-promotion in its nation-building propaganda as the custodian of an eternal Kyrgyz nation and promotion of a historiography wherein the Kyrgyz state had existed for thousands of years. If the Akaev regime was, as it claimed, the incarnation of thousands of years of Kyrgyz history, why was it handing over chunks of itself to China, especially given that the Soviet predecessors, now vilified for the evils of

communism, had done such a good job of keeping the Chinese at bay and had never ceded so much as a millimeter?

The opposition media for several months 2001-2002 buzzed with discussion of “fraud and treachery.” In an emotional comparison of worth, they seized on similarities between the land ceded to China and the size of Hong Kong. The opposition deftly equated a dynamo of the world economy, also quite recently demanded back by the PRC, with the forfeited potential of the Kyrgyz area squandered to China.<sup>305</sup> They argued that tiny chunks of land can turn out to be very valuable, you never know. Bakyt Bukanbekov, writing in *Aalam*, dismissed government claims that the ceded territory was insignificant and unimportant:

“...Kyrgyz have no other place than Kyrgyzstan; therefore the Kyrgyz people value not only pastures, but also mountains and rocks even though nothing grows there. You call it MOTHERLAND...Foreign Minister Imanaliev scares the Kyrgyz by pointing to Chinese military might. Although claiming to be “Sinologists” they have absolutely no idea about current Chinese foreign policy...”<sup>306</sup>

Other writers linked the issue to Kyrgyz sessions of territory to Uzbekistan during the Soviet period. Zamir Osorov, writing in *Moya Stolitsa*, contextualized the transfer as part of a historical pattern of thoughtless and irresponsible Kyrgyz leaders giving away land to foreigners. For him, this slippery slope began in the nineteenth century when the northern ruler Shabdan Batyr sold the north bank of the Chuy River valley to the Kazakhs. This was a sly dig at Akaev’s aristocratic, northern Chuy clan affiliations. The implications are that:

---

<sup>305</sup> *Moya Stolitsa*, an opposition newspaper kept the banner “our country has been deprived of a part of its territory the size of Hong Kong” on its Russian-language web site for several months after the authorities shut down the print newspaper in 2002.

<sup>306</sup> Bakyt Bukanbekov, “Istinnoe Litso Uzengi-Kusha,” in *Aalam* (June 27 2001).

“...back in the 1970s when the southerners learnt that a fertile valley (Sovetabad) at the joint of now Jalalabad and Osh provinces suddenly became the property of Uzbekistan, our authorities tried to comfort people saying that we were all living in one Soviet state...for the past decade Uzbekistan has furnished the valley and incorporated it with a military base. Undoubtedly a more powerful China will do the same with Uzengi Kush...”<sup>307</sup>

The Akaev government defense that it had only ceded to China thirty percent of the disputed areas also added fuel to the flames of opposition anger. This led to the angry retort that thirty percent of land China had no right to at all represented a one-hundred percent gain for them:

“...the authorities try to comfort us saying we only gave away 30% of the disputed land. What if China demanded all land until Balkhash based on their map? Their map was drawn during Mao Xedong’s rule, when some things belonging to Chinese were unearthed during excavations in various places. That is why the Chinese decided that those places belonged to Khanzi in the past. Were the Kyrgyz to follow the same logic we could claim that our territory stretches until Altai Sayan and the southeastern part until the Great Wall. There is a city, river and a lake called Manas on the very territory of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous region. Does that mean we also have a right to claim those lands?...”<sup>308</sup>

Azimbek Beknazarov, then Chairman of the nationalist-southern party Asaba, at the time was a particularly prominent critic. In an interview he highlighted the contradiction between the 1991 recognition of sovereignty and territorial integrity between the five Central Asian states and their neighbors, with the territorial disputes that have continued anyway. Beknazarov portrayed the lost territory as one of the greatest blows to the country since independence.<sup>309</sup> The Akaev regime rewarded

---

<sup>307</sup> Zamir Osorov, “Proschai, “Shokoladnyi” Krai Kyrgyzstana!,” in *Moya Stolitsa* (March 12 2003).

<sup>308</sup> Bazarbai Bukenbekov, “Kyrgyzskaya Zemlya Umensheatsya v Razmerakh,” in *Aalam*

<sup>309</sup> Azimbek Beknazarov, Chairman of Asaba Party, interview with author, 4 February 2004, Bishkek.

similar outspokenness at the time by accusing him of corruption during his previous career as a prosecutor. He was arrested in March 2002. This sparked demonstrations in his home village in the southern district of Ak Su in the Osh oblast, and culminated in one thousand local villagers angrily confronting police units. The police units (*militsia*), poorly trained and ineptly led, opened fire on the crowd, killing five and wounding numerous others.

The result was months of demonstrations in Bishkek. Popular anger boiled over. The Kyrgyz police, reviled in any case as being synonymous with many crimes they are theoretically supposed to prevent, stayed off the streets of Bishkek for several days fearing reprisals. That representatives of a government claiming to represent Kyrgyz had fired on a crowd of ethnic Kyrgyz villagers further infuriated the public mood. Akaev, sensing a major crisis, sacrificed his cabinet and ordered them to resign as a way of taking collective responsibility. Conveniently there were several ministers in the cabinet who attracted Akaev's ire anyway. Muratbek Imanaliev, in particular, blamed in the media for the pro-Chinese policy that led indirectly to the Ak Su massacre, had been lukewarm in cabinet about inviting in US forces. The architect of much of Kyrgyzstan's current foreign policy stepped aside. The more pragmatic and political Askar Aitmatov was appointed Foreign Minister instead. In 2003 a monument erected by opposition groups to the slain demonstrators was dedicated in Ak Su using a block of granite taken from the Uzengi-Kush valley. The Akaev regime never really recovered from this crisis, and the events surrounding the Chinese border negotiations marked the definitive beginning of the end for his administration.

Was there substance to opposition allegations that an incompetent government had agreed to hand over large tracts of Kyrgyzstan to China? Certainly all opposition leaders I interviewed two years later were enraged at the transfers, including the leaders of the two largest and most influential opposition parties Asaba and Ata-Meken. Beknazarov, when I asked him to show me where the transferred pockets were, took a ruler to a map of Kyrgyzstan on the wall of his parliamentary office and sectioned off a large salient in the Chinese border area of the Naryn and Issik Kul oblasts. Stressing his view of the situation as a lawyer by training, he explained: "...In 1991 when Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan signed agreements with China recognizing the inviolability of territory. When we joined the UN our territory was recognized. Now, knowing the weakness of the regime, China took part of our land..." He added that all of the places handed over had strategic importance or were valuable resources in terms of water and rivers.<sup>310</sup>

Amurbek Tekebayev, Chairman of the Ata-Meken Party, was equally condemnatory of the Akaev government for its handling of the frontier issue with China and Uzbekistan joking that: "...our diplomats dream of hosting a Chinese airbase between the Americans at Manas and the Russians at Kant!..." For Tekebayev, also a southerner, the Chinese transfers were very much part of a pattern established with Uzbekistan:

"...as for relations with neighbors the President is acting like a coward. He did not make it clear that we can fight for our sovereignty. Uzbekistan is undoubtedly taking our land. It is putting up barbed wire. They have been using for ten years the oil of the Batken oblast for free. People know these facts. This is my view of a national insult. The ceding of land to China is negatively viewed by the public. The

---

<sup>310</sup> Azimbek Beknazarov, Chairman of Asaba Party, interview by author, Bishkek, 04 February 2004.

problem is that the Government and the President wanted secretly to give away the territory, but they claimed they did not give away any...”<sup>311</sup>

The opposition thus characterized the land transfers to China with several main arguments. First was the primordial argument that the regime had no right to cede even valueless land to China as it was all part of the inalienable ancestral homeland. In the case of the Bedel Pass, even worse, the place had been consecrated in nationalist mythology as littered with the bones of misfortunate refugees from the turmoil of 1916 trying to flee into China. Next and related to this was the feeling that Kyrgyzstan had been shedding bits of itself to neighbors for hundreds of years and that the transfer to China was another part of this pattern, a weak Kyrgyzstan preyed upon by avaricious neighbors.

That the Kyrgyz had not been party to Tsarist or Soviet border negotiations led to questions as to why exactly the Kyrgyz were, therefore, responsible for a frontier not of their own making. The next source of furor was the secrecy of the negotiations over Uzengi Kush and the failure properly to consult parliament. Had Parliament been properly informed about the bigger picture in the 1996 ratification of the first round of Chinese-Kyrgyz border agreements they might have viewed the initial ratification issue differently. Champions of parliamentary power decried the erosion of her foreign policy powers with constitutional amendments throughout the 1990s.

Another opposition argument lay in purported Russian displeasure at the cession of former Soviet territory. The title of one newspaper article ran: “Russia is

---

<sup>311</sup> Amurbek Tekebaev, Chairman of Ata-Meken Party, interview by author, 03 February 2004, Bishkek.

unhappy with Uzengi-Kush being presented to the Dragon.”<sup>312</sup> The final sort of argument advanced centered on the idea that Kyrgyz recognition by surrounding countries in 1991 implied recognition of her pre-existing frontiers as well. For the first time since independence the public and opposition, usually quiescent as far as foreign policy matters went, began to question the issue of bilateral relations with China. They also sensed that this was all part of a wider government track record of failure in foreign policy matters, sparking an unusual amount of media debate. For the first time since independence the regime found itself in the position of refuting grave charges sparked by a foreign policy crisis. It discovered that matters of high diplomacy could come back to haunt it in domestic politics.

#### *Negotiations and settlement 1991-2000*

The negotiations and various agreements with China causing the storm of controversy outlined above were the result of a process begun almost immediately after independence in 1991. In 1987, prior to the Soviet collapse, it was agreed in principle by the two sides to use the late nineteenth century treaties (Chuguchak, St Petersburg, Kashgar and Novomargilan) as a framework for any new negotiations.<sup>313</sup> With this the wheel came full circle and laid to rest each revolutionary state’s various declarations obviating the acts of the Chinese and Russian imperial predecessors.

Following the collapse Beijing immediately recognized the Central Asian states, but also launched diplomatic moves to continue the Soviet negotiations that had restarted in the 1980s. During the first ever state visit of Akaev to Beijing in May

---

<sup>312</sup> Nurgazy Anarkulov, “Rossia Ogorchena Tem Shto Uzengi-Kush ‘Podaren’ Drakonu,” *Aalam* May 16 2002.

<sup>313</sup> Kerimbekova and Galitski, “*K Probleme*,” 130.

1992, the Chinese pressed frontier issues as one of their most important concerns. China assented to bilateral talks on each individual state's segment of the former Soviet frontier while at the same time placing the negotiations within a wider umbrella framework of a joint Russian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Tajik project on frontier settlement with China. Imanaliev recounted that Li Peng had approved of the idea personally. Each party could thus utilize the documentary support and advice of the Russian Foreign Ministry. None of the new states had either the necessary papers in their archives or any methodological experience of settling frontier disputes.<sup>314</sup>

In the case of Kyrgyz-Chinese discussions talks continued from 1992-1996. Those directly involved, writing in the official Foreign Ministry memoir on the subject, recount negotiations based on three principles: pre-existing documents, international law and mutual compromise.<sup>315</sup> Imanaliev remembered that the research was difficult due to a shortage of specialists such as water resource experts and geographers. Numerous requests were sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow, who "sent much support and advice."<sup>316</sup> An early Kyrgyz win in the process was the ownership of the approach slopes to the symbolic Khan Tengri and Pik Pobeda Mountains.<sup>317</sup>

The Kyrgyz and Chinese quickly settled the question of the two small pockets, Jangi Jer and Irkishtam. One was inhabited by Kyrgyzstani Kyrgyz, complete with the village of Nora and six-hundred inhabitants. The other was populated by Chinese

---

<sup>314</sup> Muratbek Imanaliev, "Unikalny Opit Pogranichno Uregulirovaniya" in *Kyrgyz-Kitai Mamlekettik Chek Arasi Jönündö Materyalardar Jana Dokumentter* (Bishkek: Ministerstvo Inostranniah Del Kyrgyzskoy Respublicii, 2003), 138.

<sup>315</sup> Kerimbekova and Galitski, "K Probleme," 130.

<sup>316</sup> Imanaliev, "Unikalny Opit," 137.

<sup>317</sup> Kerimbekova and Galitski "K Probleme," 131.

Kyrgyz who had extended electricity and a road into their pocket.<sup>318</sup> The decision here was to assign one to each side “in accordance with the long practice” to avoid upsetting local inhabitants. No agreement was reached on the large and strategic Uzengi-Kush valley and watershed however, including parts of the nearby Bedel Pass. As a result it was put onto a separate negotiating track. In August 1996 the previous agreements, excepting Uzengi-Kush, were formalized and signed by both parties during the visit of Jang Zimeng to Bishkek. The overall 1996 agreements were then presented to the Kyrgyz Parliament for ratification, although no mention was made of the existence of a continued Uzengi-Kush dispute or the parallel negotiating track. The matter slipped through Parliament without setting off alarms. The Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee did not even mention the issue in its 1996 report.

Parallel negotiations over Uzengi-Kush and aspects of the Bedel Pass continued until August 1999 when parties reached an agreement to divide the Uzengi-Kush disputed territories on a ratio of seventy percent to Kyrgyzstan and thirty percent to China. It was the presentation of this agreement to the *Jogorku Kengesh* that provoked the firestorm recounted above. The Akaev regime exerted as much pressure as possible on both chambers to obtain their ratification. It claimed that the process had to be completed by the upcoming June summit of the Shanghai Five (precursor to the SCO) in Bishkek and further adumbrated that the security of the country depended on the ratification of the treaties.

Apart from firing the cabinet in May 2002 and promising a full investigation into the Ak Su events, the regime, embarrassed and beleaguered, generated several immediate responses to the opposition allegations. In his May 7 2002 Speech to

---

<sup>318</sup> Alamanov, “Granitsa: Razreshenye,” 144.

Parliament, urging the deputies to ratify the 1999 agreement on Uzengi-Kush, Akaev portrayed China as a consistently close ally of the Kyrgyz throughout history: “...China has shown its kindness to Kyrgyzstan not once but several times. For instance, in the Battle of Talas in 751 between China and the Arabs forever defeated Arab annexation of our territory...”<sup>319</sup> He claimed that China had listened to Kyrgyz persuasion at various points over the centuries to forbear from adding Kyrgyz territory to her Empire: “...Tang China, having occupied Xinjiang, expressed annexation goals toward Kyrgyz land, but due to many reasons, including harsh protests from the Kyrgyz, China had to reject its plans”... For Akaev, China in historical perspective was a friend and protector of Kyrgyz autonomy.<sup>320</sup> The border demarcation agreements, he added:

“...had not been easy for me or our delegations...a classic negotiating formula in diplomatic negotiations says that sides usually come to fifty-fifty agreements. The Chinese initially demanded most of the territory in the disputed areas around the Bedelsk. But driven by sympathy to Kyrgyzstan, China agreed to seventy-thirty Kyrgyzstan-China and we could not have reached a better solution to the problem...”<sup>321</sup>

On 14 May 2002 ratification passed the lower house by a simple majority rather than the two-thirds constitutionally mandated for border issues. Meanwhile thousands of demonstrators blocked the main Bishkek to Osh highway in protest. On May 17, a week after Akaev’s foreign policy speech, a cajoled and bullied upper chamber of the Parliament ratified the accord by thirty votes out of thirty five. The government did not provide copies of the negotiation protocols when asked to do so

---

<sup>319</sup> Akaev, *Kyrgyzstan Özgörülgön Düynödö*, 24. Is this an example of preemptive rescue? The Kyrgyz were thousands of miles away at that time, on the Yenisey River in Siberia, and nowhere near their future home. Anyway centuries later the Kyrgyz embraced the Arab’s defining religion, Islam; also interesting to consider in this context.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

and several opposition deputies walked out of the vote. After the ratification Akaev, in his thanks to Parliament, noted that goods transactions with China had jumped from between three to five percent to between eighteen to nineteen percent following ratification of previous treaties. This underscored the regime argument that normalization of borders with China was a small price to pay for the economic benefits of Chinese trade and investment.<sup>322</sup> While the government has oft cited the ratio of division, it has been hazy about the exact total area handed over to China. Foreign media also muddied the issue by quoting widely differing estimates, perhaps due to confusion in various reports between metric and imperial units. However my reckoning of the amount ceded under the 1996 agreement from the old Soviet boundary is probably about ninety-five km<sup>2</sup> with another eighty-seven km<sup>2</sup> transferred in the Uzengi-Kush region in 1999.

Comparatively Kyrgyzstan fared better than other of her co-negotiators with China. Tajikistan's settlement, for example, was a fifty-fifty division of disputed areas. Russia ceded six hundred disputed islands to China in their border rivers in the Far East, although negotiations continue over several other disputed regions. The 994 km<sup>2</sup> disputed between China and Kazakhstan was divided according to a forty-sixty percent ratio respectively.<sup>323</sup> The Kazakhs, unlike the Kyrgyz negotiators, tried to use more extensive methodology in their arguments. They had forensic anthropologists on their team to try and identify the occupants of burial sites.<sup>324</sup> This method, though, may have been more apt due to the fact that the region contained quite densely

---

<sup>322</sup> Vadim Nochevkin, "Sudba Uzengi-Kuusha Reshenya," in *Delo Nomer*, (February 17, 2002).

<sup>323</sup> Imanaliev, "Unikalyniy Opyt," 150.

<sup>324</sup> Member of Kazakh Boundary Commission, conversation with author, Almaty, 15 July 2000.

inhabited lowland regions around the Tzungerian Gap, in contrast to the more sparsely populated Kyrgyz border area. In 2000 the ratification and transfer of territory to China caused a domestic outcry in Kazakhstan also but it was muted in comparison with the events next door in Kyrgyzstan. This reflected, perhaps, the weaker opposition and tighter government stranglehold on the media.

During the bitter fallout of accusations and counter-accusations after ratification the Akaev government marshaled its arguments in response to opposition charges. To the allegation that they were surrendering valuable Kyrgyz land they countered that the USSR had unilaterally moved the border into debatable land during the period 1962-1984. Therefore, the official borders of the Kirghiz SSR had been inaccurate and based on the unrecognized occupation of contested territory.<sup>325</sup> Nor, the Akaev government averred, was the Uzengi-Kush valley a paradise lost of verdant pasture and precious resources, but: "...the area that went into Chinese territory is nothing but naked cliffs full of limestone and has harsh climactic conditions..."<sup>326</sup>

In face of the opposition claim that China's recognition of Kyrgyz independence implied some recognition of her pre-existing frontiers, the regime view was most likely correct. International recognition only implies recognition of the existence of a state or government and it is possible simultaneously to recognize a regime but not the extent or shape of its frontiers at that time. Imanaliev put an interesting twist on the legal debate by seeing this broader settlement between China and the four former Soviet neighbors as the end point in the process begun by the 1975

---

<sup>325</sup> Kerimbekova and Galitski "K Probleme," 136.

<sup>326</sup> Alamanov, 148.

Helsinki Act wherein European frontiers had been firmed up.<sup>327</sup> Given that the frontier negotiations were taking place in partnership with Russian-Chinese negotiations and that the Kyrgyz regularly received advice from Moscow as talks progressed, it strikes me as unlikely that Bishkek failed to consult Russia on the outcome of the Kyrgyz-Chinese negotiations, particularly given the cautious Kyrgyz pattern of sounding Moscow out concerning major foreign policy decisions.

The Akaev regime deftly utilized and dismissed aspects of the primordial argument at the same time by saying that of course it was correct that the Kyrgyz had never been party to the creation of these frontiers either in the Tsarist or Soviet periods. However, given the reality that if they refused to start at least from a common basis they faced major terra incognita if they abandoned the tsarist treaty framework. During the ebb and flow of thousands of years of Chinese history, Beijing's borders had on occasion reached the shores of Lake Issik Kul, well inside Kyrgyzstan, and beyond. If China were led to abandon the Tsarist agreements due to Kyrgyz demands for territory far inside Xinjiang, it could well have countered with far more extravagant claims.<sup>328</sup>

The pro-ratification authorities also summoned some rather imaginative defenses that probably hindered more than helped. To the charge that the Bedel pass was a sacred graveyard of victims of the 1916 Tsarist repression, one government respondent answered that Kyrgyz had been using the Bedel pass for centuries so how could anyone really be sure that the Bedel ossuary was an artifact of 1916?<sup>329</sup> Another commentator alighted upon the fact that one of the streams in the Uzengi-Kush valley

---

<sup>327</sup> Imanaliev, "Unikalny Opit," 137.

<sup>328</sup> Kerimbekova and Galitski "K Probleme," 135.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 135.

was known to local Kyrgyz as the river *Këykup*. In archaic Kyrgyz, argued Vladimir Petrov, “*këykup*” could mean “The end of the Earth” and that the allusion even survived in the literary Kyrgyz phrase “*men këykupa baram*” (“I’m going to the end of the Earth”). In this viewpoint the area of Uzengi-Kush was the edge of the Kyrgyz universe and an apt place to draw an international frontier.<sup>330</sup> A Foreign Ministry legal team attempted to float the argument that indeed Kyrgyzstan forfeited territory but asserted that China lost too. Thus, both countries grew smaller as a result of the deal.<sup>331</sup>

Not yet having access to memoirs of backchannel diplomacy there is uncertainty as to how exactly decisions and compromises were reached between the Kyrgyz and Chinese delegations. For now we are reliant on an official collection of documents and articles issued by the Foreign Ministry in Kyrgyz and Russian.<sup>332</sup> It is unparalleled in the secretive and closed responses of Kyrgyz governments to major crisis and demonstrates that the Akaev regime understood the damage to its popularity incurred during the crisis. Unsurprising given the extreme sensitivity of the issues, those directly involved in the border negotiations were often unwilling to talk about them in detail. On the other side are the claims of opposition groups, whose arguments, though often flawed, were more persuasive to the public.

---

<sup>330</sup> Vladimir Petrov, “Këykup – Kray Zemli Nashey,” in *Kyrgyz-Kitai Mamlekettik Chek Arasi Jönüüdö Materyalardar Jana Dokumentter* (Bishkek: Ministerstvo Inostranniah Del Kyrgyzskoy Respublicii, 2003), 153.

<sup>331</sup> Emil Kaykiev *et alia*, “Otveti Na Vaprozi,” in *Kyrgyz-Kitai Mamlekettik Chek Arasi Jönüüdö Materyalardar Jana Dokumentter* (Bishkek: Ministerstvo Inostranniah Del Kyrgyzskoy Respublicii, 2003), 169.

<sup>332</sup> *Kyrgyz-Kitai Mamlekettik Chek Arasi Jönüüdö Materyalardar Jana Dokumentter* cited above.

*Shanghai Cooperation Organization*

The settlement of the frontier issue 1992-99 occurred in tandem with the crystallization of the multi-country border negotiation group into a security and trade organization that appears to be gathering momentum. Known initially as the Shanghai Five, it expanded with Uzbek participation into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2001. In April 1996 the initial series of frontier agreements was accompanied by a corollary agreement binding on the parties to demilitarize the frontier zones within a one hundred kilometer band. This was to be accompanied by cooperation and advance notice of troop movements and concentrations near border areas. Other confidence-building measures included mechanisms for local cross-border consultations and wider strategic security cooperation. This groundwork was followed up in 1997 by more detailed agreements regularizing high-level contacts between the members and establishing a formal organization. Uzbekistan was invited to join the group.

The goals of the coalescing regional organization born of frontier negotiations were articulated in summits in each of the member state's capitals 1997-2003. Declared aims were security-related with a commitment to combating separatism, religious fundamentalism and terrorism. Other goals were more clearly aimed at the West such as the idea of: "...mutual support versus interference in the internal affairs of member states under the guise of human rights or humanitarianism..."<sup>333</sup>

---

<sup>333</sup> *Joint Communiqué Issued at Conclusion of Extraordinary Meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Tashkent, September 5, 2003* (accessed June 10 2004); available from [http://russia.shaps.hawaii.edu/fp/russia/20030905\\_sco\\_fm\\_jc.html](http://russia.shaps.hawaii.edu/fp/russia/20030905_sco_fm_jc.html).

Since then annual meetings and summits have become a regular feature of the new bloc. The new *idée fixe* in US foreign policy after 2001 suited perfectly the goals of the SCO and it has jumped to add anti-terrorist structures such as the 2002 Shanghai Convention Against Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism. This led to the formalization of a Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), complete with its own RATS Executive Committee and RATS Council. Other summits produced inter-ministerial councils of trade and economy to discuss economic cooperation and investment. On 7 June 2002 members all signed a common charter in St. Petersburg that widened the multilateral consultations to many other sectors including emergencies, transport and tourism. As part of the new emphasis on anti-terrorism the member states held several joint military exercises. In 2003, for example, China hosted military contingents in Xinjiang from all states. The June 2004 summit in Tashkent resulted in the admission of Mongolia with observer status as a result of Kyrgyz lobbying.

The SCO has not yet evolved into a collective security organization nor an ambitious regional customs union or supra-national trade bloc. Therein might lie its very success as it has embraced modest, achievable goals. These are in contrast to the overambitious ideas seen in the Central Asian Union and its successor the Central Asian Cooperation Area. The SCO built upon its origins as a frontier negotiation forum and slowly expanded its embrace to other cross border issues. A bloc of six states embracing various degrees of authoritarianism does raise questions about the purposes to which its declared goals of anti separatism and terrorism will be applied.

---

Sia Ishan, a Chinese political scientist, bluntly commented that the main purpose of the SCO was more bilaterally aimed to contain potential instability emanating from Central Asia (including Xinjiang) that might serve to destabilize the two giants, Russia and China.<sup>334</sup> Kyrgyzstan has sought to widen membership and has championed Mongolian membership in particular in order to boost the creation of small state mini-bloc within the SCO.

For Kyrgyzstan the SCO is a framework for binding her Central Asian neighbors in a common security group with China and Russia. Imanaliev visualizes China's role as the "guarantor of stability in the region" and the SCO gives life to that wished for role.<sup>335</sup> Perhaps this could be equivalent to the restraints imposed by NATO membership on Greece and Turkey concerning their differences on Cyprus and the Eastern Aegean. Uzbek participation in the SCO has helped Kyrgyzstan surmount some of the issues dividing them. For instance it provided channels to pressure the Uzbeks to cease mining frontier areas. Bishkek raised this in the multilateral SCO and managed to elicit Uzbek promises to cooperate on the issue. Given Uzbekistan's lukewarm stance toward the CIS, and preference for groupings that exclude Kyrgyzstan (such as the GUAM security group formed in 1999 with Armenia and Georgia) Bishkek has very few security structures within which to develop cooperation with her belligerent neighbor. To be sure the SCO is in a very formative phase and may not turn out to be the hoped for panacea for Bishkek's regional security woes, but it certainly has a key place in her foreign policy priorities.

---

<sup>334</sup> Sia Ishan, "Mehanizm "Shanghayskoy Pyaterki" y Strategicheskoy Vzaymodeystvey Kitay y Rossia," in *Kyrgyz-Kitai Mamlekettik Chek Arasi Jönündö Materyalardar Jana Dokumentter* (Bishkek: Ministerstvo Inostranniah Del Kyrgyzskoy Respublicii, 2003), 106-116.

<sup>335</sup> Imanaliev, *Ocherki o Bneshney Politike*, 33.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, we have seen that Kyrgyzstan under Akaev made strenuous efforts to forge solid relations with China since 1991, often at the cost of domestic political outcry and providing the opposition with issues on which to focus growing public disenchantment with the regime. Imanaliev was dispatched to China in the mid 1990s personally entrusted with task of starting diplomatic relations with Beijing. Priority was given to settling hundreds of year's worth of frontier disputes that Kyrgyzstan had inherited. The Akaev regime clearly underestimated the depth of popular feeling the frontier issue would arouse or, given its reluctance to consult Parliament over the Uzengi-Kush negotiations, perhaps it did suspect. Kyrgyzstan also showed itself more than willing to toe the line on issues of Uyghur separatism and conform loyally on the wider One China policy of Beijing. Finally, Akaev's regime placed a Chinese-inspired and led security framework at the heart of its foreign policy to begin handling a number of vital security, diplomatic and trade issues. The big question is whether it was all worth it for Kyrgyzstan. Would a less conciliated Beijing really have posed such a problem to Kyrgyzstan in its first decade of independence?

Kyrgyz policy makers, including personnel such as Imanaliev with extensive experience of China from his Soviet career, were not prepared to take the risk of finding out, given the reality of Russian withdrawal from the region and the inability of the five Central Asian republics to band together meaningfully for collective security. China made it clear to Bishkek very early on that any relationship would depend on resolution of the frontier. Russia, on the other hand, wanted better relations

with China to settle its own far more numerous frontier disputes in the Far East. For this reason Moscow was not willing to take a more aggressive stance over issues of the former Soviet frontier in Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan was therefore in no position to refuse to compromise with China, especially as its two other Central Asian neighbors were also in favor of settlement.

Seen in the light of Kyrgyzstan's search for regional security, a hostile China on the Eastern frontier would be too much given its problems with Uzbekistan to the West. If China had refused to recognize Kyrgyzstan's frontiers it would have been a disaster from the point of view of regularizing its other frontiers (with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) in comparison to which the frontier disputes with China were minor. The Chinese border is in a remote and unpopulated area of Kyrgyzstan. None of its large cities or prime agricultural land is proximate, unlike the western Ferghana rim provinces.

The experience of settling its frontier disputes with China, under Russian tutelage, may help explain the hardening stance concerning its negotiations on frontier issues with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Plunged into immediate on-the-job training on Chinese frontier issues, its diplomats can now apply this experience to western frontier problems. Should Xinjiang become more unstable in future due to an upsurge in Uyghur separatism, Bishkek will already have established solid credentials as a reliable partner in refusing aid to separatists. A multi-ethnic state with a large Uzbek population in its south, Kyrgyzstan could not risk aiding and abetting an ethnically based separatist movement next door in China.

Kyrgyzstan has started to export small amounts of electricity to China (under 500 kilowatt hours in 2003) on an experimental basis. As we have seen oil and gas concessions were given to Chinese companies for developing deposits discovered in the Naryn plateau. Yet many of the supposed bilateral benefits from the normalization of relations after frontier agreements have yet to arrive. Protocols and declarations have tried to will into existence a railway extension from Kashgar, itself connected to the Chinese railway network in 2002. Yet the source of the massive amount of investment necessary to extend that through Kyrgyzstan to the Ferghana remains unresolved. The transport route that could connect Kyrgyzstan to the Karakorum highway, and thus give it trade outlet to South Asia, also remains unfulfilled in potential. Its internal main roads crossing into China are in terrible condition and would require major revamping to carry significant amounts of trade over to the Karakorum. Neither is China a large donor of foreign aid to Kyrgyzstan. Its donations rank with Iran and Turkey as significant but not in the big league of donors like the US, Japan and the EU. From 1992-2002 China's entire foreign aid to Kyrgyzstan consisted of about four million dollars, modest in comparison to over ten million dollars from Japan in 2002 alone.

One would not want to paint a picture of unfulfilled promise from the Chinese side, as fifteen years is a short time. Kyrgyz-Chinese relations are just beginning to gel. It is also true that Beijing has a very different perspective on Bishkek. Kyrgyzstan's primary value is to be stable and not contribute in anyway to Uyghur secession in Xinjiang. Secondary considerations would be that the frontier be regularized and that Bishkek do nothing to entice the Kyrgyz within the Kizil Su

Autonomous Prefecture to desire unification across the border. Beyond that it is unlikely that Kyrgyzstan looms large on Beijing's radar. China has no wish ever to annex or absorb Kyrgyzstan, given that Kyrgyzstan is still under Russia's security blanket. Equally important are traditional Chinese attitudes to the nomadic Turkic peoples on its borders, a legacy of haughty disdain. More positively to Beijing, with no serious recent history of conflict with China Kyrgyzstan could be a useful client state and an Asian ally. If Japanese investment and donor aid to Kyrgyzstan continues at its present rate Bishkek might even find itself faced with Chinese concern about growing Japanese influence in Mongolia and former Soviet Central Asia; Beijing's fear of a Japanese policy of encirclement by donor aid.

The entire issue of the Chinese frontier was illustrative of the clash between nation-building in cementing a sense of national identity. Kyrgyz leaders were confronted with a burning post-Soviet legitimacy issue, as we have seen many times in the course of looking at Kyrgyz history and politics in previous Chapters. The legitimacy issue will continue to haunt the post-Akaev regime. Yet it was also a small state searching for regional stability. Like those in the Baltic States worried about the impact of EU membership upon their newly regained independence, the Kyrgyz are pulled in many different directions by the new independent nationalist ideology. True, their sense of national identity was forged by the Soviets who provided a state system in miniature within the Soviet Union. This was bound by a coherent ideology that acknowledged the existence and legitimacy of nationalism but submerged nationalism into the larger supra ideology of the Marxist-Leninist state.

The Akaev regime had a difficult time explaining to the public how their new supposedly liberated and improved independent non-Soviet variety of nationalism fit into the global system and the world economy. Their efforts to articulate a nationalist ideology to shore up internal loyalty and control indeed contributed to a byproduct of xenophobia making it hard for the regime to simultaneously push fresh supranational projects on a reluctant people. The *Silk Road ideology*, with Kyrgyzstan as a Eurasian crossroads, partners better with the internal civic nationalist strand of Kyrgyz nation-building. Kyrgyzstan, the argument went, could be a bridge because it is a microcosm of Eurasia with both Asian and European populations. In reality, the '*Nash obsitsia Dom*' (Our Common Homeland) ideology won limited acceptance both within and without the population in Kyrgyzstan. Many non-Kyrgyz view it as window-dressing. Many ethnic Kyrgyz were given, via the Kyrgyz language media and educational system, a contradictory message emphasizing the Kyrgyz nationalist plank of the regime's legitimacy. As we have seen, the pro et contra debates that raged around the border agreements were highly referential to ancient history with China. The opposition found itself able to appropriate much of the mystical-historical symbolism within Kyrgyz nationalist arguments about the inalienable homeland, thousands of years of Kyrgyz statehood and use it to attack the Akaev regime. This tension between a pragmatic non-ideological foreign policy and internal state-building will also confront the opposition now in power.

## CONCLUSION

Hitherto a nomadic pre-modern people with a history of loose and informal macro-level political organization, the Soviet construction of the Kirghiz SSR, however random or externally-imposed, resulted in the irrevocable arrival of the modern state among the Kyrgyz. Their Soviet experience was shaped around a European development-focused ideology that produced massive socio-economic change. Despite the near-incomprehensible brutality and oppression of its early decades, the Soviet model, especially in its more benign post-Stalinist phase eventually garnered enormous legitimacy due to its ability to produce economic outputs and goods and to better the welfare of the Kyrgyz people. For the first time in history many Kyrgyz lived in modern fixed-dwellings with electricity and running water and had access to a modern educational system that delivered universal literacy.

In Chapter Two I recounted the process wherein the Kirghiz SSR became an overstretched but efficient agrarian supplier to the center. At the same time, drawing upon Martin's analysis of the evolution of Soviet nationalities policy, we see that Soviet nationalities policy was not a fig leaf in the Kyrgyz context, but built on pre-modern identities in order to induce a sense of solidarity and indirect state legitimacy. As a counterbalance it was carefully crafted to bolster the identity of non-territorial nationalities living within the state. Decades of continuous existence in the Kirghiz

SSR solidified the nebulous connection between the modern state and a majority-based titular identity within the wider society of the USSR.

In Chapter Three I showed that Soviet Kyrgyz elites, under the first presidency of Askar Akaev, responded to the challenge of collapse by nation-building and attempting to replace the legitimacy of the Soviet center with that of the nation-state. This was a considerable challenge given the regional, clan and ethnic complexities inherited from the Kirghiz SSR. They replaced a marginal, subtly managed relationship between legitimacy, power and the titular nationality with a very direct one in the traditions of western and central European nationalism. This route was also the choice of its neighbors and the net result was the further destruction of the post-imperial regional sub-system, a process that mirrored the dissolution of the Hapsburg and Ottoman Empires earlier in the century. To some extent, as we saw, nation building has been successful in terms of creating state symbolism and having a surprising degree of coercive power in terms of loyalty and fostering legitimacy. Simultaneously this process is constrained by the continued presence of large numbers of national minorities who are not easily co opted by that message. Elsewhere in Central Asia there is a similar situation in Kyrgyzstan's larger neighbor Kazakhstan.

Another challenge with nationalism as an ideology of legitimacy is that it is not a particularly successful ideology of economic development. As seen in Uzbekistan, where it becomes so it tends to defy rather than accept modern economic thought. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, nationalism has been constructed with a codicil of adoption of free market economics and opening of the countries to the global economy. This creates a tension between the nationalizing and the globalizing forces

that I will return to discuss more below. It has thrown into high relief the problem in Kyrgyzstan between nation-building and attempts to integrate Kyrgyzstan into the global economic system in the aftermath of a collapsed integrated economic system whose failure legitimizes the successor state. Yet nationalism is not delivering anything like the rapid results of Soviet development. The Kyrgyz economy has shrunk by roughly two thirds since 1991 and the free market model has been discredited in the eyes of many average Kyrgyz by the unfettered capitalism that prevails throughout the country, enriching elites but rendering food staples like bread and potatoes unaffordable to pensioners.

Chapter Four examined the various components of Kyrgyz foreign policy making in the period 1991-1994; the leadership, the bureaucracy, opposition politics and other societal factors with potential to influence foreign policy. It was argued that a strong executive tradition in Kyrgyzstan helped shape the authoritarianism of the presidency. Yet, as with many former Soviet constitutional orders, this was underpinned by a legal framework that supported this strong presidential leadership. We have argued that barring a revolutionary recasting of the Kyrgyz constitution and shape of government, a strong presidency, if not an outright authoritarian regime, is inevitable in Kyrgyzstan in the near future, “Tulip revolutions” aside. This has also created the popular perception, and appearance of overbearing presidential influence on foreign policy.

In looking at the Foreign Ministry and also the sources of foreign policy in the period under consideration, I have sought to underline that Kyrgyzstan *does* possess a foreign policy, although not widely promulgated beyond the official but somewhat

shallow version of the *Silk Road* ideology. In order to illustrate the fuller picture, I have drawn in some other key foreign policy sources from the Akaev era. Sometimes these are contradictory as in the foreign policy sources of states everywhere. Still, they give an idea of the worldview of Kyrgyz elites, one that is unlikely to change with the advent of the new government in 2005. These sources for Kyrgyzstan's foreign relations challenge the assumption that Kyrgyz foreign policy makers are reactive or flail from one issue to the next lacking any coherent roadmap or grounding in a conception of national interest in foreign affairs. After fifteen years of independence elites, well-trained in their Soviet backgrounds, have thought long and hard about how to surmount the regional challenges they face in a systematic fashion. The result is a worldview built around security concerns with great emphasis on the idea of rebuilding a regional state system.

A key feature of Kyrgyz foreign policy is its originality. It is anchored not in American, Russian or Chinese influence, nor the phantasmagoric export ideologies of Pan-Turkism or Pan-Islamism, but has a direct relationship to elite thinking about the construction of civic nationalism within Kyrgyzstan. The microcosm idea, that Kyrgyzstan is Eurasia in miniature, advocates its centrality as a key link for Europe and Asia rather than just being a peripheral part of the CIS. This of course raises questions regarding the extent to which foreign policy elites, especially after Akaev, in Kyrgyzstan will be able to straddle that delicate gap between a foreign policy that is essentially 'non-nationalist' in a state that is still in the throes of a nation-building phase and will be for the foreseeable future. Civic nationalism has succeeded to some extent in Kyrgyzstan as many minorities (and ethnic Kyrgyz) have voted with their

feet and joined the migrant labor diaspora that is a relic of Soviet labor mobility. Despite this tension, formulating a broadly coherent foreign policy, so vital for a small state, should be viewed as one of the better legacies of the Akaev administration, whatever criticisms adhere to its domestic policies.

In Chapter Five we looked at the role of the first circle of states in Kyrgyz foreign relations as envisioned by the Akaev regime's informal foreign policy strategy. The first circle contains one key great power friend that, as I have argued, is better viewed as a guarantor of, rather than challenge to, Kyrgyz sovereignty. Russia remains vital to Kyrgyzstan although its own evolving post-imperial defense strategy has forced Kyrgyz leaders to search for alternatives to over-reliance on Russia. Russia seems to be moving toward a model of post-colonial relations with her Eurasian neighbors that takes on aspects of the British Commonwealth. Additionally in its claim to strategic primacy in Central Asia, Moscow's attitudes are reminiscent of the Monroe Doctrine toward Latin America. Russia has slowly been embracing a new defense strategy. This is a massive undertaking as painful as the equivalent reorientation of American strategy and security in the post-Cold War era. It is a work in progress but so far seems to manifesting itself in the withdrawal of forces actually on old Soviet frontiers. In exchange Russia is moving toward collective security military alliances with only token forces perched on the edges, somewhat akin to the pattern evolving of US military deployment. The consequence for Kyrgyzstan and her neighbors has been to seek greater cooperation with China and to a lesser extent each other in order to fill the void left by Russian retreat.

The CIS remains a key supranational structure shaping Kyrgyz interaction with Russia and the other former Soviet republics. Kyrgyz attitudes toward their former colonial master quickly grew sophisticated. Bishkek understood that one could think independently and still remain a loyal ally; analogously to US-Canadian relations. Since 1991 Kyrgyz leaders have grasped seemingly better options not sponsored by Russia or likely to arouse short term Russian ire. This was seen in the break with the ruble zone in 1993 and joining the WTO to the derision of neighbors in 1999.

In looking at relations with near neighbors we see that Uzbekistan, and not Russia, is the major threat that concerns Kyrgyz leaders. I have drawn attention to the actions of Kyrgyz policy makers who cement close links with Turkey and Iran and in so doing attempt to achieve a diplomatic counterweight to the Uzbeks. Kyrgyzstan has also tried to find ways out of the energy-water bargaining game with Uzbekistan by improving relations with Russia and Kazakhstan. It has leveraged its growing regional heft to harden its negotiating stance with Tashkent over issues of frontier demarcation. Despite Bishkek's attempts to best Uzbekistan, instability from inside that country remains the most serious threat to it and the region. Any serious intra-Uzbek conflict would inevitably destabilize Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

In its relations with Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, we saw that Bishkek is not above using its diplomatic profile to gain leverage on trade and frontier issues. For example as seen in the positioning of two foreign military bases literally right on top of the border with Kazakhstan in the context of Kazakh claims along their common frontier. Kyrgyzstan has tried to be a good neighbor to Tajikistan, and indeed has close relations as a fellow small state in a similar situation on many foreign policy

headaches. On the other hand, Bishkek has not been above exploiting Tajik weakness to win back land in disputed frontier areas. In stark contrast to Bishkek's stance with China regarding its kinsmen there, it has exploited the presence of large ethnic Kyrgyz populations in contested Tajik frontier districts to bolster claims.

In Chapter Six, we focused on Kyrgyzstan's outer circle beyond the Soviet heartland. We noted that Iran and Turkey are important to the Kyrgyz yet hardly represent ideological models or realistic sponsors or exporters of alternate state identities. The United States, in contrast, has been active in both roles as a model and an exporter. We have argued that this essentially predates the new post 2001 geo strategic interest in Kyrgyzstan. US interests in Kyrgyzstan were well-established by the late 1990s due to its perceived potential as a laboratory of reform in the region and its receptiveness to donor aid and public diplomacy programs. I have shown that while Kyrgyz elites were keen to accommodate the US this was offset by increasing alarm at the level of US involvement in areas that many Kyrgyz, both in government and opposition, see as an arena of domestic politics. While Iran and Turkey have a clear role in the geo strategic reconstruction of a Kyrgyz state system, the United States is a *deus ex machina*; a global hegemon that does not fit into a regional system. American involvement in Kyrgyz affairs is not inherently negative and American political support for democratization and human rights efforts are valuable ends in themselves. However we need to underscore the comparative sense wherein US involvement is unique and also highly ideological. US policymakers often seem very sensitive to Russian, Turkish or Chinese involvement in the region but lose track of American comparative impact.

The case study of Kyrgyz-Chinese relations and the saga of frontier settlement, recounted in Chapter Seven, illustrate the manner wherein Kyrgyz sovereignty continues to be shaped by the Soviet legacy. This is in the context of its being locked into a negotiating track begun in the 1980s between the USSR and China. The Akaev regime pragmatically accommodated the situation and tried to lay the foundations of solid relations. It genuinely thought, given the career experience of many of the leading foreign policymakers, that this was the only option in terms of Kyrgyzstan's immediate security interests. Normalization of relations was also seen as vital to its long-term search for an economic mentor and model to replace the Soviet center.

Overall the picture that emerges is that Kyrgyz state elites under Akaev successfully constructed and articulated a foreign policy anchored in the Soviet past but innovative in attempting to address the new challenges based upon that template. Elites were able to draw upon their pre-independence experience to identify and propose rapid solutions to what they felt were the most urgent issues presented by the newly-realized national interest. However they have not communicated well to the public about foreign policy matters. This is influenced by the Soviet technocratic legacy wherein elites are simply not accustomed to public explanations. Partially this lack of communication lies in the Central Asian tradition that policy debates are inappropriate to the public sphere. One must also acknowledge the other side of the equation, that opposition politicians and the NGO sector are preoccupied with domestic issues in Kyrgyzstan.

Geo-strategy and diplomacy aside, foreign policy actors have been less successful in articulating a development strategy. I suggest that this is at least partially

because nationalism as the state ideology in the forefront of new state legitimacy is ideologically fulfilling this function. There is a dissonance between nationalism and economic liberalization within this. State elites, having chosen economic liberalization, felt less need to steer foreign economic policy as compared to traditional security issues, frontiers and bilateral relations. The idea of Kyrgyzstan as a central part of a trans-Eurasian trading highway is a logical response to the challenge to find a new niche for Kyrgyzstan in the new post-Soviet economic order, but it needs fleshing out. There is a gap between the emergency preoccupations of the foreign donor community and the aspirations of the Kyrgyz state classes for some form of regional security. They yearn for predictable reintegration and a long-term regional niche. Should Kyrgyzstan aim at being a regional Ireland, an agrarian producer with strong human capital export and a robust 'offshore' financial sector? Will Lesotho be Kyrgyzstan's long-term future; a marginalized supplier of water and seasonal migrant labor to a hegemonic neighbor?

The current preoccupation of Kyrgyz foreign policy actors with essentially geo-strategic goals is understandable given the challenges of the past decade. However, they will have to begin to grapple with these wider questions, building on the undoubted successes of independence; a strong currency and reasonably well-regulated banking sector together with an independent and well-managed central bank. Another set of problems looming on the horizon is transnational in nature. The increasing power of NGOs and INGOs is something the Kyrgyz state has yet to formulate a response to other than alternately dismissing them, or in the case, for example, of the Open Society Institute, entreating with them almost as sovereign

entities. Human trafficking and narcotics production and trafficking are two other areas where the Kyrgyz state has shown itself conceptually and functionally deficient. The small size of its diplomatic establishment has meant that Kyrgyz diplomats have been able to do little to halt either. It is also complicated by the fact that government officials at various levels are complicit. In short, assuming Kyrgyzstan reaches the calmer waters of a reordered regional state system, however anchored, fresh storms lurk over the horizon.

### *Theoretical considerations*

Kyrgyzstan during the period of this study conforms strongly to Hey's adaptation of Rosenau's pre-theory of foreign policy regarding small state behavior that we examined in Chapter One.<sup>336</sup> Hey, summarizing several case studies of small states in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, notes several important variables in terms of Rosenau's 1966 pre theory of foreign policy analysis. She notes that: "...there is little doubt that the system level is a key explanatory factor in small state foreign policy..." Indeed, with Kyrgyzstan, we see a small state struggling to replace and create a system. This indicates that regional systems are a prerequisite for small state foreign policies. This has been the paramount variable for Kyrgyz foreign policy actors. As we have seen, this stemmed from a recognition that the CIS would be too weak to supply the geo-strategic security provided by the USSR. At the same time,

---

<sup>336</sup> Jeanne A. Hey. *Small States in World Politics: Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2003), Ch. 1 and 4. James N. Rosenau, "Pre-Theories and Theories of Foreign Policy," in R. Barry Farrell ed., *Approaches to Comparative and International Politics* (Evanston Ill: Northwestern University Press:, 1966), 27-93.

Kyrgyzstan found itself in the unenviable position of poor relations and myriad disputes with the most populous state in the region, Uzbekistan.

Hey also predicts that the domestic level of analysis is less central in looking at several case studies from Paraguay to Laos. Again, this is borne out in Kyrgyzstan, where we see that the construction of foreign policy has unpredictable relations with internal nation building. The very existence of external politics must necessarily draw upon the internal nationalist ideology to some extent; the legitimacy of the Kyrgyz state derives from the titular identity. The Akaev regime, we suggested, used the sovereign aspects of being involved in foreign affairs to shore up its internal legitimacy and it tried to identify the regime with public diplomacy initiatives such as AUCA. By contrast, the domestic level of analysis, internal politics, has not actively contributed to shaping current Kyrgyz foreign policy, although foreign policy strongly contributed to the erosion of support for the regime given popular dislike of the border settlements with China. The Akaev regime pragmatically went ahead anyway with the settlement of the frontier with China, constrained as it was by system-level needs. It had to coordinate its foreign policy with other former Soviet states escaping the legacy of Chinese-Soviet relations. It was also necessary to exploit the potential of a strong Kyrgyz-Chinese partnership. Despite that, the opposition reaction during the crisis, that lit the slow-burning fuse to the eventual overthrow of the regime in March 2005, showed that areas where national identity intersect with foreign policy, particularly frontier issues in this instance, have potential to contribute to domestic political upheaval in Kyrgyzstan.

Kyrgyzstan in the period also falls squarely into the predicted behaviors of developing small states, reliant on international financial donors and foreign aid. In turn foreign aid has an influence upon the construction of its foreign policy in bilateral relations. I have stressed in this study foreign aid as an index of interest albeit foreign aid does not alone determine a country's foreign relations. On the state level, Hey argues that: "...two state-level features require special attention: regime type and level of development..."<sup>337</sup> Kyrgyzstan joins its small state brethren in the behavior of authoritarian small states. Hey argues that the authoritarian nature of the small state does not necessarily preclude domestic unrest due to foreign policy issues.<sup>338</sup> Even authoritarian regimes need to pay attention to the role of popular opinion, as we saw in the case of Kyrgyz-Chinese relations. This overall conformity of Kyrgyzstan to predicted behaviors of a typical developing small state leads us in the direction of concluding that the small states emerging from the Soviet Union deserve more attention as, and in comparison to, other small states world wide. We need to stop viewing post-Soviet small states as regional oddities. Nor should they be viewed only through lens of either continuously trying to break away from, or gravitate towards, Russia's orbit.

In Kyrgyzstan the idiosyncratic variable, elite leadership, continues to play an important role in Kyrgyz domestic and foreign politics, as it does in many developing authoritarian states. However, the Kyrgyz case shows that the leadership variable in foreign policy is not necessarily more prominent than that of the bureaucracy and state actors, an atypical variable in comparative perspective to other authoritarian

---

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 191.

developing small states. Akaev's aloof, top-down approach to cabinet government often created the impression of a dictatorial, whimsical presidential foreign policy. In reality we saw in Chapter Four that the Kyrgyz bureaucratic elites were central to her foreign policy formation and thinking, and are likely to continue to exercise this influence in the future.

Consensus was achievable particularly within the small cadres that Kyrgyzstan inherited from the Soviet foreign policy apparatus. They were strengthened by a notional tradition of institutional autonomy and a common Soviet pedigree. Helped by this, the new Foreign Ministry and presidential foreign policy apparatus innovatively built up an independent Kyrgyz foreign policy. The foreign policy bureaucracy has the experience and the training to carry out policy goals although the generation gap within the Foreign Ministry calls into question its ability to train junior cadres in future sufficiently. While aspects of the foreign policy apparatus such as the ambassadorships were held hostage to political whims by their use to exile domestic politicians occasionally, broadly speaking the Akaev's presidential administration consulted with and deferred to the expertise of the Foreign Ministry. My study of Kyrgyz foreign policy therefore draws heavily upon Rosenau and Hey's framework for analyzing small state behavior. It shows that Kyrgyzstan is a fairly typical authoritarian small state, with the main difference lying in the role of the state leader in foreign policy. Foreign policy in Kyrgyzstan is more a group effort of post-Soviet elites rather than the product of dictatorial whimsy, and this feature will also continue to shape the foreign policy behavior of the post-Akaev regime.

*Nationalism and state identity*

Kyrgyzstan is an example where the process of national formation was advanced before independence. Independence was followed by a period when elites made explicit connections between Kyrgyz titular identity, language and the new state in order to safeguard Kyrgyz primacy. All of the Central Asian states have gone down this road, as have many former Soviet states. From a theoretical perspective, as we saw in Chapter One, elements of the Kyrgyz experience are almost a blueprint of the Gellnerian thesis on nationalism. This included features such as the formation of a national educational system, the promulgation of a literary language, the role of urban elites and the transformation of a peasant culture into a mass-culture in the service of a modern state. The Soviet difference was that the elite, urban culture was never as closely cemented to its popular rural base as in other nationalist states, so that the post-independence legacy is a gap between the popular culture and that of the high nationalist elites. In addition, it was a bilingual nationalism because the Soviet promotion of Russian did not, as we have suggested in Chapter Three, erode Kyrgyz identity so much as change its course and in some ways even strengthen it. The Kyrgyz experience is also atypical in that state elites have sought to mute the role of nationalism as a state ideology and refer legitimacy to a civic nationalist agenda as well as a Kyrgyz nationalist option.

Foreign policy seems very closely connected to the civic nationalist as opposed to the Kyrgyz nationalist idea. We saw in Chapter One that theories of nationalism tend to have little to say about the foreign policy behavior of the nation-state beyond

suggesting that irredentism might play a role or that internal interethnic strife might have trans-boundary implications. In the Kyrgyz case the regime did occasionally use ethnic Kyrgyz outside the patria for purposes of international politics, such as seen in the settlement of frontiers with Tajikistan. But by and large it avoided any element of irredentism or revisionism in foreign policy matters. We have seen that Kyrgyz nationalist ideology in internal state legitimacy is quite sealed off from foreign policy matters.

Related to this, other external identity ideologies have failed to gain much influence in independent Kyrgyzstan. The two principal contenders were possibly Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism. Pan-Turkism, we showed, was not strong enough to bind extremely diverse groups and has had even less success than other pan-ethnic ideologies such as, for instance, Pan-Slavism. The other problem with Pan-Turkism was that its main potential promoter, Turkey, was not a Pan-Turkist state. It was really more interested in, for want of a better term, Pan-Turkey-ism. This meant focusing on the creation of reliable co-ethnic client states who would be useful diplomatic and trading partners. Turkey has certainly had an impact on Kyrgyzstan, and will continue to do so. Pan-Turkism though has not played a significant role so far on either side.

As we saw in Chapter Two the Kyrgyz experience of Islam was very much on the external margins of the *Umma*. This was a long way from the core region of urban Islam, the Fertile Crescent and Persia, and was even on the edge of the Silk Road oasis cities that had been more integrally part of the Islamic world. The aftermath of Soviet collapse naturally saw some resurgence of religious identity as a response to decades of repression. For example, Turkish Sufi high schools spread and mosques were built

or rebuilt in villages and towns, as in the case of the Saudi-funded central mosque in Naryn.<sup>339</sup> Often this cultural reconstruction was a result of foreign donations. Funds aside however, Islamic politics have almost no influence on either the Kyrgyz state or most of its opponents despite the oft-hyped activities of various marginal, shadowy international radical groups in the country. It is true that in a climate of rural decay, general psychological trauma caused by economic collapse, authoritarianism and shrinking space for outlet of dissent, some Kyrgyz have turned to Islamic radical groups such as *Hizb I Tahrir*. Yet comparatively far greater numbers are attracted to other radical proselytizing religious groups, particularly American missionary groups active in the region such as the Mormons or Southern Baptists. Indeed the long-term challenge for the established Kyrgyz Islamic hierarchy would appear to be maintaining its position against a secular fundamentalist state increasingly eager to purge politics of all religious content.

#### *Globalization and Central Asia*

Here we must acknowledge the limitations of this study. It has focused on an analysis of the construction of Kyrgyz foreign policy emphasizing the way in which Kyrgyz elites built a traditional geo-strategy and set of prioritizations for their bilateral and multilateral relations during Akaev's tenure. Tangentially, we analyze the likely ideological impact on the fledgling country that states seen as key by the Kyrgyz, might have. However, in doing this, we have placed less emphasis on the political economy of foreign aid although we have acknowledged that this is important. It was discussed where it has played an auxiliary role in the formation of bilateral relations

---

<sup>339</sup> Architecturally interesting as it eschews both Gulf and Neo-Ottoman style in favor of an attempted Kyrgyz design synthesis.

and as a convenient measure of a country's particular involvement in Kyrgyzstan. But the central purpose of this study was to describe and reveal the traditional foreign policy strategy that is sometimes overlooked or obscured in views of Kyrgyz international behavior seen purely through the foreign aid/developing country lens. Another dimension we have not dealt with, but which will represent a major foreign policy challenge for the Kyrgyz and elites of other regional states in coming years, is what Rosenau has termed "frangmentation."<sup>340</sup>

This concept refers to the idea of a completely new international arena characterized by the tension between localizing and globalizing forces that compete, or collaborate, but are the new funnels for rapid change affecting many developing societies everywhere. In Rosenau's model societies fragment into sub clusters in which the traditional state has less power. Frontiers are increasingly blurred according to their relationship with, and exposure to, globalization and the modern communications revolution that challenge the unity of the traditional state. It also creates transnational local constituencies that react differently to different aspects of the phenomenon. Rosenau describes "insular locals," groups untouched by the process and largely unaffected by modernity. "Resistant locals" by contrast embody the idea of sub-societal groups that resist the process of state weakness in the face of globalization. Also opposed, "exclusionary locals" foster local identities in order to resist the subversion of their legitimacy by globalization and communication

---

<sup>340</sup> James N. Rosenau, *Distant Proximities: Dynamics Beyond Globalization* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

revolutions. A final “inclusionary local” group benefits from the process and responds with a cultural cross-synthesis.<sup>341</sup>

The Soviet template supplied a foreign policy formula that worked reliably in the construction of bilateral relations and also for multilateral relations within international organizations. Successor state cadres, trained in this conservative stable of Soviet foreign policy thinking, are less-able to deal effectively with transnational threats. The systemic changes posited by Rosenau hugely increase the challenge of nation-building in an era where the nation-state is losing its monopoly on power. Rosenau suggests that the model of the failing, interpenetrated and developing state is becoming the norm in international relations rather than the exception. It is easy to see this process begin to play out in Kyrgyzstan.

Soviet elites, though needing nationalist ‘exclusionary’ localism to bolster their legitimacy, are inclined by virtue of their Soviet experience to be ‘inclusionary’ in many ways. This produces a strange synthesis and tensions between Soviet traditionalism, nationalism and the impact of the communications revolution beginning to hit Kyrgyzstan. In Kyrgyzstan even in August 1997 mobile phones were as yet unheard of novelties seen in movies. Internet access was very difficult and available only to a few. A visitor to Bishkek in February of 2004 would see that mobile phones had become cheap and ubiquitous; as in many developing countries they are a popular alternative to substandard fixed telephone communications. Internet access was now widespread and cheap internet cafes had become a major social scene for even middle class urban Kyrgyz. Although the content of the internet is mainly English, the possibilities for e-mail and access to the quite large Russian language

---

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., Chapter. 4.

content portend a revolution in communication access for what previously had been a very isolated society.

This raises significant questions about how state elites at all levels, including those within the foreign policy establishment, will be able to maintain the exclusivity of foreign relations and their 'expert' status in the face of the slow but unassailable communications revolution. We have not addressed this in this study, but it remains perhaps the future chapter in the next avenue for looking at Kyrgyz identity and foreign politics in future years. The USSR was an integrative, unitary state that operated a radical development ideology based on an inherited imperial model. The integration was achieved through the creation of a miniature international society of quasi sovereign republics. Will the impact of the communications revolution in the region be the creation of interlinked Eurasian city states in the region?

#### *Recommendations for further research*

Enough time has yet to elapse, but of course the foreign policy of the new government in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 will be fascinating to watch for elements of continuity with that of the Akaev regime. "Transitology," the loose term for social science looking at Central and Eastern Europe after communism has produced a body of macro-theory for explaining the politics of transition as societies and their political structures reorder. Less studied and often left out of the theoretical mix, because they usually do not fit, are the Central Asian states. A cross-comparative survey of the evolving foreign policies of each Central Asian State is needed along with recognition that they are not a bloc, but have differing interests and priorities in their international

behavior. Although there were overarching commonalities to the Soviet experience each of the five Soviet Central Asian republics actually developed very differently in the matter of how central policies were applied and carried out. This idiosyncrasy needs to be better understood to explain the differing behavior of the independent states. Scholarship has been focusing more in the past decade on Xinjiang, but much about recent developments in the relations between the Central Asian states and China remains unstudied.<sup>342</sup>

Remarkably, the literature on small states has largely ignored those emerging from the Soviet Union, which as we have argued elsewhere, could be defined as an incubator of small states. More cross-comparative research is indicated on the international politics of former Soviet small states. When and if the state archives are reopened in Kyrgyzstan an examination of the politics and history of the Kirghiz SSR, so much the parent of Kyrgyzstan, need further investigation. Other areas that present themselves for further research include the legacy of a Soviet civil society in the region, and its contrasts to the imposition of a western version grafted on and encouraged by donor organizations.

Related to this, although work has been done critiquing the role of donor assistance in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia, these studies have essentially just shown that Central Asia is unexceptional in being similar to developing countries in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa at various stages in the past thirty years as Crawford Young has persuasively argued in the slightly different context of the post-Colonial

---

<sup>342</sup> See for instance the excellent recent edited collection from the Johns Hopkins Caucasus and Central Asia Institute: S. Frederick Starr, ed. *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland* (New York: ME Sharpe and Co., 2004).

African state in comparative perspective.<sup>343</sup> Another fruitful avenue of research lies in studying the impact of ‘fragnegration’ upon the newly independent states in Central Asia. We have seen the importance of academic exchanges, public diplomacy and the penetration of NGOs into Kyrgyz society. Not discussed in this dissertation due to space limitations was the arrival of the communications revolution in a very short time in Kyrgyzstan. Although still the province of urban elites it is beginning to create communities of dissent and information that the government cannot control. These influence the very process of nation-building in Kyrgyzstan itself. In 1999 the Uzbek government tried to route the entire country’s internet access through servers it controlled, demonstrating the awareness that Central Asian regimes are beginning to have of this problem. In Turkmenistan such moves to maintain regime control via artificial insulation of wider society from external influences manifested itself in extreme forms with the government refusing to recognize foreign educational diplomas.<sup>344</sup>

Analysts of Kyrgyzstan might be wise to start viewing its international behavior through the lens of small state analysis, as well as attempting to understand better how *Kyrgyz* foreign policy actors view the world and what their thinking is, rather than viewing Kyrgyzstan as a passive player. The roadmap laid down by the first generation of independence leaders shows that their geo-strategic plan committed to close Kyrgyz relations with Russia and China. In a choice it is highly unlikely that Kyrgyz elites would opt for the United States over the latter two great powers. The

---

<sup>343</sup> Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

<sup>344</sup> Turkmenistan is not examined in my study, but it is easily the most unstable of the five former Soviet Central Asian states and possibly prone to chaotic state collapse in the near future.

ease with which the US has been able to establish forward security in Central Asia in the aftermath of September 2001 should not lull American policymakers into a sense of expecting automatic support from any of the Central Asian states, particularly Kyrgyzstan. The US has yet to articulate a regional vision to rival that of Russia and China, although resuscitations of CENTO have been mooted, to provide the systemic security that Kyrgyzstan craves. Only a short term configuration of regional interests lies at the foundation of US-Kyrgyz relations. Post-Akaev Kyrgyzstan will undoubtedly continue its close military cooperation with China and Russia within the SCO.

Although the US has penetrated Kyrgyzstan in the form of influential donor organizations and NGOs, it has also alienated many of the state classes through this move. Many view the trend in the 1990s of unqualified Kyrgyz cooperation with US interests in the region as a net mistake, and the new administration elected in July 2005 will probably continue to be cautious toward the US. All three great powers use anti-terrorism in the service of legitimizing their respective global and domestic agendas as seen, for instance, in the US endorsement of Chinese outlawry of Uyghur nationalist groups. Yet this symmetry is new and has no proven permanence. Both China and the US want supplies of Russian oil. It is not hard to think of ways in which this confluence of great power interest in Kyrgyzstan might be fleeting.

## WORKS CITED

## Newspapers and Electronic Media:

*Aalam*

*BBC Monitoring Service*

*Delo Nomer (Bishkek)*

*Erkin Too (Bishkek)*

*Eurasianet.org*

*IRINnews.org*

*Institute for War and Peace Reporting*

*Kyrgyz Tuusuu (Bishkek)*

*Moya Stolitsa*

*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest*

*Times of Central Asia (Bishkek)*

*Vicherney Bishkek*

## Government Documents:

Akaev, Askar. *Kyrgyzstan Özgörülgön Düynödö: Kyrgyz Respublikasının Prezidenti Askar Akaevdin Kyrgyz Respublikasının Jogorku Kengeshinin Kosh Palatasının Birgeleshken Jyynında Süylögön Sözü (7 Mai 2002 Jil)*. Bishkek: Uchkun Publishing House, 2002.

Asanaliyev, G. *Otchet o Deyatelinosti Komiteta Po Mejdunarodnum I MejParliamentskim Sviyaziyam Cobraniya Nardonih Predstaviteley Jogorku Kenesha Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki za 1997 God.* Bishkek: Komiteta Po Mejdunarodnym y Mejparlamentskim Svyaziyam Sobraniya Narodniyah Predstaviteley Jorgorku Kenesha Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki, 12 Yanvarya 1998.

Jokorku Kengesh. *1999/ N626 Postanovlenie Pravelstva Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki O Reorganizatsia zagranuchrejdenei Ministerstva Inostranniy Del Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki.* Bishkek: Dom Pravitelstva, 15 Noyabrya 1999.

Ministerstvo Inostranniah Del. *Istoria Obrazovania Ministerstva Inostranniah Del Kirgizskoi Respublikii. Portal Gosudarstvennix Slujb* (accessed December 10, 2003); available from <http://www.gov.kg/cgi-bin/page.pl?id=1129>.

Ministerstvo Inostranniah Del Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki. *Kyrgyz-Kitai Mamlekettik Chek Arasi Jönündö Materyalardar Jana Dokumentter.* Bishkek: Ministerstvo Inostranniah Del Kyrgyzskoy Respublicii, 2003.

## Interviews

- Aitmatov, Askar, Ambassador. Interview by author, 11 December 1999, Bishkek.
- Azymbekiev, Muratbek Counselor, Policy Planning Department Kyrgyz Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Interview by author, 04 February 2004, Bishkek.
- Beknazarov, Azimbek, Chairman of Asaba Party. Interview by author, 04 February 2004, Bishkek.
- Cholponkulova, Aynura. Interview by author, 17 August 2002, Bishkek.
- Duysheev, Orozbek. Deputy Chairman of the Kyrgyz Communist Party. Interview by author, 5 February 2004, Bishkek.
- Imanaliev, Muratbek, Ambassador. Interview by author, 16 August 2002, Bishkek.
- Imanalieva, Lydia, Deputy Foreign Minister. Interview by author, 6 February 2004, Bishkek.
- Kemalbaev, Nurgazy, Ambassador. Interview by author, February 08 2002, Bishkek.
- Shailyzbekova, Nurjan, Research Assistant to the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee. Interview by author, 12 August 2002, Bishkek.
- Sevchenko, Yulia, Pyramida journalist. Interview by author, April 02, 2005, Washington DC.
- Tekebaev, Amurbek, Chairman of Ata-Meken Party. Interview by author, Bishkek 03 February 2004.

## Monographs and Articles:

- Abazov, Rafis. *The Formation of Post-Soviet International Politics in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan*. (The Donald W. Treadgold Papers, no. 21). The University of Washington: The Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, 1999.
- Achylova, Rakhat. "Political Culture and Foreign Policy in Kyrgyzstan." In *Political Culture and Civil Society in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, ed. Vladimir Tismaneanu, 318-336. (The International Politics of Eurasia Series, ed. Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrot, Vol. 7). New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995.
- Akaev, Askar. *Kyrgyzstan: Zor Kadamdın Bashtalishi*. Bishkek: Uchkun Publishing House, 1995.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Diplomacy of the Silk Road (A Foreign Policy Doctrine)*. New York: Global Scholarly Publications, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Kyrgyz Statehood and the National Epos "Manas."* New York: Global Scholarly Publications, 2003.
- Alexandrov, Mikhail. *Uneasy Alliance: Relations Between Russia and Kazkahstan in the Post-Soviet Era, 1992-1997*. Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1999.
- Allworth, Edward. "The New Central Asians." In *Central Asia: 130 Years of Russian Dominance: A Historical Overview*, ed. Edward Allworth, 527-572. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1994.
- Anderson, John. *The International Politics of Central Asia*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Island of Democracy?* London: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. New York: Verso, 1983.
- Anderson, Malcolm. *Frontiers: Territory and State Formation in the Modern World*. Cambridge: The Polity Press, 1996.
- Aslund, Anders, Martha Brill Olcott, and Sherman Garnett. *Getting It Wrong: Regional Cooperation and the Commonwealth of Independent States*. Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999.
- Beissinger, Mark R. and Crawford Young. "Convergence to Crisis: Pre-Independence State Legacies and Post-Independence State Breakdown in Africa and Eurasia." In *Beyond State Crisis? Postcolonial Africa and Post-Soviet Eurasia in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Mark R. Beissinger and Crawford Young, 19-52. Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2002.
- Bertsch, Gary K., Craft Cassidy and Jones Scott A. eds. *Crossroads in Conflict: Security and Foreign Policy in the Caucuses and Central Asia*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Baker, Alan R. "Introduction: On Ideology and Landscape." In *Ideology and Landscape in Historical Perspective: Essays on the Meanings of some Places in the Past*, ed. Alan R.H. Baker and Gideon Biger, 1-14. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Bohr, Annette. *Uzbekistan: Politics and Foreign Policy*. London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs Central Asian and Caucasian Prospects Series, 1998.

- Breuilly, John. *Nationalism and the State*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Brill Olcott, Martha. "Emerging Political Elites." In *The New Geopolitics of Central Asia and its Borderlands*, ed. Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner, 44-67. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Central Asia's New States: Independence, Foreign Policy, and Regional Security*. Washington DC: USIP Press, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise*. Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002.
- Brubaker, Rogers. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Brzezinski, Zbigniew. *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives*. New York: Basic Books, 1997.
- Cassels, Alan. *Ideology and International Relations*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Chehabi H.E. and Juan J. Linz. "A Theory of Sultanism 1: A Type of Non-Democratic Rule." In *Sultanistic Regimes*, ed. H.E. Chelabi and Juan J. Linz, 3-25. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.
- Carothers, Thomas. *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve*. Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment, 1999.
- Cholponkulova, Aynura O. *Konstitutsionnie Osnovi Bneshnepoliticheskoi Deyatel'nosti Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki*. Bishkek: 2000.
- Cooley, Alexander. "Depending Fortunes: Aid, Oil, and the Formation of the Post-Soviet States." Ph.D. diss., Columbia University 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "International Aid to the Former Soviet States: Agent of Change or Guardian of the Status Quo?" *Problems of Post-Communism* 47, no. 4 (July-August 2000): 34-44.
- Cooley, Alexander and James Ron. "The NGO Scramble: Organizational Insecurity and the Political Economy of Transnational Action." *International Security* 27, no. 1 (Summer 2002): 5-39.
- Dave, Bahvna. "A Shrinking Reach of the State? Language Policy and Implementation in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan." In *The Transformation of Central Asia: States and Societies from Soviet Rule to Independence*, ed. Pauline Jones-Luong, 120-158. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004.

- Duara, Prasenjit. "Historicizing National Identity, or Who Imagines What and When." In *Becoming National*, ed. Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny, 151-179. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Duncan, Peter J.S. *Westernism, Eurasianism and Pragmatism: The Foreign Policies of the Post-Soviet States, 1991-2001*. (Working Papers Series in Politics Paper No. 2). London: University College London School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 2002.
- Dukenbaev, Askat and William W. Hansen. *Understanding Politics in Kyrgyzstan*. (DEMSTAR Research Report no. 16). Aarhus: University of Aarhus September 2003.
- Edgar, Adrienne L. *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Ersanlı, Büşra. *İktidar ve Tarih*. İstanbul: AFA Yayınevi, 1990.
- Fuller, Graham and Ian O. Lesser. *Turkey's New Geopolitics*. Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1995.
- Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1983.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Plough, Sword and Book: The Structure of Human History*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Georgeon, François. *Aux Origines du Nationalisme Turc: Yusuf Akçura 1876-1935*. Paris: ADPF, 1980.
- Glenn, John. *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.
- Herb, Guntram H. and David H. Kaplan eds. *Nested Identities: Nationalism, Territory and Scale*. Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999
- Herzig, Edmund. *Iran and the Former Soviet South*. London: Royal Institute of International Affairs Former Soviet South Project, 1995.
- Hey, Jeanne A.K. "Introducing Small State Foreign Policy." In *Small States in World Politics: Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior*, ed. Jeanne A.K. Hey, 1-12. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2003.
- Holsti, Ole. "Foreign Policy Formation Viewed Cognitively." In *Structure of Decision: The Cognitive Maps of Political Elites*, ed. Robert Axelrod, 18-54. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.

- Huskey, Eugene. "Kyrgyzstan: The Fate of Political Liberalization." In *Conflict, Cleavage and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, ed. Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrot, 242-276. (Authoritarianism and Democratization in Postcommunist Societies, 4). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Imanaliev, Muratbek. *Ocherki o Bneshney Politike Kyrgyzstana*. Bishkek: Sabir, 2002.
- Imanalieva, Lidya. "Tishki Siyasat." In *Kyrgyzstan Entsiklopediasi*. Bishkek: Mamlakettik Til jana Entsiklopedia Borboru, 2001.
- International Crisis Group. *Central Asia: Water and Conflict*. (International Crisis Group Asia Report 34). Brussels, 2002.
- Kennedy, Paul. "Pivotal States and U.S. Strategy." *Foreign Affairs* 75, no.1 (February 1996): 33-51.
- Keohane, Robert O. "Lilliputian's Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics." *International Organization* 23, no. 2 (Spring 1969): 291-310.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Institutional Theory in International Relations." In *Realism and Institutionalism in International Studies*, ed. Michael Brecher and Frank P. Harvey. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002.
- Khalid, Adeb. *The Politics of Moslem Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- Koichiev, Arslan. "Ethno-Territorial Claims in the Ferghana Valley During the Process of National Delimitation, 1924-7." In *Central Asia: Aspects of Transition*, ed. Tom Everett-Health, 45-56. London: Routledge-Curzon, 2003.
- Krasner, Stephen D. *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- Landau, Jacob M. *Pan-Turkism in Turkey: A Study of Irredentism*. London: C. Hurst, 1981.
- Laitin, David D. *Identity Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad*. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Lowe, Robert. "Nation-Building in the Kyrgyz Republic." In *Central Asia: Aspects of Transition*, ed. Tom Everett-Health, 106-131. London: Routledge-Curzon, 2003.
- Malabaev J.M. *Kyrgyz Mamleketinin Tarixi*. Bishkek: Kyrgyz Respublikasinin Bilim, Ilim jana Madanyat Ministeriiligi Bekitken, 1999.

- Mambetov, A. *Bizge Kanday Koom Jana Kanday Ideologia Kerek?* Bishkek: "Erkin Too" Publishing House, 1996.
- Martin, Terry. *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.
- Massell, Gregory J. *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974.
- Mayall, James. *Nationalism and International Society*. Cambridge Studies in International Relations 10. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- McChesney, R.D. *Central Asia: Foundations of Change*. Princeton NJ: The Darwin Press, 1996.
- Menges, Karl H. "People, Languages and Migrations." In *Central Asia: 130 Years of Russian Dominance: A Historical Overview*, ed. Edward Allworth, 60-91. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1994.
- Mikosz, David. "Academic Exchange Programs in Central Asia: the First Eight Years." In *The Challenges of Education in Central Asia*, ed. Stephen P. Heyneman and Alan J. De Young, 113-130. Greenwich CT: Information Age Publishing, 2003.
- Ministerstvo Inostranniah Del Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki. *Kyrgyz-Kitai Mamlekettik Chek Arasi Jönündö Materyalardar Jana Dokumentter*. Bishkek: Ministerstvo Inostranniah Del Kyrgyzskoy Respublicii, 2003.
- Newman, David ed. *Boundaries, Territory, and Postmodernity*. London: Frank Cass, 1999.
- Nishiyama, Katsunori. "Russian Colonization in Central Asia: A Case of Semirchie, 1867-1922." In *Migration in Central Asia: Its History and Current Problems, Population Movement in the Modern World III, (JCAS Symposium Series 9)*, ed. H. Komatsu, Chika Obiya and John S. Schoeberlein, 65-86. Osaka: Japan Center for Area Studies, 2000.
- S.A. Oljobaev and Ö Karaev eds., *Kyrgyzstandin Tarixi: Eng Bayirki Mezgilerden XIX Kilimdin Sonuna Cheyinki*. Bishkek: "Kyrgyzstan-Soros" Fondunun Basma Borboru, 1998.
- Parrot, Bruce. "Analyzing the Transformation of the Soviet Union in Comparative Perspective." In *The End of Empire? The Transformation of the USSR in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrot, 3-29. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1997.

- Reeves, Madeleine. "Dis/locating the State: Making, Crossing and Contesting Borders in Kyrgyzstan." M.Phil. thesis, Cambridge University, 2003.
- Rokowska-Harmstone, Teresa. *Russia and Nationalism in Central Asia*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970.
- Roy, Olivier. *The New Central Asia: the Creation of Nations*. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
- Rudelson, Justin J. *Oasis Identities: Uyghur Nationalism Along China's Silk Road*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.
- Rumer, Boris and Stanislav Zhukov eds. *Central Asia: The Challenges of Independence*. London: ME Sharpe, 1998.
- Schoeberlein, John S. "Shifting Ground: How the Soviet Regime Used Resettlement to Transform Central Asian Society and the Consequences of this Policy Today." In *Migration in Central Asia: Its History and Current Problems, Population Movement in the Modern World III, JCAS Symposium Series*, ed. H. Komatsu, Chika Obiya and John S. Schoeberlein, 41-64. Osaka: Japan Center for Area Studies, 2000.
- Seliger, Martin. *Ideology and Politics*. New York: The Free Press, 1976.
- Soucek Svat. *A History of Inner Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Smith, Anthony D. *The Ethnic origins of Nations*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1986.
- Smith, Jeremy R. "National Conflict in the USSR in the 1920s," *Ab Imperio* 3, no. 21 (August 2001): 221-265.
- Snyder, Jack. "Nationalism and the Crisis of the Post-Soviet State." *Survival* 35, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 5-26
- Thompson, John B. *Studies in the Theory of Ideology*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984.
- Ustanbekov B.U. and T.K. Choroiev. *Kyrgyz Tarihi: Kisaja Entsiklopedialik Sözdök Mektep Okuuchulari Üchün*. Frunze: Kyrgyz Sovet Entsiklopedianin Bashki Reduktsiasi, 1990.
- Walker, Edward W. *Dissolution: Sovereignty and the Breakup of the Soviet Union*. Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.
- Wintrobe, Ronald. *The Political Economy of Dictatorship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Weinthal, Erika. *State Making and Environmental Cooperation: Linking Domestic and International Politics in Central Asia*. Cambridge MA: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2002.

Young, Crawford. *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.